

We have been living in Pilrig, on the boundary between Edinburgh and Leith, for 35 years, during which time there has been great change in the local urban fabric. This has mainly been the replacement of industrial or derelict land-use by housing development, a process which I’ve always found interesting... despite occasional disappointment at its architectural merit. Now, in 2025, my main area of interest has shifted to more northern parts of Leith, where many former industrial areas are currently going through this development process.

This **favourite ride** combines my monitoring of several new development areas with a small element of utility, my interest in wildlife, and pleasant, largely stress-free exercise where there’s almost always something new to see.

From my house it’s a short ride north to *Newhaven*, where I sometimes use the glass recycling beside the old *Fishmarket* building or pay a quick visit to *Asda (Leith)* followed by a brief detour round their car park to a great viewpoint over *Western Harbour*... is there a new ship visitor today?

The area west of *Asda* is now almost all filled in with new housing. I loop through here round the side of the new *Newhaven Primary School* to *Western Harbour Drive*, a quiet tree-lined road bordering tower blocks of apartments. At the far end of this development is an as-yet-undeveloped site called *Western Harbour Ponds* where there’s always some birdlife to be spotted – swans, herons, ducks and moorhens – (although the ponds have recently almost dried out due to dry weather). From the point there’s a great view over the entrance locks, the Forth estuary and *Inchkeith*. (1)

Returning SW along the seafront walkway there’s a view of the distant Forth bridges and, in the summer season, cruise liner tenders shuttling tourists. The path ends at *Newhaven Harbour* beside the historic cast-iron lighthouse. (2) I turn east here, pass the old *Fishmarket* (3) and retrace along *Sandpiper Rd* to *Melrose Dr*, passing *Asda*, the ADM flour mills and, to the right, the high concrete retaining wall beside the Tram terminus which often features some high-quality street art – much too good to dismiss as mere graffiti.

My route then rejoins *Melrose Dr* and follows the Tram line past the *Cruise Liner Terminal*, with a view to the left of *Britannia* and any other ship visitors before rounding *Ocean Terminal* onto *Ocean Drive*. The whole N.E. end of the O.T. building has recently been demolished, opening up a closer view of *Britannia*. I usually continue to the walkway edge of the dock to see what shipping might be in harbour that day, then retrace to *Ocean Drive*, where I cross to the south side dual-use footway to avoid the on-road tram-line hazards.

The area between *Ocean Terminal* and *Victoria Quay* has only very recently been filled in with a mixture of new housing types, and *Geissler Dr* now connects through them, so that’s an occasional detour from my direct route. On the north side of *Ocean Drive*, directly opposite, there’s another very recent development of four 10- and 12-storey apartment blocks directly fronting the water, with only some minor landscaping works still to be completed (Sept ‘25). (4)

This is a good spot to see eider ducks, who seem to like sitting on the wooden floating boom that prevents river debris escaping into the dock. At the east end of *Victoria Dock* I turn right, wind through on *Rennie’s Isle* and then cross the newly-refurbished wooden deck of the *Victoria Swing Bridge* (5) emerging opposite *Fingal*, the floating

hotel ship. Here I cross the tram-lines to the north side before detouring through the internal spine of *Stevedore Place*, (6) a very pleasant, well thought-out 3-storey housing development fronting onto both *Albert Dock* and the *Port of Leith* tram stop... fine if you like constant bell ringing!

The next building to the east is a now-defunct casino that adjoins three barely-preserved historic dockside cranes. (7) I usually do several laps of the empty car-park here just for fun. Here also the access roads for future development have already been laid in and the building work is rapidly catching up. Looking across to the east, the final blocks on the site of the former *Leith Glassworks* are now rising. (8)

My route continues south on *Constitution St*, passing on the left yet another new development, this time on the site of a former Dalton’s scrapyard. I turn left on *Baltic St* and continue with the traffic along *Salamander St* past the fronts of the recently completed housing blocks (9) to *Bath Rd* where I make a left and then go left again into *Margaret Thomson Cres* (not a curve in sight!) to make a complete circuit – again, just for fun.

I then retrace along *Salamander St*, turn right at the lights into *Salamander Pl* and I’m then in an area of new housing where the road names reflect the shipping connections of the industries that once flourished there – *Sailmaker*, *Rope-maker* and *Chandler*. *Pillans Walk* then leads into the whole *Ropeworks* housing development, a pleasant mixture of housing types, mostly low-rise, wrapped around a bowling club and having a wide green space in the centre and several pedestrian/cycle access points to *Leith Links*. (10)

I usually exit at the easternmost point and join the path that leads east to the ramp up to the walkway bridge crossing *Seafield Place*. I’m now on the route of the former railway spur that branched off the Caledonian Railway *Seafield* line specifically to service the former ropeworks and other industries in this area and terminated at *South Leith Goods* station, long since disappeared.

The walkway climbs gently through trees, far above the unpleasantly busy *Seafield Rd*, passing *Seafield Crematorium and Cemetery* on the right, before descending again to an access point near the site of the former *Eastern General Hospital* (now housing) which offers the option of continuing off-road to *Seafield* and *Portobello*. The main path curves round to the south and then swings west, going past *Restalrig allotments* and under *Restalrig Rd* – a likely stretch to spot wildlife, maybe even a fox if it’s early enough in the morning. After *Lochend Rd* there’s a snaky access ramp on the steep grassy bank to *Hawkhill Ave*. (11) This gives the option of crossing to *Lochend Park* with its doocot, loch, waterfowl and slightly creepy semi-submerged trees.

The path continues north past the grounds of *Leith Academy* before emerging near the foot of *Easter Rd*. I turn right here and then go left on *Duke St*, continuing on *Gt Junction St* (currently keeping an eye on the works for the new cycle link to *Ocean Terminal*) to *Bonnington Rd*. Heading west here takes me past yet another newly-completed housing development (12) between *Bonnington Rd* and the *Water of Leith* formerly occupied by a John Lewis Depot, a process which I was interested to watch as it grew. This brings me back to *Bonnington Toll*, *Pilrig St* and home.

**This ride has plenty of items of interest, old and new, and rarely disappoints... but then I would say that, wouldn’t I?**