

# THE TWO UNIVERSITIES WAY

A GREEN ROUTE TO WALK  
FROM STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY TO KEELE UNIVERSITY

STOKE-ON-TRENT, ENGLAND, 2012.

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A GREEN ROUTE TO WALK  
FROM STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY TO KEELE UNIVERSITY

EXPLORED AND COMPILED BY  
DAVID HADEN

PRODUCED AS PART OF A WEEK OF WOODLAND WALKS TO BE HELD  
ACROSS NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE.

MAY 2012

**T**HIS ROUTE has been chosen as the most pleasant, though perhaps not quite the shortest, way for travel on foot between the two major universities located in North Staffordshire. It may also be useful for experienced off-road cyclists.

This route has been documented as part of a week of woodland walks in North Staffordshire, and as such it takes in a great many mature and ornamental trees along the way. The Keele University campus is especially noted for its vast number of beautiful trees and its Arboretum, which has its website at: <http://www.keele.ac.uk/arboretum/>

Total walking length from library to library: just under **five miles**. Paved off-road greenways, paved canal towpaths, and other suitable (i.e: non-mudbath) footpaths form just over two miles of this path. The two most substantial main-road stretches (part of the Shelton New Road, and the Keele Road above the Gallowstree Lane roundabout) have been made friendly to cyclists and pedestrians. The rest of the path uses very quiet residential backstreets. Note that the path is not signed along its route.

Train access to the start of the route is substantial, since the Stoke-on-Trent mainline train station is adjacent to Staffordshire University. From the south the station is regularly served by direct trains from Leamington Spa, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Stafford, and Stone. From the north the station is regularly served by direct trains from Manchester, Crewe, and Kidsgrove. There are also milk-run services to/from Derby. The train station offers the usual mainline facilities. These include a post box, and 50 folding Brompton bicycles for hire (a deposit will probably be required). Key buses depart from the station, and there is a substantial taxi rank available.

Adjacent to the station is the North Staffordshire Hotel, and just around the corner you will find the Film Theatre art-house cinema (with plenty of secure cycle-locking, if the station is ever closed), an award-winning sub Post Office, and the shop of Mr. Chilton the barber.

The No.25 bus will carry you back to the starting point, from Keele University. It runs every ten minutes and costs £2 for a single fare.



**S**TART at either Stoke-on-Trent mainline train station (it's just behind you, in this view), or the Stoke campus of Staffordshire University (the buildings just ahead of you, in this view). There are bus stops for the No. 25 service here, which can take you to Keele for a £2 single fare, if you want to try the walk in reverse. The main building in these two views is the Staffordshire University Library, which external borrowers can join for £50 a year (£20 unemployed). Head on down the side of this Library building, on the rather uneven footpath.







At the end of this Station Road, turn left. This choice immediately takes you underneath two charmingly dank railway bridges, seemingly home to the city's entire roosting flock of incontinent pigeons...



Don't worry, this is about as 'Stoke' as the path gets along its route.



Immediately on the other side of these rail bridges, cross over the road using the pedestrian crossing. Once on the other side, you should head down the short-but-curved Vernon Road (it's where the Landrover is coming from, in the picture below), in order to reach the Trent and Mersey canal towpath.





As Vernon Road curves around, you will see the DPC Group building (Chartered Accountants and Business Advisers). A very short sunken footpath starts just before their building. It runs back down to the canal...





Once you are down onto the canal towpath, turn and look left. There will be a white pedestrian protection barrier, indicating the direction that you should start walking. (Feel free to do a monkey-swing or a one-handed vault of it!) Head up to the top of the canal lock...



The canal locks are part of the Trent and Mersey Canal, opened fully in 1777 to serve the Potteries. It used narrowboats to carry the fragile ceramic ware to export markets at Liverpool and Hull. Today the canal serves a thriving tourist trade, based on rented holiday narrowboats.



At the top of the canal locks, the path runs away north. As you walk along it, note the long low industrial building just across the canal. This is apparently the IT hub for much of the UK rail signaling network. It occupies the site of a former timber yard serving a boat-building shed.

