

A sweep past sixteen old curling ponds



Route in red (distance 5.65 ml. Ascent 270 ft) [Mapometer.com]

From the walk start, at the gazebo at the east end of Blackford pond, walk west along the southern bank of the pond on the wide track. Halfway along is the viewpoint of the curling photograph (in the notes) dating from 1900. In the background of the photo, to the right, you can see Arthur's Seat. Straight ahead, on top of the ridge, are the houses on Mortonhall Road and Blackford Gate, with their distinctive roof lines. All these houses still exist. On the far side of the pond the low pavilion was located near the site of an old sheepfold. Keep on along the track beside the pond to pass a low metal gate. A few paces further on turn right into the start of a narrow alleyway. Immediately enter a wooden gateway, to the left, which leads into a damp hollow. This marks the old site of a purpose built curling pond and pavilion. Push through the trees on a narrow, muddy path to reach a boardwalk. This marks the far end of the old curling pond. Retrace your steps to the low metal gate passed previously. Go through and take a path, ahead, uphill. At a cross path go left. Before the Entrance Gates stop to admire glacial erratic stones set on plinths by a seat.

Exit the Park. Keep ahead. Pass to the left of the bowling green and cross over Midmar Avenue. Go forward, along contour, along Cluny Drive. Turn right down Braid Avenue. Reach the traffic lights at Cluny Gardens to cross over and continue straight down. A bridge leads over the Suburban Railway. Notice the moderately deep cutting. Once over, turn left alongside the railway line to follow the grassy pavement of Cluny Avenue. Before reaching the main Morningside Road turn right along Hermitage Terrace. This bends left to reach the main road. We want to cross into Miller Crescent. Go right and use the pedestrian lights. We are entering the old grounds of the estate acquired on the city edge to build the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. The facility was opened as the Edinburgh Lunatic Asylum in 1813. One of the original hospital buildings (East House) lay halfway along Miller Crescent. It was demolished in 1896 and replaced by the present housing – part of Edinburgh's inexorable outward spread. Ahead, on reaching the T-junction turn left along Morningside

Terrace. Quickly find an open gateway on the opposite side of the road. This directly leads into the present-day grounds of the Royal Edinburgh Hospital.

Continue on, passing to the left of the newish hospital buildings. Lawns, an impressive stone boundary wall and the Suburban Railway line all lie to the left. Slightly off our route to the right, in amongst the hospital buildings, is the site of an old rectangular curling pond. Ahead we come to a roadway and on the right the back entrance of the original West House (opened in 1842, taking pauper patients. The H-plan contained wards for pauper lunatics with a main wing of three stories with twelve dormitories and their accompanying workrooms, day-rooms, washing and bathrooms and six sick rooms, and a separate single storey building for noisy patients of two large and six small dormitories and the kitchen and laundry.) Here turn left towards a distinctive statue 'Abraham'. A spiritual work with Abraham looking heavenwards. The granite stone was hand carved by Ronald Rae on site, much to the interest of the patients and staff. Having admired the statue's lines continue down and right into a small wooded area. A path leads across a shallow ditch to arrive at an elongated oval lawn. The grass occupies the site of a second curling pond. Leave the lawn at the far end. Cross the rough track. Slightly to the right find the entrance gates to the Community Garden. Enter. The garden forms a good place to sit for coffee or to admire the plantings. (The Royal Ed. Community Gardens was established in 2010, and is managed by Cyrenians to work with hospital patients, staff, volunteers, visitors and local community groups to grow fruit, vegetables, flowers and herbs, cook food, improve the bio-diversity of the site, and support people on a journey of recovery.) Exit, left, near the far end. Turn right along the track and follow it to Myreside Road.

