

My Favourite Place by Bike: Gullane Hill, East Lothian (OS NT486830)

Why it's my favourite place by bike... My favourite place by bike is Gullane Hill. To get there from my home in central Edinburgh, I take the cycle track north through Scotland Street Park and the Rodney Street tunnel, along by the Warriston allotments (where I can see my own plot and wonder if I should stop off and tidy up a bit!), then through Leith and on to Seafield Road and then - whoosh - down onto Portobello prom. But alas there isn't space here to describe the whole route...

Once arrived in Gullane, I go up a VERY steep road to the top of Gullane Hill, and onto the golf course – not a problem as the public are permitted to enter as long as they *don't* ride their bikes on it! Even better, benches are provided on which to recover and admire the staggering view.

To the east, there's the wonderful beach of Gullane Bents, a wide sandy sweep busy in summer but almost deserted on a clear winter's day. It's quite a distance away, but when the air is still, the sound of children's voices can be heard as they paddle or swim, not to mention people calling to their dogs as they splash in and out of the waves, and riders shouting to their horses as they gallop along.

Looking north there's Fife and the Lomond Hills, and of course the huge variety of vessels on the Forth. They always seem to be travelling sooo sloooowly, but when you've looked away and turn back to them, they've always moved on dramatically!

Turning west, there's a really splendid view of Edinburgh across Aberlady Bay, by times tide-full or a mass of watery sands. On a clear day, you can glimpse the Forth bridges in the far distance. And on almost any day, the commanding outline of Cockenzie power station at Prestonpans stands in the middle distance. Rather strangely, it doesn't seem an eyesore, but rather a landmark, an industrial version of a lighthouse marking the way into the city. Beyond it, the outlines of Edinburgh and the Pentland hills are reassuringly familiar, though sometimes lost in mist.

And on Gullane Hill itself, right in front of the recovering cyclist, there's the sight and smell of the thick growth of broom and buckthorn bushes, with birds and insects darting about, and seagulls wheeling overhead. Walkers pass by on the public path, and the golfers come and go chatting quietly, making their way into the slope of landscape beyond. The cyclist now turns around, and starts off gingerly down the steep road, testing the brakes...

