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Geographical  
Society  
with IBG

## The most loved hill in Britain?

A self-guided walk around Bennachie in Aberdeenshire



Discover an iconic hill beloved by local people

Explore contrasting landscapes of dense woodland and open moorland

Learn about human habitation from prehistoric times to the present

Enjoy legends, stories, poems and songs about a very special place

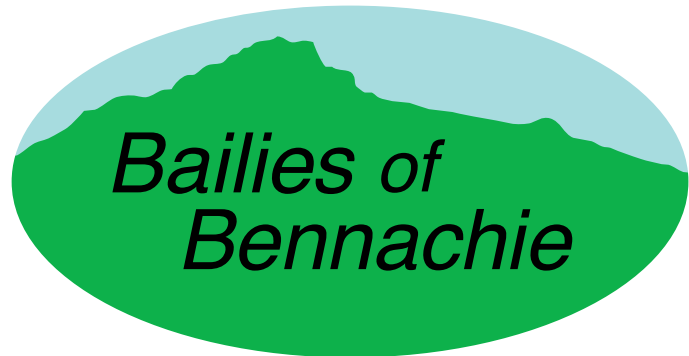
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the stories of our landscapes  
discovered through walks

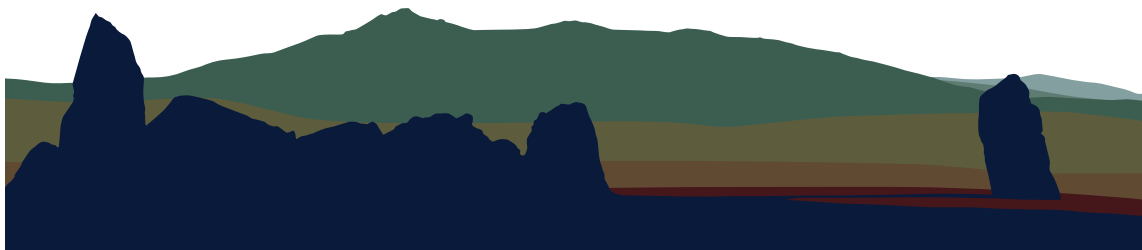


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**Created in  
collaboration  
with**



**BENNACHIE LANDSCAPES**  
**FOWK AN' THE LAN' - THE LAN' AN' THE FOWK**





This booklet is to be used alongside the audio commentary for this walk

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# The most loved hill in Britain?

## Discover the secrets of Bennachie in Aberdeenshire

"To Hell with your Alps, Rockies and Himalaya, Bennachie is the hill for me."

So said the late Lord Aberdeen. Bennachie is not particularly high, certainly compared with the giants of the nearby Cairngorm Mountains, yet it stands out from the surrounding undulating lowlands.

It has become iconic of Aberdeenshire and is much beloved by local people, imbued with folklore and often captured in the Doric poetry of the region.



This walk explores the landscapes of Bennachie from its forested lower slopes to its heather moorland and granite tors. Find out about different habitats and look out for particular flora and fauna.



Discover who has lived on the hill through the centuries from prehistoric tribespeople to 19th century crofters.

Learn how the hill's natural resources have been used from peat and timber to stone and grouse. Find out about some of the legends and stories associated with the hill.

