

Discover Cannock Chase Brindley Heath Trails

At (20), turn right and walk uphill to (21). Looking back, you can see industrial buildings in the distance; these are in an Enterprise zone on the site of the old West Cannock No. 5 pit. In Norman times, this whole area was a Royal hunting forest. Deer, wild boar and hare were hunted here and wolves roamed the woodlands and heathy glades. By the 16th century, it was a vast heathland stretching from south of Stafford to Sutton Coldfield. Deer and hare remained but shared the landscape with grazing animals, including sheep, cattle, ducks and rabbits.

In front of you is the Toc 'H' trail, built by volunteers from that organisation for people with disabilities. At post (21a) ahead, you can see colonies of crowberry. Continue to the road at (22). Cross, and follow the track to (23), heading left over an area of grasses, heather and gorse, from which skylarks and meadow pipits may be seen. The Visitor Centre and car park are ahead.

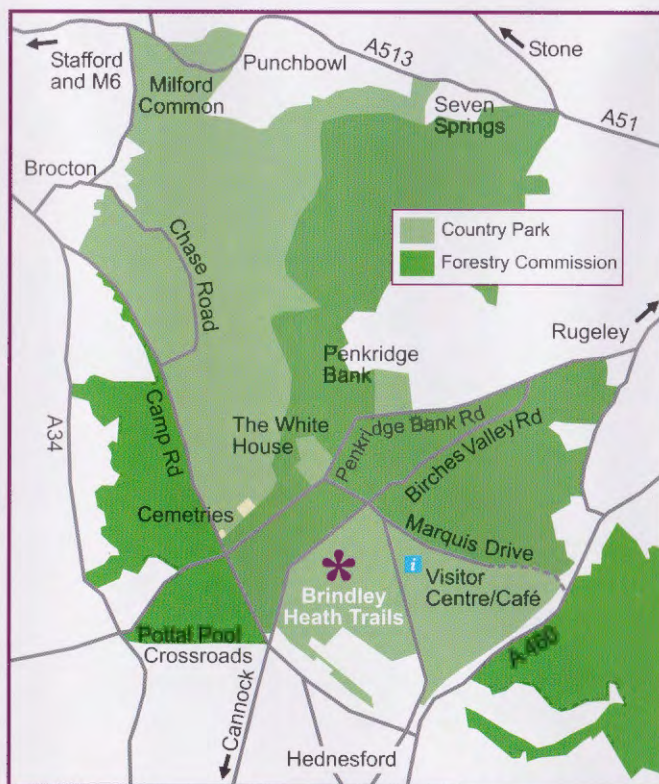
Red Trail - 1¼ miles - approx 1 hour.

This short walk will take about an hour. Follow the Blue Trail as far as post (7), then turn left at the crossroads of the Tackeroo embankment. You will pass on the left the pool and bridge which are part of the Toc H Trail for people with disabilities. You will see ahead at post (7a) the alternating strips of grass where sleepers were removed 70 years ago, and in between, traces of ash & ballast.

Where you now walk, from 1915 the "Tackeroo Express" was cajoled into making its 5 mile journey from No. 5 Pit sidings past the White House and Anson Bank to the Army Service Corps Stores at the head of Oldacre Valley and on to Milford. The original railway took the line of the present road up to Marquis Drive, but it proved too steep for the light colliery locomotives, and the route across Brindley Heath provided a gentler gradient.

Continue down the track to post (20) and follow as for the Blue Trail above.

Brindley Heath Location



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Publications regarding Cannock Chase and other Country Parks, walking and countryside events in Staffordshire are available from -

**Environment and Countryside Unit,
Development Services Directorate,
Riverway, Stafford, ST16 3TJ.
Telephone Stafford (01785) 277264.**

<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/environment/e-land/>

Should you, or someone you know require it, this information can also be produced, on request, in large print and in other formats or languages other than English.





BILBERRY
Ridged stem, deciduous finely-toothed leaves. Single black berries.



COWBERRY
Round stem, thin dark green leaves, profuse spots under. Cluster of red berries.



CHASEBERRY
(A naturally occurring hybrid between bilberry and cowberry). Round stem, sometimes ridged. Finely toothed leaves, few spots below. Few purple berries.



CROWBERRY
Mat forming shrub. Crowded shiny green leaves, white rib under. Black berries.



Heather and Gorse

- Waymarked trail
- Footpaths
- Great War remains
- Parking
- Picnic sites
- Toilets (for disabled)
- Information
- Trail post



Brindley Heath Trails

Cannock
2½ miles

Green Trail - 2 miles - approx 2 hours.

From Brindley Village car park, walk a few metres to the track's junction, turning right immediately to trail post (A). Walk towards post (B), noticing on your left, a variety of planted tree species, including Scots pine, Japanese larch, and sweet chestnut. A spring creates a damp area where soft rush occurs. These were planted for landscape purposes and to provide a timber crop, and some is due for thinning as part of good silvicultural practice. Notice the difference between the conifers such as the finer leaves of the larch and different cones.

