

THE MORAY WAY

And introducing the
BEN MACDUI TRAIL

Paul Carpenter



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All telephone numbers, web addresses correct as of 2011. The Author has made every effort to ensure historical dates, events and names are correct, but in the unlikely hood that any are found to be wrong please inform him at info@mtm-m.co.uk

Front cover image – Elgin Cathedral at sunset

Back cover painting of Author by Robert Blackwell

To Jack and Mitch



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INTRODUCTION

Moray, Oh Moray so good they only had to name it once. Its small it's compact, it's a wonderland full of surprises;

- M – has to stand for the **M**ountains, some of the highest in the UK where myth and mother nature still kick a...
- O – for **O**h my god look at the size of that Salmon that you might be lucky enough to catch or see jumping.
- R – **R**obert Burns and his quote 'Freedom an whisky gang thegither' and with over 15 distilleries in Moray (once thousands of illicit ones) you can just taste the freedom.
- A – for **A**ir and amongst the freshest on this grand Isle, just ask the old man beard dripping off of the birch.
- Y – Considering the four above it has to mean, wh**Y** the heck haven't you considered coming here before!

So what is so special about Moray that should impel you to drop everything (after reading this book) and head for it as if your life depended on it? To help make this blatantly clear let us start at one of its high points, this being Ben Avon grid reference NJ132019.

To the west of this high ground stands the mass of Cairngorms plateau holding sway to the furthestmost tip of Morays county boundary. Turning north it is possible from this vantage point on a clear day to see the calamities, natural and manmade which transformed this land into what is seen today as before you rolls out a view over the lower hills leading to the low fertile lands (Known as the 'Laich o' Moray') and finally the coast.

About 12,000 years ago, this peak would have been covered in a mighty glacier and would have been the last place you would want to stand, knee deep in solid ice whose awesome mechanical movements grinded away at everything in its path helping to create the huge corries now seen along the Lairig Ghru. Luckily, the glaciers started to melt just in time to

allow the earth to warm up enough to give us these nice summers we have today! The torrent of melted water swept down the easiest gradient opening up avenues to the coast beyond the lower hills depositing huge amounts of sediment starting the process of creating excellent farm land plus the odd hummock to build quaint little castles, churches and forts on, just waiting for the early settlers to arrive.

However, that was not until about 3,000 BC, before the arrival of man woodland and forest developed fast on the footsteps of the glaciers. Huge expanses of not just pine but great oak grew covering the whole area in a nice warm blanket of needles and leaf, which was called the Atlantic forest or more commonly the Caledonian Forest, bringing along with it the large animals that used to roam here such as the bear and wolf.

Once this excellent housing material had matured and the abundance of food supply had settled, along with the great salmon finding a few more rivers to struggle up. Then the haphazard groups of pre-historic people wandered this way pushed further up north by groups down south starting the process of civilizing the land by colonizing areas close to food and which offer the best protection. Hence, the first settlement were created, namely Burghead with its nice outcrop of rock surrounded by an inland marshy loch not far from the fertile flatlands around Forres, which also had or still does a perfect high hill for lookouts.

Over the proceeding thousands of years these people developed a severe hatred of the midge along with a few tools, starting with the humble cracked rock then later a dark hard substance, which could be moulded into all sorts of things. With this, these people developed into an isolated (due to the mountain barriers) organized group governed and taxed just we are today, but who had a fascination for painting their faces blue.

These were the Picts or Caledonians, who the Romans, despite holding sway over the rest of the UK for 3 centuries, could not bring to heel. Going by the many coin hordes found locally, they preferred to bribe for peace while they went about their business wearing shiny armour, starting the concept of paved roads and eating exotic food while watching warriors kill each other.

After the Romans left, the Vikings came and stayed, and the period of political unrest, battles, ownership, religious and royalty turmoil began serving ever more to produce that one great item. The castle ruin, which

provides so much entertainment these days plus the unfortunate demise of the great Caledonian forest eaten up by the blood thirst and history of human naval conflict, as well as some bits, cleared for farming.

In amongst all of this is what makes this place so special. One obviously being the natural forces that have and will constantly change this landscape but most importantly it is the little folk, the lads, lassies, loons and lairds. Around their hard work and good humour has developed a land full of history and intrigue, of its clans and their fight for freedom, all accomplished without the aid of mobile phones and microwaves. They grew a legacy started by their ancestors as they defied English rule and later not paying tax on illicit whisky, whose huge boat fleets from harbours large and small, brought supplies from around the world and whose rivers supply two of the world's great luxuries; the dram and salmon steak.

