Deeside Way Green Walks

Prepared by Deeside CAN

in collaboration with Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum

Walk #1: A woodland walk around Scolty Hill, Banchory



Length: max. 2 miles

Duration: 45 minutes; depending on discussions up to 2 hours!

Elevation: ca. 50m

Stiles: 0

Easy walk along good paths

Introduction:

Pilgrimage is an ancient activity in which a journey of discovery is undertaken and where the largest single gain is increased awareness of oneself and one's relationship with others and with God's creation. Pilgrimage is thus an appropriate way in which we can explore the links between ourselves and nature. It is also an activity which can be undertaken by all ages, and which can promote discussion within families as well as with others.



The Deeside Way already has established footpaths. It follows both a river and for some of its length a former railway line. It allows vistas of human activity especially farming, forestry and tourism and variation in vegetation and in geology. It thus provides the setting for us to focus on nature and the environment, and to ask questions about the appropriateness of our use of nature and how that has changed. It helps us to increase our understanding about our place in the world.

We are planning to develop Green Walks along the length of the Deeside Way over the next 2-3 years.

<u>Walk #1:</u>

Starting from the Scolty Hill carpark, follow the 'Red Route' in a clockwise direction



Start/parking: Scolty Hill car park, South of Banchory town. Managed by , Forestry & Land Scotland, car park fee is £2 per day. Grid ref NO687947, postcode AB31 6PT

Nearest town: Banchory

Refreshments: There are numerous cafés and coffee shops in Banchory. On the High Street these include Tease, Birdhouse and Dee-Licious, as well as the Burnett Arms, Douglas and the Stag hotels. South of the High Street are Chatterbox and the Falls of Feugh, as well as the Banchory Lodge Hotel, and to the East of the town are Ride, and Buchanans.

Public toilets: In Bellfield Park

Public transport: Buses to Aberdeen and Braemar stop on Banchory High Street.

Maps: OS Explorer 38

<u>Stop 1</u>: A small river in the wood

<u>Theme</u>: The adaptability of nature





Plants adapt to the environment in which they find themselves even after stressful natural events such as high winds. Birch trees have been pushed over by high winds but have regrown from a horizontal position. This reminds us that difficult times happen and can be adjusted to, although often with evidence that there have been serious issues.

As we look around, we see evolutionary history laid out for us. There are mosses and ferns which have been with us for as much as 500 million years, and the mycorrhizal associations, obvious on the beech trees, which helped large plants exploit the earth's crust.

Observe

- The interaction of rock, water and plants.
- The lack of biodiversity – this is a plantation not a natural forest.

Reflect on

- What was here before the wood was planted? Why was it planted? How long ago?

- The community of things living in the wood - trees, plants, fungi, birds, insects. They live together and communicate with each other – how do they do that? How do we fit into that community?
- The ability of nature to adapt to a changing environment.

Readings:

- **Job 37, v 14-15; Job 38, v 1-2, 12-15, 19-21, 34-38 (Revised English version)**

  Listen Job to this argument - stop and consider God's wonderful works. Do you know how God assigns them to their tasks, how he sends light flashing from his clouds?

  Then the Lord answered Job out of the tempest. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?

  In all your life have you ever called up the dawn or assigned the morning to its place? Have you taught it to grasp the fringes of the earth and shake the dog star from the sky; to bring up the horizon in relief as clay under a seal, until all things stand out like the folds of a cloak, when the light of the dog star is dimmed, and the stars of the navigators' line go out one by one?

  Which is the way to the home of light and where does darkness dwell? Can you then take each to its appointed boundary and escort it on its homeward path? Doubtless you know, for you were already born. How long is the span of your life!

  Can you command the clouds to envelope you in a deluge of rain? If you bid lightning speed on its way, will it say to you I am ready? Who put wisdom in depths of darkness and veiled understanding in secrecy? Who is wise enough to marshal the rain clouds and empty the cisterns of heaven when the dusty soil sets in a dense mass and the clods of earth stick fast together?

- **The living soil, in *Farming or gardening for health or disease,* by Albert Howard**

  The soil is as a matter of fact full of living organisms. It is essential to conceive of it as something pulsating with life and not as a dead or

inert mass. There could be no greater misconception than to regard the earth as dead; a handful of soil is teaming with life. The living fungi, bacteria and protozoa invisibly present in the soil complex are known as the soil population. This population of minute existences pursue their own lives. They come into being, grow, work and die. They are divided into groups fitted to exist under all sorts of conditions.

This lively and exciting life of the soil is the first thing, which sets in motion the great wheel of life. Not without truth have poets and priests paid worship to mother earth. The source of our being. What poetry or religion have vaguely celebrated, science has minutely examined. It is this life which is continually being passed into the plant.

- **1887, in *The Shropshire lad,* by A E Houseman**

  Loveliest of trees, the cherry now is hung with bloom along the bough and stands about the woodland ride wearing white for Eastertide.

