Kincorth & Tullos Hill Trail

Aberdeen's Grampian Mountains



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Many thanks to the Countryside Ranger Service who have helped illustrate the majority of this booklet.

Opposite: © The Geoinformation Group 2006

Ness Farm courtesy of Ethel Stewart

9 Tullos House, courtesy of Mrs Manson

13 First edition Ordnance Survey, 1867. Reproduction courtesy of the National Library of Scotland

Accessibility



This trail by its nature covers uneven ground and steep slopes. Like all hills they may not be fully accessible to all visitors. Kincorth Hill has level paths and the top part has level access from Nigg.

Public Transport

The following buses link between the hills and central Aberdeen. A day ticket allows unlimited travel by the same bus operator:

Nigg for both hills: First Bus 3&18

Kincorth: First Bus 17&18 Tullos: First Bus 12&20

Both hills are on the southern edge of Aberdeen City but walkable from the city centre. Tullos Hill is closest to central Aberdeen at around 2 miles (3.2km) away, a 45 minute walk to the start of the hill path.

Cycling

Responsible cycling on the paths is welcome, please respect other users. The area can best be reached using National Cycle Route 1 and local routes. www.aberdeencity.gov/cyclemaps www.sustrans.org.uk

Countryside Ranger Service

Regular guided walks and activities on both hills are available. Please see the following link for further details: www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/rangerservice

Orienteering

Kincorth Hill features a waymarked orienteering course. The map can be downloaded here: https://grampoc.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/ kincorthpermanentmap.pdf



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The Grampians are one of Scotland's three major mountain ranges and are set between two fault lines, the Great Glen from Fort William to Inverness, and the Highland Boundary from Firth of Clyde to Stonehaven. Strictly speaking, the Grampian Mountains are the central part including the UK's highest, Ben Nevis and the Cairngorms. However the west coast part and low lying Aberdeenshire are within the wider geological area. Hence the cherished local name, 'the Gramps'.

Both hills are alike in being higher and wilder 'natural' landscapes in the midst of conurbation. They share a great deal of early history whilst retaining their own distinctive character. Kincorth Hill has been heavily exploited by quarrying and surrounded by housing developments. Tullos Hill's Bronze Age cairns have survived for about four millennia, despite changing land use from rough ground to cultivated fields to wartime strongpoint and today's industrial zone.

These hills are relatively easy climbs by hillwalking standards and please enjoy exploring them. However the same care should be taken, particularly in steeper parts and in areas of loose rocks, expecially if it's wet or icy.



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Tullos Hill

King William the Lion founded the Abbey of Arbroath in the late 1100s. He gifted it lands and property including St Fittick's Church (see Torry Local Area Trail) at Bay of Nigg and from there to Cove including Kincorth and Tullos. Tullos Hill does not seem to have been settled during the Medieval period, as much of the land was not amenable to agriculture. A document of 1281 mentions the extensive moor, marsh and rocky barren soils. The Abbot remained feudal superior until the Reformation in 1560 when the area was split between the town of Aberdeen and the Lairds of Pitfodels.

In 1786, the town council feued out — a perpetual form of leasing — their lands in nine lots. The agricultural revolution having allowed more land to be cultivated and farming began with Peterseat and Ness Farms. WWII changed the landscape of the hill when part of Peterseat was adapted to become an anti-aircraft battery, and later a prisoner of war camp. The hill became home to a landfill site in the middle 1900s and industrial estates were developed around it in the last decades of the 1900s.



The Legacy of Landfill

Waste management has long been an activity in the form of landfill sites at Tullos Hill and Ness Farm (left, prior to demolition) of 15 & 49 hectares respectively,

which has an estimated three million tonnes of waste from more than 40 years. The site stopped accepting waste in 2001 with activity now focused on restoration, comprising capping of the site using a geosynthetic composite cap to prevent water getting into the waste, new drainage, tree planting, and path improvements. Aberdeen City Council has invested £17 million into this work. This expenditure has taught us an important lesson about the need for sustainable waste management practices. Landfill prevents valuable materials from being reused and leaves a legacy of pollution requiring treatment measures for decades to come.

