

EAST LoTHIAN SUNDIAL TRAIL by Dennis Cowan

East Lothian has over forty miles of magnificent coastline with golden beaches and sand dunes like those at Gullane. There are spectacular cliffs, award winning tourist attractions and the world's finest selection of links golf courses such as the championship course at Muirfield. It's overlooked by many, but it's only minutes away from Edinburgh by car!

East Lothian has something to offer everyone. The castles and churches are steeped in history while the unique venues of the Scottish Seabird Centre allow you to control cameras on the internationally renowned Bass Rock (boat trips too) and the National Museum of Flight offers tours, but not flights, on Concorde! Musselburgh Racecourse hosts around twenty-six race meetings a year and if you visit Glenkinchie Distillery you'll find out everything about Scotland's greatest export, malt whisky.

But East Lothian is less well known, probably not known at all, for the large number of ancient and varied sundials within its boundaries. This sundial trail has been produced to try to redress the balance and perhaps introduce you to something new. In addition to the normal horizontal sundials that everyone recognises, there are obelisk, lectern and facet sundials. There is a sundial with 24 faces and one with 17 faces. There are sundials on corbals and on a market cross. There are single faced sundials on churches, as well as an armillary globe and a heliochronometer.

By going on this trail, you will see some significant and important sundials such as:

- One of the oldest dated sundials in Scotland (1633);
- The second oldest dated lectern sundial in Scotland (1644);
- An obelisk sundial, virtually unique to Scotland;
- A polyhedron sundial with 24 faces, marked with various cities throughout the world;
- One of the most beautiful of all sundials dated 1679 with 17 faces, balanced precariously on a woman's head;
- and more.

Due to the nature of this trail and the lack of suitable public transport, it can only be undertaken by car. The total journey is around 64 miles and will take from 5 to 7 hours depending on how long you take to view each of the sundials, and whether you stop for meals or refreshments on the way. The trail can be shortened by missing out any of the sundials en route and one shorter option is detailed in the text. There are 17 sundials on view in 11 different locations. Nine of these can be easily seen from a public road, whereas 8 are on private ground. Contact details have been given for access where this is necessary. These can be visited or by-passed, but please make every effort to visit them, as they are very special indeed and it would be a pity not to see them.

Binoculars or the zoom facility on your camera would be useful to see some of the details on those sundials which are mounted at height. References to Ross in the text refer to Thomas Ross who wrote "The Ancient Sundials of Scotland" in 1890.

However, even if you have no interest in sundials, this trail is a lovely drive through several picturesque old villages and wonderful scenery, and is well worth taking for that alone. There are even optional detours to visit Glenkinchie Distillery and the National Museum of Flight to visit Concorde.

There are various options for refreshments and meals along the way and these have been indicated in the text.

Grid references and cumulative timings and distances for the trail are as follows – this does not include stops and is for the travelling time only. An indicative map of the trail is shown at the end.

Map Ref.	Location	Grid Reference	Distance in miles	Time in hours:mins
Start	Luca's Olympia Café, Musselburgh	NT 34744 72755	0	0
1	Inveresk Lodge	NT 34895 71776	.6	0:5
2	Inveresk Church	NT 34426 72039	1.0	0:7
3	Carberry House	NT 36320 69642	3.2	0:12
4	Oxenfoord Castle	NT 38848 65538	7.6	0:22
5	Pencaitland Church	NT 44371 69034	14.3	0:32
6	Pencaitland Market Cross	NT 44098 68893	14.4	0:34
7	Garvald Church	NT 59070 70886	25.6	0:54
8	Nunraw House	NT 59744 70542	26.4	1:0
9	Smeatons Garden Centre	NT 59432 78574	36.3	1:25
10	Prestonkirk	NT 59236 77804	37.0	1:28
11	Lennoxlove	NT 51551 72057	44.6	1:45
	Luca's Olympia Café, Musselburgh	NT 34744 72755	63.6	2:15

Start from Musselburgh which is around six miles east from the centre of Edinburgh. The start of the trail in Musselburgh is at Luca's Olympia Cafe at 32 High Street (Grid Ref NT 34744 72755), considered by many to make the best ice cream in Scotland. On many a sunny afternoon and evening (and rainy days too), a queue will extend right out of the shop and down the street. It also has a café where you can have breakfast and other meals and snacks.