  Now of my three score years and ten twenty will not come again and take from seventy springs a score it only leaves me fifty more.

  And since to look at things in bloom fifty springs are little room about the woodlands, I will go to see the cherry hung with snow.

- **Mycorrhizas: functional processes and ecological impact, by Vivienne Gianinazzi Pearson, Marie Tollot and Pascale Seddas**

  Arbuscular Mycorrhizas have existed since Ordovician times (over 450 million years ago) and the presence of this root symbiosis in most families of extant land plants can only be explained by the maintenance of compatibility systems as new species appeared during evolution. Identification of molecular codes driving the co-ordinated development of plant and fungal partners provides not only the basis for deciphering implied cell programmes but also a starting block for optimising manipulation and management of the symbiosis for sustainable crop production. Establishment of the arbuscular mycorrhizal symbiosis follows a conserved sequence of developmental steps, which are independent of the fungal and plant species involved. Once the first interface of contact is established, plant accommodation of the fungal symbionts drives root penetration.

Cell to cell interactions leading to the finely tuned re-adjustments in plant and fungal tissues during mycorrhizal development must be the outcome of sophisticated signalling events between the symbiotic partners. The first events occur in the rhizosphere where plant exudates not only stimulate or inhibit microbial activities through the production of metabolites but also act as messengers which initiate molecular dialogues between root and micro-organism.

- **The nature of mycorrhizal associations, in *Mycorrhizas,* by J Harley and S Smith**

  Although the term mycorrhiza would seem to imply the association of fungi with roots, the relationships are found between hyphal fungi and the organs of higher plants of whatever morphological origin, which are concerned with the absorption of substances from the soil. Mycorrhizas are the chief organs involved in nutrient uptake of most land plants. The presence of the fungal associate of mycorrhizal systems in the root region, on or in the root tissues and surrounding soil inevitably ensures that it influences the absorption of soil derived substances by the host and is influenced by substances exuded or lost by the host.

  In this respect the mycorrhizal fungus is a specialised member of the root region or rhizosphere entourage of micro-organisms. Mycorrhizal infection usually increases the efficiency of nutrient absorption by its host from which the fungus directly obtains carbon compounds.

  The essential difference between mycorrhizal associations and the general association of organisms with the root surface lies in the closeness of the relationship. In mycorrhizas there is always some penetration of the tissues or a recognisable structure conforming to one of the common patterns. The difference of the mycorrhizal condition from disease depends on it being the normal state of both partners in at least some ecological situations. The partners are dependent upon one another, and interchange of material takes place between their living cells.

<u>Stop 2</u>: By a gate looking out towards Kerloch hill

<u>Theme</u>: Integration and impact of Man and Nature





Being able to see the tops of hills gives perspective to the landscape. We see change as the land goes upwards and away from us. The existence of hills makes us wonder why there are hills, and how they came to be, and why they are where they are. We are reminded of geological history and of how rocks came to be and of how they differ.

Man impacts the environment in many ways such as by improving the species content of grassland, burning heather moorland so as to keep the heather young and vigorous and integrating our agricultural and forest practices. We now increasingly use the wind, which blow across our hills as a source of energy.

Observe

- Different elements in the landscape: farmland, hills covered in heather, commercial woodland, windfarms, the Durris mast, roads with traffic.

Reflect on

- How is the land used now? What is the history of that land use?
- What would it look like without Man's interference?
- How do we assist the natural habitat so that it functions naturally? Should we re-introduce predators, e.g., lynx?
- Is Man apart from Nature?
- What will the landscape look like in 30 years' time?

Readings:

- **1 Corinthians 12, v 14-26 (Revised English version)**

  A body is not a single organ but many. Suppose the foot were to say, "because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body", it belongs to the body none the less. Suppose the ear were to say, "because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body", it still belongs to the body. If the body were all eye, how would it hear? If the body were all ear, how could it smell?

  But in fact, God appointed each limb and organ to its own place in the body as He chose. If the whole were a single organ there would not be a body at all. In fact, there are many different organs but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you". God has combined the various parts of the body giving special honour to the humbler parts so that there might be no divisions in the body, but that all parts might feel the same concern for each other. If one part suffers, all suffer together; if one flourishes, all rejoice together.

- **The Bird of Time, by NW Moore**

  The reduction of forest cover from about 90% of the land surface to less than 10% must have had a roughly proportional effect on many species. It is estimated that today there are about 35,000 pairs of greater spotted woodpecker in GB. This species is dependent on large trees for food. The original population was around 300,000 pairs.

  The Skylark has benefited from agriculture and must have been rare in pre-agricultural Britain, probably under 100,000 pairs while there are now around 4,000,000 pairs.

  The destruction of forest has reduced the total amount of woodland habitat and it has broken up the original continuous area into fragments. Thus, populations reduced by habitat become fragmented. Although genetically connected variability is retained. This matters if populations become genetically isolated and so inbred, with a loss of variability and of the ability to adapt to changing conditions so becoming vulnerable to extinction.

