

Formakin Estate

Formakin Estate is a beautiful country estate set in the rolling Renfrewshire countryside. The complex of buildings is a gem of Scottish architecture, with a little mischief thrown in. But there's more to Formakin than attractive buildings. The Estate is surrounded by peaceful woodlands and attractive meadows, brimming with flowers in the summer and beautiful colours in the autumn.

Opening hours May-Sept: Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-6pm.
October-April: Wednesday-Saturday, 10am-4pm. Free entry.
£3 car parking fee.

Start and finish Formakin lies between Bishopton, Houston and Langbank - just over 3km from each. The route starts at the Formakin Estate car park on the unclassified road between Bishopton and Houston, near its junction with the B789 Houston to Langbank road (grid reference NS 411707).

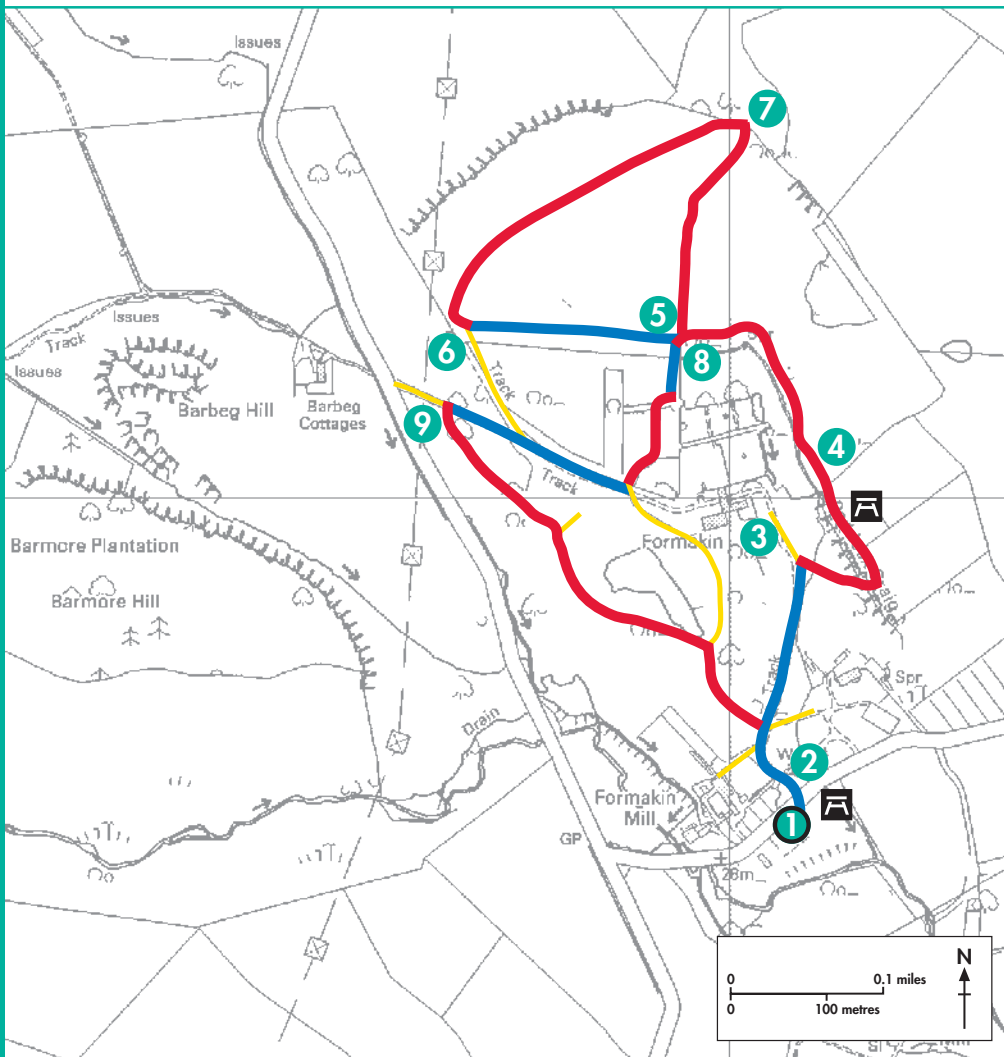
Distance 2.5 km (1.5 miles). Allow at least an hour.

