

the hub

The Manifold Trail



The little Leek and Manifold Light Railway ran for only 30 years before closing in 1934. Then, thanks to an inspired move by Staffordshire County Council, it became Britain's first railway path to be created for public use. The route is well used by walkers, especially at weekends – please ride with care.

The Trail provides a dramatic ride along the valleys of the Hamps and Manifold rivers, both of which flow underground for

part of their course except when in flood. If you travel to Waterhouses by bus, bikes can be hired at the southern terminus of the old line, just off the A523 road. Just after the start, the path crosses the main road where riders are advised to take special care. From here, you join the steep-sided valley of the River Hamps as it winds northwards. Many parts of these limestone landscapes have been classified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and they provide habitats for a wide range of species - you could spot kingfishers or even otters.

Just below Beeston Tor, the trail joins the River Manifold, and then passes below Thor's Cave, a ten-metre opening, high in a tooth-like rock, in which ancient stone tools and the remains of now-extinct animals have been found. If you fancy the climb to the nearby village of Wetton, there is a footpath from there to the cave. If you are looking for more sedentary pursuits, there are several tea-rooms along the way.

A two-mile section of the Trail from Wetton Mill to Swainsley Tunnel is

shared with light motor traffic. Though the Tunnel is narrow and care is needed, it is illuminated and runs in a straight line so that drivers can see anyone ahead silhouetted against the far entrance. Originally, the tunnel was built mainly so that the Wardle family of Swainsley Hall (shareholders in the railway company) didn't have their view spoiled by the source of their dividends!

The last mile and a half runs through more open countryside to Hulme End (Hulme was a Viking word for water meadow) where you'll find picnic seats, publications, a static model railway and loos at the Visitor Centre; and a shop and pub in the village.

Making loops from the Manifold Trail is relatively easy for map-readers for whom (steep) on-lane options might take in Butterton, Grindon or Ford to the west or Wetton to the East. However, if you do pick your own route, it's best to stay well away from the A523. Otherwise, the Trail itself is so picturesque that returning the way you came should be no disappointment to anyone but the most compulsive adventurer.

The Route

Where: Hulme End to Waterhouses (Staffordshire)
National Route: 54 (not yet signed)
Distance: 8 to 9 miles each way
Terrain: gentle gradients, much traffic-free
Public transport: direct buses from Derby, Leek, Ashbourne and Macclesfield to Waterhouses (which don't carry bikes)
Bike hire: Brown End Farm Cycle Hire - 01538 308313; Peak Cycle Hire - 01538 308609
OS maps: Explorer OL24, Landranger 119
Tourist information: Manifold Valley Visitor Centre at Hulme End – 01298 84679, Leek TIC - 01538 483741
Places to search for on Sustrans website mapping: Waterhouses, Hulme End

Below Thor's Cave



West Midlands - Route Development



The opening ceremony for the new Greenway

52 Coventry Greenway

The 5.5-mile Coventry Canal Greenway was formally opened on 1 July at Hawkesbury Junction. The ribbon was cut by Perminder Balu, Sustrans Regional Manager, with the Green Man of the Woods. As well as folk music children's activities, there was a celebratory ride to Coventry Canal Basin led by Sustrans volunteer Rangers.

Discussions continue with Coventry City Council about extending the route further south into the City Centre, and also further north towards Bedworth. We are also working hard to ensure that cycling and walking routes are included in the redevelopment of the railway station.

41 Warwickshire

In April, local cyclists celebrated the opening of 15 miles of National Route 41 between Warwick and Stratford-upon-Avon, with rides from the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, and Shire Hall in Warwick, converging at Charlecote Park for the official ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The route mostly follows quiet roads, with some purpose-built cycle paths beside busy roads coming out of Warwick. It meanders through beautiful countryside around Sherbourne and Hampton Lucy, and past Charlecote Park. Ultimately we are planning to create a more direct route from Charlecote to Stratford.

This new section also links to the popular and largely traffic-free Stratford Greenway.

5 Cannock

We are at the preliminary stage of

planning a new family-friendly Greenway along approximately 3 miles of disused railway between Rawnsley and Hednesford (Cannock). The completed route will provide a key link to the railway path to Walsall, and will be of equal benefit to local people and visitors, enabling them to explore the area by bike and on foot.

Currently, travelling between the two

communities involves some steep and prolonged climbs along fast and busy roads, not conducive to walking or cycling. Sustrans' proposed Greenway will largely bypass this local road network. It will also be a valuable link to the forthcoming Chase Heritage Trail and a route on to Stafford.

There are various planning conditions to be met, and we are at the early stages of fundraising; but we hope to be in a position to begin construction in 2007.

5 Stafford

Discussions are at an advanced stage for a new route funded by a grant from the Department for Transport Links to Schools Programme. This will include a new riverside section of National Route 5 near the station, with links to the Chetwynd Sixth Form Centre off Newport Road, and Stafford College off Tenterbanks.

5 Stoke

Work is progressing well on the construction of a new foot/cycle bridge over the busy Biddulph Rd, A527, along with the developer-constructed paths at Norton. This will complete National Route 55 in Stoke City.

81 Wolverhampton

National Route 81 is now signed through Wolverhampton from the railway station to Pendeford, with an on-road route through the city centre, and the option to bypass the centre using the towpath the Birmingham Main Line Canal. Sustrans, British Waterways and the City Council have provided new signs and information boards along the canal route between Deepfields junction and Autherley Junction.

54 Wolverhampton to Walsall

The towpath of the Wyrle & Essington Canal has been upgraded between Moat House Bridge and Devil's Elbow Bridge as part of the creation of a safe route to Wednesfield High School. The footpath along Griffiths Lane was widened to create a shared route for pedestrians and cyclists connecting to local services and the Ashmore Park Sports & Playing Fields. Wolverhampton Council, British Waterways and Sustrans are now considering continuing the route along the towpath to connect at Perry Hall Bridge with the towpath route into Walsall. A route between the Walsall and Wolverhampton will inevitably be useful and popular.



Part of the new route to Wednesfield School, scheduled to open early in the new academic year

53 Birmingham - Cole Valley Route

An extensive traffic-free greenway will be created by Birmingham City Council in the Cole Valley following cabling work by Central Networks. There will be about five miles of route in east Birmingham, extending across the boundary into Solihull to take in the area around Birmingham Airport before continuing east to Coventry.

45 Worcester - Bewdley/ Stourport-on-Severn

This long-awaited section of National Cycle Network should soon be complete. Work by Worcestershire County Council on the highway north of Stourport-on-Severn and a new crossing east of Bewdley will provide the final links in a route connecting Stourport to the Wyre Forest via Birchen Coppice, Blackstone and Bewdley.

Further afield, land negotiations continue between Stourport-on-Severn and Droitwich Spa.

Details of Route Developments in the West Midlands

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