

Blackburn to Mid Calder

Second leg of a 4-part route down the full length of the valley of the River Almond.

Starts Blackburn (old bridge on Mill Road). Buses: from Edinburgh (X27, 275, 600); or local (change at Livingstone 22, 287). Ends Mid Calder. Good bus service to Edinburgh and Livingstone (X27, X28).

Varied walk: visiting former mill-site, reshaped shale-bing, miners' rows, river-side woodlands, two huge shopping malls, eight public works of art.

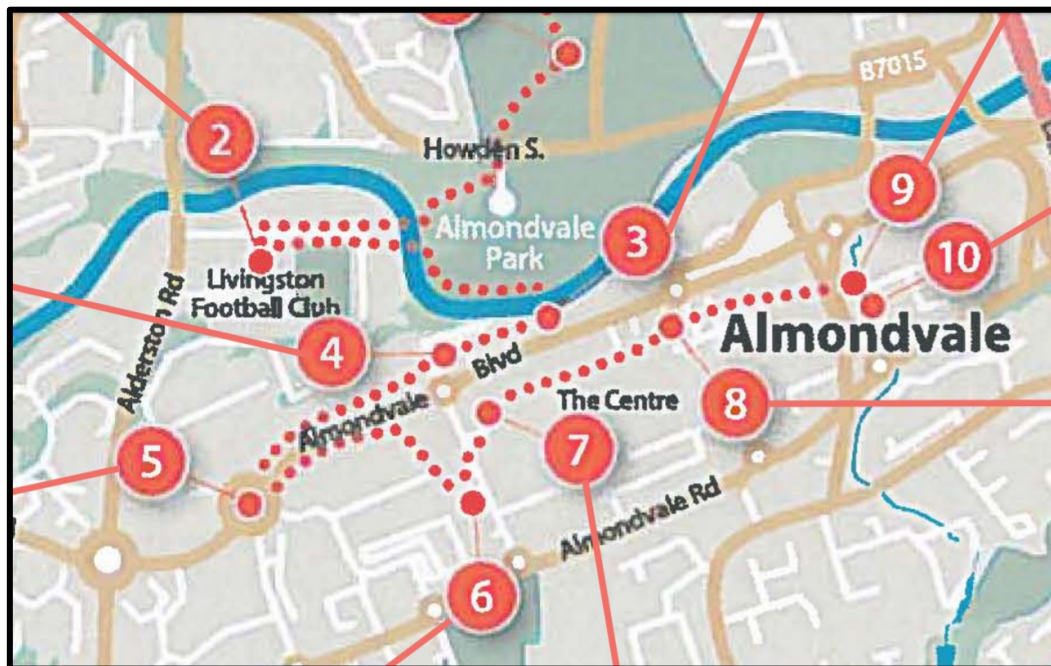
From the bus stop (Mosshall Industrial Estate) walk east a few paces along Main St. to Mill Rd and the old, twin-arched bridge over the R. Almond. The bridge (whose foundations probably date back 400 yrs.) marks the start of the walk. Cross over. At the north end a footpath sign points upstream into a small wooded area which occupies the site of a former cotton mill (established 1793). Circle through the woods following paths around a short anticlockwise loop to emerge into Riddochhill Rd. Indistinct traces of the old mill lade are just visible here. Turn left and soon take the first right into Ladeside Av. When the avenue swings left keep straight ahead into an open park with children's playing facilities. After 100m discover a snicket on the left. Once through, turn right to follow Ladeside Rd. to the Mill Shopping Centre. It can be glimpsed directly ahead. Cross the B792, Bathgate Rd., to carry on forwards, either through, or alongside the Centre. At the far end continue on the same general direction along the edge of a grassy area beside Rowan Terrace. Cross Rowan St. to find a snicket slightly to the left and ahead. In 150m pass an electricity substation and then turn left up Elm Grove. Turn right into Rowan Dr. and Elm Terrace. Follow these to their far end and the entrance to Seafield Moss and Bing.

A pleasant old railway path leads, through trees, to a Y-junction. Keep right. (Goods trains from the Seafield oil-works ran into the 'Y', and then had to reverse out to continue across Easter Inch Moss to Bathgate and the main line.) In a further 600m a second path junction is reached. Make a note of this turn-off to Seafield. We return to it after having climbed Seafield Bing. (One of the author's favourite, Lothian bings.) Turn left. The path quickly starts to rise right. Choice. Either scramble up the bank ahead, and route-find your way, for almost 400m due north, to the top. Else, continue along the well-surfaced path, which emerges from the trees and rises gently to a coll. Turn off left, up a narrow footpath. Follow the ridge crest, all the way to the top. (Extensive 360 degree views: down the Almond valley - Livingston; southeast - full panorama of the Pentlands (Allermuir, Castlelaw, Carnethy, Scald Law, The Kipps, Cauldstane Slap, Darlees Rigg); up the Almond valley - Hassockrigg Moss and coal-tip; below, west, Easter Inch Moss; and finally north - Bathgate Hills and closer to the huge Tesco distribution centre.) Return along the ridge and then turn right down the surfaced-path to the Seafield turn-off that you carefully memorized.

