

The Mid-Cheshire Footpath Society

The Longster Trail

an easy, medium-distance trail between
Chester and Helsby

**12 miles of walking between Chester and the
Sandstone Ridge**



More about the Longster Trail

The Longster Trail is one of the medium / long distance footpaths created by The Mid-Cheshire Footpath Society and for which guide leaflets have been produced. It is named after Frank Longster, who lived in Frodsham and was an active member and chairman of the Society but who sadly died in office in 1974. The route was originally surveyed in the early 1970s but it was 1980 before all of the paths were cleared of obstructions and waymarked. The original trail ended at Piper's Ash on the A41 Chester ring road leaving the walker to find their own way on foot or by bus into the city. While the western end of the original route remains as a spur from Guilden Sutton to Piper's Ash, the main line of the trail was extended in 2008 to connect with the Chester to Connah's Quay Greenway (created and maintained by SusTrans). The Longster Trail now follows this Greenway into Chester, either to the city centre (with easy access to Chester Station – the terminus of several other walking routes) or on to the Shropshire Union (Ellesmere) Canal at Abbot's Meads (Blacon) just west of the city where it connects with the Chester Spur of the North Cheshire Way (another of the Society's routes) and with the Canalside Trail to Ellesmere Port.

From its start at the top of Helsby Hill, the Trail runs in a generally south-westerly direction for a total of just over 19 km (12 miles) to the Shropshire Union Canal west of Chester. The first part, from Helsby to Alvanley, runs along the sandstone ridge of Mid-Cheshire with splendid views to the west towards Chester, Merseyside and North Wales. The Trail then descends to cross a rural scene of dairying country before climbing to the 'island' village of Great Barrow perched on its sandstone hill above the plain. It then descends again into the Gowy plain and crosses the River Gowy itself at Oxen Bridge before climbing to the village of Guilden Sutton on slightly higher ground.

Here the spur route of the original trail branches off to Piper's Ash on the outskirts of Chester while the main line of the trail joins the Greenway. This is a peaceful off-road multi-user route that passes through the northern suburbs of the city – Hoole, Newton and Bache – and provides easy access to the historic city centre and to Chester railway and bus stations (allowing the ends of the Longster Trail to be linked by public transport) and continues to Abbot's Meads and beyond.

Throughout its length, the Longster Trail provides easy walking through a representative cross-section of Cheshire landscapes. It also provides an easy walking route that leads out from the urban areas of Chester into the surrounding countryside as well as providing a link between other waymarked trails: with the North Cheshire Way at Helsby and Abbot's Meads; with the Sandstone Trail at Helsby; with the Baker Way and the Marches Way at Chester Station; and with the Two Saints Way at Chester Cathedral).

While this guide describes the Longster Trail itself, many circular walks are possible that allow the path to be walked in sections without backtracking or the use of a second vehicle as a 'shuttle'. For those wishing further information—or to find company for walks—the Mid-Cheshire Footpath Society welcomes enquiries. Contacts and further information are available at most Libraries and Tourist Information Offices in the area

—or visit our web site at <http://www.mcfs.org.uk>

How to walk the path

Waymarks and Maps: The entire route has been waymarked by The Mid-Cheshire Footpath Society. The waymarks are circular and show a yellow directional arrow on a black background with the text “Longster Trail”. In theory, it should be possible to walk the path by waymarks alone. However, this is not advised, as things can change and waymarks do have a habit of “disappearing”. The walking instructions and sectional maps in this book provide a lot more detail and should suffice for most purposes. However, it is always possible that you may encounter difficulties, wish to return by a different route or need to access a nearby road or village in case of an emergency. We therefore strongly recommend that walkers purchase and carry the relevant Ordnance Survey map(s). The “Explorer” series maps are the best for walkers. They are printed at a scale of 1:25000 (1 cm on the map represents 250m on the ground, about 2½ inches to the mile) and show footpaths and roads, as well as the terrain right down to the level of individual field boundaries; maps 266 and 267 cover the entire route.

It is also worth remembering that things change! Paths may be diverted, obstacles appear and signs get moved. We have tried hard to make sure that this book is accurate, clear and up-to-date at the time of publication. If you do find any difficulties or changes, we would like to hear from you. Contact The Mid-Cheshire Footpath Society (via our web site at www.mcfs.org.uk or by e-mail to info@mcfs.org.uk). Alternatively, contact Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council at https://eforms.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/?page_id=134.

Terrain: The terrain is varied – field paths and tracks, some quiet lanes and very short sections of busier roads. This is an easy and essentially lowland route that strong walkers could complete in a day or can be divided into segments for shorter strolls or circular walks.

Clothing and Footwear: Very little in the way of special equipment is needed for walking the path. However, a little common sense in choosing what to wear – especially on your feet – can make a big difference to the enjoyment of a day out. Comfortable and waterproof boots that have been “walked in” are ideal in all weather. In dry weather, heavy-duty trainers are perfectly adequate. Wellington boots are not recommended, as they tend to cause blisters. Socks should be cotton;

many walkers find that two pairs, one thin and one thicker, are better than one for comfort on longer walks. Other clothing should follow the principle that several layers are often better than one. In cold weather, you will feel much warmer if you have gloves and a hat as well as warm socks.

