

WALK 7 DOCTORS WOOD

Quite a varied walk, with a mix of terrain, including one short marshy bit, and at least one climb (though it's not long) where you might want to take your time. It passes through a splendidly converted farm, a working farm and a historic wood.

START NORTH STREET CAR PARK
(OFF MARKET STREET, OPPOSITE SPORTSMAN'S)

TIME Allow 2 hours minimum, but there are sections requiring care, and you'll want to pause a while, so give yourself 3 hours.

DISTANCE Almost 5 miles

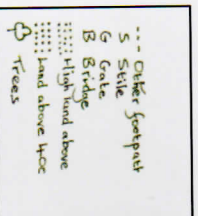
FOOTWEAR Sturdy boots essential

Walk away from the main road, past Whitworth Museum.

At the T-junction turn left along Rawstron Street past Brookside Mill, then first right onto William Street. At the end go left along Cowm Park Way, then first right onto the newer part of Lloyd Street. At the far right-hand corner is a footpath between a tall hedge on the left and a garden fence on the right that takes you over a bridge to meet a flagstone path known as the Cockle. At this very point, climb over a stile in the angle of two masterfully restored flagstone walls and walk up the edge of the field next to the flag wall. At the gate at the top turn right, and walk along the roadway through the handsome Cock Hall Farm. ("Cockle" is a corruption of "Cock Hall".) Beyond the final building is a set of steps – up you go, slowly. At the top, where sometimes sparrowhawks hunt, go



Map by Steve Flood



through the gateway in the wall ahead of you, turn left, go through a metal gate, then immediately right, to start another, shallower, climb to a small metal gate between the barn and the main buildings of Linned Farm. This is a right of way, despite the fact that you'll feel as though you're trespassing. As you walk up, do look around you for a splendid view of Brown Wardle across the valley, and Manchester to the south. Go through the small gate, cross the little stile, then go through the metal gate ahead and straight on up the track between walls. Now Rooley Moor is ahead of you: behind and south are views of Saddleworth.

Just before this track terminates in a field gate there's a ramshackle stile over the fence on the left. Go over, but continue in the same direction, with the wall on your

right. Move 5/6 metres to your left to avoid water but stay parallel with the wall. Drop into the corner of the field and go over the stile to a rather indistinct path trending left, following the line of a wall which is now on your left. After 200 metres the path takes you to a stile: go over, then pick out the best path you can following the line of the wall, now on your right. Drop down to a stone slab bridge. Cross it, then turn immediately left. Do not go through the metal gate. Walk with real care through an uneven, marshy section of about 20 metres to an obvious stile. (Note the ancient horsetail grass growing in this area.) The other side is worse, briefly. To avoid boots full of water go over so that you end up facing the stile, then traverse a few metres to what is briefly your left, holding on to the mesh fence but avoiding the barbed wire. Once on terra firma turn round and go up the mound ahead of you, with a bare patch on top. Stop, and look dead ahead.

You should just see, poking up above the immediate horizon, the dome of the top of a single tree and, maybe, the tower blocks in Rochdale. Fix the tree in mind and head for it. You'll lose it in the first dip, but then pick it up more clearly. There is a sort of path, beginning about 15 metres from the fence, that will take you down towards the tree, crossing and re-crossing tumbled field walls. At the ruin move closer to the helpful tree, to say thank you, obviously, but also because the least bad path through the rushes that come next is over here. You'll see Spring Mill reservoir ahead, but you're aiming at the middle of the wood down the hill a way and right, entered via a ladder-stile: beware – the steps on the wood side can be loose. Work your way down to the stream. There's a pleasant clearing, if you're looking for a place to pause.