1 Diamond Woodlands

This is one of 60 Diamond Woodlands planted across the UK in Her Majesty The Queen's Diamond Jubilee year and promoted by the Woodland Trust. In 2012, about 30 hectares of Tullos Hill was planted with a mix of broad-leaved and coniferous trees. They were planted in areas of rough grass or gorse scrub. As this new woodland develops, it will become a haven for wildlife as most species are either native to Scotland or good for our wildlife. The mix includes Scots pine, Norway spruce, larch, sycamore, wild cherry, hazel, wych elm, ash, oak, blackthorn and hawthorn. These will make a good feeding and breeding habitat for red squirrels, bats, woodland birds and larger animals such as roe deer.



2 Tullos Cairn

In some ways, this is the most impressive of the prehistoric burial cairns on Tullos Hill, being 20 metres in diameter and 2.5 metres high. It is unusual in being not on the skyline, but in a slightly terraced area on the north-west facing slope of the hill. There are a number of small field clearance cairns nearby, which may relate to prehistoric or later attempts at agriculture on this relatively protected side of the hill, where it is likely that the cairn builders may also have farmed and lived. The shape of the cairn has been altered at various times in the recent and more distant past.



3 Tullos Hill Burial Cairns

In addition to the well-known ones, a number of other possible prehistoric burial cairns have been noticed over the years and during archaeological survey. This is the more striking and visible of them, measuring about 13 x 11 metres and some 2 metres in height, it is distinguishable from other natural mounds nearby because of the stones which protrude from its cover of vegetation. However, some cairns are thought to be simply early attempts to clear the rocky ground for cultivation. Without archaeological excavation, it is not possible to determine the period when this activity took place, but it may date from prehistoric to Medieval times.



4 Crab's Cairn

This is the least visible and robust of the long-identified group of Bronze Age burial cairns on Tullos Hill, which also includes Tullos Cairn, Cat Cairn and Baron's Cairn. It is said to have been damaged during the WWII and again through some of the landfill work in the area. What it does retain to some extent is its striking position, with clear visibility between it and both Cat Cairn and Baron's Cairn — a placing in the landscape which was obviously important to its original builders some 3,500 or so years ago.



5 Baron's Cairn

This is one of the most noticeable of the Bronze age burial cairns being at the summit of Tullos Hill: its elevated position demonstrates the importance of these features as landmarks throughout the ages. It is part of a readily visible surviving group, which also includes Crab's Cairn, Cat Cairn and Tullos Cairn, all of which probably date from around the 2nd millenium BC. There has never been any archaeological excavation of this cairn, but it may originally have covered the burial place of a prominent member of society. Its shape has been altered over the ages, most recently when it was used as a look-out post during WWII – remnants of brick and concrete structures can be seen on and near the cairn. There is a trig point on top (above), see 16 for details of its purpose.



6 Consumption Dykes

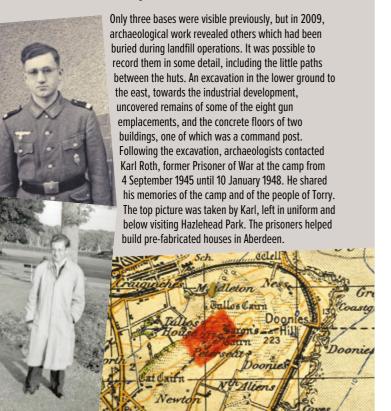
These distinctive drystone field boundaries are very characteristic of the landscape of North-East Scotland. There are more than 100 recorded in Aberdeen alone, of which several fine examples survive on the hills. They are in essence simply walls which have been built excessively large, most usually in width, to 'consume' stones which have been cleared out of the fields to make the ground suitable for agriculture. In many cases, great care has been taken to make them aesthetically pleasing as well as practical. The examples on Tullos are related to land improvements by David Morrice, owner of Tullos House (9) in the early 1800s.



