

- At the Priory, pick up the footpath that heads out past a field gate and over a stile into a wood. Pass through this to briefly join a service road leading to the gates of the waterworks, before turning left at the gates to continue between two metal fences. Follow the fence line, and where it veers right climb the stile on to the open river floodplain.

St. Thomas Priory was founded in 1174 by Gerard fitz Brian, a local landowner and burgess, and settled by canons from Darley Abbey in Derbyshire. Following England's break with the Church of Rome in 1534, the Priory was surrendered to the Crown and passed to the Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry. The Priory survives well, with standing masonry and earthworks and buried remains and is a Scheduled Monument.

- Proceed along the lower ground to a fenced pool and trees and here turn left towards a gate to follow a route with trees on the right and a wire fence on the left, heading towards a dense tree line in the distance. Enter the woods (Black Covert), and veer slightly right to leave via a double-stile bridge before following the track to Holdiford Road.

- Turn right and follow the road to re-cross the river and railway. Turn right into the service road used earlier. Cross the main road to Milford Common car park. If you started from the Punch Bowl then at the rear of the car park climb the three steps adjacent to the information board to take the path up through the trees, past the pool (on the left) and immediately follow the narrower track to climb again into trees. Continue around the bend to a junction of paths and take the second on the left up the cutting. Climb to the top, turn left down a wide path, then first left to pick up the path back to the Punch Bowl car park.



a national landscape

Cannock Chase has been protected since 1958 as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) for the beauty of its heaths, forests and historic parklands, its abundant wildlife and rich cultural heritage.

At just 26 square miles (69 square kilometres), it is located in Staffordshire and is mainland England's smallest AONB.

about these walks

- This is one of a series of walks exploring Cannock Chase.
- The Chase is a working landscape and routes are undertaken at walker's own risk.
- Plan ahead and be prepared. Wear suitable footwear and clothing and carry food and drink.
- Whilst every care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of route directions, neither the Ramblers nor AONB can accept responsibility for errors or omissions, or for changes in the details given.

protect · respect · enjoy



Be a Chase Champion – Follow the Cannock Chase Code

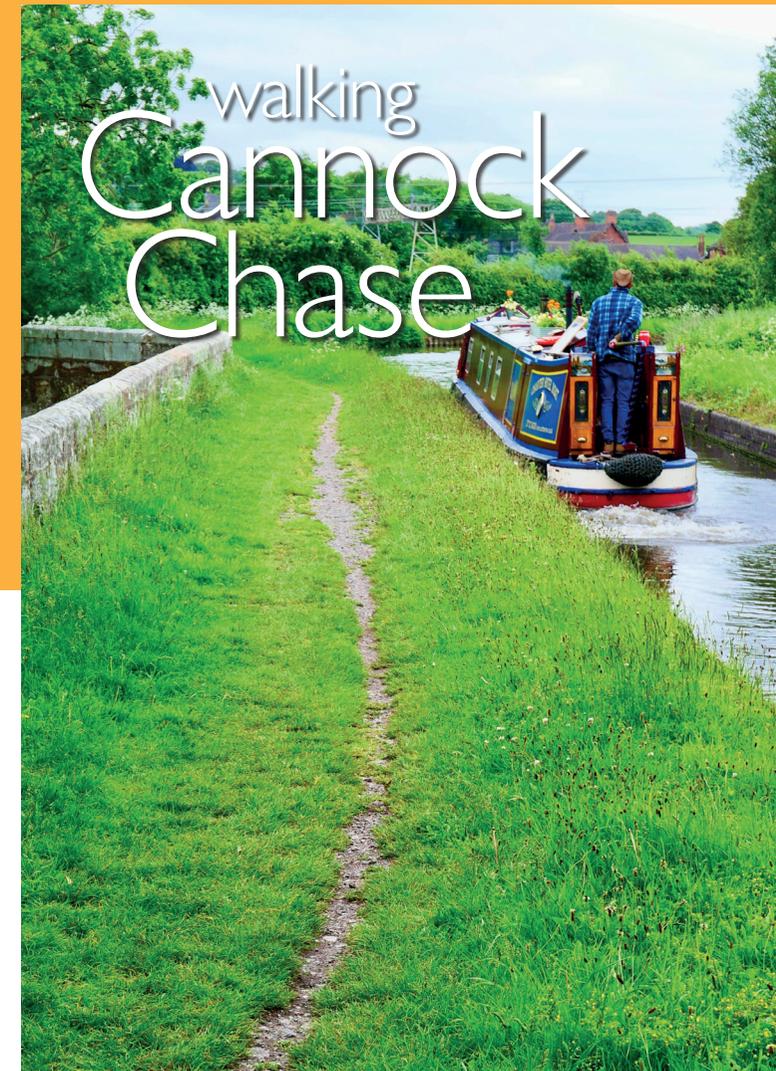
Front cover image: Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal

