



Viewpoint

## The Lion's Head



Time: 15 mins

Region: Scotland

Landscape: urban



Location: Holyrood Park, Edinburgh, EH2 2DG

Grid reference: NT 27100 73700

**Getting there:** If travelling by car, approach the hill from the South West up Holyrood Park Road. Pass the Chancellor's Court at Pollock Halls on your right. Keep following the road until you reach a clearing and the first roundabout should be in front of you. This is where you will find the viewpoint of Arthur's Seat

**Keep an eye out for:** The ruins of an ancient Celtic hill fort near the summit of the hill

Vigilantly guarding the thriving city of Edinburgh lays the 350 million year old slumbering giant of Arthur's Seat.

This ancient volcano which sits at the heart of Holyrood Park is known for its daunting lion-like appearance, dominates the city landscape. It has even been described by the novelist Robert Louis Stevenson as; "a hill for magnitude, a mountain in virtue of its bold design".

The primeval hill soars 822 feet into the sky and has a fiery past. Standing here since long before the first humans set foot on the British Isles, is also means that every culture and generation throughout the ages has their own story to tell of its origins and influence.

**How did volcanoes, tribes and ancient poems give Arthur's Seat its name?**



Natural forces and mythology have worked hand in hand to create Arthur's Seat as we see and experience it today. But to uncover how they have played into naming it, we need to explore them one by one.

Just like the great rock on which Edinburgh Castle sits, Arthur's Seat was formed by an extinct volcano nearly 350 million years ago. In the hundreds of millions of years since it stopped erupting, the volcano was buried beneath other rocks, then gradually eroded to become exposed again at the surface.

Only half of it remains though, which means we can now see right into the heart of the volcano! The two summits are all that is left of its central vents.

So although Edinburgh sits in the shadow of a volcano chain, fortunately it has been extinct for millions of years. The city can today sleep soundly!

So that is why it is here, but how did it get its name?

The hill stands in a prominent and strategic location – close to the North Sea and towering above the landscape around it. At the summit of the peak there lies a hill fort that is most likely to have been a fortress and centre of power for the Votadini; a Celtic warrior tribe who roamed the northern lands of Britain from 800 BC all the way up to the Roman invasion of 43 AD.

The 7th century Welsh poem Y Gododdin which is thought to be one of the oldest ever pieces of Celtic literature, tells of how a force of 300 chosen Votadini warriors were assembled at the summit of Arthur's Seat which was at the centre of the capital of their empire (Din Eidyn or Edinburgh as it is now known). Could it therefore be said it was their 'seat' of power over their city and empire?

Several mythical chronicles claim that the name 'Arthur's Seat' is derived from the story of King Arthur and his noble Knights of the Round Table as they name it as one of the possible locations for the ancient kingdom of Camelot. A verse in Y Gododdin makes reference to him as a paragon of bravery and is regarded as the earliest known mention of the character.

Although now recognised as Arthurs Seat, other mythologies have also played into its heritage, all resting on its volcanic roots.

The hill has become synonymous with the rather daunting name 'The Lion's Head'. It is thought that the two extinct volcano vents resemble a resting lion's head and haunch.

Celtic stories also tell us that the great hill itself was once a monstrous dragon that terrorised the land, breathing fire upon the poor souls of Din Eidyn and slaughtering their livestock. However after years of relentless devouring the dragon became slow and fat and had to rest. And from this deep slumber he never woke again.

Although, the story also says that he may rise again and reign fire and terror across the land once more...

From fiery roots to modern day playground, the ancient rock formation of Arthur's Seat has been a source of pride and history for the people of Edinburgh throughout the ages. However, its time as a legendary stronghold and symbol of military might is over.

It now lies dormant, as a seat of nature's greatness sleeping peacefully above the nation's capital.