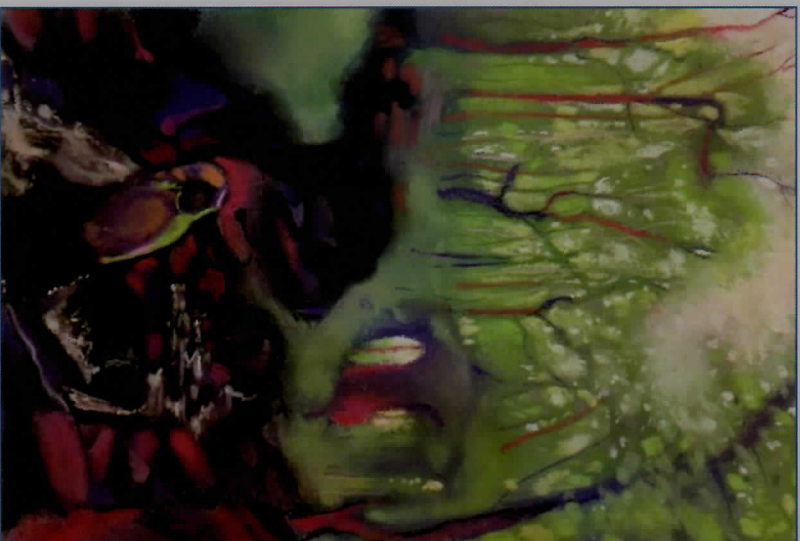


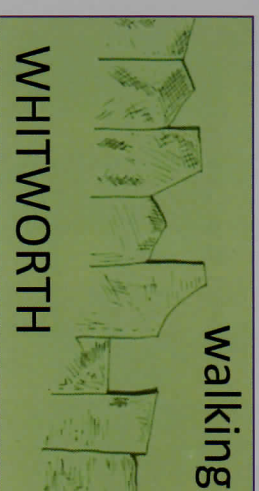
spectacular route in the colours of autumn – the steps up to it are just beyond the arch, on the right. Then simply stay on the main footpath as far as Bluebell Hill, passing either side, watching out for the little bridge at the bottom of the path up to the snack bar.

Alternatively, at the road-arch you can take the path down to river level, which then has all the viaduct's magnificent piers and curiously angled arches looming over your left shoulder, and the Spodden bubbling or thundering at you to your left as you climb up to the steps to the otherworldly Fairies Chapel. (A sign will send you on this lovely detour down steep stone steps – but take care: they are uneven, and at the bottom often wet with spray. *Beauty – but who knows what beauty conceals? A rich young man was cruelly deceived by fairies. Desperate, he petitioned the King of the Fairies for help - giving up his golden ring of faithfulness as the price for it – not knowing it was the self-same King who had set the fairies their task. The King used his mighty power to imprison his own sprites beneath these elemental rocks! When the water trickles, it masks the fairies' sighs and whispered incantations. When the water roars, it drowns out their shrieking anger...just about! Never trust a fairy.* Back at the top, turn left.)

At the end of the path, up a short flight of steps, is Station Road. There are various ways to get back to the snack bar from here, but a direct and varied route is straight ahead of you, immediately below the houses on the hillside. Descend, for about 200m, until you see a little bridge, where you go right and up (gently) to the path round the duckpond; cross a wooden bridge; walk straight ahead, with Bluebell Hill and its totem pole on your left; and in 200 metres there's the narrow metal bridge below the car park where you started.



Fairies Chapel. Pastel drawing by Krista Howell



This second series of guides follows the same format as the first - all the walks are circular; all start from a place where you can leave a car; most fit comfortably into a morning or an afternoon or a summer evening (walk 14 may be tight); all have ups, to give you the splendid views that Whitworth is blessed with, and downs (obviously); and all have route instructions supplemented with a clear, simple map and a small helping of history.

Whitworth has a fantastic network of paths that can be knitted together into many satisfying walks. But there is a big wide world of walking beyond our valley walls too, of course. Invest in OS map 21 (South Pennines) and explore. You might even find some walks that are half as good as these!

