

Shak's Tracks

Theory and Practice

Theory: This glorious route fills in a gap in my paths to the south of Chelford and I am very grateful to Patricia and Donald Macleod for the directions around the Chelford Sand Quarry. Patricia's complete route was printed in last January's Parish magazine and is more highly recommended than this 'Track'. The reasons for this will soon become evident.

We'll start by getting ourselves to the joint of Congleton Lane and Mill Lane. There are loads of ways from Chelford; via Astle Farms and Mill Lane or Brook House Farm; by St. Johns and Congleton Lane etc.

We shall start by taking the bridleway immediately opposite the end of Mill Lane and jog beneath the trees of the Mosses until we reach the remains of Lapwing Lane, sawn in two by the sandpit some years ago. Turning right onto the lane and going on for a short distance to Foden Bank Farm, we come to a track on the left whose broad sweep takes us past the quarry workings (on the left) to the point where the footpath branches off right through the trees. We are now on Patricia's route around the quarry and it can be your personal racetrack with its smooth, nettle-free progress, extensive views of the hills and a glimpse of Withington Hall. We'll follow this on around the turns until we get to the odd gravel patch by the conveyor where straight ahead, by the side of a small building, is the gate to the fieldpath which takes us across two large pastures to Whitecroft Heath Road.

Turning right onto the road, we'll go on a short way and take the bridleway on the right of the bend in the direction of Dairy House Farm. Follow the track through the farm and keep on until we get to the Holmes Chapel road. From this part of the A535, you can just make out the humps of three tumuli in the field opposite and to the right by Dingle Brook. The first of these was excavated during 1976/77 and the remains of an 18 years old female were discovered. She appeared to have died some 3,500 years ago as a result of a blow to the head. Analysis of the soil revealed 'a sad picture of agricultural decline', suggesting that the barrow was

constructed at a time when the cultivated land was losing its fertility and slipping back into wilderness. Put this sad little story from your mind and go left for a short distance with extreme care along the Holmes Chapel road (A535) to turn right into Bomish Lane in the direction of Goostrey.

Dominating the skyline to your left is the radio telescope of Jodrell Bank and a little way along the road on the right is Batemill Lane. We'll follow this undulating road past the beautiful Batemill Cottage and the handsome brick railway viaduct to Bate Mill. This historic corn mill worked until the late 1960's, latterly producing cattle, sheep and horse feeds. On we go, up the hill and to the point where the crossroads gives a choice to either go straight on along Cinder Lane to the Dog Inn for refreshment or to turn right into Boundary Lane. The latter route takes us roughly parallel to the railway to the point where we can turn right into Snelson Lane, cross the railway on the road bridge and up Peover Lane to arrive at Chelford Post Office; an historic and picturesque track with simple navigation. Schoolboy error!

Practice: When I did this route, it was one of those times when everything clicked into place. The first three miles to Whitecroft Heath Road flew by in spite of being rainsoaked in the first half mile. The cool of the Mosses was perfect. In pouring rain, I started down the track to Dairy House Farm, scornful of the need for a map. I reached the point where the track goes through the farm only for some stupid reason to branch off on the left to take a path that went through neck-high nettles around the edge of Dingle Bank Quarry. The path then vanished in a slurry of mud, cow muck and some knee-deep standing water, leaving me to guess where to go next. In desperation, I went through a gate and followed the lane. Yes, it was Catchpenny Lane and it dropped me off on the Holmes Chapel Road on the wrong side of the Cheshire Hunt from Bomish Lane.

By now Shak was soaked, filthy, nettled and in danger of being mown down by speeding wagons. In the sprint for Bomish Lane, my runner split, leaving an exposed big toe as the final insult. Does the track through Dairy House Farm still exist? The map thinks so but your correspondent does not know for sure, Beware.

The impending thunderstorm held off and a fearful yet still living Shak ignored any fieldpath variations on his way back home, arriving massively late to discover Mrs Shak, a picture of smouldering fury. What would Alf have done when faced with Aunt Meg in a similar mood? What might we learn from this? Take a map, be humble in navigation and ambition. I swear that, in future I will not make such careless judgements. Oh, what a liar.

