

Top to bottom: East of Bowling. The Falkirk Wheel. In-Bru inventor Robert Barr, (in top hat) in Falkirk. Viaduct beyond Ratho

Weekender

Across Scotland on the flat

The canal towpath route from Glasgow to Edinburgh is Britain's longest car-free C2C. **Rob Ainsley** rode it



ROB AINSLEY

Rob collects international end-to-ends and blogs about rides in Yorkshire and beyond at e2e.bike

Coast-to-coasts don't come easier. The 60-ish miles of canal towpath from Bowling, west of Glasgow, to the centre of Edinburgh is all flat, mostly tarmac, car free and well signed – Britain's longest such bike route. (Sustrans says that this route, NCN 754, is 99.3% traffic free and 68.9% asphalt.) It can be ridden either way but west-to-east follows the prevailing wind. There are a few short stony bits through tunnels and across lofty viaducts, but essentially it's a smooth, stress-free, family-friendly delight.

Train access is great, thanks to mainline stations in Glasgow and Edinburgh connecting you to the rest of Britain. Regular bike-friendly Scotrail services run parallel to the route, giving lots of bailout opportunities if the weather turns.

You can blast the route in a day or do it at leisure in two. Falkirk is halfway, with plenty of accommodation choice, and you ride right past a modern wonder of the canal network: the Falkirk Wheel's unique canal-lift-carousel hybrid. (There's also the Antonine Wall, a smaller version of Hadrian's.) A short side trip away is the Kelpies' pair of horse head sculptures, and a glimpse of the sea.

Scenery isn't mountainous but it's all easy on the eye and camera – from the open calm east of Glasgow, through Falkirk's engineering and sculptures, past elegant, waterside Linlithgow, to the sense of urban climax as you burrow into Edinburgh's handsome centre. Cafés and shops are never far away, and you start and finish right in the middle of two very visitable, very different cities.

More C2Cs

Rob wrote an article for Cycle on UK coast-to-coasts a while ago: cyclinguk.org/cycle/coast-coast-alternatives

