



*Stoke Minster set among trees, as seen from the ridge walk.*

Version 1.1

STOKE-ON-TRENT, ENGLAND, 2012.

THE  
KIDSGROVE TO STOKE  
RIDGEWAY

AN ELEVATED GREEN ROUTE, TO WALK  
FROM KIDSGROVE STATION TO STOKE STATION

*AN UNOFFICIAL EXTENSION OF THE GRITSTONE TRAIL*

EXPLORED AND COMPILED BY  
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## THE KIDSGROVE TO STOKE RIDGWAY

**Length:** about 10 miles, north to south. Possibly six hours, for a fit individual walker moving along at their own pace and taking short breathers.

**Location:** in North Staffordshire, along a mostly green and elevated route.

**Level:** this is a **strenuous** dry weather (summer or autumn) walk of many slopes, effectively continuing the ‘up-down’ of the Gritstone Trail through to Stoke-on-Trent. It is suitable for fit adult walkers wearing good boots.

**Type:** perhaps 80% of the walk is off-road through or alongside woodland and parkland/pasture, and there are fine elevated views at numerous points. This is substantially a ridge and hill walk, designed for those who are bored with the dull level plodding of canal and lake walks - and so you must enjoy a constant variation of slopes, some of them quite steep.

**Extras:** there are many fine views and small binoculars might be desirable. Secateurs could also be useful after mid-June, for cutting long brambles. A Stoke-on-Trent A-Z map book might be useful for the suburban bits. Those who can't tell what compass direction they're going in might want a compass.

**Eateries:** Stoke-on-Trent train station / New Smithy Inn, Wolstanton / the many cafes / pubs of Stoke town. There are no shops directly on the route.

**Date undertaken:** June 2012. There had been two days of rain prior to the walk - but mud was not found to be any real problem.

**NORTH-to-south initial access:** take a train to Kidsgrove train station. Kidsgrove is served hourly by trains (departing 58 minutes past the hour) from the mainline station at Stoke-on-Trent. This is the slow “all stops” train from Stoke to Manchester. Single fare is £3.70 from Stoke, and the journey takes about 7 minutes.

**SOUTH-to-North initial access** (the reverse of the walk as presented in this book): take a train to Stoke-on-Trent mainline station, and start from there. There is free and secure cycle locking at Stoke train station.

Kidsgrove station is also on the National Cycle Path No. 5; and the Trent and Mersey Canal through North Staffordshire. It is the current southerly terminus of the Gritstone Trail long-distance path [ <http://www.discoverthegritstonetrail.co.uk> ].



**START FROM KIDSGROVE  
TRAIN STATION (north to south):**

EXIT Kidsgrove train station across the steep passenger bridge, and enter the station's small car park. You will see ahead of you a prominent pedestrian exit from the car-park. This steps you down onto the towing path of the Trent and Mersey Canal. You can't miss the canal, as it is bright orange – this is not pollution, but is due to the natural level of ironstone runoff in the water here.

Turn right, onto and along the canal towing path. Go towards the north entrance of the Harecastle Tunnels.

**HISTORICAL NOTE:**

The navigable Harecastle Tunnel's 'Telford Tunnel' is 2,926 yards long, and was finished in 1827.

There used to be a 1½-mile side tunnel, now disused, through to the mines at Goldenhill.

Folklore clusters around the tunnel, and there are tales of a 'boggart' here.



Ahead you will see the Harecastle Tunnels and the British Waterways office. This office manages / instructs the holiday narrowboat traffic, showing them how to get through the tunnel that is still navigable.

Walk **behind** the office, to find a wide vehicle path that goes around and up. Narrowboat horses once took this path to get to the old Boathorse Road, since they would not go through the tunnel...



This short lane leads up through a wooded section, then runs alongside the church (which, although relatively modern, has a very fine peal of bells)...



At the end of this very short leafy lane (excellent for conkers in the Autumn), turn left and go down the short slope toward the car road...



Cross over the car road and immediately turn right. You should see this junction just a few yards ahead...



Look for the prominent road sign to “Acres Nook”, since this also points you down the Boathouse Road - which starts under the trees. Cross over and go up onto the elevated and fenced Boathouse Road pedestrian walkway...



**Then, immediately** you enter the pedestrian walkway, strike off up the woodland path directly to the right. Head on up the hill into the woods. Go about forty yards up the steep slope path. **DO NOT** go to the very top.



When you are about three-quarters of the way up, note this side path to the left - the one that leaps over a little rain gully. Take it. You will then find yourself walking a curvy path going ever higher. It runs along the top of a secluded wooded ridge, among maturing young chestnut and beech trees.



When this delightful ridge path eventually drops down, it does so onto the narrow paved access lane which runs along the north edge of Bathpool Park (a large local beauty spot set in a wooded valley with an artificial lake).

You just saved yourself a low gloomy walk along Boathorse Lane, with the car traffic zipping past you and you munching on car fumes. By now, you should be getting into your stride...



