

## **Cycle Ride Newcastle to Edinburgh to Stirling March 2024**

### **From Katharine Melville**

Coast and Castles on National Cycle Route 1: first planned 2020; cancelled by Covid, and on the back burner ever since. Then suddenly it was back on the agenda because my daughter Nicola had a week's annual leave which had to be used by the end of March. As it was still early in the year, we limited ourselves to a maximum of 40 miles a day.

Day 1. By train from Perth to Edinburgh, then Edinburgh to Newcastle.

As usual the LNER with its hanging-bike-space-in-a-cupboard was a challenge for any short woman, but the train guard was very helpful.

*Newcastle to Bedlington. Distance 28 miles. Climb 268 metres.*

We arrived in Newcastle at midday and immediately set off down the hill to find the NCN1 trail alongside the river. First highlight was the Tyne Bridge aka the "Kittiwake Bridge", because this is the furthest inland for the nest sites of these small gulls which are normally found in remote sea colonies.



Then a stop at the Newcastle Bike Hub. Worth a stop for the cafe alone, but my bike pannier attachments were causing trouble. The mechanic solved my problem, requiring only a glowing review on Facebook!

Then onwards, passing dockyards full of massive submarine cables and the end of the Hadrian's Wall walking route at the Roman fort of Segedunum.

At the mouth of the Tyne estuary we turned north, taking the full force of the unrelenting westerly cross wind.

The sun continued to shine making the colour of the choppy sea and cliffside and estuary scenery outstanding.

Curlews feeding in the fields at high tide and shelduck and redshank at the river edge as we turned into the teeth of the wind towards our first night's stop at Bedlington.

Much of the trail was on cycle paths of varying quality, from new smooth seaside resort paths still under construction to some gravel sections. Throughout the signage for NCN1 was excellent.

A comfortable night with dinner at the Laird's House hotel.



*Day 2. Bedlington to Embleton. Distance 38 miles. Climb 381 metres.*

Still battered by the unrelenting west wind, but marvellous coastal scenery including lapwings and geese on the coastal grasslands. Nicola enjoyed the rutted coast path which at one point crossed the beach by a narrow footbridge, but I think I might have preferred the road alternative! Coffee stop at Amble and a fine view of Warkworth Castle, although the road crossing here was exceptionally dangerous. Following the



river to cross the bridge into Alnmouth then a more inland route with a glimpse of Dunstanburgh Castle before our night's stop at Embleton.

Accommodation a bit off-hand, made up for by dinner at the busy, friendly Grey's Inn.

*Day 3. Embleton to Berwick-on-Tweed. 38 miles. Climb 408 metres.*

Sustained by pastries and coffee from the village farm shop, we made for Seahouses where took a look at the harbour - embarkation point for wildlife tours to the Farne - Islands, then made for bacon rolls at the local bakery.

The route was mainly on quiet roads dominated by views of Bamburgh Castle followed by the causeway over to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne.

Skylarks and new lambs today.

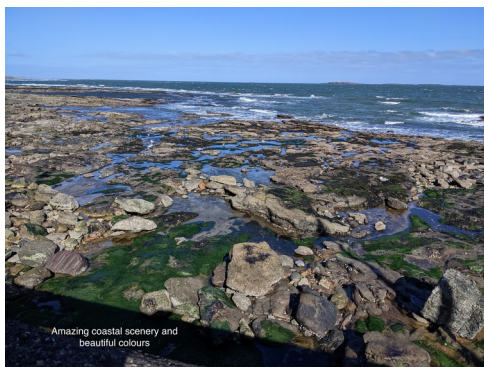
Lunch at a farm cafe gave us another break from the north west wind.

Such friendly people everywhere!

The final ten miles took us along a fairly challenging marshland and surprising, grassy cliff path.

The first views of Berwick itself demonstrated its strong fortifications. The town has changed hands 13 times during 300 years of Border warfare and the Elizabethan walls, which we walked round later, completely encircle the town. We didn't manage to cross via the Old Bridge thanks to confusing roadworks signage, but found our way to Berwick Youth Hostel situated on the quayside in an old granary building

A recommendation from the friendly staff took us to yet another good eating place for dinner.



*Day 4. Berwick to Kelso. 31 miles. Climb 388 metres.*

We set out early in an attempt to avoid the worst of the day's rain.

Although we were now heading west, the wind had lightened considerably.

