

Spokes Competition 2012 : My Favourite Place by Bike

Note ... Entries with pictures are in individual pdf files. Entries entirely in text are below.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_1

Favourite Place: Craigie's farm shop and cafe, South Queensferry EH30 9TR – just off the A90

Why it's a favourite: Craigie's farm is around a 15-mile round trip from Edinburgh and so it's a great distance for a short trip when you want a bit of a cycle but don't want to go too far – and there is the incentive of a good feed in the cafe to get you up the final hill! The distance from the city isn't too far if you're not feeling like a long ride, or if you have a busy weekend but feel the need for a bit of exercise at some point.

They are very welcoming to cyclists with a map on their website showing how to get there by bike and encouraging signs on the hill up to the farm. The cafe looks out over the Firth of Forth with expansive views over the west of the city and the airport, and as it faces east it's a really good place to spend a chilly winter's morning soaking up the sunshine indoors – or out on the terrace in the summer.

If you want to make more of an outing of it, there are plenty of further cycling opportunities around the area, a network of walking routes around the farm or you can even pick-your-own fruit at the right time of the year! I've been restricted in how far I can cycle for some time due to a back problem, so this is just within my range and the calories expended to get there mean I can enjoy a cappuccino with a scone & jam guilt-free!

It's always good to support a local business and have a look at what's going on there. We've been at the farm when there has been activities for kids, birdwatching events and they take the educational side of their work seriously in terms of their environmental responsibilities. There is always interesting food in the farm shop (often with samples) and lots of local produce - so make sure you have carrying capacity in your panniers if you visit to carry any impulse purchases!

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_2

Favourite Place: Dunsapie Loch

Why it's a favourite: It takes a few seconds to begin to appreciate it.

Your lungs gasp for air, your heart thumps, your legs feel like they've had acid pored down the inside.

Gradually some features appear through sweaty eyes. Birds nesting in the middle of the loch; swans, geese or seagulls, it takes a few seconds to clarify. The cars are mercifully mostly stationary, or coming up slowly from behind. Any other cyclist always smiles a greeting; joggers are more frequent, but are often lost in their own MP3 worlds. It's a favourite place for walkers and picnickers, tending to toddlers or dogs or gazing at the view.

And the view is amazing, priceless, incomparable, always changing. Behind is the East Lothian coast, with views over to Fife and uninhabited islands in the Forth. Above is the top of Arthur's Seat, with the path up a faded green, contrasting with the wild lush grass, heather and gorse elsewhere on the hill. Over the loch, South Edinburgh appears with inspirational views of the Moorfoots and Pentlands beyond, with the promise of mountain biking remoteness. You know round the corner you'll see a magnificent vista of the Old Town, but that's for later.

For now, I glance down at my cycle computer and have it confirmed: slower up this time than last time. A moment's sadness passes by as I'm forced to acknowledge the passing of the years. Then I remember, I'm still able to get up, and there is so much to appreciate here in my favourite place.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_3

Favourite Place: Not so much a geographical location as a state of mind

Why it's a favourite: Riding a bike is the ultimate way of getting around for local journeys. For all the usual reasons, quicker than walking, carrying loads easily, quiet and minimal emissions. I cycle mostly for utility.

However when I am riding as fast as I can, I compete in the occasional triathlon, the feeling of strength and speed is unbeatable. As I spin in a high cadence, preferably with a tail wind and down a gentle incline, I am well and truly in the zone.

The zone has been described in many ways but the closest I got to was by a Czech psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*, who used the term flow. Flow is the mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. It could be a state obtained by the focus required to make a model or whilst singing or even in a shoe factory. I reach that "place" when riding my bike and I encourage you to join me.

If heaven existed then much of my time would consist of pedaling in the warm sun with the wind at my back and in my hair – helmets definitely optional in heaven. Dressed in appropriate comfortable apparel; short sleeved cycle shirt and shorts, mitts and my snug fitting Sidi's (1988 vintage cycle shoes).

