

# MARCH STONES ABERDEEN

Aberdeen's March Stones & Freedom Lands



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Courtesy of Yvonne Holton

# MARCH STONES ABERDEEN

## Introduction

This is the story of how Aberdeen acquired its boundaries and ultimately established itself as the city we know today. Walking or riding this boundary by following stone markers was an important tradition in Aberdeen. This leaflet explores the history of the Freedom Lands and provides details on how to continue the tradition of 'Riding the Marches'.

### The March Stones

There are two sets of boundary stones: the inner and the outer. The inner march stones mark the boundary of the crofts that ringed the medieval Royal Burgh of Aberdeen. The outer march stones define a much larger area known as the Freedom Lands. These lands went on to become the right and responsibility of the medieval and later Royal Burgh of Aberdeen. The name 'march stones' derives from the 16th century meaning of march as a boundary.

### Robert the Bruce

In 1313, Robert the Bruce granted Aberdeen custodianship over his Royal Forest of the Stocket. The term Royal Forest is slightly misleading as it really meant a hunting ground, which may have included a wooded area. In 1319 Robert issued a second charter. This granted Aberdeen fuller rights over the Stocket, in return for an annual payment, or feu, of £213 6s 8d Sterling – the modern day equivalent of approximately £91,000.



*Charter issued by King Robert the Bruce feuing the Stocket Forest to Aberdeen, 1319*

### The Freedom Lands

The City Council also bought three other plots of land, which together with the Stocket Forest came to be called the Freedom Lands. These purchases were Rubislaw, bought in 1379, the lands of Cruives (Woodside) bought in 1405 and finally, the lands of Gilcomston, bought in 1680. The lands of Caprastone (Hilton) were also purchased in 1595. However, they were not strictly speaking ever part of the Freedom Lands.

In 1551, for a number of financial reasons, Aberdeen applied to Mary Queen of Scots for the rights to let these lands. This meant that in return for a yearly payment, the lands became privately managed. Many of the main estates established at this time are still recognisable today, such as Countesswells, Forresterhill, Hazlehead and Kingswells.

## Boundary Markers

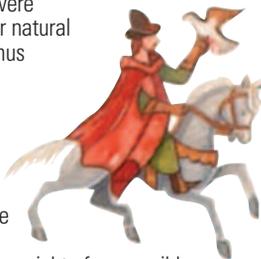
The earliest boundary markers were probably natural features such as burns and stones (described as 'earthfast' stones), with the addition of small purpose-built cairns. The first description of the marches dates back to a 'riding of the marches' in 1525. The practice of riding the boundary lines was intended to ensure they were being observed and respected, and that no adjacent landowners had encroached onto the town's lands. These rides were accompanied by a great deal of ceremony and feasting.

From the description of 1525 it is certain that there had been no standardised marking system. However, large 'earthfast' stones are a common feature in the records of this riding: some were described as including saucers, others as having a varied number of holes. It is possible that the saucer marks were filled with lead and then the town's mark (or possibly seal) was impressed into it. Although, from a description of March Stone 1 made in 1578, it would seem that the town's mark had been engraved into this particular stone. Moreover, through the 16th and 17th centuries there are repeated references to cairns next to march stones. In a riding of the marches in 1673, several cairns were ordered to be erected to mark the line of the marches on the Chapman road (this track ran from Aberdeen, out through Newhills to the Chapman ford, from stones No 44-34). This may have been an older practice, in spite of which, none of these 'march cairns' survive.

It was after 1790 that the saucer stone system was replaced by a new system of lettered and numbered stones. This style, which is still with us today, has a number coupled with the letters ABD for Aberdeen and in the case of the inner march stones the additional letters CR for either City Royalty or City Regality. In the years immediately following 1790 the stones up to number 48 were replaced with the new letter stones and the entire series was completed by 1810. The new series was not entirely the same as the older one had been; some stones were omitted whilst a number of new stones were introduced. Over the years the courses of older natural boundaries (such as burns) had been altered, thus necessitating some changes in the series.

## Using This Guide

Although the March Stones of Aberdeen were intended to be easy to access, the city has since expanded and many are difficult to get to. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gives everyone a right of responsible access to most land. In most cases, members of the public can get access to stones that are 'off the beaten track'. Nevertheless, some stones are not publicly accessible and in such cases, the right of responsible access does not apply.



Whilst enjoying the outdoors, please ensure that you behave responsibly by respecting the interests of others, caring for the environment and taking responsibility for your own actions. Further information can be found on the back cover of this leaflet.

