



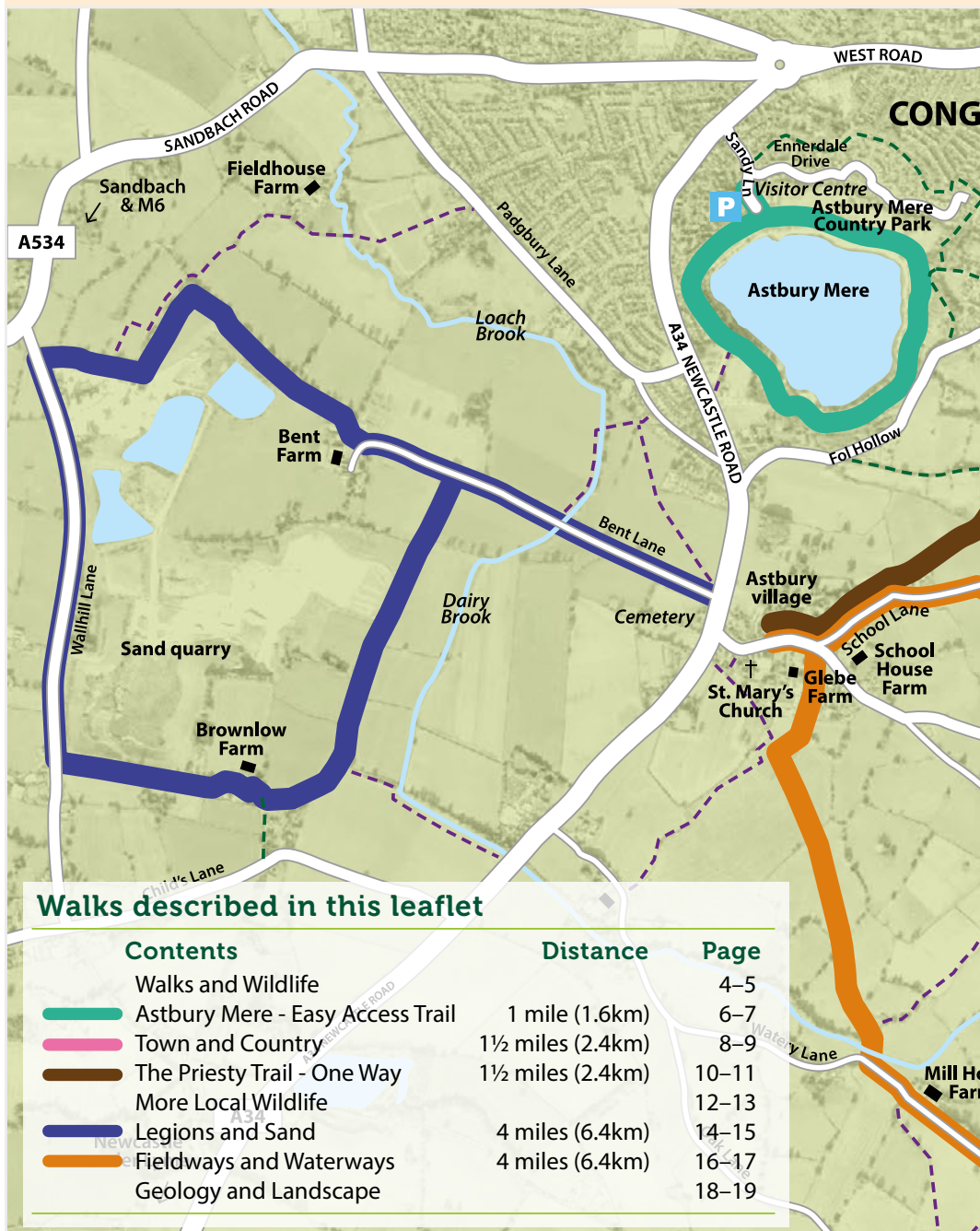
Footpaths
to fitness

Walks and Wildlife






South of Congleton



Congleton Southern Fringe



Walks described in this leaflet

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Walks and Wildlife

Walks

This booklet contains five walks ranging from one mile to four miles in the countryside south of Congleton. The Easy Access Trail at Astbury Mere Country Park is suitable for wheelchair and pushchair users. The remaining four walks explore the countryside south of Congleton town using country lanes, footpaths, bridleways and green lanes.

To enjoy any activity in the countryside it's best to be prepared. Walking boots or strong shoes are recommended as some paths may be rough underfoot or muddy. Waterproofs and warm clothes are useful as the weather can change quickly, even in summer.