The path runs north along the main north-south Etruria valley, along which the bulk of the city of Stoke-on-Trent runs. Despite its grimy industrial reputation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Stoke-on-Trent is now one of the UK's greenest and most tree-populated urban places in the UK.

The canal towpath is also the National Cycle Route No.5, part of the national Sustrans network. Sadly the section between Stoke and Stone is a mudbath, effectively cutting off the city from the national cycle paths coming up from Birmingham and the south of the UK.

The city of Stoke-on-Trent, and the adjacent and abutting Newcastle-under-Lyme, now offer over 100 miles of off-road cycle paths. Many of these run along the canals and use a network of former industrial light railway lines that once served the city's potteries, mines and steel works.



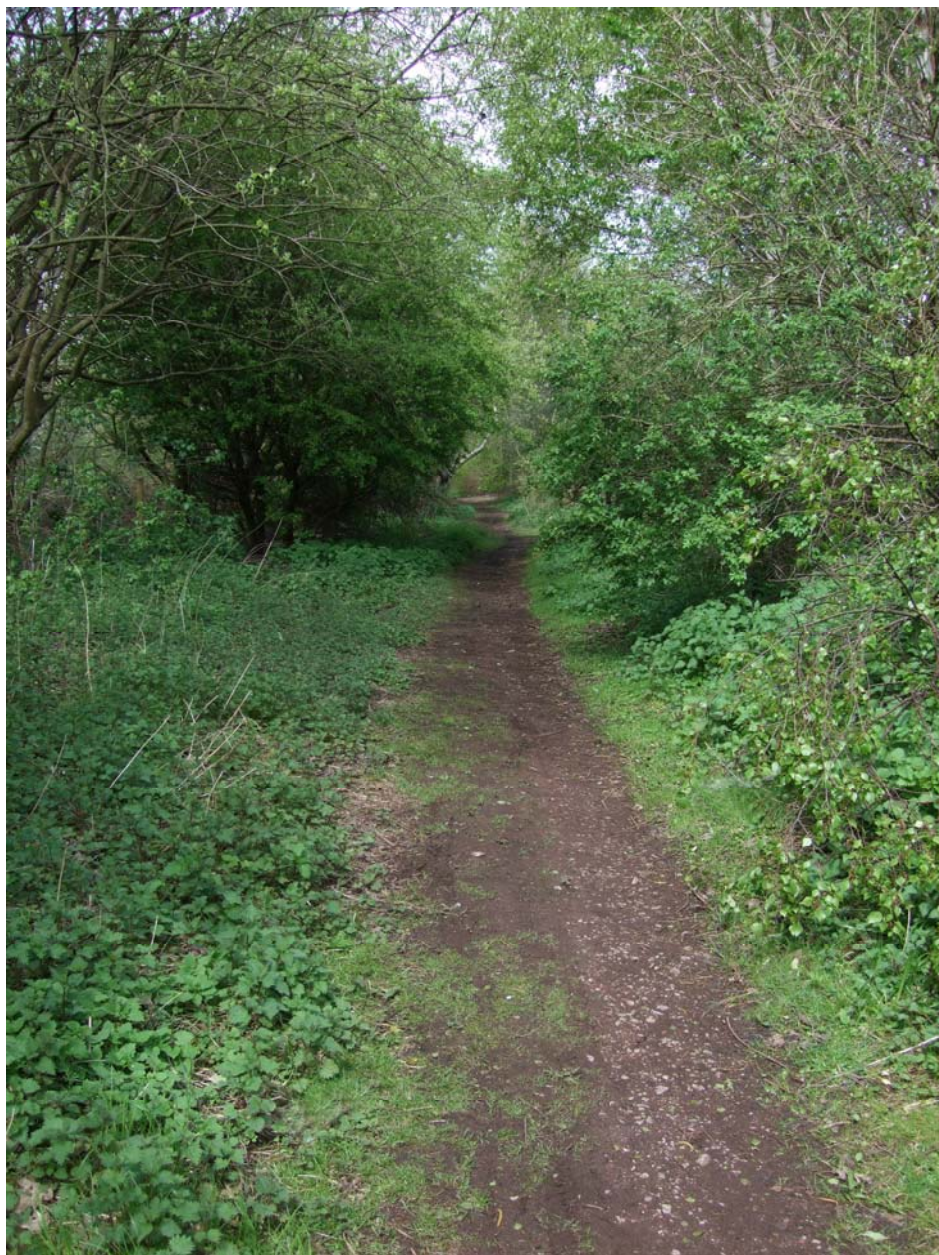
A minute's walking brings you to the first of two railway bridges. You may see the tubular Imerys railway wagons waiting to enter the Imerys plant (above). These contain scoops of Cornish clay, being brought from Cornwall to Stoke. They supply most of the city's ceramics industry with clay.