A map has been included, indicating the historic line of the march stones. Two maps have been included indicating recommended trails that take in some of the more accessible stones. These trails include sections ranging from highly urban to countryside, from flat firm surfaces to steep, uneven and sometimes muddy paths. Where possible, descriptions of these conditions have been included for each stone. In addition to this, it is the responsibility of individual members of the public to ensure their personal safety. The descriptions given with each stone assume a starting point at Alpha and an end at Omega. Some of the routes will take you past private property. Please respect the privacy of the residents.

Inner march stones are marked with an additional 'CR', as in Stones Alpha to 1 and 61 to Omega

Six stones marked simply 'CR' are appended at the end of the descriptive list: these may have been inner march stones at one point. Others of this kind may also exist: please note that these stones can be difficult to find.

*All photographs © Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums Collections, unless otherwise stated.*

## Key to Symbols

Uneven or steep slope



Not wheelchair accessible



No access



Please ensure you follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code when enjoying the outdoors. The code is available from Aberdeen City Council on 01224 523316 or at [www.outdooraccess-scotland.com](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com)



# Aberdeen's March Stones & Freedom Lands

## Descriptive List

Please note, the engraving on some of these stones has faded.

### March Stone Alpha

Marked 'ABD CR'

Location: North end of parapet over the mouth of Ferryhill Burn at River Dee, opposite Old Ford Road.

This stone is a comparatively recent addition to the series, dating to the early nineteenth century.

### March Stone 1

Marked '1 ABD CR'

Location: Set in carriageway, near kerb at 79 Hardgate.

In 1525 described as 'ane gret grey stane, with ane sawssir ...' It was still marked with a saucer in 1698 but a new stone marked ABD was in place by the late 18th century.



Stone 1

### March Stone 2

Marked '2 ABD'

Location: Flush in pavement, south side of Fonthill Road, next to car park at Library, in small garden area.

No mention of this stone in 1525, certainly existed by 1698. Please note that this stone is immediately next to a very busy road and care should be taken. Wheelchair users may need to use opposite side of road.

### March Stone 3

Marked '3 ABD'

Location: Against cemetery wall, corner of Nellfield Place and Great Western Road.

In 1780 described as 'a large earthfast stone in the North West corner of Mrs Cochrane's Parks of Ferryhill ...'

### March Stone 4

Marked '4 ABD'

Location: Bottom of the steps at the side of The Short Mile Public House.

In 1698 described as a saucer stone in a dyke, whilst in 1780 as 'a large earthfast stone upon the outside of the North dyke of Pitmuckston ...'

### March Stone 5

Marked '5 ABD'

Location: At back garden wall of 319 Great Western Road.

In 1780 described as 'a large earthfast stone at a place called Collielaw upon the top of a Rock ...' Moved to its present location in 1889.



### March Stone 6

Marked '6 ABD'

Location: In back garden of No.11 Hammerfield Ave.

In 1698 described as 'ane great craige stone, wherein there is an sauser and four witter holes, and ane carne beside the same ...'

### March Stone 7

Marked '7 ABD'

Location: Back of pavement at 3 Craigton Road.

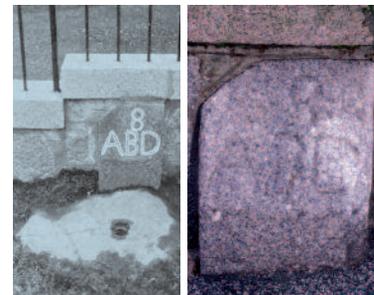
In 1698 described as marked with a 'P' for property, and also marked with a saucer in 1780.

### March Stone 8

Marked '8 ABD'

Location: Back of pavement at 37 Craigton Road.

Described in 1698 and 1780 as marked with a saucer. The original saucer stone survived until some time after 1929.



Photograph taken by James Cruickshank, 1929

### March Stone 9

Marked '9 ABD'

Location: Back of pavement at 126 Craigton Road.

In 1698 described as an 'eard-fast ston with an carne ...' The 1780 description mentions a saucer mark. Path on one side of the road only from stone 9 to 12.

### March Stone 10

Marked '10 ABD'

Location: Back of pavement at Senang Cottage, Craigton Road, opposite Slopefield Reservoir.

In 1780 this was described as an earthfast stone, with saucer.

### March Stone 11

Marked '11 ABD'

Location: Back of pavement, 36 metres west of 'Woodlands' entrance gate, Craigton Road.

