Creag Choinnich is one of the quickest ways to earn a proper mountain view from Braemar. The summit is only 538 metres high, but the path climbs firmly from the village and can feel surprisingly steep for such a short outing. Think of it as a short hillwalk rather than a gentle stroll: there are sustained uphill sections, steps on the path and a rocky, uneven finish.

The reward is a broad outlook over Braemar, the River Dee and the surrounding hills, with a sense of height that arrives much sooner than on a long approach walk. Allow **1–2 hours** for the return trip, depending on your pace, conditions and how long you spend at the top. The route is often described as around **2.5km there and back**, but check the line and distance on the map or in the local paths information before setting out.

At a glance: Creag Choinnich from Braemar

Item What to expect Distance About 2.5km there and back, depending on the start point and route followed Time Allow 1–2 hours for the return walk, including a short break at the viewpoint Difficulty Short but steep; a good uphill workout rather than an easy, level path Path Marked path with steps and uneven sections; expect a rougher approach near the top Starting point Braemar village; use the Cairngorms National Park Authority community paths leaflet for local route guidance Best for A quick climb, a rewarding viewpoint and a walk that needs little driving if you are staying in Braemar

So, how steep is it?

In plain terms, it is steep enough to make you slow down and use your legs, especially if you are not used to uphill walking. The climb begins almost as soon as you leave the village route behind, and the elevation gain comes over a short distance. There is little time for a long, gradual warm-up. If you are expecting a level riverside path, Creag Choinnich will be a different proposition.

The **steps on the path** help with the steeper ground, but they do not make the ascent effortless. Some people find steps easier to manage than a loose slope; others find the regular height and rhythm tiring. Take them at a pace that lets you breathe comfortably, and pause when you need to. There is no advantage in racing a short hill.



How hard it feels will depend on your fitness, footwear, weather and the condition of the path. Wet ground can be slippery, while ice or snow can make steps and rocky sections considerably more serious. The upper part may also

feel exposed in wind or low cloud. On a clear, calm day it is a manageable short hill for many reasonably active walkers; in poor conditions, its modest height should not be mistaken for an easy outing.

Who is it suitable for?

Creag Choinnich can suit walkers who are comfortable with a sustained uphill effort and uneven ground. It may be a satisfying first local hill for older children who already enjoy walking, but the gradient and steps can be tiring for younger walkers. There is no need to treat reaching the top as compulsory: turning around when the climb stops being enjoyable is a sensible choice.

If you have limited mobility, knee concerns or are looking for an easy, low-gradient walk, choose one of Braemar's shorter village or riverside routes instead. Those paths make a gentler outing and can be combined with a café stop or a look around the village.

Route character and what to expect on the way

Use the **Cairngorms National Park Authority community paths leaflet** to identify the signed local route and its start point. This is useful for a compact village walk, where paths can link with streets and other local tracks. Follow the waymarkers rather than assuming that every obvious path leads to the summit. A map or a downloaded route is sensible if you are unfamiliar with Braemar.

1. **Start in Braemar.** From the village, follow the route indicated in the community paths leaflet. If you are driving in, park considerately and avoid blocking access for residents or farm traffic.
2. **Settle into the climb.** The path rises out of the village towards the wooded slopes. The gradient soon becomes noticeable, so take a steady pace from the start.
3. **Use the steps carefully.** The steps provide a defined line up steeper ground. In wet or icy weather, check each foot placement and use walking poles only if they help you stay balanced.
4. **Continue towards the summit viewpoint.** The ground becomes rougher in places. Stay on the established path, particularly around vegetation and any worn or boggy edges.
5. **Return by the same route.** The descent is short but can be slippery, and tired legs may make the steps feel more awkward than they did on the way up.

Expect the outward climb to take longer than the return for most walkers, though the descent deserves your attention. It is easy to hurry downhill because the walk is short, but wet roots, loose stones and step edges can catch you out. Keep a comfortable pace and allow enough time to get back before dark.

Big views from a quick climb

Creag Choinnich is a useful choice when you want a viewpoint without committing to a full-day hill route. From the top, the view opens across Braemar and the Dee valley towards the hills of upper Deeside. On a clear day, you can take in the pattern of woods, open slopes and distant Cairngorm scenery; cloud can close the view quickly, especially when the weather is unsettled.