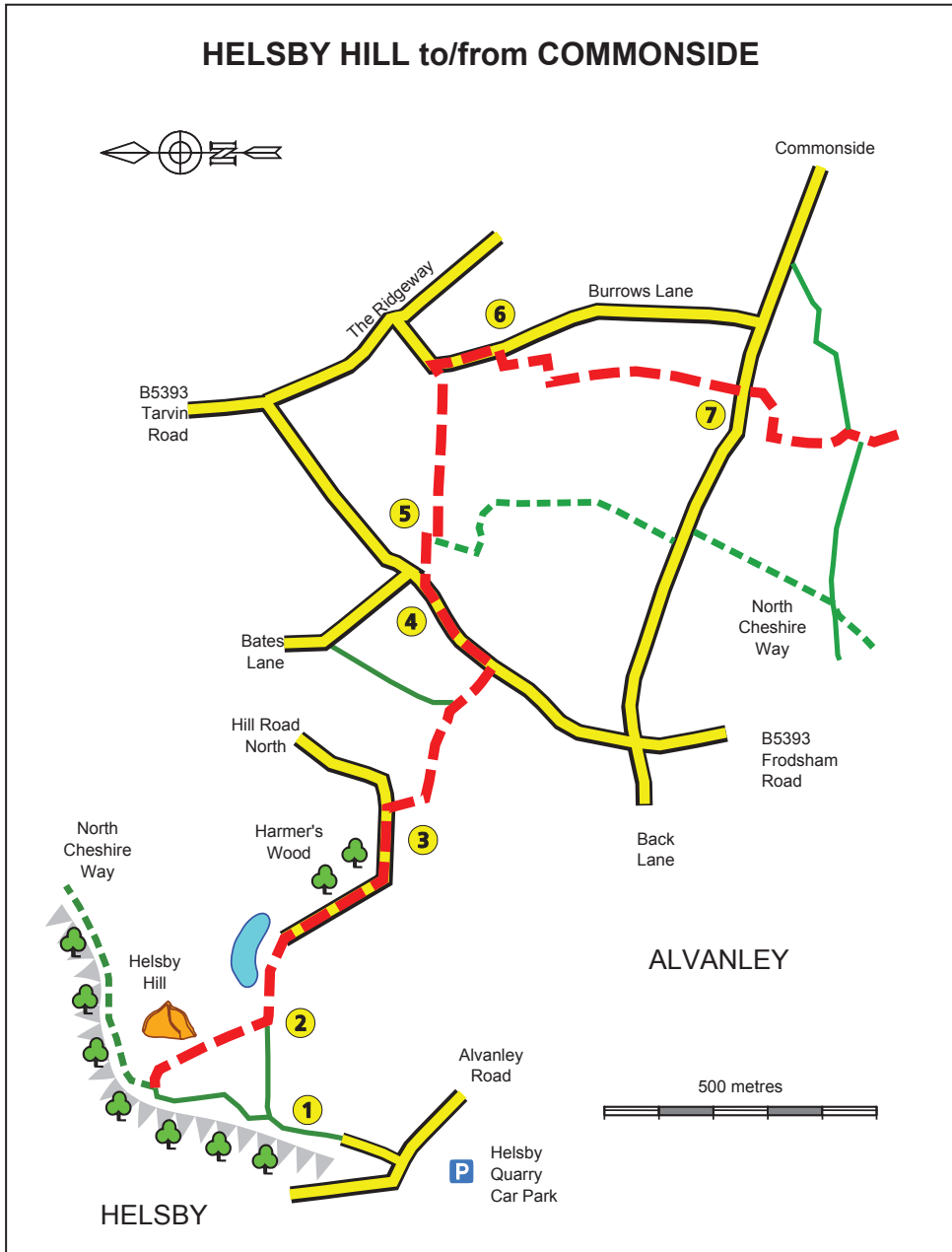
Other Equipment: It makes sense to have enough money for minor purchases or emergencies. Make sure you have some snack food and enough to drink. Carrying a simple first-aid kit is also common sense. If you have a mobile phone, take it for emergencies and for the sake of others try to keep it turned OFF unless you really need to use it. A lightweight backpack (“day pack”) is the easiest way to carry everything and keep your hands free for stiles, photography, maps, and this booklet.

Access: The Longster Trail is entirely on public roads and paths or permissive routes agreed with the landowners. The paths shown on the maps in this book are *not* necessarily public rights of way (although the vast majority of them are). It is your right to use public rights of way, but remember that they may cross private land, so keep to the path and respect private property.

Countryside Code: PLEASE remember that your enjoyment of the countryside should not detract from the pleasure of other users nor interfere with those who live and work in the country. Good practice is to follow the “Countryside Code”; it is too long to reproduce here, but see the summary below.

<p>Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs. Leave gates and property as you find them. Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home. Keep dogs under close control. Consider other people.</p>