Described in 1698 as a long stone and in 1780 as a large stone, again earthfast and with a saucer mark.

### March Stone 12

Marked '12 ABD'

Location: Adjacent to footpath at amenity area, south of Friarsfield Road and Kirkbrae junction, Cults. Unsurfaced path here.

In 1698 described as 'ane merch stone, with an sauser and four witter holes ...'



### **March Stone 13**

**Marked '13 ABD'**

**Location:** In picnic area at Hillview Crescent, Cults. Entry point opposite head of Quarry Road.

In 1525 described as 'ane gret grey stane standand on the top of the Blak Hill of Queyltis ...'. The 1698 description noted a sauser mark and four 'witter holes ...'.



*Stone 13*

### **March Stone 14**

**Marked '14 ABD'**

**Location:** Opposite the entrance to Cults Primary School, off Earlswells Road.

In 1525 described as a stone with 'three hollis hewing in the same ...'. In 1698 a saucer stone was recorded, which may be the one sitting adjacent to the lettered nineteenth-century stone.

### **March Stone 15**

**Marked '15 ABD'**

**Location:** In the amenity area adjacent to 30 Springdale Road, at junction with Baillieswells Road.

In 1525 described as 'ane gray stane with four hollis in the quhilk thar is irne zeit with laid ...'. In 1698 described as a large earthfast stone, marked on top by a saucer and on the side with three holes.

### **March Stone 16**

**Marked '16 ABD'**

**Location:** In boggy ground adjacent to summer house of 'The Policies', off Baillieswells Road.

In 1780 described as an earthfast saucer stone. Saucer stone is adjacent to the lettered stone.

### **March Stone 17**

**Marked '17 ABD'**

**Location:** 150 metres east of 'Hillhead Cottage' (east of Hillhead Road), adjacent to dyke and 2 burns.

In 1780 described as an earthfast saucer stone.

### **March Stone 18**

**Marked '18 ABD'**

**Location:** In field 150 metres south-west of entrance to Hilton Farm, west of Hillhead Road.

Described in 1698 as a saucer stone next to a cairn on the edge of a road: by 1929 the road had disappeared but the cairn was still there. The saucer stone survives next to the lettered stone, which had been broken by 1810 and the current one probably dates to the 1821 riding of the marches.



*Stone 18 with 'earthfast' saucer stone*

### **March Stone 19**

**Marked '19 ABD'**

**Location:** Stone adjacent to dyke in fields to south east of Westfield Farm.

Described in 1780 as 'a low flat earthfast Stone, with a saucer situated partly under the march dyke dividing the lands of Binghill and Westfield ...'.

### **March Stone 20**

**Marked '20 ABD'**

**Location:** Adjacent to dyke in fields to south east of Westfield Farm, on same line as above.

First mentioned in the eighteenth century when described as a long earthfast stone with a saucer mark.

### **March Stone 21**

**Marked '21 ABD'**

**Location:** In field south west of Westfield Cottage.

Described in 1698 as upon a 'knowhead' (hillock head) with a cairn.



Stone 22

### **March Stone 22**

**Marked '22 ABD'**

**Location:** In field south west of Westfield Cottage.

In 1698 was on top of a hillock and marked with a saucer.

### **March Stone 23**

**Marked '23 ABD'**

**Location:** Summit of Bean's Hill at junction of fences.

A saucer marked stone (described in 1698 and 1780) is adjacent to the lettered stone. Highest point on line of marches.

### **March Stone 24**

**Marked '24 ABD'**

**Location:** Top of bank at angle of fence, west of North Westfield farm.

In 1698 and 1780 described as being located at a place called Brunie's, or Brownie's grave.

### **March Stone 25**

**Marked '25 ABD'**

**Location:** East side of rock outcrop at Brunt Hill near Silver Burn. Access from track at East Brotherfield Farm.

In 1780 described as 'a large stone or part of a Rock marked with a saucer. . . ' Saucer stone is adjacent to lettered stone.



Stone 26

### **March Stone 26**

**Marked '26 ABD'**

**Location:** At confluence of Brodiach and Silver Burns. Access from Brotherfield farm.

In 1698 it was noted that there had never been a march stone here but the location had always been pointed out on ridings. A stone was recommended in 1780.

### **March Stone 27, 'The Ringing Stone'**

**Marked '27 ABD'**

**Location:** Adjacent to Brodiach Burn. Access from Brotherfield Farm.

Origins of this intriguing name are unknown. There are 2 miles to the next stone, being the longest distance between stones; the Brodiach burn was taken to provide a sufficient marker.