Once you have come out from the woodland path, and are standing on the Bathpool access lane, turn left. Walk the thirty yards of cycle-path back toward the main northern car park of Bathpool Park (or just cut a diagonal across the grass)...



Your aim is the rear of the car park, to get to the start of the main footpath that runs down the more secluded eastern side of Bathpool...



*The start of the eastern path, from the northern car-park at Bathpool.*

Follow this unpaved path southwards, straight down the valley - but note that there is soon the option to cut off from it, to take a slightly higher and parallel path under the trees. These paths run alongside each other, and both end up in the same place.

Along this route you will encounter two long stone bridges. Both bridges branch off to the right. They take you across the West Coast Main Line train tracks and both give elevated views. You will need to use one or the other bridge to cross. I prefer the second one, seen here...



**OPTIONAL DETOUR:** Once you are standing at the eastern entrance to the second bridge, consider a historic detour up into the woods. To make this detour, simply take the public footpath that runs directly up the slope into the woods, from the eastern entrance of the second bridge. You will then reach a walkers' stile at the top of the woods...



**HISTORICAL NOTE:** This very small mine seems to have been Lowlands Colliery Ltd's 'Ravenscliffe No. 4'. It appears to have been first formally licenced in the depths of the Great Depression in 1937 and it is known to have continued in operation into the late 1950s. It was said to be... "employing 20 men below ground and 10 above in 1957" (from *Guide to the Coalfields*, 1960). What sort of cola it supplied and to whom, appears to be unknown.

**WARNING:**

DO NOT be tempted to continue on south through the wood at this high level, in the hope of a shortcut - because a local farmer has fenced the wood with a stout barbed wire fence all the way up, blocked a public footpath and sprayed it with manure, and has also felled a large number of the valley's trees.



Instead of going over the stile (there's not much on the hilltop worth looking at), to find the mine you just **hook off right into the woods**. Once a few yards over the ridge, you will discover what seems to be the remains of a small mine.



*Above: these appear to be the filled-in mine entrance / tipping platform structure.*

**BACK ON THE PATH:** With the historical detour finished, retrace your steps down the hill, and go back to **cross the second stone bridge**. Once across the bridge, turn **left** and continue walking south on the main cycle-path that runs through the Park...



Go a few hundred yards down this very smart cycle-path, noting that it even has its own street lamps(!). Then you will see that the path wiggles and dips down just ahead of you. It's preparing to go into a short subway, which takes the cycle-path under the railway lines...



Look out for the uncomfortable and thoroughly uninviting municipal bench sited on this sharp ‘wiggle’ corner of the cycle-path (see photo overleaf).

Then note the un-signposted little path that climbs up **behind** this bench. That’s the path you want to take, **not** the cycle-path that goes under the subway.



This easy-to-miss path should then take you in a sharp curve **off to the left** and into the wildest bit of Bathpool, Target Wood. The Wood certainly doesn't look very huge at the start, but it gets a lot bigger later.

Be careful not to tromp straight on past the Target Wood entrance path.

If you note that the faint path is going past this lovely young oak tree, then you are at the start of the path into Target Wood...



*Above: entrance to the Target Wood path.*

#### **SHORTCUT:**

A very short way along the path into Target Wood, you'll see a metal gate in the hedge just off to your right. This isn't the official footpath, but it *can* take you in the same direction. You may want to use this gate in very wet weather, or if the path through the woods gets very briar-entangled in later summer...

#### **HISTORICAL NOTE:**

In mid Victorian times the wood had a large rifle range and targets. These were used by the Kidsgrove Rifle Volunteers (started 1860). The rifle targets thus give us the contemporary name of 'Target Wood'.



*The shortcut gate just inside the north end of Target Wood.*

Let's assume that it's dry weather and summer. In which case carry on past this "shortcut" gate (above), and on into Target Wood on the proper public footpath.

The woodland path then takes you weaving through some delightfully lush and secluded glades, until you eventually find your way forward barred by a

wide and deep dry gully. Possibly this was once something to do with the rifle shooting? Beyond the gully is seemingly trackless dry woodland. This is said by the local orienteering group to be the oldest part of Bathpool's woodlands. This gully is your cue to **turn to your right and head uphill**. Up a damp path you will quickly reach this photogenic stile, where you may have to trample down a few nettles...



Cross the stile and climb up the hill beyond over the cow pasture, heading for the top. Your approximate destination waymark is now the chunky

transmitter sited on the hill's peak - but it is ultimately the farm beyond it at Peacock Hay, on the other side of the hill.

Don't forget to turn around halfway up, for sweeping views back down the valley you've just walked along. Turn again, once you're nearer the summit, for even longer views over toward Mow Cop...



Steer to the right to find the hedge, once you're nearing the top of the hill. Negotiate a couple of cattle fields via their gates (avoid fields with lone bulls, obviously) and you'll soon find yourself walking down through the yard of the farm at Peacock Hay ('Middle Farm'), in order to reach the road...



