

Walks from the Bo'ness and Kinneil Railway



Trains operate between Bo'ness and Manuel, with stops at Kinneil and Birkhill.
Operating dates and train times are shown on the insert to this booklet.
They are also displayed at our stations and on our website:
www.bkrailway.co.uk

Introduction

This booklet describes 5 walks of varying length near the Bo'ness and Kinneil Railway. They are suitable for all ages and abilities, though not all are suitable for wheelchair users. Brisk walkers will easily manage the walks in the minimum times shown. Slower walkers, and those who prefer to stop and look around and take more time to enjoy the sights will take more than the time indicated.

Bo'ness (a shortened form of Borrowstounness) lies on the shore of the River Forth, between Grangemouth and South Queensferry, with superb views across the wide estuary to the Ochil Hills. The area has a long and fascinating archaeological, architectural, historical and industrial heritage. In addition to the local industries of coalmining, saltpanning, pottery, whaling, shipbreaking and importing timber Bo'ness was the port for exports from Glasgow to Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Kinneil was the original village before Bo'ness grew to predominate it. Kinneil House was the seat of the Duke of Hamilton who was the original owner the nearby coal mine which closed in 1982. The tunnel from the mine links with the Valleyfield colliery on the opposite side of the Forth.

Birkhill's name is much older: it comes from a fort on the Antonine Wall, referred to by the Roman soldiers as "The hill with Birch trees". Birch trees still grow there! Our last station, Manuel, is named after a nearby nunnery of the Sisters of Christ Immanuel, again, long since disappeared.

Most of the walks are designed to start with a train journey and a walk back to Bo'ness, thus allowing you to take as much or as little time on the walk as you wish. If, however, you are returning by train, please make sure you leave plenty of time to catch the train back.



Walkers are reminded to carry refreshments, to protect themselves against the elements, to wear sensible footwear, and to follow the Countryside Code. The accompanying sketch maps are not to scale, and reference should be made to the Ordnance Survey Map Sheet 65, Falkirk and West Lothian. Toilets, when open, can be found at Bo'ness and Birkhill stations, Tesco and the bus station at Bo'ness and at Kinneil museum.

The walks can be extended by joining one route to another route at their respective start/end points. For example, the Historic Walk from Birkhill to Kinneil can continue with the Forth River Walk from Kinneil to Bo'ness.

Walks from Bo'ness

I. Forth River Walk (2 miles/3km – 45 minutes minimum)

This short walk follows part of the John Muir Way along the shore of the River Forth. It is mainly well surfaced along flat footpaths and away from houses and roads. Highlights include grand views across the river and bird watching. The walk as described includes a train ride from Kinneil to Bo'ness. It can easily be reversed to start with a train journey from Bo'ness to Kinneil.

Start in the car park at Bo'ness station, and walk towards the entrance to the car park. Cross the footbridge over the railway line and turn left to the cobble stone path around the old tidal dock. The footbridge provides a superb viewpoint of the station, river and dock, and the Kingdom of Fife. (An alternative for walkers unable to manage the footbridge is to walk out of the car park, along the road to the Customs House, then cross the railway line to join the path beyond the tidal dock.)