### **March Stone 28**

**Marked '28 ABD'**

**Location:** Adjacent to Littlemill Burn, on rough ground, north west of Borrowstone Farm, off Blackburn Road.

### **March Stone 29**

**Marked '29 ABD'**

**Location:** Adjacent to Littlemill Burn in corner of field west of Wynford Farm, off Blackburn Road.

Saucer stone is adjacent to the lettered stone.

### **March Stone 30**

**Marked '30 ABD'**

**Location:** In field north of Wynford, opposite road junction.

An older saucer stone mentioned in 1698 and 1780 survived until some time after 1929.

### March Stone 31 'The Doupin' Stone'

Marked '31 ABD'

**Location:** In field north of Wynford, opposite road junction.

From the descriptions in 1525 and 1698 it would seem that there had not been a stone here. In 1780 two large earthfast stones were noted, both saucer marked. It was here that new burgesses underwent the initiation of 'doupin', or being dropped onto the stone. A cup stone is adjacent to the lettered stone.



Detail of saucer stone adjacent to stone 32

### March Stone 32

Marked '32 ABD'

**Location:** In field south of Southside Croft, close to burn.

A saucer stone is adjacent to the lettered stone.

### March Stone 33

Marked '33 ABD'

**Location:** In field 130 metres north east of No. 32, near stepped approach to Elrick Hill.

Described in 1525 as 'the gret marche stanniss markit with the saucher...' A saucer stone remains adjacent to the lettered stone.



Stone 33, with saucer stone

Detail of saucer stone adjacent to stone 33



Photograph taken in 1920s, near stone 34, showing the line of the Chapman Road. Taken from 'Freedom Lands and Marches of Aberdeen, 1319-1929', by James Cruickshank, 1929

### March Stone 34

Marked '34 ABD'

**Location:** In field north west of Craibstone Golf Course, against a dry stone dyke.

This is the last stone recorded in 1525, as afterwards the marches followed a well-known highway. In 1698 a cairn was noted as standing beside the stone.

*Uneven surface: some may find access difficult.*

### March Stone 35

Marked '35 ABD'

**Location:** In field north west of Craibstone Golf Course, against a dry stone dyke.

A saucer marked stone described in 1698 was reported in the 1780 riding as having been removed by quarriers.

### March Stone 36

Marked '36 ABD'

**Location:** In field north east of Craibstone Golf Course, against a dry stone dyke.

In 1698 a cairn was described as adjacent to the saucer stone, which was also described, in 1780, as being marked by a 'P'.

### March Stone 37

Marked '37 ABD'

**Location:** At south east end of outbuilding of Ashtown farm.

Described in 1698 as 'ane great march-stone marked with ane P for Propertie and ane sauser at the west head of the croft of Ashehillocks ...'

### March Stone 38

Marked '38 ABD'

Location: On south side of road from Ashtown near bridge where Gough Burn issues from Moss of Brimmond.

Described in 1698 as an earthfast stone marked by a saucer. Gough Burn was historically given as Golf Burn.

### March Stone 39

Marked '39 ABD'

Location: North side of road, 50 metres east of No.38.

This stone may mark the original extent of the Lands of Craibstone.

### March Stone 40

Marked '40 ABD'

Location: Against dry stone dyke, in field to south of 1 Christie Grange.

Described in 1698 as a saucer marked stone next to a cairn.

### March Stone 41

Marked '41 ABD'

Location: South side of main road to Bucksburn, east of Newhills Church and south east of Hopetoun Reservoir.

In 1698 described as 'another stone marked with an sauser and a carne ...'

### March Stone 42

Marked '42 ABD'

Location: North side of main road, 175 metres east of No.41.

A saucer stone is adjacent to the lettered stone.

### March Stone 43

Marked '43 ABD'

Location: North end of group of lock ups at rear of 1-4 Nether Brae, opposite Sc lattie Park.

Described in 1698 as 'an eard-fast stone, with an sauser and an carne ...'

## Start of Trail 2

### March Stone 44

Marked '44 ABD'

Location: On east side of Bucksburn.

A copy of this original stone is located on the east side of the Bucksburn, near the site of the old ford across the burn. It is adjacent to the road. The original stone is situated on the west side of the burn, although we do not recommend visiting that site.

