

Whittinghame Water Ropeswing

Location – In woodland, just before the confluence of the Whittinghame and Biel Waters GR 612 748

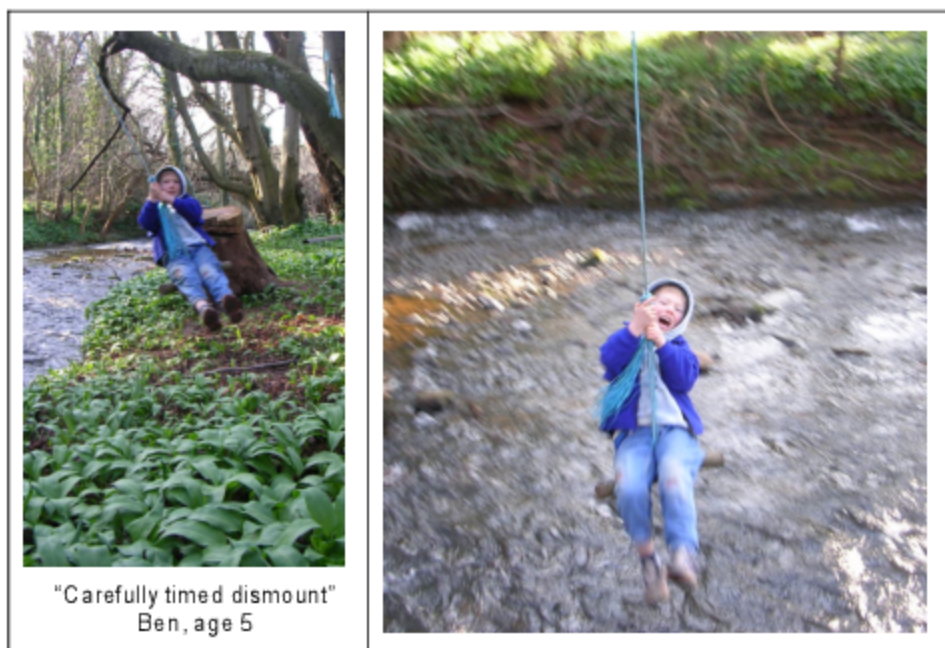
Why it's my favourite place by bike

Enticing young people out on their bikes is important to me, and not just my own family. Finding exciting destinations within easy reach of home is key to making a trip on the bike an appealing option. Just the joy of riding is, invariably, not sufficient to make cycling an attractive choice, especially when there are many other easier alternatives that don't involve exertion or venturing out of the house. Bribery with sweets is not my preference, although they can play a mollifying part. When I, by chance, came across the ropeswings, I knew I had found a great playground.

The location is enhanced by the journey. Around 5 miles on quiet roads from Dunbar; an echoing tunnel, a long gradual climb, a swooping descent and a final undulating approach. There is an effort involved but the reward makes any reservations about having to cycle quickly recede. On arrival there is an old stone bridge to park bikes, flanked by enormous Butterburr. The ropeswings are not immediately obvious, reached either by ducking under low branches or along a sweet cecily and nettle lined path. For newcomers the entrance is "Awesome!", reverentially walking into a place of worship.

Amongst the horse chestnuts hang three ropes. If you're lucky, the ropes are wrapped safely around the trunks, otherwise await mid stream tantalisingly out of reach. The burbling Whittinghame Water sounds an enthusiastic welcome. The riverside launch pad, carpeted with wild garlic, is fragrant in the damp cool. Spring is my favourite season before the midges emerge. However the swings can be enjoyed at anytime. In summer it's great to linger with a picnic, and not have a lingering anxiety that any unintended soaking will result in cold feet and misery. I now ensure my accomplices come prepared.

So, three ropes to choose from. Furthest downstream a long low swing with the easiest exit. The sycamore on the bank opposite, a target for those who receive a helping push. Just 15 metres upstream are two shorter swings. One, a tricky start upon a stump, the other requiring a carefully timed dismount. Younger swingers need helping on and off. As confidence mounts so do the calls for a push. Their requests for assistance make me happy that I have brought them to a great playground.



There is an edge to the aerial river crossing. It's necessary to keep feet up to avoid the rocks and a soaking. A loss of momentum can mean the slippery riverbank is hard to reach. A pair of crocs enables mid stream rescues of any stranded swingers that don't care for wet feet.

I've swung alone - churlish to pass without at least one swoop over the water. Best of all I've swung with many young friends and with my more adventurous peers. I have encouraged many, some more than others, to make the journey, by bike. Without fail they are delighted and are eager to return. Happy to be on their bikes.