



Billinge Loop Trail



Introduction

This leaflet is one of a series describing local walks recommended and used by the St. Helens Ranger Service; the others include Bold Loop, Garswood Loop, Bradlegh Loop and Rainford Loop.

Regrettably, this walk is not suitable for wheelchairs, however the Rangers can recommend a more suitable alternative – see contact details at the end of this document.

The walk starts and finishes at **Sankey Valley Heritage Visitor Centre** on Blackbrook Road (A58), **WA11 0AB**. The Map grid reference is **SJ535 966**

Route Distance: **14.3km** (approx 9 miles) Estimated time: **5 hours** Going: **Hard**

Enjoy your walk!

Directions

1. **START:** from the Sankey Valley Heritage Visitor Centre, walk in a northwest direction for 1 mile following the old St. Helens Canal and the Black Brook that flows from Carr Mill Dam. This public footpath eventually becomes a bridleway at a junction with a metal bridge over Black Brook, before going under the East Lancashire Road (A580) and a railway bridge on the line between St. Helens and Wigan.
2. (1.6km) After walking under the railway bridge, bear left up the slope, then left onto Garswood Old Road and past the bungalow on the left. Continue along the road and tarmac pavement at the south end of Carr Mill Dam towards the Waterside Inn. This section of the walk provides one of the best views of the Dam looking north.

INFOPOINT: *Carr Mill Dam was formed by damming Black Brook Valley and was used to power the industrial mills of the Gerard Estate. It was later enlarged and used as a headwater for the St. Helens Canal, England's first completely 'dug-out' canal of the industrial age, dating from the mid 1700s.*

It was not until the early 1960s that the site became widely known as the Carr Mill Entertainment Park, attracting thousands of visitors for a fun day out on and around the water. Lancashire Powerboat Racing Club has been based at the Dam since 1932 and shares the sporting rights with the St. Helens Angling Association. Both hold regular competitions throughout the year.

The Dam is a good place to spot an interesting variety of bird species, including the Great Crested Grebe, Mute Swan, Grey Heron, and Kingfisher.

3. (1.7km) Just before the Waterside Inn, turn right onto the paved footpath then left up the footpath on the west side of the Dam which runs parallel with Carr Mill Road on the left. Bear right when another path joins from the left, then bear left and continue along the main route. Do not go to the water's edge at this point. Follow this path towards the north end of the Dam, passing fields on your left and the Nineteen Arches Bridge on your right.
4. (2.5km) At the wide vehicle access track, turn right and walk along a public bridleway between the north end of the Dam on your right and an area of water on the left called the "dig-pits". Go straight on through the gap in the metal gate and fence, past Otter's Swift Farm on the left.

5. (3.0km) After a short distance, turn left onto a public footpath, which is the start of Lime Vale Road. Follow this track down into a dip and over a stream, passing a sewage works on your left. The partly tarmacked track then heads to the left of stone houses and on to reach Birchley Road where there is a large stone farmhouse on the left.
6. (3.6km) Turn right on the pavement and, after a short distance, carefully cross this busy road and take the track signposted as a public footpath, which goes up the left-hand side of the houses. This crosses over a stream in a dip and continues on through fields, passing a group of ponds on the right before eventually going through a gap in a hedge and reaching a main road, which is Rainford Road.
7. (4.4km) Turn right onto the pavement and walk uphill until you reach a very sharp right bend in the road.
8. (4.85km) At this point, take great care and cross over the road and follow Red Barn Road. This is a frequently used access for vehicles, so again take care.
9. (5.3km) Take the first signposted public footpath on the right which heads steeply up a hill and you will eventually arrive at the grass verge of the old Billinge Quarry access road.
10. (5.7km) Turn left and follow the grass verge on the road up the hill. Just before the road bends to the right, leave the grass verge and take the footpath to the left of the small group of trees and follow the field edge. Go through the gap between the fence and the large sandstone block, keeping the trees on your left. After a short distance, turn right at the next T-junction of the paths. When you arrive at a metal stile and a tarmac footpath, turn left and follow this route uphill. When the tarmac track ends, continue on then turn right and take the safest route up the steep hill to the Beacon building at the summit of Billinge Hill.

