

A close-up, low-angle shot of a person's leg and a red Scarpa hiking boot resting on a dark, mossy rock. The boot has a black sole and a small black label with the word 'SCARPA' in white. The person is wearing a black sock. In the background, a vast landscape unfolds under a clear blue sky. A large, calm lake is visible, surrounded by green hills and valleys. The foreground is a rocky outcrop with patches of yellowish moss. The overall scene is bright and clear, suggesting a sunny day.

With summer here at last, Source
NW presents five great waterside
walks from around the region.

WALKING ON WATER

01: Merseyside: Wigg Island



Hemmed in by the Manchester Ship Canal on one side and the River Mersey on the other, not that long ago Wigg Island was just another brownfield site, a strip of derelict, contaminated land left over from the heyday of Halton's chemical industry.

Now a 25 hectare community park, this is the perfect place if you fancy something easy-going and not too strenuous on the legs, where the only sound you'll hear is birdsong and the most pressing decision you'll need to make is whether to turn right or left.

I chose left, and was soon in the shade of a rich tapestry of broadleaved trees and thick hawthorn hedges. Rambling dog roses scrambled up into the higher branches, while deep purple foxgloves nosed their way up against the foliage.

In the tree canopy I caught the odd glimpse of a chirping flock of goldfinches, while swallows skirted over the grassland hunting for flies. Ospreys have been sighted and marsh harriers are also occasional summer visitors.

It wasn't long before I came to the first of several viewing screens looking out across the Astmoor Saltmarsh, with the Fiddlers Ferry Power Station lurking in the background. Looking back the other way, the majestic sweep of the Jubilee Bridge glistened in the sun.

With a gentle breeze coming in off the Mersey, it's great to just sit and scan the reed beds waiting for something to pop over and perch on one of the poles or twisted tree stumps that jut up from the marshes.

A broad tarmac path runs around the edge of the park, while much of the centre remains closed to the public, although guided tours can be arranged to see how the wildlife is thriving in these more protected areas.

Crossing rough grassland carpeted with buttercups, a flight of steps takes you down to an intriguing disused stretch of the Latchford canal. The path now sweeps round past the saltmarsh and doubles back through more woodland and wildflower meadows.

Wigg Island is well signposted from Runcorn town centre but it is slightly off the beaten track and there's nowhere close for refreshments, so best to bring your own food and drink. There are regular events all year round, from butterfly weeks to bat walks, and a new award winning visitor centre opens later this summer. Find out further details by calling 0151 907 8300. Or call Cathy Elwin at Mersey Waterfront for more waterside walks in Merseyside on 0151 237 3947.

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02: Manchester: Chorlton and the River Mersey

If the mood takes you this is one of those walks where you can just go on and on. In fact, not only is this stretch of the Mersey part of the Trans-Pennine Trail, but it's also a section of the European Long Distance Path that starts in Cork and will eventually take the intrepid walker all the way to Istanbul.

Starting in the car park at Chorlton Water Park head left around the lake. It's hard to believe now, with its mature trees and reed beds, that the lake's actually man-made and was created by the extraction of gravel in the 1970s, which was used to build the nearby M60 motorway. The park opened in 1978 and is now a popular oasis in south Manchester that's home to an ever increasing list of birds, including kingfishers, kestrels and a whole host of wildfowl that over-winter on the lake.

After a couple of hundred yards leave the water park and join up with the path along the river, but staying on this side of the Mersey as it meanders along. The river's broken up in places by strategically placed rapids which help to aerate the water as well as slowing its passage when storms over the Pennines add to its considerable swell.

Once you've past Jackson's Bridge, with the Jackson's Boat pub on the other side, the path starts to follow the edge of Chorlton Ees Nature Reserve. The Ees are a natural flood plain to the Mersey and the reserve was, until the early 1970s, the site of the sprawling Withington Sewage

Works. Take the steps down to explore the shady footpaths and ponds, and you'll soon discover evidence of the vast Victorian enterprise, such as the waist high walls of blue engineering bricks that were used to separate the old settling tanks.

