



North Berwick

**Things to See
on the top of
North Berwick Law**

North Berwick Environment and Heritage Trust
Heritage Guide



North Berwick Law, or Berwick Law, or simply the Law, stands 187m (613ft) high. This conical hill (law means 'round or conical hill' in Lowland Scots) is a landmark visible from miles around. Geologically, the Law is a volcanic plug of hard igneous rock – like the Bass Rock, the remains of a long-extinct

volcano. In the 19th century, the south side of the hill was quarried to provide the red sandstone used to build many of the town's houses.

With a mixture of alkaline and acidic volcanic rock that is unusual in Scotland, the Law provides growing conditions for a unique mix of wildflowers, lichens and mosses. These include the purple milk vetch and the maiden pink, which is classed as Nationally Scarce Plant. To ensure the grassland mix is kept at the right levels to promote wildflowers, some Exmoor ponies are 'employed' to graze the site.



The Law is an important archaeological site. In the Iron Age, roughly 2,000 years ago, it was a hillfort with triple ramparts enclosing a prehistoric settlement and field system. Today the ramparts are poorly preserved, but they once enclosed a wide area. Around the southern flank of the Law, the remains of at least 13 hut-circles and house platforms are still discernible on the ground – some of them visible from the main path as you ascend the hill. Iron Age pottery and other settlement debris was found further down the hill when quarrying work exposed a deep midden.



Whalebone Arch

There is no record of who first erected an arch made from the jawbones of a whale on the Law, or when it was erected, although the date of 1709 is often quoted. It may have been put up to commemorate the Act of Union with England in 1707. The arch is shown in



an engraving in *The Antiquities of Scotland* dated 1789. It was replaced three times before being taken down in 2005 by East Lothian Council because it was unsafe. In 2008, the present white fibreglass replica of the whalebone arch was paid for by an anonymous donor.

Memorial

This commemorative monument, with a brass plate set into a stone pillar, gives distances and directions to places within view. The plate records that the monument was 'Erected by his many friends to the memory of John Wallace Menzies, Solicitor and Town Clerk in North Berwick 1889–1956'. He was the Town Clerk from 1926 to 1956.



Trig Point

The white-painted pillar is an Ordnance Survey triangulation pillar, commonly known as a trig point. Triangulation as a method for surveying has been known since antiquity. The last triangulation survey was conducted between 1935 and 1961. Because many of the observation points from the previous survey had been lost, permanent concrete observation points were built instead. More recently, triangulation has been superseded by GPS and aerial photographic surveys. Many of the pillars were removed, but some have been kept as historical monuments or markers for the summits of hills.



Ruin of a Napoleonic Coastal Signal Station

In response to the threat of invasion by the French in the late 18th century, the Admiralty set up a chain of coastal signal stations to report the sightings of enemy ships. Eight stations were built along the southeast coast of Scotland, from Edinburgh to St Abb's Head, with North Berwick Law lying between Garleton Hill and Dunbar Fort. Each station was equipped with a flagstaff and a 'Telescope, one Red Flag, one Blue Pendant, and four Signal Balls' for signalling. Each station was commanded by a naval lieutenant, who was instructed to light



a beacon of 'flammable material saturated with pitch if they sighted the enemy'. Although the Signal Stations were able to give early warning of invasion, their primary purpose was to identify enemy privateers which attacked small merchant ships on coastal voyages.

World War II Aircraft Observation Post

During World War II, members of The Royal Observer Corps (ROC) manned aircraft observation posts (AOP), watching for approaching aircraft. The AOPs were organised into groups of three and would triangulate their sighting information to pinpoint the position and altitude of the incoming aircraft, as well as recognising the aircraft type to determine whether they were hostile. In East Lothian North Berwick, Athelstaneford and Aberlady formed a single cluster and reported to the Group HQ for Lothian and the Borders in Galashiels. The arc of view for the Law AOP faces up the Forth and includes the site of RAF Drem where a squadron of Spitfires was stationed for the defence of Edinburgh. Until the introduction of radar, ROC Observers were the only method of detecting enemy aircraft.

