



North Berwick

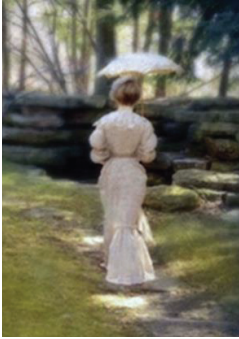
The Ladies Walk

The Glen North Berwick

North Berwick Environment and Heritage Trust
Heritage Guide

A Ladies Walk

A 'Ladies Walk' is a landscaped walk, a popular feature in the Victorian era. The Walk was designed to allow ladies to take exercise whilst enjoying the natural beauty of their surroundings without having to climb over stiles or other obstacles. Walking on prepared pathways allowed them to avoid muddying their long dresses. The Walk might be completely artificial but more often incorporated natural features and was conceived to achieve a picturesque effect. This is the case with the Glen Ladies Walk where the dramatic Glen, leading to the sea, provides a series of views each giving the impression of a composed picture: nature seen as art.



The Glen Ladies Walk

Cross the road by the pedestrian crossing opposite the car park at Aldi. Follow the pathway for a short distance and you enter a shallow dell with the Mill Burn running beside the pathway. This picture below, taken c. 1891, shows the trees are of the same size with little undergrowth and the pathway is edged, suggesting that the woodland has been managed.

'Round the south and west base of the Law runs the Mill Burn, a streamlet so called from having once driven three mills, the ruins of which still stand on its banks. This brook wends its way through a picturesque and secluded wooded ravine, through which there is a path called the Ladies' Walk, delightfully sheltered in boisterous weather from the wind, and shaded in summer from the sun. In spring the banks of the glen are dotted with primroses and a profusion of other wild flowers.' *Marine Hotel Guide to North Berwick and Vicinity*, 1891



2021



c. 1891

After a short walk you turn left at the ruins of a 16th-century mill which belonged to the nuns of St Mary's Priory. Crossing the Mill Burn by a rustic bridge, you enter a deep narrow ravine. The pathway winds downwards before passing another ruined mill and re-crossing the burn. The postcard below from c. 1935 shows less undergrowth than the present picture, again suggesting woodland management has taken place. At this point the ravine widens onto a grassy area before leading to the beach and the sea with a view of the Bass Rock.

The romance of the walk captured the imagination of Robert Louis Stevenson, who saw the ruined mills as the stony cells of hermits living a life of prayer and meditation.

'You might golf if you wanted; but I seem to have been better employed. You might secrete yourself in the Lady's Walk, a certain sunless dingle of elders, all mossed over by the damp as green as grass, and dotted here and there by the stream-side with roofless walls, the cold homes of anchorites.' Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Lantern Bearers*, 1888



While the ladies made their way down the Glen, their husbands might be playing golf on the links and the little ones making sandcastles on the beach under the careful eye of their nursemaid.

It will be a pity if the practice of allowing woodland to revert to a natural state means that the origin of the name 'Ladies Walk' is forgotten. The association with the period when North Berwick was a fashionable Victorian seaside resort for the upper and emerging middle classes will be lost. The pathway will become part of a countywide network of paths.



OS 25 inch to the mile, revised 1893

Directions from the centre of North Berwick. Take East Road (B1346) towards Tantallon and Dunbar. At the top of the hill, Recreation Park is on your left and the Aldi supermarket a little further along to your right. Continue for a short distance past Aldi and you will reach a roundabout. The Glen lies to the left, through trees.

© North Berwick Environment and Heritage Trust 2023
www.nbenvironmentheritagetrust.com
Registered Scottish Charity no. SC029992