Terrain Waymarked paths through woodlands and grass, no steep slopes but some stiles and muddy sections. Boots

recommended. Dogs must be kept on leads. All buildings on the Estate are private houses. Please respect residents' privacy and keep to the paths described.



Formakin Estate



1 Follow the short gravel path leading from the car park to the information point. This is to your left as you enter the car park. Turn left at the information point, and go through the metal gate. (Note the little monkeys sitting on top of each gatepost. These are the monkey waymarkers that you will be following on the walk.)

2 Cross the road carefully, and go up to the big arched gate in front of you. Go through the small door in the archway. (The two gatehouses either side are private houses, so please respect their privacy.) Follow the gravel drive straight in front of you, curving round to the right.

You will pass two little monkeys on your left within 100m of the gatehouse. After the second little monkey, go straight on along the gravel drive for 200m.

The Monkey House Formakin's buildings may look like they were built hundreds of years ago – the stable, opposite the car park entrance, even has the date “1694 DL” inscribed over the arch. But all is not what it seems... the letters DL mean Damned Lie. Everything was built between 1903 and 1913 for a wealthy Paisley stockbroker, John Holms. He and his well-known architect, Sir Robert Lorimer, seem to have had great fun designing the buildings – just look at the stone monkeys scampering about on the roof of the stable!

Unfortunately, Mr Holms' money suddenly ran out before the buildings were completed. Work stopped so suddenly that workmen's tools were still propped up where they left them in the half-finished Mansion House over 60 years later. Since the late 1970s, the buildings have gradually been completed and have all now been subdivided into private houses and apartments.

3 Just before a gate and “Private” sign, there is a little monkey on your right. It points up a narrow grassy path. Follow this path up some steps, through a stone wall, and up the slope beyond. There is a flight of about 20 timber steps to the top of the slope, where you will be greeted by another little monkey. Turn left along the line of the fence (don't go through the gate), along the grassy path, over a stile and past a bird information board and picnic benches after about 100m. Keep on in roughly the same direction, through a stone wall (another little monkey) to a stile in the fence after another few metres.

4 Just after the fence, the path splits. One little monkey points right, another straight on. Carry straight on, parallel with the fence on your left, for a couple





Formakin Manor House

of hundred metres. After a short downward slope, there is a little monkey pointing over a stile on your left. Turn left over the stile, and then follow the wall and fence on your left.

5 When you come to a gap in the fence after 75m, you will see a high stone wall running towards the Mansion House on your left, with a little monkey pointing that way. There is also a monkey pointing to the right, along an obvious straight track through the woods parallel with a fence on your right. Follow this track.

6 The track bends sharply left after 200m. At the same point, the fence on your right turns sharply away from you. Just beyond the bend in the fence, you will see an information board. Ignoring the monkey pointing left, go up to the information board on a faint path. Continue on this path to a stile about 15m past the board (no monkey). Go over the stile, and then follow the obvious grassy path up and over the rise, and down to a junction of stone walls under some trees.

Nature's glory The woods and fields around Formakin contain a wealth of flowers and birds. The grassland between points 6 and 7 is a riot of colour throughout the spring and summer, thanks to the huge variety of wild flowers that grow there. If you're a botanist, the grassland (a Site of Special Scientific Interest) is the best example of a dry semi-improved herb rich grassland in the area, and includes plant communities dominated by different species of hawkweeds, yarrow, tormentil, devils bit, scabious, tufted vetch and others. For the rest of us, the flowers are beautiful and the views up to the Highlands are outstanding. The woodlands around the estate are just as interesting in other ways. They contain a great variety of trees, including some native oak woodland. These in turn support many types of birds, from summer visitors such as willow warblers and swallows to permanent residents like great spotted woodpeckers. You're more likely to hear the woodpeckers than see them !