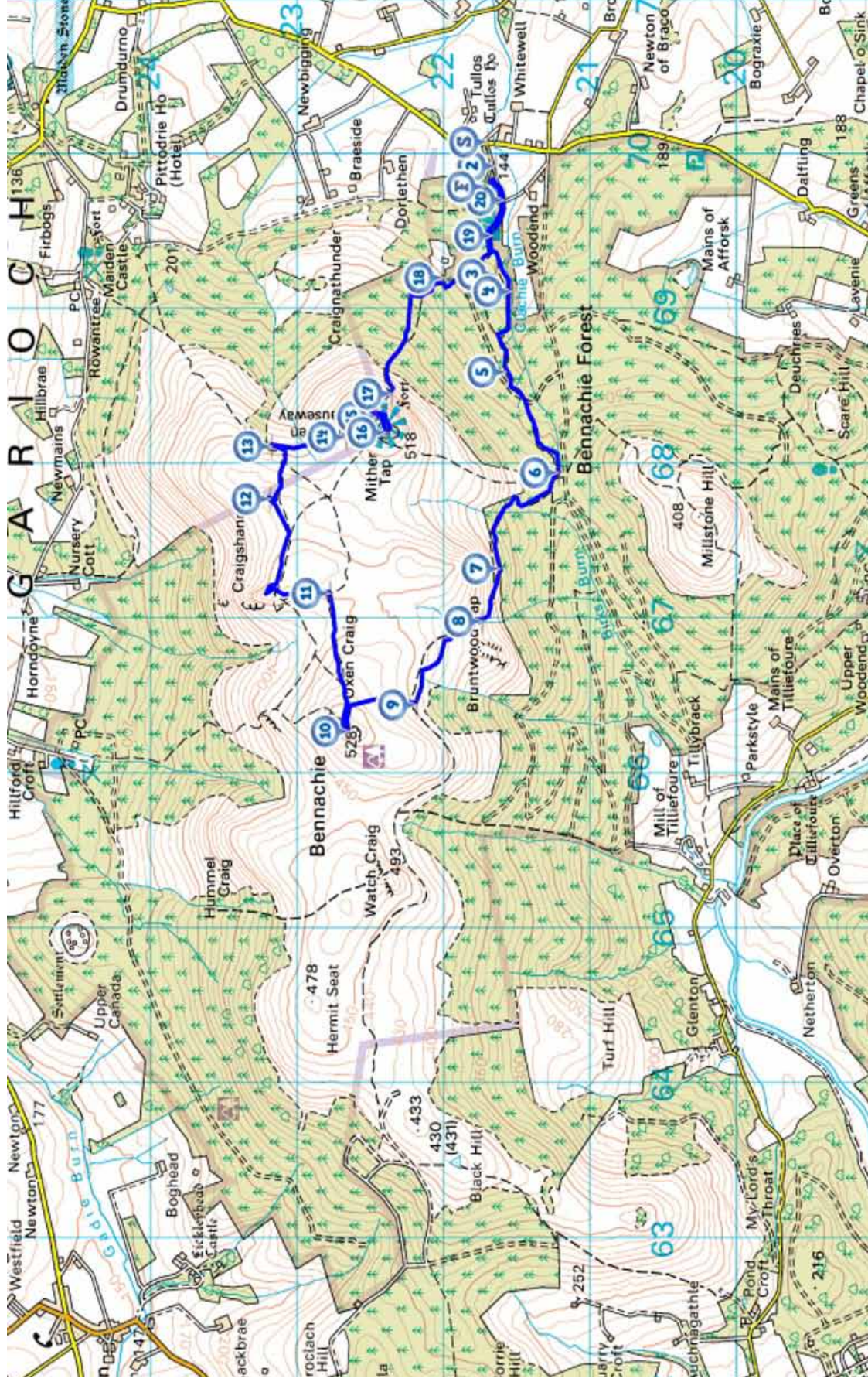
This walk offers the contrast of woodland and moorland scenery as well as spectacular views.

Images: Walking towards Mither Tap / Bennachie Forest © Jenny Lunn

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## Route overview



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## Practical information

<b>Location</b>	Bennachie, near Inverurie, Aberdeenshire
<b>Start and finish point</b>	Bennachie Centre, near Chapel of Garioch, AB51 5HX
<b>Getting there</b>	<p><b>Car</b> - The Bennachie Centre is easily accessible from the A96 (Aberdeen to Inverness road); charges apply in the visitor car park (£3 all day)</p> <p><u>Coming from the south:</u> Follow the A96 which bypasses to the west of Inverurie. From the roundabout which provides the main access to the town centre continue north for about 1 ½ miles. Take the first exit on the left signposted for Balquhain and Chapel of Garioch as well as a brown tourist sign for Pittodrie House Hotel. After about 1 ¾ miles in Chapel of Garioch, turn left signposted Kemnay and Monymusk as well as a brown tourist sign for Bennachie Centre. After about 2 miles turn right into the car park of the Bennachie Centre.</p> <p><u>Coming from the north:</u> Follow the A96. After passing the Oyne Fork (where the B9002 bears off right to Insch) take the next right which is signposted Chapel of Garioch as well as brown tourist signs for Maiden Stone and Pittodrie House Hotel. Go under the railway bridge and follow the road. After about 1 mile turn right signposted for Pittodrie House Hotel. After ½ mile turn right at a T-junction. After about 1 ¼ miles turn right into the car park of the Bennachie Centre.</p> <p><b>Public transport</b> - You cannot get all the way to Bennachie by public transport. The nearest railway station and bus links are in Inverurie (6 miles)</p>
<b>Walk distance</b>	6 miles - At a steady pace the walk should be comfortably completed in 4 hours with stops
<b>Level</b>	Challenging - There are some very steep ascents and descents
<b>Terrain</b>	The walk starts in Bennachie Forest then climbs up onto open moorland. The route follows recognised trails on paths that are regularly maintained. Conditions underfoot can be rough in places so please wear suitable sturdy footwear.
<b>Conditions</b>	<p>The weather at the visitor centre in the lower forest can be quite different to that on the open moorland. Conditions can change quickly on the higher ground at all times of year. Take warm and waterproof clothing at all times.</p> <p>This walk is recommended when there is good visibility in order to enjoy the many views.</p>