Please ensure you follow the Countryside Code:



Respect - Protect - Enjoy

Respect other people:

- consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors
- leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available

Protect the natural environment:

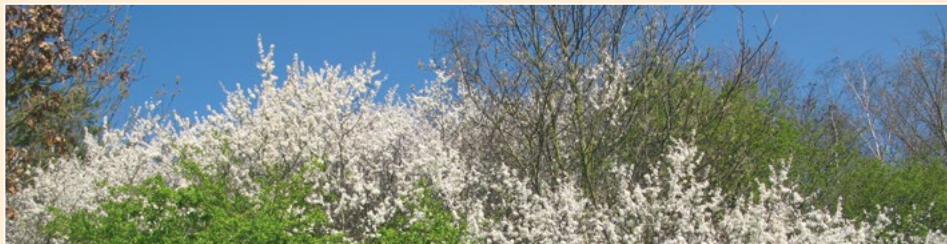
- leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
- keep dogs under effective control

Enjoy the outdoors:

- plan ahead and be prepared
- follow advice and local signs

If you encounter any problems please contact the Ranger at Astbury Mere Country Park on **01260 297237** or email astbury@cheshireeast.gov.uk.





Wildlife

On all of the walks you can see wild plants growing in and beside hedgerows, in the woodlands and in the fields. The variety of plants support a wide range of insects, animals and birds that live, shelter and feed on them.

The hedgerows are very important in the lifecycle of many plants and creatures. Hedgerows are made up of trees such as hawthorn, holly, blackthorn and hazel with infrequent wych elm and hybrid plum.

In the past, and still occasionally today, hedges are maintained by hedge-laying. This is a time consuming activity but can provide an excellent stock-proof hedge. Most hedges are now cut mechanically with the occasional tree such as oak, ash, or sycamore left to grow to their full height.

Beneath the hedgerows is the herb layer which often includes willowherb, foxglove and the smelly hedge woundwort. In spring and summer there can be a wonderful display of flowers.

These are a source of nectar for many insects including bees and butterflies. Comma and peacock butterflies lay their eggs on the common nettle so their caterpillars have an immediate food source.

Birds and animals use hedges to build nests, find shelter and hunt for food. In spring, blue tits and great tits feed their young on caterpillars and other insects that inhabit the hedge. Flocks of long-tailed tits along with the occasional goldcrest and treecreeper can be seen in the autumn foraging for hibernating insects in the bark of the trees.

For more on wildlife see page 12.



mikeatkinson.net

Astbury Mere Country Park





Easy Access Trail



All paths are suitable for pushchairs and independent wheelchairs, however some assistance may be required on the steeper slopes. A pre-booked manual wheelchair is available from the Ranger Service.

Cross the car park and enter the site at the entrance by the noticeboard. Bear right and follow the lakeside path to complete a circuit of the lake. There is seating every 100m along the path.

The Country Park is on the site of a former sand quarry and was saved from development for housing and industry in the 1980s by local residents. The park is now owned and managed by the independent charity, Astbury Mere Trust. More information can be found in the park Visitor Centre or at www.astburymerecountrypark.co.uk.

Key	 Easy Access Trail
	 Footpath
	 Other paths within Astbury Mere Country Park
	 Bridleway

