





## WALK 10 RIVER AND MOOR VIA ENDING RAKE

START Riverside

DISTANCE 4 miles plus

TIME 2 hours plus

**NATURE OF WALK** Mostly stride-out flat for the first half, but slower later, partly because of ascent, partly because of watch-your-step terrain, and partly because of glorious views that demand that you stop and appreciate. In a fine-weather period, trainers will do. The walk is a deliberate mix of the well-walked and the variant!

Go down the steps at the back of the Riverside, and just past the Leisure Centre cross the road and head up the road and steps beside Our Lady and St Anselm School. At the top go left along Cowm Park Way North, from where you've a good view of Brown Wardle and Rushy Hill across the valley to your left. Go straight ahead at the stables, crossing Tong End with care.

Walk the length of Cowm Park Way South, cross Hall Street (beware of traffic from the right, particularly) and go down the ramp with Riddiough Court on your right. *If you look back you'll see that above the home Hall Street used to pass over a bridge, hence the monumental stone. Since you started on Cowm Park Way you've been following the line of the old Rochdale-Bacup railway, and there will be other reminders of that as you walk further, one of them glorious. Riddiough Court itself is built on the site of Taylor's coalyard. Much more information on this is available from Whitworth Heritage Museum (07434703972).* Keep straight ahead, passing under a stone bridge over the newly resurfaced cycle path. Your feet should enjoy this!

At the first gate you can go straight on (if you're enjoying the stride-out), or you can deviate to the left on a loop of a path. (Don't cross the narrow bridge over the river.) At the far end of Bluebell Hill (with its totem pole on top) you can either rejoin

the main path, or you can go left and skirt around the duckpond. Beyond that again you can go right-ish and rejoin the main path, or you can stay left, parallel with it. If you do that you'll weave a bit then rise up an uneven path that's often in the shade of the houses above, ending up on Station Road, Broadway, with another ex-railway bridge to your right. If you've gone back to the main path, you can end up at this same point by walking up the ramp on your left just before the bridge.

But you don't have to! The main path will take you over the amazing Healey Dell Viaduct. If you do that, exit the main path via the steps down at the far end of the viaduct – uneven, and slippery when wet: use the handrail. At the bottom turn right, up the hill – beware traffic – for a proper view of the viaduct, and, in autumn, a fabulously coloured treescape. At the top of the hill catch your breath, then cross the main road carefully but quickly, aiming at the lane opposite, Ending Rake.

If you abandoned the main path earlier and found yourself on Station Road you have a three-way choice. One option is to go right, where, near the bridge, you'll find an unmarked path into woodland: this one's for the explorer. Stay high to reach the beginning of the viaduct. Go back one para. for your next steps.

Option two is to follow the sign that says *Fairy Chapel*. This is for those who like the spectacular. It will take you down to river level on its left side, from where there is a view upstream of a rushing weir that is lovely if the water's high, and downstream of the soaring magnificence of the viaduct. The path then leads you up to the road up out of Healey Dell.

The third option is simple: walk up Station Road to the busy main A671 Market Street. Walk right till you've a clear view either way, then cross carefully, walking beneath Healey Conservative Club to the turn at Ending Rake.

So, now we're all together again. Follow the bumpy roadway up under the beautiful bridge, and beyond, keeping the wall to your right. Where the roadway flattens you'll come to a wide gate – but you should take the track to the left for 30m. to a

second one. The track beyond it takes you towards a house, but 50m. before it you'll turn left up Rushy Hill on an obvious track that is part of the Pennine Bridleway. In summer look and listen for crickets, larks and horses. On top of the hill is a white farmhouse. If it looks familiar it's because you've got eagle eyes and you've spotted it as you've driven off the A627(M) as you've been approaching Rochdale. If, higher up this hill, you turn around and search for the motorway, it'll be hard to find – but you'll have stopped looking anyway in favour of enjoying the astonishing panorama on offer from up here. To the left (east) there is the long line of the Pennines, stretching south into Derbyshire. There's Manchester, obviously, 15 miles away; maybe Jodrell Bank, jutting up above the horizon just to the left a further 15 miles on (but you'll need to be lucky for this one, because it'll depend not only on the weather, but on whether the dish of the telescope is upright or flat); the dark outline of Alderley Edge; and Fiddler's Ferry power station, off to the right (west), with, if you're truly in luck, the outline of the Clwyddian Hills in North Wales behind it.



Moorland Pony. Pencil drawing by Lindsay Ellis-Fairhurst

Beyond the white farm the track flattens out, and the views are very different – straight ahead the moors in all their dramatically changeable glory, a panorama to match any in the country, and probably dotted with cattle, sheep and horses; and to the left a postcard of Whitworth framed by its hills,