7 Peterseat Anti-Aircraft Battery and Prisoner of War Camp (site of)

This WWII Anti-Aircraft Battery was converted and used as a post war German Prisoner of War (POW) camp from 1945-48. Concrete hut bases adjacent to the main path on the summit of Tullos Hill are the only remains of the camp now visible above ground.







B Tullos Woods

This is the legacy of a plantation by David Morrice, the owner of Tullos House (below). In springtime, this scrub and woodland comes alive with small birds singing as they claim their nesting territories in one of the mature beech trees. Chiffchaffs, blackcaps and willow warblers visit the UK to breed and resident robins, blackbirds, song thrushes, great & blue tits nest here. Great spotted woodpeckers can occasionally be heard drumming on treetrunks.



9 Tullos House (site of)

David Morrice, a successful advocate, built up a fortune in part by representing bodies such as the town council. In 1786, he acquired several lots of Tullos Hill and surrounding area. Tullos House was built for himself and probably completed by 1810. There were no trees on the feu when he took possession of it but Morrice embarked on a policy of planting on Tullos Hill, adding Scots pine, larch, oak, alder, birch, mountain ash and elm although the plantation failed on the seaward side and summit. In an article written for the *Aberdeen Journal* in 1896, it was said that the rest was largely still there, described as 'luxuriant' but with 'somewhat tortuous and scarcely perceptible footpaths — faint trails they might be called, which one would almost require to have the training of an Indian tracker to follow...'. The house was completely demolished following WWII to make way for industrial development.



history. Akin to detective work this can involve painstaking examination to reveal otherwise invisible traces or clues — in this case that people lived here on these hills. Two sub-circular 'shapes' were recorded

in this area by survey in 2004 as possible remnants of foundations of timber dwellings, or prehistoric roundhouses. Excavation in 2010 and 2012 confirmed this as a hut circle, with the stoney bank on which the walls would have been founded quite well preserved, along with some internal features. Pottery remains, and radiocarbon analysis, dates it to the Bronze Age. It could have had more than one floor and held an extended family 3000-4000 years ago.

Archaeology is invaluable in bringing the past to life and this illustration recreates a roundhouse of that period.



11 Cat Cairn

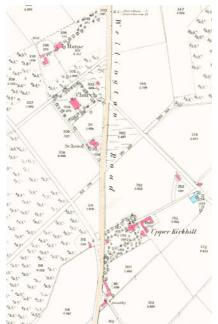
Like several of the other well-preserved burial cairns on Tullos Hill, this example boasts a wide-ranging view over the Vale of Tullos and maintains the intervisibility with Baron's Cairn and Crab's Cairn which would have been important to its prehistoric builders. It has probably become rather flatter in shape over time, as is hardly surprising considering its proximity to a highly populated area. A possible platform survives on its north and south sides. Construction of round cairns such as these probably dates to around the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. They marked the location of burials, sometimes in elaborately made stone-lined graves or 'cists'.

12 Nigg Kirk

Designed by John Smith (during his period as City Architect) and opened 7 June 1829. It replaced St Fittick's which was felt to be too distant for the growing population in the Torry, Kincorth, Loirston, and Cove. The last minister of old St Fittick's and first at Nigg Kirk was the Reverend Alexander Thom, who had lobbied for the move. The money came from the heritors of Nigg parish. Aberdeen Journal described it as 'a beautiful Gothic



structure, with a tower of considerable altitude... The interior is very handsomely finished, and contains sittings for about 1,000 hearers. By the liberality of Convenor Affleck, a very decent and perfect model of a ship of war has been provided and is hung from the roof of the church.' The heritors of the kirk in part paid for some of the area's many improvements in the early 1800s. They partly financed the turnpike road and also Wellington Suspension Bridge, both of which were vital to the development of the area. These and St Fittick's Church are covered in the Torry Local Area Trail. The churchyard was extended in the 1900s to incorporate a war memorial. The church has been closed for some time and the former manse, to the north on Craigpark is a private residence, surrounded by modern housing.