On returning to the turn-off take the path to the left, which heads east and then south towards Seafield. Cross barely-recognisable, long abandoned shale-mining and oil-refining ground to emerge into the old shale-mining village of Seafield. Turn right and cross the main road at the traffic island. In 50m turn left through the back-alleyways of the old miners' rows. Straight ahead footpath signs point to the R. Almond and Livingstone. The path leads down through fields to a sturdy bridge. Turn left and follow along the river for 2km to the outskirts of Livingston, and picnic tables beside pools left over from open-cast shale workings.

Keep the river on your left. Soon pass beneath the noisy Simpson Parkway bridge. Turn up right, immediately beyond, to spiral up right and across the bridge. Once over take steps, on the right, down to the river bank. Turn left along the footpath, passing the buildings and animals of the Almond Valley Museum. Within 1¼ km reach the arched Livingstone village bridge. Turn right over the bridge and up Charlesfield Lane. Pass housing. When the low parapet-wall, on the left, ends take the footpath which leads back, left, into delightful woods. Continue for over 1 km. Keep the river to the left, the back of housing to the right. Pass beneath the Alderstone Rd. Bridge. Shortly afterwards look

for a way up to the right. Head towards the football stadium. Cross grass. Find your way through/around a low hedge. Cross a road, and then car parks to reach the right-hand side of the stadium and so arrive at the first of eight public works of art that the route visits (cf. art-works 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 9 on map below).



The heroic sculpted figure 'Strive' with its upwards reaching, winning gesture symbolises the optimism of the new town of Livingston. Continue alongside and then around the stadium to find steps leading up towards the vast Almondvale Designer Outlet building. On reaching Bubbles roundabout, beside the Xcite leisure centre, pause by a 2nd sculpture called 'Symbiosis'. It depicts a dancing couple, or partnership. The piece is designed to look pleasing from every angle and points to co-operation helping the new town grow and flourish. Cross the busy road, using the zebra crossing, to climb steps and head straight into the hurly-burly of the retail outlet.

Keep straight ahead to pass toilets, on the right, before reaching 'Birth of Sky' a spectacular stainless steel kinetic sculpture and fountain featuring cascading rain and floating clouds beneath the real sky. It focuses on the forces and flows of nature in order to highlight the need for a healthier relationship with our planet. Here turn left to exit through the main doors. Cross the road. Bear half-left passing cafe exteriors and an ATM to enter sliding glass doors (by Debenhams in 2019). Walk straight ahead to quickly exit by more sliding glass doors. A wide paved area leads half-right to a sunken, quiet, tree-lined square featuring 'The Rolling River' pebble mosaic. This is 'Art to be walked on'. The colourful "floodscape" depicts a rolling river with banks populated by all kinds of creatures.

