

Sandbach Footpath Group

ALONG THE RIVER WHEELOCK

Approx 3.5 miles or 5.7km Allow 2 to 3 hours

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.

Footpath rerouted.

Please note, the old footpath direct from Crewe Road through the yard of Brook Farm is now closed and has been rerouted about 50m uphill along Crewe Road, as described below. This is a much easier walk, avoiding all the yard gates and is fairly recent, possibly not being shown on all OS maps.

Option A, starting from Wheelock Hall Farm

If parking at Wheelock Hall Farm, please patronise the café and/or shop.

Follow the farm track to reach Crewe Road (you should be able to see the roundabout to your right). Turn left keeping on the left hand pavement of Crewe Road, and in about 300m, just at the end of a terrace of houses, you should see a footpath sign to follow on your left.

Option B, starting from Wheelock Green Bank

From Green Bank, walk uphill along Crewe Road past the bus stop with its nicely displayed flower bed, along the main road away from the village. In about 200m, ignoring the main entrance of Brook Farm, just before a terrace of houses, you should see a footpath sign to follow on your right.

Onwards from Crewe Road

Follow the footpath leading off Crewe Road, with the end-of-terrace house on your left and a paddock on your right, and in about 40m you should reach a large metal farm gate [G1] and a footpath gate within it, having its own separate latch on the left hand side. Go forward across the field and through another gate-within-a-gate [G2], then turning left onto the farm drive.

Proceed down the farm drive, with a hedge on your left, first a large barn, then a fence on your right, over three stiles [ST1, 2, 3] at about 100m intervals (you may not notice them all because some of the adjacent farm gates are often open).

Continue forward on the farm track, keeping the field boundary to your left hand and after about 400m from Crewe Road, you should reach a farm gate (usually locked), at a field corner with no stile, where you turn right, keeping the new field boundary to your left, going downhill towards the River Wheelock.

As you approach the river, the path bends to the left and you continue downstream, keeping a hedge on your left and the river to your right, and about 200m from the field corner, go through a metal kissing gate [G3], following the course of the river, but not necessarily all its meanders.

In about 200m, approaching the end of a hedge, go through a kissing gate [G4], and keeping the hedge to your left, the field widens, then narrows, as a small tributary stream with trees comes in from the left to form the boundary. As the field narrows to about 20 metres wide there is a double stile [ST4, 5] and footbridge at a bend in the left boundary (if you reach the very end of the field as it narrows to a point, you have missed the footbridge and need to come back about 50m).

Go over the footbridge and turn right to follow the field boundary on your right. The next stile [ST6] in about 100 metres is a combined plank bridge and stile over a ditch, just to the right of an oak tree and close to the river bank.

Cross this stile into the next field and follow the field boundary on the right, alongside the River Wheelock. The next stile [ST7] is in a fence.

Go over the stile [ST7] in the fence and walk forward and slightly left, alongside another small stream.

In the shelter of the stream a variety of trees have established themselves; oak, ash, elder, alder, hawthorn and a poplar. The poplar is a handsome tree with deeply fissured bark and a triangular leaf with a leathery texture. The leaves are supported on flattened stems which allow the leaves to wave about easily in the slightest breeze, a characteristic of all the poplar family.

To the left of the poplar tree is a double stile and bridge [ST8, 9] and once through that, continue straight in the same line as the footbridge and uphill, soon bending slightly left, heading for the diagonally opposite corner of the field, and over the next stile [ST10], which leads on to the surfaced farm track. Turn right and then, keeping to the, track passing a large dark green barn on the right, and also passing Fields Farm on the right. Stay on the track, ignoring a drive going back into Fields Farm.

You should soon be able to see a lake to your right. The land has subsided due to salt extraction. Cheshire has huge volumes of solid salt underground, formed by evaporation of ancient seas. In this area the upper salt bed is covered by only about 250 feet of sandy soil. At one time salt was obtained by drilling down and pumping out the underground water, or brine. The water was replenished by rainwater which dissolved out more salt on its way down. The dissolved and eroded rock salt could be some distance from the original brine extraction point. Eventually in some places cavities formed underground and the land subsided forming lakes or "Flashes". Flashes are common in the Sandbach, Middlewich, Winsford and Northwich areas. The flashes in the Sandbach area are now nature reserves and they are important winter roosts for large numbers of water birds.

Continue down the farm track to a Tee-junction on a minor road.

Here you have a choice of return routes:

Option 1 : Turn right and follow the minor road and track on the right flank of the railway embankment.

As a result of brine subsidence a fair-sized flash has formed on the right, and a huge embankment has had to be built to take the railway with, further on, a bridge formed of pipe sections for the River Wheelock to pass through the embankment.

Go forward down the track over the river Wheelock to reach the canal, about 1km from the Tee-junction. At the canal, turn right and walk for about 2km back to Wheelock, under Crewe Road bridge, then at the canal wharf by the Cheshire Cheese public house, turn back to Crewe Road, turning left and Greenbank is only 200 metres further on.

Option 2 : Turn left on the minor road at the and follow the road between the pools (*formed due to more brine subsidence*) to the T-junction with Clay Lane.

Turn left and walk up Clay Lane. After about 500m, at the junction with Clay Lane by Lane Ends Farm keep left down the narrower road, which is Elton Lane. After about 100m go left over a stile [ST11] to leave the road and go forward with the hedge on your left, then in about 200m over another stile [ST12] and after another 100m yet another stile [ST13]. You should now have Hooter Hall Farm buildings on your right. In about 100m go over another stile [ST14], all this, since leaving the road should be with the hedge to your left. In 50m go through a succession of three metal kissing gates all 50 to 100m apart [G5, 6, 7], all with the hedge on your left.

In another 50m, you should be able to see some buildings to your right, and a kissing gate[G8], on your left, leading to a farm track, which you cross and go immediately through another kissing gate [G9]. Proceed with a hedge on you right and fence left, then over a plank bridge and stile [ST15] to go forward aiming for two barns, the left barn being green and the right one light-grey. If there are any electric fences, go through using the insulated handles to release the hook, taking care to replace it as you found it and head for a stile [ST16], all this since the plank bridge being in about the same line. Another stile [ST17] at the left hand end of a conifer hedge, midway between the two large farm houses, leads to the corner of a garden. Go diagonally left across the corner, through the gate and follow the signed permissive path to go right onto the wide concrete area, then left on to a track.

Ahead you should see Wheelock Hall farm, where you could be tempted with well-earned refreshments.

Completion, Option A

If you started from Wheelock Hall Farm, this completes the walk (apart from refreshments at the café).

Completion, Option B

If you started from Green Bank, follow the track to meet Crewe Road, where you turn left towards Wheelock, reaching Green Bank on your right in about 500m.

Sandbach Footpath Group, Along the River Wheelock walk