HELSEBY HILL to/from COMMONSIDE



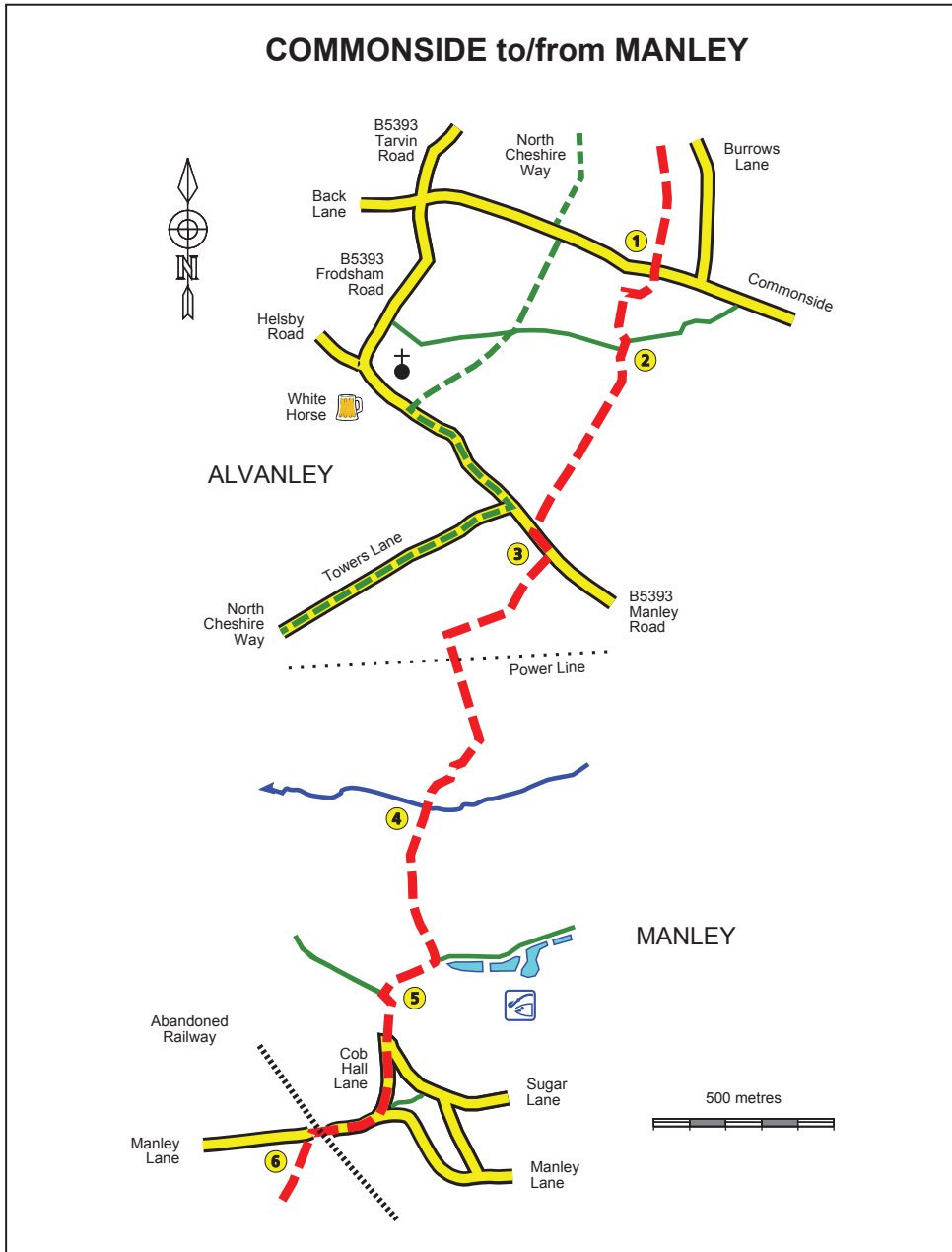
HELSEBY HILL to COMMONSIDE

From the Quarry Car Park above Helsby, cross the road at the N end of the car park and climb steeply up Hill Road South almost opposite. At the end of the road, continue ahead through woodland. Where the track forks R beneath a rock face ① keep straight ahead on a smaller path to climb steeply to the top of the Helsby Hill. The Longster Trail proper begins at the trig. point (141 m). Turning your back on the view, go down a broad track SE across the earthworks of the hill fort. The track soon narrows between hedge and fence and descends to Hill Road. At a finger post ② go L to pass Harmer's Lake on the L and reach the metalled road; Harmer's Wood is soon on your L with paths giving public access. Just after a small picnic site on the L, go R ③ at a finger post (signed Tarvin Road) on a narrow path, through a gate, then immediately L along the field edge and through another gate. Cross the next field diagonally to a gate in the bottom corner (or go around the field edge if easier) and then down a green lane to the B5393 (Tarvin Road). Turn L on the road and in 320m go R through a kissing gate (k.g.) signed Burrows Lane ④. In 80m go R through a k.g. ⑤, cross a plank bridge and immediately go L beside the hedge to reach Burrows Lane. Go R on the lane and in 150m, just after Alder Hall, go R over a stile ⑥. After crossing a footbridge, turn L, keeping the hedge on your left for 50m. Turn R at the field corner and in 30m go L through a gate at the top of the bank. Keep the hedge on your L and go up the field. When the hedge ends keep on the same bearing to a gate onto the lane (Commonside) ⑦.

COMMONSIDE to HELSEBY HILL

Go L on the lane ⑦ and almost at once go R through a gate onto a path leading downhill for 320 m to a kissing gate (k.g.) and steps down. Then go R for 30 m and turn L at the field corner. Descend for 50 m with the hedge on your R then go R over a footbridge and soon over a stile onto Burrows Lane ⑥. Turn L on the lane and, where the lane bends R, take the path on the L and follow this with the hedge on your R for 330 m to a footbridge on the R. Cross the bridge, go through a k.g. ⑤ and immediately turn L beside the left-hand hedge. In 80 m go through a k.g. ④ onto the B5393 (Tarvin Road). Go L on the road and after 320 m take the green lane on the R. Follow this to a gate then bear slightly R diagonally across the field (or go round the field edge if easier) to another gate. Then follow the path to Hill Road ③. Go L on the road, passing Harmer's Wood on the R. Where the metalled road ends, keep ahead past Harmer's Lake on the R. In 90 m after the lake, go half R at a finger post ② and follow the path, which soon becomes a broad track, to the trig. point (141 m) on top of Helsby Hill. The Longster Trail ends here. To get to the Quarry Car Park, go SW from the trig. point following a clear path downhill for 320 m to reach Hill Road South and descend to Alvanley Road. Cross the road to the car park, or turn R downhill for Helsby village.