Here is a picture of the entrance to Middle Farm (you walk down through the farm gates in the picture). Turn left, once past the front road gate...



Walk a very short way down Peacock Hay Road on the pavement. Across the road you will spot nestled in the corner of the entrance to 'Bottom Farm'. Cross this rural main road carefully, to reach the footpath's continuation...



Many farmers around Bathpool / Harecastle / Bradwell are touchy about walkers, for some reason. So you should **not** be tempted to simply use the farm track, but should follow the proper footpath over the stile and through the sheep fields...



After walking across two sheep pasture fields on a diagonal path (you might consider going around the sides, if the lambs are very young), you will soon reach the footpath stile which takes you back onto the farm track...



Now simply follow this farm track all the way south (for about a half mile), with wide low views ahead of you over Tunstall and Burslem...



As the path levels out at its bottom, it might appear that you have two onward choices (see picture below). In reality, the apparent fork to the left just goes into the site of a disused and demolished works, and is a dead-end - the footpaths that are marked on the OS map as leading out the other side of this works appear to have been extinguished- so just carry on walking straight ahead...



*Don't take a left turn here !*

You will soon reach a farmer's tractor underpass that takes you under the dual carriageway. There was once a pond hard by here - frequented by newts and frogs which spawned in it - but it was recently destroyed and filled in.



Immediately on exiting the other side of the underpass, **don't** be tempted to take the steps, but instead carry on along the wide gravel farm track. Otherwise you'll be headed straight through the active local 'pick up' spot for butch gay men...



From the top of the gravel track you will now see the hill of the Bradwell Wood rising ahead of you. You'll be walking on that ridge in few minutes...



The wide gravel path runs down to meet a new paved bicycle path. Walk across the bicycle path and take the straight and **unpaved** path that goes up into the woods (see picture at the foot of the previous page).

A very short distance along this rough straight path, look out for these steps which strike off uphill directly to your left...



*This is the worst mud patch you'll encounter, but is easily negotiated.*

At first these steps look a bit formidable and also rather unpromising. But it's just the very base of them that can get a bit muddy after wet weather. It's easy enough to jig around the bit of mud.

Once you've negotiated the first three or so steps, then the way up is easy. The upward path quickly improves, as you can see here...



At the top of this first section of the steps up to the ridge, there is a level stretch - with a handy wooden bench sited in a beautiful bluebell / oak woodland...



You may *need* that bit of rest on the bench - because beyond it you then have *even more* steps to climb...



**HISTORICAL NOTE:** The Bradwell Wood (local dialect is said to be “Bradder Wud”) appears to be ancient, since it is marked and named on the earliest maps of North Staffordshire. The rich red clay of the woods can be fired at high temperatures for a beautiful hardness and satin-sheen. About the year 1690 the Elers – artisan redware potters - briefly settled in Bradwell, since they had discovered how to take advantage of the fine red clay there for teapots. They were also said to have devised...

“...a speaking-tube made of earthenware pipes, which they laid across the mile separating Dimsdale Hall and Bradwell Wood, and through which they conversed.” — *The Romance Of Old China: The Elers’ And Their Wares*, by Mrs. Willoughby Hodgson, circa 1910.

The speaking tubes were discounted as a local myth until 1900 when excavations discovered parts of them, and they were said to have been then displayed in the Hanley Museum. A local Burslem potter called John Astbury pretended to be simple-minded in order to get work in the Elers’ secretive little pottery. By this means he discovered their teapot making secrets.

Once you reach the top, simply turn left and follow the wide main path that winds south along the ridge...





The path continues south and finally comes out of the woods, where you will see some 1970s houses ahead and a t-junction in the paths.

Hook left at this t-junction, and follow a pleasant well-established path that rambles along between the woods and the gardens of the houses...

### **WET WEATHER**

**DETOUR:** In warm weather, continue along the main path (seen above) through a lush little patch of meadow. But after very wet weather, instead take the higher path - and then drop back down onto the main path once the soggy reedy bit has been bypassed.



You will emerge onto a narrow, dry, and well-worn little ‘rut’ path. It runs between horse fields and a *very* steep ridge populated at the top with mature oak trees...



You're very high up, but sadly there is only one point on this stretch where the view is good in summer. About half way along this section, the dense oak trees give way - and there is this fine view east over Westport Lake and toward the towers of Burslem town.

Binoculars are good to have, here, as at many other points on the walk...

**HISTORICAL NOTE:**

An Iron Age clay bowl was reported in the *Sentinel* as being dug up near the wood-edge at Bradwell, in 2002.



At the very end of this pleasant oak ridge path, the path suddenly splits in two. Take the **left** hand fork...



You will then immediately emerge onto the mown park-like recreation area which is located across from the Crematorium...



