

Cramond, relaxing environment but chilling past

Taking a stroll at Cramond, one of the most popular places to relax only minutes from the centre of Edinburgh's usually bustling Capital city, on a crisp but clear winter day is an ideal way to chill for many.

The spacious waterfront promenade has become even more of a haven since the pandemic struck, providing a local release, particularly for flat dwellers in neighbouring areas.

But this relaxing spot has not always been thus. Walking from the spacious car park towards the beach you can't fail to spot the concrete 'teeth' sticking up a low tide.

They are throwback to World War II and were created to stop small surface craft or German U-Boats passing south of the island at high tide.

The 'teeth' are between the beach and Cramond Island which is connected to the land via a causeway, passable at low tide. Please consult the tide times which are posted at the start of the causeway as the only way off after the water comes in is by the lifeboat.

And these unmistakable, barnacle-encrusted concrete posts are not the only relics of the conflict at Cramond.

The War Department took over northern end as part of the defences of the Firth of Forth in World War I and the island was again requisitioned to combat the threat of Hitler in the second major world conflict.

Some of the structures still stand on the island, including the emplacement for a 75mm gun intended to guard the gap between the island on the south shore of the Firth of Forth.

Other emplacements are still noticeable on the 19-acre island which once housed buildings for anti-shipping searchlights and the terminus for the anti-submarine net.

Cramond Island is uninhabited now but is believed to have been used by the Romans, as an area to graze sheep and also as a holiday retreat.

Views of Granton and Leith to the east, North Queensferry across the river and the Forth Rail Bridge to the west are available as is the coast of Fife.

Cramond Island has, however, been despoiled by graffiti on standing structures but most dog walkers, cyclists, roller skating enthusiasts and even Nordic skiing fans, who train on roller blades along the walkway, remain on the mainland.

Near the start of the promenade is the Cramond Bistro which currently sells warming refreshments, ideal during a walk on a crisp winter day.

It overlooks the mouth of the River Almond (pictured) where local anglers cast for salmon, sea trout and trout in season and where yachtsmen moor their craft for regular racing and social sailing. The clubhouse is nearby.

Cramond Beach is only yards away to the north of the historic village of Cramond, noted for its white-washed cottages. You are only about five miles from the centre of Scotland's Capital, but it is hard to believe that, so chilled is this location.

Of course, that is in winter. It can be really busy in summer as locals escape the heat of the town for the cooler air along the coastline.

There is a large car park just above the beach along with toilets and a pub which, sadly on my last visit, is not what it used to be.

For history buffs, Cramond is one of the earliest known sites of human habitation in Scotland, with evidence of a settlement from around 8500 BC.

There was once a Roman fort on the site but, as time rolled on, it became a fishing village and then into one of the most desirable Edinburgh suburbs.

Strolling towards Granton you pass the Broadwalk Beach Club, winner of the best cafe in the 2018 Edinburgh Restaurant Awards which was a takeaway when we passed, obviously due to the pandemic

From there the promenade takes you towards an area known locally as Gypsy Brae. This stretch of grassy fields was once the location of the Granton Sea Quarry and the earliest recorded use of its stone is at The Palace of Holyrood House, a residence of The Queen, and some was used on Nelson's Column in London.

The quarry was said to be 80 feet deep and over eight acres but it collapsed and was flooded by a storm. Now the area is used to encourage wildlife as part of the Edinburgh Living Landscape programme.

Walking further takes you into a more industrial area, such a shame that, as continuing the grassed waterfront would have provided a more striking landscape.