COMMONSIDE to/from MANLEY



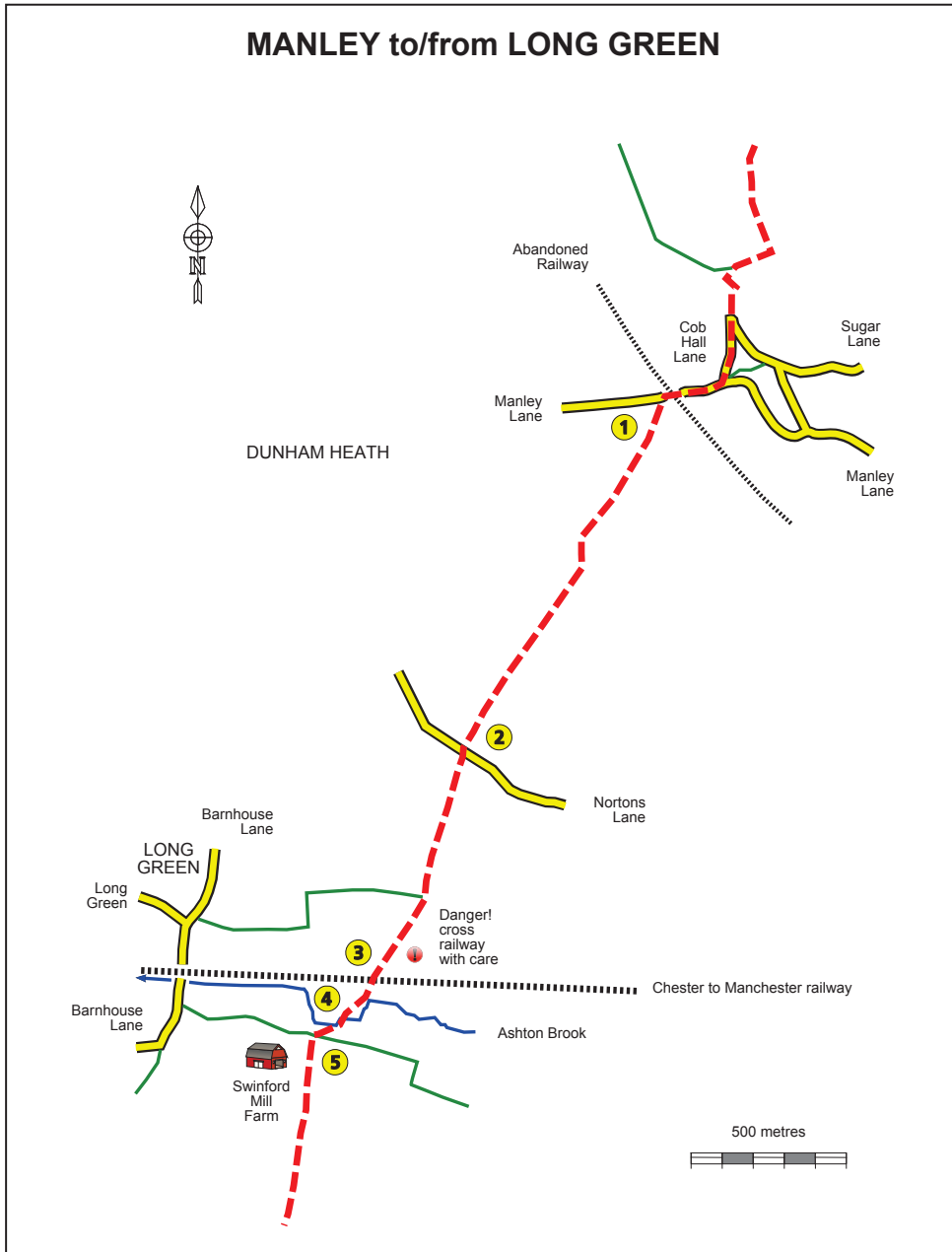
COMMONSIDE to MANLEY

Go L on the lane ① and very soon R through a kissing gate (k.g.). Follow the hedge to another k.g. into a narrow path between hedges. Exit by a stile into a grass paddock with a manège soon on the R. Where this ends, go R beside its fence into the field corner. Ignore the facing gate, cross the stile just to its L and bear L beside the hedge to a k.g. Cross and go ahead (due S) across the field beyond to another k.g. ②. (If obstructed, follow the field edge, going L then R and R again - ignoring 2 stiles on the L - to arrive at the k.g. on the L ②). Go ahead (SW) across a big field, keeping R of 2 oak trees and crossing 2 wire fences at stiles, to a projecting hedge corner. Go ahead, with a hedge on the L, to a stile onto Alvanley Road (B5393). Go L for 100m ③, then R down a track, crossing a stream and bearing R uphill beside a field. At a facing line of trees, take the faint path L towards a pylon and then ahead along the R side of a hedge. At the field corner go R with woods on the L and at the next field corner enter a belt of trees. On emerging, go L with woods on the L and on downhill, curving gently R, soon with trees on the R as well. Where these end, bear L across a footbridge and stile ④. Go ahead (not R as on the OS map) up 2 fields and over a stile onto a track. Go R for 100m and where the track bears R ⑤, leave it to bear L to a field gate and then pass stables on the L. At a surfaced drive, go L to a road (Cob Hall Lane) and descend to Manley Road. Go R under a railway bridge and soon cross a stile on the L ⑥.

MANLEY to COMMONSIDE

Go R on Manley Road ⑥ under the railway and first L up Cob Hall Lane. At the hairpin, keep ahead on a drive to the R of the entrance to Lower Hall Farm. Keep R where this forks. After passing stables on the R, go R on a path and through a field gate to join a track ⑤ for about 100m. Go over the stile on the L and down 2 fields to a stile and footbridge ④. Go half R between trees and curve gradually L always with woodland on the R. Near the top of the slope, go R into an opening by a gorse clump and through a belt of trees. On emerging, follow woodland on the R to the field corner and then go L in front of the facing hedge. Pass a pylon on the R and continue past a row of conifers to a track. Go R and follow it to reach Alvanley Road (B5393). Go L along the road for 100m ③ and cross a stile on the R. Follow the hedge on the R. At its end, go ahead across the open field, crossing 2 wire fences at stiles and passing to the L of 2 oaks. At the far hedge, go through a kissing gate (k.g.) ② and ahead (due N) across the next field to another. (If obstructed, follow the field edge, going R then L and L again - ignoring 2 stiles on the R - to arrive at the path crossing and k.g. on the L ②). Follow the R-hand hedge to a stile in the corner, cross and follow the manège fence on the L. Where this ends, go L along the R-hand hedge to a stile into a narrow path between hedges. Exit by a k.g. into a field and follow the hedge to exit through a k.g. onto the lane (Commonside) ①.

