

Sandbach Footpath Group

The SOLAR SYSTEM and BORROW PIT MEADOWS

Approx. 4.3 miles or 6.9km

Allow 2½ 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, and when walking on the road make sure you can see oncoming traffic.

This walk is family friendly and wheelchair accessible. Some of the accessible gates will need a companion to open the RADAR key lock. Non-accessible diversions are described.

Park in the Salt Line carpark at Hassall Green. The walk takes in the scaled-down Solar System, then covers almost every path in Borrow Pit Meadows. However, there are short cuts indicated and you can see from the map which routes you might prefer.

The Solar System

There is a display explaining the Solar System in the carpark and representing the Sun is a disc at the far end of the overflow carpark. A post representing Mercury is just near the gate to the overflow carpark and Venus is about halfway through the main carpark. As you leave the main carpark by the little footpath to the right, Earth is just before the road.

The scale of the "Salt Line Solar System"

The planet posts are set out to scale so walking the route and looking at the map helps to understand how close Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars are to the Sun and the huge distances, separating the planets in the outer section of our Solar System.

From the carpark cross the road and follow the Salt Line Trail, shortly coming to Mars, then continue under the M6 (we could regard the M6 as the Asteroid belt). From here on the planets become much more spread out. About 200m after the M6, you should notice footpaths, with yellow Cheshire East waymark arrows, to the left and shortly after one to the right. Ignore both these paths, on this walk, but notice Jupiter on the left between the two paths.

After about 0.75km the trail drops to a road [call this point A], but notice Saturn on the left just before the road. Cross the road and continue along the Salt Line. In summer look at the wild flowers on the banks before and after the road

Further along the trail, have a look at a display board giving information on "Life in Dead Wood – A nature reserve in miniature" and then continue on the Salt Line, passing some picnic tables.

Ignoring the sign for tree trail, continue on the Salt Line and about 1km after crossing the road [at point A], you should see the post for Uranus on the left. Ignore steps down on the right, almost immediately going over a little bridge, on the Salt Line, with hand rails either side.

Shortly after that Cheshire East yellow right of way marker arrows point to both left and right. We continue straight on the Salt Line, ignoring the other turn-offs [up steps on the right] and eventually the Sandbach Road North will come into view. Just before that, look for Neptune on the left.

It takes light from the Sun 5½ hours to reach Neptune, but hopefully you have reached this post quicker than that. Poor little Pluto is no longer considered a proper planet, but merely a dwarf planet, existing amongst other similar bodies in the Kuiper Belt which, in the Salt Line scale of things, would be somewhere in the vicinity of Lawton Heath.

Borrow Pit Meadows

Having done the Solar System, we can come back along the Salt Line to complete the walk through as many paths as we can in Borrow Pit Meadows. To begin the return journey there are two alternatives, Accessible Option A and Option B across meadows.

Option A - Accessible

Ignore the path on the left about 100m after turning round, then ignore another on the left after about 500m.

Then, where a footpath crosses the Rail Trail, shown by Cheshire East yellow arrows to the left and right, we take the path left. Follow the track slightly downhill, passing a bench on the left to reach a Borrow Pit Meadows display board and go left through double steel kissing gates.

Now follow the surfaced track round in a large loop for about 400m to gates leading out to a road [Hassall Road].

Option B – Diversion across meadows, non-accessible

From the turn-around point near Neptune, ignore the first path up some steps on the left and then take the next track left and immediately left over a stile, then turn half right to follow the yellow arrow and head for a little bridge, slightly downhill. Go over the double stile and bridge and then turn left on the surfaced track. At this point you would meet people following Option A.

Now follow the surfaced track round in a large loop for about 400m to gates leading out to a road [Hassall Road].

All Options [after A or B]

Do not leave the Borrow Pit Meadows area, but turn right, away from the gates and away from the road, to join another surfaced track, then shortly after, turn left, passing near the Alsager Recycling Plant and Tip. The path curves to the right and the Tip is soon hidden by trees. At a fork of tracks, take the left hand track and notice the cherry and ash trees on the left of the track, then hazel, field maple and hawthorn trees. The track goes gently downhill and on the left is a bench inscribed "Borrow Pit Meadows, opened 2009". The path continues downhill, bending slightly right and at the bottom are two large willow trees either side of the path.

