

Start and Finish: Red Brow Wood car park.

Nearest postcode WA12 8RA

By car, from Bradlegh Road, follow signs for the car park down a narrow tarmac access road. Please note that there is a maximum vehicle height barrier set at 2 metres.

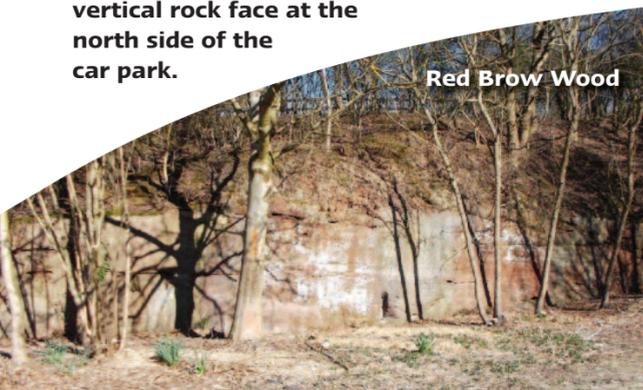
By public transport, regular bus and train services stop at Earlestown, approximately 1km to the north. Some bus services also extend to Bradlegh Road.

To walk from Earlestown to the car park, start on Earle Street and head south down Junction Lane. Follow the eastern side of Sankey Valley Industrial Estate service road before heading down past the 'Mucky Mountains' to the Red Brow Wood car park. This 1km walk should take around 20 minutes.

Enjoy your walk!

1 (Start & finish) Red Brow Wood car park.

i The car park gets its name from the adjacent red sandstone outcrop. Sandstone quarried from here was used for local building works, including the Nine Arches railway viaduct and possibly the nearby Bradlegh Old Hall. If you look closely, the tool marks made by masons in past centuries can still be seen on the vertical rock face at the north side of the car park.



Red Brow Wood

Head south from the car park to cross the St. Helens Canal via the old swing bridge.

i The Act of Parliament authorising construction of this historic canal for navigation was passed on 20th March 1755. Henry Berry from Parr, who at the time was Liverpool's Second Dock Engineer, was appointed Engineer for the scheme. Construction work began in 1755 and lasted until 1757 at which point the canal was opened to traffic. This allowed transportation of coal from the Lancashire coalfield mines to the growing chemical industries of Liverpool, together with iron ore and corn. These industries rapidly expanded, and spread back along the line of the canal to St. Helens, Haydock, Earlestown and Widnes, which were small villages until this period. The canal was thus an important factor in the regions industrial growth.

Continue south from the old swing bridge, following a narrow tarmac footpath into a small wooded area, before arriving at another footbridge that crosses the Sankey Brook.

i This once clear trout stream was so badly polluted by various local industries that it was nicknamed the 'Stinking Brook'. Following the demise of these industries, the brook's water quality has dramatically improved again, to the point that it is now home to an increasing number of birds and fish, as well as freshwater invertebrates such as the striking Banded Demoiselle damselfly.

2 (136 metres) The footbridge over the Sankey Brook marks the Council boundary between St. Helens and Warrington. Having

crossed the footbridge, follow the stone footpath upslope to the right.

3 (556 metres) Follow the stone footpath to the left, heading south along the edge of a field. Bradlegh Old Hall will come into view on the right.

i The fortified Bradlegh Hall used to stand where the main farmhouse is now, and the remains of the moat are still present, along with a 15th Century gatehouse. The Hall was once the home of Sir Piers Legh whose family held the title of 'Lords of the Manor'. It is said that in 1482 Richard, Duke of Gloucester - who later became Richard III - stayed here on his way to take Berwick Castle.

Before a hedgerow obscures the view, the Sankey or Nine Arches railway viaduct can also be seen looking off northwest to the far right.

i This Grade 1 listed viaduct was built in 1830 to carry the world's first passenger railway from Liverpool to Manchester. The massive structure was engineered by George Stephenson and cost £45,000, a huge total at the time. Each of its nine arches is 50ft. (15m) wide by 70ft. (23m) high. This was to accommodate the tall-masted Mersey Flat boats that used to transport goods on the St. Helens Canal that passed through the third arch from the right.

4 (926 metres) Continue around a metal vehicle gate, watching out for passing vehicles accessing Bradlegh Old Hall and New Bradley Hall Farm. Continue south along a short section of private road until you reach Hall Lane.

5 (1.1km) Turn left and walk around vehicle access barriers along this traffic-free section of Hall Lane, heading in an easterly direction following the edge of Gypsy Wood. You will eventually encounter another set of vehicle access barriers before Hall Lane Farm appears on your left.

6 (2km) At Hall Lane Farm, there is a choice of two routes - the longer blue route or the shorter red route.

The blue route follows field edge footpaths that are unsurfaced and can be heavy going at times. Prolonged periods of heavy rainfall can lead to sections of the route between Points 6 and 15 being flooded, given that this area is a flood plain.

