Braemar is an excellent base for walking with a dog: you can set off from the village for a short riverside wander, find a quick climb with a grand view, or spend a longer day among the Cairngorms without driving far. That variety matters when the weather is changeable, daylight is short, or your dog is happier with a steady path than a full mountain expedition.

The best choice depends on more than distance. Check the ground and river conditions, consider whether your dog can be kept under close control around wildlife and livestock, and be realistic about how long the route will take. Use the Cairngorms National Park Authority community paths leaflet to confirm local path options, and check a current mountain weather forecast before heading higher.

Braemar: a low-driving base for dog walks

One of Braemar's great strengths is that many walks begin in or close to the village. You can make a useful day of it without spending the morning in the car, and can adapt your plans if cloud, wind or rain arrives earlier than expected. The rivers, woodland and open slopes also give you a choice of settings, from easy paths to a substantial hill day.

For a relaxed outing, look for a village or riverside circuit. If the forecast offers a clear spell, consider a short climb such as Morrone. Save higher or more exposed routes for days when conditions suit both you and your dog. Braemar's surrounding hills can feel very different from the sheltered streets below: wind chill, low cloud and wet ground can turn a pleasant climb into a demanding one.

Route distances and conditions can change, and different map sources may describe local paths differently. Treat the table below as a planning guide rather than a substitute for checking the current community paths leaflet, a map and local signs.

Walk type Best for Dog-walking notes Village and riverside loop A short, flexible outing Good for a gentle leg-stretch; keep dogs close near water, roads and other path users. Morrone Birkwood Woodland nature and a shorter walk Use the paths and check signs; be especially mindful of wildlife and seasonal conservation concerns. Morrone climb A quick hill day with a broad viewpoint A much bigger outing than a village stroll; check visibility, wind and your dog's fitness. Queen's Drive road sections Linking local paths or extending a circuit Check the route on a map and take care where the walk uses a road or shared track.

Short village and riverside loops

When you want a low-effort walk, start with the community paths around the village and the River Dee. A **river dee easy path** is a useful kind of outing to look for in Braemar: a relatively gentle route where you can enjoy the water and surrounding scenery without committing to a climb. Use the community paths leaflet to identify the recommended line and any suitable connecting paths.

Make the walk suit the day

Rather than setting out with a fixed target, choose a short section and turn it into a loop where the mapped paths allow. You might keep the walk brief after a long drive, or extend it by linking streets, riverside paths and woodland edges. Take care not to assume that every visible track is a public path or that a riverside route stays level throughout.

- **After rain:** expect muddy patches, wet grass and potentially slippery stones. A short route can still take longer than it looks.
- **Near the river:** keep dogs away from steep banks and swift water, especially when levels are high or the current is strong.
- **In the village:** use a lead near roads, car parks, gardens and other walkers. Give horses and people with dogs space.
- **For a quick outing:** plan a route that lets you turn back easily if the weather changes or your dog is tired.

Short loops are not merely a fallback for poor weather. They can be the best choice for an older dog, a young dog still building fitness, or a warm day when exertion would be uncomfortable. They are also useful if you are waiting for a better weather window before attempting a hill.

Quick climbs with big viewpoints

If you want a hill walk without a long drive, Morrone is the obvious local option. It rises above Braemar and offers a rewarding sense of height and a wide outlook on a clear day. The climb is still a proper hill outing: expect steeper ground than on the village paths, changing conditions and sections where a dog may need help or close management.



Planning a Morrone outing

Choose a day when the forecast gives you a suitable window for the ascent and return. Check wind speed, cloud base, precipitation and temperature, rather than relying only on a general forecast for the village. Low cloud can remove the view and make navigation harder; strong wind can be unsettling for dogs, particularly on open ground.

Allow more time than you think you need. A dog that races ahead on a familiar path may Linn of Dee to Derry Lodge slow down on steep, rough or wet sections. Carry water and a small first-aid kit, and remember that exposed ground can be cold even when the village feels mild. If the summit conditions look poor, a lower walk in or around Morrone Birkwood may be a better day out.

