Pinkie Cleugh Battlefield Group

Pinkie Cleugh Battlefield Walk

The Scottish advance
Detail from Roll-map of the Battle of Pinkie in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The Scottish army has crossed the Esk, and is fired on from English galleys in the Forth. Pinkie House is in the foreground, and Carberry Tower beyond Inveresk Church. The Lord Protector Somerset surveys the scene at the top left. Reproduced by kind permission of The Bodleian Library.
**Pinkie Cleugh Battlefield Walk**

The battle of Pinkie Cleugh took place on Saturday, 10th September, 1547. It was the last great battle in the last war between the kingdoms of England and Scotland – less than sixty years later, the kingdoms were united when James VI of Scotland inherited the throne of England on the death of Queen Elizabeth I. Pinkie was the biggest battle ever fought on Scottish soil.

At this point in military history, hand-held firearms were just coming into widespread use, and Pinkie was one of very few battles in which bows and arrows and firearms were both used. It is also the oldest of UK battlefields which has remained undeveloped, and so is very rewarding to visit.

The political background to the war was this:

King James V of Scotland died in 1542, just six days after his heir, Mary, was born. King Henry VIII of England saw this as an opportunity to unite the two kingdoms, by arranging a marriage between Mary and his own young son, Edward, who would succeed him as Edward VI. Diplomacy failed to bring this about, and Henry had already begun to back it up with force (the ‘Rough Wooing’) by the time he died, early in 1547. The Duke of Somerset, as Lord Protector, intended to complete the project by mounting an invasion with forces large enough to take and hold a substantial extent of territory in Scotland. The Scottish defence was organised by the Regent, the Earl of Arran.

**The Old Bridge – The “Roman” Bridge (No 1 on map).**

Start your walk from the so-called ‘Roman’ Bridge, 100 metres upstream (south) from the main bridge that carries the A1 over the River Esk in the middle of Musselburgh. There is a car park opening onto the Mall on the east (Musselburgh) bank of the river. Perhaps there was a bridge and ford here in Roman times, 2000 years ago, but the oldest parts of the structure you see now are ‘only’ 700 years old.

Until the A1 bridge – called the ‘Rennie’ bridge, after the engineer who designed it – was
built, early in the 19th century, the Roman bridge was the only way of crossing the river between here and Dalkeith, and this was the main route from Edinburgh to England. The English army invaded up the high road from Berwick to Edinburgh. The 18,000 troops, 2,000 horses, accompanying men (and women), hundreds of carts, cattle on the hoof, etc., could only march by road. The choke-points on their route were the largest rivers; the Esk was the last defensive line before the capital, and the Scottish army had set up a well-defended position on the high river banks to the west of the bridge.

Walk up onto the bridge and look forward and to the left to see where the army was encamped.

The Scottish camp stretched out, a mile in circumference, to the south and west of the Fisherton side of the bridge. The Scots had built a turf rampart stretching along towards where Fisherton harbour now is, partly as a defence against the ships' guns, and they had put some guns of their own on this rampart (no doubt also covering the bridge). The centre of the Scottish camp may have been at Stoneyhill, protected by the steep slopes at Shire Haugh, and it extended as far as Monktonhall (we know this because several wills of Scottish officers who died in the battle were signed at Monktonhall).

This was an excellent defensive position, and from that day to this people have asked why Arran, the Scottish commander, chose to take all his forces out of the camp and advance across the river.

Looking in the other direction, the spire of St Michael’s Church shows the top of the ridge at Inveresk. English artillery on that ridge would have been able to bombard the Scottish army. It may have been to prevent this that the Scots advanced across the river and brought the English to battle on the plateau behind Inveresk.

No doubt horses and men could have forded the river at other points in this stretch, but the guns and heavy equipment, and many of the foot soldiers, must have crossed this bridge.

You do the same, and then walk up Inveresk Road.

**Inveresk Road**

The 'high road' from Edinburgh to Berwick did not go through Musselburgh on the eastern bank of the river; instead, it headed towards Inveresk Church, and then turned left at the foot of the hill, and went south past Musselburgh, through the separate settlement called 'Newbigging' (at the junction of the street now called Newbigging and Inveresk Road). It passed to the south of Pinkie House (then a hunting lodge, the property of the Abots of Dunfermline) and passed to the north of 'Edgabuckling Brae' – now called Pinkie Braes – and on through the village of Preston. For a couple of days before the battle, the English
had their camp in the vicinity of Goshen Farm.

Turn left at the end of Inveresk Road, with the new Tesco store to the right, and the new Health Centre in front of you, and then take the first right, up the lane between the Bowling Club and the Grammar School, and then up the steps to the church and the churchyard.

