

THE DUNS SUNDIAL TRAIL

A day out in the Scottish Borders

Dennis Cowan



Introduction

This sundial trail is in the Scottish Borders and is situated south-east of Edinburgh and west of Berwick upon Tweed. It is probably most easily accessed from the A1, the main trunk road between Edinburgh and Berwick.

It is centred on Duns which has been chosen as the starting point, as it is the largest town in the area and it lies in the centre of the trail. However you may prefer to start from Chirnside, in which case with reference to the large scale map (from Google Maps) on page 10, the trail should be completed in part reverse order as follows: 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 8, 9, 10.

On this trail there are two market crosses each with a sundial, one sundial on a house and seven churches with nine sundials, one of which is described as “remarkable”. However, these lovely old churches are well worth seeing regardless of the sundials, and it makes for a fantastic day out in the Scottish Borders.

The trail itself is about 46 miles long and will take about two hours by car not including stoppage time, but it is possible

to split it into two by cutting it short after Chirnside and returning to Duns. The second part of the trail could then be completed the following day from Duns if required.

You will probably have to allow around two hours for stoppage time looking at the sundials and more if meals and / or refreshments are taken. If travelling to and from Edinburgh, you will have to allow a full day. The journey time from Edinburgh to Duns by car is just over one hour by the fastest route via the A1, traffic permitting. The journey time from Berwick-upon-Tweed to Duns is around half an hour.

Because of the distances involved, this trail can only be completed by car and it should be noted that much of the journey is on narrow single track country roads. Having said that, you will be taken off the beaten track and you will journey to some places that not many people, other than the locals, will have been before you.

The table on page 11 gives the grid references for each of the locations as well as the cumulative times and distances involved.



The small scale map (Google Maps) above, identifies the general location of this sundial trail in relation to Edinburgh and Berwick upon Tweed. A large scale map is included on page 10, where there is also a link to Google Maps where the map can be viewed in much larger (or smaller) scales. If you are familiar with the use of the yellow figure icon in Google Maps, you can click and drag it on to the map and actually view the location of the sundials or other locations on the route. If using this facility, it is best to enlarge the map as much as possible to ensure that you place the icon in the correct position. It should be noted that you may have to move the icon up or down the road a little for the best view. It comes with practice!

Start the trail at South Street at the Market Square in the town centre of Duns, where the first sundial will be seen on the market cross.

No 1 on Map – The cube sundial will be seen on the top of the Market Cross or Mercat Cross as they are known in Scotland. There are two dial faces – south and west facing, but they appear to be 90 degrees out. Both gnomons are missing, but their holes can be clearly seen. No hour lines or numerals are visible however.

The Mercat Cross was first erected in 1792 and removed in 1816 from Market Square to make way for the new Town Hall. It was erected in a public park, but was returned to its rightful place opposite Market Square in 1993.



Duns Mercat Cross

With your back to the mercat cross and facing the Market Square, drive south-west (left) along South Street and Langtongate until you reach the “T” junction with the A6105. Turn left and continue for around four miles until you see the signpost for Polwarth. Turn left following the direction indicated by the sign. When you see the red telephone box, keep to the left. This is a narrow single track road, so take care. Take the second minor road to the right and Polwarth Church will be found atop a mound a short distance on your left.

No 2 on Map – Polwarth Church is a fine building and the two faced stone sundial will be seen high on the south-west corner of the tower. The gnomons have not survived, but little stubs remain in place. The south facing dial has Arabic numerals from 6am to 5pm.



Polwarth Church sundial



Polwarth Church

A plaque above one of the old original doors on the south wall of the church tells us that the south facing dial has the motto “Bene perecta lucrata hora” whilst the west facing dial has the translation “The hour is gained that well you spend”. The church itself was virtually rebuilt in 1703, but still retains parts of the earlier buildings. It closed for worship in 2004, but architecturally and historically, it is regarded as one of the finest buildings in Scotland.