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**Suitable for**

**Wheelchairs / Pushchairs** – The main walk route is unsuitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs but the Forestry Commission's 'Discovery Trail' close to the centre has a hard compact surface and is suitable for those with limited mobility as well as wheelchairs and buggies. There are designated disabled parking bays at the Bennachie Centre and the building and toilets are fully wheelchair accessible.

**Dogs** – Dogs are welcome at Bennachie; there is a bin at the visitor centre for waste.

**Family friendly activities**

The main walk route is only suitable for children with walking experience but the Forestry Commission's 'Discovery Trail' close to the centre is designed for youngsters and includes rubbing posts for creating crayon pictures of wildlife. The displays in the Visitor Centre are also geared towards younger visitors.

**Opening times**

The Bennachie Centre is managed by Aberdeenshire Council and the Bennachie Centre Trust. It has displays and information about the hill, its flora and fauna and human history. There is a small shop selling maps, guides and books, as well as souvenirs and postcards, drinks and snacks.

Opening hours vary throughout the year so check the website or contact the centre in advance. (Website: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-89CF8Y> Phone: 01467 681470 Email [bennachie.warden@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:bennachie.warden@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)). The car park is open even when the centre is shut.

**Refreshments**

- The small shop at the Bennachie Centre sells snacks, ice creams, hot and cold drinks
- There are picnic tables outside the Bennachie Centre and several benches along the lower trails
- The summit of Oxen Craig (Stop 10) and Mither Tap (Stop 16) are panoramic spots for a picnic if the weather is fair. There is a stone shelter on Oxen Craig which provides some protection from the wind.
- The Old Post Office Tea Room in the village of Chapel of Garioch (2 miles from the Bennachie Centre) serves lunches, cakes and refreshments

