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Castlelaw Hill Walk

Edinburgh Reporter

544 words

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The Pentland hills of Edinburgh have much to offer. Even if you haven't yet ventured up there, you have most likely admired them from the city's viewpoints. Whether you are intimately familiar with the hills or a first time visitor, there are plenty of walks throughout the park that offer an ideal short nature retreat.

Castlelaw hill walk is a gentle, staple route that takes you to the heart of the Pentlands. The well-marked, easy access trail, like many routes around Edinburgh's hills, offers a fine bit of nature right next door to the city. Castlelaw offers perhaps one of the most casual hill walks of any trail in the area. The route climbs steadily higher, but remains readily accessible to a wide range of physical abilities.

In recent months the Ministry of Defence road leading to the Castlelaw car park has been resurfaced and it is a great improvement. The single track lane has become as easy to access as nearby Hillend, but remains much quieter and has a great deal less traffic to contend with.

From the car park, the path from the farm gate winds up into the hills at a gentle, but steady, pace. The gradient is a sharp and pleasant contrast in comparison to climbing Caerketton from the Ski slope. That is a worthwhile walk that is gruelling and almost mountain climbing in comparison.

Castlelaw Hill Fort, an Iron age underground housing, makes the first interesting landmark along the way.

Ascending further and further into the hills, the view across Midlothian and deep into the Pentlands continues to get better and better as you go. The landscape shifts constantly from rural farmland to scenic countryside as you make your way up the trail. Eventually, your efforts are rewarded with one-off views across the city, the Forth, and the Kingdom of Fife.

The paths and valleys that lead off the trail are packed with options for walkers, sightseers, bird watchers, nature lovers, and even ambitious fell-runners. Cutting its way through the northern half of the Pentlands, the path steadily winds upwards, taking you deeper into the heart of the hills.

The first major path that splits to the left from the Castlelaw trail carries you to the Castlelaw Hill summit. Further along the trail, paths to the right carry you to the summit of Allermuir, continuing on towards Caerketton, Hillend, and eventually Swanston.

As the path forks between Allermuir and Capelaw hills, the trail begins to wind its way down the valley towards Dreghorn. The scenery is highly inviting and opens up to a panoramic view across the city from the three Bridges to North Berwick. Though the tired walker should be warned: each step downwards from here may need to be retraced upwards if a return to Castlelaw is required.

On a clear day the path is simple to retrace and a comfortable walk downhill back to the car park. A leisurely walk to the Allermuir turn off and back should take a very casual walker less than 90 minutes. Adding 30-45 minutes to take in a summit comes highly recommended and can be very rewarding.

Particular care should be taken by visiting dog walkers as the much of the hills are grazed by livestock at various times of the year.

Getting Started Gaming On Linux

Game with your brain

1266 words

IAN DEED

Getting Started Gaming on Linux

Just seven years ago, being passionate about gaming and passionate about Linux were two vastly different hobbies. To say you were a Linux gamer meant you once played relatively obscure indy releases, doom ports, or the penguin based Mario Cart racing clone Tuxcart. Today, many big name studios are building for the open source operating system and releasing across platforms from day one. For the end user, the result is an abundance of choice and control to run your own machine precisely how you want it. Despite the daunting looking learning curve; getting into gaming on Linux has never been easier.

Why switch to gaming on Linux

Switching to Linux, even with the abundance of games now available, can feel a little like giving yourself a social time out. Some of the highest trending titles simply can't or won't commit the resources to port their games in good time. Fortnite and PU: Battlegrounds, two of the highest trending games of the year aren't within a thousand miles of a Linux build. Without at least a Windows install to fall back on; you'll be leaving your team behind.

There is however, abundant pay-off for your self-imposed exclusion. For one: the price-point is favourable, free, but only a very slim advantage over the competition when compared to the real point of an open operating system: you own the computer.

The big 2 operating systems no longer abide by the idea that user knows best. Planning to put off updates for convenience? Shame. Didn't want them at all? Too bad. Time for an OS upgrade? Yes it is.

The modern commercial OS is like a car built for everyone; designed to be a safe, reliable, runner that will keep ticking on without services, checks, oil, or even fuel stops. Even the most oblivious user can maintain an

up-to-date, safe, functioning system without needing to know their Ethernet from their dongle.

The system that I want as a gamer is entirely different. I expect to do the servicing, tuning, customisation, and far more. Otherwise I would run a games console. A PC shouldn't wake up in the morning to half a completed rendering job and updates installed 'for your convenience'. If something stinks in my own system I want the ability to change it, or simply switch to one that already has.

The philosophy behind open source is powerful and convincing, but the real driving forces that drove me to switch were the choices available for a better gaming machine.

