

Almondell & Calderwood Country Park

Past and Present

Almondell & Calderwood Country Park lies in the valley of the River Almond between the villages of Broxburn, East and Mid Calder and is based around two ancient and historical estates. Almondell was the historical home of the Earls of Buchan and Calderwood, of the Lords of Torphichen. The estates would have been managed as working estates with shooting and fishing rights. They also would have been a source of employment for many people in the area with gamekeepers, foresters, gardeners, housemaids and cooks all being employed.

Almondell House

The house at Almondell was built by Henry Erskine in the 1790s on the site of what is now our disabled car park adjacent to the Visitor Centre. Henry was the brother of the 11th Earl of Buchan, David Stewart Erskine, and was twice Lord Advocate for Scotland. Almondell was built in the style of an Italianate villa, extended over the years to become a fine mansion with an equally grand interior.



Henry enjoyed his life and retirement at Almondell where he died in October 1817. Generations of the family continued to live at Almondell until the 1940's when the Dowager Countess passed away and the title was passed to her son in Gloucester. The house was then leased as a private residence for ladies until the 1950's. Unfortunately, the house became vacant after this and the roof and windows were removed to avoid hefty taxes. The house soon fell into disrepair and was in ruins by the 1960's. It was officially 'blown up' by the Territorial Army in June 1969 as a training exercise in the use of explosives!

The Nasmyth Bridge

This famous bridge was commissioned by Henry Erskine and designed by Alexander Nasmyth, the noted Scottish painter, architect and landscape designer. Built around 1800 to serve as a crossing point over the River Almond on the southern approach to Almondell and also known as the 'Almondell Bridge', it was constructed from sandstone in a 'romantic fashion' with parapets and stone seats or 'merlons' across its width. Henry Erskine's family and their visitors would have enjoyed views of the estate from this point.



Sections of Nasmyth's bridge collapsed into the river in October 1973. Impassable for over 25 years, this wonderful bridge became one of the first Heritage Lottery funded projects and was sympathetically restored in 1997 providing an invaluable link for visitors to cross the River Almond.

The Canal Feeder Aqueduct

Built in 1820, the aqueduct consists of a cast-iron trough, on a cantilevered support and is a replica of the famous Iron Bridge in Shropshire. It carries the canal feeder across the River Almond. The canal feeder travels for 3 miles long to deliver a vital water supply to the Union Canal at Lin's Mill .



The Railway Viaduct was built in 1885 and once carried a single-track mineral railway line (Camps Branch Line of the North British Railway) servicing local industries in Camps and the oil works at Pumpherston and Uphall. The 23m high

viaduct has 9 segmental brick arches. The railway was closed in 1956 but the viaduct path remains open to walkers, cyclists and horse riders and provides a link between Almondell, East Calder and Uphall Station.

The Suspension Bridge was built in 1970 with the help of the Royal Engineers and won a Civic Trust Award for its structural steel design. The 19m high cable stayed A-frame which supports the 40m wooden deck was hoisted by a large crane after being flown in by helicopter! It was renamed the Nelson Mandela Bridge in 1985.

Kirkhill Pillar

The pillar that now stands in front of our Visitor Centre was designed by David Stewart Erskine, the 11th Earl of Buchan and stood in the grounds of his home at Kirkhill House in Broxburn. The Earl had considerable knowledge of mathematics, languages and literature and a great interest for astronomy. In 1776, he created a scale model of the solar system and engraved the calculations that he used on to the stone pillar. The pillar remained at Kirkhill until the 1970's when it was brought to Almondell and rebuilt as seen today.

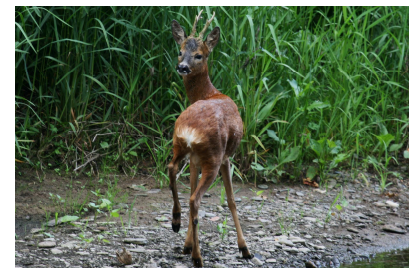


Calderwood

Calderwood was historically owned by the Sandilands Family, Barons of Torphichen who still live in Calder House in Mid Calder to this day. Wood has been harvested from Calderwood for hundreds of years with evidence of oak being used for ship building in the 1500s. In the 1700s, drovers would have driven cattle through the wood to Mid Calder before making their way to the 'Tryst' in Falkirk. Shale oil was mined in the 1800's and the Forestry Commission cut and used timber for building projects following the First World War. Ownership was granted to the local authority in the 1960's.



Calderwood is now a wild wood and haven for wildlife. It is the largest area of ancient woodland in West Lothian and a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Oak, ash, birch, hazel and gean provide a woodland backdrop to a wealth of flora and fauna. Signs of roe deer, badger and fox can be easily discovered.



In spring time, the woodland floor is abundant with wildflowers including anemone and celandine that give way to blankets of bluebells in late May. Willow warbler come from afar to make Calderwood their summer home and the ponds are habitat to amphibians including great crested newts that return to breed in the shallows year after year. Fungi spring to life in autumn bringing colour to the wood before the first frosts of winter.

Oakbank

Oakbank was a new project for the Country Park in the early 90's. Originally an old shale bing by the old mining village of Oakbank, it was stabilised, top soiled and planted with native broadleaved trees, wildflowers and nitrogen fixing plants. Fine views of West Lothian and the Pentland Hills can be enjoyed from the summit. A path runs through the new woodland adjacent to the Recycling Centre linking Oakbank to neighbouring Calderwood.

Today

Following the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1967, Almondell & Calderwood became West Lothian's first Country Park in 1969. The old stable block in Almondell was converted into the Visitor Centre in 1981 and provides a focal point for visitors, both old and new.

