

Lothian Walks – Gladhouse



The history of Edinburgh's water supply is long and fascinating. As the South Loch (today's Meadows) dried up, supplies from beyond the city limits were sought, first in the 18th century in the area of Comiston Springs and then in the Pentlands in the 19th century. These involved several on the northern edge of the Moorfoots. Talla followed in the early 20th century, to capture the abundant rainfall of upper Tweeddale, others nearby somewhat later. The huge schemes had long ceased to be exclusive to the city but involved the whole region.

The reservoirs have always been seen as a valuable enhancement of the Pentlands landscape. They have served as a goal for walks and picnics. Even when they ran almost dry in 1959, people came to see 'how far the level had fallen since last week'. The Moorfoot reservoirs may be less visited, but they are still clearly part of the group.

Indeed, the walk round Gladhouse is a good example. Approximately 9km / 5½ miles, it needs 2-3 hours. There are various places to leave a car but be careful – the roads are narrow and much used by local agriculture. Start from the cross-roads at the old school at Toxside (OS 288538) and go anti-clockwise. Follow the Dalkeith-Peebles road – the busiest you will meet – south-west for about 500m (a good ¼ mile) and take the left-hand signposted for Moorfoot. At Moorfoot leave the farmhouse left and pass other buildings to your right. Follow the sign for Huntley Cot. Here leave all buildings to your right and head for Mauldslie, following the signposts. At Mauldslie pass the farmhouse on your left, other buildings on your right and take the little road heading due north. When you meet the north-east corner of the reservoir, turn left to head back to Toxside.

Gladhouse is over 100 years old now and has aged beautifully. The islands are covered and shores lined with mature pines. As the roads carry no traffic to speak of, the absence of footpaths is in no way irksome. Along the north shore there are bits and pieces of anglers' paths and it is easy to find beautiful picnic spots. The views to the hills are as good as any in the Borders and with luck you will see a richness of bird-life to match.

Of the other reservoirs nearby, Portmore Loch is the one that offers the most attractive walking. There is limited parking by the loch but, as this is a commercial fishery, this is understandably reserved for anglers. Walkers' cars are usually left on the roadside verge at the foot of the drive. While there is a good track along the east bank and round both ends of the loch, it is harder to follow the west bank. However, an interesting possibility (that I have not visited for some years) goes by way of Northshield Rings. There is a forestry track running through the trees roughly parallel to the west bank – first SSW from the north-west corner of the loch, then SSE.

I hope you share my enthusiasm for the Moorfoots reservoirs.