13 Nigg

This small settlement was an important centre for the neighbouring lands. As well as church it had a school, now a photography studio, post office, now an accountants and the smithy (blacksmiths) was at the houses beside the petrol station on Wellington Road. Some of these features are already shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1895 (left). The old police station may be gone but a modern replacement now stands in its place. The area's sacrifice in wartime is highlighted by the war memorial in Nigg churchyard.



Kincorth Hill Local Nature Reserve

Kincorth Hill is one of Aberdeen's larger areas of countryside right on the edge of the urban area. It has retained its natural character and extensive wildlife and is open at all times to visitors — it is a Local Nature Reserve which is managed by Aberdeen City Council Ranger Service.

There is a network of paths running through areas of coniferous and deciduous woodland, grassland, scrub, heath and has a pond. It is a good area for nature watching, taking a gentle stroll or walking the dog with areas to stop, have a seat and enjoy views across the city. Below is a sunset seen from the summit. There is a plaque trail serving as an orienteering course (16) and a series of waymarked walks (14). These allow joggers or walkers to complete fixed distances.



Kincorth & Kincorth Hill

'Kin' is a reasonably common place name element deriving from the Gaelic for hill or head place — an elevated position.
'Corth' may derive from a Celtic root and relates to stone or even to man-made stone features, such as a cairn. Thus it means something like stony high place.

The lands of Kincorth and Tullos were part of a grant by King William the Lion to his newly founded Abbey of Arbroath in the late 1100s. He endowed it with rich tracts of land, including from the Bay of Nigg to Cove. The first definite reference to Kincorth, in the abbey's records, are in 1435. Although the area had been farmed for some time before this.

Traditionally, Kincorth and Tullos were part of the Parish of Nigg, until late 1800s in Kincardineshire. Modern Kincorth's development lies in a growing interest by Aberdeen City Council. Originally, when the Finance Committee recommended purchasing it in 1928 to develop a golf course and eventually the plans became residential with a design competition in 1937. Inevitably, WWII delayed building until after 1945. Kincorth was never to be a satellite town but was always planned to be an integral part of the city.



14 Waymarkers

Kincorth Hill has many paths to explore and also four waymarked routes. These are fixed lengths and colour coded: Yellow ■ 1.5km, Blue ■ 2.5km, Red ■ 3.5km and Black ■ 3.3km. Each one can be joined at any point and a circuit back to that place completed. The QR codes on the posts link to a map, which is also available to download beforehand at www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/trails



15 Pond

In the spring, this small pond can be alive with frogs and frog spawn but look out for palmate newts and numerous other pond creatures. There are also damselflies and dragonflies darting around looking for smaller insects to feed on. You might be lucky enough to see them laying eggs by dipping the end of their tails into the water. Many of the old guarry workings can also have short

seasonal ponds. Access to these is hazardous and should be avoided. During the summer months, The Countryside Ranger Service organises a range of public events at Kincorth Hill. The Rangers will also lead activities here such as pond dipping and minibeast hunts for groups which should be booked in advance.



16 Trig Point

This Ordnance Survey trig point marks the summit of Kincorth Hill. Also known as a triangulation pillar, these are used by map-makers to measure the location of landscape features. Trig is short for trigonometry, from the Greek words for triangle and measure. Irigonometry was first developed in ancient Greece and is the mathematical study of angles and triangles. Modern measurement is done by triangulation, using a survey device mounted on top of the trig point. There is another example on Baron's Cairn (5), on Tullos Hill.

A worldwide system, triangulation stations were first established across Britain between 1936 and 1962, but are themselves passing into heritage, as mapmaking is now accomplished by means of satellite-based global positioning technology.