Where to go

The first thing to consider when choosing your OS is which flavour of Linux distribution you choose to marry into. Invest your time here downloading a few major 'brands' to play with before committing to an install. By creating a live USB stick you can run each one on your own hardware without committing bits to hard drive. It's an opportunity for a test drive, a way to discover the interface options and find out the state of hardware support for your own machine.

From the dozens of Linux versions available, three major options stand out for the first time user.

Ubuntu Linux is the biggest distro on the market today. It's well-supported, friendly, and its popularity makes it well tested and easy to troubleshoot.

Linux Mint has an interface as friendly as its name. Much of the underlying system is similar to Ubuntu, both are based from Debian Linux, meaning many products and solutions for one can be brought to the other. Many newcomers choose and stick with Mint for its helpful interface and ease-of-use.

Fedora Linux is another fine choice with a smaller overall user base. With well over a million users and the work of software firm Red Hat, there is a great level of support available. RedHat Package Manager (RPM) based Fedora prides its philosophy on innovation and cutting-edge features. Though a little more intimidating than the other options mentioned, Fedora is a wonderful system to use and learn even if the curve is just a little bit steeper.

One small step

For many, a single leap of faith into the world of Linux is entirely out of the question. Apprehension strikes and many times there's at least one unsupported package where the open source alternative doesn't quite cut it. For this reason, the first foray into a Linux computer is almost always dual-booting.

Much like dual-wielding contrasting weapons in an FPS, dual-booting gives you the best options from both systems to minimise the drawbacks of each. Creating a dual-boot is as simple as selecting an option in the installer. Installing alongside windows from your live USB will allow you to choose a hard drive size that will become your Linux partition.

Licence to learn*

There are certain points you must adhere to now that you've chosen to create a Linux system. Firstly, give yourself permission to screw up a little, then, give yourself permission to screw up a lot. It shouldn't need to be said but back up well before you start even thinking about tinkering with your own machine. Just because you're installing alongside Windows doesn't mean your data there is safe. Partition tables, BIOS settings, and fresh installs are almost as dirty as software gets. You're going to break something somewhere at least once.

Break, Google, fix. There is no finer, or more efficient, tried and tested cycle to learn computing. Repeat until presented with the Linux login screen. By the time you make it there, you've already come further than more than 90

To the victor go the spoils

A common misconception about Linux is that you absolutely must learn the command line for day-to-day use. Not true. Undeniable however, is that it's remarkably satisfying, surprisingly fun, and easy.

Simply by typing "sudo apt install steam" at the terminal (Debian based distros), before entering your password, you can watch as the package manager fetches, downloads, and installs the base steam client without a further peep.

Get the most from the machine

Another common misconception to open source systems is software should from then on out be open all the way. Many great open solutions exist; Blender, VLC, Audacity, and office. But excellent proprietary solutions, even on Linux, are alive and well too.

Graphics cards are a notable case and a consistent sticking point of Linux for many years previous. The open source drivers available for most cards just don't quite make the cut yet. Today, switching to the closed source, proprietary drivers are just a mouse click in the 'software updates' menu. This is a must and will unlock the true performance of your graphics card under Linux.

Since Valve announced their support for the platform and creation of the Steam-box years ago, many organisations followed suit. Today Linux games can be found from Steam, GOG, and feature regularly within Humble Bundles. Odds are that games already in your Steam library have full support, ready to be played.

Two of the most major game engines: Unity and Unreal have been practising and improving on their Linux support since earlier than 2014. The result of which is even low-budget indy developers have managed to create ports with quick and simple tools.

It's an old trope in Linux that upcoming new year is always the "year of the Linux desktop". Realistically, support is now so good and so widespread, and the competition system so poor, I'm amazed that-amongst tech-savvy gamers at least - every year isn't more of a landmark slide towards more Linux gaming.

Glencorse View Walk

Edinburgh Reporter

573 words

IAN DEED

Walking in nature is proven to have heaps of health benefits for both brain and body. Within Scotland, even the central belt, we have extraordinary fortune when it comes to the quality and quantity of nature on our doorstep.

Just off the A702 outside of Penicuik, Flotterstone features a range of walks that vary greatly in length, gradient, and difficulty. A ton of options are opened to you here, whether you're seeking an entire day of hiking over the Pentland summits or just a simple stretch of the legs.

Glencorse View is an ideal walk of little intensity and well under 90 minutes. Featuring just two short heart raising climbs that pay generous rewards for the effort, trail route is a perfect early morning or late evening way to unwind.

The Flotterstone car park is well sized though often busy, timing can be key to finding a usable space. A happily placed cafe is the first and last mark on the trail, offering coffee, cake, and chilled drinks. Picture guides show the trails of the area, points of interest, and the routes that might be taken.

