

Haysden Country Park Historical Trail leaflet

Facts

Distance 3.9 Kilometres 2 ½ Miles

Time for easy walking 2 hours

Short cuts can be used, some unsurfaced paths.

This leaflet is a self guided trail and has been written mainly for adults but will also be of interest to children.

Introduction

The park was opened as a Country Park in 1988, but the land had been partly owned by the Council and used by the public long before this time. Find out more about the history of the park by following this trail. The trail is mainly flat and on surfaced paths but can become muddy in bad weather.

Please refer to the map at the back of this leaflet and follow the blue coloured numbers which are in the park.

As an alternative you could note down the National Grid References shown here for each point (these start with a TQ) and then use an Ordnance Survey map to navigate to each point on site.

START TQ57144596

Point 1 - Starting from the main car park notice board, walk towards the far end of the car park and cross over the wooden bridge leading towards "The Shallows".

Now follow the signs back to the car park.

We hope you enjoyed your walk.

If you enjoyed this walk there are some others you may like try on another day:

- Haysden Country Park - Nature Trail
- Tonbridge Castle to Penshurst Cycle Route

Acknowledgements are made to the following for their contributions towards the contents included in this leaflet:

- Mr G W Robinson, River Manager of National Rivers Authority
- Area Civil Engineer (SE) British Rail
- Department of the Environment and Transport, SE Regional
- Kent County Council
- Tonbridge Historical Society

This information is available in other formats please call Leisure Services on 01732 876172 or Email leisure.services@tmbc.gov.uk

invasion. Both regular troops and the Home Guard would have manned these defences. Can you imagine what it would have been like during the war, to wait for the enemy in one of these small isolated pillboxes? Made from strong concrete, many pillboxes are still present today in the English countryside.

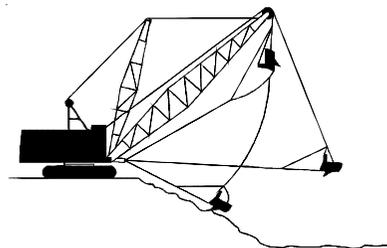


Now re-trace your steps back across Lucifer Bridge, over the footbridge but this time turn left and go around the lake to point 11.

TQ57234609

Point 11 - Barden Lake

This lake was formed when sand and gravel were extracted from the land between 1974 and 1980. Dragline excavators were used to dig the material out. The Lake is approximately 3.6 metres (12 feet) deep. From here gravel and sand was transported by road ½ mile west to Haysden Water Lake where machinery washed and finished the product.



TQ56984594

Point 2 - The Shallows

This was the old course of the River Medway now known as The Shallows. Look for the natural bends called meanders which were sometimes shallow and therefore difficult to navigate with large boats, this was significant as roads were poor and before the railway was built, rivers and canals were used as the main transport links. We shall read later how people tried and eventually succeeded in changing the course of the River Medway. Since the majority of the river water now flows another way, The Shallows has become a quiet backwater which is gradually developing into marshland.



Continue along the path that runs parallel with the railway line.

TQ56694597

Point 3 - The Railway Line

The path you have been following runs alongside the railway line that was constructed by the South Eastern Railway company. The railway was opened in 1842 as the mainline between London and Dover and is still in operation today as a passenger and freight line. When crossing over the humped-back bridge at the far end of The Shallows, look for the brick built Victorian arched railway bridge can be seen to your right.

Continue on over the bridge, turn left and follow the trail through the barrier and over the next bridge. Stop at the far end of the bridge (Point 4).

TQ56684590

Point 4 - The Straight Mile

The Straight Mile is an early attempt to straighten the River Medway, making it suitable for boat navigation. This was a money making enterprise to take barges of valuable timber from Penshurst to Tonbridge and beyond, but unfortunately the canals never filled with water, the enterprise was a failure and James Christie (the project engineer) fled to America. Think about this, and how much money and effort it would have taken to dig these canals back in the 1830s. 100 workers dug the canal. One of the Canals eventually became a bridleway which is still in use today.