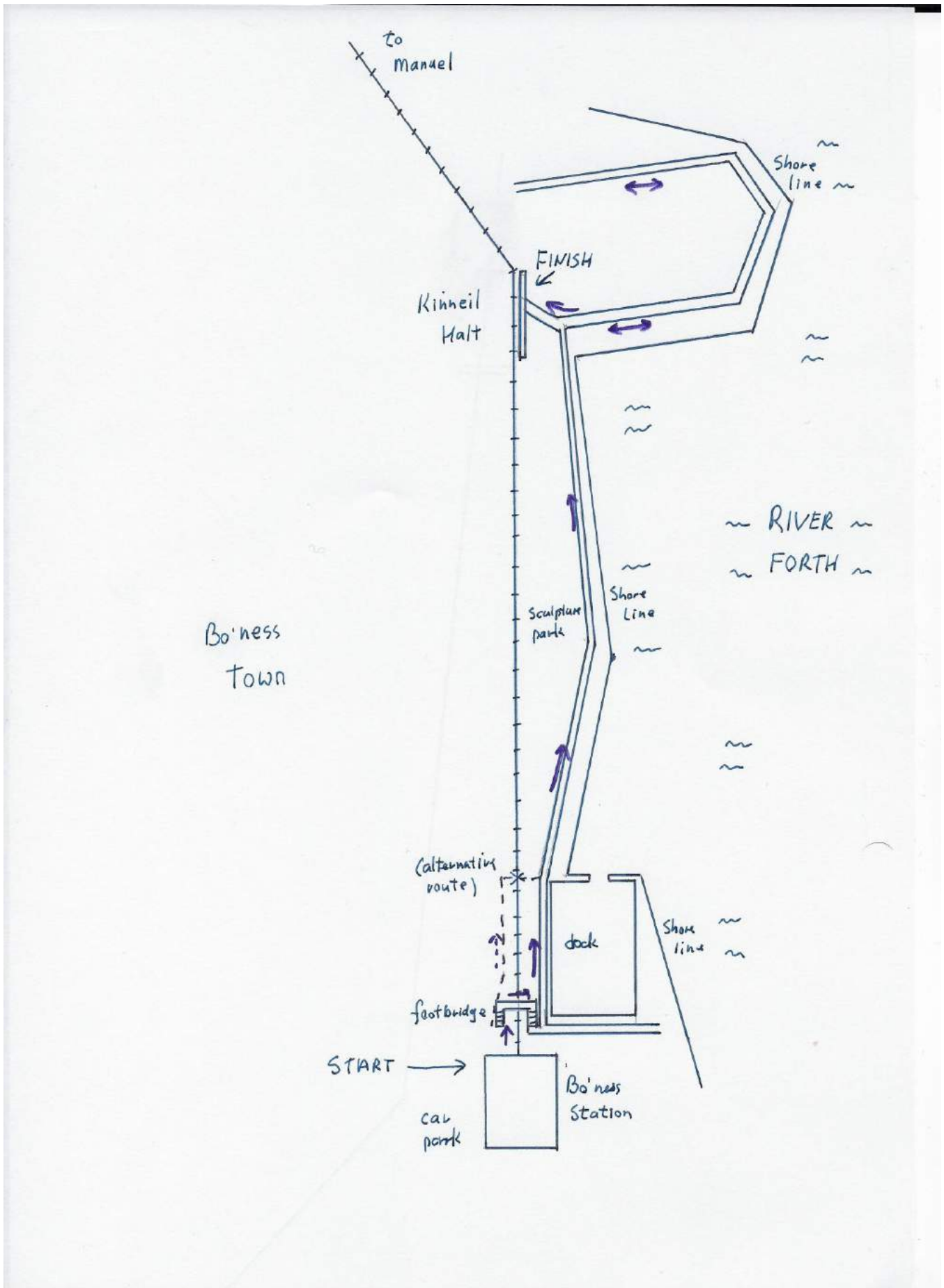
At the end of the dock, take the opportunity to cross the footbridge that spans the dock gates, and inspect the refurbishment of the outer harbour completed during 2004.

Explore the large sculptures, created by various international sculptors from blocks of granite left over from the building of the harbour wall at the end of the cobblestone path. Continue on the tarred path along the sea wall, which generally follows a parallel course with the railway. Rest on the stone seats, and admire the view across the river to the ancient Royal Burgh of Culross and the Ochil Hills.



Take the right-hand fork in the path when approaching Kinneil Halt, to walk anti-clockwise around the peninsula to the north of the Halt. Stay close to the edge of the estuary, rather than follow the inland paths through the bushes, to observe the wild birds on the mudflats. Rest a while on the wooden benches, to enjoy the panoramic view of the sites of note beside River Forth, including the now decommissioned Longannet coal-fired power station upriver at Kincardine and the Grangemouth oil refinery and docks.

This area was reclaimed from the local coal bing, and is a haven for birds living amongst the bushes and on the estuary. The walk brings you back to the Halt, where you can wait for the next train to Bo'ness.