MANLEY to/from LONG GREEN

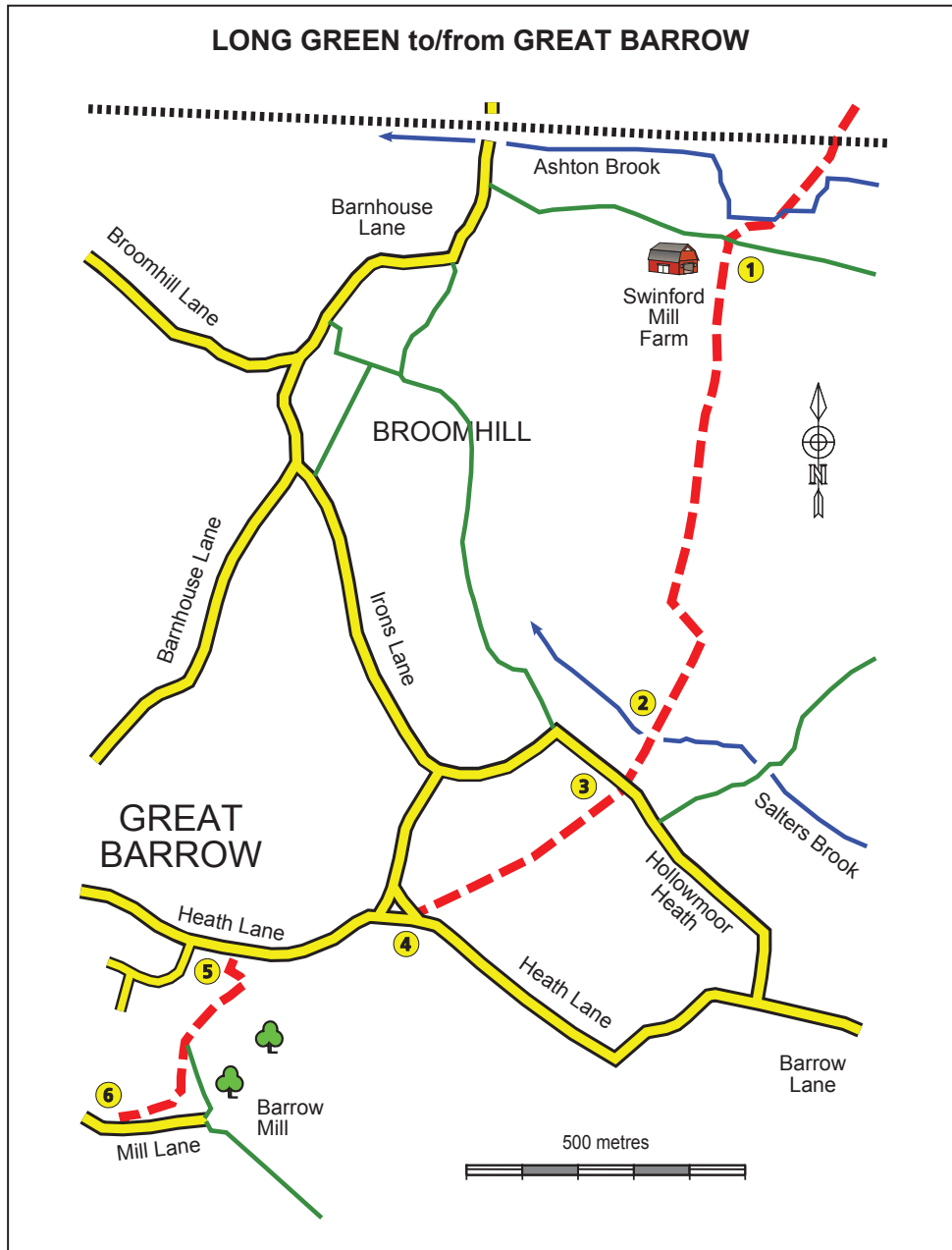


MANLEY to LONG GREEN

After crossing the stile ①, head for the field corner opposite and cross a footbridge with stiles over a stream. In the next field, go straight ahead for about 300 metres to a stile in the field corner. Cross the stile and bear slightly L across the next field to a footbridge with stiles in the opposite hedge. Continue straight ahead across a very big field, aiming for a large lone tree in the far hedge, and exit by a gate into Norton's Lane ②. Enter the field opposite by a stile and follow the hedge on the R. Pass through a broad gap by a redundant stile and go down a narrow field to a pair of gates at the far end. Turn R just in front of these, then immediately L over a stile. Bear R across the next field to go over a stile and up a railway embankment. Cross the line ③ with care, descend the other side and climb over a ladder stile. Follow a fence on the R to cross a stile by a gate, then bear L across the next field to a kissing gate. Go round the back of some buildings, with a stream on your L, and then turn L on to a track, crossing over the stream ④. Leave the track at a bend to go ahead through a kissing gate ⑤ to emerge by a signpost onto another track just north of Swinford Mill Farm.

LONG GREEN to MANLEY

Cross the track diagonally R to go through a kissing gate ⑤ and ahead to join another track. Leave this after crossing a stream, veering R then L to pass between buildings and the stream ④. Then go through a kissing gate into a field. Bear half R across the field to cross a stile by a gate then turn L along the fence to a ladder stile. Go over and climb a railway embankment, cross ③ with care and descend to a stile. In the next field, bear R towards the far corner and go over a stile a few metres to the L of a gate. Turn R and immediately L to go up a narrow field. At the end, go through a broad gap by a redundant stile into another field and follow the hedge on the L to a stile into Norton's Lane ②. Cross the lane, go through a gate and continue in the same direction across a very large field. As you approach the far side, aim just to the L of a clump of trees around a pond in the next field, heading for a footbridge with stiles to the R of a dead tree in the hedge. Cross over and bear L, passing the tree-fringed pool on the R, to a junction of hedges at a projecting field corner. Cross a stile here and follow the hedge on the R. Where this ends, continue forward to cross a footbridge with stiles in the facing hedge, then straight on through the next field to a stile by a gate, with a former railway bridge just visible to the R. Go over the stile onto Manley Road ①.



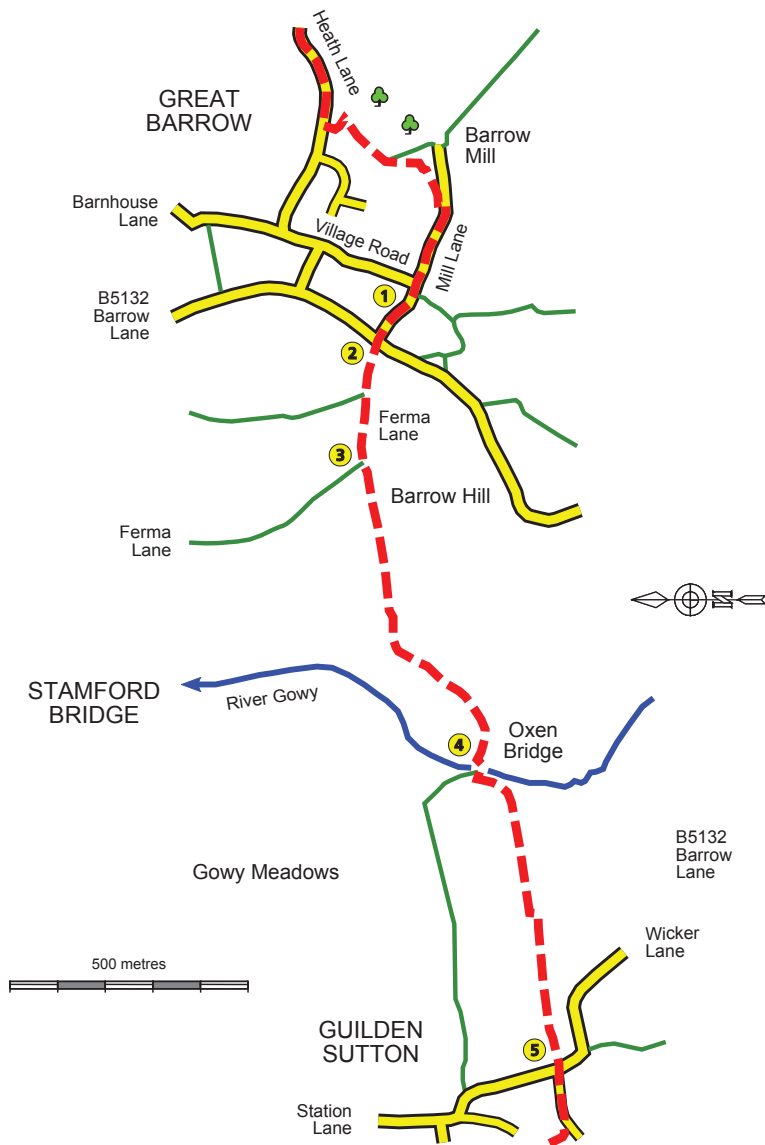
LONG GREEN to GREAT BARROW

Cross the track diagonally R ① into the drive of Swinford Mill Barns, following the sign for Great Barrow. By the house, go over a stile to a short path alongside conifers. Leave the grounds by a stile into a field, and go forward with the hedge on your R to a plank bridge and stile in the corner. Bear slightly L over the next field to a plank bridge and stile by a large tree near the R corner of the field. Continue in the same direction across the field beyond to a stile by a gate in the far R corner. Follow the hedge on your R to a stile just before the next corner. Cross the stile and continue with a hedge on your R to go over a wooden fence to a k.g. and a bridge over Salter's Brook ②. Follow a short path between hedges and continue along the field edge to a stile into a lane ③. Cross the road to go over a plank bridge and stile diagonally opposite to the L. Continue with the hedge on your L through two fields to a footbridge with stiles. Cross over and head diagonally across the next field to the far corner. Go through a k.g. into a narrow path between small trees and over a stile into a rough-surfaced lane ④. Cross this and turn R along a road (Heath Lane) for about 300m, then go through a k.g. on the L ⑤, just past Barrowmore Cottage. Follow the field boundary on the L for another 300m as it curves round, keeping on the higher ground R of the trees where it becomes open. Just past a water pumping station with a green door, go L through a k.g. and along a short path to another k.g. leading onto Mill Lane ⑥.