To see, feel and experience what is best of Moray, these routes within this book are as good a start as any at giving you the opportunity to meet the small folk, and sample the delicacies produced here, such as whisky, salmon and Cullen skink. Depending on the time of year, you may even be lucky enough to leave with the same if not worse hatred of all the dreaded midges!

HOW TO GET THE BEST FROM THIS BOOK

All of the information sections are self-explanatory about what they contain. I.e. If you need to know how to poo in the woods, then there's a whole page about it with diagrams, plus the same for bikes and boots, but you may be wandering about the main sections called 'The basics' and 'The detail'.

These were created to cater for three types of reader;



The Basic's – For those of us who just want the nitty gritty fact and figures, who just need to know the essentials and are off like a bat out of hell.



The Details – This is a much larger section written for the gentler, serene types who just love to find out about an areas colourful and even violent historical bits and pieces and take their time doing it.



Both The Basics and Details – No harm in reading both sections and is ideal for the inbetweeners who would use the basics first to get an idea of the trails and then read the detail when they are bored or laying exhausted in the B and B.

The Routes within this book are purposely not set out in durations of day 1 and day 2 type but rather set out in sections because everybody has their own pace be it on foot or on a bike. Moreover they can, from the simple maps provided assert for themselves how far they would like to go and choose where to stay the night? This is after all supposed to be fun not a test of endurance and, if you want to spend the occasional lunch sipping the odd dram – go ahead!

POO'S IN THE WILD

Poo's, more commonly referred to by a four letter word spoken out loud in haste when something goes wrong, or in some instances referred to as 'sugar' despite not having the same punch! But why oh why is there a section on excrement when perhaps the non-persistent aromas of flatulence are of more concern and the availability of toilets and nearness of settlements to the trails in this book might not make it a concern.

Unfortunately, as you walk around these trails you might be unfortunate to see the reason in the form of helpings of bangers and mash at the side of the path (the mash of course being toilet paper). Then of course, there are the recent warnings posted at the Faindouran Lodge on approach to the River Avon ford where improper dumping of human waste has caused a case of food poisoning.

Now on the defense of the poo'ee it is not always possible to spend time taking care in the placement of said waste, especially when exposing possibly the fairest, softest and whitest part of the body to the extreme windy, wet and cold environments of the Cairngorms upon a typical summer's day.

All the same, the bad side to the Cairngorms getting the recognition it deserves and being stated as one of the top 10 locations of the world (National Geographic) will undoubtedly mean an increase in possible miss-placed Poo's. It is not possible to say turn the urge to poo off as any doctor would say this is not healthy and naturally you will be eating high energy and rich food to supplement the increase in exertion. In the end when you got to go, you got to go.

The only solution would seem to be that as an individual or group, you will have to add one small item to your kit list, namely something like a garden trowel with which to dig a small or large hole depending on length of stay and amount of possible users. It's no use crying 'but sheep, cows and deer poo all over the place, why should I have to get down and dirty' simply put they eat from the system and poo into the system, they are part of the local food chain, we are not and thus cannot just cock a leg and dump. Below are a few suggestions of methods of pooing in the wilds that could be used by individuals, groups and even establishments.



- The Multi-single use poo dispenser – With said trowel or shovel if provided, this is ideal for an individual or groups of up to 4 to use staying in the same location for one or two nights.

Once you have arrived at your chosen night location, recce out a place away from rivers, streams, buildings and paths on a flat area, if possible out of the wind and allowing some privacy.

Pull away stones and undergrowth such as heather, pine needles, grass until peat or soil is exposed and dig down about 1 1/2 foot depositing the waste around the edge of the hole (diameter of hole depending on size of your derrière).

Lastly place some stones around the diameter to allow for support and your multi-single use poo dispenser is ready, no longer requiring a potential desperate user to scramble about in the mountains, woods or moors.

On average only two people might use it, for groups of more the 4 build other ones and after each deposit cover said excrement and paper with some earth/peat ready for next user. The hole will probably fill with water so expect a splash or two.

As for the jug and barrel beautifully drawn within the earth of the picture – many roman coin hordes have been found in moray plus a lot of illicit whisky distilling happened in these parts, so you never know what you might dig up!