To follow *the red route*, continue heading southeast along Hall Lane for 290 metres to Watercross & Hall Lane Stables. Having passed the private access road into the stables, turn left at Point 6a onto a signposted footpath. Follow this footpath north over Sankey Brook via the footbridge, passing back into the Borough of St. Helens. After 310 metres, this footpath eventually joins the Sankey Canal towpath at Point 16. From here, continue left, following the canal heading north to Point 17 and then to the finish at Red Brow Wood car park (Point 1). Total distance walked for the shorter red route is 4km (2.5 miles).

To follow the longer blue route from Point 6, turn right onto a signposted footpath that immediately crosses a field. In the distance, a small waymarker is positioned at the start of a drainage ditch. Continue along the footpath in a southerly direction keeping this ditch to your left. The footpath then follows a line of mature broadleaf trees along the field edge.



After passing a small pond in a wooded area on your left, Stoneyard Cottage comes into view.

At the rear boundary of Stoneyard Cottage, turn left through the line of mature trees. Keep following the narrow footpath south along the edge of a garden and then private drive, before negotiating a small brick stile positioned to the right of an electric gate pillar post, finally to emerge on Alder Lane.

7 (2.4km) At Alder Lane, turn right and walk west along the footway for approximately 330 metres to reach Point 8.

8 (2.7km) Look out for passing vehicles before carefully crossing over Alder Lane to head south along a field-edge footpath. You will also pass a small pond before arriving at Point 9.

9 (3.1km) A waymarker post will appear to your right at this junction of footpaths. Continue straight on, heading south along a more defined farm access track.

10 (3.2km) Look out for a finger post on your right as you approach another footpath junction. Continue following the defined farm access track to the left, heading eastwards. After approximately 400 metres, you will encounter a small mixed wooded area containing a pond.



Banded Demoiselle damselfly

Start/Finish

Red Brow Wood car park.
Nearest postcode WA12 8RA.

Map Ref: SJ 576 945

Sheet 108 1:50000 OS map

Sheet 276 1:25000 OS map

Longer Route – 8km (approx. 5 miles)

Estimated time – 2.5 hours (Blue route)

Going – Medium

Shorter Route – 4km (approx. 2.5 miles)

Estimated time – 1.25 hours (Red route)

Going – Easy

Further Information

To find out more about walks in your local area, please contact St.Helens Ranger Service on 01744 677772, or sankeyvalleyrangers@sthelens.gov.uk

www.sthelens.gov.uk/rangers



St.Helens Council

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



Mixed woodland areas provide valuable feeding and nesting for many types of birds. Migrant species such as Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs can be heard in the summer months, while Swallows and Swifts swoop overhead, and the colourful meadows are filled with diverse flora and a wealth of butterflies, including the colourful Peacock variety. Early morning visitors have the chance of spotting Foxes and Brown Hares.

Having passed the small wooded area, the route weaves through temporary mounds of grey paper mill waste. Being alkali, this is used as an economic lime substitute for fertilizing the land. Follow the footpath east along this vehicle access track, observing for heavy machinery that may be operating. Do not take the first footpath off to your right but instead continue until the next T-junction of footpaths where you will see a waymarked finger post.

11 (3.9km) At this T-junction, leave the vehicle access track by turning right over



Peacock butterfly

an undefined field footpath in a southerly direction, aiming to the left of a powerline pole positioned ahead. Shortly after passing under the powerline, you will see another finger post clearly marking the continuation of this footpath. Continue along the field edge following the side of Phipp's Brook and a hedgerow before reaching Old Alder Lane.

12 (4.5km) At Old Alder Lane, turn right and head east along the tarmac road, looking out for passing vehicles. You will firstly cross Sankey Brook and then Causey Bridge. As the road turns again, you arrive at a narrow linear wooded area.

13 (5.0km) In the wooded area, take a narrow tarmac track off to your left and proceed northwest along the Sankey Valley, following the former canal towpath. Immediately to the left is the now filled in St.Helens Canal which can be identified by uneven raised and unmanaged rough ground.

The former cargo along this canal section was raw sugar for the Sankey Sugar Works at Earlestown, shipped from Liverpool to where coal was transported the other way. The ending of sugar traffic in 1959 led to the closure of the canal in 1963, although the canal north of the Sugar Works had already closed in 1931.

As you head northwest, fields appear on your right used mainly for horse grazing.

14 (5.7km) Continue beneath Alder Lane Bridge, constructed in 1954. Here the tarmac track switches to the left side of the former canal. As you continue northwards, you will see Alder Root Farm on the right operating an equestrian business and a golf course, between which is the prominent Winwick Junction on the West Coast Railway Line.



