50 fascinating facts about Banffshire & district

1. **Macduff** was previously a small village called Doune or Down, until 1783 when Lord Duff, 2nd Earl of Fife 'founded' the town.
2. **Duff House** was built by that 2nd Earl but is now home to an outpost of the National Galleries of Scotland, with major visiting works and exhibitions of parts of the internationally important collections that Scotland boasts but primarily hoardes in Edinburgh!
3. Duff House itself was designed by famous 18th C Scots architect **William Adam** who – with his brothers, also architects and designers – is responsible for many of Scotland's finest houses.
4. **Banff** was 'officially' founded in 1163 with its charter as a Royal Burgh and its status was confirmed by Robert the Bruce in 1324.
5. Banff in Canada, the **famous ski resort**, is named after the town.
6. Banff has a number of very fine **Georgian buildings** marking a period of prosperity in the town's history, based largely on textiles (bleaching and thread spinning) and also brewing.
7. The **river Deveron**, which separates Banff from Macduff, and which also runs through Huntly (as the Bogie), is one of Scotlands 10 longest rivers. Its name comes from the Gaelic 'dubh-aran' or black water.
8. The Deveron is known as a 'first class, second class **salmon river**' by the fishing powers that be. One of the largest ever salmon landed came from it: 61lbs!
9. The **Trinity Alvah church** is a prime example of this fine architecture, with a cupola and portico – not the commonest of architectural features in Scottish religious architecture!
10. In 1637, a time when Banff Castle effectively belonged to Archbishop Sharp of St.Andrews, the crime of **stealing golf balls** was punishable by DEATH!!
11. **Banff's harbour** silted up in about the 1860s after the river Deveron changed course, but this didn't stop boats still being built there for a good while thereafter.
12. Before local government was reorganised in 1975, **Banffshire** extended from Ben Macdui in the south west to a stretch of 31 miles along the coast, including 13 fishing ports and, in the 1960s, 25 whisky distilleries! Banffshire was bordered in the West by the river Spey.
13. **Macduff Aquarium** has an interesting array of marine life usually found lurking only out of reach of our eyes and is well worth a visit, especially in the company of children.
14. Building on the connection with the **National Galleries of Scotland** to Duff House, the inspiration many artists draw from the coastline in the area and the particular quality of the light, the Coast Arts festival takes place in various locations along the Banffshire Coast in May each year. This year's is from 22 to 25 May.
15. **Fordyce**, near Portsoy is a charming village of tightly-packed stone houses and a real quietness that is a delight to wander around on foot. It's reminiscent somehow of Cotswald-style architecture. There is a very traditional joinery workshop in the village that's a great place to get dads and granddads enthusing!
16. **Boyndie Visitor Centre**, just south of Whitehills is sited on a former military airfield which operated either side of World War II. It's now got a gallery, artists workshops, a café, garden and plant nursery, plus lots of pictures and information about its wartime role.
17. Macduff gained its first (legal!) **distillery** in the early 1960s, courtesy of William Lawson Distillers. It produces Glen Deveron single malt.
18. **Turriff** was the site of the first battle in the 'Bishops' Wars' in Scotland, in 1639, which saw the Royalists/Episcopalians up against the Covenanters (who basically didn't want Bishops as the intermediaries between God and the faithful). Both sides were prepared to fight to the death over it back then…
19. **Delgatie Castle**, near Turriff, is as good looking a castle on the inside as on the outside. Mary Queen of Scots stayed here in 1562. The visitor centre there is renowned for the quality of its home baked cakes and goodies. You have been warned!

