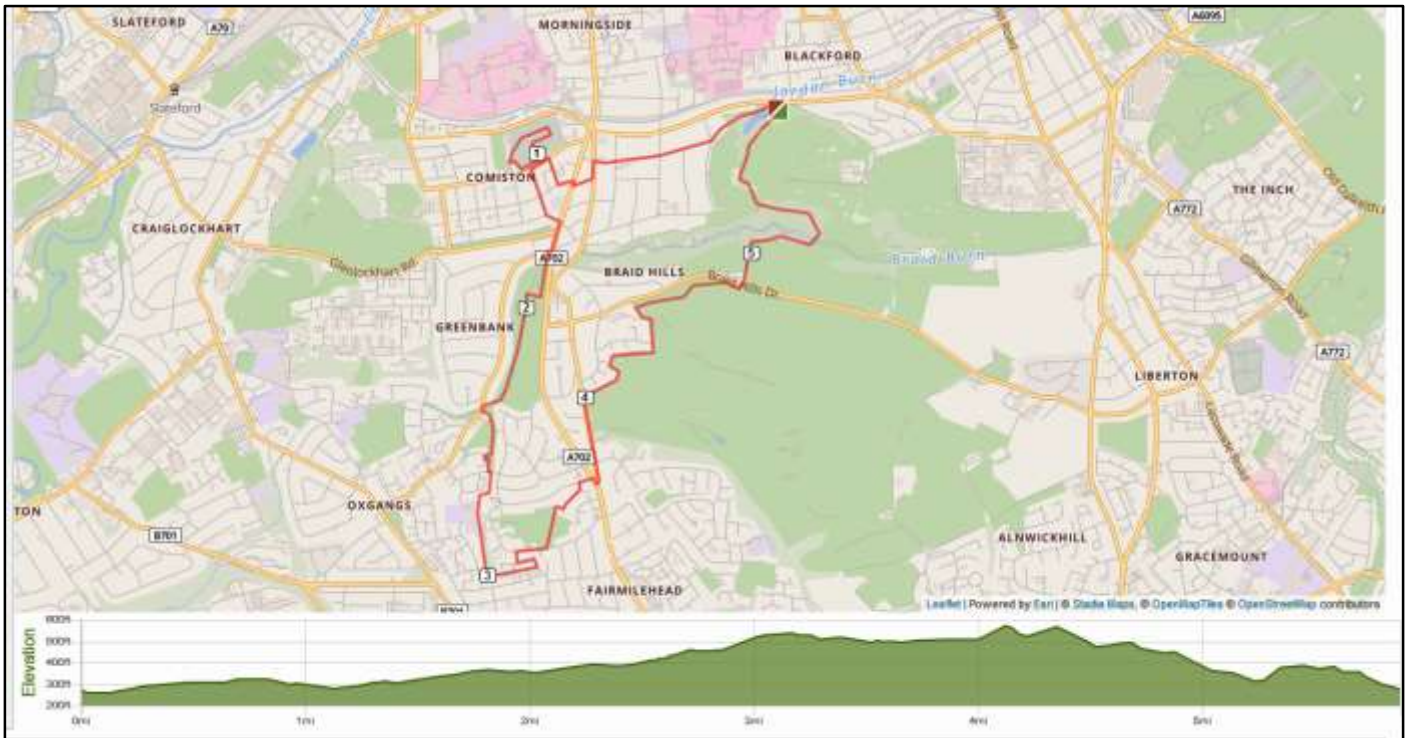


In the footsteps of RLS



Route in red 5.9 miles <https://gb.mapometer.com/>

Starting from the gazebo at the east end of Blackford Pond walk westwards along the north bank. Half way along the pond veer right up a rising path. A few paces before the Exit Gate note the two glacial erratics mounted in a small grassy area to the left. Go through the exit. Carry on straight ahead above the bowling green to cross Midmar Drive. Once over keep straight ahead along Cluny Drive. Cross Braid Avenue to reach the crossroads with Hermitage Gardens. This location marks the point where the old Edinburgh water supply pipeline (which we will follow later in the walk) passed underneath.