Time

Start

Refreshments

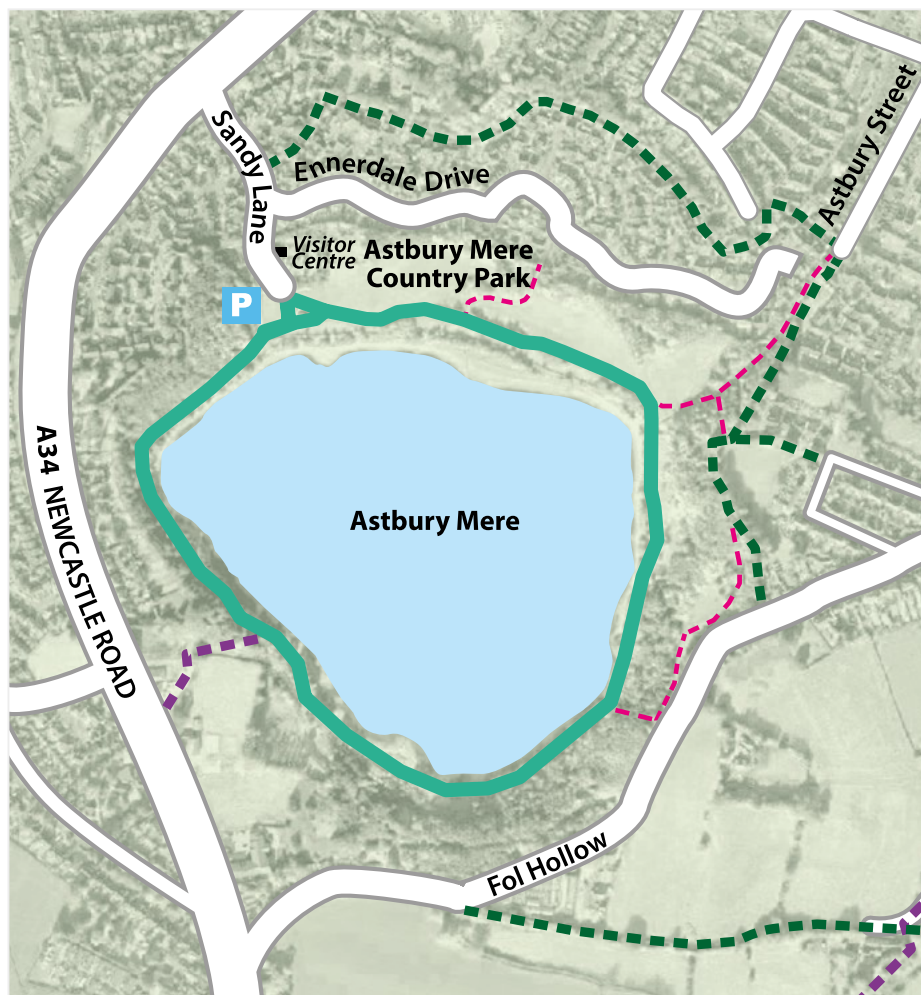
Distance

Allow about 40 minutes

By the Visitor Centre

Mobile caterer on site at weekends and school holidays

1 mile (1.6 km)



Town and Country



Starting with your back to Congleton Town Hall cross the High Street and enter Canal Street. Take the first right turn into Chapel Street and walk up past St. Peter's Church. At the end of Chapel Street turn left on to Howey Lane. Continue up the hill until the cemetery entrance is seen on the left. Bear right onto the bridleway.

Follow the path between the hedges to a field. Continue on across the field and through a gate onto Lambert's Lane bridleway. Turn right and follow the lane through the metal gate. Just

before The Howty brook take the path on your right, up three steps and through a kissing gate. Continue straight ahead through another kissing gate and follow the side of the valley before exiting the field to follow along a tree lined path to eventually reach the road ahead.

Follow the road round to the right then turn left into Moody Street to the town centre. Turn right to return to the Town Hall.

There are several different period buildings in Congleton town centre. Several were built using local stone, for example St. Peter's Church. More information about local history can be found at Congleton Museum, situated behind the Town Hall.

The Howty brook starts in the countryside just south of Congleton, flows under Congleton High Street and into the River Dane, eventually flowing west into the Irish Sea.

