

# **THE WEST FIFE SUNDIAL TRAIL**

**IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THOMAS ROSS**

**Dennis Cowan**



# The West Fife sundial trail

## Introduction

Thomas Ross was a Victorian architect, who along with his partner David MacGibbon, produced a five volume work entitled “The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland” between 1887 and 1892. Half of the fifth volume describes the ancient sundials that they saw during the production of their work and it is now regarded as the bible of ancient Scottish sundials. A shorter version of the sundial section was presented to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and published by them in 1890.

This sundial trail visits six of the sundials that Ross saw and described, and also takes the opportunity to visit the ancient village of Culross where there are another two sundials to see. During the 20th century, it became recognised that Culross contained many unique historical buildings and the National Trust for Scotland has been working on their preservation and restoration since the 1930s. See [www.nts.org.uk/Property/Culross](http://www.nts.org.uk/Property/Culross) for details.

You also have the opportunity to see one of the very few mass dials in Scotland, which although fairly common in England, are very rare in Scotland. Finally there is a visit to a ruined 13<sup>th</sup> century church where a fine sundial can be seen.

This trail starts in South Queensferry on the western outskirts of Edinburgh and then crosses the Firth of Forth to Fife via the Forth Road Bridge. It then meanders through the west of Fife following in the footsteps of Ross before crossing back over the Firth of Forth, this time further upstream at the Kincardine Bridge, before finishing in the village of Airth.

The sundial trail itself is about 30 miles long and will take just over an hour by car. You will have to allow around two hours for stoppage time looking at the sundials and more if meals and / or refreshments or other deviations are taken. It could be completed in a long morning or afternoon including travelling from Edinburgh.

The table on page 9 gives the grid references for each of the locations as well as the cumulative times and distances involved.

Start the trail at the car park at the Promenade in Edinburgh Road in South Queensferry. It overlooks the Firth of Forth and is situated conveniently between the Forth Rail and Road Bridges.

Wonderful views can be had from here looking towards the Forth Bridges and the opportunity could be taken of a boat trip out to the island of Inchcolm, including an



The small scale map (Google Maps) above, identifies the general location of this sundial trail in relation to Edinburgh. A large scale map is included on page 10, where there is also a link to Google Maps where the map can be viewed in much larger (or smaller) scales. If you are familiar with the use of the yellow figure icon in Google Maps, you can click and drag it on to the map and actually view the location of the sundials or other locations on the route. If using this facility, it is best to enlarge the map as much as possible to ensure that you place the icon in the correct position. It should be noted that you may have to move the icon up or down the road a little for the best view. It comes with practice! There are also larger scale maps showing the detailed locations at pages 11 to 16.

optional landing on the island. See [www.forthtours.com](http://www.forthtours.com) for details. Whilst there, you could see the ancient abbey where another mass dial was found in 2009, however unfortunately it is not on display. See [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/edinburgh\\_and\\_east/8214948.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/edinburgh_and_east/8214948.stm) for details of the find.

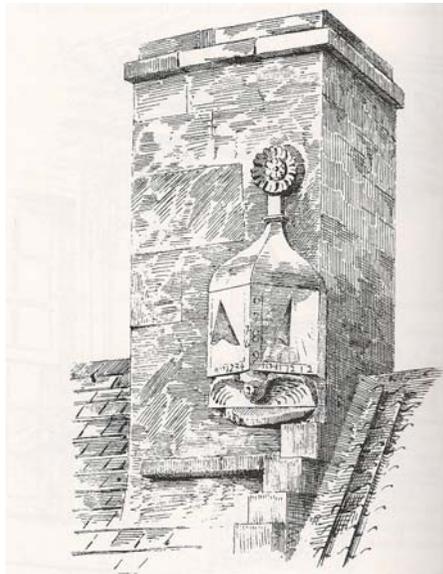
# The West Fife sundial trail

From the car park, walk towards the centre of South Queensferry with the Firth of Forth on your right. At the end of the car park before the road narrows, cross the road and walk up the hill on the path behind the gardens. Look towards the Firth of Forth between the first and second houses on your right. You will see the sundial on a chimney stack. It is well hidden and can't be seen from the main road.



No 1 - South Queensferry sundial

**No 1 on Map – Thomas Ross described this dial as having “had rough usage.” It has not improved with age. Ross goes on to say that it “is built into a chimney-stack on the south side of a house near the east end of the village.” This two faced stone dial with pyramid capping and a flower above and winged head below sits on a chimney stack. One gnomon is missing whilst a small part of the other can just be seen. It has Arabic numerals from 6am to 9am just visible on the south face and 2pm to 7pm just visible on the west face. The other numerals can no longer be seen. The hour lines are only just visible.**



Ross's sketch of the South Queensferry sundial

Return down the path to the main road. South Queensferry can get quite congested, so it is probably best to leave your car in the car park and walk the 500 yards or so to the next sundial. Continue walking away from the car park and through the narrow street until St Mary's church is seen on your right.



No 2 - Mass dial at St. Mary's Church, South Queensferry

**No 2 on Map – This church is a Scottish Episcopal church which is aligned to the Church of England rather than the Church of Scotland. The mass dial can be seen at the right hand side of the right hand window as seen from the street. It is about 7 feet above ground level and is a complete circle with 24 hour lines 15 degrees apart. This type of dial is fairly common in England, but very rare in Scotland and this is one of only a few examples of its type here.**

# The West Fife sundial trail

Return to your car in the car park and drive back through the narrow street until the first road junction where you should turn left. Continue uphill to the roundabout and turn right. Follow the signs to the A90 and the Forth Road Bridge, and cross the bridge into Fife.

