

Shak's Tracks

An Uphill Struggle

Whenever two people meet to agree a route, one can guarantee that there will be at least three opinions. When three persons and a dog attempt the same agreement, one can expect a pitched battle and so it was with red and ringing ears that I set off on this testing five mile route around Macclesfield Forest.

The starting point for the debacle is the Leather's Smithy pub by Ridgegate Reservoir near Langley. To add to my woes, the first two miles are a continuous uphill slog, starting up Clarke Lane and continuing on to the Forest Bridleway via the large gate on the left at the point where the gradient of the lane eases off (slightly). At the time of writing, the Forest Bridleway had acquired a new surface of gravel which gives a dry but unforgiving footing. Fear not, it gets better. The views from the track across the Cheshire Plain are fine as long as you remember to turn around to admire them. My view, on this last occasion was of a red and furious wife and friend and a dog who objected to the stony surface. The track bends left, continues up the hill and on the right of the angle of the next bend is a sign post indicating the track to Forest Chapel.

Up we go, via the steps (oh dear), deeper into the forest to the point where you think we can climb no further, then there's another small hill. Beyond this, there's suddenly a clearing and the glorious vista of Shining Tor and the Cat and Fiddle opens up. This and the slight decline to Forest Chapel is guaranteed to lift the spirits. Forest Chapel is one of those rare places which still maintains a rush bearing service, harking back to pre-lino days. Have a look at the Chapel and we'll crack on up the road immediately opposite. This will take us around the hill to the Standing Stone car park. Strangely, there is no standing stone here, There is one close to Leather's Smithy but on the last time we did this route it was not politic to point this out.

No matter, by the time we move off from the Standing Stone car park along the bridleway to the south west, the feel of the forest and the views of the hills compensate for all the climbing and all we have to face now is a few undulations in the trees. After about a mile, we come to the point where we can pop through the kissing gate and run up to the summit of Shutlingsloe and quickly back down to pick up where we left off. If you try this, please be sure to keep your companions appraised of what they might face. It avoids injury and bad language.

If you are sensible, then all you need to do is to follow the track down to Trentabank visitor centre and jog down the road and along the reservoir to the solace of the pub. A quick look at the map gives you quite a few alternative routes from the 'Shutlingsloe cut-off' back to the pub, via various forest tracks, again, this is a matter of prudence and negotiation.

What lessons might we draw from this? Possibly that it is better to leave the car at Trentabank and start off downhill so as to warm up the running apparatus and to

give the appearance of a care-free jog in the forest. Alternatively, leave the route management to your companions.