2. Town Walk (2.25 miles/3.5km – 1 hour minimum: one steep climb)

This walk explores the historic town of Bo'ness. Highlights include superb views across the river and diverse Scottish town architecture. The walk is combined with a trip on the railway between Kinneil and Bo'ness,

Leave the car park at Bo'ness station and walk directly along Union Street keeping the railway line on your right-hand side. At the car park exit is the Baltic Wharf (1899). Next pass the former Customs House (1891), with the plaque commemorating George Denholm, fighter pilot in WW2. All the land between the road and the river has been reclaimed since the 19th century.

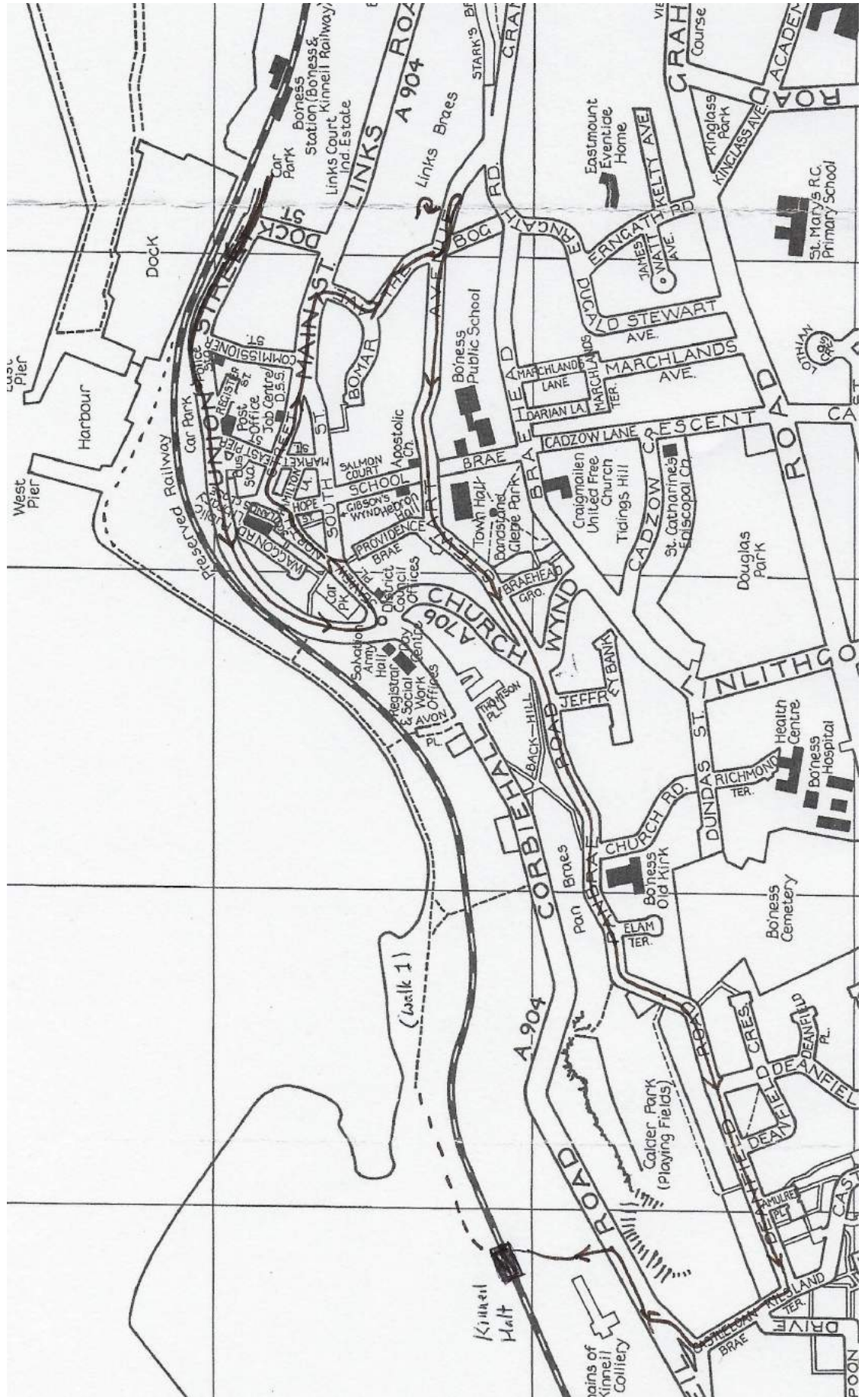
On your left is Dymock's Building, one of the oldest buildings in town dating from before 1650. Restored to its original yellow, it is now converted into flats. Next to it is Bo'ness Library which was converted from the 18th century West Pier Tavern and a tobacco warehouse. Turn left in to Waggon Road and continue on to the Miner's Memorial near the car park.



