

WALK 12 WHITWORTH EAST-WEST

Mostly Whitworth runs north-south – the Spodden, the old railway, the present cycleway, and of course the main road - but until the coming of the turnpike road in the 18th century maps record Whitworth as an east-west village. This route uses the two east-west routes shown on those early maps, with links to create a circular walk.

START Car park on Market Street, opposite Post Office (disc parking)

DISTANCE 3 miles

TIME 2 hours

NATURE OF WALK The biggest up is out of the way first: there's one later. Underfoot is good... except for that second, shorter ascent, which can be wet.

Walk around Basil's to go up Church Street. At the top and into Taylor Street past the mini roundabout you'll spot four buildings with date stones that attest to the antiquity of this way. At the next junction pass left of the house-end, into Whitworth Square. The house where the famous Whitworth Doctors practised is on the left (see leaflet 3 for more), with the Red Lion pub just beyond. At the top of the Square is a set of steps leading to the Taylor vault, the stocks (just inside the churchyard) and, by kinking left then right, St Bartholomew's Church with its splendid collection of gargoyles looking at you from on high, on all four sides of the church. After which, take the obvious flat track to just below the cattle grid on the Rake.

Ignore the turn for Lobden Golf Club, then, at the top of the Rake, pass through the gap by the 9th tee, turn left, then stop, to take in the panorama beyond the Whitworth valley. *All of this was land belonging to the Lord of the Manor of Rochdale, and ahead of you lies the road that linked Whitworth and Rochdale. Pick out two modern roads linking Lancashire to*

Yorkshire - the M62 bridge beyond Hollingworth Lake, and the White House at the top of Blackstone Edge on the A58 from Rochdale to Halifax. Now go left again at the signpost pointing you back through a second gap in the tramway, and aiming you at a field-wall about 200 metres dead ahead. This whole Lobden area has a history as Whitworth's playground. These days it's golf and horse-riding and mountain biking, but go back in time and rougher sports prevailed, notably running races and naked wrestling – a group of men from Oldham were once banned from participating after they greased up, making themselves impossible to grapple or pin down. The Great Pedestrian 'Treacle' Sanderson trained - and won his earliest races - up here. In the present day two of Whitworth's fell races use this terrain – the junior race each June (round the east of Brown Wardle and back over the top); and the senior out-and-back Hades Hill race in September which starts near the Square and crosses Brown Wardle and Middle Hill as well as Hades.



Map by Steve Flood

Beyond the field wall stay on the broad track that sweeps up to the right, offering lovely views out across the Whitworth valley. By your right foot will be an old drainage channel that used to

filter water away into reservoirs on the Rochdale side of this high land. An industrial-architectural marvel, its dereliction now is very sad. It acts as a good way-finder, though, in mist. Keep it by your right foot until you encounter a rough roadway leading down to the left to Pot Oven Farm. Before you descend, just pause to look across to the other side of the valley directly opposite and get a sense of its geography: in particular, spot the sticky-out piece of higher land that dips to a leftward end below the reservoir. Got it? Hold that image.

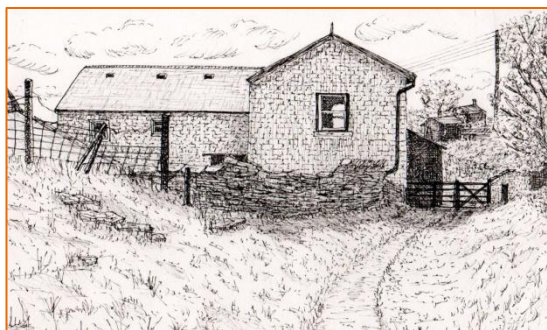
Pot Oven is named for a long-vanished pottery but its main claim to fame is that it was home to Ailse o'Fussers, a woman who was one of the last drovers locally to ply her trade up and down Limers Gate. 20 Galloway ponies she had, and a donkey called Jerry that she used to tether to her bedpost. Pictures show her in male attire, perhaps as a form of self-protection. She had a child that died in infancy, and legend has it that she bore the coffin to the graveyard herself, and that local women made floral tributes. Before the farm is a narrow gate in the moor wall. Through you go, and after a few metres of uneven ground comes a splendid heads-up descent. Enjoy.

