

Making connections

A self-guided walk in Falkirk



Find out about different routeways across Scotland's Central Belt
Discover waterways, railways and roads connecting east and west
See how manmade constructions make use of the natural landscape
Marvel at the skills of surveyors and engineers over two millennia

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discovered through walks**





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Cover image: Aqueduct onto the Falkirk Wheel © Rory Walsh

Making connections

Discover how Falkirk links the east and west of Scotland

Scotland's two largest cities, Edinburgh and Glasgow, lie on different sides of the country. Connecting them across the 'Central Belt' are various ancient and modern routeways. This walk explores some of these as they pass through the town of Falkirk.

The structures are all different and so were the reasons for building them. But they all share a very similar route. These routeways across central Scotland are a product of geography and landscape.



Roman surveyors chose the best line for a defensive wall and military road. They took into consideration the lie of the land and the supply of construction materials to achieve a combination of defensive positioning, rapid communications and effective supply.

Centuries later canals transported raw materials to the industrial cities. Canal builders needed to take into consideration distance and elevation to achieve maximum efficiency. The Forth and Clyde Canal and the Union Canal snake across the landscape following almost exactly the same path that the Romans chose.

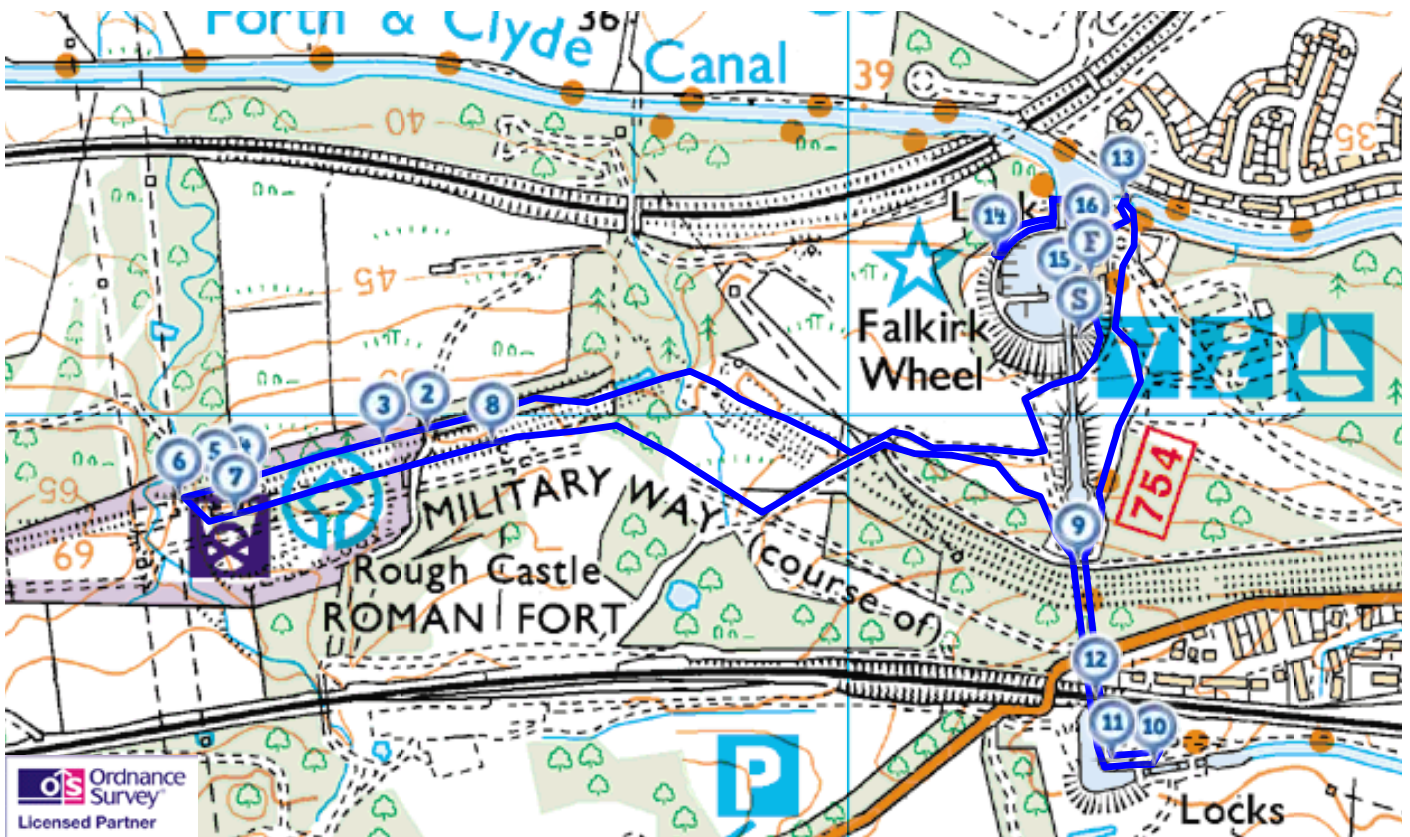


Developments in engineering and technology meant that railways and motorways were not so restricted by the lie of land. Across the Central Belt is a dense network of lines and roads transporting people and goods between the two cities.