Turn sharp left back on yourself, and walk along North Street. Pass the Journal & Gazette Office building (1884) and the Hippodrome Theatre (1911). This was the first purpose built cinema in Scotland. It has been refurbished and is a great asset to the town. Follow North Street as it bends to the right around the corner of the Anchor Tavern (1891). Continue along North Street, passing the Jubilee Drinking Fountain (1887 – Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee), to the Tesco Supermarket.

Turn right and climb up The Bog, turning left into Stewart Avenue, and walk a short way along to admire the view of Bo'ness Railway Station, then go back, cross The Bog and continue along Stewart Avenue to pass the Masonic Hall (1909); the Town Hall (1904); and the War Memorial. From the seat at the War Memorial, Ben Lomond can be seen in the far west.

Continue along Stewart Avenue, and cross the main road directly into Panbrae Road. Visit the Old Kirk (1887) in Panbrae Road, one of the many fine churches in Bo'ness. Continue to Deanfield Road. At the end, turn right and descend Castlehill. Fork right, and cross the main road to Grangemouth. Turn right along the main road towards the houses, turning left before the houses down a wide track, leading to the railway line. Carefully cross the railway line using the foot crossing and gates and continue to Kinneil Halt, where you can wait for the next train to Bo'ness or follow the Forth River Walk (walk 1) back to Bo'ness along the foreshore.



Walks from Birkhill

3. Birkhill Meadow (0.5 mile/0.6km – 20 minutes minimum)

Travel to Birkhill and on leaving the train turn right and walk along the platform. The wooden hutch on your left was used to carry clay from the mine to the crusher. Continue towards the stone overbridge and up the slope.

At the top of the slope turn back on yourself to the left and follow the sign for woodland walks. Soon you emerge into an open area with picnic benches. The house and garden on your right are privately owned; please respect their privacy and peace. In front of you is the demolished crushing



descriptive board that process. In the extreme you can just see narrow that used to go up at a left of where you are these: more of them location of the now plant. There is a explains the crushing right of this picture gauge railway tracks steep angle just to the now. Remember later!

Go through the gap in the wooden fence and follow the path across the flat area. The track leads on towards some old buildings. Go between these and turn left. You will shortly come to a fork in the path - take the left branch up past a picnic table.

The area on your right is the Meadow. The path now enters a wooded area. At the next junction, where there is a bench, bear right and curve round back towards the mine buildings. You are walking along the top of a steep banking of ancient oak trees. This banking slopes steeply down to the river Avon (pronounced "Ann"). As you come back to the mine buildings you pass over a set of steeply inclined narrow gauge railway tracks which led from the mine entrance across the river Avon up to the crusher. Remember the tracks you saw in the picture near the start of the walk? These are the tracks that led up to the high-level structure. The incline on your left leads down to the mine entrances. You can see these mine workings on the 1952 plan in the exhibition room in Birkhill station.