Do NOT go under the second of the railway bridges. The path you need to take cuts off to the left, just before the second bridge.



The steps are rather worn out and overgrown now, but there are only a few.

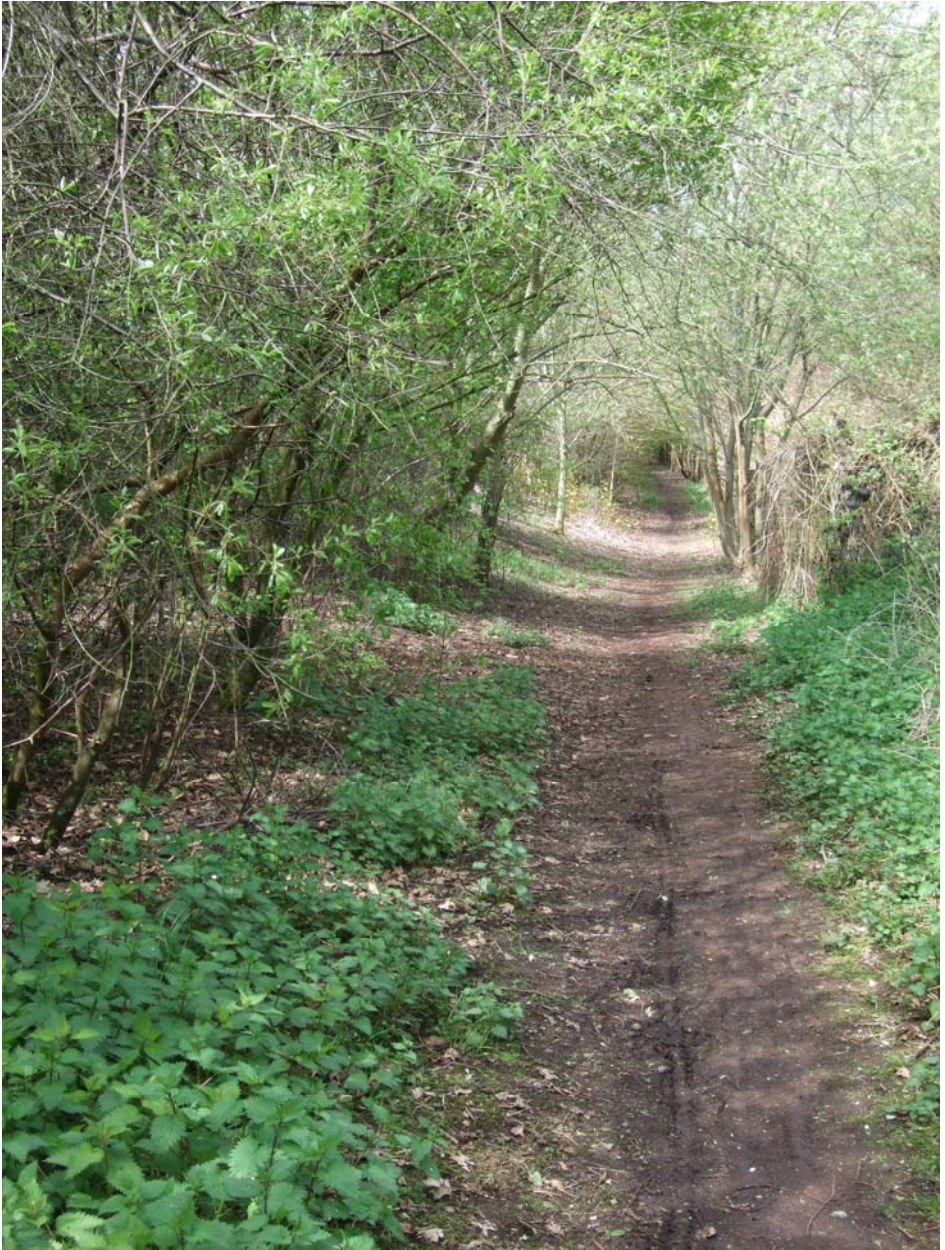




You'll then find yourself going along a scrubby woodland ride. It's flat, and even the wettest of wet weather makes it only slightly muddy. It runs down the side of the Imerys clay processing factory and rail yard. Half way down you can also glimpse the West Coast Main line railway, and just beyond it the new canalside apartments at Lock 38. Lock 38 was formerly Cliffe Vale



Pottery, built by T.W. Twyford in 1887. His factory invented and manufactured the world's first commercial flushing toilets, and other innovative sanitary ware. His toilets were made there for over 100 years.



The path continues on for about half a mile, sloping down slightly toward the end. The railway sidings and buildings here were used as the winter

quarters for the world's biggest circus, Barnum & Bailey, from 1897 until 1911. Incidentally, Philip Astley (1742–1814), the founder of the modern circus, was the son of a cabinet maker from Newcastle-under-Lyme – the North Staffordshire town that you're now heading for.

The wooded path emerges on the slip-road of a small industrial estate, where you immediately turn left to reach the main road.



The slip road serves a small estate of light industrial units in restored Victorian train sheds of the former North Staffordshire Railway. White Van Man may not be expecting cyclists or walkers, and the footpath is heavily overgrown, so take care. But it's just a very short walk, about thirty yards.





At the head of the slip road, turn right onto the pavement. You will then see - immediately ahead - the Shelton New Road, and a road crossing.

**WARNING!** The crossing (as seen below) is perhaps the most difficult one you will encounter on the whole walk. It looks deceptively easy. But you are essentially dealing with three very different flows of traffic, two of which are seemingly desperate to get onto the A500. First-time users should stand and watch how the traffic flows for a minute, before trying to cross.



Once you are across this tricky crossing, you'll stroll/roll across the main bridge which carries the Shelton New Road over the A500. The A500 is the main dual carriageway through the city, connecting it to the M6 motorway.