20. Gardenstown, together with Crovie (pron. 'crivvie') and Troup are collectively known as **Gamrie**.
21. **Crovie** is virtually impossible to access by car, so narrow and winding is the single main street with adjoining alleys. It sits right on the beach head and is accessed by a path, with cars left higher up above the village.
22. The Garden Arms Hotel in **Gardenstown** has been on the go for 250 years.
23. A local type of biscuit called **Gamrie Knotties** is very similar indeed to the ginger iced biscuits called Lebkuchen that are normally associated with Germany and the Baltic region…probably because of the trade between the two areas from the 1600s onwards.
24. **Troup Head**, east of Gardenstown. is a major RSPB site for seabird nesting and for getting close enough to see them and what they're up to
25. **Tarlair** was briefly a minor spa resort in the 1770s thanks to a mineral spring having been found there.
26. The **open air swimming pool** below the cliffs at Tarlair was opened in 1931 and is a prime example of high art deco architecture. It's no longer open for bathing but is under a high level preservation order from Historic Scotland (Grade A listed) and there are periodically whispers of ways to restore it to something of its former glory rather than letting it decay further.
27. Well-known pop singer **Sandi Thom** (you may have heard her Number 1 song 'I Wish I was a Punk Rocker…') hails from Banff and often performs at events in the town.
28. **Robert Burns** visited Banff in 1780 and commemorated James Macpherson, a famous freebooter and fiddler who was executed in the town in 1700 or 1701. Macpherson played a 'rant' on the fiddle on his way to the gallows, offered the fiddle to the crowd, then broke it in two before climbing the scaffold. Good material for a song!
29. Alex Salmond, **Scotland's current First Minister** (2007 – date), is the local member of the Scottish and UK parliaments.
30. East of the Banffshire coast, in neighbouring Buchan, the **Lighthouse Museum** in Fraserburgh is a fascinating place to gain an insight into how Britain's coasts were renedered much safer over the last 250 years by precariously placed yet astonishingly-engineered lighthouses.
31. **Portsoy's** earliest fame was as a port for the shipping out of locally quarried dark green marble, more correctly called Serpentine. There are bits of it in the chimney fronts of the Palace of Versailles.
32. Portsoy was, in the late 18th century, the source of '**incombustible cloth'**, woven there from asbestos fibres found within the local marble.
33. Portsoy is wall-to-wall with gorgeous traditional Scottish and international boats in July each year for the **Portsoy Traditional Boat Festival**. A photographer's delight, particularly with the picturesque harbour as a backdrop.
34. **Whitehills** had a large distillery from 1863 till 1983, even surviving bombing raids by the Germans, but it was finally demolished in 1988. It had produced up to 900,000 litres of Highland malt whisky a year at its peak.
35. **Craigston Castle** near Turriff is associated with the Urquhart family. It's unusual architecturally and houses a notable library. It's open to the public.
36. This year the **Keith Country Show** celebrates its 137th year (Sunday 9th & Monday 10th August 2009).
37. The **Keith and Dufftown Railway** is an eleven-mile historic line linking the World's Malt Whisky Capital, Dufftown, to the market town of Keith.
38. **The name Keith** first appears in a charter of William the Lion around 1195, deriving from Gaelic word for 'wind' or 'pure air', a thought with which any "Keith Cyard" would cordially agree.
39. **Keith's old gallows** was on the site of the present New Town, not far from the river where the present A96 crosses the Isla. Here was a deep pool, Gaun's Pot, where witches were thrown to ascertain if they were really in league with Satan. If Auld Nick supported them and they floated, they were burnt. If not, it was usually too late.
40. James Gordon Bennet, born in Newmill, emigrated to America in 1819, eventually founding the **New York Herald**, a paper dedicated to 'facts in a brief and agreeable form'. This enterprise made him two million pounds. His son, of the same name, earned undying fame by sending a reporter, Henry Morton Stanley, to Africa, with the terse command, 'Find Livingstone.' He did.
41. George Stephen (Lord Mount Stephen), born in Glenrinnes in 1829 and educated in Dufftown was a joint promoter of the **Canadian Pacific Railway**.

42. The **Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival** will run from 1st to 10th May in 2009, specially extended as part of the Homecoming celebrations. www.spiritofspeyside.com. Learn more than you thought possible about whisky!
43. James Duff, 4th Earl of Fife after he returned from the Napoleonic Wars as a hero, founded **Dufftown**.
44. The part of town that James Duff added to Keith was Fife-Keith, which was originally intended to be called Waterloo. Street names commemorate James Duff and the Napoleonic wars.
45. **Auchindoon** castle was a Gordon stronghold. Held by Edim o Gordon in the 16th century is was burned down. Edim himself had seen the burning of Corgarff Castle resulting in the death of 27 Forbes, his sworn enemies. The Forbes were mostly woman and children.
46. Keith was the surname of an ancient Scottish family who held the office of **Knight Marischal and later Earl Marischal of Scotland**. The common surname is derived from this family or the town of Keith in Morayshire.
47. **Huntly**, about 25 miles south west of Banff, boast one of the only places in Britain where you can learn to do cross country skiing all year round. There are various types of artificial terrain for learning on, some relying on you trying out 'roller skis', and instruction for ad hoc lessons and courses.
48. Between Huntly and Keith there is a special centre where you can go and watch peregrine falcons (it's called **Peregrine Watch**). These are the fastest birds (fastest creatures in fact) on earth, able to reach more than 120mph in flight.
49. A visit to **Cullen** is a must for anyone who appreciates good, traditionally-made ice-cream as there are 2 producers in the village, providing vast quantities, too!
50. **Pennan**, along the coast to the east of Banff, is where the village scenes in the well-known film 'Local Hero' were filmed.