



Cycling in Auld Reekie (Part 1)

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Since I hate driving there were two options available to get me to Edinburgh, train or plane. The plane is cheaper, faster, and more comfortable, but taking it meant I was unable to take my bike. However, there was no way I was going without a bike for a whole week, so I hired one from [Leith Cycles](#). Whilst the bike (a Dawes Discovery) was fine, it was quite expensive so I hired it for an afternoon only. But at least the price included tools, spare inner tube, and (if I wanted them) a helmet, a lock, lights, and a pump (I had lights and a pump with me). I had already seen the city centre, and since I'm not keen on suicide I decided to avoid it. Instead I headed north, where after a short while I was able to join a network of old railway lines that have been converted into shared-use paths. These are generally quite wide and mostly well signposted. They are also smoothly tarmacked and properly lit.



Barriers were mostly absent from them, with sensible signage used instead (below left). Alas clearly some still think barriers are necessary as I came across a complicated arrangement consisting of a low hoop, a narrow gap, a double-gate, and a back-up kissing gate with a larger than average cage (below right). It divides the path from a residential area. I would love to know what was going through the mind of the person who came up with this.



Whilst this network is pretty good by British standards, it suffers from the usual problems of conflict that are associated with shared paths. Often not all of the available width was used, even

though that would have allowed segregation of cyclists from pedestrians. However, it was a delight getting away from the motorised traffic.

Unfortunately things go awry as soon as one leaves this small network. An excellent sign might direct you to the right exit, but after that there would be nothing to tell you whether you should turn left or right. And on my bike ride I found myself dumped in the middle of [a busy junction with no cycle or pedestrian phase](#). I eventually made it across in the miniscule gap between phases, but unfortunately I delayed someone by approximately five hundred milliseconds and received a cheery white van driver's salute in return.

After that I followed the narrow shared-use promenade path for a few hundred metres. It tried to dump me back on the A901, but that is narrow and very busy with cars and many large trucks, so I did what everyone else clearly did and went off-piste; the resulting muddy track is visible from space. There's clearly enough space for the badly needed segregated path, but one hasn't been built. Alas that does mean a bunny-hop (or in my case a dismount and a lot of curmudgeonly grumbling) over a low wall where on both sides of the abandoned Eastern Breakwater road the wall bends around.



The A901 terminates at an exciting and imaginative multi-lane gyratory thingy illogically called [Granton Square](#). It was swarming with cars and trucks and I had no idea how it was supposed to be negotiated even if I could have gotten my bike to the other side of the A901 so I could pretend I was a car, so I opted for pavement cycling until I could get far enough down West Harbour Road to join the carriageway. This road was pretty unpleasant, but I didn't have far to go until I could get back on to the cycle route that leads up to the Forth Bridge.

The cycle route along the Firth of Forth is a very wide shared-use path. Bizarrely I encountered a number of pedestrians who looked absolutely terrified as I approached; they seemed convinced I would go many metres out of my way to crash into them. Cycling along here did prove challenging, however, on account my having to cycle into the lazy wind for which Edinburgh is famous (it doesn't take the trouble to go around you). At one point I found myself catching up with another cyclist, and thus began the world's slowest bicycle race. I did manage to draw parallel with him, but from somewhere he found an extra reserve of energy and gradually pulled away from me, possibly achieving a double-digit speed.



Normally the presence of all that water would encourage me to go for a swim, but it wasn't just the fact that a chill December gale was blowing that put me off. Judging by the details on the sign I found warning of "poor water quality", the Forth is used as a sewer.

I eventually left the Firth of Forth at the River Almond, where I stopped for a while to warm up. I appreciate that sounds like an oxymoron, but despite cycling hard whilst wearing a t-shirt, a thermal vest, an Arran pullover, and a storm-proof jacket over a fleece-lined jacket, the wind and low temperature meant I was frozen to the marrow. Anyhow, it's a nice place to take a rest. Unfortunately I didn't have time to cycle up to the Forth Bridge (I didn't want to cycle back in the dark), but I had a pretty good view of it and hopefully I'll be able to do the complete ride next year.



As it happened the wind meant I arrived back at Granton Square rather quickly, so I took the opportunity to poke around a new residential development there. Amazingly some rather crude segregated cycle lanes have been built, but they are so crude they just made getting about difficult. Ironically, this being a network of roads to nowhere other than the development, the Dutch probably wouldn't bother with segregated paths here.

Anyhow, it was a mostly enjoyable ride. But what's it like cycling in Auld Reekie if your journey doesn't happen to coincide with the old railway lines? I'll answer that question in Part 2.