INFOPOINT: *Standing at 587 feet (179m), Billinge Hill, or “Billinge Lump” as it is also known, is the highest point in Merseyside, and provides panoramic views across southwest Lancashire, North Wales, the Derbyshire Peak District, plus Winter Hill to the northeast.*

The Beacon building was built in 1788 as a landmark for ships, but was also used as a summerhouse by Winstanley Hall. The hill was used to monitor aircraft during World War II, and then by the Royal Observer Corps who were based at the former bunker just below and west of the summit. This bunker post was opened in January 1960 and would have been used to monitor the location of nuclear blasts and the resulting fallout over Lancashire in the event of a nuclear war. The post closed in October 1966.

11. (6.7km) From the summit, take care and use the safest route down the hill, keeping parallel with the old quarry fence and dry-stone wall on the left. Once at the bottom of the steep slope, turn left and follow the tarmac footpath down the right-hand side of the quarry fence, passing through a series of metal stiles along the way. Eventually you will reach the tarmacked old quarry road at a small gas-powered electricity generating station where you turn left.

At the final sharp left bend, turn right off the road and head down a small slope and along the narrow tarmacked and concrete footpath, still with the quarry fence on the left. This footpath soon opens out into a wide vehicle access track. Continue on with ‘The Old Vicarage’ on your right. When you reach the houses at the northwest end of Beacon Road, continue along the left-hand pavement until you reach Main Street opposite St. Aidan’s Parish Church.

INFOPOINT: *In the southern section of St. Aidan’s Parish Church graveyard, the somewhat macabre “coffin shaped” grave of George and Kitty Smith can be seen. This dates back to 1720 and the “coffin” lid shows a skull with a winged serpent. It is rumoured that the couple died having been bitten by snakes on Billinge Hill!*

12. (8.3km) Carefully cross over Main Street and turn right, then left down the pavement of Newton Road. Continue along the left-hand pavement of Newton Road, heading in an easterly direction, passing the end of Windsor Road on the opposite side of the road.
13. (9.0km) A short distance after passing the end of Windsor Road, carefully cross over Newton Road and take the vehicle track, signposted as a public footpath, south towards Blackley Hurst Hall Farm.
14. (9.4km) Just before the gate entrance to the yard area, bear sharp right and head towards the housing estate. Just before you reach a tree-lined ditch on your right, veer sharp left on the track and head south. On reaching the top of a small rise, you will see St.Helens in the distance and possibly even North Wales on the horizon.
15. (10.0km) When you reach an old cobbled track, turn left, then sharp right past an old colliery spoil heap, the 'Blue Hills', on your left. As the track heads gently downhill, continue to follow it as it bends to the right and then sharply to the left. You very soon pass a footpath off to the right, which you do not take but continue on towards St.Helens. When you reach a T-junction, turn left and then bear left down a narrower path, on the left-hand side of a hedgerow.
16. (11.3km) Once at the Goyt woodland at the bottom of the gentle slope, cross the stream via the footbridge and turn right. Follow this scenic footpath through the woodland, passing over the stream and its tributaries by means of a series of boardwalks. After the last boardwalk, the footpath rises sharply and continues straight on. Do not take the footpath on the right. Follow this route through the ponds and continue parallel with the field and its fence on your left.

At the end of the field on the left, the route veers right then almost immediately left. Follow this wider footpath down the gentle slope through the Hollins Hey woodland, keeping parallel with the railway and its metal fence over to the left.
17. (12.1km) After a railway bridge on your left, continue to follow the railway fence on your left along a wide track that is part of Garswood Old Road. On approaching a fenced compound over to your right, do not take the footpath to the right towards the 'Boathouse' but carry on towards the cottage. Just before reaching the cottage, the footpath veers to the right and to a metal stile next to the Boathouse wall. Go through this stile and carefully follow the tarmacked vehicle access road along the southeast corner of Carr Mill Dam. This road eventually reaches the point that you used earlier on in the walk.
18. (12.7km) From here turn left down the public bridleway beneath the railway and East Lancashire Road and back through Sankey Valley Country Park to the start at the Heritage Visitor Centre.
19. (14.3km) **FINISH** at the Sankey valley Heritage Visitor Centre

Further Information

To find out more about walks in your local area, please contact St.Helens Ranger Service on 01744 677 772 or sankeyvalleyrangers@sthelens.gov.uk, or see www.sthelens.gov.uk/rangers

General Council-related enquiries should be directed to:

Contact Centre: Wesley House, Corporation Street, St.Helens WA10 1HF

Tel: 01744 676789

Minicom: 01744 671671

Fax: 01744 676895

Email: contactcentre@sthelens.gov.uk

Website: www.sthelens.gov.uk

Please contact us to request translation of Council information into Braille, audiotape or a foreign language.