The Queen’s Drive can feature in local route planning, but do not assume that every part is a quiet, off-road path. Check the exact line on a current map or in the leaflet, and take particular care on **queen's drive road sections** or

any stretch used by vehicles. Keep your dog close, walk in a way that leaves room for traffic and other users, and avoid using an unfamiliar road section as an improvised shortcut.

Morrone Birkwood: nature, trees and conservation

Morrone Birkwood offers a different experience from the open hill above it. The woodland setting makes it a good choice when you want a more sheltered walk, an opportunity to look closely at local nature, or a change from riverside scenery. It can be a rewarding destination in its own right, especially if you do not have the time or conditions for the summit.

Woodland walks call for a slightly different style of dog control. Wildlife may be close to the path or difficult to see, and dogs running through undergrowth can disturb animals even when they do not chase them. Keep to the paths, follow any signs about access or conservation, and put your dog on a lead where needed. That is particularly important during sensitive periods for wildlife and where the path passes close to animals or nesting areas.

Walk gently in a nature reserve

- Keep dogs close enough that you can prevent them from chasing or disturbing wildlife.
- Use a lead where signs request it, and whenever you cannot rely on a quick recall.
- Leave plants, fallen wood and other natural features where they are.
- Take all waste away with you, including bagged dog waste; do not leave bags hanging on trees or fences.
- Be considerate of other visitors, especially people who may be nervous around dogs.

Conservation is not an optional extra in a place valued for its wildlife and woodland. A dog that is under close control allows other visitors to enjoy the paths too, while reducing disturbance to animals that may be hidden from view.

Access rights and responsible dog control

Scotland’s access rights come with responsibilities. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code asks dog walkers to keep dogs under proper control, particularly around livestock and wildlife. A lead is sensible near roads, in busy areas, around grazing animals, and wherever signs or conditions call for one. In other places, a reliable recall and close supervision may be appropriate, but “off lead” should never mean out of sight or free to chase.

The phrase **access code dog control** is worth keeping in mind when planning any route around Braemar. The code is not just about whether a lead is attached: you are responsible for preventing your dog from causing harm or disturbance. If you encounter livestock, shorten the lead and give animals space. If cattle become threatening, let the dog go rather than putting yourself at risk, then move away calmly and safely.

Pick up after your dog and take the waste with you. Do not leave it beside the path, even if it is bagged. On a narrow track, step aside to let other walkers pass, and give particular consideration to runners, cyclists, horses and people walking dogs on leads.

Choosing the right walk for the weather and daylight

In winter, the daylight window is short and conditions can change quickly. Start early enough to finish in good light, and make your route shorter if cloud, wind or rain is moving in. A village or woodland loop gives you more options to turn back than a summit outing, so it is often the sensible choice when the forecast is uncertain.

In summer, longer evenings make it easier to fit in a hill walk, but do not let daylight encourage you to underestimate distance. Dogs can overheat, particularly on exposed climbs or during a warm spell. Carry water, take breaks and choose shaded paths when needed. Ticks can be present in grassy and woodland areas, so check your dog after the walk and remove any ticks promptly using an appropriate tool.

Before setting out, use this simple checklist:



1. Check the Cairngorms National Park Authority community paths leaflet for the route and local access information.
2. Check a current mountain forecast if you are going above the village or onto exposed ground.
3. Choose a route that matches your dog's fitness, confidence and ability to cope with rough or wet terrain.
4. Carry water, food, a lead, waste bags and a map or reliable navigation aid.
5. Set a turnaround time that leaves enough daylight for an unhurried return.

So, which Braemar route is best?

For an easy outing, choose a mapped village or riverside loop and keep the distance flexible. For woodland interest and a sheltered feel, explore Morrone Birkwood while respecting conservation signs and keeping your dog close. For a short drive-free hill challenge with a big reward, consider Morrone when the forecast is suitable and your dog is fit for the climb.

That is the real appeal of Braemar as a dog-walking base: you do not have to choose between a small walk and a major expedition. Start with the weather, daylight and your dog's needs, then use the local community paths to join the right pieces together. A modest route walked attentively is often a better day than a summit pushed in poor conditions.