7 Go over the stile at the junction of stone walls (no monkey). Turn sharp right and follow the line of beech trees along the wall (no path). This takes you back to a stile and little monkey after 200m. Cross the stile, and continue for another 50m to the two little monkeys at point 5. When you were here before, you followed the right-hand monkey. Now go straight on for 100m, alongside the high stone wall, to a big metal gate on your left. You can see the Mansion House's formal gardens through the gate.

8 Turn round so that the gate and wall are directly behind you, and go straight ahead between the two hedges (no monkey). Take the first left (20m) along another wide grassy path lined with hedges. After 50m this brings you out onto a track, which comes from the Mansion House on your left. Turn right along the track (ignore the little monkey pointing straight on), through a pair of stone gateposts after just over



Formakin Corn Mill



The Manor House



100m. Follow the little monkey straight on downhill (ignore the track up to your right).

9 50m beyond the stone gateposts, there is a little monkey pointing down a narrow path on your left (easy to miss). Follow this path down a few steps, after which it becomes wider. After 100m, the path divides in front of a big ash tree. Keep to the right of this tree, staying on the mown footpath and ignoring the vehicle tracks. You will pass a little monkey about 20m beyond the ash tree. Continue straight on all the way to join the gravel drive at a monkey pointing left (300m) - you've been here before. Turn right, away from the monkey. The gravel drive forks after 10m. Keep left, continuing towards the gatehouses 50m further on (point 2). Then go through the arched gateway, crossing the road carefully, and back to the car park.

Getting to the start

Rail The nearest railway station is Bishopton about 3km away. There is no public transport between Bishopton and Formakin. The road is quiet, but there is no pavement. We suggest that you take a taxi or bring a bicycle with you.

Bus The nearest bus services are approximately 3km away in Bishopton – Slaemuir Coaches 521 from Erskine (not Sundays) and Arriva 27 from Erskine, Renfrew and Glasgow (not Sundays). The road from Bishopton to Formakin is quiet, but there is no pavement. We suggest that you take a taxi.

Bicycle It is possible to cycle to Formakin, possibly combining it with rail travel to Bishopton station. Please bear in mind that although the roads around Formakin itself are quiet, they have 60mph speed limits and can have fast moving vehicles. There are no cycle stands. Bring a lock. (See Car section for detailed directions.)

Car You can approach from two directions. From the B789 between Johnstone/Houston and Langbank, just over 3km from Houston or Langbank turn off onto an unclassified road signposted “Formakin Estate”. The car park entrance is about 200 metres on the right, at a beech hedge (no sign) just before gatehouses on the other side of the road. Alternatively, from Bishopton, follow the A8 westwards through the village towards Langbank. As you leave the village turn left onto Old Greenock Road. After 1 km, turn left at a T junction signposted “Formakin Estate”. The Estate car park is 1.5km along this road on the left through a beech hedge (no sign) just after gatehouses on the other side of the road. £3 parking fee.

Please check rail and bus times with Traveline Scotland before travelling. Tel: 0870 608 2 608 www.travelinescotland.com

Refreshments

The nearest places for refreshments are at Bishopton, Houston and Langbank. Each is about 3 km from Formakin. All have pubs and shops. See the Houston/Bridge of Weir walk for details of what’s available in Houston, and the Kilmacolm/Langbank for what’s available in Langbank.

Further information

Website links

For general information about Formakin, visit www.happyhaggis.co.uk

For an in-depth biography of the stockbroker, John Holms, and information about the Estate’s gardens, visit www.inbishopton.org.uk

For more information on the architect, Sir Robert Lorimer, visit www.homepage.ntlworld.com/jmwest/standrews/
The architects responsible for the completion of the buildings since the late 1970s, MAST, have some information about Formakin’s buildings at www.mastarchitects.co.uk



Ewing Street, Kilbarchan