On the left you'll see a new junior school, charmingly placed amid the lush greenery of Hartshill Park. On the right you'll see the smart new £8m factory and HQ building of Olympus Engineering. You'll also see that there's an on-road cycle-path running along the Shelton New Road.







Once over the A500 bridge, carry on up the Shelton New Road for a few minutes, until the road starts to climb up a bank and goes alongside an old stone wall. Look out to your right, between the houses, for distant views of an old pithead winding gear - a rare relic on the old mining industry.

Once the road starts to rise, look out for a “Hand Car Wash” ahead, on the site of an old petrol station. When you draw exactly level with this car wash, turn immediately left.



Go down this little business estate entrance lane...



The road is a cul-de-sac and is very little trafficked at present (but it looks like a retirement home is going up on the former brick works, and you can see the JCB at work on the site). But pedestrians and cyclists can get through at the bottom.





Here you are at the bottom. There are two paths, and one ‘petering-out’ road. You want the road, on the far-right. This is the Shelton Old Road, and is now almost unused by traffic. Climb up it.



The left-hand verge/bank of the Shelton Old Road bank is delightfully verdant and has several mature trees on it. Including, near the top, this willow. Here you can still get a sense of what the old pack-horse route might have been like. Turn around once you’re near the top, for views over Cliffe Vale and Stoke.



At the top of the rise is this evocative old Victorian building, still in some kind of use. Note the stacked bricks. The area on this side of the canal was noted for its brick making, in Victorian times.





Shelton Old Road levels out and carries on, as a pleasantly quiet back street. Cross straight over the narrow-but-busy road that it meets, and continue in the same direction down the continuing Shelton Old Road. You will soon come to the Red Lion pub at Hartshill. This is the home of the long-running Renegade Writers' Group (Weds, 7pm), in which there are many science fiction and fantasy writers.