**St Michael's Church, Inveresk (No 2 on map)**

“Oliver's Mount” The long low mound to the right of the path is all that now remains visible of a fortification roughly on the site of the present church. Despite the name, it is older than Oliver Cromwell. Archaeologists now date it to the middle of the 16th century – but whether this means it was constructed before or after 1547 is unknown. Before the battle, the Scots had certainly positioned artillery near the church. If you walk along the mound you can see that guns here would perfectly command the Old Bridge. From this mound, you can also just see the mouth of the river Esk; during the battle the English galley or galleys (with forward-pointing guns in the bows) came close to the shore here and fired on the Scottish army with devastating results. (Larger warships further out in the Forth fired on the Scottish camp and on Musselburgh before the battle.)

The English were not expecting a pitched battle (their cavalry did not put on the full heavy horse armour on the day of the battle); instead, they intended to occupy the top of this hill, from where their artillery could fire into the Scottish camp on the far bank of the river.

Walk past the church, but take a look at it as you pass. There has been a church on this site since the 6th century, though the present building was only built in 1805.

Walk down the path out of the church gate, and turn left onto the road which runs through the middle of the village of Inveresk.. After 200 metres, another road joins from the left, where it has climbed steeply up Inveresk Brae.

**Inveresk Village**

Carry on straight past the rows of grand 18th century houses. In the medieval period, Inveresk was an important religious centre, and no doubt there was a substantial village here in 1547.

William Patten, a young English lawyer who accompanied the invasion, and then wrote a best-selling book about the campaign, says that the Scots advanced on both sides of the
church; another eyewitness says that they advanced along the “high road”. Scots forces advancing to the south of the Church would have marched down the village street, or could have crossed the river above the Old Bridge, formed up in the meadows close to where the railway bridge now is, and emerged up the slopes beside where Wedderburn House now is.

Imagine the 30,000 Scottish troops, marching through these narrow lanes in battle order, knowing that they would be going into action as soon as they came within sight of the English army.

At the end of the village is the entrance to Inveresk Lodge Garden – battle-averse members of the party might like to stroll in these pleasant gardens above the river Esk, and admire the aviary in the greenhouse while the military historians carry on to the battlefield, which you can find by taking the left fork along Crookston Road.

On September 9th, the day before the main battle, there was a significant clash between Scottish and English cavalry, back and forth over several miles, on the slopes of Fa'side Brae; the Scots horsemen came off worse, and in consequence played no significant part in the battle next day. Also as a result, this area was cleared of Scottish forces, and it was safe for the English commander, Somerset, to survey the position of the Scottish camp from the hills (at Fa'side or Carberry), and by riding with a small party towards Inveresk church (he did not reach the church, presumably because of the Scottish artillery and other forces there) along a lane which is described as having a turf embankment on either side. This lane is believed to be what is now Carberry Road, which runs roughly parallel to Crookston Road, about 200 metres to the right.

Near the last houses in Carberry Road, you will find a stone marker for one of the turf-cutting sites for the Riding of the Marches ceremony. Across the fields to the left, the level of the roofs of Edenhall Hospital shows you how steeply the ground falls away. The circular depression where Edenhall now stands was called Pinkie Cleugh, and this feature gave its name to the battle. The level ground beside the Cleugh would have been a good place to station the left wing of the Scottish army, where attackers would have had to
climb a steep slope to get at them.

**Crookston Road, Railway Bridge**

Walk up onto the bridge over the railway line, and the fields to the left and in front of you are thought to be where the 'rereward' or left wing of the Scottish forces were drawn up when they were fired on from English ship(s). The losses this caused started a movement of the whole Scottish army southwards, away from the coast and towards higher ground.

If you look to the east along the railway line, you can just see where the footbridge at Wallyford station and the road junction at Wallyford Toll cross the line. The English camp had been established just beyond this point. Early in the morning of 10th September, the English struck camp, and set off in line of march towards Inveresk Church, intending to set up camp again roughly where you are standing now. Before they had come half way, they were surprised to see that the whole Scottish army had crossed the river and was deploying in line of battle in front of them. While the English were wheeling to their left in order to line up their battles face to face with the Scots, the Scottish army began its southward move.

Seeing that the Scots were rapidly advancing to higher ground, Somerset ordered an English cavalry charge. This was a desperate and costly move (because the lightly-armoured cavalry would be impaled on the solid array of 12-foot pikes at the leading edge of the Scottish battles), but it brought the Scots to a halt, and denied them the higher ground. Shot at by the superior numbers of English guns (some on the higher ground, firing over the heads of the English army) – and by a 'conveyor belt' of continental mercenary soldiers on horseback, armed with the new, hand-held, firearms – the Scottish army broke and ran (the commander, Arran, was amongst the first to call for his horse and ride away). The main body of English foot soldiers was never engaged.