GREAT BARROW to LONG GREEN

Soon after the end of the houses on the L, go L from Mill Lane ⑥ through a kissing gate (k.g.) and beside a water pumping station along a short path to another k.g. Go R and follow the field edge for about 300m, keeping to the higher ground, to a k.g. ⑤ into Heath Lane. Turn R and follow this for another 300m. Shortly after its junction with a lane on the L (Hollowmoor Heath), leave Heath Lane to cross a rough-surfaced lane joining from the L ④ and go over a stile, along a narrow path between trees and through a k.g. into a field. Cross diagonally to the far corner and over a footbridge with stiles and then go through two more fields, with the hedge on the R, to a lane ③. Cross diagonally L to go over a stile and then follow the hedge forward to a short path between hedges. Cross over Salter's Brook ②, go through a k.g. and over a wooden fence into a field. Follow the hedge on the L to the far end, cross a stile and turn L along the hedge to another stile by a gate. Bear R across the field beyond to cross a stile and plank bridge. Then continue in the same direction in the next field to cross another stile and plank bridge in the L corner. Follow a hedge on the L through a further field and enter by a stile into the grounds of Swinford Mill Barns. Go forward into a path beside conifers, over a stile by the house and down the drive to a cross-track ①.

GREAT BARROW to/from GULDEN SUTTON

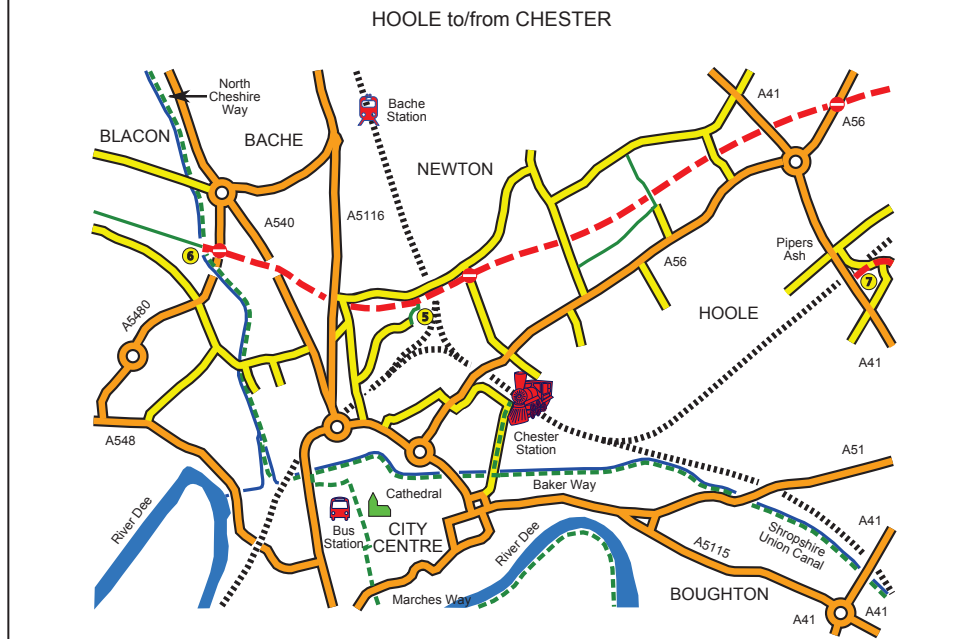
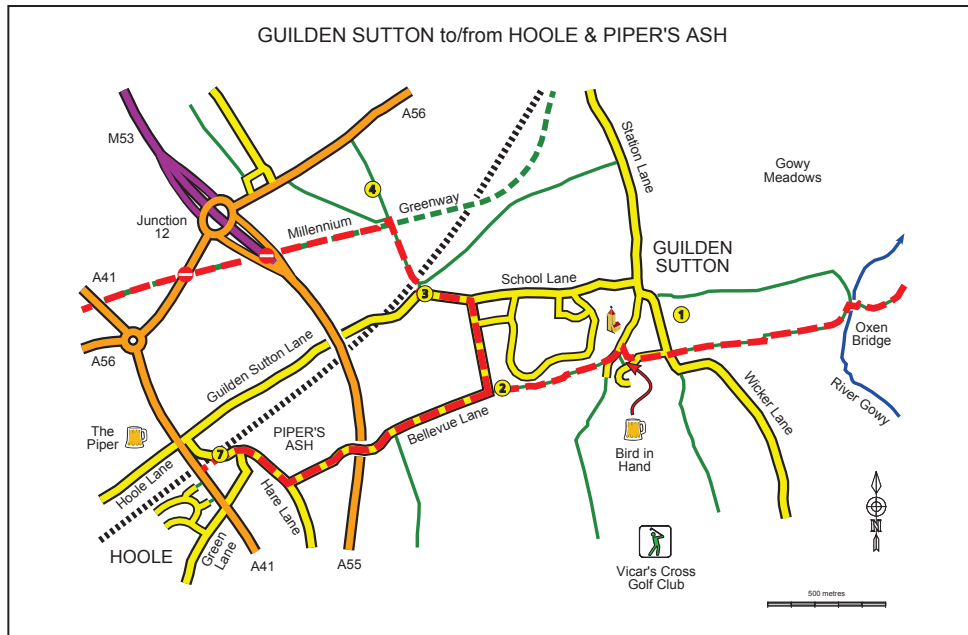


GREAT BARROW to GULDEN SUTTON

Go R on Mill Lane and continue to the road junction ① with an old pump in the middle in the centre of Great Barrow. Keep L, passing between the White Horse Inn and the village shop and post box, to reach a crossroads ②. Cross over the B5132 and go up Ferma Lane, continuing ahead as it becomes a track. Where this turns R, go forward through a kissing gate ③ and down two fields with the hedge on the L. At an angle in the hedge, go through a kissing gate by an oak tree and then continue in the same direction with the hedge on your R. Cross a footbridge with stiles over a ditch. Go diagonally left (SW) across a large field to a metal gate leading onto a footbridge. If necessary to find firmer ground, deviate to the R. Cross the bridge and on the far side, turn R and go through a kissing gate and cross the concrete Oxen Bridge ④ over the River Gowy. Turn L over a stile then take a track leading round to the R by a hedge. Follow this for about 800m. Keep L where it joins another track, cross a driveway and then continue onwards to Wicker Lane ⑤.

