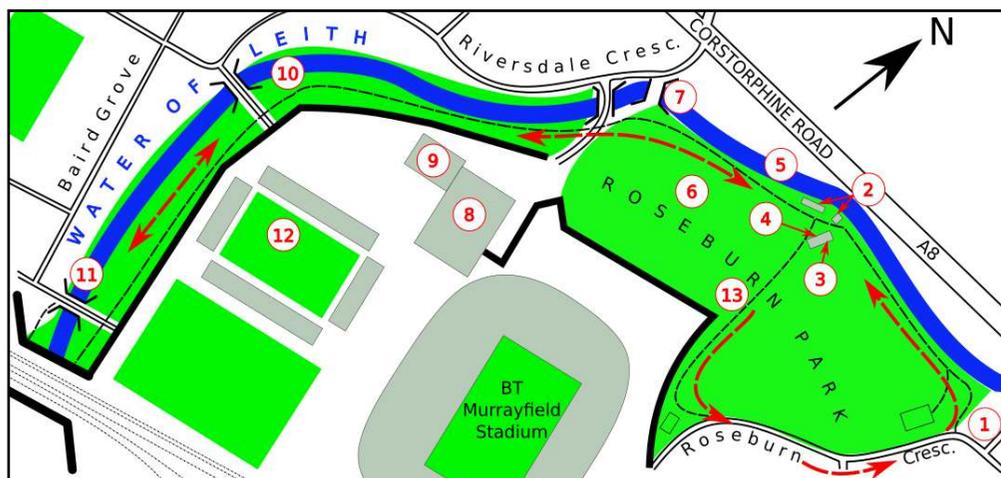


## Roseburn Park Guided Walk

Time: 35- 40 minutes



Hamish Ross

**Roseburn Park** was once marshland. In the 18th century it was part of an overground sewage system, the "[Irrigated Meadows](#)" where sewage fertilised the land and the grass crops were sold to local dairy farmers. In the 19th century sewers went underground. The area began to be drained in the 1850s and was filled in and levelled in 1891. The grounds were used as a polo ground and for golf.

The Park is on the banks of the **Water of Leith** which flows for 24 miles from the **Pentland Hills** to the **Port of Leith**. Heavily used by mills and other industries as well as for sewage discharge, it was once highly polluted, but now is clean and harbours wildlife— 80 species of birds including herons, ducks, swans and kingfishers. Otters are frequently seen. The **Water of Leith Walkway** runs at the edge of the park in its 13 mile journey from **Balerno** to **Leith**. ([www.waterofleith.org.uk](http://www.waterofleith.org.uk))

In 1922 the **Scottish Rugby Union** bought 19 acres of polo ground and built **Murrayfield Stadium**, which dominates the park. It opened in March 1925, with Scotland playing England (score 14-11 to Scotland). The Stadium was rebuilt in 1994. As well as being the home for international rugby it puts on big-name rock concerts. It holds 67,000 spectators.

**1 Entrance to Park, Roseburn Crescent** The walk starts at the ramp. Look over the railings and you may see a heron or goosanders. To the left is the new playpark. Continue along the shared walking/cycling path until you reach a T-junction.

**2** On the right is the old toilet block, earmarked for conversion. and the **Cricket Pavilion** (1935). The [Murrayfield Dafs Cricket Club](#) plays in Roseburn Park, where it settled after World War Two. It was founded in 1909 and has merged with other clubs. It currently fields three teams in the **East of Scotland** Saturday senior Leagues and a Sunday team in

the **Development League** which allows youngsters from the club's junior section to transition from junior to adult cricket. It has its own practice facilities in the park where there is a grass square and a separate artificial wicket.

Over the past 10 years, the club has invested heavily in its junior section thanks initially to a huge amount of work by **Ian Shiels**, who sadly passed away in 2018. He is commemorated by a bench overlooking the grass square.