Key	 Town and Country route
	 Footpath
	 Bridleway

Time

Allow about 45 minutes

Start

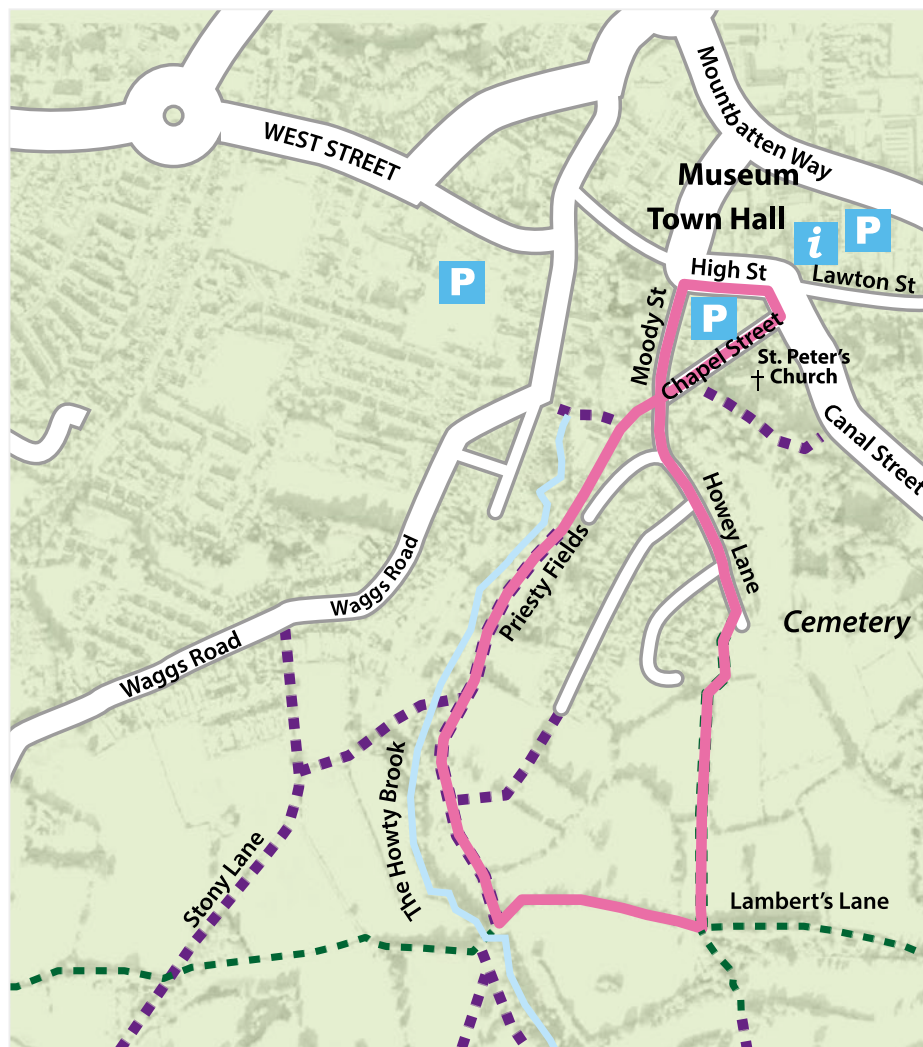
Congleton Town Hall

Refreshments

Only in town, none on the walk

Distance

1½ miles (2.4 km)



The Priestly Trail

In the middle ages the priests of St. Mary's Church used to walk from Astbury to what is now St. Peter's Church in Congleton to hold services. Congleton at that time was smaller than Astbury and Congleton's "Chapel at Ease" could not perform weddings or funerals and had no full time clergy.

Start from St. Peter's Church in Chapel Street. From the main church gate walk towards the junction with Howey Lane. Cross over into Priestly Fields.

At the end of the tarmac road follow the signed footpath through a kissing gate. The path follows alongside an old stone wall and then continues on between two hedges. Go through the first kissing gate on your right, proceed over Paynes Bridge and continue up the gentle incline to the junction with Stony Lane. Turn left along the sunken path, then bear right on to the lane down towards Moreton Meadows.

Take the path directly ahead of you and continue past the buildings on your right.



St Peter's Church

To continue, follow the path through an old kissing gate and turn right. When the field opens up, bear left towards another kissing gate. Pass through the kissing gate and head up the incline towards the church spire. The path exits the field on a track that leads to School Lane. Walk down the lane, turn right by the school, finishing the walk at St. Mary's Church in Astbury.

To return to Congleton either retrace your steps or follow one of the other waymarked footpaths as shown on the map.