More recently some of the old routeways have been given a new life and engineers have found new ways to overcome the challenges of the natural landscape.

Top: The Antonine Wall © Martin Haslett / Bottom: The Falkirk Wheel © Rory Walsh

Route map



Stopping points

- Start** Outside the Falkirk Wheel Visitor Centre
- 2.** Gate into the Historic Scotland Antonine Wall area
 - 3.** Top of mound looking into ditch
 - 4.** Information board at the causeway across the ditch
 - 5.** Overlooking the lilia
 - 6.** Opposite Rough Castle Fort
 - 7.** Within Rough Castle Fort
 - 8.** Community woodland
 - 9.** Roughcastle Tunnel entrance
 - 10.** Union Canal locks
 - 11.** Sharp turn in the Union Canal between locks and tunnel
 - 12.** Under railway bridge
 - 13.** Footbridge over the Forth and Clyde Canal
 - 14.** View of the Falkirk Wheel from the canal basin
 - 15.** Falkirk Wheel
 - 16.** Sculpture outside Falkirk Wheel Visitor Centre
- Finish** Outside the Falkirk Wheel Visitor Centre

Practical information

Location	Falkirk, Central Scotland
Start and finish	Falkirk Wheel Visitor Centre, Lime Rd, Tamfourhill, Falkirk FK1 4RS
Getting there	<p>Car – The Falkirk Wheel is 2 miles west of Falkirk and is well signed from the town and nearby motorways; parking at the Visitor Centre (charges apply) or across the Forth and Clyde Canal at Millennium Wheel Drive (free).</p> <p>Train – The nearest stations are Falkirk High on the Glasgow-Edinburgh line and Falkirk Grahamston on the Edinburgh-Stirling line; both stations are about 2 miles from the Visitor Centre and there is a bus service from stops close to both stations (every 15 minutes; limited service on Sundays).</p> <p>Bus – The Falkirk Wheel Visitor Centre is served by local buses from Falkirk and Grangemouth (every 20 mins Monday to Saturday; every 30 mins Sundays). See www.travelinescotland.com for details</p> <p>Bicycle – National Cycle Route 754 (Glasgow to Edinburgh) passes the Falkirk Wheel.</p>
Walk distance	2 ¼ miles
Level	Moderate – There are some steep sections and rough ground.
Terrain	Paved paths, footpaths including some steep grassy slopes, canal towpath.
Conditions	Footpaths around the Antonine Wall may be muddy after wet weather.
Best time	Suitable at all times of year.
Suitable for	<p>Families – Plenty for children to enjoy including activities at the Visitor Centre.</p> <p>Pushchairs – Suitable for pushchairs if they can be carried for short sections; only the lower section around the Falkirk Wheel is suitable for wheelchairs.</p> <p>Dogs – Should be kept on a lead around the Falkirk Wheel site; water bowls are provided at various points.</p>
Refreshments	There is a café at the Visitor Centre (open every day 10am to 5.30pm).
Toilets	There are toilets at the Falkirk Wheel Visitor Centre.

What to do at the Falkirk Wheel

Canal basin – There is free public access to the footpaths around the site, even when the visitor centre is closed.

Visitor Centre – includes interactive displays about the history of the canals and The Falkirk Wheel, café and gift shop. Open all year round, every day from 10am to 5.30pm. Free entry.

Boat Trips – Experience the Wheel for yourself on a short boat ride; available at various times throughout the day.

Children's Activity Zone – Includes play park, nature trail, Mini Canal and Water Play Area. You will get wet so bring a change of clothes or waterproofs! Open every day.

See website for further details: www.thefalkirkwheel.co.uk

Other parts of the Antonine Wall to visit

Watling Lodge (Falkirk) – Sections of the Antonine Wall on either side Watling Lodge (no entry to house or grounds). The eastern section is one of the deepest and steepest stretches of the ditch visible.

Seabegs Wood (1 mile west of Bonnybridge) – A stretch of rampart and ditch with the military way behind.

Bar Hill Fort (2 ½ miles northwest of Cumbernauld) – The highest fort on the Antonine Wall containing the foundations of the headquarters building and bath-house. This is the best site to appreciate the strategic significance of the Antonine Wall and enjoy the superb views over the Kelvin Valley.