The summit makes a good pause point, but it is not a place to linger in exposed conditions. Bring an extra layer for the top even if Braemar feels mild. A short ascent can still lead into colder, windier weather, and a gusty viewpoint is not the place to unpack a long picnic.

For anyone staying in Braemar, the walk has a practical advantage: you can often get to the start on foot. That makes it a good option for a spare morning, a short daylight window or a day when you do not want to spend

time driving to a trailhead. It also works well as a leg-stretcher after a longer journey into Deeside.

Braemar as a low-driving walking base

Braemar is a handy base for walkers because a range of outings begin in or close to the village. You can choose a short path and still be back for lunch, or use the village as a starting point for a more ambitious hill day when the forecast and daylight allow. That flexibility matters in the Cairngorms, where a change in wind, rain or cloud can alter the best plan.

Creag Choinnich is the quick-climb choice: concentrated effort, a summit viewpoint and a short return. On another day, a riverside loop or a village wander may be more appealing. These lower-level outings are useful when the tops are clouded over, when the ground is icy, or when you simply want a gentle day between longer walks.

For an easy outing, keep to the local paths described by the Cairngorms National Park Authority and choose a route that matches the conditions underfoot. A short village or riverside circuit can still be a good way to notice Braemar's setting, the River Dee and the nearby woodland, without committing to a steep ascent.

Morrone Birkwood: a gentler nature stop

The **Morrone Birkwood** is a valuable part of the local landscape and offers a different kind of interest from the open summit of Creag Choinnich. Birch woodland provides habitat for wildlife and adds variety to the lower slopes around Braemar. It is worth slowing down to notice the trees, ground vegetation and birdlife rather than treating the woods simply as a passage to a viewpoint.

Woodland habitats can be sensitive to trampling, erosion and disturbance. Staying on established paths helps protect the plants and soils, while giving wildlife space is especially important during breeding and nesting seasons. Take any litter back with you, keep dogs under close control where needed, and follow local signs about access or conservation work.

The wooded surroundings also make a lower-level walk a worthwhile alternative if the summit route is too steep or the weather is poor. You can enjoy the landscape without turning every visit into a climb. Check the community paths leaflet for the local route options and any current guidance, as path conditions or management arrangements may change.

Weather, daylight and what to bring

Before leaving Braemar, check a **mountain weather forecast** for the Cairngorms rather than relying only on the village forecast. Pay particular attention to wind, freezing levels, precipitation and visibility. Strong wind can make the exposed upper section uncomfortable; rain can make steps and rock slippery; snow or ice can transform a short walk into a much more demanding outing.

In winter, do not assume that a short, low summit is automatically safe. Ice can be difficult to see, and compacted snow on steps can be treacherous. If conditions require winter skills or equipment you do not have, choose a lower, safer walk. In summer, allow for warm clothing and waterproofs too: weather can change quickly in the hills.

- Wear supportive footwear with a good grip; trainers may be unsuitable when the path is wet or rough.
- Carry waterproofs and an insulating layer, even for a short walk.
- Take water and a small snack, particularly if walking with children.
- Bring a charged phone and a map or downloaded route, but do not rely on phone reception.

- Check sunset time and leave enough daylight for the return, especially in autumn and winter.

Forecasts are helpful planning tools, not guarantees. If cloud lowers, the wind rises or the ground feels unsafe, turn back. A short walk should remain a short commitment, not a reason to push on in deteriorating conditions.

Is Creag Choinnich worth it?

Yes, if you want a compact walk with a real climb and a rewarding outlook. The distance is modest, but the steep sections and steps make it more strenuous than the numbers suggest. Allow 1–2 hours, take the ascent steadily and expect the descent https://fionaoutdoors.co.uk/2026/11/walks-from-braemar-village-paths-birchwoods-and-big-cairngorm-days to need care. For walkers staying in Braemar, it is a particularly convenient way to reach a viewpoint without a long drive.



If you want a gentle stroll, choose a village or riverside loop instead. If the weather is settled and you are happy with a short, steep climb, Creag Choinnich delivers a satisfying little hill day. Check the Cairngorms National Park Authority community paths leaflet for local route details, consult a mountain weather forecast before setting off, and enjoy the view at a pace that suits you.