

# Walks in the Shire Brook Valley



Key:

	Pond/Brook		Pathways
	Cut Grass		Heathland (Gorse)
	Marsh		Heather
	Woodland		Built-up areas
	Rough Grassland		Local Nature Reserve Boundary
	Trig Point		Area of walks
	Tarmac Path/Road		

## Introduction

The Shire Brook Valley is in the South East of Sheffield about 4 miles from the city centre. The general information in the leaflet covers the whole of the valley shown on the map above. The four walks in this leaflet are based around the middle part of the Shire Brook between Normanton Springs and the Beighton Road Landfill site. This area is criss-crossed by footpaths and bridleways, most of which are fairly flat and easy to walk along. However some are steep, running up and down the hillsides, and go through areas that can sometimes be muddy, slippery or overgrown.

There are seats along some of the paths so that you can rest and admire the view. The walks have been planned to explore some of the valley's industrial past and the variety of wildlife that lives there. As well as this leaflet, waymarkers have been placed along the route of the walks at junctions to some of the paths.

## Footpaths

Some of the footpaths and bridleways that cross the area are very old routes. They linked the old villages of Hackenthorpe and Woodhouse and the farms and mills that were dotted across the valley. Others provided access to quarries and brick making yards and onto the old 'Birley Moor'. Almost all are now protected as Public Rights of Way. Other paths are modern ones laid out by the City Council as the nature reserve area has developed. At certain points on each of the walks you will see 'A' frame



Occupation Road

barriers which have been installed to prevent motorcyclists from using the paths. One of the main paths which runs alongside Stone Lane is now part of the Trans-Pennine Trail. The path alongside Stone Lane, used by several of the



Modern Footpath

walks, was originally the track bed of the railway that served the coal mines in the valley.

## Nature Reserve

The Shire Brook Valley Local Nature Reserve was designated in 1999. The majority of the land in the valley is now protected from future development as Green Belt. The Visitor Centre and the



The Visitor Centre

central part of the Local Nature Reserve are based around the former Coisley Hill Sewage Works. This sewage works was opened in the 1920s and replaced earlier sewage works that had been built in the area at the end of the nineteenth century. The sewage works closed in the early 1990s and a reclamation scheme was developed to turn the site into a wildlife area. Some of the old settling tanks have become wildlife ponds, old metal walkways have become new bridges and the manager's office is now the Visitor Centre. A time-line sculpture on the outside of the building shows the history of the valley, starting with the dinosaurs millions of years ago. Paths around the Visitor Centre provide an easy walking option and are accessible by wheelchair users. The paths go by the ponds where birds such as moorhen and coot nest. In summer parts of the grassy areas are mown but others are kept long so that wildflowers such as knapweed can grow. The longer grassy areas are good places to see butterflies.



Old Settling Tanks early 1990's

## Old Boundary

The Shire Brook is an old historical boundary stretching back over a thousand years. It separated the ancient kingdoms of Northumbria and Mercia, and for 900 years until 1967, was the boundary between Yorkshire and Derbyshire. In 1967, the City of Sheffield expanded its boundaries and the land around Beighton and Hackenthorpe became part of Sheffield. It is not clear when the brook became known as the Shire Brook. On early nineteenth century maps the brook is called Der or Beighton and some sections have been known as 'Ochre Dike'.

## Water Wheels

The Shire Brook itself was key to early industry providing water for turning water wheels. In the early years of the nineteenth century there were five water-powered mills in use along the valley. Two of the mills, Rainbow and Carr, also had forges attached to them but their primary use were for finishing the edge tools (sickles and scythes) brought from the forges at Hackenthorpe and Mosborough. Carr Forge was the first mill and forge in the middle part of the valley dating from around the sixteenth century. It was originally used for making knives and changed to making scythes in the eighteenth century. At this time it was known as Nether Wheel. It later changed its name to Carr Forge and the mill at the bottom of



Nether Wheel remains

Coisley Hill became known as Nether Wheel. Remains of this Nether Wheel can be seen on the extension to the Red Walk. The rebuilt Carr Forge dam, which you can see on some of the walks, attracts many different birds including herons.