Walk forward and go straight across this recreation ground, but beware that some of **this old pasture ground is uneven in parts**, and ankles could easily be twisted here. You will soon see an ugly 1970s-style municipal house in the distance – this grim little edifice marks the entrance to the council Crematorium and its extensive ornamental gardens.



Walk toward the 1970s house initially, but then veer off so as to strike the cemetery roadway at a 90 degree angle. If you approach this way then you should strike the road near a stile in the hedge. The stile is sited about 50 yards before the crematorium house and entrance...



Hop over the stile, and you're onto a continuation of the municipal recreation ground that serves as a mini 'green belt' for the Crematorium. Keep on walking ahead, going down the side of the fat hedge which forms the western boundary of the Crematorium's gardens. You now walk along this hedge into the lowest bottom corner of the recreation ground...



In this corner under the trees you will find the entrance to a well-established local path, which runs down into a little valley...



Although not marked on OS maps, the valley path is quite well worn...



...and more importantly it takes you across the valley's stream – and does so before the little valley becomes precipitously steep (the stream drops off the ridge lower down)...



You may have some trouble crossing here in very wet weather(?) But even after two days of heavy rain, in June the stream was a trickle and was very easily crossed. There are stepping stones. Or you could just jump. Possibly the stream is low in normal weather, because it's so steep and fast-flowing?

The path then climbs up, as the little valley drops away steeply to one side...



The path then goes around the back of some domestic gardens, and finally breaks out onto the suburban First Avenue, from under some trees...



You now have to undertake a more suburban section on some roadside pavements. But the route is still quite leafy.

Step out onto First Avenue, and turn left...



Now head down the pavement of First Avenue to where it meets Wedgwood Drive and is crossed by the main Porthill Bank road. Cross over this main road (**careful**: can be busy!) and continue on down Wedgwood Drive...



Wedgwood Drive quickly runs down into this pleasant woody dip - which also gives access on one side to an ornamental park with pools, for those needing a rest.



At the end of Wedgwood Drive, cross straight over Boulton Street (wide but not heavily trafficked) and continue on into Inglewood Avenue...



Inglewood Avenue is marked as a 'cul-de-sac' on the road sign, but that's only meant as a warning for cars. There's a pedestrian way through at the top of it.

On the other side, Inglewood Avenue continues on into a drab stretch of council housing, to become Ridgeway Place...



*Don't be tempted to turn sharp right and climb the narrow footpath that climbs steeply between the houses here. Just keep on the level along into Ridgeway Place.*

Walk straight on into Ridgeway Place. As Ridgeway Place turns its first corner, note that there are some sweeping distant views across Burslem, and up and down the valley. From here you can see across much of the north of the city of Stoke-on-Trent...



Now carry on up the rising Ridgeway Place for about another twenty yards, until a hairpin bend suddenly turns it back on itself...



At the top of the hairpin bend, stop. Tucked away in the corner, you will see the entrance to a paved footpath. Let this path lead you along the ridge...



The path will emerge onto Minton Street. Turn left and then swing around the corner of this very quiet road...



Once around this corner (above) you will immediately see the huge Wolstanton Church spire in the distance. Note the entrance to a continuation of the ridge footpath, which quickly starts again under the trees immediately ahead of you...





Follow this short path along the ridge. It quickly curves around to an end, bringing you out by the side of a block of flats in Wedgewood Street. **DON'T** follow the path into Wedgewood Street. Instead, at the curve, just keep walking straight on across the lawns of the flats...



Just beyond the trees you will easily spot a locally made 'stile', which lets you walk into the end of Chetwynd Street (a cul-de-sac)...



Once through this very handy gap, you'll be standing at the bottom of Chetwynd Street.

The bottom of Wolstanton Churchyard is now directly ahead of you over the wall. But how best to get into the churchyard, and walk pleasantly up through it, instead of beside the grotty garages on your right in Chetwynd Street?

To enter the foot of the churchyard, simply turn left from where you are standing - and walk down a little sloping paved path...



This path will have hardly begun, when you'll see a tumbledown-but-handly pedestrian entrance on your right. This gives an access that swings you up

into the churchyard. You can then walk up through the very pleasant Wolstanton Church churchyard...



Half way up the churchyard, you will see a bright red dog-bin ahead. From here, just cut straight on across the grass, to reach the foot of the massive church spire...



On the northern side of the redstone spire (the side seen in the picture below) you will find a classic and pleasant wooden bench for a rest...



Exit the churchyard via the main Lych Gate and War Memorial seen on page 49. This is the only exit. A main road runs along the top front of the church. Turn and walk left, along the busy main road, toward the New Smithy Inn.

**HISTORICAL NOTE:** St. Margaret was altered 1858/60 by Gilbert Scott – who incorporated the layout and many elements of the old medieval church.

In his later years the Potteries artist and writer Arthur Berry (1925-1994) lived in Wolstanton.