At the bottom of the field go through the gate and bear left, then down the hill at the public lamppost, with a brook burbling over the wall at your right. At the junction cross to the pavement on the right of Acre Street, and so down to the main road. There cross to Tong Lane: the handy zebra crossing will get you to the pavement on the left. *Tong* is a variant of the word *tongue*, meaning...that sticky-out piece of higher land, and soon you'll reach the stables that mark the bottom point of it. Cross the road in front with care, then pass between the stables and the *Cock and Magpie*. *This was once the Railway Inn, because the road you've just crossed follows the line of the railway that was built in the 19th century to serve Whitworth's quarries. At this point there was a level crossing. Now wagons bring loads of stone from the quarries using this road: in an earlier era the exit route was via Facit Incline, some 600 metres north of here, using a gravity system (full truck down hauled empty truck up).*

The older houses here again suggest antiquity, but *this area was changed almost beyond recognition by the building of Cowm reservoir, which opened in 1877. Straggling on from Tong End, where you are now, was a community called Syke, now obliterated beneath the dam and the water. If you detour briefly to the left beyond Tong End's last house there's an information board about it.* Our route goes up the slope, then left through the car park and through the gate onto the dam, borrowing a bit of Whitworth's most popular recreational walk. The sporting theme repeats here – frequent running races loop the reservoir; you may see water-skiers, riders walking horses out of the stables, and motor-cyclists and 4x4 drivers heading up to the quarry, where there's an area commercially set aside for them - and if there's a decent snowfall there will be people sledging on the various slopes to the left. And, back in time, 'Treacle' lived and trained hereabouts – a memorial to his achievements is halfway down the right-hand side of the reservoir. To your right, beyond the water, are the towering slopes of the vast present quarry. From here you may not see much machinery, but you may well hear the activity.

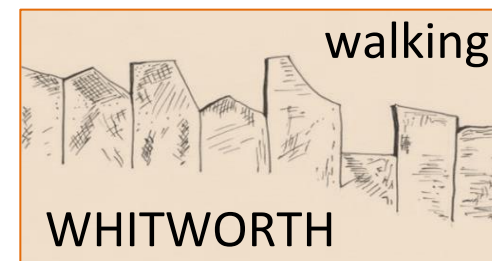
At the far end of the dam go through the corner gate, then, just before the next, turn left through a kissing gate. Please be sure to secure it after you. Wend your way between rushes, following the line of the broken wall on your left to a gap in the boundary wall. To your right here, and round the bend, are the ruins of the hamlet of Cowclough, in 1851 home to 52 people who farmed and quarried this corner of the Cowm valley. *The whole valley once thrived, and in places at the far end of the valley you can see areas of good pasture that must have been hard won by generations of farmers. 'Treacle' Sanderson's father (also 'Treacle') was a blacksmith here at Cowclough; at the far side of the valley there was a cotton mill; further back a stone rubbing mill; and of course there were several farms. Some properties disappeared as a direct result of the construction of the reservoir; others were gradually abandoned, presumably in favour of less rigorous lives elsewhere – though remarkably the final family moved out only in 1950.*

Our route here turns left, up the steep and usually damp slope of Cowclough Rake, with the wood on the right and a decent, recent drystone wall on the left. In fact the driest ascent is usually on the narrow embankment next to the wall. (It has the added advantage of a view.) If you walk on the stones of the Rake, do take care – the wheel-grooved flagstones can be very smooth and slippery, so it may be better to be a horse and walk up the angled, bedded stones between them. At the top bear left, then right, through a gate and along a gloopy track. Over the gate you'll have a good view of Pot Oven nestling beneath Brown Wardle, but you're going straight on (another useful left embankment) over a stile; and then straight on again. There isn't really much to say about this path, it being hemmed in by embankments and walls, other than that it's quite the duller footpath in Whitworth...but it doesn't last long.



Fold Head Old Chapel. Pen and ink drawing by Peter Williams

At its far end a gate releases you at Fold Head, and the first building on your left has an interesting history recorded on a blue plaque on its far side. Now it's downhill, initially on a pitted track, between blackberry brambles. Then you're on to the roadway of Hall Fold, which winds its way prettily between mostly old houses (and St Bart's School), to the neat remnants of an old graveyard and the left turn into Hall Street, always busy with traffic. At its end Basil's is across the main road. To your left are a small cafe and a handy pelican crossing. JF



This second series of guides follows the same format as the first - all the walks are circular; all start from a place where you can leave a car; most fit comfortably into a morning or an afternoon or a summer evening (walk 14 may be tight); all have ups, to give you the splendid views that Whitworth is blessed with, and downs (obviously); and all have route instructions supplemented with a clear, simple map and a small helping of history.

Whitworth has a fantastic network of paths that can be knitted together into many satisfying walks. This one – like walk 11, but with added history - does just that. But there is a big wide world of walking beyond our valley walls too, of course. Invest in OS map 21 (South Pennines) and explore. You might even find some walks that are half as good as these!

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