Croy Hill (2 miles northwest of Cumbernauld) – Though the fort is not visible, the wall ditch survives and there are two beacon platforms. Here the Romans had to cut through solid rock to create the ditch.

See website for further details: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Other places to visit

Callendar House – This Museum in Falkirk includes permanent exhibits about Rome's Northern Frontier and the Antonine Wall. Open Monday to Saturday 10am to 5pm; Sunday 2pm to 5pm. There is also a large park which includes a further section of the Antonine Wall plus a tea room. www.falkirkcommunitytrust.org/venues/callendar-house

The Helix – This open greenspace in Falkirk offers various attractions including The Kelpies, family friendly cycling and walking paths, a splash play area, and the plaza café. www.falkirkcommunitytrust.org/venues/the-helix

Directions

These directions are for use with the audio commentary. Listen to each track then read the directions below to get to the next stop.

1. Welcome to Falkirk

Outside Falkirk Wheel Visitor Centre

Directions 1

From the roundabout outside the Visitor Centre, turn right and take the broad path marked 'Antonine Wall and Union Canal'. After about 75 metres turn right and go under the canal aqueduct. Follow the main path as it turns to the left up to a signpost. Turn right on the path signed 'Antonine Wall, Rough Castle Fort'. At the footpath junction turn right signed 'Antonine Wall, Rough Castle Fort.' Stop after about 700 metres just before the gate to the Antonine Wall. Listen to Track 2.

2. A great empire

Gate into the Historic Scotland Antonine Wall area

Directions 2

Go through the gate to the top of the mound from where you can look into the ditch. Stop here to listen to Track 3.

3. A military zone

Top of mound looking into ditch

Directions 3

Walk along the mound for about 100 metres until you meet a causeway that crosses the ditch. Stop at the Historic Scotland information board. Listen to Track 4.

4. A line of forts

Information board at the causeway across the ditch

Directions 4

With your back to the fort information board, go to the next Historic Scotland board located about 30 metres to the left. Listen here to Track 5.

5. Protection by lilies

Overlooking the lilia

Directions 5

With the fort on your left go another 30 metres to the top of the earthworks overlooking a deep valley. Listen to Track 6.

Optional walk extension

If you would like to explore more of the defences of the Antonine Wall go down into the valley and up the other side. You will find well preserved sections of the wall showing the rampart, ditch and the spoil bank.

At the opposite side of the valley from here there are good views back to Rough Castle Fort. Further on (towards a small car park) there are more well-preserved sections of wall. When you are ready resume the directions below.



Views back to Rough Castle
from the opposite side of the valley
© Martin Haslett

6. A magnificent failure?

Opposite Rough Castle Fort

Directions 6

Retrace your steps along the top of the spoil bank and go back to the Rough Castle Fort information board. across the causeway. Turn right to cross over the wall and go into the site of Rough Castle Fort. Listen to Track 7.

7. A simple plan

Within Rough Castle Fort

Directions 7

Continue along the top of the wall (keeping the ditch to your left). When you reach a fence, go through the gap signed 'Falkirk Wheel and Tamfourhill'. Follow the path through the trees for about 100 metres. Take care as there is some uneven ground. Stop inside the area of woodland. Listen to Track 8.

8. Fast communications

Community woodland

Directions 8

Continue along the path into an open area. Keep the woodland on your left and continue until a wider path crosses horizontally. Turn left, then almost immediately left again onto the path signed 'Falkirk Wheel'. Keep following the signposts for the Falkirk Wheel, passing a metal fence. At the third signpost turn right following 'Union Canal'.

The canal will emerge on your left and a tunnel will be ahead. Follow the towpath towards the tunnel. Before reaching it take the path to the right that crosses over the top of the tunnel. When you have crossed over stop by the tunnel entrance on the opposite towpath. Listen to Track 9.

9. A modern waterway

Roughcastle Tunnel entrance

Directions 9

Follow the canal towpath through Roughcastle Tunnel. At the other end continue along the towpath as it bends to the left. Stop when you reach the locks. Listen here to Track 10.

10. Along the contour

Union Canal locks

Directions 10

Retrace your steps a little way to the sharp bend in the canal corner before the tunnel. Listen to Track 11.

11. A great restoration

Sharp turn in Union Canal between locks and tunnel

Directions 11

Return to the tunnel entrance. Listen to Track 12.

12. On the rails

Under railway bridge

Directions 12

Return through Roughcastle Tunnel. Keep the Wheel to your left (we will see it in due course) and follow the path downhill to the Visitor Centre. Keep the Visitor Centre on your left and follow the path to the right for the Forth and Clyde Canal. Stop halfway over the footbridge over the canal. Listen to Track 13.

