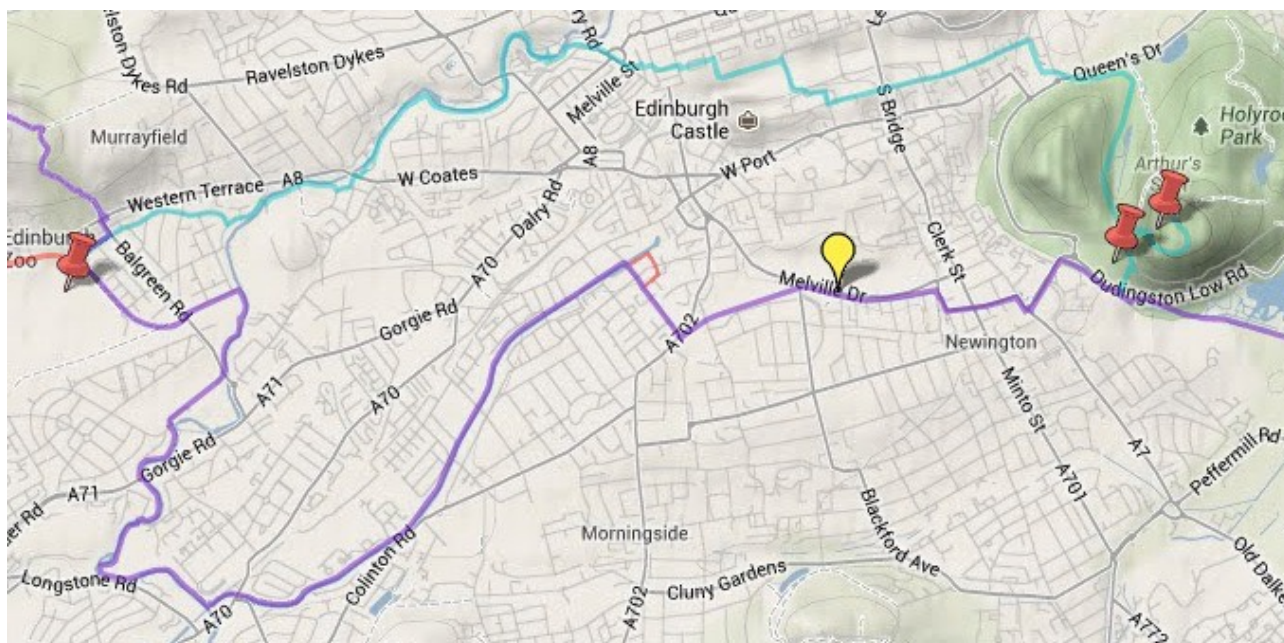


John Muir Way: unofficial city centre shortcut (4 pages)

Please see www.rucksacs.com/books/jmw for the guidebook to which this PDF is a supplement. It offers an alternative to the route description on pages 61-62 from mile 87.1 to mile 94.1. For its pros and cons, see page 4.

Please visit our online route map (same page, click map graphic) to see all routes, official and unofficial, for walkers and cyclists: zoom in repeatedly for utmost detail.

In the map clip below, the purple line shows the official route and the turquoise line shows our alternative (shorter and, in our view, better for walkers).



This alternative may be more suited to walkers than to cyclists: see page 4. Refer to our guidebook page 60 – and from mile 85.7 follow Saughton Crescent. The total length is 5.5 miles/9 km (excluding Arthur's Seat).

- Turn left (east) along Saughton Crescent which within 500 m becomes Riversdale Road. Keep straight ahead until you meet Riversdale Crescent at a T-junction: turn left.
- After about 200 m, cross the Water of Leith by footbridge and turn left to follow the Water of Leith Walkway downstream for nearly 3 km to Dean Village. You start by skirting Murrayfield Stadium, then follow signage carefully across Roseburn Terrace to resume the riverside walk.
- The walkway crosses the river a couple of times but is well signed throughout. Sometimes sections are closed because of subsidence, but diversions are clearly signed, in places with local maps.
- Approaching Dean Village, descend steps past a weir to reach a metal footbridge. Turn sharp left on its far side to cross the river and then turn left past half-timbered cottages, along Hawthornbank up to a road junction.

