

## **Shotts to Redmill Cottages** (East Whitburn). Distance: 16.5 km

First leg of a 4-part walk down the full length of the valley of the River Almond.

Starts: Shotts Railway Station. Trains run from Edinburgh (36 mins), or Glasgow Central (33 mins), typically half hourly.

On leaving Shotts Railway Station turn left into Station Street. After a short distance (50 m), opposite shops, take the second right into Dyfig Street. On passing house number 92 a short lane leads right through a gate to reveal a vast vista of open, derelict ground left over from the days of coal and iron mining. To the left the outline of the North Shotts (Calderhead) coal-bing beckons. Its summit is our next point of call. Follow rough paths forward and to the left. An old railway line is encountered. Bear left along this, or its embankments, to eventually pass beneath an old bridge.

At this point scramble up to the right. Head towards the tip. The ground can be very boggy. If in doubt aim further right than the tip, onto somewhat higher, drier ground, before swinging left to reach bushes and an old track. The old tramway to the summit of the highest bing is easily climbed (in 7 mins) to unveil a 360-degree view. The summit lies astride the Clyde-Forth watershed. From now on the walk is “downhill all the way” to Cramond and the Firth of Forth.

Return to the base of the bing. Follow the track eastwards to pass to the right of the stark, abandoned buildings of the NCB training centre. Cross the B717. 30 m to the right a good track leads into forest. Follow this well-surfaced track for 2 km to a junction at GR NS899625. The youthful River Almond can be glimpsed down to the left. Some navigational care is needed as a veritable maze of old coal-mining tracks and new wind-farm roadways lies ahead. On reaching the junction, escape the track-maze, by turning 90 degrees left down an unassuming, unsurfaced track. [NB. A new windfarm access track has been proposed (2013) but had, as yet, not been built in 2019.] Keep straight ahead to reach open scrub-land, at the forest edge, in 250 m.

We are aiming for the delightful Peden’s Stane in its secluded, hidden glade at GR NS899625. Once out of the forest and over an old fence-line turn right to follow along the fence, or make use of thin paths, or even the indistinct dismantled railway line, to reach a stile in 300 m. Note this location as we will return here after visiting Peden’s stane which lies a further 300 m north. To reach the stane cross roughish ground by heading almost due north towards trees. A better path is encountered which leads down, across a small bridge, to the stane. It is named after the Covenanting field preacher, Alexander ‘Prophet’ Peden (d.1686). A cast iron pillar was erected on top of the boulder by supportive, local, iron-mine workers in 1866.

Return to the stile. Climb over and re-enter the forest. Follow the track (a somewhat overgrown and boggy, old mineral line) for 1km to an obvious path junction at GR NS911620. Three old mineral lines once met here. Turn back, sharp left, to head north. The path gently swings right, presenting views of the attractive, pyramidal East Benharl coal-bing to the southeast. The path meets the Harthill-Fauldhouse road at GR NS913624.

Navigation is much more straightforward from now on. Turn left along the minor road. After 700m take the unclassified road to the right. Pass Greenrigg farm to turn left at a T-junction. Cross the very busy B7066 (originally the Edinburgh-Glasgow turnpike, latterly the A8). Go right 70 m along the broad footpath to a gateway into Polkemmet Country Park. Follow the path leading straight into the park. On reaching the River Almond turn right (downstream) through mature, specimen trees. Head left over a small bridge to rise across grass to discover the play areas, owl-centre, cafe and toilets.

Exit the Centre by heading east. At the end of the Steading/building complex a row of seats leads alongside a walled garden containing a bowling green. At the far corner of the walled garden follow a track down to cross the R. Almond. Leave the track, as it bends left, in order to continue ahead in the same general direction as the bridge was pointing. Head towards the southeast corner of the Park. Proceed along the edges of golf fairways and make use of a narrow, winding cinder track. At the far most green enter trees to continue left (east), immediately inside the high boundary wall. At the very end of the wall step over a low wire fence to exit onto the B7066 by pedestrian lights.

Cross towards the modern housing estate. This new neighbourhood, on the site of the former Polkemmet coal mine and opencast, forms a small part of the vast Heartlands project which is one of the largest regeneration projects in Europe. Walk up Riggthouse Road. As it bends right go left into Riggthouse View. After a few tens of paces the 2<sup>nd</sup> right leads through to a more open area. Turn left and cross Polkemmet Road. A blue footpath/cycle-track sign points straight ahead, along the Town Walk towards our final destination beyond East Whitburn. Keep straight on along this old railway line. Pass three Schools, to the right of the path, to eventually reach a road and pedestrian crossing. Cross, and continue directly ahead still along the footpath. The path swings left and crosses Mansewood Cres. to join the White Burn (a tributary of the Almond). Turn right and follow the burn downstream. Footpaths on either side can be used.

Reach, and cross, Blaeberryhill Road. Use the footpath on the northern (left) bank to continue down the burn. After 300 m, fairly soon after the housing on the left ends, take a path to the left which heads north to a metal gate and kissing gate and the main road at E Whitburn. Cross. Immediately opposite lie another metal gate and kissing gate. These lead into community woodland. Press on into the woodland. Bear diagonally right to exit the woodland between the motorway embankment and the back of housing at a wooden kissing gate.

At Torbane Dr. turn left. Walk on parallel to the motorway (which lies behind the housing on the left). Don't swing right, but carry straight on along a short lane and through a tunnel. The industrial remains here (e.g., the cobbled floor of the tunnel) are the relics of a C18<sup>th</sup> mill-lade which was re-routed when the railway line was constructed overhead in 1850 in order to connect coal deposits around Bathgate with the Wilsontown Ironworks. Follow along the course of the old mill lade (which powered the Redmill corn and barley mill). Ahead the River Almond emerges from beneath the motorway. Follow the river bank for 150 m. Turn right (due south) towards the miners' rows. A break in the boundary fencing gives access to the back road and thence to the main road.

Either finish this stage of the walk here at Redmill (with direct bus connections to Edinburgh or local services to Livingstone (22, 26, 600, 701, X27), or else turn left to walk along the unappealing pavement beside the busy main road. Cross the roundabout and continue to Blackburn.

*Enlargement of route (in red) through West Behar forest.*



Map of full route (in red) from Shotts railway station to Redmill Cottages.

