

WALK 6 HEALEY DELL AND PRICKSHAW

A walk of outstanding natural beauty – one to savour and repeat throughout the seasons. Locally we're inclined to take Healey Dell for granted: this walk starts with its obvious delights, then takes a little-walked path that ought to rekindle your joy in the Dell. It then climbs, twists, turns and drops along a real variety of tracks and country roads, taking in an amazing old house and a pretty hamlet.

START Station Road, Broadley

Park sensibly on the wooded side of Station Road; or round the corner on the right of the bridge; or further round in the car park at Broadley Wood.

TIME Allow 2 hours plus – you'll not be able to resist standing and staring.

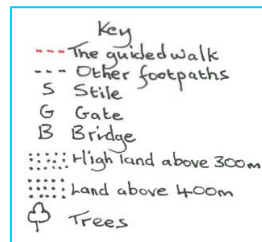
DISTANCE 3.5 miles

FOOTWEAR Sensible, sturdy

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On the left, just before Station Road crosses the bridge is a set of steps signposted 'Fairy Chapel'. Go down, and follow the path. This is an enchanting area, shrouded in legends of a Fairy King and a witch. At the information board you can drop right down to the Fairy Chapel (undeniably beautiful, but be careful on the uneven steps, particularly if they are damp). Back at the information board you'll need to turn right, continuing down the main track. At the bottom the path swings sharp right, and if

there's one spot that sums up the glories of this place this is it. To your right is the river, tumbling powerfully through the rocks and trees. Ahead, and above, is the astonishing, awesome Healey Dell Viaduct. Please pause a while.



Map by Steve Flood

The viaduct was built in 1867, using "Rough Rock". It stands 103 feet above the river below, and has 8 arches. In its heyday it carried the railway to

Rochdale, being opened initially to carry the products of the quarry and textile industries to the waiting world. Later, passenger trains were introduced and the line was extended to Bacup. In 1949 it reverted to freight, in the form of coal. The last trains steamed across in the 1960s. The Dell also housed a corn mill on the river (as far back as Anglo-Saxon times); then later a fulling mill; and in World War 2 an ammunition store.

The path leads you up under the least spectacular of the viaduct's arches to the road: turn right, downhill. Where the road flattens and turns left (the tearoom is straight ahead, 200metres along) there is a terrace of red-brick houses on your right, opposite the Rochdale Angling Club sign. Immediately past their front gardens turn right down an unmarked narrow flagstone path that leads to a bridge. Once over you turn to your left and follow a long, twisty path up through the woods – it's usually clear enough. At the clearing stay right and climbing.

Soon there's a stream on your right to guide you, but eventually you cross a little arched bridge: for a few metres the way isn't obvious, but the path is still going more or less in the same direction, left and upwards, even if the sound of the river is fading to your left. Soon enough you'll catch a glimpse of sky, and the wood will release you onto the left edge of a field. Ahead, next to some grim-looking farm buildings, is a tall signpost. Go left, and prepare to be surprised when you emerge through a metal gate. Now head left along the setted Smallshaw Road, past the Whitworth Angling Society's water, and turn right at the end onto Rooley Moor Road.

You'll be walking a mere 25 metres of this astonishing Cotton Famine Road, which goes straight on from here right over the moor for another 2000 yards, and over 20,000 rows of setts (cobblestones), to Rossendale, with claims to be one of the highest roads in England.

The road dates from 1863. The American Civil War had included a blockade of Confederate ports by Union forces, and this led to a severe shortage of raw cotton for the mills of Lancashire, workers on low (or no) wages, and the Cotton Famine. The Public Works Act of 1863 allowed

local government to create work projects for the public good and the road over Rooley Moor was one such project. Mill workers from the area were offered ‘poor relief’, a sort of working tax credit, to break rocks and surface the road – all the work was done by hand!

The Cotton Famine caused great hardship - and there’s a hillock just above this spot called Hunger Hill - but despite this the Lancashire Mill workers came down firmly on the side of Abraham Lincoln and backed the abolition of Slavery.

Pass through the gate, resist the temptation to hop on a bus, and turn right again, just 20 metres later, onto a broad track (Weighver’s Way) with a wall on your right. At Knacks Farm cross the cattle grid, bear left at the first fork, then swing right up to the hamlet of Prickshaw. Turn second left beyond the first row of cottages, heading down on an uneven setted path into a wooded area. Now keep to the right, on the main path, following it all the way down to the flat footpath that was the old railway line. Turn right and stroll along Whitworth’s second most frequented path. (The circuit of Cowm Reservoir is number 1.)

At Broadley Station (platform/bridge) you have a choice: straight back to your car, in which case you simply walk up the station approach road to your left (or, if you are parked at Broadley Wood, take the steps to the right *before* the station); or, if you fancy walking *over* the viaduct (and why not?), go straight on, dropping cautiously down the usually slippery, uneven steps at the far end of the viaduct, cross Dell Road, and reverse the (magical?) opening steps of your walk. JF

Viaduct. Pen and paint drawing by Lindsay Ellis-Fairhurst



There are splendid walks in Whitworth around Cowm Res, and into Healey Dell - but how about something a *bit* more adventurous? There are plenty of moorland paths, but how do you get to them; are you allowed; and can you get back without retracing your steps?

Well, you could be brave and just *go*...or you could take one of these guides. All are circular; all start from a place where you can leave a car; all fit comfortably into a morning or afternoon or a long summer evening; all have ups (to give you views) and downs (obviously); and all have route instructions, recently revised, along with a clear, simple map and a small helping of history.

Whitworth, you’ll find, has a fantastic network of paths that can be knitted together into satisfying walks. And then? Invest in OS Explorer map OL21 (South Pennines) and explore. You might even find some walks that are half as good!

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Reprint funded by Crook Hill Community Benefit Fund and Whitworth Sports Council