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for Scotland  
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# Castle Fraser

## Alton Brae Trail

### Description

The designed landscape you see today at Castle Fraser was established in the 18th and early 19th centuries. The ancient system of shared farming on open fields was replaced by a profit-driven, agriculturally 'improved' estate, alongside fashionable leisure areas and an attractive parkland setting. Walking the trails today, you can see how the estate's design combines practical functionality with impressive vistas.

### Grade

Easy

### Terrain

The path is unsurfaced with some slopes

### Distance

1½ miles / 2.4km

### Time

1 hour

### OS Map

Landranger Sheet 38

### Facilities

Parking  
Suitable for picnics  
Tearoom  
Shop  
Toilets  
Dogs welcome



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**1** The Broad Walk of sycamores presents an impressive approach to the castle. The oldest trees here were planted over 200 years ago and fortunately survived recent gales.

**2** The Broad Walk once continued along here, connecting the castle with the old Aberdeen to Kemnay road, which ran through Alton Brae.

**3** In this mainly coniferous woodland you can hear and sometimes see a variety of birds, including treecreepers, long-tailed tits and coal tits. Treecreepers move in short hops up tree trunks hunting for insects. Once they reach the top they fly to the base of another tree and start climbing again.

**4** Have a look into the woodland on your left. The long linear ridges you see here are the remains of medieval cultivation 'rigs', created by a massive plough pulled by a team of oxen. Cereals were grown on top of the rigs, while the furrows in between were for drainage.

**5** The Flight Pond was created in the 19th century in an area of low-lying bog to attract wildfowl for shooting. You can still see the remains of some shooting butts, but the area is now a peaceful haven for wildlife. Ponds are a valuable habitat for many creatures, providing a place for frogs and newts to breed, birds to drink and insect larvae to grow. Swallows, swifts and martins hunt the insects flying over the water, and in the evenings Daubenton's bats skim the surface for flies and midges. They are able to eat up to 3,000 insects a night!

**6** In the late 1700s, this area was divided into 'parks' for grazing the laird's beasts, fattening them up for market. They had evocative names, such as Whin Park and Clinking-Stile Park.

**7** The field to your right was enclosed by stone dykes at the very end of the 18th century. A huge effort was needed to level the patchwork of unenclosed medieval rigs, to allow the use of a new, lighter plough pulled by just two horses.



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## Miss Bristow's Trail

### Description

Mary Bristow of Quidenham Hall, Norfolk was a close friend of Elyza Fraser. She designed this woodland, known as Miss Bristow's Wood, as a pleasure ground full of winding paths, pleasant glades and distant views.

Elyza Fraser and Mary Bristow developed these woods from agricultural land. They spent more than £9,600 (over £500,000 today) between 1797 and 1800, following the fashion set by Elyza's neighbour, Sir Archibald Grant of Monymusk.

Highly cultured ladies, Mary and Elyza travelled through Europe together. You can see their portraits hanging in the castle. Mary Bristow bought several books on landscape design, which are still in the castle library today.

### Grade

Easy

### Terrain

The path is unsurfaced with some slopes

### Distance

1¼ miles / 2.4km

### Time

45–60 mins

### OS Map

Landranger Sheet 38

### Facilities

Parking  
Suitable for picnics  
Tearoom  
Shop  
Toilets  
Dogs welcome

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**1** On the slope you can see the tall cistern and pump-house of a mechanical water pump that provided a water supply to the castle and estate. It was installed in the early 1900s, and although now powered by a modern electrical pump it still serves the surrounding farms.

**2** A natural spring rises here and the fountain head may have been set up as part of Miss Bristow's landscaping scheme. It is a re-used triangular stone from above a dormer window, almost certainly from the castle, and dates from the 1630s. The carved initials – L A F – stand for Lord Andrew Fraser. High up on the castle you will see similar decorative dormer heads.

The well house beyond – called the Moses Well – is more of a mystery. The beautiful stone panels form part of one large panel depicting the Old Testament prophet Moses, surrounded by scenes from his life. They were carved in the mid-1600s, possibly in the Netherlands, and probably for an important church. We don't know how or when they came to Castle Fraser, and work is ongoing to answer these questions.

**3** Wildflowers can be seen throughout Miss Bristow's Wood competing to attract the insects that pollinate them. Small white flowers of wood sorrel, wood anemones and bluebells appear in spring, with tall spires of foxgloves and pink rosebay willowherb emerging in mid- to late summer. On a sunny summer day the air is filled with the sound of buzzing bees.