Pass the New Smithy Inn, a good local pub which offers food and a possible half-way lunch point (if you didn't already have a picnic in the churchyard). You are now following the approximate route of the old Roman Rykeneld Street (Chester to Derby).



Turn left at the New Smithy Inn junction, into Grange Lane, and immediately cross over this road at the crossing. Then walk up Grange Lane for about thirty yards. Admire the sweeping northerly views at the crest...



After admiring the views, look to your immediate right. There is a young children's pre-school nursery, and a paved public path going down the side of it. Follow this path...





The nursery path brings you out at the short Highfield Avenue. Walk up this short road, until you see this little paved path leading to a low-gated pedestrian way. It leads through into the continuing Highfield Avenue.....





Go through the low metal gate. Follow the continuing Highfield Avenue a short way along, until it is crossed by Stratford Avenue. Turn left down Stratford Avenue. Immediately ahead of you, you will see the entrance to a paved pedestrian path which runs down through the woods...





Follow this path all the way down. You'll hear the waterfall-like sound of the major A500 dual carriageway from your left. Eventually the trees thin on your right, and you will immediately see an unpaved grass path striking off up the ridge... take it...



Follow this turfy grass path up, left and up round a hairpin bend, then continue south along the ridge path, turning around to take in the magnificent 180 degree views east across the valley.

#### **ALTERNATIVE ROUTE:**

Tired at this point? Is so, just **continue down the paved path** rather than taking the grass slope. You will have to walk alongside the A500 dual carriageway on the pavement for 200 yards or so. You will emerge at the Basford Bank crossing (seen on page 57) and will be back on the walk path.

From the ridge you have a superb view and can look directly down on the *Sentinel* newspaper offices and printing plant on Festival Park (formerly the 1986 National Garden Festival site) at Etruria Valley – a site which still has some traces of the old Wedgwood factory. Also the site of the Shelton Steel Works and Bar Rolling Mill.

Then follow the ridge path south. You will come to this inadequate barrier – just hop across it...

#### **HISTORICAL NOTE:**

The 1986 Stoke-on-Trent National Garden Festival was instigated locally by Conservative Councillor Cyril Finney and was one of a series sponsored by the Conservative government. This major project kick-started the regeneration of the city. The former steel works still has superb green space, and is home to many major employers.

#### **HISTORICAL NOTE:**

Etruria was home to the main Wedgwood pottery factory (1769-1950). The factory later moved south down the valley to Barlaston (1940-), where it still operates and where there is now an award-winning museum for the Wedgwood collection.



Immediately after your little ‘hop-over’, walk down this slope path that drops to your left. Carefully make your way down to the superstore car park...



If you need a bit of spine relaxation you might even go in a try out some of the superstore’s beds ;-)

*Above: what the view from the ridge once looked like in the year 1860, as painted by Henry Lark Pratt.*

Once in the car park, follow a paved path around the back of the warehouse...



Note the massive Michelin tyre (which presumably prevents scrambler-bike racing here), one of several placed on the corner of the warehouse path. Michelin still manufactures tyres and has an HQ in the city - and this monster is a prime example of their workmanship.

You will emerge at the bottom of the Basford Bank, infamous as the busiest and most traffic-choked road in the city.

Head down over the mown grass, toward the Basford Bank pedestrian (traffic lights) crossing...



Cross via the handy push-button pedestrian crossings, which are **by far the safest place to cross on this incredibly busy road.**



Once across the Basford Bank pedestrian crossings, head straight on up on the grass verge, and head for a little lane nestled in the corner under the trees. Note that the lane you want goes up **behind** the Victorian villas...



Find the entrance to a neglected steep little side lane, called the Fowlea Bank. This is the original and steep old lane which - until the 1820s - took all the traffic up the bank. Walking down it has been described as... “like falling off the edge of the world”. For you, it offers a very quiet and picturesque climb up.

Pause at intervals while climbing the lane, to look across through the trees at the wide southerly views over Stoke town. The lane is still usable by residents’ cars, but has almost no traffic - unlike the ferociously busy Basford Bank.

**HISTORICAL NOTE:**

The science-fiction author H.G. Wells (*The Time Machine*, *War of the Worlds*) once lived at 18 Victoria Street, Basford. He wrote a macabre revenge story – “The Cone” - set in the iron works at Etruria (directly below the Fowlea Bank).



*The Fowlea Bank*

At the top of the quiet Fowlea Bank is the large roadhouse pub called the Queen's. At June 2012 this well-known local pub is now closed, and on offer freehold for a mere £200,000 - so doesn't currently offer a handy rest-stop for walkers.

