

Weatherman Walking

Holywell to Flint Walk

Approximate distance: 8 miles
 For this walk we've included OS map coordinates as an option, should you wish to follow them.
OS Explorer Map: 265



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The Weatherman Walking maps are intended as a guide to help you walk the route. We recommend using an OS map of the area in conjunction with this guide. Routes and conditions may have changed since this guide was written. The BBC takes no responsibility for any accident or injury that may occur while following the route. Always wear appropriate clothing and footwear and check weather conditions before heading out.

Walking information

This moderate, eight mile linear walk begins in Holywell – which takes its name from a nearby holy well which we will visit later.

From the centre of town we walk down through Greenfield Valley Heritage Park with a fascinating industrial past. After a short detour to the holy well we continue down the valley to Greenfield Docks on the banks of the Dee estuary where we follow the Wales Coast Path along to Flint Castle.

1. Start of the walk - Holywell (SJ 18708 75979)

From the Tesco car park, follow a sloping concrete walkway into Greenfield Valley Heritage Park and pass under a large stone railway bridge.

2. Railway Bridge (SJ 18682 76028)

The main footpath follows the line of a standard gauge railway which from 1912, carried passengers on the 'Little Train'. It was the steepest conventional passenger railway in Britain with a 1:27 gradient.

The path widens after the bridge and follows an old stone wall down amongst deciduous woodland, now managed by the local wildlife trust. Along the way you'll spot remnants of old industry with ruined buildings hidden in amongst the trees to your left.

The woods are full of wildlife with up to 27 species of butterfly being recorded. In amongst the trees rare goshawks now nest and you can even find otters living in the old mill workings and reservoirs.

At a bend in the trail follow signs for St Winefride's Well, passing a bench and forested area with plenty of well established, over-hanging trees.

Keep straight on through a metal foot-gate and walk down the hill passing a furniture warehouse on your right. At the main road turn left and follow the pavement along Greenfield Road towards St Winefride's Well.

3. St Winefride's Well (SJ 18507 76267)

According to legend, the well first erupted at the spot where Winefride's would-be rapist Caradog cut off her head with his sword, back in the 7th century.

A spring rose from the ground where her head fell and her uncle, St Beuno, brought her back from the dead through the power of prayer.

For centuries pilgrims including Richard I and Henry V have visited the site to bathe in the holy water, known as the 'Lourdes of Wales'. Visitors can pay an entry fee and bathe in a swimming pool fed by the holy water, so take your bathers if you fancy a healing dip.

Walk back along the pavement to Greenfield Valley, past the bench and turn left, following a yellow way marker and follow the steep wooden steps to Greenfield Mills.

At the bottom of the steps, walk across the Royal Oak pub car park. Just before you reach the main road turn right (SJ 18789 76629) and follow a track down through the woods to the reservoir and ruins of the old mill.

4. Greenfield Mills (SJ 18924 76706)

Established in 1776, the Battery Works, as it was known, employed local people to literally bash out pots from brass sheets using heavy tilt hammers.

The site contained numerous water wheels and the noise here must have deafening during the manufacturing process.

Goods from the mill were exported from Liverpool to Africa and the money was used to buy slaves who worked the cotton fields in America. The cotton was then shipped back to Wales and the cotton mills further down Greenfield Valley.

The lake is now half as full as it was during the height of production at the mill, as water has been diverted off upstream for other uses over the years.

During the winter months pochard, tufted duck, little grebe, pintail and mandarin duck can be spotted on the ponds.

Walk across the bridge towards a tall chimney stack at the edge of the woods and follow a path up through the trees, past derelict buildings to the main path.

Turn left and walk down through the valley passing another reservoir and Meadow Mill on your left.

5. Meadow Mill (SJ 19119 76968)

The mill, built in 1787 produced copper bolts and sheets used to sheath the wooden hulls of ships sailing to the tropics. The copper protected them against a timber-eating shipworm, hence the phrase 'copper bottomed'.

The buildings left standing today were used for smaller industries including a tin plates work.

Arriving at a crossroads, keep left, following an old wall. At the bottom, pass by some old black iron gates and keep right.

Walk towards Lower Cotton Mill passing a pleasant lake, and turn left for a look at the Lower Cotton Mill below. Follow wooden steps down to the mill and cross over a footbridge for a closer look.

6. Lower Cotton Mill (SJ 19285 77189)

This is all that remains of the many cotton mills that once flourished here. The mill was once a six storey mill, powered entirely by the Holywell stream with water wheels and culverts.

The cotton mill closed in 1840 but reopened as a corn mill in 1850, producing flour until the early 1900s.