You want to get to the other side of that car-hire place (see picture below) - but they won't let people walk through their parking lot. So, hook left around the Red Lion pub...



...and then immediately hook back right...





A zebra crossing and the new Harpfield Primary School are now directly ahead of you. (Note that the No.25 Stoke-Keele bus does not appear to stop anywhere on or near this stretch). Cross the zebra crossing, and carry straight on over into Palmers Green. The street-name sign for Palmers Green is that of a cul-de-sac... but there's a way through at the top - except when the gates are closed between 19:00 BST and 8:00 BST.





Admire the shaggy village-style green that gives Palmer's Green its name. It's still apparently in use as a junior football pitch. Carry straight on up alongside the green.



At the top of the Palmer's Green cul-de-sac, ignore twitching curtains and head for the topmost left corner. There you will find a newly-gated way. These gates are closed between 19:00 BST and 8:00 BST. Currently they are opened by a private company (at April 2012), but Stoke-on-Trent City Council is trying to pass the responsibility to the local residents in order to cut costs. If that happens, and a local lockbollar is appointed, it's possible that the opening times of these gates could become more erratic in the future. Or possibly they will simply be left open at night, as they should be.





Here is the first gate, and a fine elevated view of the Stubbs Fields beyond them. The short path that runs between and just beyond the two gates is patchily paved, but is well drained.





The bulging stone wall just after the two gates provides a type of rough seating, for a brief resting place if needed.



Palmer's Way, then continues down and crosses a road. From a few paces further on you can see across to the fine and very ornate pointed steeple of St. Paul's church, and can glimpse the buildings of the Newcastle-under-Lyme School.

The path continues on, unpaved, going down between this high-achieving independent public school and its extensive playing fields. Once again, with the distant views here you can get a feel for what one of the area's old pack-horse routes might have been like.



Palmer's Way finishes adjacent to a open park-like area with huge trees, called Stubbs Walks.



*A visit to the nearby St. Paul's church is a short detour option at this point, a pleasant walk under the massive mature trees of Stubbs Walk. Although the most interesting feature of the church is probably the flying buttresses of the ornate tower – which can be seen from the walk (above).*

Carry straight on across, continuing downwards, into Occupation Street. You're now entering a traditional area of sturdy vintage Victorian terraced houses that sit above the outskirts of Newcastle-under-Lyme town centre.



From the top of Occupation Street you can see over to the mature woods on the other side of the valley. You'll be up among them, in a few minutes more. But first take the first turning to the right from Occupation Street, into Freehold Street. There used to be a "tremendous little boozer" in this stubby little street, a front-room pub evocatively called The Steam Plough. Its bar served as a miniature local museum. This pub closed in the 1970s.



Then, after a few yards of Freehold Street, turn down into Victoria Street.





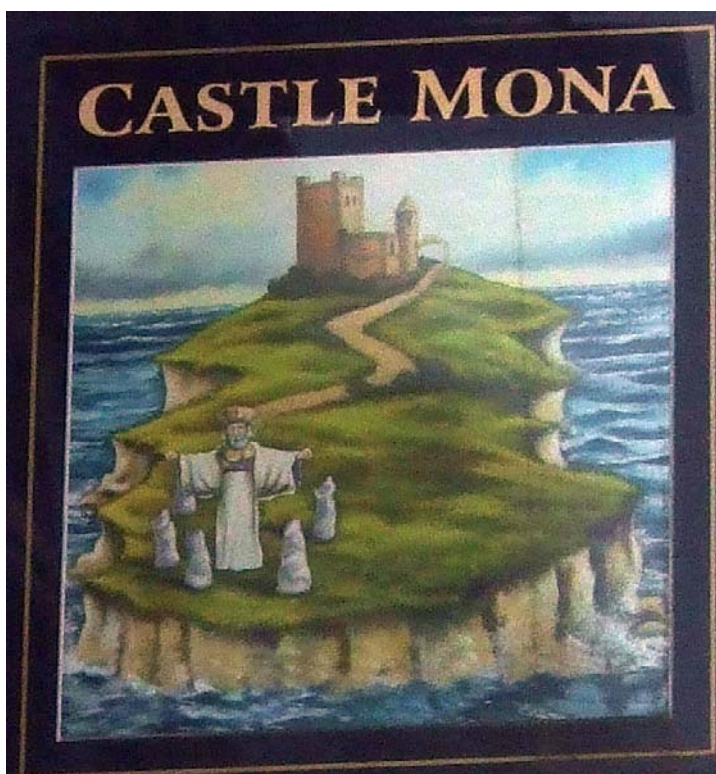
*The Steam Plough is now a private house (corner of Freehold Street and Victoria Street), but the owners retain the old pub sign on the outer wall.*