From the traffic lights 50 yards from Luca's, turn left and proceed up Newbigging to the "T" junction. Turn right and take first left on to the A6124. Reach Inveresk Lodge (National Trust for Scotland) (NT 34895 71776) in 5 minutes just over half a mile on the right. (There is a £3 admission charge to the gardens, but please don't let that put you off as the 1644 lectern sundial is really worth seeing, as are the gardens.)

This lectern sundial is a star desk type with polar hemi cylinders mounted on a square column. This stands on four balls on a square plinth on top of an octagonal base. This dial was formerly at Pitreavie in Fife and was seen there by Ross. It was moved here sometime in the early 20th century. As far as lectern dials are concerned, it is second



{Image 1}

in age only to the lectern dial at Dundas Castle. It is dated 1644 and bears the initials and arms of Sir Henry Wardlaw. This is a significant sundial. Lectern dials, although not unique to Scotland, are recorded here earlier than anywhere else in the world and this is a fine example.

Next go to Inveresk Church. To go there, turn round and head back towards Musselburgh. After 400 yards, as the road bends sharply to the right, go straight on. Inveresk Church (St Michaels) is 200 yards on the right (NT 34426 72039), and should take less than 2 minutes to reach from Inveresk Lodge.

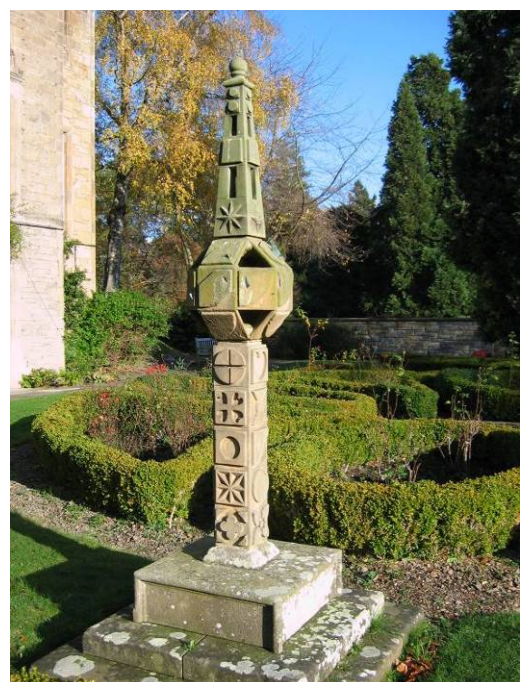


{Image 2}

Two rectangular sundials are mounted either side of the church entrance. Both of these dials were reported in 1890 as lying loosely against the wall of the church, so evidently they have been mounted on the wall at some point since then. The left hand dial is dated 1735 and the other one is of a similar age. They are by Archibald Handasyde, an important sundial maker of the period. The left hand one has the motto

“Sic transit gloria Mundi” as well as “Piscatorii”, the classical name for the village of Fisherrow where Handasyde lived at the time. He also invented the name “Conchi Polensis” for the town of Musselburgh when he lived there. Both dials have rounded moulding on their edges, and both have open, but different style iron gnomons.

Next head for Carberry House. The sundial here is an extremely important dial and should not be missed. There is no problem with access, but it would be wise to make contact first at mail@carberrytower.com or by phoning 0131 665 3135. From Inveresk Church, head back towards Inveresk Lodge, passing it again on your right. Continue on the A6214 and after crossing straight over the first roundabout, the entrance to Carberry House is a short distance on the left. Distance from Inveresk Church is about 2 miles and will take about 5 minutes. Take care when driving up the approach drive as there are a number of large potholes. Park in one of the obvious parking places at the front of the house. Go round the right hand side of the house and the sundial will be seen in the centre of the rose garden. (NT 36320 69642)



{Image 3}

This obelisk sundial is of a type that is virtually unique to Scotland and this is a magnificent example, although it appears that only the capital is original, whilst the shaft and obelisk finial may be early 20th century reproductions. The capital is uniquely pierced right through and the raised plaques on the faces are also quite uncommon. The obelisk too, is pierced. The whole dial is over 7 feet in height.

From here go to Oxenfoord Castle. (NT 38848 65538) This is about 4.5 miles and will take about 10 minutes. This option can be missed out, but there are three different types of sundials here which are all worth seeing. Prior arrangements should be made with the Castle by e-mailing enquiries@oxenfoord.co.uk or by telephoning 01875 320844. From Carberry House, continue south on the A6124 and turn left on to the A68. Travel south on the A68 for about 2 miles. Oxenfoord Castle is on the left hand side of the road, opposite the turn off to Gorebridge. The entrance is on a slight bend and is easily missed. When you see a small white sign to Cranston Church, the entrance is 100 yards past that on the left. If you pass the Stair Arms Hotel on your right, you have gone too far and need to turn round.