Where did this decisive encounter occur?

Howe Mire occupied the fold in the ground about 200 metres in front of you (looking towards Wallyford), which drained down through Pinkie Cleugh to form Pinkie Burn. Patten refers to a 'mire or ditch' which obstructed the English cavalry charge that halted the Scottish advance to higher ground. This is widely believed to refer to Howe Mire, but soil scientists have recently suggested that this area was not very marshy – peat deposits have not been found.

Significant quantities of battlefield artefacts (musket balls, artillery shot, etc.) were found recently in archaeological excavations on the site of a new dog track at Wallyford (the steel work for the stand is in the middle of the view from the railway bridge), and in adjacent fields (metal detectorists are also known to have recovered large numbers of
musket balls from these fields). But this is the only part of the potential battlefield area which has been so carefully surveyed.

Patten's account of the battle says that the Scots 'took their stand' in the fallow fields of Inveresk, and his battle diagrams show the plough rigs of these fields (which he says impeded the English horsemen) stretching away west to east from the lane leading to Inveresk church. How far did these fields extend?

A third group of historians believe that the main encounter occurred closer to Carberry, beside a stream that rises in a cleft in the slope between Crookston and Carberry, and which flows into the Esk at Whitecraig.

The Scottish battalions broke and fled towards Dalkeith (to the west – to your right) and back to the Esk. They were pursued by the English cavalry, and thousands were slaughtered. It was a devastating defeat for the Scots, but though the English occupied Haddington for 18 months after the battle, they did not succeed in uniting the kingdoms by marrying Mary to Edward. The Scots instead formed an alliance with France, and French forces drove the English garrisons out of Scotland within the next two years. Mary married the Dauphin of France, and after his death returned to Scotland as its Queen.

After their overwhelming victory at Pinkie, the English marched forward and occupied Leith (which had been abandoned by its residents). They stayed there a week (making no attempt on Edinburgh, despite the near-total destruction of the Scots forces in the battle) – drinking everything they could find – and then withdrew, leaving small garrisons at a number of locations in south east Scotland, including Haddington. The military purpose of the invasion was to establish English government in East Lothian and the Borders (in the hope that this would persuade the Scots to agree to the union of the crowns); the experiment ended when French forces drove out the English. And meanwhile, of course, the Scots instead chose to 'unite the crowns' of Scotland and France.

The English commander, Somerset, won the battle of Pinkie Cleugh, but lost the war. Because of this and other setbacks, he fell from power, and was beheaded in 1553. His main enemy by then was the Earl of Warwick, who had been second in command at Pinkie. Warwick himself was executed later that year, having failed to bring about the succession of Lady Jane Grey, on the death of Edward VI.
Before you move on from here, take a careful look at the skyline in front of you. To the right of the farm buildings of Hillhead Farm, you can see the edge of dark green woodland running up the hill. Just at the top is 'Queen Mary's Mount'. On 15th June 1567, 20 years after the battle of Pinkie Cleugh, Mary and her new husband, Bothwell, gathered 2000 of their last remaining loyal troops on this hilltop. A similar-sized army of the Confederate Lords confronted them from Cousland, on the other side of the valley to the south of Carberry Hill.

The stand-off lasted for all of a sweltering hot day; at last Mary was forced to surrender, in order to secure Bothwell's temporary escape to his castle at Dunbar. She was taken as a prisoner to Edinburgh and then Loch Leven, where she was coerced into abdication. A few weeks later, she fled to England and the captivity which continued until her execution on 8th February 1587. So the landscape in front of you was the stage for great events which marked both the beginning and end of her reign.

Now walk up the footpath; after a few hundred yards, you will emerge into a lay-by between Salter's Road and the A1, where the Pinkie Cleugh Battlefield Memorial stands.

**Battlefield Memorial (No 4 on map)**

*English advance:* The English camp was in the area between Pinkie Braes and Drummohr (not quite visible from here – Wallyford is on somewhat higher ground, and it gets in the way!). Patten says that they broke camp early on 10th September, (sending the baggage train to be out of the way of trouble on the slopes of Fa'side Brae) and headed straight for Inveresk church. But heading 'straight' for the church, along the high road, would have required climbing up steep slopes to the church (at Pinkie Cleugh or Inveresk Brae). Reaching the church by keeping to higher ground, and approaching Inveresk on the roads from Carberry or Crookston, meant hooking round to the south of Pinkie Cleugh – and perhaps the Howe Mire, if this was a significant obstacle. This would have brought the English forces into the fields to the north and west of the memorial.