*Also of note in Victoria Street is this classic old terrace-house front door at No.14, complete with leaded stained glass and traditional boot-scraper set into the wall.*



Carry on down to Victoria Street to the main London Road (a main road that carries traffic from the south into Newcastle-under-Lyme). The Castle Mona Inn is at the foot of Victoria Road, but there are no opening times posted in the windows. The pub appears to be named after a castle in the Isle of Man, which is shown on the fine painted sign-board, complete with druid and circle of phallic standing stones...







Once you are safely across the main road there is a small corner newsagents, Devon's. This is the only convenient corner shop on the route, other than at the start and finish. It's a crammed little nook of a place.

Note also that there is a fine traditional Castle Oatcakes shop and small cafe [ <http://www.castleoatcakes.co.uk/> ] which is located just a few paces to the side and at the back of Devgon's, in a cul-de-sac at 78 London Road. Castle Oatcakes doesn't seem to be signed from the road on weekdays (although it seems it is on weekends), so can be easy to miss. If open, they can offer a complete 'Boxed Oatcake' meal package to take away. They also have outside seating in the summer, far enough away from the main road to be quite pleasant.

There is an ad-hoc place to lock bicycles, in order to quickly visit Devgons or Castle Oatcakes. Lock your bike with a D-lock to the footings of the very robustly-secured Victorian bench, to be found next to the little-used payphone booth (something that seems likely to be removed in the near future?). Given its location, it's not the ideal cycle-locking. But if you have good lock it's probably suitable for a five-minute lock-up in the daytime.



Alternatively, for a longer meal at Castle Oatcakes, you might be able to use the health-centre railings as a bicycle lock-up point (they're opposite Castle Oatcakes).

Once across the main road, head a little way down a terraced street called Stubbs Gate. This was apparently the street that people would take in earlier times, to get to an ancient town gate that served as a bypass around the town centre. About ten yards into the modern Stubbs Gate, you will see a wide alleyway running straight off to the left. Follow it...



This unpaved footpath runs down the side of the new medical centre, and in just a few yards it leads to the northern tip of the valley-bottom Lyme Valley Parkway [ <http://lymevalley.webs.com/> ].



# LYME VALLEY PARKWAY

The map illustrates the layout of Lyme Valley Parkway, a community facility. It features a central 'LYME BROOK' flowing through the site. Key areas include 'BROOK LANE' at the top left, 'LYME VALLEY ROAD' at the top, and 'A34 LONDON ROAD' on the right. The map is divided into several zones: 'HOME BASE' (purple), 'CAR PARK' (green), 'EVENTS SPACE' (green), 'PLAY AREA' (yellow), 'WIDELAND AREA' (green), 'DEMPLOY' (purple), 'INFORMATION POINT' (red dot), 'TRAINING PITCHES' (green), 'FOOTBALL PITCH' (green), 'MURDER PITCH' (green), 'VEL JOURNALS AND INFORMATION CENTRE' (yellow), 'PLAY AREA' (yellow), 'NEWCASTLE & PRIORITY CLUB' (green), and 'NEWCASTLE & PRIORITY CLUB' (green). A 'KEY' on the left defines symbols for 'Site boundary' (red dashed line), 'Tree planting' (green), 'Shared foot/cycleway' (brown), 'Lyme Brook' (blue), 'Pathway' (green), and 'Direction' (red arrow). A north arrow is located in the top right. The map is bordered by 'BUCKMASTER AVENUE' on the left and 'CLAYTON LANE' at the bottom.