Leave the road at Junction 1 as it changes into the M90 and follow the A985 left towards Kincardine. Go straight over all roundabouts for nearly three miles until you see Limekilns signposted to the left. Follow this unclassified road into Limekilns. At the bottom of the hill, at the village green, turn right into the village centre. Hope Cottage will be seen on your right just before the Post Office.

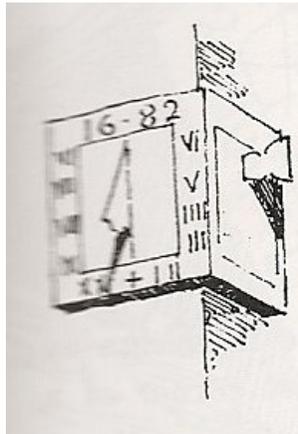
**No 3 on Map – Ross does not say much about this dial other than “on the south-east corner of a house here there is a dial bearing the date 1682” - it is actually 1689. It is a very nice two faced dial with Roman numerals and a + for the noon mark and carries the date of 1689 on its south face. The other face is east facing and has Arabic numerals from 4am to 11am. It is in very good condition with both solid gnomons intact.**



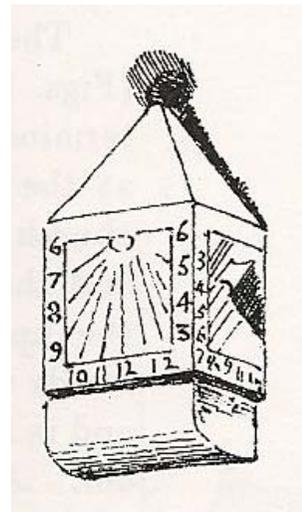
No 3 - The sundial on Hope Cottage, Limekilns

Continue on the road for 300 yards or so, until just before the Ship Inn. This old inn is famous for being mentioned in Robert Louis Stevenson’s classic novel “Treasure Island” and meals are served during the day.

**No 4 on Map – This three faced dial sits on a corbel on a house just before the Ship Inn. The east and west faces are very narrow and can’t be read, but the south face has Arabic numerals from 6am to 6pm. Ross briefly mentions it, saying only that it “may be classed with those from the Melrose district.”<sup>1</sup>**



Ross's sketch of the sundial on Hope Cottage



Ross's sketch of the sundial near the Ship Inn



No 4 - The sundial near the Ship Inn

1 – This refers to the six sundials identified by Ross in the village of Newstead near Melrose, produced by the local stonemasons and installed on their houses.

# The West Fife sundial trail

Return back to the junction with the A985 road and turn left. Take the 2<sup>nd</sup> road on the right to Crossford and turn left at the traffic lights as the village is reached. Dunfermline Golf Club, which once was the Pitfirrane estate, will be found around 200 yards on your left. Follow the drive to the clubhouse where the next sundial will be found at the south west corner.

**No 5 on map - Ross describes this dial at length as follows – “The dial-stone which rested on this fine lion-shaped pedestal is lost. The figure holds between his fore-paws a shield, containing a lion passant regardant, over three piles, the cognisance of the Halketts of Pitfirrane. The date on the castle is 1580, but there is nothing to connect this date with the dial, and the earliest dated dials (at Dundas Castle and Kenmure Castle) are forty-three years after this time. This dial disappeared, and all knowledge of its ever having been at Pitfirrane was lost, till the late Mr. Paton of Dunfermline found it lying in a garden in the neighbourhood, and on Sir Arthur Halkett recognising the arms as his own it was restored to Pitfirrane. The height of the lion is 2 feet 6 inches, and including the base 3 feet 3 inches; breadth of base 12 inches; breadth across shield, 9 inches.”**

**However I’m not clear in my own mind whether this is the original pedestal or a copy. A circular dial plate has been installed with the motto “Tak tent o time ere time be tint” loosely translated as “take care of time or it will be lost”. It has Roman numerals from 6am to 6pm and includes the name “Pitfirrane”. It also includes “Fides Sufficit”, the motto of the Halketts, meaning “Faith is Sufficient”. The gnomon has a very fine “H” for Halkett incorporated in its design.**



No 5 - The Pitfirrane/Dunfermline Golf Club sundial



Detail of the Pitfirrane/Dunfermline Golf Club sundial



Ross's sketch of the Pitfirrane/Dunfermline Golf Club sundial pedestal

# The West Fife sundial trail

Drive back towards the village. As the exit from the golf club is reached, the next sundial will be seen across the road directly in front of you. There is a parking space available here but take care not to obstruct the driveways to the houses.