Back by the river, after roughly 3 km cross over to the south bank using a bridge shared with the metro system. Here you can continue along the Mersey or skirt round the edge of Sale Water Park, another legacy of the M60's construction. The lake is now a popular watersports centre complete with its own restaurant, Deckers (0161 962 0118), on the far shore.

This is also a great place to see Chorlton's resident cormorants, which are often perched high up on the electricity pylons when they're not out on the water fishing.

Passing Jackson's Bridge once again, Sale Golf Club stretches out to your right and there's the option to take a detour into Kenworthy Woods where over 30,000 trees have been planted in recent years, along with a community orchard which, at the right time of years, offers up a feast of berries, plums and cob nuts.

Crossing over Bailey's Bridge, you're back at Chorlton Water Park where, if you're lucky, an ice cream van may well have pitched up in the car park.

Mersey Valley Rangers/
Chorlton Water Park
0161 881 5639

03: Cheshire: Anderton Nature Park

Anderton Nature Park, where this ramble begins, is just one part of the fabulous Northwich Community Woodlands.

I say ramble rather than walk because that's the best way to explore this diverse corner of Cheshire countryside, which links the majestic Marbury Country Park with various reclaimed sites that have become a haven for wildlife.

The whole area is criss-crossed by the River Weaver and the Trent & Mersey Canals, and dotted with meres, ponds and flashes, which means in the heat of summer you're never far away from a cooling expanse of water. And of course, it's also home to the famous Anderton Boatlift.

The first part of my route, which started from the car park next to the boatlift, took in the park's wildflower trail (leaflets are available from the boatlift visitor centre nearby).

The unique conditions in this part of Cheshire, where salt, lime, ash and clinker have been dumped and extracted for years, has allowed an alien ecosystem to develop, where plants which thrive in difficult conditions have taken hold. Excellent markers along the trail tell you what to look out for and the best times to see it, from fragrant orchids to the strange, slightly prehistoric looking Butterbur, and the pungent ramson, or wild garlic.

Strolling along the Weaver, dragonflies flit between the reeds and rushes, but it's the birdlife that really stands out. In fact I counted close on 30 different species during my

walk, including a couple of bold and beautiful bullfinches that teased me as they darted among the silver birches, posing for the camera one minute than taking off just as the shutter clicked.

After walking for a couple of kilometres an unusual site greeted me at Neumann's Flash. The flash is a large stretch of water, once used to store lime waste from the chemical industry. Again this has changed the make up of the soil, allowing orchids and other plants not native to Cheshire to take over, as well as providing habitat for the scarce Dingy skipper butterfly.

As I approached, five large birds were standing on a spit of sand, their heads tucked under their wings as they took a snooze. I presumed they were common-or-garden Canada geese until I got closer and one raised its head, revealing a bright red bill. They were in fact black swans which, a group of local birders informed me, had been there for a few months now, although they had them down as escapees on the run rather than migrants blown off course.

Heading back I stopped off at Haydn's Pool where a heron was prowling the shallows, while overhead a buzzard rode the thermals and a curlew flew past, squawking its unmistakable call. This really was bird watching paradise.

www.andertonboatlift.co.uk
Visitors centre 01606 786 777





04: Cumbria: Buttermere

This is an easy, 6.4 km walk around one of the prettiest Cumbrian lakes. There is a bus service linking Keswick and Buttermere. If arriving by car, park at the pay and display car park, behind the Bridge Hotel (GR 173169). Recommended map - OS Outdoor Leisure 4, English Lakes NW Area.

THE WALK

From the Bridge Hotel, return to the road and turn right. After a few metres, bear right, through Syke Farm (signed PUBLIC BRIDLEWAY, LAKE SHORE PATH). Once past the farm buildings, there is a view of Buttermere, High Stile and Sourmilk Gill.

At the next farm gate, go right, following a permissive path between the field boundaries, down a short flight of stone steps to a path through Pike Rigg woods to the lakeshore.