As you start on the route a short shaded walk through the woods opens into access trails for local farmland. The paths are popular and so well signposted and made into clearly identifiable trails.

A fork in the road soon invites you to tackle the hill of Scald Law over the Glencorse View trail. At 579 meters high, the summit of Scald Law is the highest in the Pentlands. The trail signs helpfully direct you left for the hill, right for the Glencorse trail at a point where the view of Scald Law is more intimidating than it appears almost anywhere else.

For the casual walker with less time and daring at hand; the more casual Glencorse trail continues along pleasantly by the river.

The first of two short climbs carries you to the access road leading to the reservoir. The trail follows the road by the waterside for a short

distance. Fishing boats are often docked by the cabin and the view over the reservoir and its small island is peaceful and picturesque.

Another trail sign down the road directs the route off the road again and into the final uphill portion of the trail. The route here is pleasantly shaded by the trees as the path climbs onto Castlelaw hill.

In the short time it takes to clear the trees and come out on to the farm path the work of the day is done. Two of perhaps the best-placed seats in Midlothian provide views down the valley into the Pentlands. A momentary stop to take in Scald Law, hikers on its trail, and a choice well made is highly worthwhile.

From the highpoint of the trail, only a gentle walk down the farm-track remains as a reward for your efforts. Signposts indicate the turn to walk down to rejoin the access road towards Flotterstone again.

The Glencorse View route is remarkably short, though refreshingly and peaceful. Even an unfit writer stopping for photographs might make their way around in about an hour. An excellent stop off to start the day before work or end it with a bit of fresh air and gentle exercise.

Like much of the area, the trails are made up of working farmland and grazing livestock in parts. Care should be taken, particularly when taking pets to enjoy the route.

Formula One 2018 Quarter Season Review

IAN DEED

Introduction

Passing by the quarter-season marker, the 2018 Formula One championship can be said to have delivered an entire season worth of racing action. Six rounds into the historically long 21 race season The headline story has been a personality-driven battle between the sports all-time greats.

Teams have challenged the rules and drivers have often dared to challenge teams in the early season. Uniquely for 2018, the action behind the scenes has been almost as exciting as the action on the track. Formula One's new owner has shaken things up in an attempt to bring, for the first time, viewing technology and 21st century thinking to the most technologically advanced racing series in the world.

Liberty Media, the firm which has only recently bought and taken over the sport of Formula One, now has a task on its hands. Liberty's unenviable task is to transform the second-hand reliable runner they purchased into a sleek, modern outfit capable of both captivating old fans while retaining new ones.

Already there are promising signs that indicate a healthy sport for the future. For the first time in the history of the sport, media regularly appears online which shows off the kind of action highlights that define open-cockpit wheel-to-wheel racing. Live race streaming is already available, though bug filled and less than reliable, for brave early adopters.

Liberty so far has had some notable own-goals in audience facing technology since they took over. Many times in many races, the on-screen graphics have forgotten either driver's names, their lap times, or both. User reports of the pay-as-you-go mobile application and streaming service have been "great when it works" which is said to be "not often". Despite Liberty's teething troubles, fans are finally receiving content they have been desperate for years to pay for.

The signatures of the past will remain on the sport still for years to come. Old agreements and contracts guarantee that services fans want to buy: live race streams, replays, timing, and highlight footage will remain

locked to broadcast license holders for many countries well into the next decade.

With more than just a stroke of fortune, the shape of the 2018 season has made sure that fans are figuring out a way to watch in any way they can.

The championship title is setting up to be an all-time classic for the era. The title race is as much motorsport as it is a year-long boxing match between two great racing heavyweights.

In the red corner, the Ferrari of Sebastian Vettel started the season in fine form. The young 4-time champion comfortably took two wins from the first two races. It wasn't until race 3, in China, that the German's car suffered a severe body blow when the Red Bull of 20-year-old Max Verstappen crashed it out of the competition.

Despite a devastating third weekend to the championship the dominating Red car was looking fast, stable, and reliable, Even the second car of the Italian team looked capable; in the hands of Kimi Raikkonen it may even be capable of race wins on its day.

For the title contenders, the third race in the season was a tipping point that would define the first quarter. The late-race crash that took Vettel's Ferrari from the points could, and certainly should, have been a minor bump in the road that kept accelerating the team towards the championship. Unfortunately, an uncontrolled Red Bull car was only the start of the team's misfortune.

In the silver corner, Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton started the season chasing hard. Finishing 2nd, 3rd, and then 4th in the first 3 races; the intent to fight was clearly there, even if the form wasn't

By the end of April, the championship continued to Baku, Azerbaijan for its fourth round street fight. The hot, high pressure, medieval street circuit revealed cracks in the otherwise unbreakable 2018 armour of the German driver.

