

Walking in the Pentlands – Castlelaw Hill Walk

The Pentland hills of Edinburgh have much to offer. Even if you haven't yet ventured up there, you have most likely admired them from the city's viewpoints. Whether you are intimately familiar with the hills or a first time visitor, there are plenty of walks throughout the park that offer an ideal short nature retreat.



A view of the Queensferry Crossing in the distance

Castlelaw hill walk is a gentle, staple route that takes you to the heart of the Pentlands. The well-marked, easy access trail, like many routes around Edinburgh's hills, offers a fine bit of nature right next door to the city. Castlelaw offers perhaps one of the most casual hill walks of any trail

in the area. The route climbs steadily higher, but remains readily accessible to a wide range of physical abilities.

In recent months the Ministry of Defence road leading to the Castlelaw car park has been resurfaced and it is a great improvement. The single track lane has become as easy to access as nearby Hillend, but remains much quieter and has a great deal less traffic to contend with.



Caerketton Hill Cairn

From the car park, the path from the farm gate winds up into the hills at a gentle, but steady, pace. The gradient is a sharp and pleasant contrast in comparison to climbing Caerketton from the Ski slope. That is a worthwhile walk that is gruelling and almost mountain climbing in comparison.

Castlelaw Hill Fort, an Iron age underground housing, makes the first interesting landmark along the way.

Ascending further and further into the hills, the view across Midlothian and deep into the Pentlands continues to get better and better as you go. The landscape shifts constantly from rural farmland to scenic countryside as you make your way up the trail. Eventually, your efforts are rewarded with one-off views across the city, the Forth, and the Kingdom of Fife.

The paths and valleys that lead off the trail are packed with options for walkers, sightseers, bird watchers, nature lovers, and even ambitious fell-runners. Cutting its way through the northern half of the Pentlands, the path steadily winds upwards, taking you deeper into the heart of the hills.

The first major path that splits to the left from the Castlelaw trail carries you to the Castlelaw Hill summit. Further along the trail, paths to the right carry you to the summit of Allermuir, continuing on towards Caerketton, Hillend, and eventually Swanston.



As the path forks between Allermuir and Capelaw hills, the trail begins to wind its way down the valley towards Dregghorn. The scenery is highly inviting and opens up to a panoramic view across the city from the three Bridges to North Berwick. Though the tired walker should be warned: each step downwards from here may need to be retraced upwards if a return to Castlelaw is required.

On a clear day the path is simple to retrace and a comfortable walk downhill back to the car park. A leisurely walk to the

Allermuir turn off and back should take a very casual walker less than 90 minutes. Adding 30-45 minutes to take in a summit comes highly recommended and can be very rewarding.

Particular care should be taken by visiting dog walkers as the much of the hills are grazed by livestock at various times of the year.