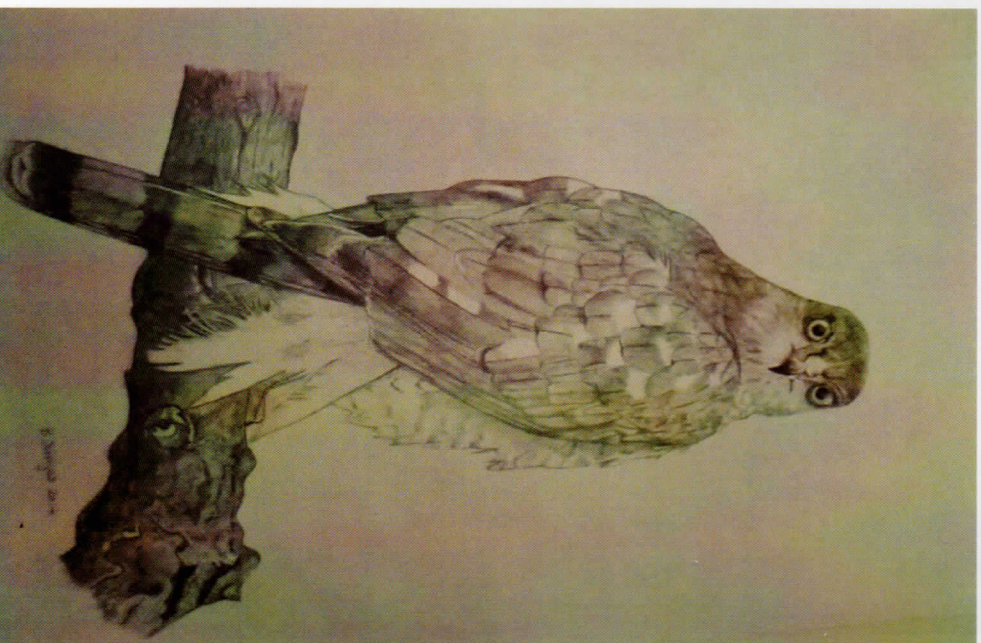
This is a place to inspire poets and artists. It was frequented by the Taylor doctors of Whitworth Square. They were a family of famous surgeons. From the 1750s to the 1870s the family produced eighteen practitioners. The early ones were unqualified – indeed they were blacksmiths with a skill for mending animal fractures. They went on to treat human patients, and were known as ‘bone-setters’. They were famed for treating cancers with ointments derived from herbs – let your imagination see them scouring this glade you’re sitting in for elderflower, dandelion, shepherd’s purse, oak bark, nettle, plantain and more. For much more information on the Whitworth Doctors, visit Whitworth Heritage Centre on North Street (tel. 07434703972).

Ford the stream and follow the path to a bridge that recrosses the stream, then go up to your right on the obvious track. Near some buildings the path turns sharply left, then leads you flat then down. When you swing left at the farm at the bottom of the first slope go to the right of Fold Head Cottage ahead of you, then double back down the rough road.

Before you descend take note of Fold Head High Barn. This was the secret meeting-place of the Halfpenny Independents during the 1600s. They were a non-conformist sect, and at that time they risked imprisonment and worse for practicing their beliefs. There are a number of these deliberately remote ‘illegal’ chapels dotted around the hills of Rosensdale.

You’ll emerge onto Hall Fold, a narrow tarmac road that drops down prettily between cottages. Just before St Bartholomew’s primary school, at Barnside, go sharp left, descending to pass between Water Street and Handel

Street (see – we do culture in Whitworth), but where the road goes through a gate with a warning sign you step to the right... onto the top end of the Cockle. Down to the flagstone walls and the stile, then right across the bridge, out onto Lloyd Street, across Cowm Park Way, along William Street, left onto Rawstron Street, right onto North Street... and possibly up the steps into *The Sportsman*. JF



Sparrowhawk. Pencil drawing by Bobby Jeffries

walking WHITWORTH

There are good walks in Whitworth around Cowm Res, and into Healey Dell - but how about something a bit more adventurous? You know there are moorland paths, but how do you get to them; are you allowed; and can you get back without retracing your steps?

Well, you could be brave and just go...or you could take one of these guides. All are circular; all start from a place where you can leave a car; all fit comfortably into a morning or afternoon; all have ups (to give you views) and downs (obviously); and all have route instructions along with a clear, simple map and a small helping of history.

Whitworth, you’ll find, has a fantastic network of paths that can be knitted together into satisfying walks. And then? Invest in OS Explorer map OL21 (South Pennines) and explore. You might even find some walks that are half as good!

WALK 7 COCK HALL/DOCTORS WOOD

These walks are part of the Spoddan Valley Revealed eco-museum. Visit: <https://spoddanvalleyrevealed.wordpress.com/>