- Group Use – Could still be dug with a trowel but a shovel would be more appropriate in this instant. Also needed would be three lengths of timber or branches for the seat support.

For use by groups of up to 15 staying in the same location for more than 4 nights, more than likely

permission would have to be granted from land owner for its use as well as the other activities which the group will do.

Rece out a position as discussed in previous example but this time after clearing area of debris, dig down to about waist height with a diameter of 2 to 3 feet depositing waste to one side. Next build support as shown in drawing just off centre and attach the trowel to one support to aid depositing soil into hole after each use. The hole will probably fill with water so expect a bigger splash or two.



- Semi-permanent use – Would involve a lot more construction and thus would probably be built by the owner or caretaker in an area/location where people frequently stay overnight or longer giving them a dry centralized location to dispose of their waste. Especially good where vehicle access is possible to wood, moor or mountain location.

Basically it is a large hole lined with stones, covered by a port-a-loo type building which when full is either piped off or burnt.

Bike and Foot Grades

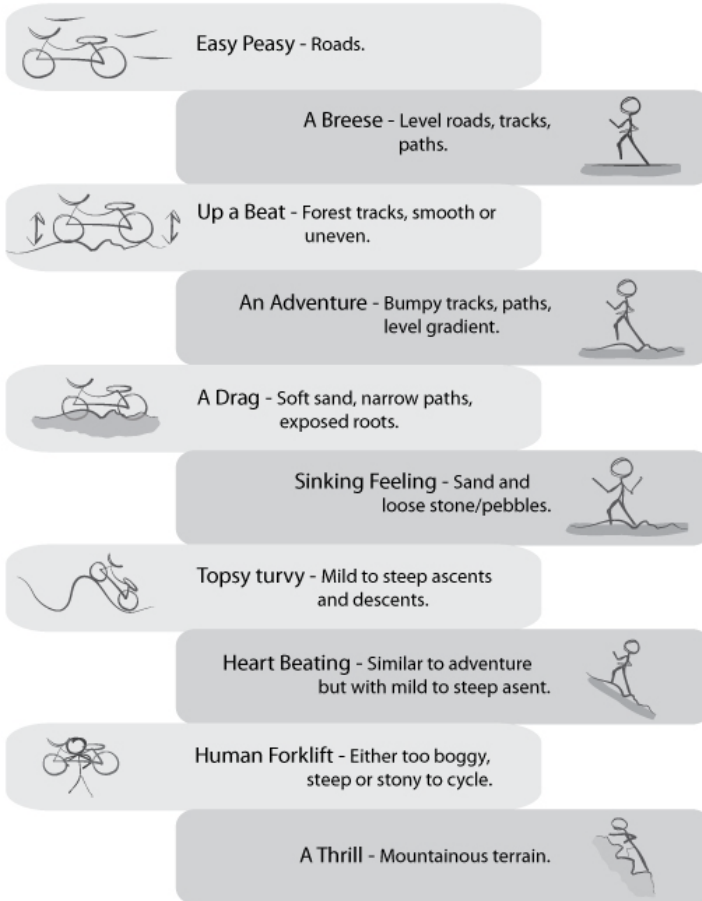
























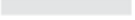






Figure 1 – Grades of both routes based on a 40 year old of mid range fitness.

Ben Macdui Trail



| | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------|---|
| BEN MACDUI TRAIL |  | SEA |  |
| PLACES OF INTEREST/BOTHIES |  | SAND |  |
| MOUNTAIN SUMMITS |  | 0 - 50M |  |
| LOCATION AND DIRECTION OF PHOTOS |  | 50 - 200M |  |
| DIRECTION OF NORTH |  | 200 - 500M |  |
| DISTANCE IN MILES BETWEEN MARKERS |  | 500 - 700M |  |
| ROAD |  | 700 - 900M |  |
| TRACK - used railway and forest tracks from smooth to stony. |  | 900 - 1100M |  |
| PATH - width between a path and track, mostly smooth and level. |  | 1100 - 1400M |  |
| PATH UNSUITABLE FOR CYCLES - often narrow steep, uneven, or over marsh. |  | TOWNS |  |
| RIVER |  | PINE WOODS |  |
| RAILWAY |  | MIXED |  |
| CAIRNGORM NATIONAL PARK BOUNDARY |  | LOCHS |  |
| COUNTY BOUNDARY |  | WINDMILL FARMS |  |
| | | CAMP GROUND - unserviced |  |



SCALE ON EACH MAP VARIES - PLEASE USE MILEAGE MARKERS AS AN INDICATION OF DISTANCE.