The route was on country roads, some quite fast and busy. Because of this, Sustrans has redesigned the route so although we were still following the classic blue signs, we were looking out for a triangle symbol instead of the number 1. We skirted large estates and farm fields with well-tended hedges. The most fun was crossing and recrossing the Scottish and English border via the River Tweed bridges. The most spectacular of these was the Union Chain Bridge. When it opened in 1820 it was the longest wrought iron suspension bridge in the world with a span of 137m, and the first vehicular bridge of its type in the UK. It is now overseen by a



couple of engineers, a contemporary one on the Scotland side and the original designer Samuel Brown on the England side.

We arrived at the Queen's Head Hotel in Kelso in time for lunch. More helpful staff. Our room was warm enough for us to set up our washing line and we spent the rest of the day gradually drying out our clothes as the rain bounced heavily in the street outside. Between showers we took a short walk to look at Kelso Abbey ruins and admire the large cobbled square, but ate dinner in the hotel and enjoyed an excellent breakfast there,



*Day 5. Kelso to Innerleithen. 51 miles. Climb 1123 metres.*



This should have been another short day of only 32 miles, but unfortunately we added another 19 miles to our trip as we retraced our route to where Nicola had lost the data card from her bike computer. The extra trip was fruitless, but at least we tried! Surprisingly, the rain held off, the wind was no longer causing problems and the country roadside for faster travelling. My electric bike made relatively light work of the hills, although it was a tough day's cycling for Nicola.

The route was much prettier as it skirted the Eildon Hills and kept close to the Tweed valley.

We stopped in Melrose where I made up for a lack of vegetables in my diet with a huge salad bowl which lasted two meals.

After saying hello to Melrose Abbey we cycled on to the independent Cleikum Mill hostel in Innerleithen.

As befits this mountain bike trail mecca, the hostel was equipped with bike washing equipment and a big cycle store room with a repair bench, tools and drying room.

We also had a comfortable sitting room, well equipped kitchen and dining area. A quick trip to the local Coop and we were ready to dine and breakfast "at home".

*Day 6. Gorebridge to Edinburgh. 21 miles. Climb 198 metres.*

Snow on the hills! The lowland route via main roads from Peebles didn't appeal. Nor did cycling back in the rain the sixteen miles to Galashiels. So with the hostel owner's advice we caught the Borders Bus with its two bike spaces back to the railway station at Galashiels, and then the Tweed Valley Railway to Gorebridge where we got off to pedal the last twenty one miles into Edinburgh. The lady bus driver was so patient with us, and the guard held the doors for us as we panted up the ramp to catch the waiting train. Passengers too were very helpful.

When we arrived at Gorebridge, we had to wait out a heavy shower, but after that we had a dry journey [apart from the puddles] into Edinburgh. We approached Arthur's Seat via an interesting railway tunnel and stopped at the Scottish Parliament for a selfie to mark the official end to our Coast and Castles tour.



The Leith Walk traffic outside Edinburgh Central Youth Hostel proved rather noisy for us rural dwellers, but we found a good Italian restaurant close by, just opposite the Edinburgh Playhouse.

*Day 7. Edinburgh to Stirling. 43 miles. Climb 470 metres.*

Our final day of cycling had always been left open to decision. Nicola had never cycled over the Forth Road Bridge, but after that we had the choice of train home from Inverkeithing, or cycle on to Stirling where I would catch the train and Nicola would get a lift home to Callander.



The day dawned fair, so we decided on the longer route.

There are a number of cycle routes through Edinburgh, but we chose cycle ways linking schools and colleges and parks until we were back on NCN1, excellently signed all the way to the Forth Road Bridge. The wind was now blowing strongly from the east, so pedalling past the big pillars proved quite scary as we were blown across the cycle and footway.

Then we parted company with NCN1 which continues through Fife and up to Aberdeen, Inverness and John o' Groats, then on to Orkney, and finishes in Unst in Shetland. Now we were following NCN76, the Round the Forth route

with the wind behind us.

A large part is on off-road paths, some on shared use pavements beside main roads.

We stopped at the cafe in Limekilns where we had lunch and waited till another weather front passed through. We were back by the seashore, with waders feeding. After that we pressed on as we had done this route before. No stop at historic Culross this time, and only a brief pause at Kincardine before heading inland to Clackmannan and Alloa. The familiar outlines of Dumyat, the Wallace monument and finally Stirling Castle came into view as NCN76 took us all the way via Cambus Kenneth to the railway station.

*Total distance 251 miles. Total ascent 3236 metres. 7 days cycling. Average 8.8mph*