

Sandbach Footpath Group

SCHOOL FARM AND JACOB'S LADDER

Approx 3 miles or 5km. Allow 1½ to 2½ hours.

The "Ladder" is only about 4 steps, so please do not be put off.

As with all country walks, some paths are wet, muddy and uneven, so wear strong footwear and have clothing to suit the weather.

On narrow country lanes, take care to watch for traffic as you climb down the stile to the road, and when walking on the road make sure you can see oncoming traffic.

From Green Bank, facing the restaurant, turn right and walk up Mill Lane out of Wheelock past the converted barns of Wheelock Farm, (now called Wheelock Court). Look out for the distinctive weather vane on Wheelock Court. About 50 metres beyond Wheelock Court, go through the tunnel under the by-pass and, on emerging, turn sharp right through a metal kissing gate and proceed with the field boundary on your right (passing a kissing gate on the right, intended for people entering from the by-pass).

At this point turn left and walk the length of the field to the far end. About half way along the field is an external field corner jutting into the field with a farm gate, making the field narrower, but ignore this gate and continue diagonally slightly right, to a stile [ST1].

(If you are interested in trees, as you approach the stile, notice the alder trees to the right and holly trees to the left, while on the other side of the stile beyond the holly is a hazel, a few hawthorns, several more alders, some elders and ending in a sycamore. Curiously the alder and elder have similar spelling, but are very different, the alder having a single rounded leaf and little egg-shaped seed pods or cones, whilst the elder has a leaf comprising five leaflets, fragrant flowers in spring and dark berries in autumn often used for making cordial and wine.)

Over the stile [ST1], up a short slope, head diagonally up and across the centre of the field, aiming just to the left of the large ash tree you can see ahead. The next stile [ST2] is to the left of this tree. *(The ash tree is easy to recognise; in summer it has a compound leaf of about 7 leaflets; in winter the buds are black, on the end of thick grey twigs.)*

From the stile [ST2] with the ash tree, keep heading in the same direction, diagonally across the centre of the field, to a meeting of fences, with two stiles [ST3 & ST4] and a farm drive, about 100m to the left of the farm buildings for Wheelock Heath Farm. Go over the stile [ST3] and over the farm drive.

*If you want a shorter walk, with no road walking, you could try the **Alternative Route from Wheelock Heath farm to Jacobs Ladder**, see the description near the end of this leaflet, just before the map.*

Our path continues over the second stile [ST4] to the right of the ash tree. In the field, go forward with Wheelock-heath Farm to your right heading for another stile [ST5]. If there are any electric fences to cross, look for the insulating handle to unhook, go through and carefully replace the hook when you have passed through.

Over the stile [ST5], head diagonally across the field, crossing a farm track and aiming for the white house. The next stile [ST6], is by a telegraph pole, but at the time of writing the farm track that you have to cross is bounded by two electric wire fences, so to save going under the wire, divert to the right following the wire until near the hedge at the road, where there should be an insulated handle on each wire to allow passage. Go over the stile [ST6] but take care, it is a little awkward because it leads directly onto a minor, sometimes busy, road (Alsager Road).

On the road go left and walk for about 500 metres, passing a minor road on the right (Hassall Road leading to Wheelock Heath), then a Public Footpath on the right (which leads to Bridgehouse Farm and then to Winterley), until you come to two farms, one on each side of the road. The farm on the right is Walnut Tree Farm (*the walnut tree, now quite old and wizened, is between the farmyard and the house*) and the farm on the left is School Farm.

At School Farm, on the left, is a signposted Public Footpath. Go through the metal kissing gate and, following the hedge on the right (with the road just beyond it) for about 10 metres, then go diagonally across the narrow field to follow the fence on the left, following it left round a corner and go over the next stile [ST7] by a sycamore tree, all this within about 80 metres of the kissing gate. Negotiating any electric fences using the insulated handles, bear slightly left and head for an external field corner with a large shed (new at the time of writing) to your left. Proceed from the shed, going diagonally downhill for about 200 metres to a metal kissing gate at the bottom left corner of the field. Go through the kissing gate, across a patch of, sometimes muddy, ground to another kissing gate in about 20 metres.

Continue forward, in line with your route from School Farm, whilst keeping the field boundary about 20 metres to your right. The field boundary meanders but, in about 100m, look for a metal kissing gate hidden in the trees, a few metres to the left of a field corner. Go through the kissing gate into a small glade of oak and other trees to a footbridge across a stream, immediately followed by a stile [ST8].

Over this stile [ST8] go diagonally and uphill across the field, then looking from the high point towards the buildings at Hassall Moss you should see three electricity poles on the field boundary. Head for the leftmost pole and look for the next stile [ST9], which is above a wooden stairway down to Jacob's House (hence "Jacob's Ladder").

Descend Jacob's Ladder and walk forward and up the hill to the crossroads with Mill Lane. Cross the lane walking forward past Jubilee Villas through the centre of the golf course to the canal. Please note, this is a right of way, but look for golfers teeing-off from high ground to your right and slightly behind you. At the canal, turn left down the towpath to the third lock (number 66) which has a brick bridge (no. 152) below it. Then bear left along the bridle path (Cotton Lane), which leads downhill and takes you directly back to Wheelock and Green Bank.

Alternative route from Wheelock-heath Farm to Jacobs Ladder

At the second stile [ST4] to the right of the ash tree near Wheelock-heath Farm, go left and, with Wheelock-heath Farm behind you, keep the field boundary to your left, work gradually away from this boundary, downhill, then uphill, heading for a large beautifully shaped oak tree. The next stile [ST10] is just to the left of this oak tree.

Go over this stile [ST10], bear slightly right to cut across the corner of the field and the next stile [ST11] is about 80m away. Over the stile [ST11], go right and follow with the field boundary on your right, undulating down, up, and then down to a bridge across a stream. The bridge has a stile at either end [ST12 & ST13]. After the bridge and stiles go uphill in the same line as before, and looking from the the high point towards the buildings at Hassall Moss you should see three electricity poles on the field boundary. Head for the leftmost pole and look for the next stile [ST9], which is above wooden steps down to Jacob's House (hence "Jacob's Ladder").

Now descend Jacob's Ladder and join the route above.