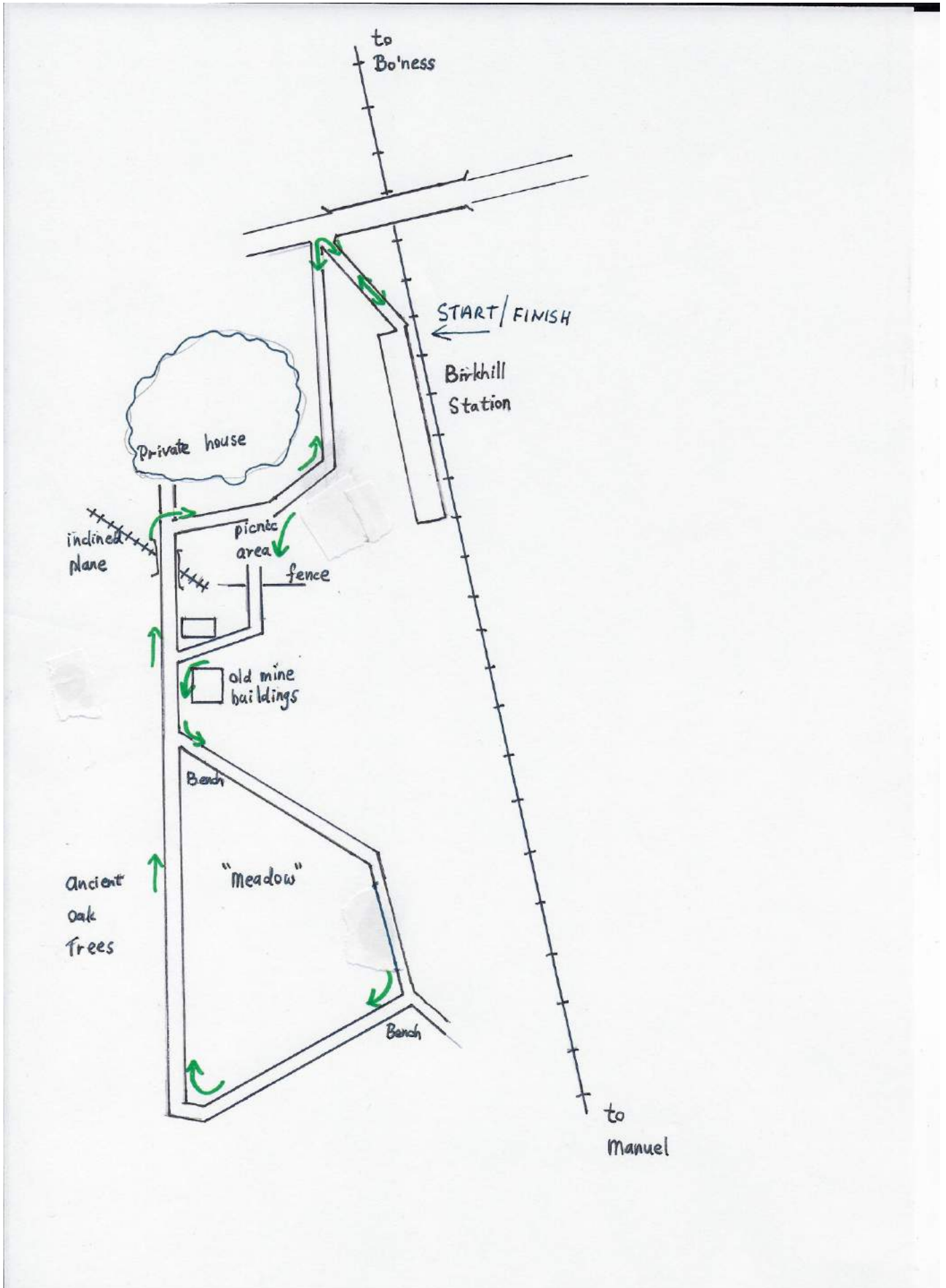
Access to the mine, the incline, and the bridge across the Avon have been closed off by Falkirk Council for safety, but these pictures show what



it was like shortly after closure.

Return the way you came back to Birkhill station for your journey back to Bo'ness or to continue on to the end of the line at Manuel, then back to Bo'ness.





4. Birkhill hilltop walk (0.5 miles/0.6 km – 30 minutes minimum; unsuitable for wheelchairs)

Travel to Birkhill and on leaving the train turn right and walk along the platform. The wooden hutch on your left was used to carry clay from the mine to the crusher. Continue towards the stone overbridge and up the slope.

At the top of the slope turn sharp left and follow the sign for woodland walks. Soon you emerge into an open area with picnic benches. The house and garden on your right are privately owned; please respect their privacy and peace.