**3 Civil Defence Building** The low building at the left was once an Air Raid Precautions Control Centre during World War II. It is bombproof and was placed under trees for camouflage. After an air raid the Wardens sent messages to various control points, stating casualties, whether the bombs were incendiary and the like. Telephones were frequently out of order and they used bicycle messengers, boy and girl volunteers aged from 15 to 18, who supplied their own bicycles.

The building was used in a 1942 documentary about civil defence (viewable [here](#)). It is now a store for the **Friends of Roseburn Park** (FORP) and the local cricket and rugby clubs. It is the only building of its kind left in Scotland and is B listed.

National Lib. of Scotland



**4 Murals** North wall - **Friends of Roseburn Park**, showing park activities (2011); West wall - **The Message Must Get Through** (2019) with a warden and a bicycle messenger against a backdrop of Edinburgh; South Wall - **Tree Shadows**. (2019) The corrugated profile haunching shows where the lean-to bicycle shed stood.

**5 Carved seat** Continue by the river and on the right is a seat carved out of an ash tree by Andy McFeters, commissioned by Friends of Roseburn Park. It commemorates the 30 trees removed for the flood defences.

**6.** The rugby pitch to your left is played on by the [Murrayfield Wanderers Football Club](#), founded in 1868. In 1873 they joined the Scottish Football Union which became the **Scottish Rugby Union** in 1924. Based from 1875 at the Grange cricket-field off Raeburn Place, they eventually moved to Murrayfield in 1928.

In 1975 they were the first team in Scotland to start up Mini Rugby with an annual tournament for under-12s. A Ladies' section was formed in 1995, which has become the dominant female side in Scotland.

They merged in 1997 with the **Murrayfield Rugby Club**, developing a weekly Touch Section and creating in 2007 the **Murrayfield Wanderers Rugby Trust Foundation** aiming through rugby to enhance life opportunities, wellbeing and healthy living for local young people. In 2018 the Scottish Rugby Union terminated Wanderers' 116-year tenure, and



Rosie Bell

the Club "wandered" to base itself at Roseburn Park.

**7 Riversdale Crescent Bridge** From the pedestrian bridge look upstream. The little island between this bridge and the vehicles bridge is a haven for waterfowl. The big golden building to the north is the Chinese Consulate.

**8 Murrayfield Ice Rink** On your left is the **Murrayfield Ice Rink**, a Category B listed building. It was designed in the art deco style by architects J B Dunn and G L Martin 1938-39. In Britain 27 ice rinks are known to have been built between 1927-39 with only four surviving to the present day. As well as acting as a venue for public skating, it has put on ice shows, ice hockey, curling, and other events eg the Commonwealth Games closing ceremony and the Harlem Globetrotters.

**9** The big grey building adjacent is the **Curling** rink belonging to the **Edinburgh Curling Club**. It is a 7-sheet rink, opening in 1980 effectively as a replacement for a rink at Haymarket (opened around 1912 and closing 1978). Many of the historic Haymarket competitions are played here, such as the **Swan Trophy** (believed to be the oldest continuously sponsored curling competition in the world) and the **Edinburgh International**, which started life as the "World's Championship" at Haymarket in 1922.

[The sport of curling](#) began in Scotland in the 16th century, with the earliest known curling stone dated 1511 and the earliest written evidence dating to 1540. The formation of the Royal Caledonian Curling Club in 1838 regulated the rules and raised the sport's popularity. In Edinburgh in the late 19th and early 20th century there is evidence of play in more than 50 locations within the city, on natural ponds, artificial ponds or cement or tarmac rinks. The first indoor ice rink was opened in 1912.

**10 Flood defences** Continue along upstream and note the flood defences (completed January 2018) built after a serious flood in April 2000 when the [river broke its banks](#). Many people were evacuated and houses in the surrounding area were seriously damaged.