**Toilets**

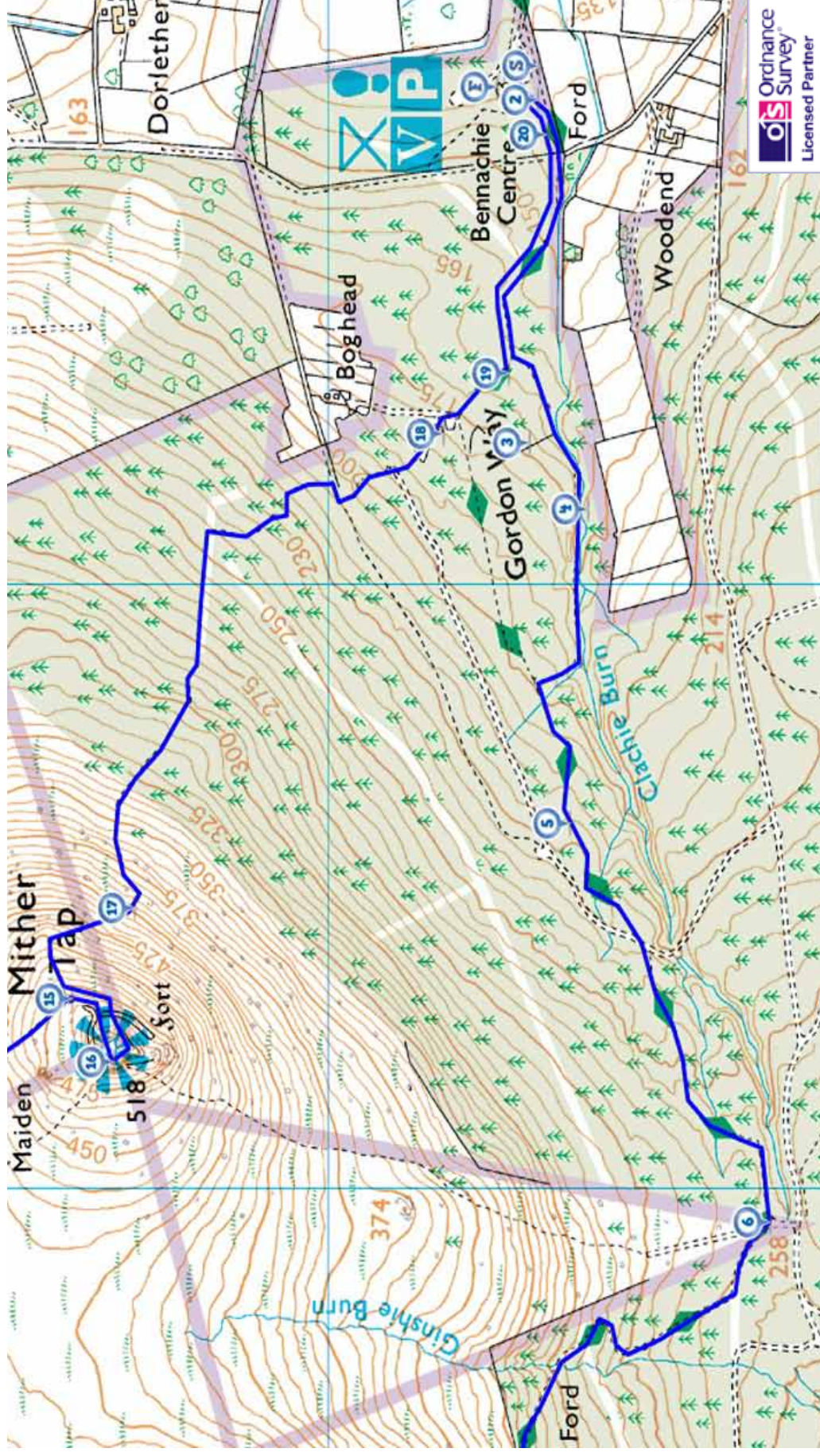
Toilets at the Bennachie Centre (not accessible when the centre is closed)

**Tourist information**

Inverurie Visitor Information Centre  
18 High St, Inverurie, Aberdeenshire, AB51 3XQ