Carr Forge Dam Wall

By the start of the twentieth century the valley was dominated by coal mines and the mills had stopped making tools as water power fell out of favour. The cottages associated with Carr and Rainbow Forges were still lived in into the middle of the twentieth century but have all since been demolished.

## Coal Mining

Five different coal seams run through the valley. The Barnsley seam is closest to the surface. Shallow pits were dug out from medieval times on Birley Moor to get this coal. In the nineteenth century the coal mining industry expanded as technology improved and deep mining became possible. Several coal mines were developed in this part of the valley to mine coal from the Silkstone and other seams. Birley East Colliery dominated the eastern end of the valley and produced coal between 1888 and 1943. It was then used as a mine training centre and closed in the 1950s. There is a commemorative stone showing the site of Birley East but little else remains. The Red and Blue Walks both take you across this area. The branch railway that served the coal mines closed in the 1950s and since then there has been little industry in the valley.



Birley East Colliery c1950

## Sewage Works and Landfill Sites

Several small sewage works were opened in the late part of the nineteenth century along the valley to cope with the increasing local population and need for better public health. Little now remains of any of these works. The large Coisley Hill Sewage Works took over from some of these. Small landfill sites were also established at the end of the nineteenth century in some of the old quarries in the valley. Two large landfill sites were established on the sites of the coal slag heaps and buildings of the former coal mines at Birley East and Birley West (at the bottom of Normanton Hill). The landfill site at



Coisley Hill Sewage Works early 1990's

Birley East, Beighton Road Landfill Site, can be seen from the Red and Blue Walks. In 2005, this site started to be capped and will be landscaped as a wildlife area. The Shire Brook goes underground into culverts under the landfill sites.



Good views over to Hackenthorpe

## New Housing

Much of the land on the sides of the valley has been built on for housing. By the mid 1950s, fields were covered and hedges removed as the Hackenthorpe council housing estate was being built on the south side of the valley. In the 1960s and 70s the Scowderons estate was built around the site of the old Scowderons or Scourdings farm. The steeper north side of the valley escaped the house-building but hawthorn scrub started to encroach onto the meadows as they were no longer grazed and other areas were planted with trees. The Red Walk takes you through some of these areas and gives good views over to Hackenthorpe.

## Wetlands

The course of the Shire Brook has altered over the years, some times naturally but more often because of human intervention. Water from the brook and other springs that flowed into the valley was collected into a network of dams and channels (known locally as goits) to power the water mills. Most of the dams and channels can still be seen, some in outline but others such as at Carr Forge are still large ponds. These areas together with the new ponds are good places to look out for Dragonflies, Kingfishers and Water Voles with plants such as Reedmace and Willowherb. In summer, Himalayan Balsam grows along the edge of the Shire Brook. It can be a nuisance as it swamps out other plants but many find the pink flowers attractive. All the walks in the leaflet take you beside ponds and across the Shire Brook.



New Ponds



Himalayan Balsam in the Shire Brook

## Field, Moor and Heath

The most common view across the valley was once one of a patchwork of fields surrounded by hedges with the mills and farm settlements dotted around. The south side of the valley was part of

the old 'Birley Moor' which was divided into fields in 1799 under the Beighton Enclosure Award. Before then it would have been an open area of heath and scrub used by local people for grazing their animals and collecting firewood and foodstuff. Tiny areas of the old moor heathland still remain with Gorse, Heather and Bracken in the steep hillside around Silkstone Ravine and on Wickfield Heath. On the north side of the valley was Woodthorpe(e) Common, a similar area to Birley Moor, and the steep hillside of Woodhouse Banks. Woodthorpe Common has now disappeared but Woodhouse Banks remains. This is now a mixture of old and new woodland and meadows. One of the meadows is called Sally Clark's after a woman who lived near the top of the field in the nineteenth century. This meadow still has many grasses and wildflowers which were once common in the area. The Red Walk takes you along the top of this meadow and gives good views across the valley to Silkstone Ravine and Wickfield Heath.