17 Kincorth Woods/Stoneyhill Wood

Kincorth has a mix of conifers including lodgepole pine, larch, Scots pine and sycamore. Many areas have been thinned to favour native species and others planted with more wildlife friendly species including Scots pine, Norway spruce, larch, alder, willow and rowan. The lands around Aberdeen generally are notably stony, in 1840 Catherine Sinclair wrote: 'You might fancy, in some parts of this country, that it rained stones instead of water!'. Kincorth Hill was once known as Stony Hill (or Stoneyhill). The 1867 Ordnance Survey map shows the hill entirely covered by Stoneyhill Woods.



18 3D Kincorth Hill Sculpture

As a part of a 2007-08 project (see 24), Aberdeen City's Countryside Ranger Service worked with the Arts Development Team, a sculptor, Kincorth Academy and local primary schools plus the Sue Ryder Centre to design and make a 3-D bronze sculpture of the Hill. The students and residents at the Sue Ryder Centre made the moulds for the bronze casts which delivered the 3-D model located here and at Nigg Way at the bottom of the hill behind the Kincorthland block of flats.

19 Viewfinder and What You Can See

Ranger Service or even volunteer to

help with the hill's maintenance.

This is a superb vantage point with a panoramic view of Aberdeen and beyond. Prominent features are noted below but see if you can spot others. The cityscape offers quite a contrast after the relative wilds of the surrounding hillside. However as well as what you can see from the hills, they offer many opportuities to spot what's on them. There's a short section at the end describing some of the varied habitats and wildlife to be found. Also opportunities to learn about them through Aberdeen Countryside

	Robert Gordon University Campus Fare Kincorth River Dee Cults	Adventure Aberdeen Snowsports Centre	Mannofield	Gincorth Academy Granitehill Mast Aberdeen Royal Infirmary	Donmouth Local Nature Reserve Wellington Suspension Bridge Town House St Nicholas Church	North Sea > Peterhead Power Station Aberdeen Harbour
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20 Granite Picnic Table

These substantial examples of worked granite have been formed into a picnic table and benches. As well as relaxation and picnics, the hill has a wide range of features, such as trackways, banks, enclosures and building remnants which cover a wide date range. On a fine day, it can be very rewarding to search out these remains, while enjoying glorious and colourful views up Deeside. Although, unlike Tullos, the hill has seen substantial quarrying work over the years so some will have a much more recent history!

21 Memorial to Phil 'Beefy' Robertson

This bench features a full size bass guitar and commemorates a local hero and veteran of Aberdeen's punk rock scene, who played the instrument. Phil latterly spent his free time at Balnagask Community Centre inspiring and teaching new generations to play.



22 Former Damhead/Stoneywood Quarry

Quarrying here began in 1766 when John Adam, an architect from Edinburgh, petitioned Aberdeen Burgh Council for permission to extract rocks from quarries in the Bay of Nigg. The Council quickly agreed and extended it to include all the land from the Bay of Nigg to Cove. For at least the next decade, Adam quarried in Kincorth. There were two main quarrys as shown on the map as well as smaller excavations. Kincorth Quarry itself was not closed until as late as 1967, despite many calls from residents for its closure, as these quotes from *The Press & Journal* of 2 December 1967 show. Mr Charles Campbell of Slessor Drive said, "It's like living next to a volcano" whilst Depute City Engineer William Turner noted, "With the best will in the world it is impossible to use explosives so near to houses without risk. We're lucky a stone has never struck anyone".

23 Orienteering Course and Plaque Trail

You may have noticed cryptic symbols along the trail. These are markers, known as 'controls', for the hill's orienteering course – there's a link to the online map at the start of this booklet. They were part of a project with Kincorth's schools in 2007-08. This was to encourage use of the hill by the local community, helping raise awareness of its value for wildlife and recreation and to help reduce willful fire raising. The students came up with the idea of making bronze casts of animal footprints and tree leaf prints and are spread across the hill. Some include the name of the animal or tree, but some don't, so users have to work out what those are themselves!