St Mary's Church

Time

Start

Refreshments

Distance

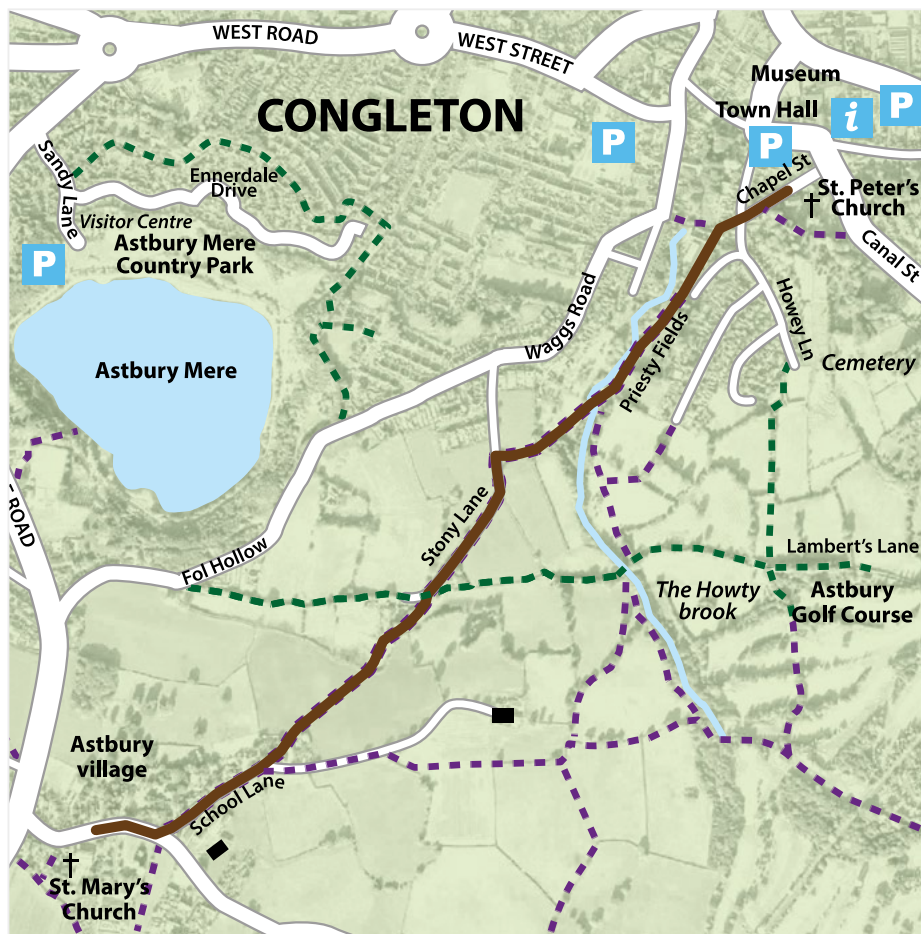
Allow 1 – 1½ hours – inc. return

St. Peter's Church, Chapel Street, Congleton

Plenty in the town and Astbury village

1½ miles (2.4 km) - one way

3 miles (4.8 km) – return



Key



Priestly Trail



Footpath



Bridleway

More Local Wildlife

Sheltered green lanes and field hedges are excellent places to see a wide variety of butterflies. Look for comma, small tortoiseshell, speckled wood and peacock from March to October, meadow brown and gatekeeper from June into the autumn. The orange tip, a very recognisable butterfly, is only seen flying between April and June. It lays its eggs on garlic mustard, hedge mustard and the cuckoo flower which is Cheshire's county flower.

Chaffinches, blackbirds and other members of the finch and thrush families can be seen in the winter feeding on fruits and seeds found in the hedgerows.

Birds and animals are important in the distribution of many plant seeds. Seeds of the burdock are hooked and many cling to fur or feather. Blackberry seeds once eaten return to the ground in bird or animal droppings. Dandelion seed blows away in the breeze.

During your walk you may pass through many different types of grassland. Some fields have been 'improved' by farmers sowing few high yield grass species to which fertilisers are added. There is little plant variety in these fields. By comparison, unimproved meadows have a rich flora of grasses and flowering plants and are best seen in spring and summer before being cut or grazed. Such plants include thistles, crested-dog's tail, red and white clover and birds-foot trefoil, which the caterpillars of the common blue butterfly feed on.

Open farm land in winter supports small flocks of lapwing and carrion crow. Occasionally, you may see brown hares boxing as part of their courtship in early spring. Buzzards can also be seen soaring overhead at any time of the year.

Small woodlands contain oaks, ash and alder, with willow, birch elder and elm also present. Honeysuckle and ivy are both creepers which are found intertwined around trees and hedgerows alike. Ivy berries are a very important source of food for birds in late winter.



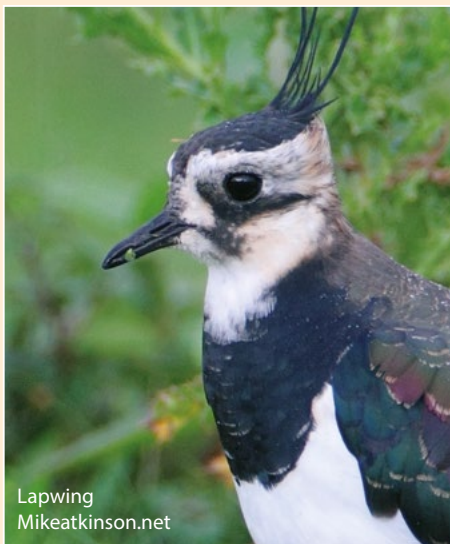
Orange tip butterflies on cuckoo flower



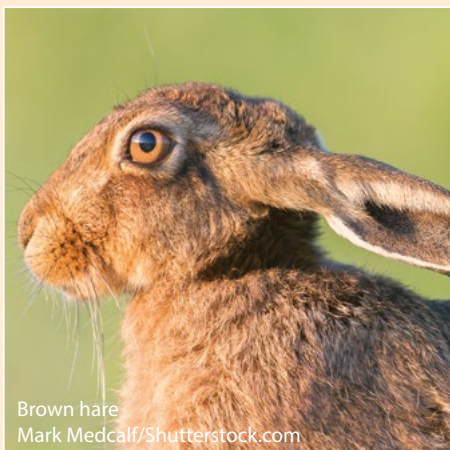
Pussy willow - the male catkins of goat willow



Common buzzard
Mikeatkinson.net



Lapwing
Mikeatkinson.net



Brown hare
Mark Medcalf/Shutterstock.com

Legions and Sand

Bent Lane is on the line of an old Roman road. The first field you cross is the site of a Roman fort where Roman legionnaires were stationed. The site is now a scheduled ancient monument.