In front of you is the location of the crushing plant. There is a descriptive board that explains what was done there.

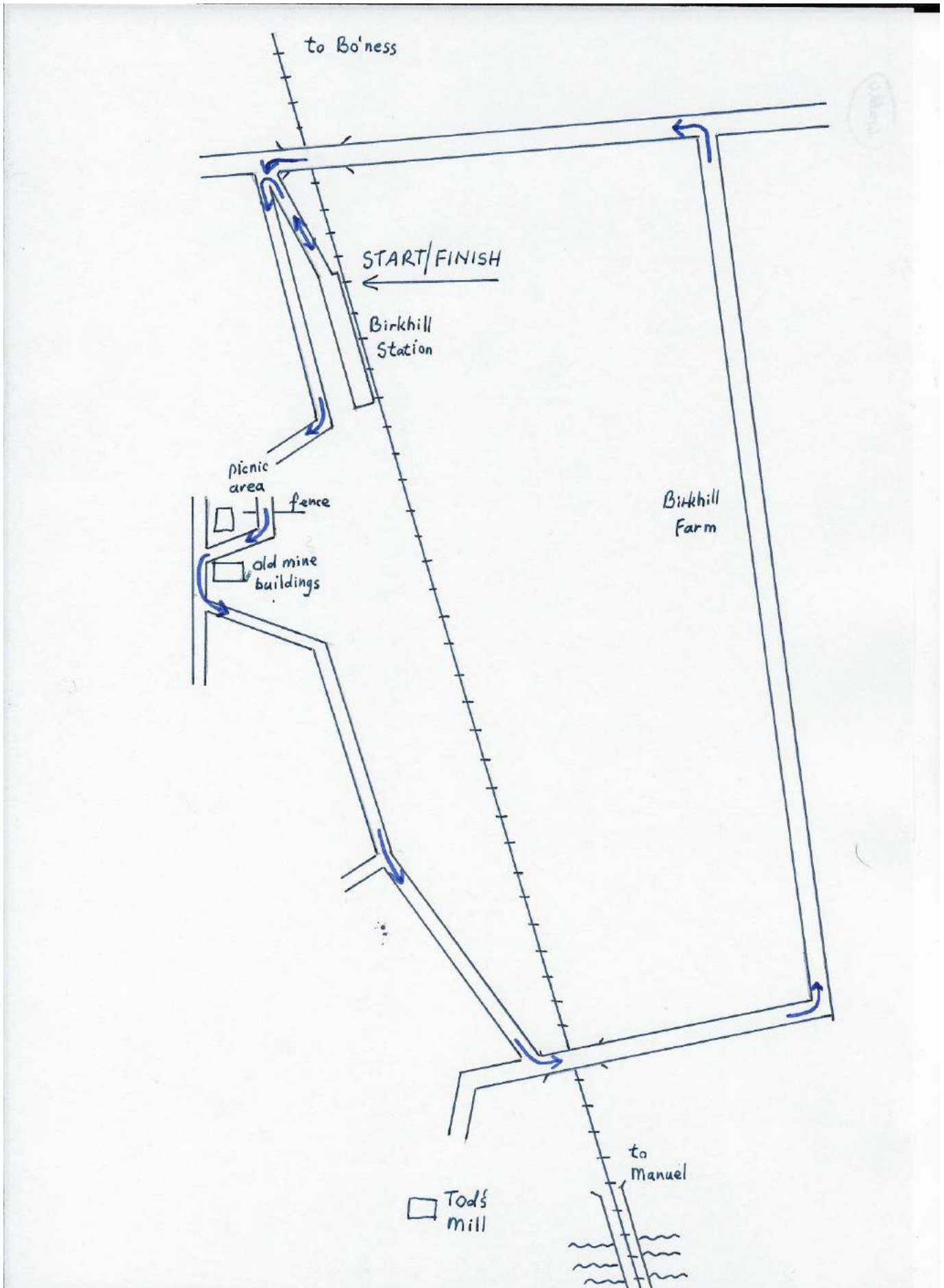
Follow the path through a gap in the wooden fence across the flat area. The track leads on between some old buildings, no longer open to the public. Turn left on to the main track. When you come to a fork in the track, take the left branch past another picnic table.

