

Exploring Edinburgh

The north slopes of the Pentland Hills

EDINBURGH (like Rome and Sheffield) is said to be built on seven hills; Arthur's Seat, Blackford, Braid, Calton, Castlehill, Corstorphine and Craiglockhart. However it's true hills are the city's backdrop – the Pentlands. This issue shows you how to sample a section.

The Pentlands can be a muddy mountain bikers' playground, but this route is on quiet roads and reasonably surfaced paths. The nervous or novice may like to consider helmets, but there are no Mad Mountain Bike Moments. As with previous trips (www.edinburghpaths.info), this trip can be started in the centre of town without having to worry too much about the traffic.

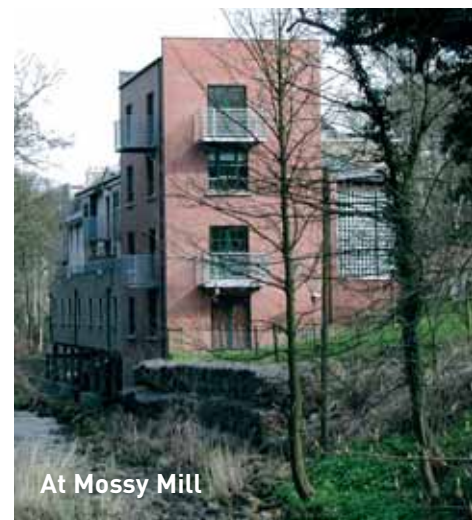
First find the Union Canal - it starts in Tollcross between Gilmore Place and Fountainbridge by the new Edinburgh Quay. Travel west over the aqueduct above the Water of Leith then up the old railway line to Balerno. This starts with the bridge over the canal.

If you miss this turn you'll find yourself

industrial history – weirs, lades and mills or their sites. Unmissable is the old railway tunnel at Colinton, not least because you have to go through it. (It's lit).

Shortly after the tunnel is Spylaw Park, a large, quiet, open space with benches (if you need a rest) and a selection of play equipment for children. If you need refreshments, turn left in the park, cross the river, go up the drive from Spylaw House, turn left into Spylaw Street and spy the Spylaw Tavern.

Spylaw House (now converted into flats) once had a snuff mill at the back - powered by the Water of Leith - which created the wealth that allowed James Gillespie to found an institution that developed into



At Mossy Mill

the school which still bears his name today. Return to the railway path, pass what was once the Scott's Porage Oats mill (now offices). Travel a short distance on tarmac and turn right onto the path again. On the left is what looks like a ditch but is a lade which carried water to power the mills downstream.

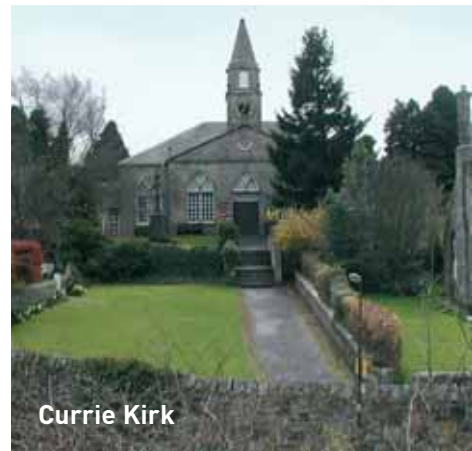
Further on you'll see new houses on the site of Mossy Mill. This is the new face of prosperous Edinburgh with houses appearing on almost any available space. Edinburgh's historic prosperity was very much based on the Water of Leith and it's eighty or so mills.

It's many years since Edinburgh's industry

was powered by water. The river has gradually become cleaner. The brown tint is Pentland peat not pollution.

The tranquility is broken by the Bypass thundering overhead. The route then passes a recently demolished grain mill and a long defunct paper mill's site.

Pass the villages of Juniper Green and Currie, with its strikingly picturesque Kirk



Currie Kirk

and on to Balerno. The off-road cycle route finishes just before the High School.