View over Wickfield Heath

New areas of heath are developing around part of the old Birley East Colliery site on the old spoil heaps and sites of buildings. The Blue Walk goes through one of these areas of Heather and Birch trees.

## Woods, Hedges and Trees

There was extensive woodland planting in the late 1980s and early 1990s which has now formed new woods. Trees were planted alongside the new A57 Mosborough Parkway and around the site of the Sewage Works. They were a mixture of mostly native species such as Oak, Ash and Hazel, but also included Larch, Cherry Laurel and Norway Maple. More trees and shrubs such as Hawthorn, Elder and Birch have self-seeded over areas that were part of old industrial sites and old meadows. These provide food and nesting sites for many birds such as the Jay and Robin. Large old willow trees can



Area of new woodland with old behind

be seen along the course of the Shire Brook; many of the stems have fallen and re-grown. Remnants of hedges can still be traced through the valley at the side of some of the paths and along the edges of the old mill goits. Some of these show evidence of having been laid for stock proofing but most are tall mainly Hawthorn hedges that mark the boundaries of enclosed fields. Examples of recently laid hedges can be seen along the Trans-Pennine Trail path on the Red and Blue Walks. Remains of old hedges can be seen on all the walks.



Old Willows

# Walks in the Shire Brook Valley

For further information contact;  
Parks, Woodlands & Countryside  
Meersbrook Park, Brook Road, Sheffield, S8 9FL  
Phone 0114 250 0500

Large print version available on request.

## Visitor Information

As visitors to this area we ask that you act with the safety and interest of all living things in mind.

- Keep dogs under close control
- Please place all dog dirt in the bins provided (by car park/Spa Lane)
- Be aware that deep cold water can be dangerous
- Be aware that power lines cross the nature reserve at a low level
- Please do not introduce any plants or animals to the ground or ponds
- Please take your litter home with you
- Please do not pick wild flowers or take away or harm any wild animals that you may see on your walk

Some paths can become muddy and slippery in wet and cold conditions and overgrown in summer. You are advised to wear suitable footwear and clothing.

Please follow the Countryside Code whilst visiting the area. It asks you to 'respect, protect and enjoy' the countryside. Copies of the code can be found on [www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk)



The planning of the walks and the production of the text has been undertaken by Hallam Environmental Consultants Ltd supported by Sheffield Hallam University. The photographs have been provided by HEC Ltd, Peter Wolstenholme, Chris Smith and David Bocking.

The authors would like to thank the people who tested the routes for the walks and made comments on the accompanying text.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information but we cannot be held responsible for any error, omission or subsequent change. If you have any further information, please contact the Ranger Service.

This project has been supported by an English Nature Wildspace grant. Printed in 2005.

## Red Walk (longest) approximately 2½ miles - allow 1½ to 2 hours

1. Leave the car park by the main entrance and turn left along the road until you reach the first path off to your right which is signposted (look for the arrow waymarker pointing to the right).
2. Ignore the Trans-Pennine Trail (TPT) signs going right to left and go straight ahead up the gentle incline where you will pass an area of young woodland. This area was planted on the site of the old sewage works settling tanks. Follow the path as it leads on to the route of an old lane. Some signs of ancient hedgerows can still be seen on either side of the path as you walk between the horse paddocks. At the top of the hill you will find a waymarker leading you to the right and on to a roadside verge. From this viewpoint you can look back over the valley towards Hackenthorpe, Mosborough Moor and Birley Spa.
3. Walk on the verge alongside the trees until you reach wooden fencing and see a path leading down to the right marked by a waymarker. After a few yards you will see another waymarker pointing to the left. The path runs along the top of Sally Clark's Meadow, named after Sally Clark who lived in a cottage at the top of the hill in the 1800s. The remains of the isolated cottage were demolished in the 1940s. The meadow is an area of unimproved grassland grazed for part of the year by highland cattle. It is a good place to see butterflies and wildflowers in spring and summer and fungi in autumn.
4. At the end of the meadow you come to a T-junction with a waymarker pointing right down a steep tarmac path into a wooded area. The path follows the line of another of the old hedged lanes that cross the valley. This path can become slippery especially when wet.
5. The path emerges into an open area that was formerly the site of Birley East Colliery and old railway sidings. Turning left and continuing along through the A-frame barrier into the centre of the colliery site you will find a commemorative stone with the dates 1888 to 1943 indicating when coal was produced at the mine. At this point go right taking the TPT signposted to Beighton. Follow this route with the path curving to the left and sloping gently down to the Shire Brook where large old crack willows line the banks. To the left of the path is the site of an old colliery tip. This now contains an area of woodland planted in the late 1980s and early 90s and you can also see some areas of heather.



