

A brief history of Beecraigs Country Park

Beecraigs Country Park, set in the Bathgate Hills consists of over 370 hectares of farm, meadow & woodland. However, Beecraigs Country Park has not always looked the way it does today. Before 1914, the Park was farmland consisting of rough grazing & arable fields. Riccarton Burn ran through this upland valley & the only trees were mixed broadleaves such as Beech, Oak & Ash that made up hedgerows, shelterbelts & small copses.

Four farms were on the site that currently makes up Beecraigs Country Park - Whitebaulks, Balvormie, Beecraigs & Hillhouse. These names are still used around the park today including Whitebaulks Cottages, Balvormie Meadow / Balvormie Pond & Hillhouse Woodland.

In 1914 the reservoir, now known as Beecraigs Loch, was built by damming Riccarton Burn. Clay & stone was used to build the dam wall, this stone was quarried from Riccarton Hill & brought down the slopes to the site using a winch powered railway. The build took 4 years but by 1918 the 8 hectare reservoir, holding 82 million gallons of water, began serving as a local water supply & continued to do so for 55 years.



In 1922 came the first plantation of pine & spruce to act as a shelterbelt. This was the start of the forest we know today at Beecraigs & a further 240 hectares were planted with conifers through to 1973. In 1972, Beecraigs Reservoir was decommissioned by the water board & by 1975 the West Lothian District Council had taken over the reservoir & were using its filter bed system to support a trout fish farm. Today Beecraigs Loch is a local biodiversity site & is managed for wildlife.

During the next few years, car parks were built at Balvormie & Whitebaulks, waymarked trails were installed & the first BBQ site was constructed.

In 1977

- Red Deer were first brought to Whitebaulks farm - 22 hinds & two stags & so began the Beecraigs herd. Later, the Animal Attraction would see the size of the Red Deer herd increase significantly & much later in 2010 the addition of a foldof Highland Cattle, followed by Belted Galloway & Hebridean sheep. The Animal attraction closed in 2023.
- West Lothian Countryside Ranger Service was created to deliver environmental education & provide information & assistance to visitors.

On the 10th of April 1980, Beecraigs became a fully registered Country Park. 1980 was also the year that the log cabin Visitor Centre (no longer in place) was completed. Over the next 10 years, the number of people visiting the Country Park continued to increase & the Park saw further developments including Balvormie toilets, fishing lodge, Caravan & Camping Site, & Restaurant at Beecraigs being built alongwith the climbing wall, target & field archery site.

In the 2000's Park infrastructure was upgraded with path improvements, improved signage, creation of mountain bike trails & skills area, additional toilet provision & parking. The building that was previously the Restaurant was upgraded & officially reopened as the Visitor Centre on 7th March 2017. The Park continues to evolve to meet the needs of its visitors. Today attracts around a million visitors each year.