

Shak's Tracks

The Matterhorn

So, if you thought last month's route was hilly, then this one is positively mountainous. However, there is the opportunity of the stunning views and three chances of a pint if you're so inclined. Of course, there is the problem of travel. No, not to Switzerland or Italy but to the Leather's Smithy pub near the Macclesfield Forest visitor centre at Trentabank from which we will tackle the Cheshire Matterhorn, Shutlingsloe. Car or bus (call Cheshire Traveline on 0870 6082608) is your best bet, however, it is possible to run cross-country to the summit from Chelford. Only a fool would do this and I have. This seven mile jaunt is a winter Saturday morning favourite of the Clan Shak as it gives fantastic views across Cheshire, Staffs, the Peak District and Wales. And there are three pubs.

For those of you who are unsure, Shutlingsloe is that pointy thing seen on the horizon to the east of Chelford, it rises to 506m. However, you can't see it from the Leather's Smithy pub in Macclesfield forest which is where we shall start at a sober (!) trot along the path below Ridgegate reservoir. We'll go down the dip and up to emerge near Greenbank Farm where we'll skirt round to the left, go up by the fence, crossing diagonally to the right to take us to the little road by Lees House Farm. Pop into the road, turn left and plug steeply up the hill to right at the top to head long the ridge towards Hardings, a house that probably has the best view in Cheshire. It's so lovely that we probably won't notice that we've just run up 300ft in a mile.

We'll carry on down the little road, forking left up the hill until we see the Hanging Gate pub on the right. Now for a real hill. Immediately opposite the pub is the footpath (well, more of a stream really) which heads up the hill towards Oakenclough. So we'll do short strides, stand up straight, land on the midfoot and bound confidently up the next 200 feet or so to our first view of Shutlingsloe poking up above Mount Pleasant. So far, so good, on we go across and down the hill to Oakenclough where we skirt the house and pond and follow the track to the left of the stream all the way down to the road by Sutton End.

We'll turn left, trot along the road then fork left on a marked track which takes us round the hill and throws up beautiful views of Wildboardclough and a wintry sun chasing the clouds from the hills. Leave the track on the right at the finger post above Lower Nabbs Farm and follow the field path across the hill, descending to the road again by the Cragg Inn. Time for a beer? Unlucky.

We're running and we're doing well, what's more things are about to get serious.

Just beyond the Cragg Inn, a track forks left up the hill toward Banktop and now's the chance for some real fell running, 800 vertical feet in a mile. We'll keep going with the summit now horribly obvious above us. As we near the top, it's a hands on knees job to race-walk up to the trig point and the glorious views. Stop the watch, have a breather and take your reward, you can even see Chelford from here. Now for the pay-off !

If you're running, put your brain in your back pocket and blast down the obvious, paved path to the edge of the forest, go through the gate, turn left and carry on as fast as you can to the Trentabank visitors' centre. You've earned the assistance of gravity, enjoy it. If you're walking the route, make the most of the view and watch out for a sparrowhawk or two.

Once at Trentabank, it's left on to the road, down the hill, past the reservoir, into the Leather's Smithy, up to the bar and pint of shandy each for the runners and a bag of crisps for Tomson.