The already difficult close quarters of Baku's street circuit was made almost impossible by unseasonably low tire grip. With cars struggling to hold the track, knicks and bumps throughout the event scattered priceless carbon fibre shards and debris into the racing line. There were points of the race where any one of the front-runners could take the win and a lot a bag of points.

The first contenders to fall from the race were the Red Bull racing pair. After butting wheels, for over a dozen laps the team nightmare came true and one teammate collected the other into the barriers. For the 4th time in 4 races, the young head of Max Verstappen tangled in an unforced incident.

After an event-packed safety car intermission, the Baku Grand Prix was set up to be decided by a sprint race to the flag. Mercedes' Valtteri Bottas led the pack followed by Vettel before Hamilton, Kimi Raikkonen chased the podium positions from fourth.

It could have been a scenario tailor-made for the Ferrari team. Finishing in race order would secure a good handful of championship points over their closest rival and set the team up to go into a season stronger than Ferrari have had for years.

As the safety car peeled from the track to get racing underway; the audience, the commentary team, and likely the drivers held their breath.

Bottas' Mercedes launched well to kick off a drag race down the impossibly long straight of the Baku circuit. In the closing meters before the first corner, Vettel made a split second choice from second that would ultimately cost him the race.

Vettel made a daring lunge to overtake from too far back on a poorly chosen line on the inside of the track. The line was too shallow and the braking too late to turn the Red Ferrari through the corner. The front wheels locked up, belched cloud-white smoke and screeched off the edge of the track. The remaining top contenders filed passed inside track limits. The Ferrari with badly scarred tires barely managed to limp round to the finish.

The Baku Grand Prix finished after Bottas retired from the lead following an unlucky and infuriating puncture in the dying laps. Hamilton, then up to second was gifted a win. Instead of losing yet more points to the championship leader; Hamilton was gathering up a whole bunch of his own.

The Grand Prix of Azerbaijan marked the return of an old wrinkle that seemed, until April, to have been ironed out of Vettel's racing career. The closing quarter in Baku was the first time in the season that his race came to crucial make or break moment of stress.

The career of a racing driver is exciting, highly paid, well rewarded, filled with glamour and ridiculously fun; but it's otherwise hard.

Vettel has the skill, talent, and charisma to weather through anything that can and will impact the professional racing driver. Tough weekends, unlucky results for months or sometimes years, technical failures and massive let-downs. Win or lose the German driver is a professional and downright phenomenal racing driver. As far as I, or seemingly anyone can tell; he may have but one Achilles heel: Pressure.

It was the same race, on the Baku circuit, of the 2017 season that saw Vettel, under a safety car, pull up alongside and ram the lead car wheel-to-wheel in an incident as unprofessional as it was silly.

As far back as the 2011 season, in the Canadian Grand Prix of that

year, we were treated to a very rare crack in an otherwise near flawless driver under pressure. Of the most memorable pieces of a spectacular race is the then Red Bull of Vettel being chased down on the closing lap by Jenson Button's McLaren. Well on his way to his second successive championship that year Vettel led the closing laps of the race comfortably. On the last lap of a historically long GP; It was a crucial mistake under pressure from Vettel that spun up the wheels and let Button breeze past to steal a phenomenal win.

It's a pattern that the 30-year-old is more and more inclined to repeat as a contest heats up. Outings that are otherwise flawless often fall foul to the smallest and most simple of mistakes. Tiny locking of the front wheels, running too deep, or losing the back end on the throttle; mistakes that Vettel never makes, unless it's crucially important.

The 2017 season gradually fell to Mercedes in bits and pieces. From a start that was dominated by the Italian team, Ferrari gradually gave away points in bits and pieces, including Baku, until the championship was over with some races still to run.

It was the closing quarter of the 2017 season, with both the drivers and constructors trophy already decided and the pressure eliminated, Sebastian Vettel found rare form again. As the Mercedes championship winning car relaxed its own fight for race wins to allow everyone else to fight for best of the rest.

Vettel appeared to carry 2017's race-winning form into the 2018 season. Even under pressure, with multiple drivers chasing for the lead, Vettel looked untouchable.

Perhaps, what is bad for Vettel is good for the championship. As momentum swung in China, Hamilton read the changing tide and jumped on the throttle to take consecutive wins from Baku and Spain.

Once again we are likely to be treated to a battle of titans as both drivers trade blows, sometimes literally on the circuit.

Like their drivers, both machines have their own unique strengths, each is more fragile than the other in different areas.

Often fans of Formula One are keen to remember past races and vintage cars with romantic hindsight. In championship battles and sheer access to top-level racing, there is no bygone era that will likely even match the 2018 season.