

# Spokes competition 2015, Entry 16

## Home from Armadale

**2. Who is it suitable for?** [it doesn't need to suit everyone] *circle all that apply...*

Families with young children / Experienced cyclists / Novice cyclists / Other – specify...

**3. Where is the route located?** *circle all that apply ...*

Ed central / Ed north / Ed south / Ed east / Ed west / ~~East Lothian~~ / ~~Midlothian~~ / West Lothian

**4. Brief description of route**

a. Start point... Waverley, Haymarket or Edinburgh Park Station

b. End point (or circular)... Fountainbridge

c. Brief description... Take a Helensburgh-bound train to Armadale station, if you travel off peak there's usually ample bike capacity. From Armadale station, follow the signs for National Cycle Route 75 east towards Edinburgh, which is clearly marked the whole way (although you might want the Spokes West Lothian Map to see where you're going). It's pretty much all traffic-free and on smooth tarmac, and when it does go on roads it's only for a very short time and the roads are quiet. You do need to push your bike up some steep steps on the approach to Almondell, but they aren't very long. When you get to Almondell Country Park you can either continue to follow the NCN 75 signs to Kirknewton (the busiest part of the ride), along the Long Dalmahoy Road, up the **steep** hill to Balerno and then down the Water of Leith path back to the Union Canal at Craiglockhart and thence to Fountainbridge or, if you want a largely traffic-free route you can follow the signs out of Almondell a short distance along quiet roads to NCN route 754, which follows the Union Canal all the way to Edinburgh via Ratho.

If you go along the canal, then a few of the miles along the canal are on an unsealed towpath, whereas if you go via Kirknewton and Balerno, the Water of Leith path is unsealed from Balerno to Craiglockhart. Both are more comfortable if your bike has fatter tyres, but you don't need a mountain bike.

Total distance about 26 miles either way.

**5. Any interesting / useful / beautiful features / facilities en route ...**

Bathgate Tesco (which you pass right by) has good bike parking, Costa Coffee and toilets. You pass a pub in Livingston Village. Almondell Country Park has toilets and a shop selling ice cream, biscuits and hot and cold drinks. For the younger cyclist, there's an excellent zip wire in the park in Midcalder.

In Almondell Country Park there's a weird wooden bridge thing to ride through, a sewage works to sniff and you get to ride across an aqueduct with water gurgling under your feet. If you follow the canal from Almondell, you'll cross the aqueduct over the Almond valley, and go past the Bridge Inn in Ratho. If you follow NCN 75, you go across the level crossing in Kirknewton, and with luck you'll see a train.

Both rides have great open views from Armadale, spend a lot of time in pleasant woods with lots of rabbits to spot and pass very close behind the Pyramids you see from the M8.

**6. Why is this a favourite route of yours? [This question is very important in the judging. You can just write one or two sentences or up to 300 words maximum].**

I like this route because it's a pleasant journey that gets a good point-to-point ride and doesn't need a car. You often get a following wind, which blows you along the wonderful smooth tarmac on the cycle path to Bathgate, and overall the route descends from Armadale, so you spend plenty of time coasting. You'll be thinking that it goes through lots of grim bits of West Lothian (which is how it looks from the map), but it doesn't feel like that at all: the first part of the ride is through open country with huge views to the south and east, and then it's through woodlands and parks before the decision point at Almondell, where you can choose to be traffic-free pretty much all the way home if you want. Overall the NCN route feels well-planned and pretty direct. There are toilets and shops at strategic intervals, so you should never be caught short! Above all, though, I have fond memories of it because it's the route where my 10-year old daughter suddenly realised that she could ride a proper long way on her bike, and it gave her the confidence to start venturing much further afield.