**HISTORICAL NOTE:** This is speculation but perhaps the old Fowlea Bank might have been where the Chester-Derby Roman road - called the Rykeneld Street - dropped down into the valley to reach Stoke (it had to reach a point roughly where the train station / University / lower Hanley Park is today). The road was likely to have avoided Hartshill for three main reasons: i) Hartshill/Penkull was a British settlement and to go near it might impede rapid military movement in a crisis - the Romans could be easily pinned down in the narrow stretch between Penkhull and the Hartshill ridge, with an enemy on the higher ground; ii) any such road would have passed very near the possible local 'sacred grove' of the British (where the Stoke Minster church is now), and such a 'trespass' could have been seen as sacrilegious; and iii) the Stoke/Boothten confluence of the Fowlea and the River Trent was once very prone to flooding - it was apparently underwater for much of the year. Far more likely then is that the Romans dropped their road down the steep valley side well before Hartshill/Penkull. This also appears to have been the opinion of local historian Steve Birks in a letter to *The Sentinel* in 2008. The road could then have gone on a raised wooden causeway across the Fowlea water meadows at Etruria, then through Shelton to reach the point where the modern Stoke train station is.

Half way up the Fowlea Bank, pause for a breather and note this delightful little allotment and corner garden, and the fine view beyond it...



At the top, pass on up the side of the Queen's pub (don't worry, this isn't the main road, which is still below you and to your right) which is seen here...



Then immediately turn left, to pass alongside the pub's main frontage. Your path now lies at the back of the Queen's car park.

**HISTORICAL NOTE:** The Queen's was built in 1769, by Robert Emery, as "The Queen's Arms". It was rebuilt in 1881, and was reportedly the preferred venue for the meetings of the many local friendly societies. Trade was possibly helped by having Etruria Station at the bottom of the bank (closed in 2005). The current car park was the site of the lawns of the Basford Lawn Tennis Club (from 1883-1926). From the 1980s to the late 2000s part of The Queen's operated as a nightclub (500 person capacity), and the venue is still fondly remembered by many in the Potteries.

In the far corner of the (empty) Queen's car park you will find the start of a little track through the woods...



This path is initially quite verdant, but quickly drops down into a wide cinder track. Then after twenty yards it goes over and down a little bank and comes out onto the new tarmaced bicycle path of a public recreation ground at Basford Park.

As you approach the recreation ground there's a few feet of banked local clay near the surface, so **beware of slipping** after wet weather, as you walk down the little bank...



#### POSSIBLE DETOUR:

You took this path at the back of the Queens - rather than the more obvious paved lane - because there are large iron gates at the bottom of the lane. These gates can sometimes be padlocked, especially on Saturdays. This woody path 'around the back' thus avoids the potential problem of finding locked gates.

The other alternatives are: i) to use the lane, and hope the gates are open; or ii) turn right instead of left at the lane bottom, and so reach a path into Basford Park further west.

You now drop down onto the end of the Basford Park cycle-path - there are two nice new metal benches, next to community vegetable-growing troughs.

Now head straight on across the Basford Park recreation ground, directly across the pitches and **between the two mini goalposts**. If there are sports matches taking place on weekends, or if it's wet, then of course use the cycle path that goes around the pitch.

Walk to the other side of those far goalposts, which takes you toward the top of the new Camellia Close...



Once you are just beyond the goalposts you will have views across to the church spire at Hartshill. The pipe sticking out above the trees of Hartshill Park is from the new £400m NHS mega-hospital at Hartshill. You may see the air ambulance helicopter landing, seemingly straight into the trees...



At the bottom of the picture above you can see the top of the new little cul-de-sac lane called Camellia Close. This Close goes down into the new upmarket private housing estate. Follow it down the slope.

After a just a few yards of walking down Camellia Close, at the bottom of it you will see this rather handsome wooden gate...



Go through the pedestrian side gate, and turn left onto the main road (the Shelton New Road). Walk down it a few yards, and then cross over at the pedestrian bollards - which you can see in this picture...



Once on the other side of this busy road, continue on down in the same direction as you were walking before...



Then follow the footpath as it curves around...



It then meets a wide dual cycle/pedestrian footpath which runs down the gentle slope alongside Hartshill Park woods...



About half way down this path, you will find the bottom entrance to Hartshill Park.

**HISTORICAL NOTE:** Hartshill Park was part of a Norman deer hunting park, which survived as such well into the 15th century - evidenced by records of the boundaries being repaired at that time. The bulk of it became a working farm and it continued as such until 1978, seemingly providing a rare instance of a fragment of medieval hunting park surviving as green open space in an industrial city. In the southern reaches there was a gentleman's mansion with extensive grounds (later became a girls' school) and a convent. Stoke-on-Trent City Council compulsory purchased the land in 1975 and did some basic reclamation, but the Park then had very little maintenance or attention for the next thirty years. The Park is now run by the Friends of Hartshill Park group, as a wildlife park.

Half way down, find and take these access steps and into Hartshill Park...



Follow the “bear paw” on-path marks, to follow the paved footpath that curves around the edge of the school playing fields...



These marks will lead you around to the eastern pedestrian/park entrance to the junior school, where you will find a nice large carved oak bench with a tall back.