Neighbourhood Information Point  
Grampian Transport Museum, Alford

## Detail of first and last part of route

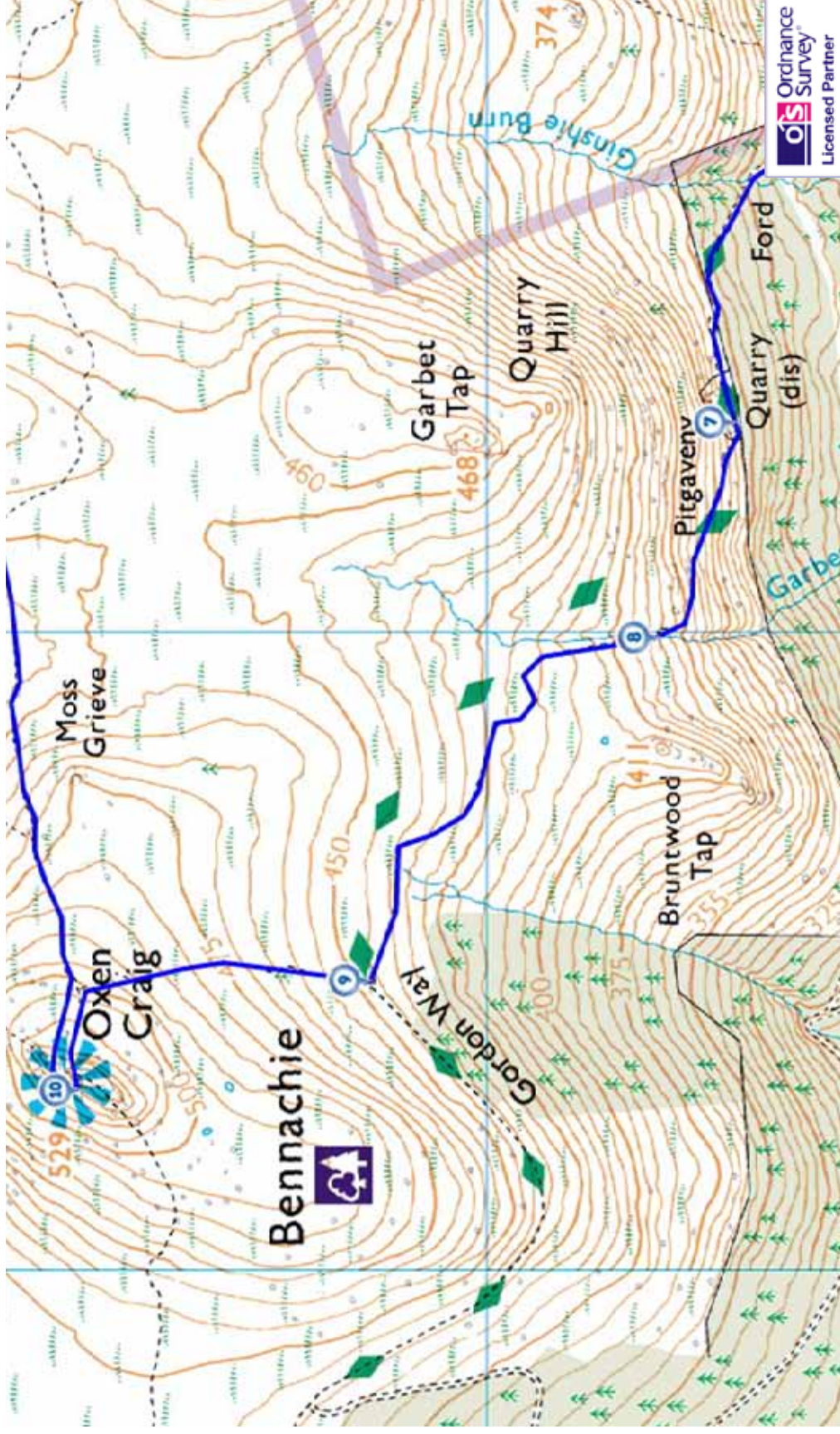


### Stopping points

- |   |                                    |                                   |
|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>S</b> Bennachie Centre                       | <b>4.</b> Dr Danny Gordon's Widdie | <b>18.</b> Ruins of Cairn Couttie |
| <b>2.</b> Information board near Visitor Centre | <b>5.</b> On the Gordon Way Trail  | <b>19.</b> Junction of paths      |
| <b>3.</b> The Gouk Stone                        | <b>6.</b> On the Gordon Way Trail  | <b>20.</b> Bennachie Centre       |
|   |                                    | <b>F</b> Bennachie Centre         |