On-road there is a cycle lane. Turn left after the school and visit a real gem - the gardens of Malleny House. These are looked after by the National Trust for Scotland and contain four magnificent, old, sculptural, yew trees. By complete contrast there is also the Scottish Bonsai Collection.

After visiting this well kept oasis you can take a path up the hill to Harlaw Road or backtrack and visit Balerno. The Main Street area has a few small shops, a supermarket and a couple of pubs, so buying something for a snack is easy.

About half a mile west, (on Johnsburn Road, the 'main' road at the roundabout), is Johnsburn House, an old Scottish Baronial style mansion with a bar with the most amazing collection of old signs and photos. It also has welcoming fires, a good selection of beer and a wide range of food and room to sit outside when the weather is good (Closed on Mondays).

After Balerno, the road to the reservoirs



Higher than Corstorphine Hill

(Harlaw Road) is relentlessly up – but not too steep, with places to rest such as the Harmony Wood Neighbourhood Nature Area – look out for the guardian owl! An alternative possibility is to go via Mansfield Road to Red Moss Wildlife Reserve and Threipmuir – but it's longer and steeper!

Near the top of the hill the road turns sharp left. You could go straight ahead along the narrow path after climbing the stile. If you stay on the road turn right at the next junction to the car park and then right through the trees to the Harlaw House Ranger Centre (Opening times Monday to Friday 13.30-15.30. Saturday and Sunday 11.00-15.00).

The Ranger Centre has leaflets about the Pentland Hills Regional Park including details of where you can cycle and where you shouldn't.

From here you can visit Harlaw and Threipmuir Reservoirs, go over the hill to Glencorse (NOT for beginners) or just enjoy the fresh air and head back to the road. Turn right along a fairly straight, almost flat, road with stunning views to the Forth bridges and Fife with Edinburgh spread out way below – you're 200 feet higher than the top of Corstorphine Hill!

Go straight ahead at the crossroads. The road runs out in the farmyard of East Kinleith. Turn sharp right and take the stony track to Clubbidean Reservoir. After this is a steep descent to Torduff, you'll believe you're lost in the Highlands. Then downhill again to the City Bypass and continue onwards to the Water of Leith path at West Mill Road.



SPOKES, the Lothian Cycle Campaign, covers all of Edinburgh. Available in all good book and bike shops and online at www.spokes.org.uk for £4.95 each (post free).

British Waterways ask that cyclists apply for a permit to use the canal. Permits are available free from, [British Waterways Canal House](http://www.britishwaterways.co.uk), [Applecross Street Glasgow G4 9SP](http://www.britishwaterways.co.uk) Tel: 0141 332 6936. All canal users should follow the canal code of conduct to protect their own and other people's safety and the waterway environment. Find it at www.britishwaterways.co.uk



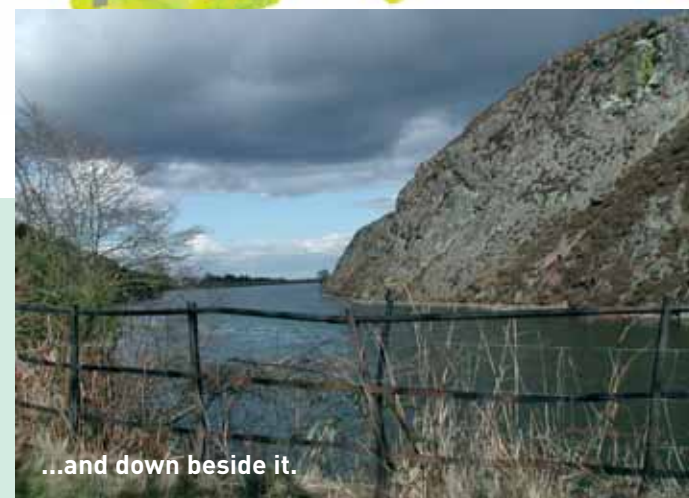
Harlaw, leading to Threipmuir Reservoir



Clubbidean Reservoir



Up the hill at Torduff...



...and down beside it.