GULDEN SUTTON to GREAT BARROW

Cross over Wicker Lane ⑤ into a wide track and follow this for about 800m down to the River Gowy, crossing a driveway then turning R at a junction with another track. At the bottom, go over a stile and turn R to cross the concrete Oxen Bridge ④ over the River Gowy. Go through a kissing gate, then L across a footbridge over a tributary stream and through a metal gate. Go diagonally (NE) across the large field beyond, heading for its far corner and a footbridge with stiles just in front of a tree. If necessary to find firmer ground, deviate to the L. Cross over and keep to the L-hand hedge for 30m then go through a kissing gate. Continue with the hedge on the R up two fields and through another kissing gate ③. Go forward to join a track that becomes a lane, and follow it into Great Barrow. On reaching the junction with the B5132 ②, cross over and keep straight on between the White Horse Inn and the village shop and post box, to a junction ① with an old pump in the middle. Continue down Mill Lane past the village hall.



GUILDEN SUTTON to CHESTER

Cross Wicker Lane ① into Cinder Lane and follow the L-hand footway between fence and hedge. Where the hedge ends, cross the road and take paved path down to the car park of the Bird in Hand. Go L across the front of the pub, then up the lane for 50m, to a surfaced path on the R. This climbs some steps goes behind a housing estate for about 450m, and then through a narrow section between hedges to reach Bellevue Lane at a corner ②. Turn R along the lane, follow it to its junction with School Lane and turn L. Where the lane bends L, take a surfaced path on the R, signposted Greenway and Chester ③. Bear L over a railway bridge and continue past Park Farm into a narrower section between hedges. Go under a bridge and then immediately L up a ramp ④ to join the Greenway (signed Chester). In about 3km, just after passing over railway sidings, an arch on the L ⑤ marks a well-signed route to the city centre, past the Northgate Arena on the inner ring road, with directions also to the railway station. About 1km further along the Greenway, a signed exit leads to the Shropshire Union Canal at Blacon ⑥. *(If taking the Piper's Ash spur: On reaching Bellevue Lane ②, go straight ahead for 1km, crossing the Chester by-pass. Turn R at the junction with Hare Lane to go through the village of Piper's Ash. Just before a railway bridge, go L down a track for 80m to reach the A41, where the Longster Trail spur ends at a memorial ⑦ to the eponymous Frank Longster.)*

CHESTER to GUILDEN SUTTON

Join the Greenway where it meets the Shropshire Union canal at Blacon ⑥ and follow it towards Guilden Sutton for about 4 km. *If starting from the centre of Chester, follow the Pink Route, a well-signed cycle route that goes from the inner ring road and past the Northgate Arena to Northgate Ponds. Join the Greenway here ⑤ and follow it for 3 km.* Leave the Greenway by going down a ramp ④ on the L signed Guilden Sutton and through a gate to a track. Go R under the bridge, pass Park Farm on the L, go over a railway bridge and then bear R to School Lane ③. Go L, signed Guilden Sutton, and then first R into Bellevue Lane. Leave this at a sharp R-hand bend ②, passing to the R of a house and into a narrow path between hedges. This widens into a tarmac path behind a housing estate and in about 450m bears R going down steps to a lane. Go L for 50m, and then R into the car park of the Bird in Hand pub. Take the path at the far L corner to climb and bear L to Cinder Lane. Cross the road and go L into a path between a fence and a hedge to reach Wicker Lane ①. *(If starting from Piper's Ash: From the A41 railway bridge at Piper's Ash, by the memorial to Frank Longster ⑦, go down a track between the bridge and an electricity substation to reach Hare Lane. Go R, through the village, and after the derestriction sign, go L into Bellevue Lane, signed Guilden Sutton. Continue for about 1km, crossing the Chester bypass. Where the lane bends sharp L ②, leave it and take the path ahead, to join the main route.)*

TOURIST INFORMATION

The Longster Trail begins at the summit of Helsby Hill (462 ft.), the northern culmination of the sandstone ridge forming a north-south spine in the west of Cheshire. The views are spectacular: west to the Clwydian Hills in north Wales and north across the Mersey estuary, to Liverpool. The first part of the Trail runs through hill country in miniature: thin sandy soils covering the sandstone and the scattered woodland often gives the appearance of a heath. The pasture here is much poorer than on the rich Cheshire Plain. This is the hilliest part of the whole Trail and forms a sharp contrast with the lowland scenery to come. The hilltop is also the site of an Iron Age promontory fort constructed around 800 B.C. by the Cornovii at the northern limit of their tribal lands. In the skies above may be seen raven, buzzards and – with luck – peregrine falcons.

From the hilltop, the Trail descends quite steeply into the Woodhouses valley separating Helsby and Frodsham hills before crossing into the parish of Alvanley and climbing back up onto higher ground to reach the small settlement of Commonsides. The Trail then crosses fields, passing close by Alvanley village and beginning its long slow descent into the valley of the R Gowy, never again to reach the dizzy height of 300 ft.!

Alvanley, a small village of some 500 souls, appears in the Domesday Book (with 3 households!). The red sandstone Victorian church of St John the Evangelist and the village pub (the White Lion) lie just west of the trail. Alvanley Hall, just east and visible from the Trail, is mostly 17th century and was once the residence of William Arden, 2nd Baron Alvanley, a notorious Regency buck and friend of Beau Brummell.

After Alvanley, the Trail descends gently through fields to cross Moor's Brook, which flows into the R Mersey near Helsby. This is the parish boundary and the Trail now enters the parish of Manley, climbing a little up to Lowerhall Farm before descending again to a road bridge over the dismantled West Cheshire Railway. This opened in 1869 and ran from Mouldsworth along the foot of the escarpment. There was a short-lived passenger service from 1870 to 1875; thereafter it served as a "mineral line" servicing the former BICC cable works in Helsby. The track has been removed but little progress seems to have been made with plans to develop it as a cycleway.

After the railway bridge, the next few miles of the Trail cross the flat low-lying lush meadows of the flood plain of the R Gowy. This is a countryside of managed farming, with strong field patterns, many hedgerows and isolated copses. Its origins lie in the effects of glaciation; the underlying Triassic marls and sandstones are thickly covered by boulder clay left behind by retreating glaciers at the end of the last ice age.

Historically, this land was so densely wooded that human settlement came late and is still sparse. Indeed, the flood plain – disproportionately wide for the little Gowy – was until recently so wet and marshy that it could only be farmed as water meadows although in modern times much of the land has been drained and "improved".

Less than half a mile after the railway, the Trail crosses Peckmill Brook and briefly enters the parish of Mouldsworth; the village lies well to the east but does have a pleasant pub! Crossing Norton's Lane, the extensive parish of Barrow is reached. This centres on Great Barrow, sitting atop a small sandstone outcrop forming an "island" in the surrounding plain. On the approach to the village, the Trail crosses the Mid-Cheshire Line railway – cross with care! This section was built in 1874 as an extension from Mouldsworth to the former Chester Northgate station; it was reduced to single-line traffic when Northgate was closed and the line diverted to Chester station in 1969.