You now enter a more wooded area and come to a bench where the path splits, one track swinging sharply to the right. Take the other track straight ahead. Go through a gate marked "Hideaway Cottages" and past a garden swing - don't worry, this is a statutory right of way! Ahead through the trees you can see a stone railway bridge. The path goes through a gap in the fence on your left and joins a tarmac road. Turn left.

As you cross the bridge over the railway catch sight of the viaduct over the River Avon. Look closely at the track between the bridge and the start of the viaduct. You can see on the far side an overgrown low brick wall: the remains of the loading platform at the siding serving Tod's Mill, now a private house, at the riverside beyond. This is shown on the plan in the exhibition room at Birkhill station.



Continue on the road heading left up the hill, coming into open country as the road swings left. Walk up the hill past Birkhill Farm on the left. The vista now opens out, giving, on clear day, stunning views of the Ochil Hills in the distance and the Kingdom of Fife. The road continues down and you can see the station on your left. Crossing the Forties Pipeline, turn left at the junction and descend a rough track to cross the railway bridge to return to the station.



5. Birkhill to Kinneil/Bo'ness: "The Historic Walk"

(3 miles/5km – 1 hour minimum; unsuitable for wheelchairs)

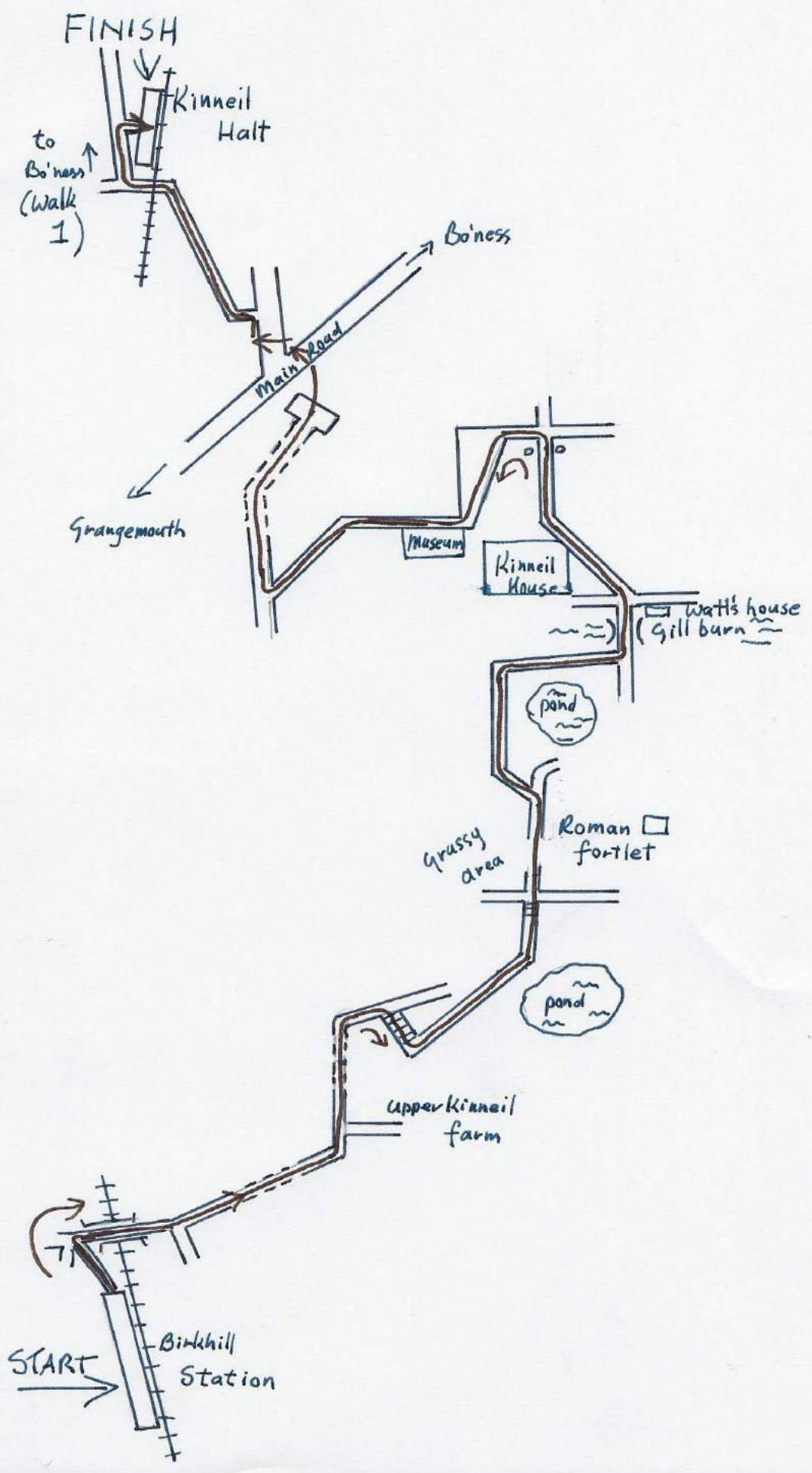
Take the train to Birkhill station. Exit the station and cross the bridge. Continue up the rough track to a tarmac road. Turn left up the gentle incline for about ½ mile turning sharp left just before Upper Kinneil farm. Ignore the road to your right and carry straight on along the tarmac road with splendid views of the River Forth, Culross and the Ochil Hills beyond. Follow the road down the hill, as it swings right. Soon you come to steps on the right signposted Cycle Route 76. Go up the steps and follow the path at the top.