- Bear right up Bell's Brae to the main road (Queensferry St) and cross over: Dean Bridge (designed by Thomas Telford) is to the left, but you turn right past Randolph Crescent.
- Turn left into Randolph Place and make a right-left dogleg to emerge on Charlotte Square.
- Cross the Square along its southern edge, making another right-left dogleg to enter Rose Street, a cobbled pedestrian enclave of cafes and pubs.
- Where this meets Castle Street, turn right to face the impressive sight of Edinburgh Castle on its volcanic outcrop.
- Follow Castle Street down to Princes Street and cross it to enter Princes St Gardens at the statue of Thomas Guthrie. Turn left down the ramp to follow the broad lane that runs through the gardens parallel to Princes Street until you pass the floral clock (in summer). Climb steps to the road (The Mound).
- Turn right: the Scottish National Gallery is just across the road (admission is free). Once across the railway, The Mound climbs further, giving good views to your left of the towers of the Scott Monument and Balmoral Hotel on Princes Street.
- Cyclists should stay on the Mound which climbs to the Royal Mile via North Bank Street and St Giles Street: turn left at the High Street. Walkers may prefer to turn right into Lady Stair's Close through Makar's Court (with Writers' Museum); there's an interesting selection of quotations set into the stone pavement.
- On reaching the Royal Mile, turn left to follow it all the way (unless you wish to divert right to visit the castle). It heads east to Holyrood Palace, going gently downhill under various name (e.g. Lawnmarket, High Street, Canongate).
- Pass St Giles Cathedral (or go in: donations welcome, but not compulsory), noticing the Heart of Midlothian set in the stones outside its western entrance. After a pedestrianised section, the Royal Mile crosses the main road: Waverley Station lies 200 m to the left of this junction.
- You pass a fascinating mixture of specialist shops and tea rooms, ancient vennels and closes, historic houses and museums – and some outlets selling tatty tartan souvenirs.
- About 200 m after the fine Canongate Kirk on your left, you gain your first glimpse, unimpressive from here, of the Parliament building on the right. The view improves as you round the corner into Horse Wynd and pass the public entrance. (Or enter: admission is free, see www.scottish.parliament.uk for details.)
- Opposite, note the Palace of Holyrood House: www.royal.gov.uk. Enter Holyrood Park, cross the road angling left and go through the car park, heading for the zebra crossing to reach the far side of Queen's Drive.
- Pick up the broad tarmac path (the "Volunteer's Walk") that climbs east at first, quickly escaping sight and sound of traffic. Keep to the main path as it veers right, eventually on a looser surface. It climbs gently above Hunter's Bog, an area rich in butterflies.
- After 1 km of path through this secret glen you reach a col with various path junctions marked by boulders: Salisbury Crags are to your right – a tiny detour for superb views to the west. To reach Edinburgh's most spectacular viewpoint, to your left there's an excellent route up Arthur's Seat: see below.

- Otherwise, continue ahead on the grassy slope, uphill briefly then descending to the road (another section of the Queen's Drive). Turn left along the road for about 100 m, then descend stone steps that aim back to the right.
- At the foot of the main flight (56 steps), look left to see your objective: the narrow turning off the Low Road leading to the Innocent Cycleway. In dry conditions, you may decide to make a bee-line for it down the steep grassy slope. In the wet, it's safer and kinder to the terrain to continue down the rest of the steps before turning left downhill across the grass to pick up the Low Road.
- Either way, you reach the fingerpost pointing right down a tarmac path to reach the Innocent. Resume from our guidebook page 63.

To climb Arthur's Seat:

Caution: this hill has some steep slopes with no protection and no waymarking. Care is needed, especially in wet conditions and on the descent. Unless you are experienced and well equipped, it may be unsafe to climb it in wintry conditions or alone. In normal conditions, it is neither dangerous nor very strenuous and it's justly popular – listed by Lonely Planet as among its top ten urban walks worldwide. From the col (page 2, last bullet) this ascent takes most people 20-30 minutes, but allow an hour for the round trip so you have time to enjoy the summit views. On the descent, be sure to retrace your steps by the gradual ascent route described, thus avoiding some steep and treacherous terrain.

Please refer also to our online route map which shows the recommended route.

At the path junction, face left and choose the flight of steps ascending to the right near a fence; the route to the left looks gentler but this is deceptive. You climb in steep zigzags at first, but on fine stone steps that help you get a rhythm.

After the first section, the gradient eases, the steps thin out and you then follow a gently sloping path which loops anticlockwise with great views ahead over Prestonfield House and its circular stables. Stick to the main route, bearing right at any junctions, and don't be tempted by apparent shortcuts.

The route actually dips slightly before its final approach to the craggy summit (250.5 m/823 ft). The top section is a bit of a scramble, and needs extra care in the wet.

Once at the summit, don't miss the location finder which identifies the main sights with their height and distance enjoy the summit on a clear day. You can pick out the Royal Mile and the route you just followed across Edinburgh, as well as the views across the Forth to Fife and the hills to the south and east..

Rationale for the alternative route

Developing and documenting this alternative has taken a lot of work, and you may wonder why I thought it necessary. As a citizen of Edinburgh, I felt that first-time visitors, including those in a hurry, should see Edinburgh's famous city centre, with its contrasting Old and New Towns which are a UNESCO World Heritage Site: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/728>.

Those with longer to spare may wish to spend a night or two exploring Scotland's capital rather than cycling or walking straight through as if wearing blinkers. This is much easier if the route that you leave and rejoin goes through the city centre (with trains, trams and lots of buses) than if it diverts south-west to Slateford. And I wanted to save some distance from an already long section from South Queensferry to The Meadows (16.1 miles/25.9 km).

Here are some advantages of this alternative route:

- saves nearly 2 miles/3 km on a long day and avoids a climb of 87 steps to the Union Canal
- uses the Water of Leith Walkway downstream through its more attractive parts
- passes through part of Edinburgh's New Town and Princes Street Gardens
- takes in the Old Town with nearly all of the Royal Mile to pass between the Parliament and Holyrood Palace
- follows an excellent path through a secret glen in Holyrood Park
- by staying high, it makes the ascent of Arthur's Seat both quicker and easier
- connects with many more options for public transport, accommodation and pubs and cafés, helping those who are tackling the route in sections.

In fairness to the official route, its advantages are:

- it is well waymarked
- it takes you to the Water of Leith Visitor Centre and Slateford Aqueduct
- it uses lots of towpath and cycleway, avoiding traffic-laden roads, and may suit cyclists better than our alternative.

Having said that, the real test is what you, the reader, thinks of this route. If you try it, please let me know its good and bad points: thanks so much.

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