Keep on ahead to arrive at Braid Road. Turn left, cross and walk uphill. Immediately before Comiston Terrace, within the roadway itself, note the two cobbled plinths of the Hanging Stones where the last two highwaymen in Scotland were hung by public execution in 1815. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote of being shown the flat stones as a child and hearing of “*a crow-haunted gibbet, with two bodies hanged in chains...*”

Turn right down Comiston Terrace. Cross over the busy main road and opposite and slightly to the right, take Craiglea Drive. Stevenson was very dismissive of the ever-increasing signs of suburban creep and sprawl in this area. “*Day by day, one new villa, one new object of offence, is added to another; all around Newington and Morningside, the dismallest structures keep springing up like mushrooms; the pleasant hills are loaded with them, each impudently squatted in its garden, each roofed and carrying chimneys like a house. And yet a glance of an eye discovers their true character. They are not houses; for they were not designed with a view to human habitation, and the internal arrangements are, as they tell me, fantastically*

unsuited to the needs of man. They are not buildings; for you can scarcely say a thing is built where every measurement is in clamant disproportion with its neighbour. They belong to no style of art, only to a form of business much to be regretted."

Next, turn right down Ethel Terrace. On arrival at the T-junction turn left along Morningside Drive. Crossover and on the right, in 40m, find the entrance gate into Morningside Cemetery. We visit five graves of interest. Once inside the Cemetery there is a helpful map on the right (we visit locations 12, 4, 2). The first is of Stevenson's nursemaid known as "Cummy". Head straight ahead down the broad, brick pathway to reach an avenue of trees and stony path. Turn right. Proceed roughly three-quarters of the way (100 large paces) towards the far eastern end of the graveyard. Turn left. You should be facing a distinctive block of more modern flats with blue-grey cladding situated, in the distance, on Balcarres Street. Cummy's grave is the leftmost of a pair of standing stones about 25 paces downslope. Alison Cunningham (1822 – 1913), who was RLS's nurse, was deeply devoted and loyal to the Stevensons and particularly loved RLS. Cummy's strict religious views had a strong influence on the young Stevenson.

Return to the wooded avenue and turn back to the west. On reaching the far western end bear slightly left. Beyond the angle in the boundary wall, the leftmost of a small group of four rough-hewn headstones is Sir Edward Appleton (1892 – 1965): Nobel Prize winner (1947) and pioneer in radiophysics. Appleton managed to discover layers hundreds of km high. These were found to reflect short radio waves and enable communications as far afield as Australia and America. He used the BBC radio broadcast transmitter at Bournemouth to send a signal towards the upper reaches of the atmosphere. He then received the radio signals near Cambridge, proving they were being reflected. Without Appleton's scientific work, radar would have come too late to have been of decisive use in the Battle of Britain.

Several paces further south, and one row east is a tall, distinctive, fluted half-column with ivy carvings marking the graves of two suffragettes: the Cadell sisters. Dr. Grace Ross Cadell (1855 – 1918) was in the first group of women to qualify in medicine in Scotland. She became a very lively, active suffragette becoming well known for public acts of defiance in the cause of women's suffrage. Her younger sister, Dr Martha Georgina Isabella Cadell (1858 - 1905), was also one of the students in the first intake at the Edinburgh School of Medicine for Women, receiving lectures in Surgeons' Square. She qualified as one of 57 candidates, out of 121, who passed the 'Triple Qualification' of LRCSE, LRCPE and LFPSG (Licentiate awarded jointly by the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow) that year before becoming a Medical Practitioner.

Next we locate the gravestones of two famous geologists. Head east (for four rows), keeping to the right of the tall spire of Cluny Church. The gravestone of James Geikie (1839 - 1915) has a distinctive asymmetrical rough-hewn top. Professor of Geology at Edinburgh University from 1882 to 1914, Geikie became an expert

on glaciations and the leader of the school that upheld the all-important action of land-ice, as against the work of pack ice and icebergs, in forming glacial deposits.

Turn around three quarters to the right and head southwest. By the back wall, in a closed-off private area, the low boulder-shaped gravestone of Ben Peach (1842 – 1926) is just visible beyond closed metal gates. Peach with his colleague John Horne helped bring the “Highlands Controversy” to an end by establishing, through careful mapping, the structure of the North West Highlands.

Return to the cemetery entrance by following the perimeter track anticlockwise. Step out onto Morningside Drive. Turn right. Cross and after a few paces rise left into Dalhousie Terrace. Walk up its full length, passing over Craiglea Drive. On reaching the Y-junction bear left along Comiston Drive to the main road. Turn right. Keep on the pavement facing the traffic. At the second set of traffic lights, by the entrance to Braidburn Valley Park, go right a few paces along Greenbank Crescent to enter the imposing park gates. In 50m reach the Braid Burn. Go left over the bridge turn right, upstream, and enter the grassy area. Rise diagonally to a point about halfway up the slope opposite the Braid Hills Hotel, just over the brow of the small ridge, to two marker posts. Exactly one ell (1.143m) beneath is the line of Edinburgh City’s first water supply pipes. This open hillside is a good place to pause, to take in the lie of the land, and to work out where you would have laid the pipes. The steep-sided Braidburn Valley was created as a result of glacial and fluvial activity and is likely an overflow channel from an ice-dammed lake. (Such channels are characterised by having tiny misfit streams in flat-floored, steep-sided valleys). When the City water supply was first put in (1675) this whole area was countryside. A direct route could be used to pipe the water from a newly commissioned gathering tank at Comiston Springs (which we will shortly be visiting) to a large storage/distribution tank high on Castle Hill above the Old Town. The pipe runs north from here beneath the garage on Comiston Road. The gravity-fed, syphoning pipe had to rise and fall and cross four distinct topographic features: four ridges separated by four valleys; the Braid Burn, the Pow Burn, the old lake bed of the Meadows and the deep cleft of the Grassmarket. An amazing hydro-engineering feat.