PARTS OF ROUTE WHICH HAVE NO DISTINCT PATH OR TRACK SUCH AS ON THE CAIRNGORMS AND MARSH AREAS ARE LEFT BLANK.

Figure 2 - Map Legend for the Ben Macdui Trail maps

THE MORAY WAY – An introduction

The Moray Way was created a few years ago from the amalgamation of three existing walks, these being The Dava Way, The Moray Coastal Trail and The Speyside Way.

It is over 90 miles long and shaped like a triangle.....sounds quite

normal when just its facts and figures are listed but for a comparatively compact circular route, it is in fact very unique.

Aside from being a circular route, meaning the start and exit are at the same place and could very well be anywhere along it. Each of its three sides involves going over completely different terrain from one another.

If you love the sand, the gentle rolling of the waves, clear sea water to swim in, pine forests, spotting multitudes of sea birds and exploring hidden caves, then you'll love the Coastal part of the route from Findhorn to Kingston.

Next is the route down the River Spey from its ever-changing mouth where its torrent endlessly shifts the sands as well as sometimes bridges in bad spates. It is the main artery out of Moray for runoff from the high Cairngorms and surrounding hills, and some might say the main reason of Morays fame for its many Whiskies (which you start smelling past Craigellachie) and salmon fishing. From Kingston to Grantown on Spey you get the chance to see the hidden sides to this most majestic of rivers from its banks and above in the pine clad hills along its length.

The final stretch takes you far from the populated areas you have seen thus far out of the historic home base of the clan Grant over a fairly even and gentle climb up to the moors. Following in the rail tracks which really opened up the wonders of moray to the masses seeking the same peace, isolation and clean air you can still experience.

Have a safe journey.

Length – 96 miles (155 km)

Total Ascent – 2,016m (6,762ft)

Highest point – 330m (1,083ft)

THE MORAY WAY – The Basics

Stage 1 - **Forres to Findhorn** – OS sheet 27, 28, 423

Distance – 4.8 miles Height gain/loss – 0m/18m



By bike -

By foot -



Route – Cycle path most of the way until the entrance to Findhorn foundation at GR050635. Path changes side of road at GR062611. At traffic lights GR064616 carry on taking first right to see Kinloss cathedral or turn left to Findhorn. After foundation, follow road to marina.

Alternative routes/short cuts – Take right hand turning at GR045637 for Heath House and follow to beach car park.

