

Lothian Walks – The coast after North Berwick

with John Davidson



Eighteen months ago I described a spring walk from Aberlady to North Berwick. In summer 2004 I went back to continue beyond North Berwick. A very different coast. Indeed many people say it is not possible to walk from North Berwick to Dunbar – and that is certainly true at high tide. There are two clear breaks that make a straight-through walk hard to plan or rule it out altogether for most. These are the mouth of the Tyne and the rocks below Tantallon, which are covered at high tide. (I suppose the medieval castle-builders knew a thing or two about the choice of impregnable positions. In June I watched another walker stripping off in order to wade the short gap but I declined to follow!)

This walk starts from the harbour and goes eastward to Canty Bay, there-and-back. Pass the clubhouse of the Glen Golf Course and go to the end of the sea-front road. At the end of the road a few trees grow horizontally – what must the winter winds be like? you wonder. But let's assume you have chosen a summer's day. On my June day I saw all sorts of butterflies and wildflowers.

Do not rush over the top of the little hill at the end of the road. Step on to the springy turf of the golf course and take in the view. Nearest, the Bass Rock dominates the scene, with the flat mass of the May behind and the long, low line of Fife beyond that. To the left there are other islands round North Berwick harbour – Craighleith, the Lamb, Fidra. Beyond that the view is framed by the Pentlands and the Ochils, with the Forth Bridges in between and, if you are very

lucky, the first Highland hills behind. I have often watched gannets fishing here, climbing and diving repeatedly. It is one of the great sights, so much a thing of this coast that the gannets' French name, *fous de Bassan*, derives from it.

In June I saw house-martins at their nests on the rocky face of the low cliffs, with kittiwakes for neighbours. Common scoters are in every little bay during the summer moult, sitting on the water, often associated with eiders; of the birds of the open sea feeding close inshore, cormorants are most frequent.

An easy walk along this coast, say, as far as Canty Bay and back, is about 6km/4 miles and might take a couple of hours, depending on how often you stop to look at views, birds, rock-pools, etc.

After Canty Bay, for a kilometre or so the rocks are difficult or downright impassable for the walker.