Retrace your steps back up the steps and turn left onto the path. A little further on is the Abbey Wire Mill (SJ 19385 77347) complete with a working water wheel.

Today the walled mill area is a pretty garden and venue for open air events. Leave the garden and follow the quiet road opposite towards Greenfield Valley Museum – well worth a look if you have time.

The museum consists of a number of historic buildings all lovingly relocated and rebuilt on the site, so don't be confused if you see a Victorian schoolhouse next to a 16th century farmhouse.

Turn left behind the visitor centre (SJ 19498 77381). At the end of the path, turn right and walk down to the abbey.

7. Basingwerk Abbey (SJ 19643 77408)

Basingwerk Abbey, which dates from 1132, were where Cistercian Monks lived and worked for more than 400 years, harnessing the power of the stream to power their mills and grind corn. The impressive ruins are all that remain today.

During medieval times the abbey flourished and an artistic community developed around it that contained many Welsh poets. The monks were finally driven out by Henry VIII's Dissolution Act in 1536.

Follow the path to the right skirting the abbey passing under some huge old sycamore trees down into the woods. Pass between two ornately carved wooden totem poles marking the entrance to the park and walk down into the car park below.

Turn left onto to Bagillt Road (A548) (SJ 19667 77528) and turn right at Dock road. Walk up over the railway bridge (SJ 19776 77841). After a short stroll, turn left into Greenfields Docks.

8. Greenfield Dock (SJ 19974 77931)

There has been maritime activity here since Roman times but it wasn't until the legend of St Winefride's Well took hold that this quiet dock became busy as pilgrims flocked here from the Wirral, Liverpool and further afield.

As industry in the valley grew, the dock expanded and raw copper from Parys Mountain on Anglesey was unloaded here and sent to Greenfield Valleys' mills to be turned into copper goods.

The arrival of the railway along the north coast and the continuing problems of silt spelled the end of the dock, which was put up for sale in 1901.

In 2012 the dock was reopened and the Wales Coast Path, which is constantly being improved, now runs through it.

Walk past a large shipping buoy and pass through a metal barrier onto the coast path which will eventually be a tarmac path with a separate bridle way.

From here you'll be rewarded with panoramic views across to Hillbre Island and the town of Hoylake on the opposite bank.

The old factories that once thrived here have now been demolished and much of the stone reused to create modern sea defenses – the ultimate in recycling.

Along the estuary, the former waste ground is now home to a variety of wildflowers and shrubs creating ideal habitat for songbirds, migratory warblers, butterflies and short-eared owls which hunt here over winter when the grass is shorter.

You'll find plenty of new native planting here and, during the winter months, up to 130,000 wading birds arrive in this internationally important site.

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9. Viewing area (SJ 20641 77425)

After around 800m you'll arrive at a curved viewing area, overlooking a natural high tide bird roost on the marsh below. The path had to be carefully re-routed here to avoid disturbing this vital habitat.

Follow the path along to a metal gate and pass through. Turn left and follow the signs for Bettisfield and Bagillt. This stretch is an excellent place to see oystercatchers feeding at low tide in the mudflats opposite.

Pass a community plaque on a large stone and cross over an overflow. Head through a metal kissing gate and continue along the embankment through two more gates (SJ 20641 77425).

Head down over a cattle access point, where cows can access the salt marsh to feed and head through another gate (SJ 21071 76554).

The route here is swathed in wildflowers with hawthorn and elder berries in the autumn and purple sea aster and samphire growing along the salt marsh during the summer.

If you see something red and unusual looking growing on the wild roses here, it's probably robin's pincushion - a pretty, red, fibrous growth containing larvae from the gall wasp.

A little further on walk past a turning and an area of gorse, veer left down a sloping gravel track through what was once an old coal tip (SJ 21361 76242).

Walk straight along the track, past a railway bridge, through another gate and stop when you hear the sound of rushing water.

10. Milwr Outfall Tunnel (SJ 21383 76075)

The tunnel here is an outfall built in the early 1900s to drain the former mine works in the Halkyn Mountain near Holywell.

The tunnel stretched for 10 miles and drained over 50 veins, creating a labyrinth of over 60 miles of interconnected passageways.

Water from the holy well also flows through here and local people refer to this spot as 'The Holy'.

Continue straight along a tarmac path passing the old red brick pithead building on your right which is now part of a scrap metal business.

11. Bettisfield Colliery (SJ 21542 75957)

There were 11 known coal mines in Bagillt during the 19th century with Bettisfield Colliery being the largest and most important, employing over 500 men, and producing both house and steam coal – used by steam trains and ships.

