

## Circles around Mintlaw

We start our drive in Ellon on A948 coming from the south; after crossing the bridge over the River Ythan, take the 2<sup>nd</sup> exit at the roundabout, signposted to New Deer. You pass the golf course on your left and then turn left at the T-junction to join the A948 to Auchnagatt. It's a fastish road with good views ahead and generally wide sweeping bends but there are some challenging double bends also, to keep you on your toes.

8 miles on, you reach the 30mph limit at Auchnagatt, where you turn off right towards Old Deer. The B9030 is another decent road with a few tighter bends and after 4 miles you reach Stuartfield, where you need to turn left at the crossroads in the centre of the village onto Windhill street. (Your left turn is just beside the sign that points to Longside in the opposite direction.)

The road up to Windhill is a single track with restricted views so you need to *ca canny*. After about 1.5 miles from Stuartfield, you pass Parkhouse farm on your right and as you reach the next tight left-hander, you see a grassy track up the hill ahead of you. Park up at the roadside just beyond this bend at the edge of the open field. (Unfortunately, none of the sites visited on this route have decent parking areas close by.)

Having parked, walk up the grass track for about 200m to the top of the hill. There you will find a gate into the small wood with information about the site. Follow the stones that line the edge of the path as it meanders through the group of dense conifer trees to reach the first of our stone circles just beyond the wood.



**Aikey Bray** comprises a circle of 10 stones, 5 of which are upright but the rest have fallen over. The focus of the circle is the recumbent stone with its 2 flankers. The largest stone is estimated to weigh about 21.5 tons and is not local granite. The purpose of the circle is unknown but it is thought to date from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.

After returning to your vehicle, continue heading down the single road for about 0.5 mile till you reach the T-junction with the B9029 then turn right to Old Deer. In Old Deer, turn left onto the B9030 which joins the A950 at a T-junction after travelling less than 0.5 mile. You now have a choice of 2 routes to get to our next circle.

**Long walk:** If you turn left at the T-junction, passing Old Deer Abbey and after just over 1.5 miles, turn off right on the road to Strichen. Loudon wood, where the circle is located, is actually on your right at the start of this road but the designated car park is some 1.5 miles from the junction and the track to Loudon Wood involves a very circuitous route of more than 3 miles to the circle.



**Preferred shorter route:** Instead, at the T-junction turn right, then left and left again heading towards Fetterangus. At the crossroads before the church, turn left to the Drinnies Wood car park where you can leave your vehicle. The forest path takes you past the Pitfour Observatory and continues on clockwise through Drinnies Wood and after passing open parkland on your left, you reach Loudon Wood. After 5 more minutes walking, you reach a woodland area on the left, which is more open for about 150m. About 20m from the start of this open area, a tiny path leads into the denser conifers on the right. Follow this forest path for about 100m till you reach 2 grassy areas.

Note that the path is no more than an animal track to reach the trees and there are 2 entrances. The 1st leads right away from the stone circle. The 2<sup>nd</sup> leads perpendicular to the road and passes the circle clearing.

Go left from the grassy patch about 30 - 40m to reach the circle in a clearing. **Loudon Woods stone circle** has a reputation for being difficult to find and for having been somewhat spoiled by forestry operations. The recumbent stone here weighs about 12 tons. Its maybe not worth the 1.5 miles hike.

After returning to your vehicle, head towards and through Fetterangus till you reach the A92. Turn left and after 100m left again, on the B9093 to Strichen. In Strichen, turn left to head towards New Deer and straight ahead at the junction with the A981. Then almost immediately, take the 1<sup>st</sup> right onto Brewery Road.



You will be driving parallel to the dismantled railway forming the Formantine and Buchanan way and at the end of this straight to will see a brown tourist information sign to the **Strichen Stone Circle**. There is a small parking area at the sign. Walk underneath the old railway bridge and follow the grassy path for some 700m to the top of a small hill, where you will find our third stone circle in a field. Watch out for the bull!

Once back at your vehicle, return along Brewery Road and Bridge Street to again reach the Strichen High Street and the B9093, where you turn right towards Mintlaw.

However, you might want to stop first for a coffee or bite to eat. There is a nice little café called the the Old Auction Rooms, just back from the Bridge St / High St junction, which gets good reviews.

A mile or so beyond Strichen, turn left on the minor road, sign posted to New Leeds and follow this for about 3 miles till you arrive at the T-junction with the A952. Turn left towards Fraserburgh but after about 1.5 miles there is a crossroads with minor roads both left and right. Turn right (signposted to Crimmond) and after a further 1.5 miles you will be approaching another crossroads. On your right you will notice a cope of trees in a field. This is the location of our final site, the Berrybrae stone circle, located about 100m from the SW corner of the crossroads. You should see a passing place as you approach the offset crossroads and just less than 30m further on is an opening to a field. This offers an area suitable for temporary parking and as the circle is only less than 50m away, you should be OK to stay for 10 minutes.



From the field opening, you will see a small wood which appears to be on a bit of raised ground with a low stone wall encircling it. You will notice where other visitors have created a track which leads to a wooden gate through a fenced enclosure.

The **Berrybrae Stone Circle** comprises 5 stones with the largest being the recumbent stone which is estimated to be about 12.5 tons. Originally there were 9 upright stones and some 2500 years ago the site appears to have been used as a cremation cemetery. There is no information at this site regarding its history.

Take the road south from the crossroads. After 2 miles you reach a T-junction where you head right towards Mintlaw. Then its another 2.5 miles till you reach the junction with the main A952 road which will take you into Mintlaw. At the roundabout in the town centre, you will take the 2<sup>nd</sup> exit, signposted to Aberdeen and continue on A952 until it joins the A90 at the Toll of Burness. From there, it is a straight run south on the main arterial route to Ellon, Aberdeen or beyond.

Although the stone circles themselves are perhaps a bit underwhelming, we hope you enjoy our **Circles around Mintlaw** route and the walks are away from the common well-beaten paths. We'll continue producing more outings in our *Oot an' aboot* series but if there is anywhere that you would like to propose, please tell us, so that we can include your suggestion on the website for the benefit of the Aberdeen Advanced Motorists community as well as other IAM drivers or motorcyclists visiting our region.

**Stone circles notes:** There are 100 known sites in Aberdeenshire, a concentration, which is higher than any other region in UK. The upright stones in these circles are generally smallest on the northern arc and get taller as they get closer to the recumbent stone. The flankers are generally the tallest. The recumbent stone is usually in a position on an arc between SSE and SW. Aberdeenshire Councils website lists the 10 most significant sites. (Also see EYE-SPY Gordon Stones – another “*Oot an' Aboot*” outing.)