At a tee-junction and a display board for "Borrow Pit Meadows – Wild Flowers", turn right. As you progress you should see some of the wild flowers shown on the display board.

At the time of writing in June there were plenty of red campion, teasel, cow parsley, hogweed, cranesbill, buttercup, various grasses and most especially some magnificent purple orchids.

Pass another bench on the left, then come to a junction and ignore the track off to the left with a display board for "Borrow Pit Meadows – Wild Birds".

Keeping straight on the path and going slightly uphill. When the path flattens out, there is a bench on the left to view the trees, plants and perhaps some wildlife in this part of the Meadows.

Go uphill to reach a tee-junction, at the brow of the little hill. Here we turn left, very soon coming to a large flat bench where you can sit and admire the view all around. The path meanders downhill towards some kissing gates and fences, ignoring a path coming in at an angle from the right. Near the kissing gates there is a small notice explaining when the Borrow Pit Meadows loop path was created, with the help of volunteers, in 2016.

Do not go through the kissing gates, but near the display board for "Borrow Pit Meadows – Back to Nature" showing a map and other information, look for a three-track multi-fork, and take the leftmost fork with the blue banded post and a blue circle with a white arrow (designating the Tree Trail, see website references later). This path goes through numerous oaks, alder, guelder rose and several large wild dog-rose shrubs. On the right there is the pool with various waterfowl.

Ignore the track on the left and then ignore steps off to the the left (if you need it, this would be a short cut back to the Salt Line, where you would turn left to return to the start).

Continue round the pool, keeping it on your right, and look out for yellow flag iris, yellow-flowering water lilies and rushes. At the end of the pool, there is a bench ideally positioned to sit and look at the pool. A little further on from the bench, there is an open area to the right and trees to the left.

The path leaves the pool and ends at a junction, where we go sharp left, slightly uphill.

Soon after, you should come to some very interesting and quite rare aspen trees at post number 17. The the unusual characteristic of the leaves is a trembling and rustling in the wind. In fact, the Latin name means trembling. The leaves are rounded, with large rounded teeth like a cog-wheel and the reason for the trembling is the flattened leaf-stalk allowing the leaves to flutter and turn in the wind.

After that the trees revert to mountain ash, hawthorn and hazel, on the left and then look out for dogwood, on the right, with white flowers in June.

Continue on rising ground to join the Salt Line, where we turn left.

Here we have Options C and D. Option C is accessible, and slightly shorter, and Option D is included for the sake of completeness, because we have missed some of the paths in Borrow Pit Meadows.

Option C - Accessible

Continue on the Salt Line all the way back to the carpark.

Option D – Diversion down steps, non-accessible

On the Salt Line, look out for the little bridge with hand rails that we passed previously. Immediately after that, we turn left and go down some steps.

At the bottom of the steps, go right at the tee-junction, and keep right where there is a turning left, to return to the display board for "Borrow Pit Meadows – Wild Birds", and at this point we turn right. At the display board for "Borrow Pit Meadows – Wild Flowers", we continue straight, ignoring the path to the left.

We have not covered this particular path previously on the walk and we follow it as it curves round to the right, over a stream via Tillys Bridge, then meandering uphill right then left.

As you go uphill, notice a little grove of larch trees, a coniferous tree, but deciduous, dropping its needle-leaves in winter. Then we have the traditional oak and numerous elder shrubs, fragrant white flowers in early summer with purple berries in autumn.

At the top, we go through the metal structure to reach the Salt Line again, where we turn left to return all the way to the carpark.

All Options [after C or D]

That completes our tour of the Borrow Pit Meadows. However, it will be worth repeating the visit at different times of year to see the life cycles of the plants and trees and the changing colours of leaves and fruits.

Follow the Salt Line, dropping down to the road and up again, and then all the way back to the carpark. Along the way, look out for some carefully positioned benches overlooking trees growing from the bottom of the high embankment, so from the Salt Line, you almost look into the tree canopy. If you pause here, with luck you may see some bird-life.

Return to the carpark.

If you want to do the Tree Trail only, or need further information, please try the websites below.

Cheshire East Leaflets:

Tree Trail, www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/PDF/Tale_of_Trees.pdf

Solar System information

Use Google or similar to search for: Cheshire East Solar System

Or search for: Cheshire East Salt Line and Borrow Pit Meadows

The Cheshire East Rangers sometimes do guided walks and events. Try searching for: Cheshire East Ranger Events.

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