Bear left at the next Cycle Route 76 sign, pass a pond on your right then leave the cycle route to descend a short flight of steps on your right. Continue straight ahead across open grassland on the line of the Antonine Wall. Passing a Roman Fortlet on your right. Bear to the left as you approach the trees. Entering the trees, turn right and pass another pond on your right then turn left to follow a mown grass path which is on the line of the Antonine Wall. Ahead are the ruins of Kinneil church on the left.

After passing close to the church on your left, follow the path as it swings right along the top of a deep gully. Turn left across the small bridge over the Gill Burn. At the crossroads is the workshop used by James Watt when employed by the Duke of Hamilton. Watt worked on improvements to the machinery for pumping water out of the mines. Here he developed the condenser which improved the efficiency of steam engines. Nearby is the cylinder from one of the mine pumps.



Carry on straight ahead past Kinneil House, once the home of the Duke of Hamilton. As you leave the gates, turn left to the small museum, normally open in afternoons (except Tuesdays) during the holiday season. This has a model of the Antonine Wall that is well worth visiting together with other exhibits of local interest. Continue on past the museum down a road to make your way out of the estate. You will soon see a disused road ahead. Turn right along the old road, keeping the railway on your left. The old road eventually peters out and there is a short scramble up the banking to the road. Cross this busy road at the junction with great care and head down towards some houses. Take the path off to the left signed Bo'ness Foreshore Path, carefully cross the railway track and reach Kinneil halt. Here you have a choice: catch the next train back to Bo'ness, or follow the Forth River Walk (Walk 1) in reverse back to Bo'ness. The loop round the foreshore can be omitted if coffee (or something stronger!) beckons.



Walks from Manuel

There are currently no walks from Manuel station, though it is possible, with prior arrangement, to travel to Manuel and use public roads to walk or cycle to various destinations such as Linlithgow or the Union canal that leads westwards to the Falkirk Wheel, the Kelpies and eventually Glasgow. Heading east, the canal meanders into the centre of Edinburgh.



The Scottish Railway Preservation Society published the first version of this booklet in February 2005, with the help of volunteers. This second version has been updated for 2017 season.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in the booklet and while The Scottish Railway Preservation Society cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions, we welcome any corrections or comments from our visitors.

For further information, please contact SRPS, Bo'ness Station, Union Street, Bo'ness EH51 9AQ. Alternatively, telephone 01506 822298 or 825855; or send an e-mail to enquiries@railway.srps.org.uk

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