## Detail of second part of route

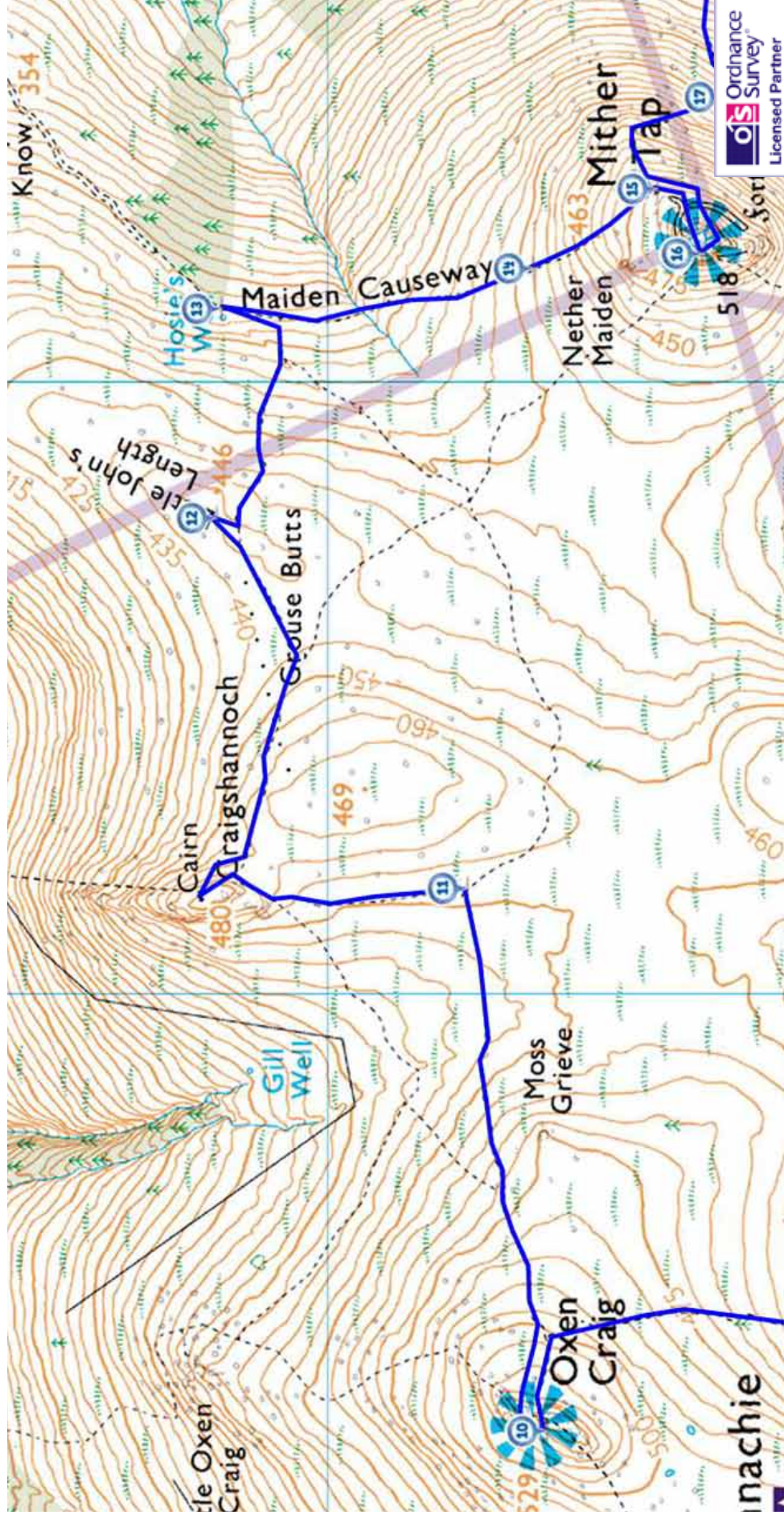


### Stopping points

7. The English Quarry
8. Above stone steps, due east of Bruntwood Tap
9. Junction of paths due south of Oxen Craig
10. Summit of Oxen Craig



## Detail of third part of route



### Stopping points

- 11.** Moss Grieve
- 12.** Cairn at southern end of Little John's Length
- 13.** Hosie's Well
- 14.** Grouse Butts
- 15.** Information board below Mither Tap Iron Age Fort
- 16.** Summit of Mither Tap
- 17.** Stone steps down from Mither Tap

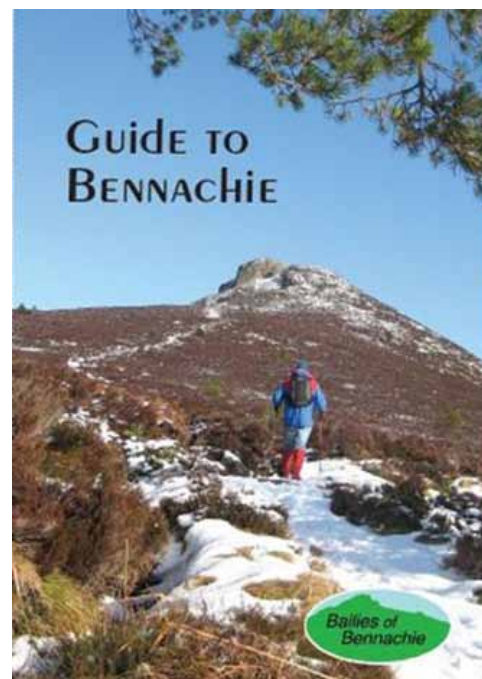


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## Important note on navigation

Weather conditions and visibility can change suddenly on the hill. **Always take a map** and know where you are at all times.

In addition to the maps supplied in this booklet, the **Guide to Bennachie** (2nd edition, 2013) includes the only accurate, up-to-date and weatherproof map of Bennachie and its trails. It is on sale at the visitor centre.



The Forestry Commission has produced a fold-out pamphlet and map which shows the **Bennachie Trails**. This is also available at the visitor centre.