The pithead building would have housed the main winding engine house and winding shaft.

Amazingly some mine shafts were dug under the estuary itself with only two small pumps to drain the water away, but no flooding was ever reported.

The most well-known mine, Point of Ayr colliery further down the estuary, was one of the last deep coal mines in Wales and by 1953 was producing 213,000 tons of coal a year. It closed in 1996.

Turn left at the signpost for Bettisfield and walk towards a small inlet used by local fishermen.

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12. Fisherman's Inlet (SJ 21621 76189)

Local fishermen have fished here for generations, landing seasonal catches from cockles to shrimp and bass and played a key role in the regeneration of the docks area.

Turn right and follow a grassy track up over the hill towards an impressive dragon sculpture on top of the hill.

13. Dragon sculpture (SJ 21707 76110)

The sculpture is made from steel and has a beacon on its back which is lit along with other beacons along the coast during special events. Underneath it lies a time capsule, placed there by local people and due to be opened in 50 years' time.

Walk downhill towards the pithead building (SJ 21566 75933). Pass through a kissing gate, and along a landscaped path, past a wooden sculpture known locally as Bettisfield Bob who was once stolen and found on the top of Halkyn Mountain.

Veer left and follow the path running parallel to a minor road, just yards from the railway line and the busy A548.

14. Halkyn marble gate posts (SJ 21974 75582)

A little further on, on your left hand-side you'll come across two gateposts made from local Halkyn Mountain marble. The fronts of the posts have been polished and sandblasted to create fish designs and when wet the real fossils beneath are revealed.

Walk along the track to the old Bagillt Docks and the inlet at Station Gutter.

15. Station Gutter (SJ 22175 75433)

The inlet, now silted up, used to be a very busy quay, exporting goods from the area around Bagillt where lead smelting, coal mining, brewing and rope making all took place.

At its peak, up to 30 ships a day would land here carrying lead, coal and copper as well as passengers from Liverpool on their way to Denbigh and Flint.

Nowadays the big ships sail past as they make their way from the Airbus wing factory at Broughton to Mostyn Dock and then on to Toulouse.

You may also see giant wind turbines being ferried down the estuary to wind farm sites.

Cross over a stone bridge and turn left towards Flint. Walk through a kissing gate and out along a track following a curving embankment with superb vistas over the golden sands, which glisten and catch the sun at low tide.

Opposite is Parkgate where Lord Nelson and his mistress Lady Hamilton often stayed. She was from nearby Ness and used to bathe at Parkgate to cure a skin complaint.

Follow the trail along a long, flat section known as Panton Cop for half a mile and down into a slight dip.

Keep left and walk up a slope, passing through a metal gate and up onto a narrow, enclosed pathway that brings you back alongside the sea. The track then widens as you pass through an area planted with native trees, shrubs and plenty of buddleia.

At a fork in the track, turn left (SJ23810 74112) and walk through a small wooded area of silver birch trees emerging at Flint Point.

16. Flint Point (SJ 24556 74028)

Here you'll find another beacon which is lit for special events as well as magnificent views back up the estuary towards Greenfields and down river towards the Flintshire Bridge and Connah's Quay Power Station.

Keep right and follow the winding river around the inlet. At the end of the path turn left and follow a short section of road down through a business park. Turn left again, back onto the coastal path and past the remains of Flint Dock.

17. Flint Dock (SJ 24315 73593)

The dock was built in the 1800s to export lead from Halkyn Mountain and later coal and timber as the boatyard developed. It's hard to believe but this quiet quayside was once the busiest place in Flint and also the dirtiest and most polluted due to the chemicals heavy industry used here.

Follow a winding path around the dock and into the woods beyond with glimpses of the estuary between the trees. Follow the path as it snakes its way all the way to Flint Castle.

18. Flint Castle (SJ 24679 73357)

This magnificent castle was the first of a series of castles built during Edward I's campaign to conquer Wales and known as the 'iron ring'.

It was built in a strategic position only one day's march from Chester and easily resupplied by boat.

It's had a colourful past, being attacked by Welsh forces under the command of Dafydd ap Gruffydd, brother of Llewellyn the Last and attacked again in 1294 during the revolt of Madog ap Llewellyn.

During the English Civil War, Flint Castle was held by the Royalists and finally captured by the Parliamentarians in 1647 after a three-month siege.

Oliver Cromwell later ordered the castle to be destroyed to prevent its reuse and the ruins are what you see today.

This marks the end of the walk along the magnificent Dee estuary. Flint town centre is just around the corner where there is a regular bus service taking you back to the starting point in Holywell.