

## A FOUR MILE WALK IN THE CHURNET VALLEY (CHEADLE)

The steep and wooded valley of the River Churnet, a major feature of the Southern Staffordshire Moorlands, lies partly within the Parish of Cheadle. This walk, which commences on the rim of the valley at Highshutt, is typical of the area. The route goes through the National Trust Reserve of Hawksmoor and passes paths giving access to the attractive tributary valley of Dimmingsdale, both of which repay further exploration. The Ordnance Survey 1: 25000 map of Ashbourne and the Churnet Valley (SK04/14) is strongly recommended.

To reach Highshutt, where there is ample parking space, leave the town car park by the exit past the bottle banks and turn left for 20-30 yards. At the first mini-roundabout turn right towards Oakamoor and continue along this road for 1.5 miles. Where the road begins to rise more steeply as you approach a sharp left hand bend, pass a junction on your right and about 100 yards further on, another turn to your left signposted to Kingsley Holt and Froghall (Lockwood Road). Immediately past this road, also on your left there is a parking area sufficient for perhaps a dozen cars. Alternative parking can be found in the disused quarry opposite.

Commence the walk by going back downhill to the road now on your left (towards Alton - signpost broken) and turn into it. Proceed to the top of the rise where you will come to a farm on your left (Highshutt Farm). Go through the metal gate into the farmyard and walk straight ahead to a track which bears a little to the left as it starts to descend. The track, which is rather muddy, passes through another metal gate and continues to descend by the hedge on your right offering an attractive view along the valley towards Alton Towers. About 100 yards beyond another metal gate the track swings left and ends near two oak trees. Continue to descend, still bearing slightly to your left towards a fourth metal gate in the hedge at the noticeable dip in the field. Go through this gate and follow the line of the hedge to your right to a stile in the bottom right hand corner of the field. Cross this stile to a road (Greendale Lane).

Turn right along the lane for about 200 yards until you reach the junction by a house called Old Furnace. Turn left here (but note the track ahead of you which gives access to Dimmingsdale) and continue along the road as it rises past Old Furnace Farm on the right and enters a wooded area. As you reach the summit of the road you pass another track which leads to The Ranger Youth Hostel and which also gives access to Dimmingsdale.

However the route continues along the road, descending for about 300 yards until you come to a track on your left signposted Staffordshire Way and to Hawksmoor. Follow this track rising through the wood until you reach its crest. Ignore the other tracks in this vicinity and keep to the line of the Staffordshire Way as the track descends to a road.

When you reach the road (B5417) cross over and turn left. Walk up the road for about 50 yards to a prominent stone gateway on your right and turn into it. These gates, which mark the entrance to Hawksmoor Nature Reserve are dedicated to John Richard Beech Masefield and bear an explanatory plaque. Follow the track ahead which descends through woodland for about a third of a mile. When you come to the junction with another track keep to the left, continuing to descend slightly but before you reach the farm take the fork to the left, again signposted as the Staffordshire Way, and after about 100 yards follow the path to your right by a fence (Staffordshire Way sign) by-passing the farm (East Wall Farm). When you reach the next stile near the pool do not cross it but turn left and follow the path keeping the line of bushes on your right. The path becomes sketchy beyond the pool but continues by the edge of the wood (Gibriding Wood) as it begins to climb out of the valley. Pass a memorial to a Major-General Alfred Martin, who died here on 31st December 1892. Still keep to the edge of the wood as the ground rises more steeply until you reach a stile by a metal gate on a sketchy track. Cross the stile and bearing slightly to the right keep to the boundary of the wood until you come to more open ground. The path then leaves the side of the wood and bears left towards the middle of the field but returns to it near the top of the field. On reaching the small stream, cross it and bear right then left before ascending to a gap in the tall hedge/bushes at the top right hand corner of the field. Beyond the gap continue straight up the field to a stile by a metal gate at the road (Lockwood Road).

Turn left and walk along the road for 300-400 yards until you come to a short track on your right which leads to a stile by a metal gate. Cross into the field and keep the fence on your right, noting the view towards the town, until you reach another stile by another metal gate at the road (B5417), turn left along the road for about a quarter of a mile and return to the parking areas at Highshutt.

The walk described may be shortened by turning left on reaching Greendale Lane, continuing to its end opposite the gates of the Hawksmoor Nature Reserve and resuming the route from there. The final section of the walk could also be omitted by continuing straight along Lockwood Road to Highshutt. These modifications reduce the distance by about three-quarters of a mile altogether.

MAP OVERLEAF