Key

- Site boundary
- Tree planting
- Shared foot/cycleway
- Lyme Brook
- Pathway
- Direction

Lyme Valley Parkway has been improved to provide a community facility, accessible to all with assistance from

**NEWCASTLE UNDERLYME**  
Council

**Staffordshire**  
County Council

**Advantage**  
West Midlands

**growing**  
**growth**

**STAFFORDSHIRE ENVIRONMENTAL FUND**  
Supporting the environment

**Supported by the**  
**Heritage Lottery Fund**

**supported by**  
**the new**  
**CLAYTON**

You should now be nearly at the Lyme Valley Road car park (at the very top of the map). You'll be heading for the Brook Lane exit.



Hop across the road to the medical centre (not literally, or they might have you in for treatment!) and go down the short path that runs down the side of the Lyme Valley Parkway's car park. Note that these park gates look as though they might have locking times?



At the end of this car park, the path forks (see picture below). One part goes winding away south for a mile down the floodplain of the Lyme Valley, where it finds a bridge (see map). The other goes around a corner to the north, to a much nearer bridge over the Lyme. You want the path that goes north...



So, once you've had a quick look at the public noticeboard and map at the foot of the car-park, turn right and head north on the cyclepath...



It's a short path, but is very pleasant and runs directly alongside the Lyme Brook. This area was once the rail-yards of the terminus of the Newcastle-under-Lyme Canal (Stoke town to Newcastle-u-L). Sadly, the canal is long gone, or else it could have offered a flat off-road route from Stoke to the point shown.



The Lyme Brooke is named after the immense belt of wild forest that once ran in a wide arc across the top of North Staffordshire. Possibly it formed a protective buffer against the Welsh tribes, and from Irish raids coming from the Mersey. The name would have arisen from the ancient name for the Elm tree, rather than the Lime tree. ‘Brook’ is also ancient and derives from the Old English word ‘broc’. So by saying “Lyme Brook” out loud, you are speaking words that the ancient Anglo-Saxons would have understood.



The little path quickly emerges near a sturdy and busy road bridge. Turn left and take the footpath cross the bridge, then immediately turn left again, into Clayton Road...



Clayton Road is a busy main road, but you only need walk a fairly short part of it. A hundred yards up from here, you'll find the entrance to the off-road woodlands paths.



Cross over at the crossing shown above, and the entrance to the woodland paths is just a few paces further on...





It's called the "Three Parks" woodland paths. Enter, and go up the slope.

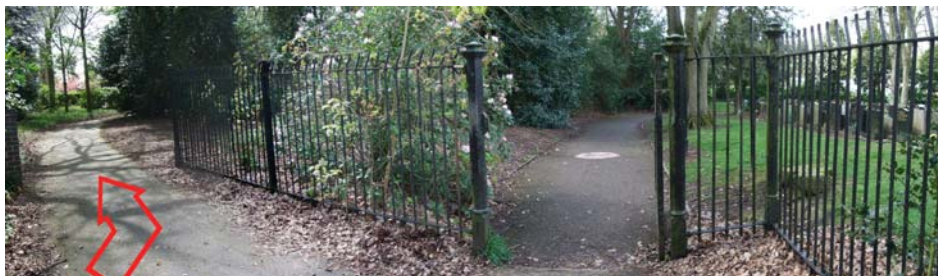
(Note that the Newcastle-under-Lyme/Stoke cycle map is thoroughly misleading about the location of this entrance).



The way up to the Three Parks path is quite steep, and goes on up for quite a way. You may need a couple of quick rest stops, going up. Not one to try



in icy weather! Although the surface certainly has an excellent grip. Half-way up, you'll see that you're coming level with the Cemetery grounds.



At the top of the rise, there are two paths. Don't enter the one that leads into the Cemetery (obvious because it has gravestones and is fenced off). Instead, take the open path that hooks off to the left.



You'll find that there are about four pleasant benches along this well-paved and idyllic woodland path, which runs for about three-quarters of a mile in total.