13. A sea-going canal

Footbridge over the Forth and Clyde Canal

Directions 13

From the footbridge retrace your steps towards the Visitor Centre. Before you reach it, turn right through a set of gates. Cross the pedestrian area towards the lock where the Forth and Clyde Canal connects to the Falkirk Wheel basin. Go over the lock and follow the path as it bears left around the Falkirk Wheel basin. Stop near the Water Park for a good view of the Wheel. Listen to Track 14.

14. A magnificent rebirth

View of the Falkirk Wheel from the canal basin

Directions 14

Remain in the same place and listen to Track 15.

15. An engineering triumph

View of the Falkirk Wheel from the canal basin

Directions 15

Retrace your steps around the basin towards the Visitor Centre. Stop by the sculpture of two horse heads known as The Kelpies. Listen to Track 16.

16. Watery rebirth

Sculpture outside the Falkirk Wheel Visitor Centre

Directions 16

Remain at the Visitor Centre and listen to Track 17.

17. A missed connection?

Outside the Falkirk Wheel Visitor Centre

Directions 17

If you haven't already done so, do explore the Visitor Centre. We highly recommend booking a boat trip so that you can experience travelling through the Falkirk Wheel.

Alternatively there is an optional walk extension you may like to try, starting at the car park of the Union Inn pub. It allows you to see where the two canals used to meet and then to follow some of the original course of the Union Canal. See the directions on the next page.

Walk extension along the original Union Canal

Before the new section of the Union Canal was built in the 2000s its original course met the Forth and Clyde Canal at the Union Inn, about a mile east of the Falkirk Wheel.

Directions on foot (from the bridge over the Forth and Clyde Canal at Stop 13)

To reach the Union Inn you can follow the towpath of the Forth and Clyde Canal. Turn right before the bridge (Stop 13) and keep the canal on your left.

Directions by road (from the Falkirk Wheel car parks)

Alternatively you can drive from the Falkirk Wheel. Turn left out of the entrance road to the Wheel and follow the B816 Tamfourhill Road. At the end turn left onto Glenfuir Road. The Inn and car park will appear on the left.

The Union Inn was originally built for travellers stopping on their journey between Edinburgh and Glasgow. Today many people stop here while visiting the Falkirk Wheel or navigating the Forth and Clyde Canal for leisure.

Like the canals, the Union Inn has recently been restored. In fact there are plans to regenerate the canalside between here and the Falkirk Wheel.

Outside the Union Inn was a large canal basin called Port Downie. With your back to the building you should be able to see Lock 16, which marks the original junction where the Forth and Clyde and the Union Canal met.



The Union Inn
© Martin Haslett



The blocked original junction of the Union Canal
© Martin Haslett

Just before the locks is a barrier between the canal and the road. Look carefully here and you should see that the canal widens briefly and there are two different types of material along the bank. The section by the barrier marks where the original Union Canal junction was blocked.

You now have the chance to follow a short section of the Union Canal's original course.

Directions to follow the original Union Canal
(pictures numbered in the text top to bottom)

If you haven't already, continue up to Lock 16 (keeping the canal on your left). Turn right from the barrier and continue into the grassy area across the road. Keep Glenfuir Road on your left and pass an industrial building on your right (1).



Cross over the end of Tamfourhil Road - to the right is another section of the Antonine Wall. Continue ahead in the grassy area towards a childrens' play park. Notice the downward slope in the ground and how far the houses are set back from the main road (2).



Pass the play park and cross the end of Carradale Avenue. Head towards the railway bridge and carefully cross the road. Go under the bridge then immediately turn left. Go through a metal gate onto a path inside a wooded area.



Follow the path, with the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway line on your left. Just past a mobile phone mast, on the right you can see the remains of an original Union Canal lock (3).



Continue further and the path meets the canal at a clearing. Notice how wide the canal is here - this point marks where it turned towards Port Downie and the Union Inn. The original entry point to Lock 16 is clearly visible in the shape of the towpath (4).



Go about a further 100 metres along the towpath. Look back (with the canal on your left) and you will be able to see where the new section of the Union Canal joins to the right (5).

Look a little further and straight on you should be able to see where the old canal was blocked off, with a road built across the original navigation.

Further information

The Antonine Wall

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/antoninewall
www.antoninewall.org

The Falkirk Wheel

www.thefalkirkwheel.co.uk

Frontiers of the Roman Empire

whc.unesco.org/en/list/430

Portdownie

www.portdownie.com

Scottish Canals

www.scottishcanals.co.uk/our-canals

Callendar House

www.falkirkcommunitytrust.org/venues/callendar-house

Forth and Clyde Canal Society

www.forthandclyde.org.uk

The Helix

www.thehelix.co.uk

Roman Scotland

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/roman-scotland.pdf

Visit Scotland

www.visitscotland.com

Credits

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