**No 6 on map – This is a cube dial with three marble faces. The east face is complete, the south face is blank whilst the west face has been marked out, but no gnomon has been fitted. However Ross’s sketch shows the gnomons complete. Was this artistic licence on his part or have the faces been replaced? Ross says “A well-shaped dial of this century. It forms the termination of a gate pillar adjoining the public road at Pitfirrane”. However there is a problem with this dial – can you spot it? See page 17 for a larger image and the answer.**



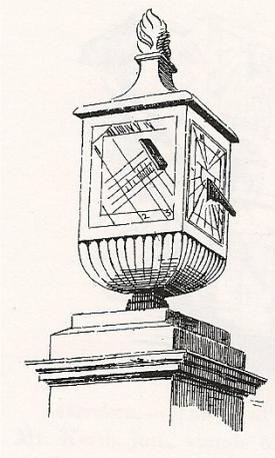
No 6 - Crossford sundial

**No 7 on map – The three faced stone sundial will be found on a corbel on the south-west corner of the ruins of Carnock Old Church which dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The central south face has Roman numerals from 6am to 6pm with a + for the noon mark and includes the date of 1683. The east face has Arabic numerals from 4am to noon whilst the west face also has Arabic numerals this time from 1pm to 8pm. Gnomons have not survived, but stubs remain on all three faces. There was originally a dial on the south-east corner too, but this has been lost probably when that corner collapsed.**



No 7 - Carnock Old Church sundial

Head back towards the traffic lights, but take the first road on your left into Lundin Road before the traffic lights are reached. Follow this road over the hill and down the other side, and when the “T” junction with the A907 road is reached, turn left. Follow this road into Carnock, passing the Old Inn on your left, where meals are served. After the series of bends through the village, park your car in the layby on your left adjacent to the burial ground. Walk through the burial ground to the ruined church.



Ross’s sketch of the Crossford sundial

# The West Fife sundial trail

Continue on the A907 road into the village of Oakley. As you pass Oakley Industrial Estate on your right, take the next road on your left into Station Road. Continue on this road until the “T” junction with the A985 is reached where you should turn right. Take the first road (B9037) on your left signposted to High Valleyfield. Follow this road for nearly 1,000 yards until you see Culross signposted to the right and take this sharp turn. Follow this road into Culross. Continue through the village, passing the Red Lion Inn on your left, where meals are served, and park in the car park on your left after the village green. Walk back to the village green and the next sundial will be seen on Robertson’s House on the far side of the green – in Culross it was customary to name houses after their owners.

**No 8 on map – This rectangular stone sundial is at first floor level of the house. It has rather faint Roman numerals and lines, but its solid gnomon is intact.**

Facing the sundial, walk westwards to your left and Culross Palace will be seen just a short distance away.

**No 9 on map – Ross does not mention this sundial specifically, but he does provide a section on Culross in volume 2 of his work and the sundial can be seen in his sketch of the palace. It is a plain rectangular dial mounted at first floor level on the south face of the palace. It has Roman numerals from 7am to 5pm. The gnomon is missing.**



No 9 - The Culross Palace sundial



No 8 - The Robertson’s House sundial



Ross’s sketch of Culross Palace showing the sundial

# The West Fife sundial trail

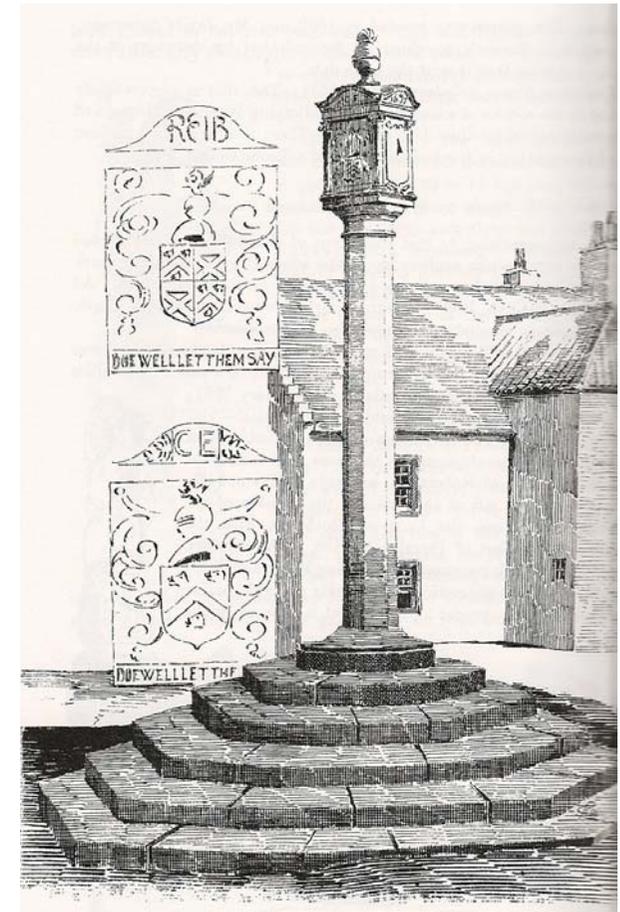
Return to your car, and turn left out of the car park. Follow this road which eventually reaches a roundabout on the A985 road. Turn left here towards the Kincardine Bridge which should be crossed. At the first roundabout after the bridge, take the first exit on to the A876, then a short distance later take the 2<sup>nd</sup> slip road on to the A905 towards Airth. Follow the signs to Airth, and as the village is reached and after you have passed the new houses on your left, turn left into the High Street. Continue until you see the Mercat Cross in front of you.