One particular time sticks in the memory as I roared with pleasure - on the road to Athlestoneford from the Garleton Hills. Legs pumping, chasing down a fellow ompetitor, just ahead, all else excluded for the duration.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_4

Favourite Place: Calton Hill – see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_5

Favourite Place: Torphichen, West Lothian

Why it's a favourite: 'Favourite' can mean 'most liked' or 'most frequented', or a mixture of both. When I say that Torphichen, in West Lothian, is my 'favourite' place by bike, I mean it in the sense of 'most liked', since unfortunately life's other demands mean that visits there are less frequent than I'd like.

I like visiting Torphichen because the Village Hall there holds a coffee morning on the first Saturday of each month. That gives me a *goal* or destination for my ride – always important, since for me, cycling is in essence a utility, a means of getting from A to B, albeit one with multiple side benefits such as fresh air, exercise, doing one's bit for the environment, and just sheer pleasure.

Torphichen lies about 5 miles south of Linlithgow and 3 miles north of Bathgate. It's a pretty village which nestles snugly in the Bathgate hills. It's historic – its oldest building being the Preceptory, which dates to 1163, and was the main Scottish base (it gave out the 'Precepts', or rules) for the Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem, an Order which cared for the poor and the sick (a sort of forerunner of the NHS ?).

The ride to Torphichen from Edinburgh is of the right length – takes about an hour and twenty minutes – and can be done largely on off-road paths and minor roads. From Newbridge one takes the path beside the A89 before turning off towards Winchburgh, to cross the railway and the canal, surrounded by the now historic 'bings'. One then turns up through the delightfully-named hamlet of Faucheldean, to climb into the Bathgate hills, and then follows a ridge road with excellent views both south, to the Pentlands, and north, to Fife, the Ochils, and on good days, the Trossachs. Use the new Spokes West Lothian map if you don't already know the way. This route is a good mix of the flat/easy and hilly/strenuous.

The coffee mornings are 'benefit days' for local community groups, who organise them – so the money goes to a good cause. For £2 (minimum) you get as much tea/coffee and slabs of home-made cake, biscuits etc as you wish – great 'bonk' food for a cyclist (and I don't mean one kind of bonk!). The locals are always very friendly, and the place is often full of noisy kids, so you feel part of something active. One of the organisers, Julia Miller, is herself a cyclist and (former?) Spokes member.

You can return to the city by a different route, via Bathgate and Livingston, using NCN1 here and there as wished, as well as the extensive off-road path network of Livingston, and then Almondell Country Park, and the canal towpath, or via minor roads.

Finally, the ride and visit don't take up the whole day, leaving time for other activities. Something to look forward to, once a month. What's not to like?

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_6

Favourite Place: Water of Leith Walkway / Cyclepath NT2270 NT2170 NT2169 NT2168 (Colinton and Craiglockart Dells)

Why it's a favourite: Colinton and Craiglockart Dells are my favourite places in Edinburgh! There so much to see – from fields of orchids to wonderful views down onto the river in the steep sided valley. If you stop on the bridges you have a good chance of seeing a kingfisher and there are sometimes deer too.

The cyclepath is nice and wide and not too crowded the times I'm there. It seems to be well looked after by volunteers from SPOKES and the Water of Leith Conservation Trust. There's not too much litter and the path seems to be kept clear of too much undergrowth and overhanging foliage.

The adventurous cyclist can also try some of the other paths in the Dells, which are rougher and hillier than the cyclepath but still mostly wide enough that you can cycle without disturbing pedestrians or joggers.

Mostly its just a wonderful peaceful place to enjoy cycling through nature.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_7

Favourite Place: I just love Linlithgow

Why it's a favourite: It's where I have learned cycling, literally, with free cyclecraft lessons, but also by eating up the miles on the roads and canal paths. From my office I can be on the route around Linlithgow Loch in seconds, or out along the canal for an 8 mile lunch hour loop.

But my favourite section has to be the hills from Linlithgow to Bo'ness. You reach a crossroads at the top and there is a 360 degree panorama, taking in the Forth Bridges, House of Binns, West Lothian bings, Cockleroy and over to the Ochil Hills and the Wallace Monument.

