



Grant Park/Cluny Hill

Forres is so fortunate in having this beautiful area of parkland and the woodlands for all to enjoy. The Trust have produced this leaflet so that those who are new to the area can venture forth for an hour or so without feeling they are setting off without any sort of local knowledge.



Geocaches on or near this route: I've Been to Forres and Cluny Hill.

Walk Information

Terrain

Stiles-None
Suitable for most abilities

Planning

Start/Parking

Victoria Road (Free)
Grid Ref: NJ043593
Map OS Landranger 27
Explorer 423

Refreshments

Various in Forres

Public Toilets

Grant Park



Grant Park

The map provided shows access points so that wherever you are in Forres the footpaths are readily accessible and are in the main wide and well maintained as well as being informal. There are no formal routes on this leaflet although one of our other walks does pass through the area. Grant Park was once part of the grounds of Forres House which stood where the sunken gardens are now situated, Forres House and it's grounds came into the possession of the Town Council largely through the generosity of Sir Alexander Grant, a native of Forres and one of its many benefactors. The high wall (ten feet) which screened the house and grounds from view were removed, the grounds, thirty-two acres in extent were laid out as a public park, named Grant Park. Lady Grant formally opened the park on the 27th of August 1924. One of the old lodges whereby access was gained to the grounds when the high wall was still in place can be seen along Victoria Road towards the car park shown on the map, the other stood in South Street. Cricket is played here in the park, indeed Sir Donald Bradman played here in 1934 with an Australian eleven. The park has played a major part in Forres being so successful in "Britain in Bloom" and other competitions, this is due to a lot of hard work, fund raising by the Forres in Bloom committee and their volunteers working in "partnership" with the Council and their local staff.

The Cluny Hills

The title of this part of the narrative is something of a misnomer really although the area is known locally as Cluny Hill. According to Dr. Robert Douglas in his history of Forres printed in 1934, which suggests that it is sometimes spoken of locally as "Cleeny" although Matheson in his place names states that it is derived from the Gaelic "Cluan" or "Cloon" a fertile piece of land. Dr. Douglas goes on to say that "This does not seem to suit the topography of this district, there may be fertile pieces of land nearby these hills, but the hills themselves are chiefly composed of sand". He continues, I personally favour the name "Cloven" the Danish "Klove" or hollow at the foot of a slope, and Dutch "Kloven" and the English word "Cloven" meaning split or divided. This definition admirably fits the appearance of these five hills all more or less divided from one another by hollows or passages. This definition is also supported by the habitation or piece of land to the east of these hills known as Clovenside, an old record in Latin also supports this definition. The Cloven Hills are five in number if one counts a small eminence inside the grounds of what is now Cluny Hill College run by the Findhorn Foundation. This building was built originally as a hydropathic establishment and was opened as such in August 1865. The hills vary considerably in size, the largest being the one on which the Nelson Tower now stands. It was believed at one time that the hills were formed by sand dunes like those at Culbin, now it is thought otherwise as large stones or boulders are found in the hills, pointing rather to the conclusion that these hills belong to the glacial or northern drift period and were deposited when the country was covered with ice. The Cloven Hills

have not always been as pleasing to the eye as they are today. Whins or gorse as you may know them was a common problem with the attendant risk of fire. Indeed one of the statutes of the Burgh of Forres in June 1818 states - "That none presume to burn the whins in the Cloven Hills, under the penalty of one hundred pounds (Scots), and that parents to be answerable for their children". Council minutes of 1824 and 1826 tell us that improvements were to be made to the Cloven Hills. In 1835 we are told yet again that the whins are to be cleared with a view to planting trees and in November 1836 it was agreed to plant the northwest shoulder of the Cluny Hills, this no doubt being more profitable than whins. In 1857 fires were occurring so regularly in connection with the Cluny Hill plantations that incendiarism was suspected. More planting and enclosure came at the end of 1865. Walks were made on the southwest hill of the Cluny Hills about January 1889 and more levelling and path making were undertaken in 1925 and 1926. The area covered by the Cloven Hills is in the region of a hundred acres and has been the towns property from ancient times. The four largest hills enclose a circular hollow known Helgy's Hole, Helges Hole or Hells Hole.