From the nice carved bench and the school entrance, continue upwards on the same path, again following the “bear paw marks”...



Fifty yards further up from the fork shown in the above photo, the paved path then prepares to curve up and out of sight under the trees. This is your cue to **turn directly left** onto a new packed-gravel path that goes along the ridge...





At June 2012 this path is untarmaced, but might be surfaced in future. It soon takes you past the first of the Park's many hillside pools. This pool was once the site of the Park's farmhouse. There is a plaque on a post here: "This plaque is to commemorate three generations of the Mountford family, who farmed this land from 1916 to 1978."



Now simply follow the obvious path all the way along the ridge...



You will eventually reach the new steps. Turn and look back, when at the floor of the steps, for elevated views back to the Basford Bank - and even a distant glimpse of the top of the huge church tower back at Wolstanton...



At the top of the steps, there are two diverging paths. Take the left-hand and lesser path...



Then follow this path around, staying on the level...



**The Friends of Hartshill Park** is an independent voluntary group, formed in 1999. They undertake a variety of practical conservation tasks throughout the year, including many of the improvements you've just seen. They run a variety of practical events in the Park, and hold monthly meetings. <http://www.hartshillpark.org.uk/>

After a curve the path becomes a little muddy, and you will see a bar barrier just ahead of you. Just before the barrier, take the path to the right that takes you in just a few steps up to the pool.





You will then walk - for a few paces - alongside the highest of the 'Convent Pools'. The pools are now being restored using Lottery and similar grants.

**HISTORICAL NOTE:**

The fantasy author and Old English scholar J.R.R. Tolkien (*The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings*) spent many of his long academic holidays with his son John – at Northcote House, 104 Hartshill Road (just down the road from here).

**HISTORICAL NOTE:** The pools were once part of the grounds of a Dominican Convent and associated fee-paying girls' school. The school had many free scholarships for the brighter local girls (inc. many non-Catholics). The nuns were noted for being very worldly in their views. In the 1930s exam boards required that one science subject be taught, so Botany was taught at the pools.

The path emerges out of Hartshill Park, to meet the main road.

Here you should cross over Hartshill Road, **with care.**

**Safety note:** if you are doing the path in reverse, then you **MUST** go much further up the hill in order to safely dash across the Hartshill Road.

Once across you should continue down the hill for a hundred yards until you meet the entrance to Clifton Street (you may spot this name as a road sign still on the side of a house - but note that this street is now marked as 'Gerrard Street' on most maps).



Clifton Street (aka Gerrard Street) is a short road of terraced houses which swiftly leads up to the entrance to a very pleasant little children's park. There are some comfy walls along the street, before the park entrance, which can serve nicely as impromptu benches.



Once in the park, **turn right**. Then take the elevated path that swings up around the popular small children's play area...



This elevated path then runs above the park's mini football pitch, and it has three pleasant benches set under the mature trees...



Continue along the top path and exit the park via its top/south gate. Then turn right and immediately walk up a paved alley that runs between the houses and the allotments...





This short leafy alley has a superb view down over Stoke train station, the campus of Staffordshire University and the new 'Education Quarter' of the city...



This alley is very short and it will bring you out (possibly in the company of friendly local cats) onto Richmond Street, from where you walk down the steep hill...



Keep on going downhill along Richmond Street, past the allotments. You will see the King's Hall / Civic Centre / Spode factory and the spire of Stoke Minster far ahead of you, down in the valley below.

You are now entering the elevated top part of the old Stoke town, the city's original town.

You then reach the 'Honeywall' road, and a four-way road junction...



You want to turn right here along the Honeywall. But do so **with great care**.

**SAFETY WARNING:** This is a deceptively tricky pedestrian road crossing. It may seem quiet, but cars come too fast along the Honeywall around a blind bend (on your right). The giant SLOW sign painted on the road there has almost faded away.



Once safely across Honeywall, walk up beside the high rise flats. Here you can sit on the car-crash barriers under the trees, and look out over a fine view of the Stoke Minster church - seen as if nestled among the trees...



A few paces past the views, and hard by a bus stop, you will see a white-railed pedestrian path that leads down the grassy slope. Follow it...



After wet weather there's a little natural spring half-way down this path, that lets out of the hillside under some tree roots. Sadly no-one's yet thought to make a little pond under it.

At the foot of the white-railed path, there is another deceptively tricky junction to cross. It might seem quiet, but taxis and others can rush out of the flats car park (on the left of this picture) at high speed. Possibly this is a local taxi driver's 'short cut'? So **take care in crossing**, as you make your way down into Spark Street...



You are now nearly down at the Stoke town Sainsbury's, one of the most pleasant and best-staffed supermarkets in North Staffordshire. Sainsbury's is the big silvery building you can see ahead, at the foot of Spark Street (on the London Road). It's open all week, inc. Sundays, and has a good café with a good range...



The London Road is busy, but you can cross it easily to get to Sainsbury's supermarket - via the pedestrian crossing at the foot of Spark Street...