Return down the minor road and turn right at the “T” junction. Continue to take care on this single track road. When you see the sign for the Sue Ryder Care Centre, Marchmont do not follow this sign, but turn left instead. Follow this meandering road to the crossroads where you should turn left. Take the next road on your right. Then take the next left signposted to Fogo which will be reached in one mile. Fogo Church is situated at the far end of the hamlet set back from the road on your left.

No 3 on Map – Fogo Church is a wonderful place in a peaceful and idyllic spot and it will be reached after walking through the Lych Gate, which also doubles as the war memorial. There are two sundials on this church. The first one is on the apex of the south gable which was added in 1755 when the church was predominately rebuilt, so the sundial probably dates from then. It is a cube dial, but it is unclear as to how many faces had dials, although the stub of a gnomon can be seen on the south face.

The second dial is a classic and is one of only four such dials that appear still to exist. It is similar to those at Seton Palace and Oldhamstocks and Cockburnspath churches, and which are described by Thomas Ross in the “Castellated and Domestic Architecture



of Scotland” as “remarkable”. However he was not aware of this example at Fogo. It is situated adjacent to the external staircase on the original south west corner of the church. It is a badly eroded semi cylindrical inclining dial with a triangular dial on its west face, and possibly dates from around 1570. There are no visible markings.



Inclining sundial at Fogo Church

Continue along the single track road, again taking care, until the B6460 is reached where you should turn left. After half a mile turn right on to the A6112 until Swinton, where the A6112 turns left on to Main Street. After two hundred yards you will see the Wheatsheaf Hotel on your left and the village green on your right.

No 4 on Map – On the Green you will see Swinton’s Mercat Cross on the top of which is a cube dial. There are dial faces on the south, east and west faces whilst the north face has Swinton’s coat of arms comprising of two boars.



Swinton Mercat Cross

Roman numerals are just visible on two faces but they are all rather worn and the hour lines are vague. The Mercat Cross is also known as the Twelfth Man of Swinton as the village green also doubles as the football pitch.

Continue for 100 yards to 43 Main Street on your left.

No 5 on Map – You will see a cube with two dial faces on the front of the house. The east facing dial has hour lines for 4am to 2pm whilst the south facing dial has 10am to 8pm. Both the hour lines and numerals have been crudely painted over in white. Both solid metal gnomons are intact.



Sundial at 43 Main St. Swinton

Continue on the A6112 for around 200 yards and when the main road turns sharply right, continue straight on to the B6461 and Swinton Church will be seen almost immediately on your left.

No 6 on Map – There are two sundials on this church at Swinton which was built in 1729 on the site of the old church.



Swinton Church sundial

The first takes the form of a triangular memorial on the porch of the church. It has a solid gnomon with a star above and has Roman numerals from 6am to 4pm. Around the three sides of the triangular sundial, it reads “To the glory of God and in loving memory of Oswald and Mary Brewis of Little Swinton” whilst the rectangular plaque in the form of an open book underneath

has an inscription which reads “While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest shall not cease.”



Swinton Church sundial

The second sundial is a cube with dials on the south and west faces and is situated on a skewput on the south-west corner of the church. The gnomons have not survived, but the stubs remain. Numerals and lines are no longer visible. This sundial is probably contemporary with the church.

Continue on the B6461 and at the first crossroads turn left on to the B6437 signposted to Whitsome. Continue on this road through Whitsome and on to Chirnside. Cross over the A6105 on to Kirkgate and Chirnside Church will be seen on your right after 50 yards.

No 7 on Map – Jim Clark, the famous Formulae One racing driver is buried in the graveyard behind this church. The



Chirnside Church

Chirnside Church sundial



badly eroded two faced cube sundial is set in an ogee arched niche in the south-west corner of this church. It was originally mounted on a skewput, but would have been moved to its present position in the early 20th century when the tower was added. The sundial is dated 1816, but it is thought to be much earlier. Neither the date nor the motto of "Hoc age dum Lumen adest" is now readable. It has Roman numerals but the hour lines are no longer visible. The gnomons are missing, apart from stubs, but would have emerged from sun like motifs.

