

Days out from the city – cycle through time

A round trip from Edinburgh city centre to the 15th century Rosslyn Chapel in Midlothian gives a wonderful day out on the bicycle and will cost you nothing, except 24 miles of not very hard work and a possible coffee and cake in the visitor centre café.

Mind you, it starts with a bit of grind uphill to Gilmerton, four miles out on the south side of town (A772). But before you get to the bypass, you'll be much relieved to find a brand new cycle route, heading south-west, which will take you safely under the traffic and out to Straiton Pond Nature Reserve. Pause here to get your breath, admire the swans and leave the busy 21st century behind.



Rosslyn Chapel. Photo by Jim Landerkin



Straiton Pond

Soon after that you will be flying across the Bilston Glen Viaduct, built for the Loanhead and Roslin Railway in 1874 (Roslin is how everyone, except the chapel people, spell Rosslyn). It's a "box lattice girder" bridge and a fine example of Victorian engineering.

By now you are enjoying the open fields and you soon come to

the famous Roslin sheep in the agriculture research centre. Up a slight hill, on the right is a memorial to the Battle of Roslin, a Scottish victory against the English in the First War of Independence in 1303.



Battle of Roslin memorial

Cycling on into Roslin village itself, you pass the lovely old Manse (1837) on the right and then, at the first cross-roads, you see signs for Rosslyn Chapel on your left. Perched on the edge of the dramatic North Esk Glen, this fantasy in stone was built by the Earl of Rosslyn and Prince of Orkney in 1446. Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code has given it real tourism status these days, and a fine visitor centre. (Open from 26 April)

To get home, you can either retrace your tyre-marks or, my suggestion is that you continue on the road through Roslin, turn down into the glen on the B7003, take the minor road, first on the right, and push your bike up the steep hill to the old railway track, now a fine cycle route running from Penicuik to Dalkeith. It's all delightfully flat or down hill for five miles to Eskbank Station.

Stay with the cycle route until you reach Eskbank proper and the B772. Turn north. You are back on familiar territory. Simply follow the road up to Dobbies Garden Centre and Butterfly Farm and then there's a paved cycle way all the way back to Gilmerton and the downhill glide to Edinburgh city centre.

You've been away for a day and time-travelled for 700 years. Time for a well-deserved, socially-distanced High Tea.

(Midlothian Cycle Map available from the cycling campaign Spokes and all good bookshops).