The defences were built over a distance of 1.2 km along both sides of the Water of Leith to provide a 1 in 200 year stand-

ard of protection. Works included top-of-bank, reinforced concrete piled retaining walls, which incorporate embedded steel sheet pile foundations that further reduce flood risk by controlling seepage during long duration storm events. 4 bridges across the river were demolished and replaced with 2 new road bridges and by provision of an overflow channel to provide additional storage capacity, as well as installing floodgates on the bridges.

On this stretch there is a wide flood plain, on which the river overflows when in spate. In spring and summer the bank is bright with wild flowers. The **Pentland Hills** are to the south west— the different tops of Caerketton, Allermuir, Capelaw, Harbour, Bell's, and Black.

You are approaching the tram bridge (2014) and the railway bridge on the Edinburgh to Glasgow mainline, first constructed in 1842 and with a second pair of tracks added after the Forth Bridge opened in 1890.

**11** The final point is the new **Baird Drive Bridge**. Crossing this, you could continue along the river to the fine gardens of **Saughton Park** and as far as **Balerno** (7 miles) however for this walk you turn around and retrace your steps.

**12 [Edinburgh Rugby Club](#)** is based in the stadium (completed Feb 2021) to your right. The £5.7 million ground holds around 7,800 supporters. It is the team's first permanent home.

Kicking off as a trial for the Scotland national team and drawing from fledgling clubs around the city, Edinburgh's first game was held in 1872. "Intercity" games became popular as a talent finder and a crowd draw. The club also played internationals, combining with Glasgow against New Zealand in 1935 and South Africa in 1960. Other internationals were against Fiji, Australia, Romania, Japan and Western Samoa. Rugby greats have included **Bruce Hay** and **Andy Irvine**.

In 1996, Edinburgh entered the professional era as **Edinburgh Rugby** to compete in the European Cup (now Heineken Champions Cup). After two seasons, they merged with the Border Reivers to form **Edin-**

**burgh Reivers**. In 1998/99 the side played in the European Cup, Tri-Series and WRU Challenge Trophy. Following the reduction of Scotland's professional structure to two sides, the club reverted to its earlier name of **Edinburgh Rugby**. The team reached the inaugural Celtic Cup final in 2003, the semi-final of the Heineken Cup in 2011/2012, the European Challenge Cup Final in 2014/2015 and the Final Series of the Guinness PRO14, which secured their return to the Heineken Champions Cup for the 2018/19 campaign.

To your left, on the other side of the river is the suburb of **Saughtonhall**, which was built from 1900-1930. **Corstorphine Hill** rises above all. Walk further along and to your right you can see the domes of **Donaldson School**, the spires of **St Mary's Cathedral**, **Edinburgh Castle** and **Arthur's Seat**.

**13 [Dalry Mills/Murrayfield Mills](#)** Back at the T junction take the path to the right through an avenue of trees, mostly ash and lime and some about 200 years old, up the embankment, which was built as part of the flood defences.

You are tracing the line of the relief-lades to the **Water of Leith** from **Dalry Mills**, the first paper mill in Scotland dating from 1590. A lade came from the Water of Leith via **Gorgie Mills** upstream to drive the water wheel.

The engineer **John Smeaton** advised on renovations for the mill wheels in 1771. By this time the mill was grinding oatmeal, flour and snuff. **John Smeaton** (1724-1792), who constructed the **Forth and Clyde** canal among many other projects, was a founder of the civil engineering profession. He is commemorated in Westminster Abbey with a memorial and in stained glass along with Robert and George Stephenson, James Watt and Thomas Telford. In 1876 the mill won a medal at the first World Fair in the USA for its oatmeal. The mill was working until the 20th century but is now demolished.



A water-driven paper mill

At the other side of the embankment, beyond the old playground, you can see the gap between the stadium grounds and the houses where the relief-lade ran from **Dalry Mills** to the **Water of Leith**.

You now go over another ramp and you are back in **Roseburn Crescent**. Turn left to return to the start of the walk.