

Lothian Walks – Blackridge

with John Davidson

It is hard to appreciate the significance of the narrow waist of Scotland between Forth and Clyde – less than 25 miles – in times before modern road and rail transport. Consider also complications caused by even quite small watercourses in soft ground and you begin to see what an undertaking any travel was in former times. The walk I am going to describe in this article crosses the watershed on the flat ground west of Blackridge. Many details in the landscape have not changed during or after the period of heavy industry, which is quite recent. It is a walk for taking your time and looking.

You can leave your car at the Craig Inn Centre. This is the site of the old coaching inn, one of the stopovers on the route from Glasgow to Edinburgh during the 18th and 19th centuries. It has now been restored for community use.

Walk along the main road until you have passed all the houses and take the first road on the right – Drumbeg Road. Walk for about a quarter of a mile and then follow the directional signs. You will pass a ruined steading on your left. Follow the path to the special viewing point from which you can look over the Blawhorn Moss, so called after the blowing of the horn to announce the arrival of the coach. The Moss is a site of international importance because of the rarity of its raised bog habitat. From here there are views towards the Ochils and the Bathgate Hills.

The wild, waterlogged environment of the Moss is home to a countless variety of plants and animals. Listen for the song of the skylark mixed with the twitterings of the swallows and swifts

chasing the large numbers of insects which emerge from the spongy surface of the bog.

A red grouse, perfectly camouflaged, may emerge from the vegetation with an explosive cackle. Look out too, for a hunting kestrel as it hovers, waiting to strike at its prey.

Most important of all are the bog mosses or Sphagnum on which all the other plant species live and grow. In the context of the watershed, the importance for agriculture of the lie of the land will become very evident. The wide expanses of flat ground and all hollows are filled with moss, rushes, little stagnant pools. But wherever a slope offers better drainage, especially if it faces south, as it did at Bedlormie, green meadows and fields stand out like jewels.

From the end of the shelterbelt on your left the track deteriorates, becoming softer for 300-400 metres, but then it improves again. Keep on until it makes a definite left turn at Westfield Farm. It goes equally abruptly right after the farm steading, before crossing the North Calder Water into Lanarkshire. Further on lies Hillend Reservoir, a popular sailing venue, but we turn left at the road-end. As you approach Forrestfield, a path leaves the road to the right just before the railway bridge to join the Millennium Link cycle path and walkway. It is a long time since trains stopped at this platform!

From Forrestfield it is an easy walk of 3.5km or 2 miles back to Blackridge along the cycleway.

Look about you, there is a lot to see and discover, not least the various sculptures and works of art, starting with the Bedrock Bicycle sculpture shortly after you leave Forrestfield.



Thanks to Central Scotland Forest Trust for advice. The CSFT have a number of leaflets for walkers. Contact them on 01501 822015 or see www.csft.co.uk

Pictures:

*Top: Gulls take flight over the pond
Left: The ruined cottage is a reminder of times gone by
Right: These peat bogs are protected as they are home to wide variety of plants and animals*

Edge and the Watershed