Findhorn to Burghead

Distance – 6.9 miles Height gain/loss – 14m/0m



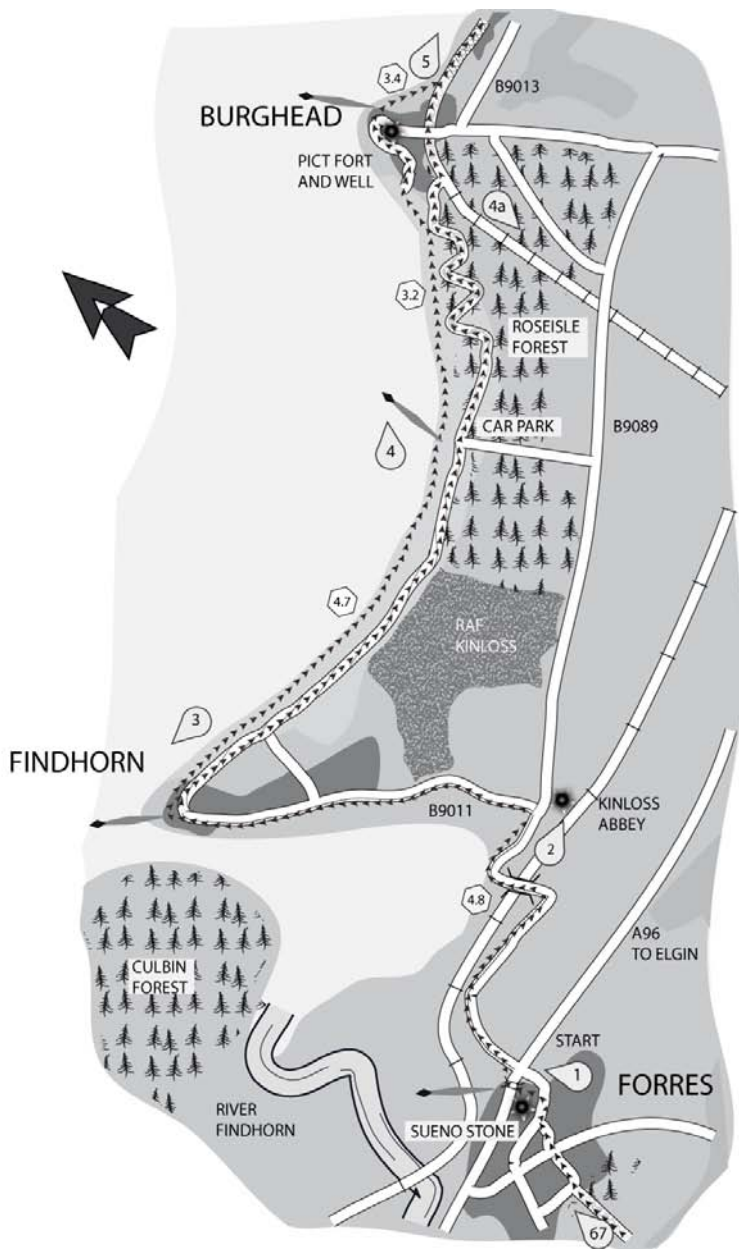
By bike -

By foot -



Route – When the tide is out sand is firm enough to ride on by tidemark, exit by Caravan Park in Burghead, turn left and follow road to Pict fort. When tide is in use soft sand/pebble track past dunes and RAF Kinloss, ground firms up from here and leads into forest where vehicle tracks lead past car park then to old railway line – follow to road, turn left to Pict fort.

Alternative routes/short cuts – After railway track go straight over Grant Street and follow road to right side of large building to join up with coastal path.



Stage 1 – Forres to Burghead

THE MORAY WAY – The Detail

Stage 1 - **Forres to Findhorn** – OS sheet 27, 28, 423

Distance – 4.8 miles Height gain/loss – 0m/18m

The night had been savage under the dark steamy clouds. When dawn broke, what was left of them faded away under the hot morning sun creating a fine low mist as all ground water was boiled and evaporated.

The carts wheels cracked and groaned under immense weight as it progressed unseen along the narrow track, while the feeble collection of people waited in fear and mourning for their lost ones.

Suddenly a shout was heard followed by impenetrable silence when only the sharp breathing of the tired and weary beast dragging the wagon could be heard copying the thumping of hearts of all present in anticipation of its arrival. Orders were shouted and the running of feet exploded amidst this silence as the great stone years in the making was slowly raised into place by rope, wood, sweat and pulsing muscles.....

Over 1,000 years later and that stone, known as the Sueno Stone standing 6m high covered on all sides from top to bottom with symbols and drawings of old is still standing for all to see in near perfect condition despite a millennium of strong westerly winds, the rain and bloody human history. Making it as good a place as any to start this route in a direction, which would ensure that those strong winds aid you along the exposed coastal part and not beat you back.

Most important thing to remember at this point is do not just rush off over the spanking new white footbridge and on along the cycle path to Kinloss. Rather take some time to look around the four varied faces of the Sueno stone. Of intricate Celtic curves and interweaving lines, recoding a battle where enemies met and charged with lance, sword and shield under the screams of death and malice. The record of victory is particularly poignant seeing the fate of the loser's heads. In addition, the extent and detail of the carvings only reflects more than any supposition

of the presence of supreme and skilled artisans amidst these savage times.

If only it could talk, not only would it have many true stories to tell of the events and conflicts around Forres but perhaps it could solve the greatest mystery of all, that being the reason for its existence.

Many believe that Sueno stone was made by the church as a reminder to the constant conflicts in this region, of good over evil. While many more still hold onto the belief that only the feelings left upon the aftermath of fierce battles would give reason for such a costly and meaningful statue to man's loss to be made.

Around 844AD, Moray was an independent region led by leaders called the Maormars who migrating from Argyll to escape the invading Scandinavians only to have them invade their new home. Maelbrigd or more commonly known as 'Tooth' unwilling to run again set forth to challenge 'Sigurd the powerful' the Norseman's leader. Unfortunately, the tactful deceiving of Sigurd won the day and they marched from the battlefield with the losers heads bobbing around their gear. (The head chopping giving it an association with the stone)

Maelbrigd was named 'tooth' due to a large tooth protruding from his mouth, which in death allowed him to wreak his revenge upon Sigurd who had his head. This tooth scrapes Sigurd skin, infesting him with a gangrenous infection (no such thing as Colgate back then!) killing him three days later. The location of the stone is said to mark his grave.