**No 10 on map – Ross comments that “This fine market cross stands in the centre of the village. On the top of the shaft a square architectural composition, which resembles an old-fashioned eight-day clock, contains two sundials. Over one of them is the date 1697. On the other two faces there are first the Elphinstone arms and motto DOE WELL LET THEM SAY, and above are the initials C.E. On the other face are quartered the Elphinstone and Bruce arms; above are the initials, probably of Richard Elphinstone, eldest son of Sir Thomas Elphinstone of Calderhall. Along with his initials are those of his wife, I.E., Jane Bruce, heiress of the estate of Airth”.**

**There is nothing more that can be said really except that Arabic numerals of 4am to 3pm can be seen on the south face, whilst 2pm to 8pm can be seen on the west face. However the hour lines are no longer visible. The solid gnomons are still in place although they are rather battered.**



No 10 - Airth Mercat Cross



Ross's sketch of Airth Mercat Cross

To return to Edinburgh, drive back in the direction of the Kincardine Bridge, and follow the signs to Edinburgh via the M9 motorway.

# The West Fife sundial trail

## LOCATION DETAILS

Map Ref.	Location	Grid Reference	Cum Distance in miles	Cum Time in hours:mins
1	South Queensferry	NT 13156 78287	0.0	0:00
2	South Queensferry – St Mary’s Church	NT 12887 78424	0.3	0:01
3	Limekilns – Hope Cottage	NT 07539 83394	8.0	0:18
4	Limekilns – near the Ship Inn	NT 07261 83434	8.2	0:19
5	Dunfermline Golf Club, Crossford	NT 06210 86087	12.0	0:30
6	Crossford Main Street	NT 06552 86575	12.2	0:31
7	Carnock Old Church	NT 04126 89123	15.2	0:37
8	Culross – Robertson’s House	NS 98553 85928	21.0	0:49
9	Culross Palace	NS 98447 85951	21.1	0:50
10	Airth Mercat Cross	NS 89822 87528	28.6	1:07

The above table assumes that a car will be used between all locations. If walking between the two South Queensferry sundials, then an extra 20 minutes will be needed. The two Limekilns sundials are very close together as are the two Culross sundials, so walking will make no significant difference to the times. The times are journey times only and do not include time looking at the sundials.

It should be noted that Scotland’s oldest reliably and authenticated sundial (a lectern dial) is dated 1623 and is located at Dundas Castle on the south western outskirts of South Queensferry. However the castle and grounds are in private hands, but it is now employed as a luxurious conference and wedding centre. If you get the opportunity to visit, you must take it. The sundial is on top of a huge fountain and is situated to the right hand side as you face the front of the castle. Website details are [www.dundascalcastle.co.uk](http://www.dundascalcastle.co.uk).

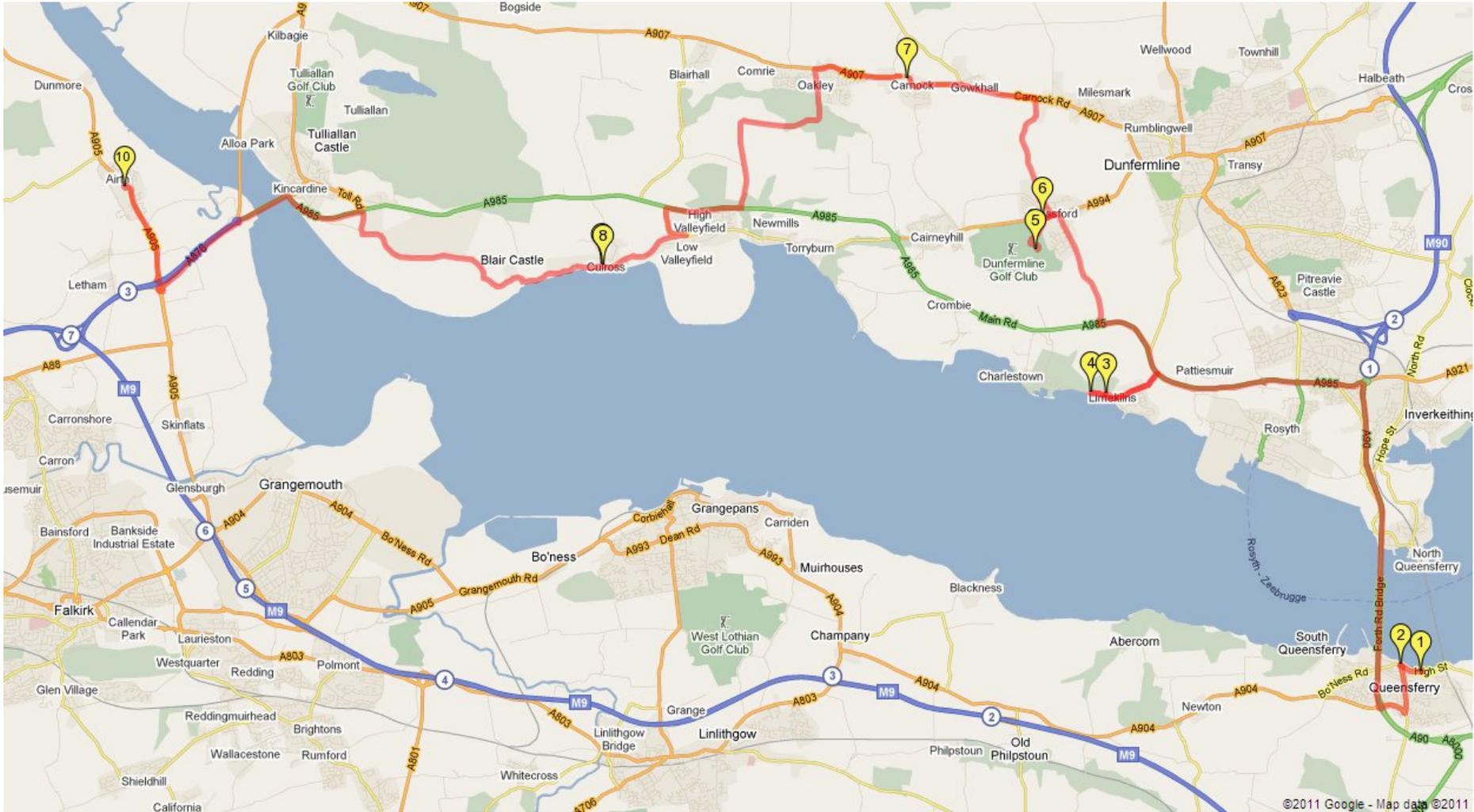
**Reference** – D.MacGibbon and T.Ross: *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, David Douglas, Edinburgh, 1887-92