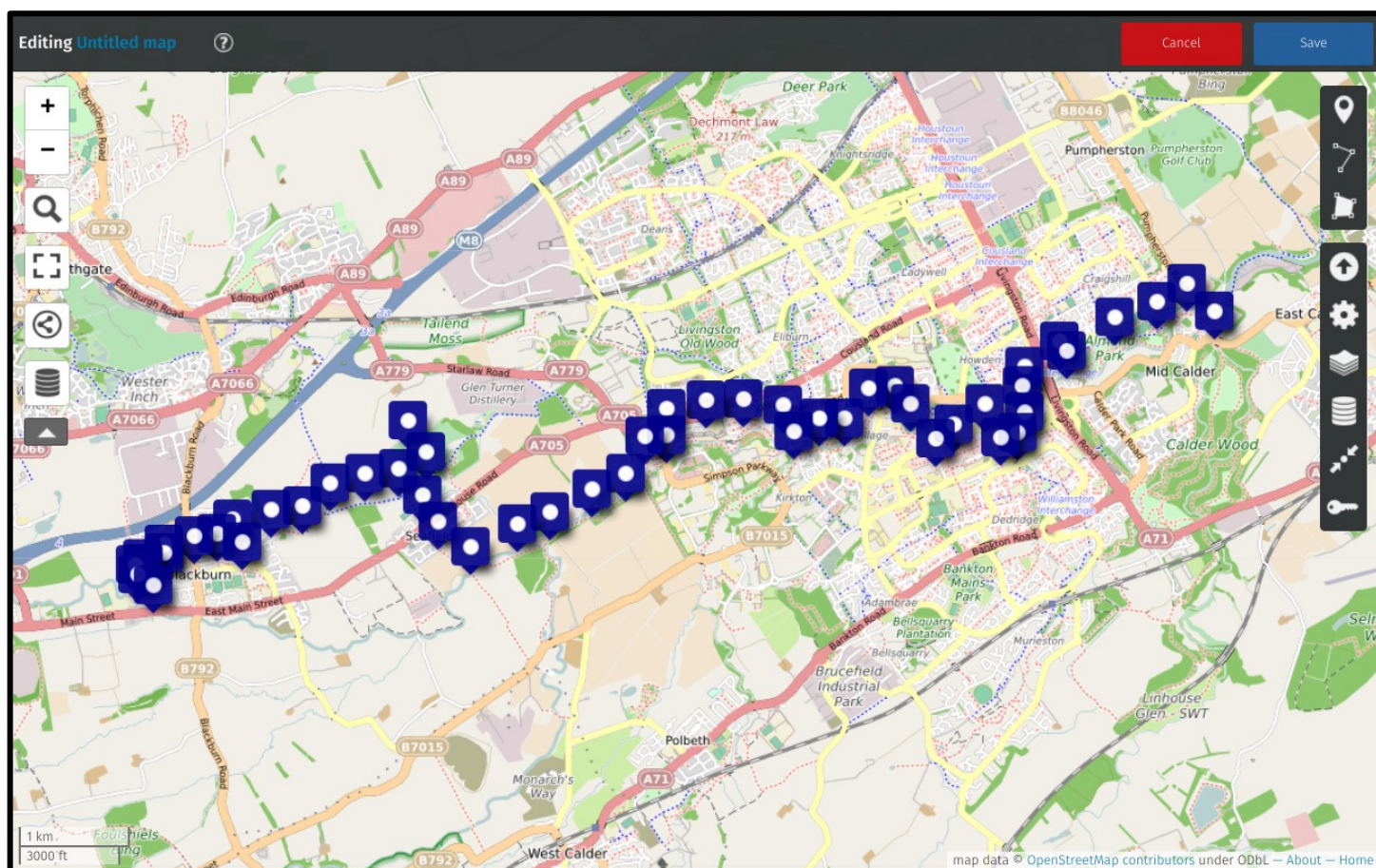
Exit the square by its far left-hand corner. Continue straight on, in the open. Keep the multi-story carpark to your left and main shopping centre to your right. In 120m turn right to re-enter the mall. Pass straight across the main thoroughfare to use another side-exit immediately opposite. Once outside, Poundland (in 2019) lies ahead and to the left. Half-way up the steps ahead the figurative 'Angel of Peace', roughcut from sandstone using an electric power saw, graces a raised platform. It's dramatic form (best seen close-up) represents the emergence of the still incomplete town of Livingston and espouses power, hope and optimism.

Retrace your steps and re-enter the Almondale mall. This time turn, right along the main spine for a few tens of paces to escape through the first exit on the right. Ahead half-sunken paths and an underpass lead south-east for 200m. On reaching paving and an assortment of quarter circular blocks take the path that swings left to use an underpass going beneath Almondvale E. Rd. 50m further on take the pedestrian bridge left over the small streamlet, which we follow to re-join the R. Almond. A footpath sign points back, down the far side of the stream. Swing slowly right to reach housing at the end of Falconer Road. At the far side of this open, grassy, tree-lined area strewn with

boulders rise slightly to another underpass. Keep left, in trees, beside the stream to reach 'Abstract' a large shiny, steel sculpture. Beyond, slightly left of our route, is 'Wave Pond' a classic Ian Hamilton Finlay decorative concrete slab and poem.

Take the underpass at the right-hand end of the concrete poem. Follow the footpath, stream to the left, car parking and housing to the right. Go through another underpass. Proceed, half-right, across grass, towards the river Almond and the viewing area for the 'Old Men of Hoy'. Each of the five cast concrete pillars has stylised patterns looking like geological strata. Do not cross the river. Instead continue downstream on a good path, beneath a low road-bridge and then a major expressway way overhead. A few paces on turn left to cross the Almond on a pedestrian only bridge.

Turn right, downstream, for 1.2 km through trees and grassy expanses. Take any path. All eventually lead to the bridge, below the weir, which gives access to Mid Calder. Once across, keep ahead to rise diagonally up behind housing. At the end of the housing turn up, right, along a path across open grass, and into School Lane. Walk through the narrow lane to turn right and pop-out at the walk-end and bus shelters on Bank St.



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