24 Granite Memorial Seat

A granite sofa in memory of loved ones, whoever they might be. This is a place to stop and contemplate today's surroundings or to reminisce with friends on days gone by. It was donated by Kincorth Memories From When We Were Young, who are on Facebook. The seat is also a reminder of the quarrying conducted on the hill (23) and the many examples of finished and unfinished granite you can see here. Aberdeen is famously known as the Silver City for the sparkle of its granite buildings. This is caused by the mineral mica, simply meaning crumb in Latin but most likely from micare — to glitter. The granite legacy is covered by Aberdeen Granite Trail.





There is a variety of habitats including rough grassland, heathland, scrub and woodland attracting rich and varied wildlife.

Heathland

Both hills were previously mostly heathland (top) but agriculture, quarrying and landfill have destroyed much of it. However it is recognisable in remaining patches dominated by heather. Three kinds grow on Tullos Hill, common, cross-leaved heath, bell heather and ling on Kincorth Hill. These all flower in late summer creating a purple haze whilst skylarks and meadow pipits perform amazing aerial displays overhead.

Rough Grassland

Rough grassland is dominated by vigorous, tall growing grasses, which outcompete other species for water, light and nutrients. On sunny summer days, look out for meadow brown butterflies. Mice and voles attract birds of prey. Kestrels hover looking for food and Buzzards are common hunters here. Tawny owls are occasionally seen early evening and around dawn. Wildflowers such as yellow rattle, knapweed and cow parsley flourish in summer. Scrub is beginning to spread into many of these areas of grassland.

Inset pictures, left from top: Willow Warbler, Common Blue, Red Admiral, Roe Deer, Common Blue Damselfly, Rough Grassland.

Inset pictures, right from top: Gorse, Hawthorn flower, Broom, Northern Marsh Orchid. Volunteers at work.



View from Tullos Hill including St Fittick's Church ruins (see Torry Local Area Trail), Torry Point Battery and Girdleness Lighthouse (see Aberdeen Coastal Trail).

Scrub

There are large areas are dominated by gorse and broom scrub (above) and this is good habitat to provide cover to species such as roe deer and other small mammals as well as nesting sites for many small birds. It is however very invasive and needs to be kept in check to prevent it from taking over more valuable habitats. Gorse flowers during most months of the year but makes a colourful sea of yellow in late spring and early summer when the flower's scent of coconut can fill the air.

Volunteering and Education

The Countryside Ranger Service offers opportunities for people to learn about their local environment and biodiversity in the classroom or outdoors. Popular subjects include pond dipping, minibeast hunts, shelter building, and tree studies. Volunteers play an invaluable role in our services particularly when managing our countryside sites. People can come to our advertised events, join our Volunteers Ranger Team, or organise a community or corporate volunteer event. We regularly work with students and keen young environmentalists, offering opportunities and experience to help them take the next step in their careers. We also work with community and residents groups who want to give something back by improving their local area. Please see our website for further details: www.aberdeencitv. gov.uk/rangerservice







Archaeology and Industrial Heritage

Following the very successful 2004 survey of Tullos Hill by experts from Edinburgh's Centre for Field Archaeology, a similar 2008 survey was commissioned by Aberdeen City Council for Kincorth Hill. This identified and recorded features which may range in date from prehistoric to the 20th century — a period of around 5000-6000 years. However survey alone cannot necessarily determine dates or origin without further archaeological excavation. Cairns and a hut circle may represent a specific location of prehistoric settlement and cultivation.

There are many traces from the days of **quarrying** on the hill since the 1700s, and probably before, including smaller 'test pits' as well as the larger expanses of quarrying. Some now infilled and others open but overgrown (as above). The distinctive striped object on the right is a ranging pole, marked in 20cm red and white sections. These are used during archaeological surveys to add scale to photographs.