In Great Barrow, the Trail passes St Bartholomew's, another of the red sandstone churches so typical of the area. The present building dates from 1671 and was much restored in the late 19th century by John Douglas, the Cheshire architect. The small industrial estate in the north of the village was the site of Barrowmore Hall, converted in the 1920s to a tuberculosis sanatorium. In 1940, this was destroyed by a German air raid. 32 patients and staff were killed but the hospital was rebuilt within 3 years despite the ongoing war.

The way out of the village leads along Ferma Lane passing Greysfield House (1883), now a retirement home. Shortly after this, Ferma Lane swings away north (giving access to Ferma Wood, a new Community Woodland) while the Trail enters fields and descends quite steeply into the flood plain of the River Gowy. The river is crossed at Oxen Bridge (this is the lowest point of the Trail - just 26 ft. above sea level) and enters the parish of Guilden Sutton, climbing gently away from the river to the village.

Guilden Sutton is the last distinct village along the Trail and dates back to the Domesday Book. However, unlike the earlier villages encountered, it has lost much of its character as an agricultural community and has become very much a dormitory settlement for nearby Chester – whose cathedral tower is within sight. The church of St John the Baptist dates from the 12th and 13th century but was mostly destroyed in the great storm of 1802 and rebuilt in 1815 with brick construction contrasting with the sandstone churches earlier in the walk. The Trail passes the door of the village pub, the Bird in Hand.

Here the Trail divides. The original route is now a spur going west to end at Piper's Ash – just a mile away on the outskirts of Chester. The main route extends four miles further west to end at Abbot's Meads on the Shropshire Union Canal where it links with the North Cheshire Way.

After leaving Guilden Sutton, the main route soon joins the Chester Millennium Greenway, which it follows for the rest of its journey. The Greenway is a new multi-user route running from Mickle Trafford to Chester. It follows the course of the former railway opened to freight in 1874 and to passengers in 1875 when Chester Northgate station was completed. Both station and railway have now disappeared since their closure in 1969.

Next comes the old village of Hoole, now a suburb of Chester. 18th century Hoole Hall is now a large hotel and country club. The village was the birthplace of Leonard Cheshire VC, the wartime RAF pilot whose horror at war turned him to his post-war work for the disabled and the foundation of the Leonard Cheshire Homes. The Trail then continues through the suburbs of Newton (where it crosses the line of the old Roman road from Chester to Manchester), Flookersbrook and Bache with various links to the city centre.

Space does not permit us to do justice to the fascinating history of the walled city of Chester itself. This begins in the Stone Age, enters recorded history in Roman times (as the frontier fortress of Deva), and continues through Saxon development and the foundation of St Werburgh's cathedral. Later came the Norman Conquest with the construction of the castle and the foundation of a powerful earldom. The city grew through mediaeval times and by the 16th century was a thriving and cosmopolitan trading centre with its unique two-storey shopping streets, the "Rows". After troubled times in the Civil War and the silting of the River Dee, the importance of the city declined but it remains an important administrative centre for the region and one of England's top tourist destinations.

At Abbot's Meads to the north-west of the city, the Trail comes to its end. Here it links to the towpath of Telford's Shropshire Union Canal built in 1796 and linking the Mersey to the Dee. Along the towpath runs the Chester spur of the North Cheshire Way leading into the city centre. ***Buy the book from us and walk this longer trail next!***

FURTHER INFORMATION

Distance Checklist

Section	Section		Cumulative	
	km	Miles	km	Miles
1. Helsby Hill to Commonsides	2.4	1.5	2.4	1.5
2. Commonsides to Manley	2.7	1.7	5.0	3.1
3. Manley to Long Green	2.8	1.8	7.8	4.9
4. Long Green to Great Barrow	2.3	1.4	10.1	6.3
5. Great Barrow to Guilden Sutton	2.8	1.8	12.9	8.1
6. Guilden Sutton to Hoole	2.7	1.7	15.6	9.8
7. Hoole to Blacon (<i>see note 2</i>)	3.6	2.3	19.3	12.1
<i>Piper's Ash Spur</i>	1.4	0.9		

Notes:

- Each section typically covers 2½-3 km (1½-2 miles) for which an average walker should estimate 30-40 minutes walking time.*
- Hoole to Chester is slightly less than Hoole to Blacon and the Shropshire Union Canal.*
- Numbers are rounded – they do add up!*

Transport

While we would normally recommend the use of public transport where possible, it has to be admitted that public transport in rural Cheshire has nearly vanished and the use of a car will be hard to avoid. However, there are buses between Helsby and Chester and a train service from Helsby station to Chester station for those walking the whole trail in one go (about 13 miles station-to-station).

Refreshment

The villages near the trail for the most part still have rural pubs although many have closed in recent years. Landlords and chefs change so we cannot make recommendations! Pubs on or near to the route that are believed still to be open at the time of writing (2014) are the White Lion in Alvanley, the White Horse in Great Barrow and the Bird-in-Hand in Guilden Sutton – as well as numerous pubs and restaurants in Chester.

The Mid-Cheshire Footpath Society

The Society is a registered charity that has been caring for mid-Cheshire's public rights of way since 1961. It was formed to bring together people who enjoy walking and who are interested in keeping open and well signed the public rights of way in an area stretching roughly from Runcorn and Warrington in the north to the Shropshire border in the south and from the M6 motorway in the east to the Welsh border in the west.

The Society works with Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council and whenever and wherever possible in cooperation with landowners and their tenants in order to maintain the public's right to use footpaths and bridleways while respecting the legitimate needs of those who live and work in the countryside, especially the farming community. We walk the paths, carry out minor maintenance, report to the Council on the condition of the paths and work with them to address problems arising. We also waymark the paths on behalf of the Council.

The Society conducts walks every Wednesday and on alternate Sundays led by our own experienced walk leaders. Guests are always welcome to "give us a try" and new members are, of course, particularly welcome!

We have developed several waymarked routes in the county, all shown on the OS 'Explorer' maps. We publish leaflets for all of these paths or, for the North Cheshire Way, a full colour book. At the time of writing these paths are:

Baker Way – 22 km (14 miles) from Chester to Delamere station (for Delamere Forest).

Delamere Way – 34 km (21 miles) from Frodsham via Delamere Forest to Stockton Heath near Warrington.

Eddisbury Way – 26 km (18 miles) from Frodsham to Burwardsley.

Longster Trail – 15 km (10 miles) from Chester to Helsby Hill.

North Cheshire Way – 114 km (71 miles) from Hooton (Wirral) to Disley near Stockport, with a spur from Chester to Croughton.

South Cheshire Way – 55 km (35 miles) from Mow Cop to Grindley Brook near Whitchurch.

Further details of the Society and its walks are available on its web site at: <http://www.mcfs.org.uk>

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