Birley East Colliery

6. At the bottom of the path you look up to the former Beighton Road landfill site. This is now being reclaimed as a wildlife site. Turn right and cross the bridge over the Shire Brook and head up the gentle slope. (It is possible to take a path to the right and enjoy a brief detour through the woodland). The path eventually comes to a T-junction with a signpost for the TPT pointing to the left. Your walk now requires you to turn to the right along a broad path between the busy Mosborough Parkway and an area of woodland planted with trees and shrubs at the time the road was built. This woodland provides a good home for butterflies and small birds and is made colourful in the autumn by the abundance of berries.
7. Walk along this wide path until you come to the next arrow waymarker which is near to a shrub in the middle of the path. At this point take the right fork from the main path leading towards the middle of the valley and the Shire Brook. Follow this narrow path through an area of tall vegetation in summer and after a short distance you will go over another path crossing from right to left. Carry straight on until you reach another waymarker which tells you to take the path going off to the left through the trees. If you go just beyond your turning point and look to your right you should be able to see a discarded grinding wheel and the derelict footings of Rainbow Forge in the bottom of the valley. On the opposite side of the path at this point there is a stone sign identifying the remains of Rainbow Dam.
8. Now retrace your steps to the marked path and head through an area of woodland. The area on the right of the path used to be the site of the house for the Rainbow Forge manager. It is still possible to see two gateposts by the side of the path. You eventually come to a T-junction and rejoin the wide path running between the busy road and the woodland. At this point, just to the left, there is a bridge leading over the road to Hackenthorpe.
9. Turn right onto the wide path and the woodland gradually gives way to more open ground. Looking over the valley to your right you will be able to see the Visitor Centre and looking straight ahead you may just be able to pick out the tower of St Catherine's church beyond Richmond Park. The City School can be seen on top of the hill to the right of Richmond Park and the church tower.
10. Continue along this path until you reach Carr Forge Dam. It is worth taking a moment to visit the pond and look back over the valley to Sally Clark's meadow and the path you walked along earlier. As you leave Carr Forge Dam cross over a path with a tunnel under the road on your left. Just beyond the tunnel path follow the waymarker arrow bearing to the

right on a diagonal path. This route takes you through a wooded and grassy area and rejoins the Shire Brook at a bridge. Do not cross over the Shire Brook at this point. Turn left onto the path that runs parallel to the brook until you reach the next bridge. In summer this path leads through an area of tall bracken. Cross the bridge and follow the waymarker arrow to the left along an old lane bordered on either side by rows of hawthorn. It isn't clear when this route was first used and whether it has always been on a raised bed. This old lane is known as Occupation Road but referred to locally as 'icky-picky'. At the end of this lane you arrive at a gate leading into Coisley Hill. Just before the gate turn right up the hill. You can go through the gap and up the road to avoid the big step at the top of this path.

**Extension** If you wish to extend this walk go through the gap at the side of the gate, head left and cross over the very busy Mosborough Parkway. Go through a gap in the fence (signposted) and follow the marked path until you come to a route heading off to the right. From here you will be able to see the remains of Lower Sickle Wheel (nether or middle wheel) with an interpretation panel situated at the side of the path. This Mill was built in 1749 and was used for grinding sickle blades. The site was excavated in 1988 revealing the site of the old grinding troughs. Retrace your steps back over the main road, through the gate and turn left, you will then rejoin the main walk.