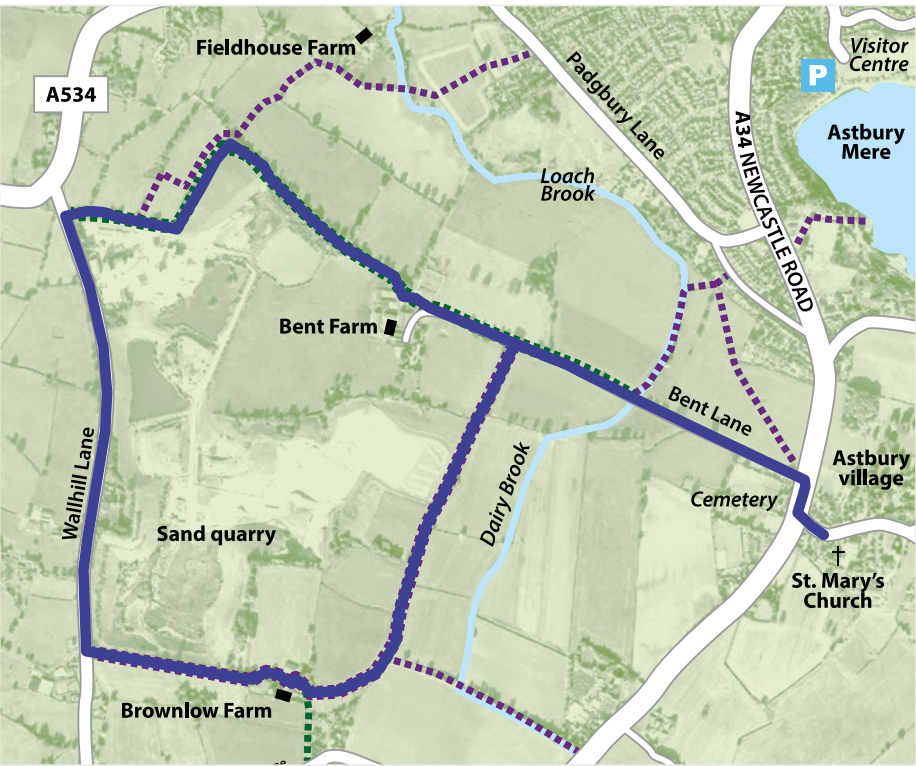
The walk starts by St. Mary's Church in Astbury. Head towards the A34, turn right and cross the road by the traffic island. Turn right and then left into Bent Lane. Head up the lane towards Bent Farm and take the kissing gate on your left into the field approximately 100 metres before the farm. Follow the path, passing through a gate and over a short bridge to enter into a hedged green lane. The lane bends right towards Brownlow Farm. At the end of the green lane take the waymarked route on the right through the farm to join the path that runs parallel with the quarry workings. Pass through a gap in the hedge and follow the path alongside the field edge to Wallhill Lane. Turn right, taking care as you walk along this road. Be aware of approaching traffic.

Just past the entrance to Bent Farm quarry take the bridleway to the right which wends its way around the sand quarry towards Bent Farm. As you approach the farm the track bears round to the right. Take the bridleway straight through the gate ahead. Take care as you pass through the farm, keeping the slurry pit to your left. Cross a short section of field to rejoin Bent lane. Follow the lane back to Astbury Village.



Time
Start
Refreshments
Distance

Allow 2 – 2½ hours
By Astbury Village Hall
Available in Astbury village
4 miles (6.4 km)



Key

- Legions and Sand route
- - - Footpath
- - - Bridleway

Fieldways and Waterways

Turn left out of the car park by Astbury Village Hall. Follow the way marking through Glebe Farm. Take the path waymarked across the next four fields. In the bottom right corner of the fourth field cross the footbridge and exit onto Watery Lane. Turn left and follow the road until the canal bridge is reached.

Climb up to the canal via the steps on the right hand side of the road and turn left along the towpath.

