

Edinburgh Walks : Dalkeith Country Park

Dalkeith Country Park is a large country estate set just on the outskirts of Edinburgh. Well served by both public transport links and visitor parking, the grounds have plenty to attract visitors with interesting architecture, abundant nature walks and a vast playground park.

In previous years the estate was renowned amongst primary school children for its adventure playground fort. The flying fox felt 20 feet high and death-defying, its 3D maze of bridges and towers were enough to be lost in. At its centre, an enormous slide travelled from fort peak to forest floor, its length seemed to grow in length in every story it featured in.



Dalkeith Country Park – a walk for all times of the year

The old play park space has long since been torn down and replaced with open, green picnic space. The trails have been restored and walking routes throughout the grounds thoroughly refreshed.

The park entrance by the town centre gate opens to a wide range of choices from the crossroads. St Mary's Church sits almost behind the gate on the right-hand side, a stunning visual marker and useful way-point to find your path by the end of the route. The leftmost trail takes in a pleasingly shaded forest route that follows the Esk river deep into the grounds. The main road straight ahead takes you to the open grounds and the front face of the grand former country home of the Duke of Buccleuch.

Following the road ahead past the grand country house a short, casual walk takes you to the newly renovated park centre. A hub for the park's cafe, shops, and events; the yard neighbours the freshly designed children's play park.

Even without visiting the parks shops or playground, the centre yard is a useful kicking off point to visit some of the finest attractions of the grounds. Sitting on the other side of the park centre is the grand conservatory ruins. Once designed as part of the grand estate, a way to grow exotic fruits in the Scottish climate, the derelict ruins feature extraordinary stonework of the 1830's. The structure, once fitted with under-floor heating, is in the process of being conserved and restored to some of its original design.

From the conservatory building, a pleasant trail leads out in the direction of East-Lothian. A well-maintained route takes in forestry and fields as it crosses the Esk and back again.

Back behind grasslands surrounding Dalkeith Palace, a path winds steeply downwards below the high stone bridge over the river. The path rejoins one of the trails left back at the

gate entrance under an arch tunnel through the bridge. The Esk and walking trail follow each other out into the woodland, cutting through the best walks that the estate has to offer.

Plenty of great walks, sights, and picnic spots exist throughout the estate without straying too far from facilities or transport links. Dalkeith Country Park is even one of the rare locations to enjoy a great deal of outdoor, quiet space in the countryside without straying from tarmac path; a gem for those with accessibility considerations or buggies.

Since the admission price of years gone by has been scrapped, it's outdoor exercise that's cheaper and healthier than a gym membership too.