Oh and from Linlithgow I can get a train to Wemyss Bay to get to Rothesay, my next favourite cycle destination.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_8

Favourite Place: Waverley Station

Why it's a favourite: I've lived all over Edinburgh, but Waverley has always seemed to be about ten minutes away on two wheels. Stretched out along the valley, it's the heart and the hub of the city.

Coming from the south, I mostly whizz down Market Street from the top of the Mound, passing below the proud, puffed-up Bank building. My heart normally skips a beat as I glance at the cheekily fast clock on the Balmoral. Waverley Bridge is always heaving with tour buses and taxis, but then you get a great feeling as you turn in and descend further and enter the gritty shadiness of the station.

Waverley is favourite place to go on a bike because it acts as portal through which you and your bike can rapidly swap city scenery for some of Scotland's magic cycle experiences - every trip bringing something unknown and exciting.

On your return, as you sweep up past the taxi rank, you emerge back in Auld Reekie to be greeted by the best skyline in Europe: the chaotic levels of the Old Town distracting you as you make your way back up the hill.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_9

Favourite Place: Innocent Railway Path - see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_10

Favourite Place: Burial mound on Cairnpapple Hill near Torphichen in the Bathgate Alps
Elevation 312 m (1,024 ft), Prominence c. 173 metres (568 ft), OS grid NS987718,
Coordinates: 55°55'41"N 3°37'21"W, Topo map OS *Landranger* 65

Why it's a favourite: The hilltop Neolithic ceremonial henge and Bronze Age burial site of the “Kings of the Lothians” is the ultimate destination for a view that can take in Goat Fell on Arran, Fife, West Lothian, Edinburgh and North Berwick Law. Sitting there you can understand why it could be the last resting place of a Celtic warrior.

I cycle there from Balerno via Kirkliston and Linlithgow on a Sunday when the roads are quiet. The site is possibly more accessible by bike than by motor car in my view. You know you have climbed a hill up from Linlithgow but the effort is truly worth it every time. I go with my pal Jim and we swap jeely piece sandwiches at the top (we both make our own bread and jam).

Did I say the climb is steep? That is the truth but it is well worth it for the camaraderie, the view, the picnic and the descent at the end. All taking place at a site steeped in ancient history (and a fake stone circle the farmer has put in on the way down to Bathgate).

Atmosphere, geography, history, archaeology, friendship, great exercise on quiet but hilly roads and pieces on jam to get you home. A grand day out.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_11

Favourite Place: Whittinghame Water ropeswing – see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_12

Favourite Place: Prestongrange Visitor Centre and Café, Morison's Haven, near Prestonpans. EH32 9RX

Why it's a favourite: It's a great place to go for a ride or stop for a break on the way from Edinburgh and Midlothian to East Lothian. It's one of the few really good rest stops that are on a key cycle route – in this instance National Cycle Route 76 to Longniddry and Haddington, and also the coast road to Dirleton and North Berwick. The museum and exhibits are well worth exploring, and the café serves cafetière coffee! Picnic tables outside (they don't sell sandwiches and don't mind you bringing your own picnic) and good loos complete a great destination or rest stop.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_13

Favourite Place: Gladhouse reservoir – see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_14

Favourite Place: Near the " Quarter Mile" , ascending down " Middle Meadow Walk " all the way to Melville Drive.

Why it's a favourite: It gives one plenty of opportunities to tell off beautiful girls who regularly walk unknowingly or rebelliously onto the cycle path.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_15

Favourite Place: On the Edinburgh-Glasgow train

Why it's a favourite: An odd place you may think, but just remember all the pleasures it's allowing you...

ScotRail is getting you with your bike to huge numbers of destinations - maybe a work journey, a visit to friends, to a concert, or of course to hundreds of great bike rides - such as the Sustrans route from Glasgow along the Clyde then up to Loch Lomond, getting the train back; or in Edinburgh out to the Forth Bridge then Linlithgow and train back.

