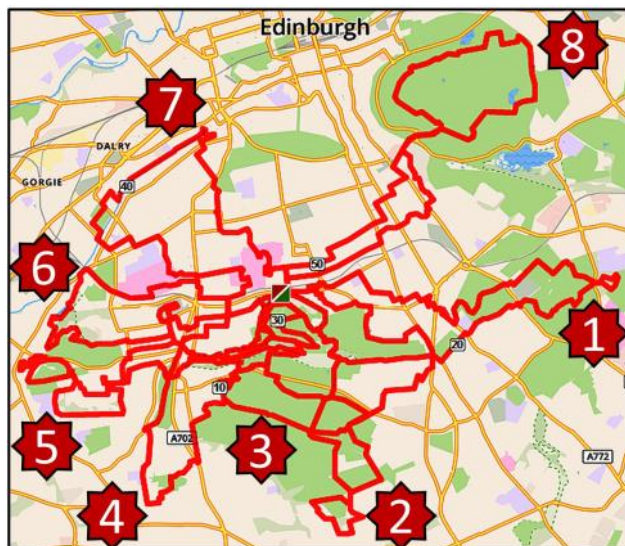


Groups

Unmasking South Edinburgh's hidden gems: Roy Thompson

I first came across a range of local gems during the midnight walks that constituted my sole daily exercise during lockdown.



My top eight, all lying within a 5-mile travel limit, are:

- A late-medieval 'P'-shaped fishpond;
- The remains of a WWII radar platform and anti-aircraft battery on the flank of Alnwickhill;
- Ancient quarries and trackway leading through the middle of the Braids (superb, panoramic views to Fife);
- Small stone constructions dotted around Comiston and wall markers in the Grange marking the underground pipe network which first supplied drinking water to the Capital (1756);
- The magnificent geological exposure of well-formed, hexagonal columns of basalt lava on Wester Hill;
- A secluded, still-serviceable Victorian curling pond on Easter Hill;
- The understated, obtuse angles outlining the former terminus of the Union Canal at Lochrin Basin Lane (completed 1822);
- and finally:-
- A flight of ancient cultivation terraces on the far side of Arthur's Seat.

When the first lockdown was eased and formally organised, outdoor physical activities were given

exemptions from certain restrictions (e.g. the rule -of-six) if specific protocols were put in place, it gradually dawned on me that my 'midnight' discoveries might form the basis for leading "small-bubble" perambulations for established U3A walking groups. The Ramblers' Association helpfully summarised these exemptions, detailed by **Sportscotland**.

I decided to create walks that all began and ended at Blackford Pond: a good location for socially distanced assembly. Additional measures required were that before each walk the group leader should:-

1. Complete up-to-date compliance and risk-assessment records (e.g. note any pinch points and mitigate by re-routing)
2. Obtain contact information for Test and Protect
3. Remind members not to participate with flu-like symptoms
4. Advise that face masks and hand sanitizer should be carried

5. At the start of each walk, a Gate Monitor needed appointing along with a recap of the need for physical distancing
6. Finally, post-walk, the importance of booking a test, via the coronavirus helpline, if symptoms should materialise within 48h, was to be restated

To date I have devised eight routes (typically 5 to 7 miles long). All radiate outwards from Blackford Pond (see route numbers on map). Each visits one of my top eight hidden gems. Routes: **[1]** A Craigmillar Castle Circular **[2]** Mortonhall figure of eight (WWII defences, Ha-ha & Arboretum), **[3]** Le Tour de Braids, **[4]** In the footsteps of RLS (Morningside Cemetery, Cockmylane & White Lady Walk), **[5]** A War Poets 4-loop walk (Owen View & The Hydropathic), **[6]** A sweep past 16 old curling ponds (Royal Ed., Happy Valley), **[7]** The Canal Basin (Astley Ainslie, Plague Tomb & Harrison Park), **[8]** Outlying tops of Arthur's Seat (Salisbury, Haggis, Quarter Mile path, Dunsapie).

For route descriptions, notes, maps and GPX file visit <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/roythompson/home/edinburgh-walks/>

(Roy's article and the following article from David Syme was written before the early 2021 "lock down" **ED**)