Continue by descending diagonally down to a small bridge across the Braid Burn. Turn left, upstream, to follow the footpath to the exit where Oxgangs Avenue and Greenbank Crescent meet. Turn left to re-cross the Braid Burn and immediately turn left again onto a signed footpath which is the start of Cockmylane (from the Gaelic cuach na leanaidh, meaning hollow on the sloping meadow containing springs). This path was favoured by RLS, in the 1860s, to reach Swanston Cottage every summer. Swing around the back of new buildings to pass, in roughly 150m, the ancient Comiston Springs Gathering House. In a further 100m, to the right, find Oxgangs Loan and there, through the trees, in a small grassy patch is the wellhead of one of the six original Comiston Springs. Stevenson was well aware of these springs as Swanston Cottage, his summer holidaying home, was built in connection with an extension to the City water supply when in 1761 the springs at Swanston were piped to this spot to join and augment the Comiston supply. (The ever burgeoning population of the City was always requiring additional ‘sweet’ water.

Return to and continue up Cockmylane. Follow around the dog-leg that marks the perimeter wall of the old Comiston Farmhouse to pass Pentlands Primary School. Keep on up the lane to a distinctive notice to the White Lady Walk. Take it, left, to reach the 16thC tower (later dovecot). In this lane according to Stevenson *“a belated carter beheld a lady in white, ‘with the most beautiful, clear shoes upon her feet,’ who looked upon him in a very ghastly manner and then vanished”*.

Carry on along White Lady Walk. Turn left into Camus Avenue which leads left through to the entrance to the renovated Comiston Farmhouse. Turn right. In 50 m a short path dives through woods and into Fairmilehead Public Park (formerly Comiston Sand Pit). Proceed diagonally, slightly down, across the open grass towards the play area. Pass to its right. Find a footpath which leads out of the Park through trees. The footpath winds left and then sharp right to exit onto Colmestone Gate. Head through this attractive housing development onto Pentland View. Turn right and within 50m reach the main A702. Cross. Briefly go right, uphill. Take the old road of Buckstone Terrace, angled sharply left, towards the Braid Hills. Buckstone Terrace soon morphs into Braid Road. Look for the Buck Stane. This historic relic is set in a cobbled area, next to the old Buckstone farmhouse, on the right, about 40 m beyond Buckstone Drive. Tradition associates the Stane with the Barony of Penicuik and the royal hunts on the Boroughmuir. This marchstone, a relic of feudal times, occupied, until recently, a site on the Roman road about 250 yards north. It is said to have marked the spot where the buckhounds were unleashed when the King of Scotland hunted in the region.

To leave the Buck Stane cross back over Braid Road onto the pavement. Continue northwards passing Mortonhall Golf Club. Keep ahead over the crest of the hill (where the Buck Stane originally stood) to find an entrance way to the Braid Hills Trail. Take this right. It leads onto the shoulder of the Braid Hills. Keep alongside the back of housing. The main footpath diverges towards the top of the Braid Hills, but we keep left beside the housing. Our route swings round and down to eventually come out near the Braids United Golf Club House. Persevere northward along Braid Hills Approach. Where the road swings left we keep ahead still on the footpath of the Braid Hills Trail. Carry on through trees and gorse. The trail swings right. Keep on above Braid Hills Road. Head towards Blackford Hill. After about 400m the track allows an escape onto Braid Hills Drive. Take it and cross over and walk along the footpath, right, to the Lang Linn Path. Turn left down the path alongside metal railings.

The Lang Linn Path turns right to descend to the sturdy bridge over the Braid Burn. Cross and head up over the shoulder of Blackford Hill. There is no need to climb the steep steps to the top of the hill. Instead keep left alongside the boundary wall. Once over the shoulder the path swings down and round to pass alongside Blackford Pond and return to the gazebo and the walk end.