Now re-trace your steps back across the bridge, then follow the narrow path under the Railway bridge.

If you continue the walk, take the path alongside the lake, with the woodland on your left to the far end of the park. Cross the wooden bridge into the woodland. Follow the cycle route to your left towards a car park. Turn left towards the river, this will take you to Lucifer Bridge.

TQ57674648

Point 9 - Lucifer Bridge

This bridge is one of the few crossing points on the river. The bridge is constructed in a steel lattice pattern with wooden deck which has created an attractive piece of engineering.



Cross the bridge (beware of cyclists), turn right down the footpath, and a few hundred metres along the path you will find a pillbox on your left.

TQ57714661

Point 10 - Pillbox

A World War 2 pillbox can be found in the hedgerow along the riverbank. During World War 2 (1939-1945) pillboxes were built along many major routes in England, such as the rivers, as lines of defences to repel an expected invasion. This pill box and others along the river Medway formed part of the 'Ironside Line', the premier line of defence against German

TQ56714607

Point 7 - New cut (river)

The New Cut that joins with the Long Reach was constructed to bypass The Shallows (the former course of the river). These river channels (which connect to one another) now take the majority of the river water from the Leigh Flood Barrier gates downstream towards Tonbridge.

TQ57014605

Point 8 - Stone Lock

The Stone Lock is at the far end of the Straight Mile and was built in about 1829 again by the engineer James Christie. The Lock was built to lift the barges of timber up to the level of the river from the Straight Mile canals. It is constructed from huge blocks of stone, which are reputed to have come from Tonbridge Castle. The stone blocks are hand-finished – if you look carefully chisel marks are still visible on the stones.



Continue to follow the footpath by the River Medway and go over the footbridge.

Hint: To shorten the walk miss out Points 9 and 10 and go straight to point 11.

More remnants of the old course of the River Medway can be seen beside the path to your left and right, as you walk towards the entrance to Heusenstamm Friendship Wood.

TQ56634605

Point 5 - Heusenstamm Friendship Wood

The wood will be on your left once you go through the entrance. Take the unmade path on your right and follow along the river bank. You can see the Leigh Barrier from the end of Heusenstamm Friendship Wood.

This wood is located on part of the infilled river where the old Weir once stood – a massive construction of brick and wooden sluices that controlled the water levels. The Weir Pool (also known as ‘Tonbridge Lido’) was once a popular location for swimming, fishing and boating but was near to collapse and had to be demolished when the Leigh Flood Barrier was built in 1981.

Following the Great Storm of 1987, this new woodland was planted with trees donated by Tonbridge’s twin town of Heusenstamm in Germany.



TQ56464609

Point 6 - Leigh Barrier

Standing by the stile at the far end of the woodland, you can see the Leigh Flood Barrier which was completed in 1981 protecting Tonbridge from the threat of flooding. Three gates automatically control the flow of the water in the river. Each weighs 11 tonnes and can pass up to 150 cubic metres of floodwater every second.



The storage area behind the Leigh Barrier is 278 hectares (686 acres) (that is about 255 football pitches), and when the land is flooded it can hold 5,580 million litres of water (1,230 million gallons). Before the barrier was constructed Tonbridge would regularly flood – the last serious floods being in 1968. See www.environment-agency.gov.uk for more information about the barrier.

Still standing at the stile and looking across beyond the Leigh Flood Barrier grass banks, the A21 flyover can be seen. This was built in 1969-1970 to cope with the increased road traffic on

the roads into and out of Tonbridge. The road was opened by the then Prime Minister, Edward Heath. The elevated flyover, which is 440 metres (1450 feet) in length, spans about half of the natural valley.



Hint:

On another day you may want to climb over the stile and explore this area and Haysden Water Lake which you can gain access to, by walking under the railway bridge at the far end of the water meadow.

Retrace your steps, come out of the woodland and follow the River Medway, keeping the river to your left. This is the new route of the River Medway.