The hill's main trails are well signposted at all major junctions. These **signposts** are widely referred to in the directions in this booklet. On the back of each signpost is a **6 figure grid reference** so that you can identify where you are.



The forest is managed by Forestry Commission Scotland which clears sections of trees from time to time. Descriptions in this guide may refer to wooded areas which you may subsequently find to be **clear-felled** while cleared areas may have been planted.

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## Directions

Listen to each track then read the directions in the boxes below to get to the next stop.

### 1. Welcome to Bennachie

#### Bennachie Centre

##### Directions 1

With your back to the entrance of the visitor centre, turn right and walk a few steps to a colourful information board beside a signpost for various trails. Stop here and listen to Track 2,

### 2. A hill or a mountain?

#### View of valley just past gate to Meadowcroft

##### Directions 2

Follow the path signposted the Discovery Trail, Gordon Way Trail and Mither Tap Timeline Trail. After about 100 metres pass a similar signpost and continue straight on. At the next signpost, where the Discovery Trail goes off to the right, keep straight on. Then at the next signpost shortly after, where the Gordon Way Trail and Mither Tap Timeline Trail go off to the right, turn left on the unmarked path. After about 100 metres, just as the path starts to go down a dip, look for a signpost on the right for the Gouk Stone. Follow the grassy path for about 50 metres through the trees. Stop when you reach the stone and listen to Track 3.

### 3. The Bailies of Bennachie

#### The Gouk Stone

##### Directions 3

From the Gouk Stone, retrace your steps along the grassy path to the gravel path and turn right. After about 200 metres, look on the left side for a few stone steps down to a little bridge over the stream (Clachie Burn). Go across to the granite cairn marked with a plaque indicating 'Dr Danny Gordon's Widdie' and listen to Track 4.



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## **4. A widdie and a plantin**

### **Dr Danny Gordon's Widdie**

#### **Directions 4**

Go back across the little bridge and turn left along the path, which takes you past the Rev Wood's plantation about 100 metres further on the left. Continue along the path which is straight for a short distance then makes a sharp right turn up a hill. At the junction of paths at the top turn left following the signpost for the Gordon Way Trail. Follow the path as it winds through trees. Stop at the next junction of paths where there is a signpost and listen to Track 5.

## **5. A bald mountain**

### **On the Gordon Way Trail**

#### **Directions 5**

Continue straight along the path signposted as the Gordon Way Trail which climbs steadily through the trees. Where the path meets a wider track, turn left then immediately right, again following signs for the Gordon Way Trail. This path crosses an area clear-felled in 2013. The next signpost which indicates Donview to the left, Mither Tap, Heather Brig and Gordon Way Trail to the right. Stop at this junction and listen to Track 6.

## **6. Planting and felling**

### **On the Gordon Way Trail**

#### **Directions 6**

Follow the signpost for the Gordon Way Trail which is the path that forks to the left. It begins fairly level then starts to climb steeply. After about half a mile, the path levels off and there are clear views to the left. Look for a very large pile of loose rocks on the right side of the path. Just behind you can see the face of the old English Quarry. Stop here and listen to Track 7.

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## 7. Massive rocks

### The English Quarry

#### Directions 7

From the old quarry, continue along the path which is level for a short distance further then starts to climb up stone steps. This takes you through thinning trees and up onto the heather-clad moorland slopes. Continue following the path up the hillside. Stop due east of Bruntwood Tap where the gradient lessens for a breather and listen to Track 8.

## 8. A colourful carpet

### Above stone steps, due east of Bruntwood Tap

#### Directions 8

Continue on the path which rises steadily as it traverses the hillside. Stop when you reach the junction of paths with a signpost that indicates the Gordon Way Trail to the left and listen to Track 9.

## 9. Fog and snow

### Junction of paths due south of Oxen Craig

#### Directions 9

At this point we leave the Gordon Way Trail. Continue uphill along the unnamed path. At the next signpost turn left which is indicated Back o' Bennachie Car Park. This path leads up to the summit of Oxen Craig. As you climb onto the bare rock, ignore the signpost which points downhill and continue up the gentle granite surfaces past the cairn shelter and beyond it to the trig point and viewpoint indicator. Stop at the trig point and listen to Track 10.