But which was the 'hill' that the Scots were racing towards when they were stopped by the English cavalry charge (and from which they were fired on by English artillery)? Was it close to Wallyford? (the village already existed at the time of the battle). Or was it Crookston? Or further back – Fa'side Hill? Fa'side Castle? West Mains? Carberry?

Patten records that the weakened Scottish cavalry, not involved in the main action, made a half-hearted attack on the English baggage train on Fa'side Brae. He says that this attack was repulsed by the English artillery on these slopes. Contemporary drawings of the battle (now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford) show Scottish horsemen in this incident gathered apparently near Carberry Tower.

*Fa'side Castle:* Fa'side Castle is an excellent spot to keep watch on the eastern approach to Edinburgh. It dominates the view from the outskirts of Prestonpans (and is in the middle of the view, looking the other way, from the Shell petrol station at Fisherrow harbour, up Market Street – the road to the Old Bridge). It was manned during the battle by a small garrison of Scots defenders who shot at any English who came close enough. After the battle, the English burnt it and the defenders died in the fire. The castle remained a
ruin until it was beautifully restored about 30 years ago. It is now a private dwelling.

**Scottish defeat:** In the main encounter, the three Scottish battles had merged into a single, unmanoeuvrable mass. The 'rereward', under the Earl of Huntley, retained most good order. Huntley himself, along with many others, was captured and taken to London. His remark to his captors that he 'did not so much mislike the match as the rough manner of wooing' is the origin of this name for the war.

When the Scots ran, they abandoned their weapons, leaving what Patten described as an impenetrable thicket of pikes at the foot of the hill.(Thousands of abandoned weapons and 'jacks' were gathered up the next day by the English and sent to the armouries in London)

The Scots fled along the sands towards Leith, towards Holyrood Park and Edinburgh or along the Esk towards Dalkeith. They were ridden down and slaughtered by the regrouped English cavalry, taking revenge for their earlier mauling. As many as half the Scottish forces may have been killed, and Patten said that the bodies were strewn across the landscape like cattle in a rich pasture. The weather had been cold and damp all day, and it began to rain at about 8 o'clock in the evening.

Now walk back to Crookston Road and Inveresk. At the junction near Inveresk Lodge NTS Garden, turn sharp right down Double Dykes. Just up here on the left, you will find a giant teddy bear, a giant cat, and a small steam train.

Take the left fork just past the steam train, and walk past the gates of Inveresk allotments. You will come out at one corner of a cricket field. Walk across to the diagonally opposite corner (better walk round if there is a match on)……..

**Lewisvale Park**

…… and you will find a stone which marks one of the places where the Duke of Somerset set up camp. According to David Macbeth Moir, the stone was erected by Lord Eskgrove. (It is shown at the corner of the grounds of Eskgrove on the OS map of 1824). But the inscription does present a puzzle. On the date given on this stone, 9th September, the English camp was about a mile to the east of here; it is possible that the reference is to a meeting on the 9th between Somerset and representatives of Arran, the Scottish commander, or this may be the location of the English camp on the night following the battle, 10th September.
If you climb up to see the other side of the stone, you will see the same inscription carved in an older-looking font; presumably the owner of Eskgrove put up the stone for his guests to see, and later repeated the inscription on the other side, so that Joe Public did not have to trespass on his garden to read it!

**New Cricket Pavilion:** Two rare Roman altar stones were recently excavated on the site of this new building, suggesting that a temple to the god Mithras may have stood here.

From here, you can walk down the zigzag sloping path in front of you to the lower level of Lewisvale Park, and exit past the bandstand, the tennis courts and the aviary to the gates in Newbigging opposite Musselburgh Grammar School and the Swimming Pool. Go down Newbigging (a dog-leg crossing at Inveresk Road/Pinkie Road) to the High Street.

Or, 30 metres to the right (East) of the memorial stone, you will find a steeper path which leads down to an adventure playground, and out into Park Lane. Turn left at Pinkie Road, and then right into Newbigging.

Either way, if you keep heading North you will work your way back to the Old Town Hall, in the middle of Musselburgh. Turn left here to take you back to your starting point – or, of course, you could turn right instead to find a certain famous ice cream shop………

If you would like to find out more about the battle, the best place to start is with this Historic Scotland website:


This guidebook was put together by members of the Pinkie Cleugh Battlefield Group. The Group was formed in 2010 by collaboration amongst several local community and heritage groups, to try to enhance knowledge and understanding of the battlefield, for the benefit of the local communities and our visitors. You can contact us by email to pinkiecleugh@btinternet.com
The Battle of Pinkie Cleugh, 1547

Lithograph facsimile, published by the Bannatyne Club (1824) of a 16th-century copper plate engraving, now in the British Library.