Helges Hole/Hells Hole

Is an interesting and curious formation which has enshrined in the hearts of the natives of Forres many wonderful tales and captivating experiences. It is thought that at one time the centre of this hollow was raised to form a cricket field or at least a ground for sports. When levelling was going on in 1870 a skeleton was found at some depth below the surface. This was said to be that of a suicide case about 1810. There are quite a number of stories as to how the hole got its name. The most plain and practical version as to how it got its name is suggested by Dr. Douglas. In bygone days Shinty or Club Matches used to take place and it was here at the foot of the "Cloven Hills" that these games were held. Many a keen tussle took place among the Forres loons to reach with the ball this spot which was called Hale's Hole or the "Goal of Success" the successful team would delight in recording that they reached Hale's Hole, while their opponents with chagrin and disappointment would tell their friends that they never got near Hell's Hole. Over the intervening years this area was used as a dumping ground for vegetation from the cemetery close by. Today it is a lovely quiet spot where one can sit and enjoy the tranquillity it offers thanks in no small part to the efforts of Mr. Donnie Williamson (now deceased), a resident of Forres who made it into what you see before you.

The Nelson Tower

Someone in the enthusiasm that followed Nelson's victory at the Battle of Trafalgar suggested that there should be a monument to his memory at Forres. It isn't clear who that someone was. In 1806 a public announcement was made either by the town bellman or by proclamation at the Market Cross "It is proposed to erect, by subscription, on the summit of the Cluny Hills, near Forres, a tower of which a plan, furnished gratuitously by Mr. Charles Stuart, architect at Darnaway, is herewith laid before the publick (sic)". The promoters also intimated that in addition to its intended purpose, "It will be a useful sea beacon, an excellent observatory and a commanding alarm post in the event of an enemy's approach by sea or land". The cost was estimated at seven hundred guineas (seven hundred and thirty-five pounds). It was on the 26th August 1806 that the foundation stone was laid by Brodie of Brodie. The subscriptions, however, were far short of what was required and a further appeal for funds was launched mainly to parties abroad in Madras, Calcutta, Jamaica and Demerara. On the 22nd October 1810 a second subscription list was started at home and according to the "Annals of the Royal Burgh of Forres" by the 21st October 1824 the total subscriptions amounted to seven hundred and thirty-eight pounds, seven shillings and three pence. Independent of much voluntary labour and material gratuitously given by public subscription amounted to seven hundred and forty-nine pounds, nine shillings and nine pence and the total expenditure having been seven hundred and fifty pounds, two shillings and five pence. Those of us who are old enough will recognise that the amounts quoted are before decimalisation was introduced and pounds, shillings and pence meant something. A separate fund was started for the upkeep and repair of the tower. In October 1807 long before the fund was complete a considerable number of subscribers formed themselves into "The Trafalgar Club" to meet annually, on the 21st October, to commemorate Nelson's victory. At the anniversary meeting of 1817 the name was changed to "Trafalgar Meeting". By November 1837 it is being hinted at that the winding up of the Trafalgar Club was appearing on the horizon. Over the next ten or twelve years the fortunes of the club seemed to be very much on the wane and it comes as no surprise that at a meeting of the Forres Town Council on April 1st, 1850, it was moved that the Council should get in touch with any remaining trustees of the Nelson Tower and take over if necessary, any relics or belongings of the Club. Accordingly, on 3rd February 1851 it was reported that there was now no Trafalgar Club and that various items of interest had been handed over to the Council along with the custody of the monument. For those who are interested in such things the design accepted way back in 1806 was that the shape of the structure would be octagonal and would have a diameter of twenty-four feet overall, with a height of sixty feet above ground. Permission was granted to add eight or twelve feet more if necessary. Permission as flexible as this would doubtless be something of a rarity today. If the structure was no more than sixty feet high then there would be twenty-three windows each two feet by four feet, more windows would be required if structure rose to seventy-two feet. The outer walls to be two feet nine inches thick in first storey, two feet six inches in second storey and two feet in third storey. The staircase was to lie into the wall fifteen inches up to the first storey, then twelve inches to the next and ten inches thereafter to the platform, each step not to exceed seven inches in height and nine inches in breadth in the centre. Steps to overlap one inch. There are many more interesting details on record, to record them all here would be rather too much, suffice to say that the stone had to come from Burgie Quarry a few miles away to the east. Stone for the stair steps, cornice and coping to be taken from Covesea on the coast some fifteen or sixteen miles distant by road. The Nelson Tower and its artefacts are now in the custody of Forres Heritage Trust. Admittance is gained in the afternoon between 2.00 pm and 4.00 pm (Monday excepted) May to the end of September. If one can see the flag flying on top of the tower, then it is open. It really is worth making the effort a second time if necessary. The top is said to be some three hundred and twenty feet above sea level and that one can see eight or nine counties from this vantage point.