## 10. Resistant rock

### Summit of Oxen Craig

#### Directions 10

Retrace your steps from the summit of Oxen Craig back down the track to the first junction of paths. Go straight on the path signposted Mither Tap Quarry Trail. At the next signpost where a small path descends steeply to the left, continue straight on. Stop at the next junction of paths which indicates Mither Tap Quarry Trail to the right and listen to Track 11.



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## **11. Traditional fuel**

### **Moss Grieve**

#### **Directions 11**

Turn left along the unnamed path. At the next signpost turn right, which again is unnamed. At the next signpost, turn left on another unnamed path to the summit of Craigshannoch to enjoy the view. When you are ready, trace your steps down from the summit and turn left along the unnamed path. At the signpost, turn left and follow the path along level ground. Where the surfaced path turns a sharp right downhill, continue straight to the stone cairn. Stop at the cairn and listen to Track 12.

## **12. A tall tale**

### **Cairn at southern end of Little John's Length**

#### **Directions 12**

Retrace your steps from the cairn back to the surfaced path and turn left down the hill. At the junction of paths at the bottom, turn left which is signposted for Rowan Tree Car Park. Pass through some trees and after about 50 metres look on the left for an information board beside a small pool of water. Stop here and listen to Track 13.

## **13. A battle and a broken heart**

### **Hosie's Well**

#### **Directions 13**

Retrace your steps back along the path. At the junction go straight ahead on the path signposted Mither Tap and Maiden Causeway. This path takes you upwards towards the peak of Mither Tap. Stop for a rest where the stone steps begin. Look back over the heather-clad hillside and listen to Track 14.

## **14. Beautiful birds**

### **Grouse Butts**

#### **Directions 14**

Continue up the path and stone steps towards Mither Tap until you reach a level area with a signpost. Stop by the information board and listen to Track 15.

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## **15. Picts versus Romans**

### **Information board below Mither Tap Iron Age Fort**

#### **Directions 15**

Go through the stone walls and follow the steps up to the summit of Mither Tap. Stop by the trig point and viewpoint indicator and listen to Track 16.

## **16. The Thieves' Mark**

### **Summit of Mither Tap**

#### **Directions 16**

Retrace your steps back down from the summit to the information board and signpost. Take the path indicated for Bennachie Visitor Centre Car Park. It is a very steep descent down stone steps, which can be slippery in wet weather, so take your time and stop regularly to rest. Stop part way down the steps for a rest – look out for a horizontal stone which makes a handy bench - and listen to Track 17.

## **17. A well-worn path**

### **Stone steps down from Mither Tap**

#### **Directions 17**

Continue down the stone steps which end after the steepest section. Follow the path as it drops below through heather moorland and into the trees. Notice the different sections of woodland including some mature Christmas-tree-shaped firs called 'Noble Fir'. Follow 3 successive signposts for Bennachie Visitor Centre Car Park which send you right, left and straight on respectively. Look for a stone ruin on the right side which has an information board and a post numbered 2. Stop here and listen to Track 18.

## **18. The Colony**

### **Ruins of Cairn Couttie**

#### **Directions 18**

From the cottage ruin continue along the path. At the next junction of paths turn left which is signposted Bennachie Visitor Centre Car Park. At the next junction of paths the Gordon Way Trail meets the Colony Trail and Mither Tap Timeline Trail. Stop here and listen to Track 19.



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## 19. The next generation

### Junction of paths

#### Directions 19

Turn left following the signs for Bennachie Centre Car Park. This leads back to the centre along the path used at the start of the walk. Stop outside the centre and listen to Track 20.

## 20. A popular spot

### Bennachie Centre

#### Directions 20

Remain at Bennachie Centre and listen to Track 21.

## 21. The hill that rugs at the heart

### Bennachie Centre

#### Directions 21

This is the end of the walk. Do go in the visitor centre if it is open to look at the displays. There is also a small shop selling guidebooks, maps, souvenirs, snacks and hot drinks.



The Bennachie Centre  
Forestry Commission / Isobel Cameron  
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Enjoy exploring forest and open moorland as well as stunning views from the tops  
© Jenny Lunn / Dick Bateman / Bailies of Bennachie



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## Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing this Discovering Britain walk:

**Dick Bateman** for creating the walk, providing the audio commentary and photographs

**James Mackay** for accompanying Dick around Bennachie, sharing his extensive knowledge of the hill and careful corrections to the script

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