Then of course it's getting you there without the hassle and cost of a car - no parking problems, no need to return to the same car park after your bike ride; and of course time in the train for reading, talking, eating, computing, etc rather than having your hands on the steering wheel and your mind on the road (hopefully) all the way. If the train has a mechanical problem or there's a delay for other reasons, ScotRail will deal with it whilst you just keep reading - you don't have to move off the carriageway and wait for the AA, or sit in the fumes of a traffic queue.

What's great about the Edinburgh-Glasgow main line in particular is its excellent bike capacity. Trains run every 15 minutes; the 3-car trains have 4 official bike spaces (in practice 6 bikes fit easily), and the 6-car trains have 8. That's anything between 16 and 50+ bike spaces per hour, depending on time of day and other factors. Admittedly the rush hour can be a problem at intermediate stations, but other than that you can be 95%+ confident of getting on easily - and with no more than 15mins wait in the unlikely event that the spaces are completely full.

My only worry is whether ScotRail will still provide such fantastic service on the new trains when the line is electrified in the next few years - I hope Spokes will encourage people like me to tell our MSPs how important this is!

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_16

Favourite Place: Haddington-Longniddry path – see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_17

Favourite Place: The Coalgate pub in Ormiston - see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_18

Favourite Place: Top of Leamington Walk - see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_19

Favourite Place: the Dalmeny Estate, lying to the west of Edinburgh and on cycle routes NCN1 and 76

Why it's a favourite: For a leisurely cycle excursion or quick spin to blow away the cobwebs, the Dalmeny Estate is hard to beat. It's easily accessible from Cramond/Barnton via the Cramond Brig and offers an extensive network of peaceful roads and tracks close to the city yet right in the country.

The views to the Forth and to the Pentlands are stunning, while the terrain is varied and full of interest, with plenty of challenging gradients and surfaces. Buildings of historic and architectural significance punctuate your route.

You can take a picnic and relax by the seashore, before heading on to South Queensferry for ice creams etc. Alternatively, a diversion south across the B924 (Queensferry Road) with some steep ascents on the way will earn you a coffee and cake at Craigie Farm.

The Cramond Brig Inn at the Edinburgh end of the estate provides further refreshments if you're flagging on the way back. And while you're in the Estate don't miss the chance to brush up on your knowledge of ancient monuments (the Eagle Rock) or laugh out loud at the fantastic topiary heads of Leuchold House.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_20

Favourite Place: Western Harbour View/Drive area – see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_21 [age 7]

Favourite Place: Cramond

Why it's a favourite: I go on a bike path from near the city centre to the Forth. It's a long cycle track that goes along the sea.

I like it because there's a good cafe, and ice cream van and a Fish Sculpture. You can only go across to the island when the tide is out. It is a safe place; there are no cars so it's good cycling practice for children and it's a smooth surface with lots of space.

I like going with my family and it's about 12 miles which is good training for bike challenges.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_22

Favourite Place: The south bank of Harlow reservoir

Why it's a favourite: Sitting by a tree, reading a book, hearing the fish jump and watching the sun set has to be the most peaceful and beautiful way to end a day.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_23 [age 7]

Favourite Place: Astley Ainslie hospital grounds, Morningside

Why it's a favourite: Because I can find new places. And because it's nice and quiet and you can practice cycling. And it's very close to our house. There aren't too many cars. You can see rabbits and owls. And Morningside is a good place to bike.

And I've already found a secret place. And I love it cause you can play so many games on your bike. And because you can cycle as fast as you want.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_24

Favourite Place: Cramond harbour and promenade

Why it's a favourite: Easy to get to on north Edinburgh cycle tracks with children and once you get there you can lock up your bikes and:

- a) walk out to Cramond island, making sure you check the tides. Explore the island. Have picnic
 - b) play in the play-park behind the car park
 - c) visit the Roman ruins and check out the beach sculpture of fish
 - d) have a scone or an ice cream in the cafe
 - e) use the nice clean public toilets!
 - f) walk along the beach or check out the boats in the harbour
 - g) take roller blades in pannier and use on the promenade
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Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_25

Favourite Place: Gladhouse reservoir

Why it's a favourite:

- Views of water and hills
- Easy to get to even on a Sunday afternoon in winter
- Good place for a picnic

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_26

Favourite Place: The Union canal, area around the Bridge Inn - EH28 8RA

Why it's a favourite: I cycle past this every day on my way in to work, fairly early in the morning. At the moment, the sun has just risen so the light is really clear and the air looks slightly misty because of the dew. On the left just near the Bridge Inn there's a field with what looks like an old Victorian walled garden in it and as you cycle past where the Bridge Inn sits there's always a few narrow-boats tied up and the little group of ducks that hang around there are just getting up and around. Also, many mornings when I pass there's the most wonderful smell of baking and sometimes coffee which gives me an extra push to get to the office and breakfast!