STOKE TOWN: Sainsbury's is open 7am -10pm except Sundays. On Sundays it opens at 10am and closes at 4pm. The café is at the opposite end from the south entrance seen above – so if the café is all you want, walk down the outside of the supermarket and use the north entrance to reach the café.

There are plenty of alternative independent eateries in Stoke town:

- The Market café (cheap, sometimes very busy with pensioners).
- Apple's Coffee House, Hill Street (Apple can also do her Thai food).
- The White Star and The Glebe pubs (both a better quality of pub, and also open in the evenings).
- Various Indian restaurants (open in the evenings).

There is also much to see in Stoke town. Have a look at this complete photo gallery of the sights of the town, on Flickr:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/futurilla/sets/72157624864396050/>

### **OPTION: ONWARD TO TRENTHAM?**

From Sainsbury's you can easily continue on to Trentham Gardens, one of the UK's biggest attractions, which is located in the south of the city. Simply walk through Sainsbury's car park, to the Bothen Road, then follow it as it becomes the quiet Bothen Old Road. Just after you go past a new infants' school, you will see the entrance to the new river path that runs alongside the River Trent. Follow this quiet paved cycle path for a mile and a half along the banks of the Trent, to Hanford. From Hanford take the wide footpath along the A34.

If you are passing through Stoke back to the train station, then just walk up the side of Sainsbury's...



Then - at the tip of Sainsbury's - cross over at the pedestrian crossing. Immediately turn right and head toward the prominent signs for the Market...



Then turn left into south Wolfe Street, and walk alongside the public market and the new public library and its square. Cross over into the Kingsway, and past one of the best pubs in Stoke-on-Trent, The White Star, operated by the local independent Titantic Brewery...



Continue on down the EU-funded Kingsway, past the war memorial and the Civic Centre. Ahead of you is the Stoke Minster church. (Cross over the road with care, if you are going to visit the church and churchyard).

If you're not going over to the church, then turn left into Glebe Street...



**HISTORICAL NOTE:** A church has been on this site for over 1,300 years. It was possibly originally a pagan 'sacred grove' of the ancient British, sited at the confluence of the River Trent and Fowlea Brook. The first church was founded by missionaries from Lindisfarne and built of wood in the year 670. A stone church was erected in 805, and the current Victorian building incorporates elements of the older structure including the Anglo-Saxon baptismal font. Anglo-Saxon remains, including an ancient cross, can also be seen in the churchyard. It is on the route of the major Two Saints Way walking route.

You will then walk past the other quality pub in Stoke town, The Glebe...



After the Glebe pub, use the twin pedestrian crossings to cross over onto the far side of the A500 bridge, thus...



You now walk on a long bridge over the A500 dual carriage way, and also over the Trent and Mersey canal and its towpath.

Once the Trent and Mersey canal is directly below you, turn and look back to see views along the ridge...



Stoke-on-Trent train station is not far off now. You may see a train sliding out of the station, along your eye-line. But to get to the station, you first have to use this ratty little underpass under the railway lines...



As you walk up and out the other side of the underpass, turn left on the pavement. As you walk down Station Road, you will see the station buildings ahead...



Just keep on walking along the station's *long* frontage...



There is a Subway fast food outlet in the red brick building seen across the road here. The bar of the North Staffordshire hotel (just behind Subway) may also be open, and the Hotel can also offer rooms for the night.

HISTORICAL NOTE: You have now rejoined the approximate route of the old Roman road, the Rykeneld Street, which you were last on back at Wolstanton. See Wikipedia:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rykeneld\\_Street](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rykeneld_Street)

You will finally reach the main entrance to the train station...



In the square opposite the station is the statue of Josiah Wedgwood, holding the famous Portland Vase. There are also several benches to sit on here, but they are rather too near the traffic for my taste...



If you want somewhere to sit down and eat a picnic without having to buy a coffee / listen to muzak / endure mobile phone yak-yak / suffer screaming babies etc, then you could also consider walking to a point just around the corner from the station. To get there, just walk past the entrance to the station, past the Taxi Rank, and then cross over onto the main campus of Staffordshire University. There's a bench there, where you won't have to eat bus or train fumes along with your meal. Although you may have some puzzled glances at your muddy boots, from the arts and media students which the campus specialises in. Here's a view of the entrance to the campus on College Road...



If the HSBC cash machine at the station is broken or empty (as it frequently is), then you will also have to go onto the campus. You can find the alternative cash machine located just past the sub- Post Office, up College Road. Beware that this machine makes hefty extra charges for cash.

If for some reason you need to kill a few hours (massive chaos on the trains has been known), then during term time there are evening art house cinema

showings at the Film Theatre cinema (located just a few paces from that handy seat) The programmes and times for the Film Theatre are on the Web at <http://www.stokefilmtheatre.org.uk/>



*8,000 words. Version 1.1.*