There are three types of sundial here, all situated to the left hand side of the castle. Firstly there is a cube dial with dials on three faces sitting on a carved square pedestal on top of a rectangular base. The other face appears to be blank. The ball finial shown in Ross's sketch is missing. There is a bear on each face of the square pedestal - the crest of the Macgills of Cousland from where according to Ross this dial was brought.

Secondly there is an octagonal stone dial broken in part, standing in the centre of the garden on top of a repaired pedestal with swag decoration. Both the hours and lines on this stone dial face are very faint.



{Image 4,a,b,c}

Finally there is a type 2 Pilkington Gibbs Heliochronometer serial number 730, indicating that it was built around 1911 or so. Only around 1,000 of these were made and production stopped around 1914. This type of dial is extremely accurate and takes into account the equation of time.

Leave the Castle and turn right on to the A68 this time heading back towards Musselburgh. Take care when joining the road as it can be busy and the drive is not easily seen from the

road. Take the first road on the right (A6093 – signposted Haddington). Pencaitland will be reached in about 7 miles and will take about 10 minutes. On entering the village, drive through the traffic lights and past the church which will be easily seen on the right as you proceed uphill. Park in the pub (Winton Arms) car park on the right about 100 yards further on. Walk back to the church (NT 44371 69034), stopping for refreshments at the pub first if required.

There are three sundials on this church. You will see the first one high up on the east gable. It is a cube dial with faces on each of the four sides and a fancy ball type



{Image 5}



{Image 6}

finial on top. All of the gnomons are intact. Walk round the church and the stone dial with three faces on the south west buttress will be easily seen. There are no identifiable numerals, but the hour lines on the central dial are very clear. Finally look upwards, and you will see a very worn single faced dial mounted high on the tower. This dial has very faint hour lines and Roman numerals. Parts of the church date from the late 12th and 13th centuries but the tower was built later, in 1631. The bell, dated 1656, is located in the 4th stage of the tower and there is a cockerel weather vane on the roof. It is likely therefore that this dial dates from between 1631 and 1656.



{Image 7}



{Image 8}

Next walk downhill to the left, away from your car. In 200 yards you will see the old market cross with the sundials on top. (NT 44098 68893)

This is an old market cross from about 1699 with well weathered dials on all four sides. A story has been handed down that Pencaitland was one of the last places in Scotland where “[body snatching](#)” was carried out. A party of watchers once caught two body snatchers in the very act and tied one of them to this cross, where he received very rough treatment from an angry crowd, among whom many were women!

Walk back to your car and drive onwards through the village. At the edge of the village turn right on to the B6355 towards Gifford, which is just under 7 miles from Pencaitland. (About 2 miles down this road from Pencaitland, a detour can be taken by turning right on an unclassified road to Glenkinchie Distillery – post code EH34 5ET for satnavs.) Gifford is a lovely village with a number of options for a meal or refreshments. If time is short, the trail can be shortened here by missing out the dials at Garvald, Nunraw, East Linton and Prestonkirk by taking the B6369 towards Haddington. Look out for Lennoxlove on your left just before Haddington to see the last two dials on the trail. Otherwise to continue the trail, continue on the B6355 at Gifford. After one mile, turn left on to the B6370. In less than three miles, turn right on an unclassified road signposted to Garvald. Drive into the village. Just after the road turns sharply right, take the first on the left. The lane to the Garvald and Bara Parish church is signposted and is around 100 yards on the right just as the road turns sharply left. Turn into the lane and park outside the church. (NT 59070 70886.) This is just over 11 miles from Pencaitland and should take about 20 minutes.

The church was built in the 1100s, though the bulk of what is on view dates back to a major rebuild in 1829. The single face square stone sundial dated 1633 (one of the earliest dated sundials in Scotland) is on the wall of the church facing you. It has a solid metal gnomon, Roman numerals from 5am to 5pm and an inscription of “Georg Faa Fecit Anno 1633” (made by George Faa in the year 1633).



{Image 9}

The next sundial is at Nunraw House. (NT 59744 70542) Nunraw is the thriving home of the Cistercian Monks in Scotland. Drive back out of the lane and turn left. At the “T” junction, turn left. Nunraw House will be found a short distance away on the left and will only take a few minutes to reach. Drive through the archway and on to the large red stone house. Park in an available parking space. There is no objection to members of the public walking in the grounds although it would be good manners to go into the Abbey Shop and ask permission. Continue past the shop and in the grass field beyond, the sundial will be seen at the far side.