For further information on sundials, makers or restorers, or to join the society, see the British Sundial Society’s website [www.sundialsoc.org.uk](http://www.sundialsoc.org.uk).

For further information on Scottish sundials, see [www.sundialsofscotland.co.uk](http://www.sundialsofscotland.co.uk).

To contact me by e-mail [dennis@sundialsofscotland.co.uk](mailto:dennis@sundialsofscotland.co.uk)

# The West Fife sundial trail



<http://maps.google.co.uk/maps/ms?msa=0&msid=215463598107297255369.0004a8065bf2036f932d1&hl=en&ie=UTF8&z=12>

Note that because sundial locations 8 and 9 are so close together, 9 is hidden behind 8 on the above map.

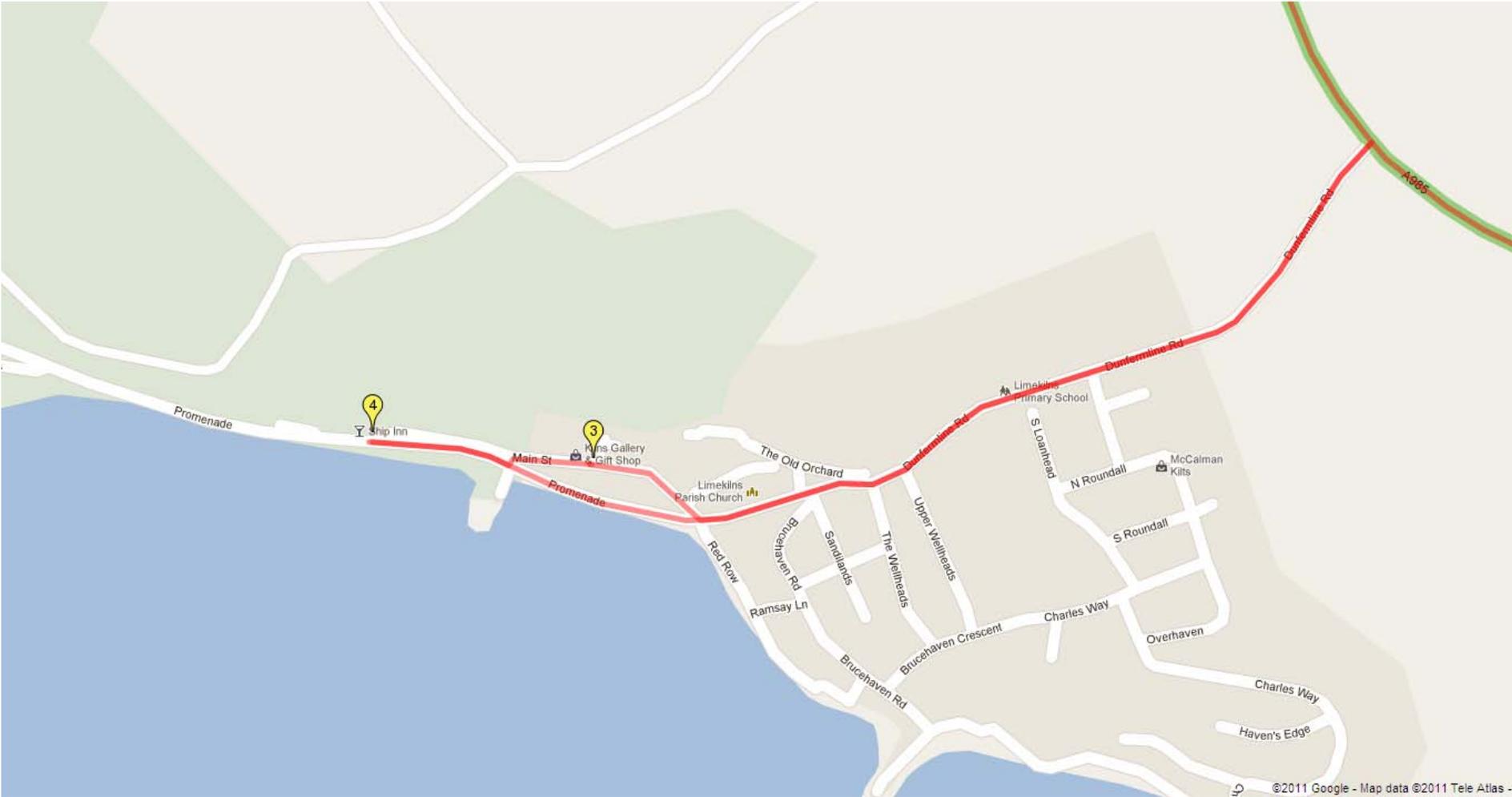