### March Stone 45

Marked '45 ABD'

Location: Corner of south west access road 35 metres from Newton of Auchmill. Access from Golf Club car park.

### March Stone 46

Marked '46 ABD'

Location: At gable end of 104 Bonnyview Drive, Heathryfold.

In 1780 described as 'a large earthfast stone with a saucer but not mentioned in the Old marches, altho' it appears to be one'.



### March Stone 47

Marked '47 ABD'

Location: In lane at rear of 17 Howes Drive.

In 1780 described as 'a large earthfast Stone marked with a deep saucer which is neither mentioned among the Old Marches, nor appears to have been one, but to have been placed there since the Council gave over the Riding ...'

### March Stone 48

Marked '48 ABD'

Location: In amenity area of 8-16 Marchburn Drive near corner of Oldtown Place.

The saucer stone survived until some time after 1929.

## End of Trail 2

### March Stone 49

Marked '49 ABD'

Location: There are two stones numbered '49'. The newer one is situated back of pavement on south west corner of Persley Bridge. This is a replacement for the earlier stone which was washed away from its original site, east of Scatterburn. We do not encourage visiting the original stone due to its hazardous location.



### March Stone 50

Marked '50 ABD'

Location: Very attractive area, but please note that the path is uneven. Grandholm and Persley Bridges are accessible by car. Cross Grandholm Bridge and take cobbled street with sharp Right turn. Stone is against wall at corner of Don Terrace, Woodside, near 'Jacob's Ladder'; staircase now closed to public.

Described in 1698 as adjacent to 'the old Ford of the Dirra-dyke...'



### March Stone 51

Marked '51 ABD'

Location: Cross A96 using crossing then double back along pavement and up Deer Road. Stone is at back of pavement, Clifton Road, opposite Woodside Primary School.

Described in 1698 and 1780 as a saucer stone.



### March Stone 52

Marked '52 ABD'

Location: On pavement adjacent to 2-8 Smithfield Road.

Described in 1780 as 'a large earthfast stone...marked with a saucer and also a key ...'



### March Stone 53

Marked '53 ABD'

Location: Up Smithfield Road, left along Hilton Drive. Stone is set flush in pavement at Hilton Road /Drive, south east corner. Described in 1780 as marked with a saucer and key.



Stone 53

### March Stone 54

Marked '54 ABD'

Location: In pavement on west side of Smithfield Drive, at junction with Provost Rust Drive.

Described in 1780 as marked with a saucer and a key. In 1698 ridings, it was noted to stand next to the supposed site of Caperstown kiln.

*Level access bus stop on Provost Rust Drive. Stewart Park provides a convenient rest spot with good views.*



## Start of Trail 1

### March Stone 55

Marked '55 ABD'

Location: Against wall near gateway at junction of Cattofield Terrace and Back Hilton Road.

Described in 1780 as marked with a saucer and key.

### March Stone 56

Marked '56 ABD'

Location: Back of pavement opposite 12 Clifton Road.

Described in 1698 as marked with a saucer and key.

### March Stone 57

Marked '57 ABD'

Location: 55 Powis Terrace.

Described in 1698 as at 'the croft of Pickelltillin, in the midst of which croft there are two march stones, markt with Sanct Peter's Key with carnes ...'

### March Stone 58

Marked '58 ABD'

Location: Back of pavement against front garden wall of 21 Elmbank Terrace.

Not mentioned in 1698 but described in 1780 as marked with a saucer and a key.

### March Stone 59

Marked '59 ABD'

Location: Back of pavement near amenity area in front of 10 Elmbank Terrace.

No seventeenth or eighteenth-century descriptions.

### March Stone 60

Marked '60 ABD'

Location: At gate in front garden of 74 Jute Street.

No seventeenth or eighteenth-century descriptions.

### March Stone 61

Marked '61 ABD CR'

Location: Adjacent to gable wall of 35 King's Crescent, in front garden of Viewton Cottage.

Described in 1698 as an earthfast stone with a saucer and key mark, this stone marks the junction of Inner and Outer marches on the north side.

*This stone is at the top of a steep path: some may find access difficult.*

### March Stone 62

Marked '62 ABD CR'

Location: Back of pavement opposite 39 King's Crescent, at corner of St Peter Street.

### March Stone 63

Marked '63 ABD CR'

Location: Set flush into pavement on Golf Road, near east entry to Pittodrie Football Ground.

Described in 1698 as an earthfast stone marked by a saucer and key.

### March Stone 64

Marked '64 ABD CR'

Location: In traffic island at east end of School Road at junction with Golf Road.