{Image 10}

At Nunraw House, there is a 24 faced polyhedron sundial marked with various cities throughout the world, although it now lies in two pieces. The upper faceted part of the dial which now lies separate, has hollowed and plain dials, whilst the other part has an octagonal base on a cubic pedestal, all with dials. The small dials include dials for Cairo, Jerusalem, Mount Sinai and Philadelphia amongst others.

Retrace your steps to Garvald and return to the B6370. On reaching the B6370, turn right and follow signs towards Dunbar. Drive for just under 5 miles and take the unclassified road on the left signposted East Linton. If you reach Stenton, you have missed the turning and need to turn round. This is a very scenic road with lovely views to the Bass Rock, Berwick Law and over the Firth of Forth to Fife. In 3 miles turn right towards East Linton, then shortly afterwards turn right again at the “T” junction on to the A199. At the first roundabout, turn left to East Linton. In the centre of East Linton, turn right into Bridge Street, then shortly afterwards turn right into Preston Road. After a short distance, turn left (signposted) into Smeatons Nursery and Garden Centre. Follow the signs to the car park which is a few minutes drive through parkland – but look out for the sheep which wander freely over the road. (NT 59432 78574) This is about 10 miles from Nunraw and should take about 25 minutes.

The armillary sphere sundial sits in the garden and can only be viewed from within the tea room. But if you ask nicely, you may be allowed outside to have a closer look at the globe! However the main attraction here is the lunch or mid afternoon tea stop.



{Image 11}

Return back towards East Linton, turning right on reaching the main road. Prestonkirk can be seen a few yards on the right. Turn into the church car park on the right. (NT 59236 77804)



{Image 12}

Prestonkirk is a plain Georgian church largely dating from 1770, although it lies on a site associated with religious worship since the ancient times. The church has a 13th century chancel. The square bell-tower was added in the early 17th century and the two faces of the sundial mounted on a corbel can be seen high up on the SW corner of the church. The gnomons are still in place on the two faces, but no numerals or lines are visible.

Continue onwards to East Linton and turn left at the “T” junction. At the next “T” junction turn right on to the B1407. This is followed for a short distance until the A199 is reached, where you should turn right. (You pass the access road to the National Museum of Flight on the A199 – look for the signs. EH39 5LF for satnavs.) Continue on the A199 until the first roundabout is reached. Follow the brown signs to Lennoxlove. This involves driving through Haddington. Once off the roundabout, keep straight and do not turn left or right. Lennoxlove is situated on the right hand side of the B6369. Follow the signs to the car park. (NT 51551 72069) Distance from Prestonkirk is just over 7 miles and should take about 15 minutes. There is a tea room here which is currently open on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday from 1pm to 4:30pm during the summer, although the grounds are open to the public

at all times. Go round the house to the left hand side and the first sundial will be seen in front of you.

This is an octagonal metal dial plate sitting on a stone bulbous column with a square top and square base. It was made by David Lyon for latitude 56 degrees which suggests that it was made for this location or somewhere nearby. (Haddington is 55 degrees 57.3 minutes.)



{Image 13}

Leaving the best to last, look through the gap in the hedge and you will see one of the most beautiful of all sundials, in the formal garden east of the house. On a base of two octagonal steps stands a lady in 17th century court dress, supporting a polygonal block with seventeen dials balanced precariously on her head. The figure is around 4 feet high, the dial stone around 1 foot high, and the steps are 8 inches high. It originally came from North Barr House, Renfrewshire and bears the initials of Donald MacGilchrist, who built that house, with the date 1679. This sundial is believed to have been made by James Gifford of West Linton, a noted 17th century stonemason. Note the ingenious way that the figure's hair helps balance the dial stone. There are a total of 17 dials and cup faces and it is in remarkable condition, given its age.



{Image 14}

Return through Haddington (like the outward journey, go straight, do not turn left or right) to the roundabout at the A199/A1 and take the A1 towards Edinburgh. Follow the A1 until the junction A199 to Musselburgh. Take this exit and follow the signs over two

roundabouts to Musselburgh, eventually passing the racecourse on your right and back to where you started at Luca's Olympia Café, just in time for an ice-cream to finish off what has hopefully been a very interesting day. This final leg of the trail is about 19 miles from Lennoxlove and will take about half an hour.

If this trail has wetted your appetite and you would like to look at details and photographs of other sundials, then visit my website at www.sundialsofscotland.co.uk.