# The West Fife sundial trail

## SOUTH QUEENSFERRY



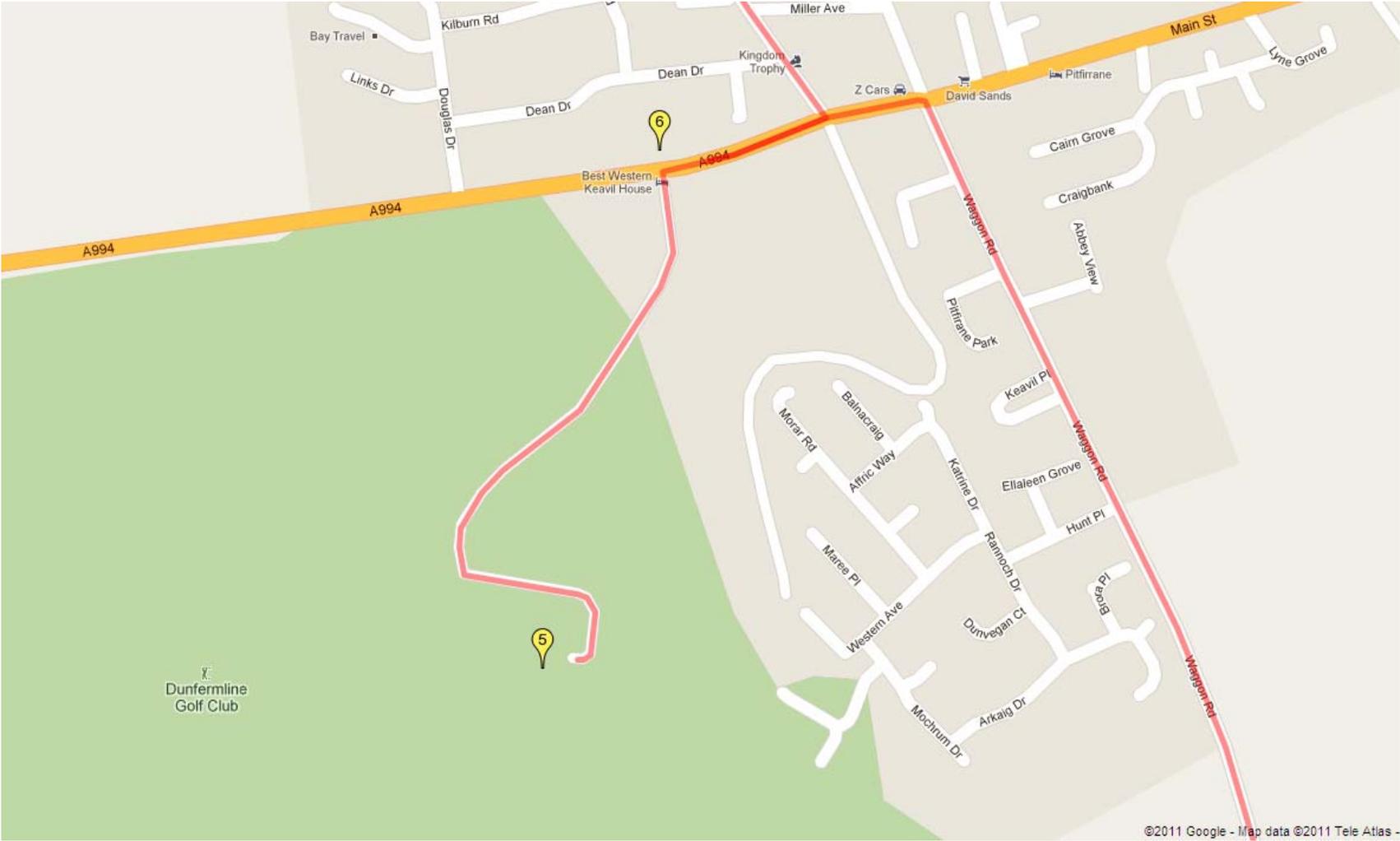
# The West Fife sundial trail

## LIMEKILNS



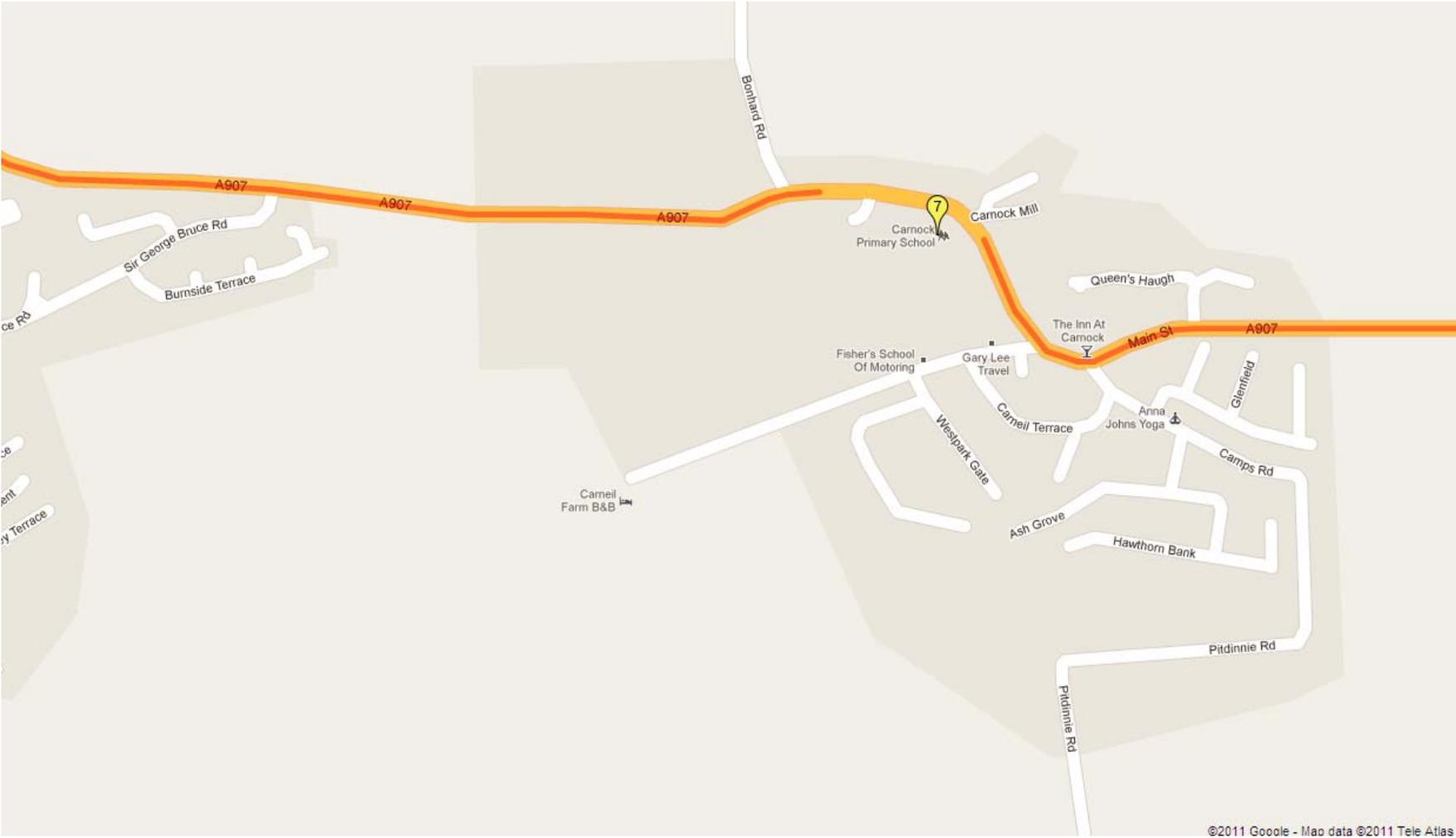
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## CROSSFORD



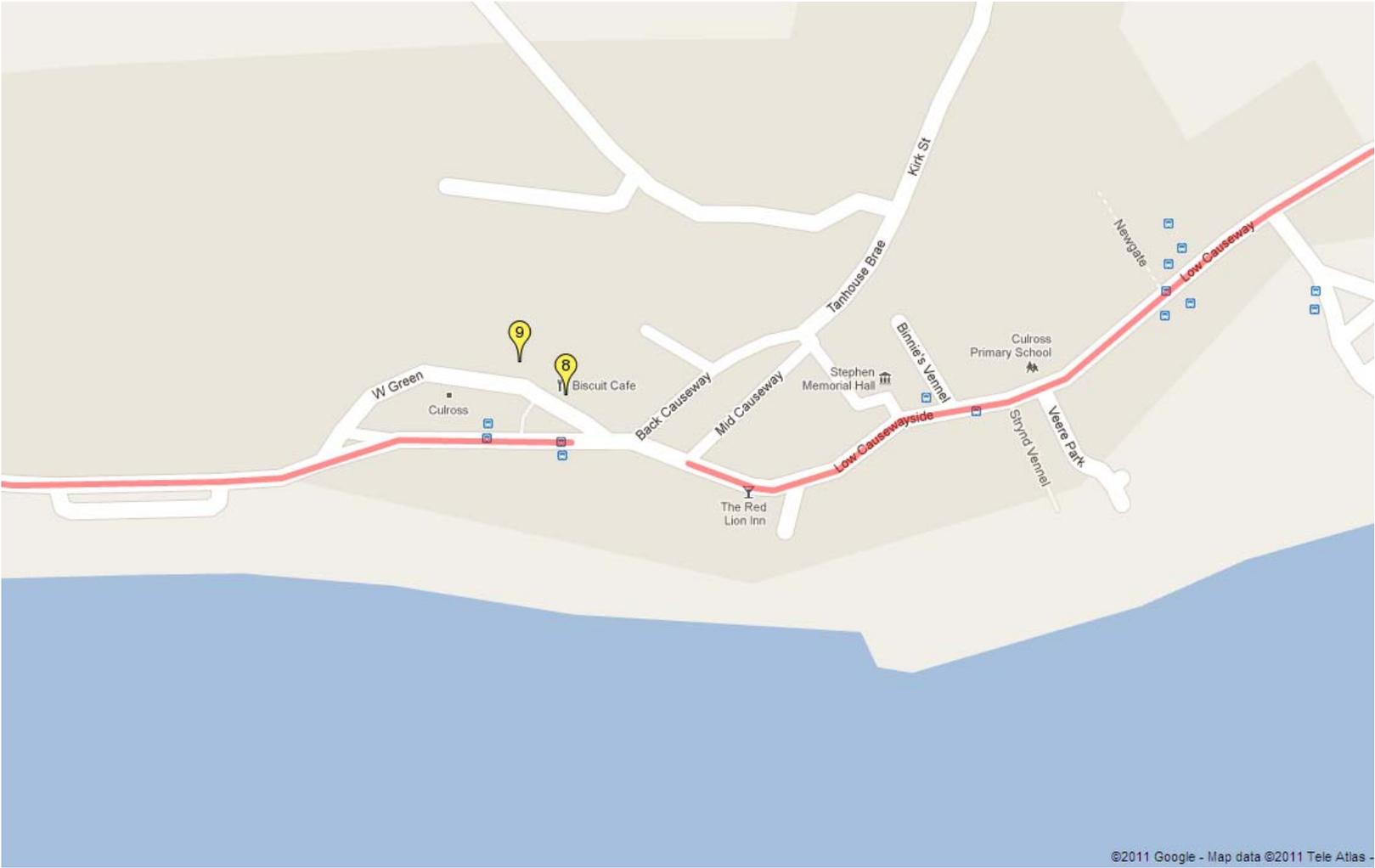
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## CARNOCK