Turn round and continue back to the junction with the A6105. Turn right and drive towards Duns. If you wish to end your trip here, carry on the A6105 to return to Duns. Otherwise after half a mile, take the B6355 on your right and continue on the B6355 passing through Preston. About two miles after Preston take the minor road on your right signposted Abbey St Bathans. This is another single track road so take care. Abbey St Bathans Church will be seen on your right after about three miles.

No 8 on Map - A three faced stone dial mounted on a corbel is situated to the right of the south elevation of this 17th century church at Abbey St Bathans. Gnomons have not survived but stubs remain. Hour lines can be seen but the numerals are no longer visible. The south dial face is starting to flake.

Abbey St Bathans was originally a priory of Cistercian nuns. However, the original location of the monastic accommodation is unknown today.

Return back along the single track road to the B6355 and turn right. After about two miles where a red telephone box can be seen on your right, turn left down a single track road signposted to Longformacus. Drive along this single track road for three miles until Longformacus is reached. Turn right and Longformacus Church is situated up a leafy lane about 200 yards further on, on your right.

No 9 on Map - A three faced stone cube dial in reasonable condition is situated



Abbey St Bathans Church sundial



Longformacus Church sundial

on a corbel beneath a skewput on the south elevation of this 1730 church. The solid gnomons are intact, but moss is starting to encroach on the dial faces. There are Roman numerals on all faces, but are partly covered by the moss.

Turn round and drive back along the single track road to the B6355 and the red telephone box, and turn left. Cranshaws Church will be seen across the fields in about four miles on your right.



The left hand face of the Cranshaws Church sundial

No 10 on Map - A carved grotesque figure said to represent "Time" supports this three faced cube dial on the south west corner of the church. The left hand face is partly missing. The two remaining gnomons are replacements but are only just surviving. It is inscribed "Mr JC 1731" on the central face which has Arabic numerals from 10am to 8pm. It has an unusual noon mark. The dial is older than the church which dates from 1899, so it was possibly taken from an earlier church which was on the site, but which no longer exists.

There are several options at this point. If returning to Duns, then retrace your steps back along the B6355 and as Preston is reached, turn right (south) on to the A6112 back to Duns. However, if going to Berwick or heading south, then return on the B6355 to Chirnside and take the A6105 to Berwick and the A1.

If heading to Edinburgh or the north, then again retrace your steps back along the B6355, but take the A6112 north (left) at Preston to the A1.

However, as an alternative, continue on the B6355 from Cranshaws north-west to Gifford, where you should take the B6369 towards Haddington and eventually to the A1.