Fast forward now to 1000AD and the Danes, under a leader called 'Sueno' (the matching names giving raise to its association with the stone) came to the shores of Moray to spill blood and other numerous naughty things, they were met by the combined forces of the Scots under Malcolm II, king of Scotland. Suffice to say is that the Scots lost to an army of veterans.

However, not to be out done, Malcolm gathered another better army 60 years later and in the face of defeat spurred his men onto final victory by charging sword raised into the thick of the unorganized enemy. The association to this 'Battle of Mortlach' to the stone is said to be within the treaty drawn up after between Malcolm and his enemies. Creating a period of peace, that was seen as a far greater reason to celebrate, with



Photo 1 – Sueno Stone

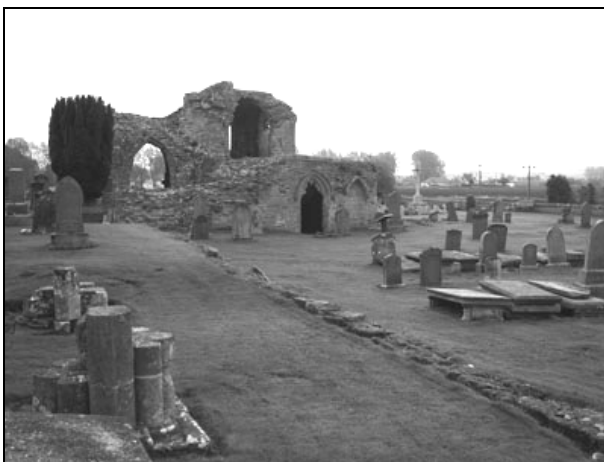


Photo 2 – Kinloss Abbey

the men back from their manly games and able once more to fertilize field and lassies.

As you make your way along the nice level road to Kinloss, it is hard to imagine that once this whole area was covered in dense woodland. Much harder to travel through and easier to get lost in; bring us nicely to the creation of Kinloss abbey. While it existed, before reformation caused many seats of religion to relinquish their huge assets of land and money, it provided an important place of learning for local nobles and resting place for royalty and soldiers alike. Amongst its gardens of wondrous herbs, a library full of vast knowledge and a kitchen where cooks used the fruits from their land, as well as a chapel for prayer.

But before all that during a hunting party around 1150AD, the leader, David I, king of Scotland got separated from the party and was only rescued by the attentions of a white dove leading him to a clearing. It was late in the day and he was thankful for the shelter offered by a Shepard for the night during which he dreamt of the Virgin Mary, who asked in return for saving him to build a sacred building within the clearing. Upon returning to Duffus castle where he was staying he quickly organized for the best architects to start building straight away, and the rest as they say is history!

Upon entering Kinloss passing through the traffic lights and taking the right hand track, the ruin that this leads to does not suitably reflect the abbey's size and importance to the locality but the tombstones certainly make for some interesting reading.

Nowadays the local's concerns centre around the RAF camp, whose quarters you see around you and long runway on the road leading to village of Findhorn. For over 70 years, this camp (along with RAF Lossiemouth) has been a base from which the air forces of the UK have provided security around the world, but (unlike RAF Lossiemouth) this camp's days are numbered.

Scheduled to be closed by 2015 it is worth a look down the runway as you pass it on the right and perhaps get a glimpse of the fleet of Nimrods (if still there). No more will they fill the skies with their poetic flight, their grace and ease of movement like that of a swan, very different to the roar of the super jets at RAF Lossiemouth.



Photo 3 – Looking towards Findhorn



Photo 4 – Looking towards Burghead

On the left side of the road just past the runway is a hide from which it is possible to see the flight of birds, who love the marshy and coastal estuary of the River Findhorn. Huge in breadth and width, a good pair of binoculars and good zoom lens could provide some memorable sights.

Just up the road a bit more is the World-renowned Findhorn Foundation, which you either know a lot about or have never heard of before. Whichever, their enlightened approach to life is worth exploring, as well as their bread. The skills portrayed in the pottery shop are only equaled by the eco art displayed in the Moray Art Centre but perhaps nowhere as good as the paintings on the Foundations Four wind turbines which can be seen upon crossing the sand dunes towards Burghead.