**4** Elyza Fraser built this monument in memory of her companion, Mary Bristow. The inscription translates as:

*Farewell! Alas how much less is the society of others than the memory of thee.*

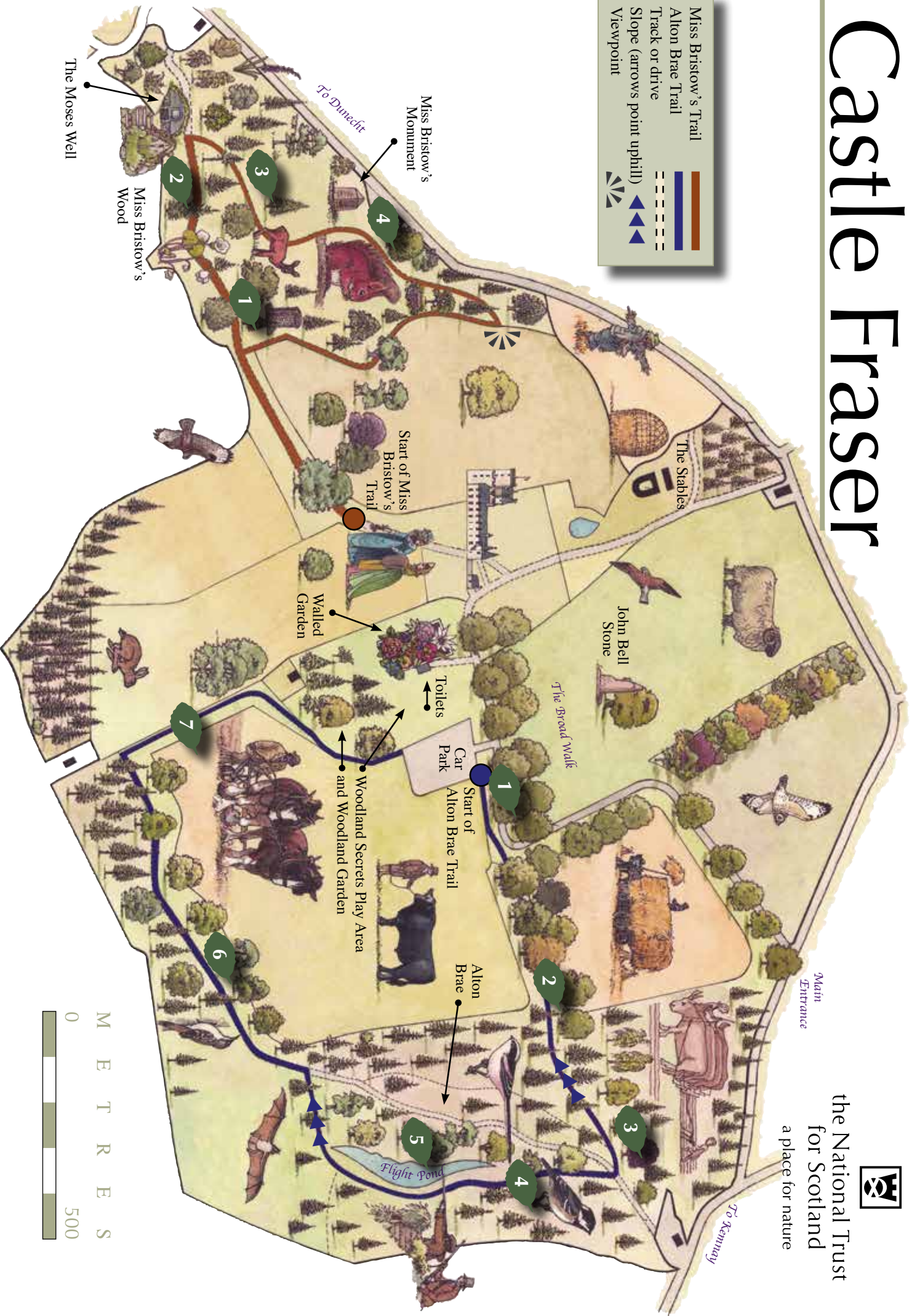
The inscriptions also commemorate Elyza's nephew, Alexander Fraser. Rumour has it that he became heir to the estate when his elder brother upset Elyza by giving her a bull-dog instead of the lap-dog she had requested!

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Miss Bristow's Trail	
Alton Brae Trail	
Track or drive	
Slope (arrows point uphill)	
Viewpoint	



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