WALK 13 ABOVE PRICKSHAW

Produced by Whitworth Sports Council and funded by



WALK 13 ABOVE PRICKSHAW

START Car park next to the snack bar on the west side of Market Street, just north of Oakenshaw Avenue

DISTANCE 3 miles

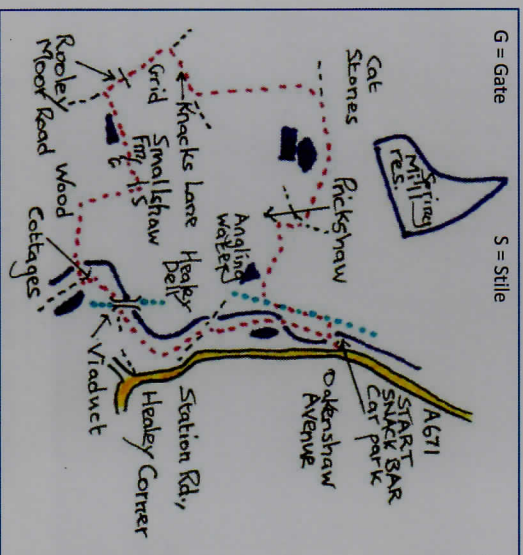
TIME 2 hours

NATURE OF WALK Wear waterproof boots, whatever the weather. Some of these tracks are very rarely walked. The rise is steep, but well worth it. You'll encounter three memorable historic artefacts along a walk of continuous birdsong coming from the branches of almost every tree the UK has to offer. And - in season - bluebells!

Take the obvious path down towards Healey Dell. At the bottom cross the narrow bridge, turn right, then left onto the main Healey Dell path/cycleway for 300m. About 100m. before the old Broadley Station platform (You may want to divert to read the *Information about the industry that used to prevail hereabouts*) there's a path up shallow steps to the right. At the top is a car park below the Whitworth Angling Club water. Go right, onto the setted road that leads up to Prickshaw hamlet. *How many vintage gas lamps can you count as you meander through? Rare survivors from the distant day when children would set up rope swings from the cross-bars.* Pass in front of the row of houses, turn left at the end, and then, after 10 metres, right. Beyond the gate/stile the path will be wet, possibly ankle deep: you may need to skirt quietly into the field on the left. Just

beyond the tree the path is usually ok again...for a while. Ahead you'll see the main rise. Once you're on that you'll be fine, but the 15/20 metres before it can be ankle dampener too, and the area just to the left a real bog. If it is, cling to the wall on the right and traverse, carefully. At a ruin the track rises to the left of a pylon.

As with many steep rises, the compensation is the view when you stop to catch your breath and turn around, so take your time. Rochdale, Manchester etc are away to the south; there's an unusually long view east *beyond* Brown Wardle to Crook Hill; and the water features in the foreground probably can't be seen together and fully from any vantage point other than this.



Map by Steve Flood

At the pylon the rise sweeps left towards two more pylons and flattens, soon becoming a gently descending track leading past Snipe Barn Farm, to a T-junction. Go

right to another junction, 200m. away. Here you turn left, downhill, for the merest taste of Rooley Moor Road (*aka the Cotton Farmine Road - worth googling its amazing history*). Below the bus terminus go through the gate by the cattle grid, then first left at the footpath sign onto Smallshaw Road. To your right now is another Whitworth AC water, and at the end of the street is the lovely old Smallshaw Farm where there may be house martins nesting in the barn. Another footpath sign guides you right through a farm gate, and 50m. further on, at a stone stile, a third sends you sharp right along the side of a meadow, and down into a wood.

About 100 m. into the trees there's a point where the broad path seems to go straight on, but it's a false friend - you want the narrow path that goes down a bit more steeply to the right. You'll hear the stream before you see it. The pathway crosses it on a packhorse bridge, and then it's there to your left as you pick your way (easily) down. Where the trees clear to your right, look across the stream to what must have been a substantial landslip. Stay with the stream, on the path that is narrow but obvious, until, just above the metal bridge over the Spodden, it seems momentarily to have disappeared. It's just a hairpin to get you down easily.

Cross, walk up the path by the cottage gardens, then at the end turn left, to start the climb up Healey Dell Road towards the Viaduct. *Construction of this wonderful, 103 feet high, feat of engineering began in 1867, with the first train crossing in 1870. The line ran initially from Rochdale up to Facit as a goods line, designed to shift huge tonnages of stone from the quarries to Manchester and beyond. There is said to be flagstone from Whitworth in Trafalgar Square, and around the Eiffel Tower.* You can choose to cross the viaduct, a