You now enter Findhorn village after the turning for the foundation and have to walk on the pavement or cycle on the road leading past the roundhouse on the left then through pine woodland. Just past this is the right hand turning towards the sand dunes car park and detour round Findhorn, but why rush when there is so much more to see and enjoy, especially the soft vanilla ice cream from the marina café, which you could enjoy while sitting at the captain's table!

On the long straight down towards the marina, the views on offer on the left are of the estuary and the many small and large boat landings, plus on the far bank can be seen the start of the immense Culbin forest stretching from here all the way to Nairn.

If you were standing here in the 17th century, you would have seen what was called the 'Granary of Moray' of fields and small settlements instead of trees. Going by finds of early man's tools the area was used since we first arrived here, on and off in-between the local battles between land and sea. Fast forward to the early 18th century and an immense stretch of sand dunes would present itself to you covering all dwellings and fields.

The reason was the fierce winds and storms, which will always move about the coastal sands of Moray, and specifically on one unforgettable night in the late 17th century. After seven centuries of relative, calm a night of wild winds, enveloped the area forever in tones of sand. Was it Mother Nature just organizing her pantry? Or as legend has it, was it the cruel blasphemous lairds fault for playing cards one Saturday night into the Sabbath shouting upon being told this that he would play all day if he wanted to, with the devil as his partner!!!

Apart from now thinking 'bad, bad laird' you may be wondering how a desert of sand was converted into woodland supporting numerous wild animals such as the elusive red squirrel and badger plus hundreds of different species of flora. It was not easy, first Marram Grass was tried but failed at stabilizing the sand, and then the never-ending task of thatching the sand with brushwood was tried and succeeded. Upon this stable ground, numerous species of pine were tried with Corsican Pine being the most successful. If you have time, you can see the small areas in culbin where these different types were tested from the Welhill Car Park, just take the left hand path as you enter the Car Park and follow it as it twists and turns for about 1 mile.

Back to Findhorn, you are probably passing the first of two pubs and on a hot day is the last place before Burghead to wet you whiskers. Follow the road round to the right and take the left turning towards the marina, or alternatively take the path hugging the River Findhorn opposite the Kimberley Inn leading you to the marina café and a great viewpoint of the busy little port.

After the soft vanilla ice cream treat head west to the sand dunes leading to Burghead or if the tide is out you cannot really leave this town without seeing its resident herd of seals. If you do then just follow the estuary as it curves round towards the culbin looking back at Findhorn harbour just before going over the dunes, at sunset the colours can be quite fantastic off the boats, buildings and calm water.

On the other side of the dunes, you should see the black mass of the seals at the end of the exposed sand bank or even on the Culbin side if too many people are present. The stretch of River Findhorn along these dunes is very deep and tidal so swimming is not advised away from the protected cove just past the marina.

Findhorn as a working fishing and shipping port has been around for a long time, the town you see today is the third with the others being swept away or flooded by the same storms, which desolated culbin. The first Findhorn was said to of stood well out into the Moray Firth meaning it could well of been far beyond where you see the seals, the second is recorded to have been a mile north west of the present town meaning that the seals are laying around on top of it.

This second town was to all accounts, thriving with warehouses, shipping produce all over the continent but the ever-shifting sands made

its port shallower and stated to encroach onto the houses of the sailors and fisherman. Eventually the present town was planned and built, until like the culbin in the space of one night all the buildings and what was Findhorn the 2nd disappeared under the surf and sand.

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View of Glenlivet and Cairngorms from Scurran of Merinsh near Ben Rinnes 840M

If you have an odd 2 to 4 hours to spare, a hike up to the summit of Ben Rinnes would be a good idea. It offers a grand 360-degree view over most of Moray including the middle section of the Ben Macdui trail.

Distance is about 6 miles with an ascent of 530m from the lay by at 284360 (Landranger 28) and it is just a matter of following the yellow brick road all the way to the top. Well not actually yellow or brick but the coarse wide gravel track looks like it with the odd section of steps over the steeper parts.

Apparently, someone had a wedding on the summit and there are tales of plane crashes plus of the battle of Glenlivet or Balrinnes – visit <http://www.friendsofbenrinnes.org.uk/Tales.html> for full details of these tales.