The original West Coast Railway Line opened on 25th July 1831 and ran between Earlestown and Warrington Bank Quay. Through trains had to negotiate slow rail curves at Earlestown and Parkside Junction to the east of Newton-le-Willows. A more direct route between Winwick and Golborne Junctions was opened on 1st August 1864 to facilitate quicker passenger journey times and increased freight traffic and is the main line used today.

15 (6.3km) Continue over Newton Brook via a footbridge, passing from Warrington back into the St.Helens area. Newton Brook was previously culverted below the open water canal, but now cuts through the in-filled canal by way of a concrete and steel-piled channel.



The Sankey Canal Restoration Society (SCARS) was formed in 1985, with the help and encouragement of the St.Helens Groundwork Trust. The principal aim of the Society is to achieve the full restoration of the canal. To bring this about, the Society actively publicises and promotes the cause of the canal, particularly in the three administrative Boroughs through which it runs – Halton, St.Helens and Warrington.

16 (6.7km or 2.6km for the shorter route) Continue following the canal north to Hey Lock. This canal section is well-used by the Newton-le-Willows Angling Association.

The canal contains a healthy population of coarse fish, making it popular with waterbirds such as Kingfisher and Grey Heron, while other locally rare species such as Goosander and Great



Northern Diver have also been seen here. Insect life is abundant, and both the Brown Hawker and Migrant Hawker dragonflies can be seen skimming the water's surface in summer.

17 (6.9km or 2.9km for the shorter route)

The site of the old Hey Lock is positioned to the right of the towpath.

Nearby is Vulcan Village, where thousands of railway locomotives were built in the former engine works established in the 1830s. The adjoining streets of workers' cottages have since been preserved and now form a distinctive conservation area.

Continue heading north along the canal towpath. After a kilometre, you will finally reach the old swing bridge over the canal.

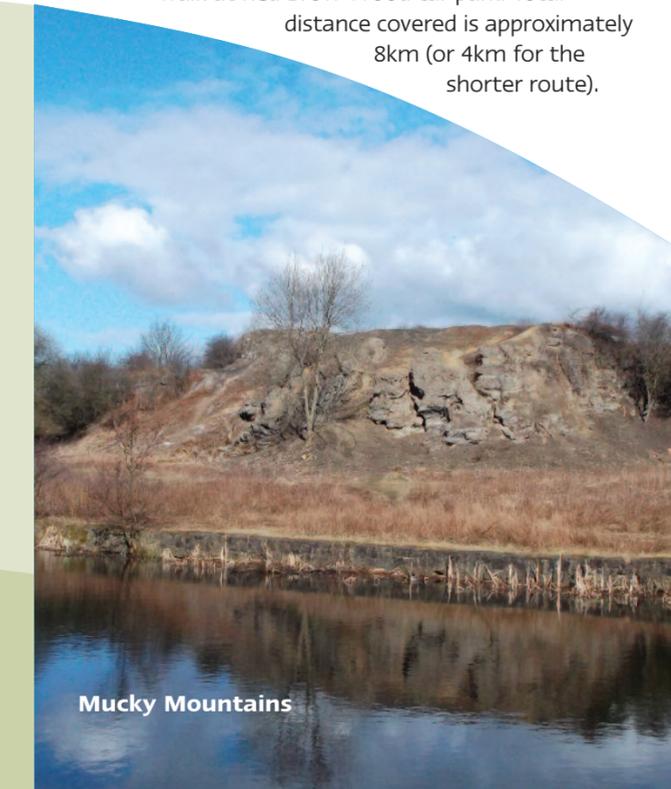
The "Mucky Mountains" are visible to the west of the swing bridge. These are made of solidified chemical waste known as 'galligu', produced as a by-product of the 'Leblanc' process for bleaching textiles using alkali (soda) instead of the much slower previous method of using sunlight.

In 1830 an Irishman named James Muspratt (1793-1886) pioneered the alkali trade in this country when he established the first large-scale soda-producing Vitriol works on the opposite side of the valley. However, for one ton of soda, two tons of galligu waste was produced, which was deposited nearby. As the dust from the drying waste dispersed, it killed crops, trees and tarnished metals in the immediate locality.

From 1832 to 1850, Muspratt's business was subject to costly, continuous litigation that finally compelled him to close and abandon his works. He built 400 feet (121 metres) high chimneys to reduce public health risks by diffusing the noxious fumes into the higher atmosphere, however to no avail as the gases blew downwind polluting Newton-le-Willows instead.

Eventually galligu weathers down to form Calcium Carbonate and creates a lime-rich habitat. The 'Mucky Mountains' is now a nature reserve, whose self-seeded flora once included the locally rare Pyramidal Orchid.

Finally, cross the old swing bridge to finish your walk at Red Brow Wood car park. Total distance covered is approximately 8km (or 4km for the shorter route).



Mucky Mountains

Welcome to Bradlegh Loop Trail & Map



St.Helens Council



St.Helens RANGER SERVICE