Use the pedestrian lights to cross and proceed along a narrow path. The railway line lies down below and to the left. To the right, over the wall, is the car park of the Myreside Pavilions which is the former site of double old curling rinks. A few tens of paces on, over the wall, is a low building which uses for its base the floor of yet another curling pond. Keep ahead along the path noting how deep the railway cutting has had to be made (the reason for the excavation will soon be obvious). On reaching Colington Road we have arrived at the site of the old Craiglockhart Railway Station. Cross this busy road at the pedestrian island. Immediately opposite a little gateway should allow access up a flight of steps to a boathouse and onto the boardwalk by the Union Canal. Curling competitions took place on the canal near here. The Suburban Railway is in a tunnel deep underneath the canal. Beyond the canal the railway branched. One branch led to Slateford the other ran beneath the Caledonian railway to join the main Edinburgh-Glasgow line near Murrayfield.

Retrace your steps to recross Colington Road. We are halfway and are now heading back towards Blackford Pond. Across and to the right take Craiglockhart Terrace. This handsome (1900s) Terrace soon swings to the right. Ahead is a complex of many old curling ponds. Just after entering the Happy Valley area of Craiglockhart Woods and the Leisure Centre, but down to the right, slightly beneath our path, is the setting of a pair of former curling ponds. Their remains are not obvious. The closest pond had steep banking. This has partly collapsed to form a minor slope. The farther pond lay alongside the wall next to Lockharton Gardens. Drop down to the area of the ponds. Bear left and pass through the wooded area that previously housed the old curling pavilion. Reach a notice board and walk

along the left side of Craiglockhart Pond. Arrive at a new building. This occupies the site of another old (square) curling pond. The path ahead rise slightly. Find a small lane, to the right, which leads between buildings to car parks. Look down to the right to see the previous deep-level of the curling ponds. Ahead find a short flight of steps up to the left. Turn left through the car park to pass a main entrance. Near the far left-hand corner of the car park locate steps leading down quite steeply. This lower level occupies the position of an extensive old skating pond which was also used for curling. Near the base of the steps is the whereabouts of an old spring which provided the water for the boating, skating and curling ponds.

From here we head towards the summit of Easter Craiglockhart Hill. Go left around the side of the somewhat dilapidated tennis court. You might be able to convince yourself that you can hear the spring water trickling beneath an inspection cover. Pass between a building and the tennis court to get back to the path we were using previously. You will need to scramble up a little bank - possibly diagonally up to the right. Turn right. Clamber up several steps to reach a path junction. Take more steps to the left leading up towards Easter Craiglockhart Hill. Follow several flights up until you have to descend, right, into a small hollow. Here, rather than following steep steps up to the right, go diagonally up and to the left. Reach and pass through the boundary wall of the old Craig House (the lintel above the entrance is dated 1565). Turn right to rise on the path inside of the boundary wall. After a hundred or so paces come to a flat area, on your left, with a shallow concrete rounded border. This is the old curling rink. Halfway along its left-hand side find the old outlet hole. Return to the boundary wall and pass through a gap. Rise up through bushes to gain the summit of Easter Craiglockhart Hill.

Having admired the view head towards the masts of the Braid Hills. Soon pass through the old wall to find a track leading down eastwards. Exit through a gateway to pass to the left of housing on Craiglea Place. Turn right along Morning Side Grove. After a short distance turn left to follow Comiston Drive all the way to the main Comiston Road. Use traffic lights to cross Comiston Road and then to climb up Greenbank Place. This leads through to Braidburn Terrace and thence Braid Road. Head right down towards the Entrance to the Hermitage. Keep on to come to the last pair of curling ponds at Greenbank. On the right hand side of the road, walk into the area of the tennis courts. Here, there were two curling ponds. (In the accompanying notes a photograph shows the pavilion of the Greenbank curling ponds. Today its plinth is occupied by a newer pavilion for the tennis courts.)

Return to the Entrance Lodge and follow the Hermitage Road. Pass the Hermitage House Visitor Centre. Pass over small bridges crossing the Braid Burn to come upon steps which lead up steeply and over the shoulder of Blackford Hill. A good path leads over and around to bring you back to Blackford Pond and the gazebo where the walk began.

The 16 ponds used for curling

Blackford, Braid Estate, Royal Edinburgh Hospital: rectangular and oval, Myreside: double and single, Union Canal, Double Waverley artificial, Craiglockhart boating & skating & curling, Rectangular in grounds of New Craig House, Two Greenbank Curling Ponds.