- **London Plane, in *The Cinder Path,* by Andrew Motion**

  They felled the plane that broke the pavement slabs.

  My next-door neighbour worried for his house. He said its roots had cracked his bedroom wall. The council sent tree surgeons and he watched. A thin man in the heat without a shirt.

  They started at the top and then worked down. It took a day with one hour free for lunch. The trunk was carted off in useful logs.

  The stump remained for two weeks after that. A wren sat on it once. Then back the tree men came with their machine. They chomped the stump and left a square of mud. All afternoon the street was strewn with bits. That night the wind got up and blew it bare.

<u>Stop 3:</u> **A log on the way back to the car park**

<u>Theme</u>: **Regeneration**

A number of facts about nature and the world in which we live such as the importance of the recycling of resources such as the decay of timber and the growth of bracket fungi and the power of nature as seen in the wind blow of trees.





Observe

- Fungi on the log.
- Seasonal plant cover, e.g., by Oxalis.
- Recycling.

Reflect on

- The cyclical nature of life: nothing is forever. There is a rhythm to life, with nature recycling everything to make room for new life (e.g., annual seasonal cycles). How does this apply to us?
- The webs of nature. How do we fit into them? How do we help or destroy them?
- How do we contribute to recycling?

Readings:

- **Ecclesiastes 3, v 1-8, 14 (Revised English version)**

  For everything there is a season, a time for activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot; a time to break down and a time to build up; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time for mourning and a time for dancing; a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek and a time to loose; a time to keep and a time to discard; a time to scatter and a time to mend; a time for silence and a time for speech; a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace.

  I know that whatever God does lasts forever; there is no adding to it and no taking away. And he has done it all in such a way that everyone must feel in awe in his presence.

- **Introduction, in *The Epigenetic Revolution,* by Nessa Carey**

  We talk about DNA as if it is a template like a mould for car parts in a factory. But DNA isn't like that. It's more like a script. Think of Romeo and Juliet. Several productions have used Shakespeare's script and yet have produced very different movies. Identical starting points with very different outcomes. That's what happens when cells read the genetic code that's in DNA. The same script can result in very different productions. The implications for human health are very wide ranging. Without anything happening to the DNA blueprint of people, their DNA didn't mutate and yet life histories can be altered irrevocably in response to environment. Audrey Hepburn was one of the 20th centuries greatest Movie stars. Her beauty was created by terrible hardship. She was a survivor of the Dutch hunger winter the after-effects of which, including poor health, stayed with her for the rest of her life.

- **Life as we knew it, in *The Epigenetics Revolution,* by Nessa Carey**

  Science is just as prone to mood swings and fashions as any other human activity. There was a period when the prevailing orthodoxy was that the only thing that mattered was our DNA script, but the same

script can be used differently depending on its cellular context. DNA remains important. Even if the script is perfect the final outcome can be awful if the interpretation is poor. Genetics and epigenetics work together. DNA carries the code for all proteins, which carry out the activities, which keep us alive.

- **Something for hope, in *Steeple Bush,* by Robert Frost**

  At the present rate it must come to pass, and that right soon, that the meadow sweet and steeple bush, not good to eat, will have crowded out the edible grass.

  Then all there is to do is wait for maple, birch and spruce to push through meadowsweet and steeplebush and crowd them out at a similar rate. No plough among these rocks would pay, so busy yourself with other things while trees put on their wooden rings and with long sleeved branches hold their sway.

  Then cut down the trees when lumber grown and there's your pristine earth all freed from blooming, but wasteful weed and ready again for the grass to own.

  A cycle we will say of a hundred years, thus foresight does it and laissez-faire a virtue in which we all may share, unless a government interferes.

  Patience and looking away ahead and leaving some things to take their course. Hope may not nourish a cow or horse but 'spes alit agricolam' tis said.

Postscript:

The wonders of God's creation are there to be seen wherever we find ourselves, but for many they are most evident in our wilder areas. Here the impact of man is at its smallest. Man may have modified the landscape through forestry and agriculture, but these tend to act as a mere superficial clothing on the fabric of creation and of the evidence, which exists of the care of our Creator for His creation over many millions of years.

When we walk along the course of the River Dee in Aberdeenshire, we cannot but be impressed with the evidence of the working of natural processes over geological time, and over a period when we as a species have been present for such a short time. What we see is the result of processes in which we have had only a marginal influence. We experience species which have been present for as much as a thousand times the life of our species and which seem likely to be present after we have evolved into what we know not.

This walk and these readings are offered as an aid to understanding just how a pilgrimage journey along the river Dee can help us in seeing the multiple ways in which we are part of nature and the environment.

NOTES:

We hope you enjoyed this walk
and look forward to seeing you again!

For more information, see:
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