### March Stone 65

Marked '65 ABD CR'

Location: North east corner of wall adjacent to access road to Brickfield Cottage (Cat and Dog Home).

### March Stone Omega

Marked 'Ω ABD CR'

Location: On amenity area, north side of Beach Esplanade, on line of Powis Burn, near confluence with River Don.

## End of Trail 1

### March Stone marked 'CR'

Location: 34-41 Thistle Lane, built into wall of car park at rear of block.

### March Stone marked 'CR'

Location: Thistle Street, adjacent to car park.

### March Stone marked 'CR'

Location: Alford Lane, on side of Holburn Central Church.

### March Stone marked 'CR'

Location: Jack's Brae amenity area, free standing stone.



*CR stone on Jack's Brae*

### March Stone marked 'CR'

Location: 4 Mackie Place.

### March Stone marked 'CR'

Location: 5 Mackie Place.

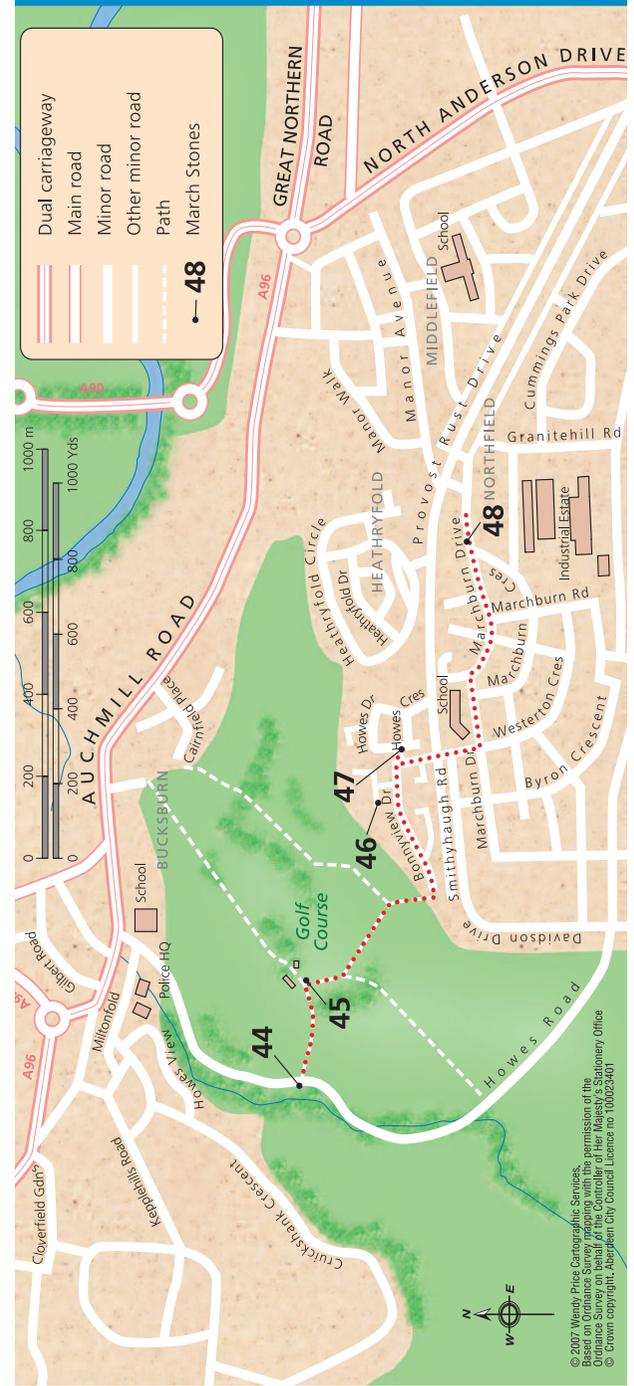
### March Stone marked 'CR'

Location: 48 Canal Road.

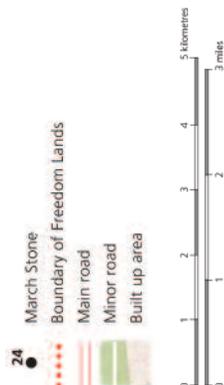
# Trail 1



# Trail 2



# MARCH STONES ABERDEEN



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# MARCH STONES ABERDEEN

one of a series of themed trails  
being developed around the City.

Further details about these trails can be found at:  
[www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/heritagetrails](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/heritagetrails)



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## For further information contact

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