

## A brief history of Beecraigs Country Park

Beecraigs Country Park, set in the Bathgate Hills consists of over 370 hectares of farm, meadow and woodland. However, Beecraigs Country Park has not always looked the way it does today. In fact, once upon a time there were very few trees on the land that now makes up the Country Park.

Before 1914, the Park was farmland consisting of rough grazing and arable fields. Riccarton Burn ran through this upland valley and the only trees were mixed broadleaves such as Beech, Oak and Ash that made up hedgerows, shelterbelts and small copses.

Three farms were on the site that currently makes up Beecraigs Country Park:- Whitebaulks (the location of the present Visitor Centre), Balvormie and Beecraigs. These names are still used around the Park today, including Whitebaulks Cottages and Balvormie Meadow/Balvormie Pond.

In 1914, the reservoir, now known as Beecraigs Loch, was built by German Prisoners of War by damming Riccarton Burn. Clay and stone was used to build the dam wall, this stone was quarried from Riccarton Hill and brought down the slopes to the site using a winch-powered railway. The build took 4 years but by 1918 the 8 hectare reservoir, holding 82 million gallons of water, began serving as a local water supply and continued to do so for 55 years. 1922 saw the start of fishing at Beecraigs Loch, with anglers fishing native brown trout which inhabit the Riccarton Burn.



Also in 1922 came the first plantation of pine and spruce to act as a shelterbelt. This was the start of the forest we know today at Beecraigs and a further 240 hectares were planted with conifers through to 1973. In 1972, Beecraigs Reservoir was decommissioned by the water board and by 1975 the West Lothian District Council had taken over the reservoir and were using its filter bed system to support a trout fish farm.

During the next few years, car parks were built at Balvormie and Whitebaulks, waymarked trails were installed and the first BBQ site was constructed.



In 1977, Red Deer were first brought to Whitebaulks farm - 22 hinds and two stags and so began the Beecraigs herd. Later on the animal attraction would see the size of the Red Deer herd increase significantly and much later in 2010 the addition of a fold of Highland Cattle.

In 1977 the West Lothian Countryside Ranger Service was created to lead guided walks and provide information and assistance to visitors. The orienteering course was also laid out and the BBQ sites improved.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1980, Beecraigs became a fully registered Country Park. 1980 was also the year that the log cabin (no longer in place) was also completed. Over the next 10 years, the number of people visiting the Country Park continued to increase and the Park saw further developments including Balvormie toilets, the fishing lodge, Caravan & Camping Site and Restaurant at Beecraigs being built along with the climbing wall and field archery site.

Today Beecraigs Country Park attracts over 500,000 visitors each year and has had exceptional demand during recent years with 1,209,106 visitors in 2020/21. The building that was previously the Restaurant was upgraded and officially reopened as the Visitor Centre on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2017. The Park continues to evolve to meet the needs of its visitors.