

Hidden Gems Drive

Here's a run you might like to take, on a nice sunny weekend day comprising some decent A and B roads and generally avoiding the main arterial routes. It's not all about driving though, as we've stitched together some nice scenery with interesting places, which are off the beaten track as well as suggested eateries en-route.

From Aberdeen, take the South Deeside road (B9077) from the old Bridge of Dee to Crathes where it joins the Slug Road (A957). Go straight over the junction and you will arrive at the Bridge of Feugh. You might want to stop here (there's a free car park near the bridge) because salmon can often be spotted, especially in springtime, trying to thrash through the raging torrent as it cascades over the rocky chasm. There's also a fine example of an old turnpike toll house here. In the 1800s, Scotland had many turnpike roads where travellers were charged to use them.

After crossing the bridge itself, turn left on the B974 to Strachan (pronounced Strawn). At Strachan, follow the B974 left, signposted towards Fettercairn. You will see Clachnaben in the distance on your right-hand side as you go through Glen Dye. This 589m hill looks as though it has a pimple on the top. It's actually a solid granite Tor, which makes it very distinctive. Eventually you'll arrive at the snow gates at the Bridge of Dye. This bridge has often been damaged by lorries, sometimes causing the road to be closed. Hopefully, at the time of the run, you will not have this particular problem.



Then it's an exciting and challenging drive up the Cairn O'Mount, a road with tight corners, even hairpins, steep inclines and blind summits. Be warned it's a great favourite route for sports bikes enthusiasts and sports car clubs so don't be surprised if you encounter folk having a "spirited" drive. When you get to the top, there's a wee stopping place, where you can take in the views: the Mearns to the east and all the way to the North Sea while looking south you can easily see Dundee and the Lomond Hills in Fife on the horizon. Off to the west are the Munros around Glen Clova.

As you descend from the cairn and reach the Clatterin' Brig, be sure to stop at the little café there for breakfast, coffee, lunch, etc. The food is great and often there is a big cosy log fire to warm you up.

Then you continue on the B974 all the way to Fettercairn where you turn right to go through the arch and carry straight on heading towards Edzell on the B966. However, some 3.5 miles from Fettercairn, there is a minor road to the right, signposted Glen Esk. Take this road (passing places) which follows the River North Esk and after about 8 miles, you will reach The Glen Esk Retreat and Folk Museum.



This is a hidden gem with displays showing how people lived and worked in the 19th century, particularly in Victorian times. The Green shed stables displays agricultural implements from as early as the 18th century. The museum also boasts a café with delicious home baked scones and cakes. It's run by volunteers from the local community; it's free to go in but there is a voluntary donation jar to help maintain the place. Please be generous.

The road up Glen Esk is a dead end so you will have to retrace your route back to the B966 at Gannachy where you turn right to carry on through Edzell to Brechin.

Once in Brechin turn right passing the Esso garage on your right-hand side so that you are heading towards Forfar. However, just as you reach the outskirts of the town, take the B9134, signposted Aberlemno. Continue for about 10 miles and you will come to a junction in Forfar centre, where you will turn left onto the A932 towards Frockheim and Montrose. It's a nice fast road with sweeping bends and it's usually not too busy with traffic although you might encounter some slow-moving tractors.

As you approach Frockheim turn left onto the A933 which heads back towards Brechin but after 4 miles or so, you will come to a crossroads, where you are going to go right towards Montrose. Again, this a nice fast road with sweeping bends and eventually you will join the A92 on the south side of Montrose.

If you are interested in wildfowl, just after this A933/ A92 junction, is the Scottish Wildlife Trust visitor centre at Montrose Basin, so it's worth stopping. The basin is an internationally important place for migratory wildfowl roosting and feeding, including up to 80,000 pick footed geese but there are breeding Eider Ducks as well.

Thereafter, follow the A92 through Montrose and just before the road splits to Laurencekirk and Stonehaven, you will see an Esso filling station on your right and a brown signpost to the Montrose Air Heritage Museum. This is another hidden gem, again it's staffed by volunteers, and it tells the story of the airfield, which was the first British operational airbase established by the Royal Flying Corps in 1913.



Sadly, the field is no longer there but some of the huts and hangers still exist and there are plenty of interesting artefacts and vintage aircraft to see. They are even constructing a replica Biplane typical of the World war 1 era.

Flying machines: A Lamborghini parks up beside the "Red Lichtie" Spitfire outside the museum entrance.

Take care though, the place is reputed to be haunted so you might see ghostly airmen or a black labrador!

It's worth getting a guided tour, if available, as there are many stories associated with this historic establishment.

90 minutes is a good time to spend here.

Afterwards, you might fancy afternoon tea so its only a mile or so from Montrose on the Stonehaven Road (A92) to Castleton Fruit Farm where you can enjoy delicious cream scones or cakes or even a strawberry sundae. Not for folk on a sugar free diet though!

Back in the car or on the bike, you can continue on the A92 coast road through Inverbervie to Stonehaven. If you're still a bit peckish, why not park up near the outdoor swimming pool and enjoy a Fish Supper from the award-winning Bay Fish & Chip shop on the promenade. A fine way to finish an interesting route as you look over Stonehaven Bay and reflect on your day packed full of history.

We hope you enjoy our **hidden gems** route. We'll be producing other suggested outings but if there is anywhere that you feel other members would appreciate, please let us know.