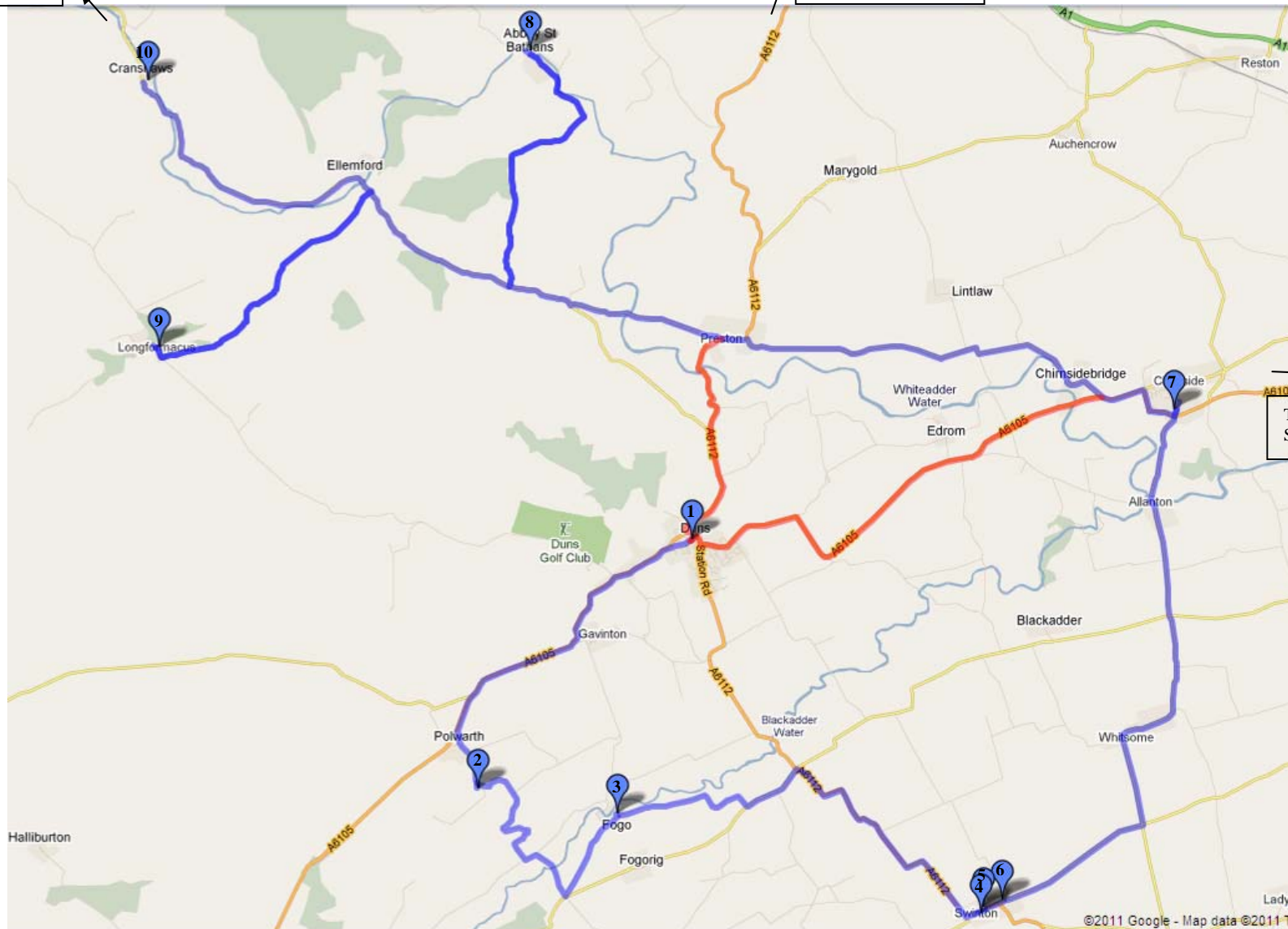
The central face of the Cranshaws Church sundial

These roads pass through the Lammermuir hills and are a wonderful drive. They are minor roads however and are much slower than the A1. The choice is yours.

To Edinburgh and
the North via Gifford

To Edinburgh and the
North via the A1

To Berwick and the
South via the A1



<http://maps.google.co.uk/maps/ms?hl=en&ie=UTF8&msa=0&msid=215463598107297255369.00049fc87b05df6f00d49&z=12>

Map Ref.	Location	Grid Reference	Cum Distance in miles	Cum Time in hours:mins
1	Duns Market Square – Mercat Cross	NT 78552 53883	.0	0:0
2	Polwarth Church	NT 74995 49492	4.2	0:10
3	Fogo Church	NT 77251 49169	7.6	0:20
4	Swinton Mercat Cross	NT 83508 47413	12.7	0:35
5	Swinton, 43 Main Street	NT 83575 47483	12.8	0:36
6	Swinton Church	NT 83878 47647	13.0	0:38
7	Chirnside Church	NT 86985 56033	19.6	0:53
8	Abbey St. Bathans Church	NT 75863 62266	30.9	1:18
9	Longformacus Church	NT 69411 57269	39.4	1:38
10	Cranshaws Church	NT 69216 61833	46.0	1:53

For further information on sundials, makers or restorers, or to join the society, see the British Sundial Society's website www.sundialsoc.org.uk.

For further information on Scottish sundials, see www.sundialsofscotland.co.uk.

e-mail dennis@sundialsofscotland.co.uk