This is a nice place to cycle any time of the day but early in the morning with those views, that smell, the silence and the fact that I hardly see another soul makes it really easy to imagine it's 1912, not 2012. A little bit of peace on my daily commute.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_27

Favourite Place: (after a long hard day) - my own front door – see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_28

Favourite Place: Pinkerton Hill, where you emerge from the woods after cycling up the track from The Brunt, above Spott, above Dunbar.

Why it's a favourite: First of all you have a wonderful off-road bike ride up the track from the Brunt, especially good if you've come along some of the other local hill tracks to get there. There are lots of views of the surrounding hills & woods, plus glimpses of the sea to the east below you.

Once you come out of the woods you are suddenly, spectacularly presented with a breathtaking view over the Firth of Forth, the Bass Rock gleaming white and the Cairngorms visible on clear days. Just beneath you is Doon Hill, famous for Oliver Cromwell defeating the Scots in 1650. There are also the foundations of a Saxon Hall.

After stopping to take it all in (and rest for a while after the ascent) you know there is a superb fast blast down the rough track to come and a delight in the whole landscape as you speed along.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_29

Favourite Place: Cramond – see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_30

Favourite Place: Gullane Hill, East Lothian – see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_31

Favourite Place: On Queen's Drive, Holyrood Park, at the high-point of the road (heading West through the small cutting, with Samson's Ribs to the left)

Why it's a favourite: What a place to be, yet so close to the centre of Edinburgh (and my house).

After a long climb up Queen's Drive, you get your reward. The ride along the high-level terrace is wonderful enough and then you enter the small cutting and the city unfolds.

First Edinburgh Castle appears, then the rest of the city skyline. Salisbury Crags to your right completes the vista. Don't think you could ever tire of that view. A great view of a great city, the wind in your hair (I pass no comment on compulsory helmet use), a cracking dive downhill to follow ...

This place is superb on a clear day, hot or cold, but also terrific with some low cloud and mist swirling around. I find it extra-special at night too.

Of course, you should also go there on a Sunday – the only thing that is better than few cars is no cars at all.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_32

Favourite Place: 'Hole in the Wall', between Abden House and Pollock Halls, University of Edinburgh (from the little circle in front of Abden House itself, go up a slightly uphill path towards the wall)

Why it's a favourite: The best places to be on a bike are those you can't get to in a car. Better still if it feels a little secret (it ain't on my Spokes map).

This cunning cut-through allows me to get from my house in Priestfield up to the city or Holyrood Park without going out on to Dalkeith Road. From my place, you can cruise through the quiet streets in to the leafy grounds of Abden House. The University Pollock Halls campus is also quiet and provides a nice pedal through the trees.

The hole itself is actually a stone archway which has a door that is never closed. For me, it's a quiet little haven close to home. On the way downhill (from the university), riding through the hole is largely blind and you have the feeling of passing through a portal into another world.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_33

Favourite Place: Path just west of Aberlady – see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_34

Favourite Place: Balfour Monument, E Lothian - see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_35

Favourite Place: Biel Mill A1 underpass , East Lothian – see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_36

Favourite Place: View opening up as you round Arthur's Seat – see pdf

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_37

Favourite Place: Holyrood Park, in all weathers

Why it's a favourite: I'm lucky enough to cycle through my favourite place nearly every day.

As a cyclist one is always more aware of the weather than when using an enclosed form of transport and it's an even more intense weather experience than walking. The contrast between a gale force westerly pushing me home against my will as I try to cycle into the wind and the balm of an early Sunday morning in May (traffic free) is part of the delight of Holyrood Park.