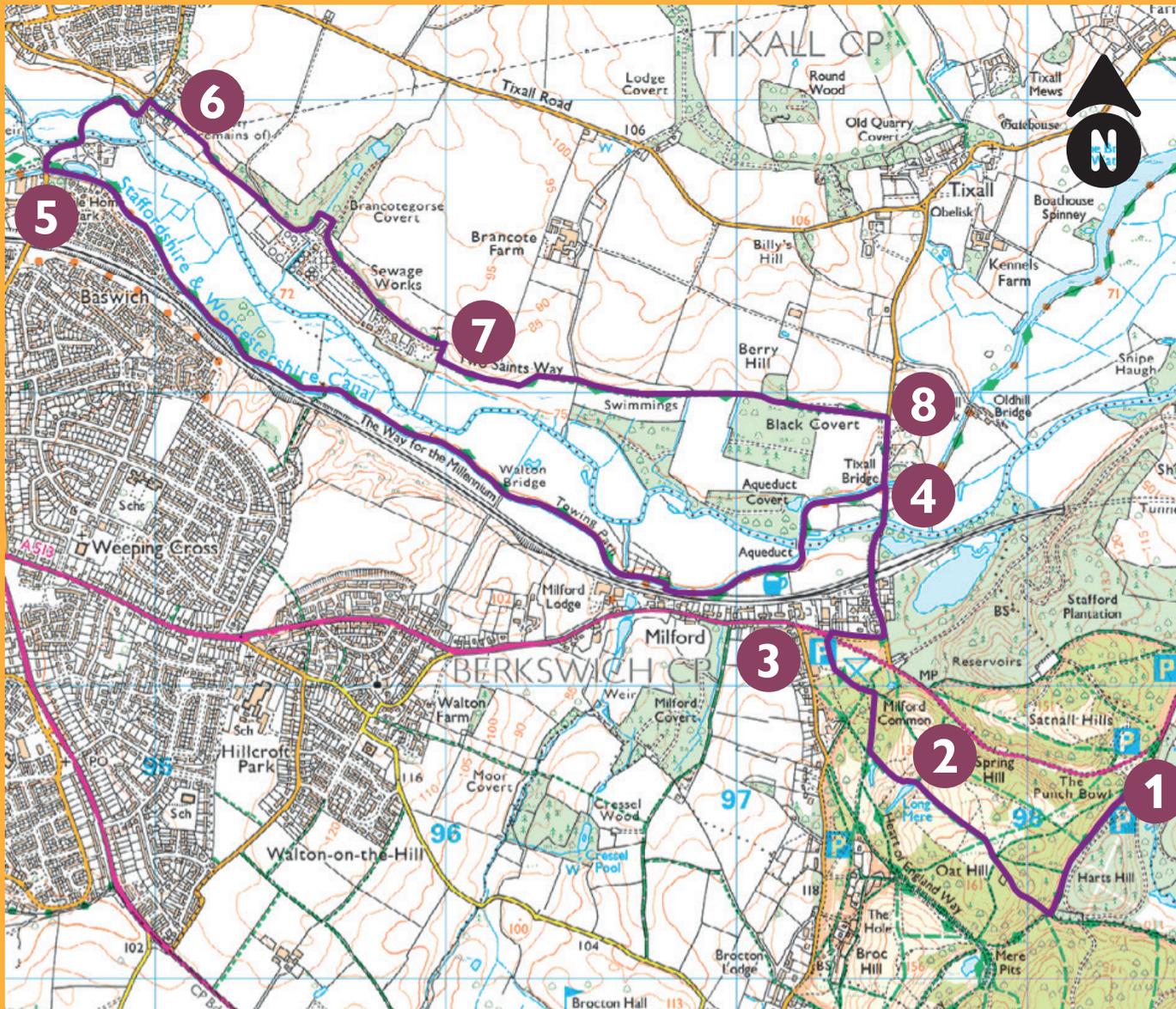
Date of issue: September 2023

Sow Valley

Self-guided walk 8 ¼ miles / 3 hours

Explore canal and ecclesiastical heritage in the north of the AONB





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Difficulty: Easy

Route Terrain: Towpaths, Tracks, Lanes

Start/finish: The Punch Bowl car park

Grid ref: SJ 983 207

Postcode for SatNav: ST17 0UP

OS map: OS Explorer 244 Cannock Chase & Chasewater

the walk

1. Starting from the Punch Bowl car park take the wide bridleway in the rear corner of the car park (past barrier). Follow it downhill and where this crosses / joins another bridleway go right until reaching a path

on the right passing down a steep cutting.

2. Go down this path, then at a junction of paths turn slightly right to follow a good track that initially climbs then descends past a pool before entering woods that lead down into the car park at Milford Common. (Alternate start/finish for the walk).

Milford Common is a popular spot for local people and has traditionally been the site for travelling fairs. With the development of the railways it became a destination for visitors from the towns and cities, especially the Potteries.

3. Cross over the car park and the grass play area, then (carefully) the main road (A513). Turn right on to the service road. Turn left at the road junction, (signposted Tixall & Great Haywood), and continue along this road to cross the railway and river bridges before arriving at the canal (taking care as there are no pavements). Descend to the canal towpath and turn left keeping the canal to the right.

The high plateau which forms the core of Cannock Chase falls off steeply along its northern edge into the Trent Valley and its tributary the Sow. The low-lying alluvial floodplains form a distinctive meadowland landscape.

4. Follow the path along the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal passing over the aqueduct above the River Sow and at the next bridge (Milford Bridge, N^o. 105) the towpath switches to the opposite bank. The canal now follows a route between the River Sow on the right and the railway on the left. Continue along the towpath until reaching St Thomas Bridge No. 101. Leave the canal here to arrive at Baswich Lane.

The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal is an early narrow canal engineered by James Brindley, completed in 1772. The canal is designated a Conservation Area.

5. Turn right to follow the lane along the verge (taking care as there is no pavement), to cross the River Sow again and after a further (narrow) bridge eventually meet St. Thomas Lane, joining from the left. Turn right and follow the wide track towards the remains of St. Thomas Priory.