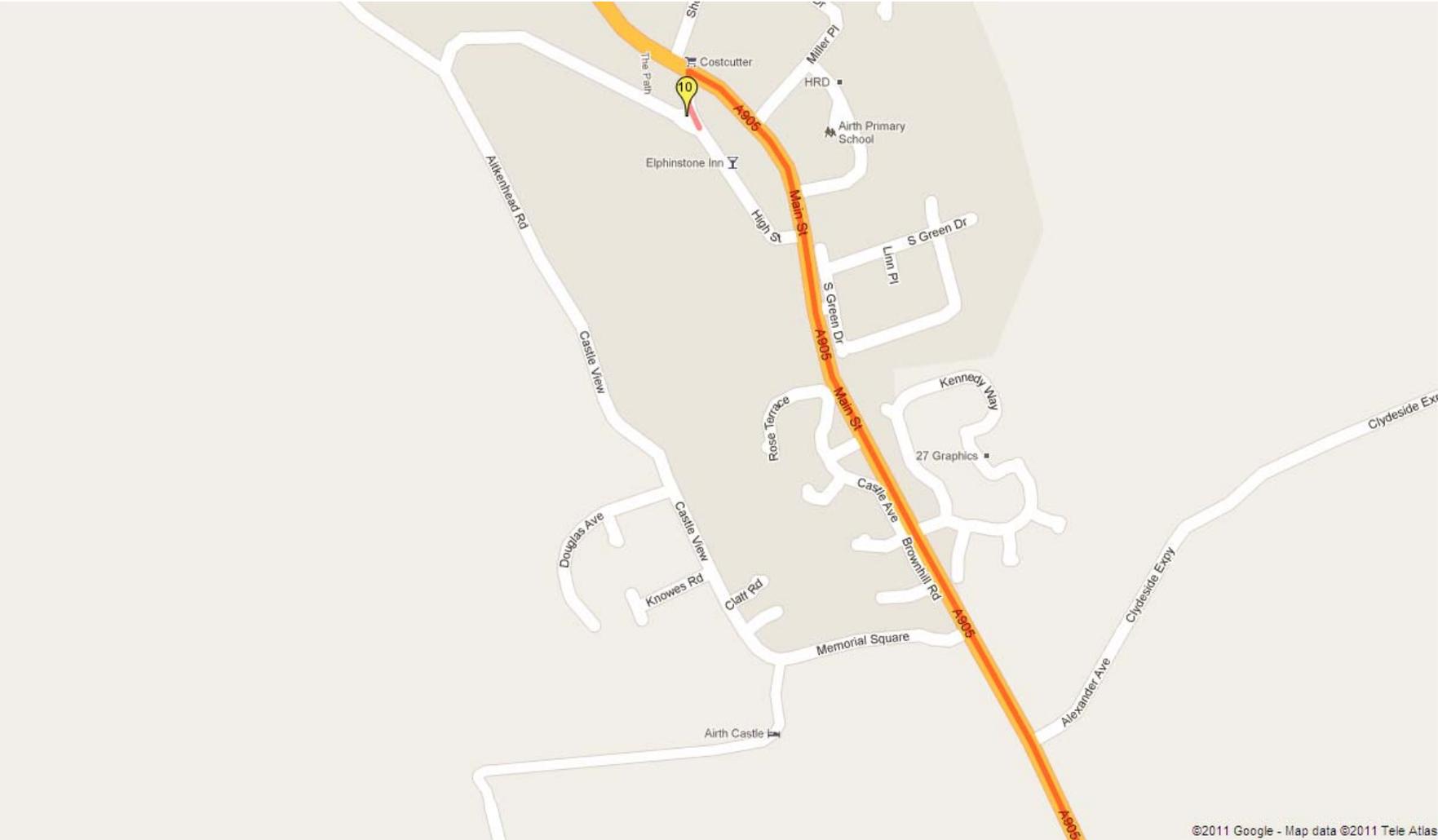
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## CULROSS



# The West Fife sundial trail

AIRTH



# The West Fife sundial trail

No 6 – CROSSFORD SUNDIAL – Can you spot the fault?



Answer to dial no 6 - The hour numerals are inscribed incorrectly on the east face. The hour lines that are marked with 4 and 5 in Arabic numerals are marked III and IIII in Roman numerals at the opposite end. The hour lines 7 to 10 are correct. The west face has also been incorrectly marked out.