After the third kissing gate, look out for Hay Stacks and Warnscale Beck at the far end of the lake. The path goes through park land (look out for sycamore, oak, lime and the occasional sweet chestnut) and, after the next gate, through a rock tunnel. Watch out for the low roof! Back in daylight, you drop to a tree-lined, shingle beach.

Leaving the trees behind, you go through another kissing gate, past a fir plantation and ahead of you is a dramatic view of Fleetwith Pike.

Keep to the shore and eventually the path climbs to join the road. Keep close to the wall and watch out for traffic.

After a few minutes walking, cross the road bridge over Gatesgarth Beck and turn right, along the permissive path between Gatesgarth Farm and the beck. This takes you around the farm to a cluster of gates. Go through the small gate signed LAKE SHORE PATH and across the fields. On the left, there is a tremendous view of Fleetwith Pike, Hay Stacks and Warnscale Beck.

At the far side, the path forks. Turn right (signed PUBLIC BRIDLEWAY: BUTTERMERE). You cross a vigorous stream, then leave the bridleway to go right, along the lake shore and into Burtness Wood. Like most of this area, the wood is owned and managed by the National Trust.

A short distance into the woods, the path forks. Go right and keep to the shore for a view of the woods at Hassness, on the far side. Continue through the wood to arrive at a pair of gates. The path left climbs to Red Pike and Ennerdale. Keep right, across the pair of wooden bridges, over Sourmilk Gill and Buttermere Dubs.

Now you have a choice. Straight ahead joins a farm lane leading back the village. The more attractive alternative goes right, along the edge of the lake for a classic view of the lake and mountains. This is the route we take, but bear in mind that it may be closed during lambing time.

The path hugs the shore before crossing a beck and veering left to join the outgoing path. Turn left and back into the village.

05: Lancs: Glasson Dock Walk

A circular, 5.5 km walk along part of Lancashire's Coastal Path, returning via the Glasson branch of the Lancaster Canal. Park at Glasson Basin car park (follow the signs for East Quay). Recommended map - OS Landranger series 102.

THE WALK

Leave the car park via the main entrance and cross the road to join the wide, gravel track (signed CONDER GREEN, ALDCLIFFE & LANCASTER).

Turn right and stroll along the embankment. This gives a splendid view of the estuary and, in the distance, the Lakeland fells. The track is part of the Lancashire Cycle Way and, if you want to avoid bikes, there is a footpath on the other side of the concrete wall (but don't let dogs and children roam onto the marsh).

After fifteen minutes easy walking, cross the River Conder via the old railway bridge and come to a sign post. Turn sharp right, onto a tarmac lane, and follow this to the main road, beside The Stork Hotel.

Cross the road and turn left. After 50m, turn sharp right, down a narrow lane. Take care as there is no pavement.

After 100m or so, another road comes in from the right. Continue straight on, leaving the meandering River Conder behind and heading into open countryside.

You pass a number of cottages and a couple of footpath signs on your left. About 150m after Conder House, the road goes sharp

left. Look for the public footpath sign in the hedge on your right, just on the corner, and go through the wooden farm gate.

Keep to the hedge on your left (around the stock pen) until you come to the stile in the far left corner of the field.

Cross the footbridge and the right of way goes straight across the field to a pair of gates in the far left corner. (If feeling benevolent, walk along the field boundary.) Go through the right gate and then diagonally across the next field to the far right corner (or around the boundary). Look for the solitary tree and you'll find a footbridge beside it. This takes you over the River Conder and into a narrow field.

Go straight across to the gate opposite and you are on the towpath beside the canal. (The actual right of way stops at the gate, goes right and climbs to a bridge. However, the stile down to the towpath is a concrete mess, almost impossible to negotiate if you are over size 0 or have a dog).

Turn right and follow the canal back towards Glasson Dock. There is a variety of wildlife along here, from swans and coots, to narrowboats and their owners. You also pass The Mill pub and restaurant, a good spot for a drink on a hot summer afternoon.

Eventually, the towpath arrives back at Glasson Basin. Make sure you explore the dock and sample the excellent tea and chips at the Lock Keeper's Rest.