11. At the top of the hill you come to Stone Lane, cross over Stone Lane and turn to your right to rejoin the TPT, signposted Beighton and then Bridleway. This clear route follows the line of the old colliery railway. This line served three collieries in the valley and was also used in the summer for excursion trains taking the miners and their families to the seaside. You will soon see a sign pointing you in the direction of the car park where you rejoin your starting point.

## Blue Walk (middle distance) approximately 1½ miles - allow 1 to 1½ hours

1. Leave the car park by the main entrance and immediately you will see some steps opposite you across the lane. These steps lead to a well-defined path where you turn to the right. This path forms part of the Trans-Pennine Trail (TPT) and follows the line of the old Birley Vale Colliery railway. As you walk along this path you are able to see an area to your left that has been recently planted with trees and shrubs as part of the work to reclaim the land from the former sewage works. This area now attracts small birds including the mistle thrush; teasels growing along the edge of the path attract goldfinch. More mature trees such as oak and hawthorn form an edge to this path. Bluebells can be found here in the spring.
2. You pass the 'train seat' at the bottom of Sally Clark's Meadow. The seat was carved in 1998 to commemorate the railway with the design being taken from an old photograph of a 'Birley' engine. As you continue see if you can spot the 'corkscrew' oak tree, with branches wrapping round each other. In the autumn and winter, when there are no leaves on the trees, you will catch glimpses of the view over the valley to Hackenthorpe.



Corkscrew oak tree

3. The path eventually rejoins the lane through an A-frame barrier bringing you out to the site of the old colliery yard and railway sidings. Follow the lane through another A-frame barrier into the site of Birley East Colliery where you will find a commemorative stone engraved with the dates 1888-1943 indicating when coal was produced at the mine.



Rainbow Dam

4. Take the path sharp right, directly away from the stone, (indicated by the waymarker) across a sparse grassy area that was once the site of colliery buildings. Keep to the left down the hill ignoring the fork in the path. The path passes through an area of new heath with birch scrub and heather before emerging at the bottom of steps down to a bridge across the Shire Brook.

5. After crossing the Shire Brook turn right and after a short distance you can see a discarded grinding wheel and the derelict footings of Rainbow Forge in the bottom of the valley. Just opposite this is a sign identifying the remains of Rainbow Dam. Carry straight on passing the row of crack willow along the banks of the brook and the remains of the old dam to your left. After a short time, the area to your right opens up to reveal an area of grassland over the brook. This is called Rainbow Meadow and is often grazed by highland cattle and other rare breeds.
6. Follow straight along the path ignoring the bridges you see to your right. The path narrows and you walk along between the brook on your right and the old mill 'goit' or channel to your left. After passing through this area you will come to a concrete outfall and wooden bridge. Go over the bridge and shortly after you will see large stepping-stones to your left (these may be a bit overgrown in summer). The stepping stones lead to an area of wetland and the first of the Centenary Ponds. The ponds were created in 1993 to celebrate Sheffield's centenary as a city.
7. Continue along the main path bearing left skirting the second Centenary Pond and some seating to go up the steps or the sloped path leading you to Carr Forge Dam. The dam retaining wall can be seen to your left. The area of hawthorn and rough grassland to your right is the former site of the old mill buildings. Turn right at the top of the steps and walk by the pond until you come to a junction with a path. Turn right at this junction, following the marker arrow to the right, towards the stream.
8. You quickly come to a bridge where a number of paths meet. You need to follow the path leading to your left staying by the side of the brook. It is worth going onto the bridge to look at the commemorative plaque, a reminder that the bridge formed an ancient boundary line for over a thousand years.
9. Back on the path alongside the brook, continue to the next bridge where a waymarker will guide you to the right over the brook. Continue along a short twisty path through a dark area of blackthorn scrub before going up a long flight of steps cut into the bank. Near the top of the steps is a seat where you can take a moment to look back over the valley towards Birley Spa and Silkstone Ravine. The view may be partly hidden in summer as the bracken grows up.
10. At the top of this path cross over Stone Lane and join the TPT turning right and walking the short distance until you see a sign guiding you back to the car park.