The former Michelin factory near Redmoss Road has also left traces. Tyre production generates a huge amount of heat and required water to cool it. The above **pumping station** (not accessible) contains a Glenfield machine, which pumped water from the Dee to the factory. The Michelin factory closed in the 1970s with production moved to Dundee, which itself closed in 2020. Below are shaped granite blocks abandoned from earlier quarrying work on the hill.



Covenanters' Faulds and the Civil Wars

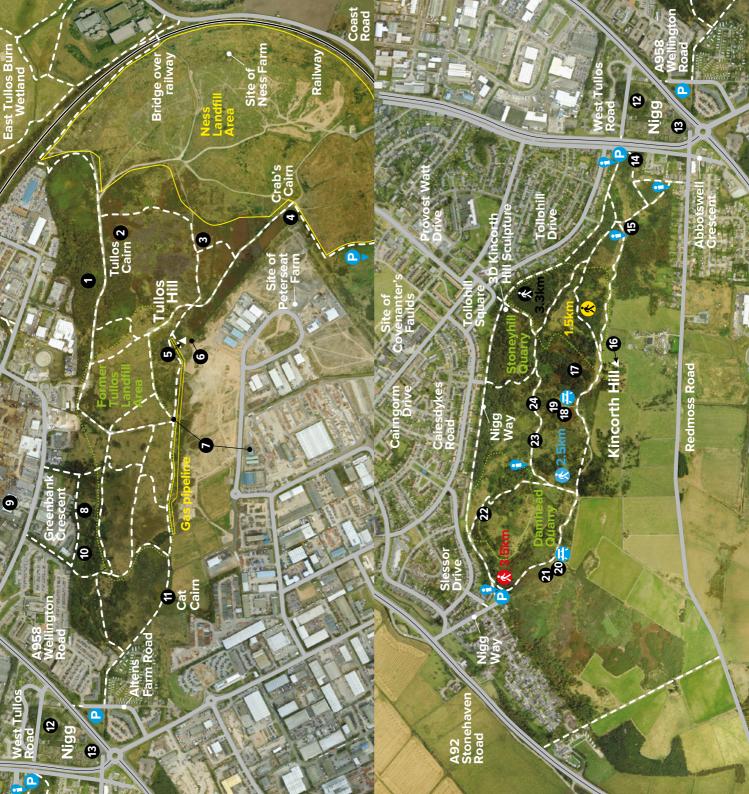
A fauld is a dyked, or walled, animal enclosure. This fauld is named for the Covenanters, those in Scotland who opposed Charles I, during the Civil Wars of the 17th century. James Graham, the Marquis of Montrose, and his army camped on Kincorth Hill on the night of 17 June 1639 before the Battle of the Bridge of Dee the next day, when Covenanting forces under his



command attacked Aberdeen. At the time, Aberdeen remained loyal to Charles I and had refused to join the Covenanters. The following day, Montrose led his forces down Kincorth Hill towards the Bridge of Dee, the gate of which at the Kincorth side had been closed and fortified to keep Montrose's forces out. The Covenanters attacked the bridge, which was defended by parties of men from Aberdeen for a day and a half before Montrose's cannons eventually battered down the town's fortifications.



There is another explanation for the origin of this name – after the end of the Republic in Britain, when the monarchy was restored, the Episcopalian form of faith was promoted and radical Presbyterians were persecuted. This forced those associated with radical Presbyterianism to meet outside in illegal open air meetings, known as conventicles. These conventicles were often held in secluded and remote areas, such as this area of Kincorth Hill would have been at the time. The name Covenanter was often attached to those who attended conventicles and so it may be that Covenanters' Faulds is named after these illegal meetings in this area. Either way, the connection remains with the turbulent times of the Civil Wars, and Montrose did camp on Kincorth Hill in 1639. The top painting is *Covenanters' Baptism* by George Hervey and the map shows Covenanters' Faulds (Folds) from a 1777 survey, courtesy of Aberdeen City Archives.



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This is one in a series of themed Aberdeen City trails. All are available via the free **GoABZ** mobile app and at **www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/trails**







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