The sight of several hundred black-headed gulls all defiantly facing into a freezing wind is thrilling. They spread out over the bright grass, perfectly spaced and absolutely aligned.

But on a quiet moonlit August night, in a gap between passing headlights, you could be anywhere in the world, as the bulk of the Whinny Hill blacks out the stars and the silhouette of St Anthony's Chapel makes a theatrical appearance, and the distant sounds of Festival music and laughter follow faintly on the breeze. Sometimes a fox slides across the road on its way to visit the bins by the nearby tenements.

A leisurely ride allows time to count the swans on St Margaret's Loch (sometimes more than 60) and to check whether the brambles are ripe. The first elm tree on the north after the palace stands sentinel, guarding the line. We have a series of beautiful photos of this tree in our house, taken over the course of one year and a constant reminder of the jewel that is Holyrood Park.

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_38

Favourite Place: the Union Canal

Why it's a favourite: I live by Lochrin Basin, and the Union Canal is my favourite place to ride. I love...

- The peace I sense immediately on leaving busy Fountainbridge behind
- The solar cats eyes, glowing white, green and red
- Seeing parents cheer on footballers in the sports fields playing in the evening light
- Watching youngsters in canoes playing canoe polo
- Seeing the dedication and teamwork, commitment and hard work of the rowers
- The milestones marking the distance
- The frisson of excitement cycling under the narrow bridges on the wet cobbles, not knowing if you're going to meet someone and end up in the water!
- Hearing the ringing of bike bells when approaching bridges
- The speed bumps where the gate hasn't been placed in the middle of them
- Seeing the swans sitting on huge, sprawling nests on the far bank
- The awe-inspiring aqueducts from which you can watch water flowing far below, or cars careering along oblivious to the joy above
- The cheery houseboats and the dreams they hold and inspire
- Watching toddlers and grandparents feeding the ducks
- The reflections when the water is still
- Experiencing it in the changing seasons
- The fact that where I used to have to turn back because of a wall, roads have been re-engineered and bridges have been built so I can pedal on and on....
- That it could take me to Glasgow and the Atlantic beyond...

Spokes Competition 2012 – My Favourite Place - Entry Comp2012_39

Favourite Place: The Esplanade between Silverknowes and Cramond

Why it's a favourite: The esplanade is the joyous culmination of an exhilarating downhill swoop towards the Forth – you've been looking forward to its panoramic views and that immediate sense of relief as you arrive. Shake off your anxieties, breathe deeply and savour the sea air as you ride along the generously proportioned esplanade – you've made it to a little piece of cycling heaven.

What's that you hear? No longer the noise of traffic but the haunting call of the curlew, the cry of the oystercatcher and the shrill of the tern – balm to the soul. On fine weekends nature's voice intermingles with the laughter of children as they learn to ride bikes or scooter along, red-cheeked and excited in the fresh air. Their excitement can be infectious, and why not? This is a place with prospects - a beach (and a carved stone fish), the 'shall I/shan't I?' possibility of exploring to Cramond Island at low tide, the charm of the old whitewashed village houses with their picturesque outlook onto the boats at the mouth of the River Almond.

Perhaps it's the open space that eases tension and lifts the spirits – tempting you to feel carefree, ride along with hands off handlebars like those two-wheeled deities of the Tour de France. There's certainly plenty of space to try it out. Once you've got your balance, look again and enjoy that sunset over the water, cruise to a halt to watch the birds probing the sandbanks as they emerge to form shifting patterns with the tides.

But it's turning chilly now – time to try your own personal time trial, Cramond to Silverknowes in how many seconds? As you crouch to reduce your air resistance (never mind the flapping pannier with the remains of your picnic in it) you might consider your onward options. Which way next? A spin along further along the coast, or test those muscles on an energetic hill ride to the nearest national cycle route. Or perhaps just stop and take a last long look at those views – the distant hills to the North, the play of light on water, the stands of trees along the shore. Store the memory to keep you going until your next visit. You know you'll be back.

END OF ENTRIES