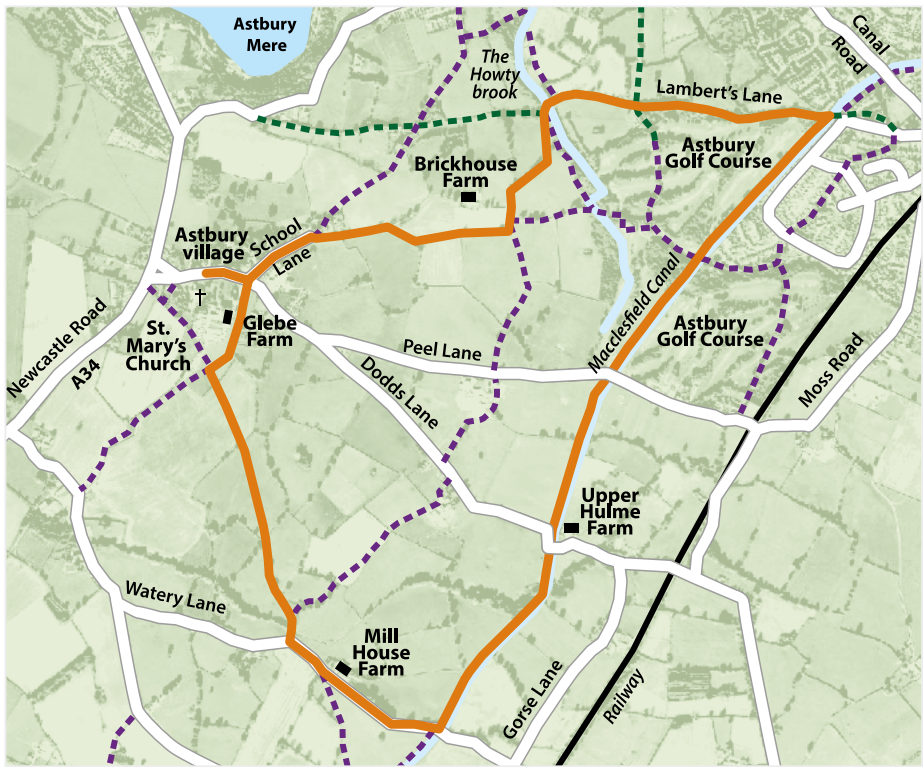
Follow the canal until “the turnover” bridge 77 is reached. This bridge allowed horses pulling canal boats to cross to the other side without being



unhitched. Leave the canal via the steps on the left and turn left on to Lambert’s Lane bridleway. Follow this lane until you reach the two bridges over The Howty brook. Cross over the bridge on the left hand side and into a field. Head up the bank to the mature oak tree in the middle of the field. Walk past the oak and keep on the same line until you see a kissing gate in the hedge ahead (ignore the other kissing gate that can be seen to your left). Pass through the kissing gate into the next field and turn right, following the hedge line around Brickhouse Farm which is on your right. When the path meets a farm track, turn left and then join the lane into Astbury, turning right at Peel Lane. It is then a short distance back to the car park.

Time
Start
Refreshments
Distance

Approximately 2 – 2½ hours
By Astbury Village Hall
Available in Astbury village
4 miles (6.4 km)



Key

- Fieldways & Waterways route
- Footpath
- Bridleway

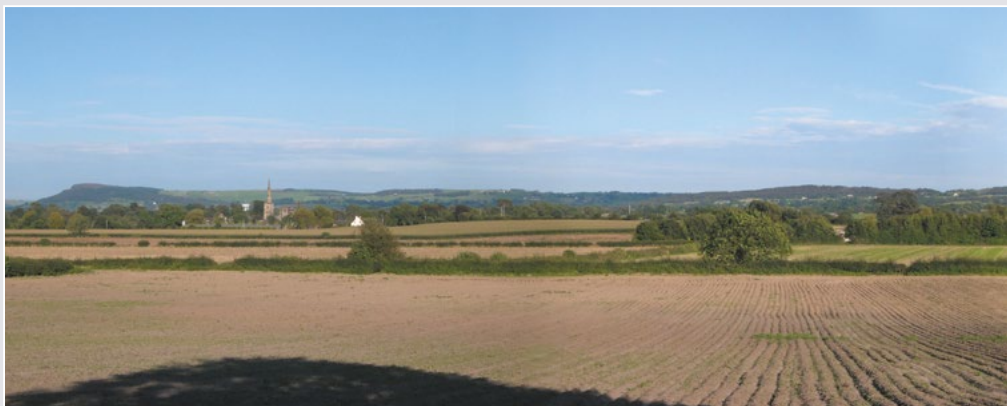
Geology and Landscape

The local landscape of the area is the result of more than 360 million years of a complex geological history.