## Purple Walk (easy walking) approximately ¾ mile - allow 30 to 45 minutes

1. From the car park follow the path through the A-frame barrier leading down to the Visitor Centre. Turn right and follow the path down the hill with the 'dipping pond' to your left. Take the first left along a well-made path where you will pass a square brick building used for organised events and as a bird hide.



A frame barrier by the Shire Brook bridge

2. Continue round the ponds following the waymarker arrow to the left and the path will take you to the right along the top edge of the 'amphitheatre'. This is an area of terraced cut grass used for events.
3. This short route now leads to the right by the edge of the amphitheatre with wooded and grassland areas to your left. This

planted area contains common knapweed which attracts a lot of butterflies and other insects during the summer. The path slopes gently down whilst curving to the left and crosses a bridge over the Shire Brook. Almost immediately you turn to the right along a path running between the Shire Brook and an old mill 'goit' or channel connecting Carr Forge Dam and Rainbow Dam.



4. After passing through this area you will come to a concrete outfall and wooden bridge. Go over the bridge and shortly after you will see large stepping-stones to your left (these may be a bit overgrown in summer). The stepping stones lead to an area of wetland and the

first of the Centenary Ponds. The ponds were created in 1993 to celebrate Sheffield's centenary as a city. Continue along the main path and you will reach the second Centenary Pond and some seating. You can see the dam wall for Carr Forge straight in front of you and can take a short detour by going up the steps to see the dam.

5. At the end of Centenary Pond take the path bearing right and shortly after, at a crossroads, follow the path over the bridge, taking a moment to look for the plaque on the bridge denoting that the Shire Brook formed an ancient boundary. Once over the bridge the path divides, follow the gently sloping path to your left until you come to the next junction. At this junction turn left at the trees and walk up the path towards the car park and Visitor Centre. At the next fork in the path you can turn left to the car park or right to the Visitor Centre.

## Orange Walk (short) approximately 1 mile - allow 45 minutes to 1 hour

1. From the car park follow the path through the A-frame barrier leading down to the Visitor Centre. Turn right and follow the path down the hill with the 'dipping pond' to your left. Take the first left along a well-made path where you will pass a square brick building used for organised events and as a bird hide.
2. Continue round the ponds following the waymarker arrow to the left and the path will take you to the right along the top edge of the 'amphitheatre'. This is an area of terraced cut grass used for events.
3. At the end of the amphitheatre turn left and go straight over another path and head up the hill. At the top cross over Stone Lane and on to the Trans-Pennine Trail (TPT). Turn right here and continue on the TPT until you arrive at the railway seat at the bottom of Sally Clark's Meadow.
4. Turn right at the railway seat and cross back over Stone Lane onto the footpath beside Rainbow Meadow. The first part of the path is quite steep and gravelly. This path eventually leads to a bridge over the Shire Brook. Cross the bridge and turn right following along the path which runs between the Shire Brook and an old mill 'goit' or



Rainbow Meadow

channel connecting Carr Forge Dam and Rainbow Dam. Do not cross back over the Shire Brook at this point.

5. After passing through this area you will come to a concrete outfall and wooden bridge. Go over the bridge and shortly after you will see large stepping-stones to your left (these may be a bit overgrown in summer). The stepping stones lead to an area of wetland and the first of the Centenary Ponds. The ponds were created in 1993 to celebrate Sheffield's centenary as a city. Continue along the main path and you will reach the second Centenary Pond and some seating. You can see the dam wall for Carr Forge straight in front of you and can take a short detour by going up the steps to see the dam.
6. At the end of Centenary Pond take the path bearing right and shortly after, at a crossroads, follow the path over the bridge, taking a moment to look for the plaque on the bridge denoting that the Shire Brook formed an ancient boundary. Once over the bridge the path divides, follow the gently sloping path to your left until you come to the next junction. At this junction turn left at the trees and walk up the path towards the car park and Visitor Centre. At the next fork in the path you can turn left to the car park or right to the Visitor Centre.