The path crosses two very minor ‘one-track’ roads as it crosses into an area called ‘The Westlands’. There is also one ‘path-crossroads’. Just carry on straight across, straight ahead...



This very lengthy paved woodland path eventually ends here...



You need to take the path that continues directly opposite. But there’s a big road in the way. Exit right around the chunky beech hedge, and then cross over the road at the pedestrian crossing point.





Take the dog's-leg path through the green on the other side of the main road, and take the curving path around the hedge.

You will find yourself walking up Wedgwood Avenue, alongside the tennis courts of the Westlands Tennis Courts. Beyond them, you may sometimes glimpse a lawn bowls match in progress.







Wedgwood Avenue runs alongside a large public green, with many different types of ornamental tree, seen here on the far left of the picture. There are also huge beech hedges.

At the top of Wedgwood Avenue, turn right into a short curving crescent...



This crescent is full of mature trees, and it curves around to meet the concealed main road called Sneyd Avenue. Despite the leafy appearance of Sneyd Avenue, don't be fooled - it is the main through road shortcut from the M6 to Keele University, and as such can be very busy with traffic.

At the top of the leafy crescent, turn right down the main Sneyd Avenue ...



You now go way down Sneyd Avenue, headed for the junction of Gallowstree Lane and Thistleberry Avenue...







At the bottom of Sneyd Road, turn right at the junction of Gallowstree Lane and Thistleberry Avenue. Walk down Gallowstree Lane, seen here...



You'll see the woods of the Keele estate ahead of you.





Carry on along the increasingly rural Gallowstree Lane, until you reach the main traffic island on the busy Keele Road...



Using the pedestrian footpath, hook around the island on the Keele side (you should already be on that side).

(This is somewhere else that the official Newcastle/Stoke cycle-map is incorrect - it would have you trying to take a long detour to get around on the other side of the traffic island).



Just around the corner (the one you just turned) is the main foot/cycle crossing. It goes over to the main road footpath that leads to Keele University.



Cross over with care, and then carry on in the same direction. The paths are nice and wide.



There's quite a view once you're over this Keele Road crossing. In the background is the peak of Mow Cop. The other peak appears to be the hill of the Wedgwood Monument.



Carry on up this wide paved footpath and cycle path. *(Incidentally, at the top of the rise, seen above, you can access proper rambling footpaths that begin under the clump of trees in the distance. These are incredibly muddy paths that will take you off across the Keele Golf Course. However, those are not the paths you need now).* Just carry on along the paved path, until this crossing.





You're now almost at the main entrance to Keele University. Cross back over the Keele Road at the top of the rise, at the crossing shown in the last picture on the previous page. Then walk ahead another 100 yards, and you're at the entrance to the Keele University campus.

Take the well-signposted road or paths down the valley slope toward the main Keele University buildings that nestle in the dell, to find No.25 bus stops that can take you back to Stoke Station and Staffordshire University. Buses depart every ten minutes, and a single fare currently costs £2. The journey should take about 45-50 minutes, usually crawling for part of the journey all around the back of a Council estate called Poolfields - but the time taken will also depend on how horrendous the peak time traffic is in Stoke/Newcastle - traffic can get quite bad in Stoke/Newcastle.

There are plenty of cycle-locking facilities on the Keele campus. Handy maps can be easily found online. If you are an offline person, I have included a standard campus map at the end of this book.

Local residents of North Staffordshire can use the Keele University library "free of charge for reference [purposes]". Take proof of identity and residence, such as a recent utility bill, if you plan to go into the Library. To become a public/external book borrower, an annual fee of £50 is charged.

Keele University Library has an excellent Local Collection, containing many books and other items that are not likely to be available on the Internet any time soon. In the Local Collection there are 5,000 local interest books, plus pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals, directories and slides. These include the *North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies* (1875-1975 - nature, folklore, and local history – for which there doesn't yet seem to be a unified contents listing and index), the *Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, and *The Pottery Gazette*, among others. No appointment is necessary, to consult the Local Collection.

The Keele University campus is especially noted for its vast number of beautiful trees and its Arboretum, which has its website at:  
<http://www.keele.ac.uk/arboretum/>