The hill area of Congleton Edge, The Cloud and Mow Cop is formed mainly from gritstone with some limestone and coal. The oldest rock is carboniferous limestone which began forming about 360 million years ago under tropical seas. The limestone comprises several different layers, some of which contain fossils. The only place limestone is exposed in the local area is at Limekiln Farm, Newbold Astbury, and it only appeared because of later earth movements. The quarry is now flooded and the banks covered in soil. This area is private.

About 300 million years ago, mountains began to form to the north. Sediment from the mountains was washed down into the sea and formed a huge delta. Millions of tons of sand and silt were deposited in distinct layers. As the sediment was buried, sandstones, gritstones and shale were formed, creating the 'millstone grit' series of rocks. The dominant ridge of this area contains some of these rocks.

Coal measures were formed where large tropical forests grew. Towards the end of the coal period huge earth movements were caused by the movement of faults in the Earth's surface. The Red Rock Fault is one of the main fault lines along the eastern edge of the Cheshire plain



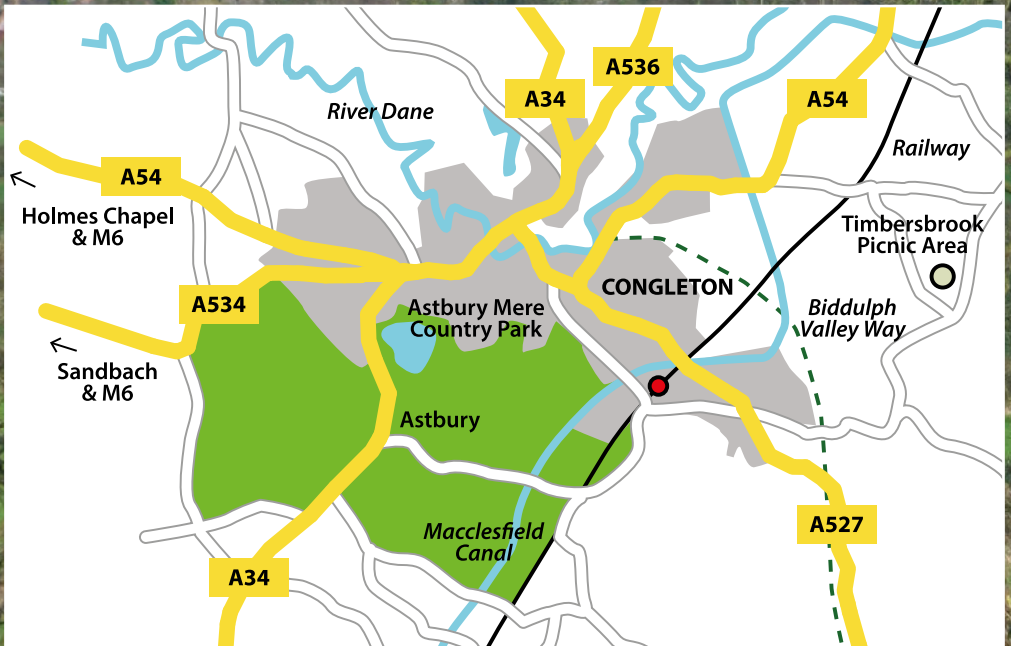
and can be traced from Bredbury near Stockport to Madeley in Staffordshire. The fault defines the eastern edge of the Cheshire plain.

The Triassic rocks of the Cheshire plain started to be laid down 250 million years ago mainly from wind blown material under desert conditions. The last of the great ice ages ended about 13,000 years ago. During the ice age 'till' (boulder clay) was deposited over a wide area including the Cheshire plain. Melt water from retreating ice sheets formed lakes such as at Congleton Moss, whilst rivers cut into the glacial material and formed steep sided terraced valleys.

Congleton Sands are the result of re-deposition by rivers of the sand left after the last ice age. This well sorted, high quality silica sand is highly sought after in the glass and foundry industries. The sand has been excavated for many years, often from below the water table. This has created meres or lakes after excavation has finished. An excellent example of a reclaimed sand quarry can be seen at Astbury Mere.

The landscape of the Congleton area has thus been shaped by natural forces over millions of years. But in more recent times the activities of man have been predominant with quarrying, building and farming creating the countryside that we see and enjoy today.





For further information about the area contact:

Astbury Mere Country Park
Sandy Lane, Congleton, Cheshire CW12 4FR

Tel: 01260 297237

Email: astbury@cheshireeast.gov.uk
www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/rangers

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