At post (C), turn left. A little further on the right at (D) is an area of open heathland, predominantly heather – purple-flowered in late summer, but being invaded by self set pine and birch from neighbouring areas. The young pine can be aged by counting the whorls of branches, each whorl being equivalent to a year. Imagine this place 200 years ago – hardly a tree in sight with huge flocks of the now extinct Cannock Grey-Face sheep roaming across the landscape and keeping the heathland open. Such areas of heathland today represent a key wildlife habitat, designated by English Nature as part of the Cannock Chase Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). More recently, as a result of the

acknowledgement of the important heathland communities on the Chase and its scarcity in Europe, the SSSI area has also become a candidate Special Area for Conservation or cSAC. This puts the Chase heaths firmly on the map as an area of international significance.

There have been many unplanned fires in this area, including the devastating one in 1976. Some charring may still be seen on any older trees in the area. Further down the track at (E), birch and pine invasion has been controlled, but it quickly re-invades without further management. In the past, grazing kept these areas open, and in its absence, mechanical methods have to be used to maintain these important open heathland areas.

Ahead at the track junction at (F) is a stand of Corsican pines, planted as a timber crop; notice the grey bark and longer, twisted needles than those of the Scots Pines. Turn right here and continue up the slope to (G). There has been large scale clearance of pine and birch in this area.

As the gradient levels out, you emerge from the trees; follow the track past a small field and

continue to post (H). Turn sharp left and walk along the hawthorn hedgerow which protects the paddocks that were once heathland from deer. On the left and opposite post (I) is a large colony of 'Chaseberry' or hybrid bilberry, now invaded by bracken. A little further and within this triangle of land, self-set oak and pine can be seen. Continue to post (J) and turn right at the tracks' crossing point. Take the left fork to (K) and turn left again. The main track soon bears right, where you pass through an area where grazing and bracken control trials took place on the heathland in the late 1970's and early 1980's.

At post (L) turn left; walking downhill, you pass an area where heather was cut for packing in the Potteries up to the 1940's. Turn left on to the main track (Duffield's Lane) at post (18) between banks of heather, bilberry and cowberry. A programme of bracken control here has enabled these species to flourish again.

About 200 metres after post (17) look out for an old pedunculate oak close to the track. Brindley Village car park is just ahead.

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Hednesford
1½ miles

Brindley Heath - a history

Brindley Heath – 185 hectares (457 acres) of woodland, plantation and open heath, is the nearest part of Cannock Chase to Hednesford. Its name reminds us that the Brindley family farmed on the Chase for generations.

Cannock Chase was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1958 and is one of a family of 37 in England. At 68km², it is the smallest mainland AONB.



Brindley Village, 1926

The name 'Brindley Village' is of more recent origin; during the Great War, a military hospital was built here, and from 1924, miners of the West Cannock Colliery Company No. 5 pit were housed in the recently abandoned buildings. By 1926, a club and school had been installed, and the hospital chapel re-dedicated as St. Mary's Church.

By the late 1950's, the buildings were demolished, but remains may still be found amongst the vegetation – as with the railway track where from 1915 the 'Tackeroo Express' carried supplies to the 1500 huts of the Rugeley and Brocton camps, hurriedly built on the nearby heathland of the Chase.

Brindley Heath is steeped in memories, and together with its natural history, provides interesting walks in very pleasant countryside.

Brindley Heath - Blue and Red Trails

To follow these circular trails, walk in the direction shown by the arrows on the posts, which start and finish at the Visitor Centre at Marquis Drive.

Blue Trail - 2¼ miles - approx 2 hours.

Leaving the Visitor Centre at post (1), walk over the grassed area to (2). Cross the road and make your way over to the corner of the former RAF camp playing field to (2a). Notice the pioneer heather in the closely mown grass and the mature pines planted as a commercial crop to the right.

Cross the road, bearing to the right towards post (3). Notice the rowan tree to your left which provides food for blackbirds and fieldfares, and the more open heathland and grasses on the right. With the car park on your left and the BT tower straight ahead, follow the track to post (4). Take the right fork. Notice the carpet-like colonies at the edges of the trees, including heather, crowberry, cowberry, bilberry and 'Chaseberry', as it is locally known.

Walk down hill past banks of heather and bilberry. Pine clearance on the right has left standing birch as songposts for passing birds like long-tailed tits moving between nearby plantations. Deer hoof prints or 'slots' can sometimes be seen in the softer ground, though the deer themselves are rarely seen. Their presence may however, be confirmed by bark-stripped trees in the area.

At post (6), you can see the nearest of the four concrete filter beds remaining from the Great War sewage works on the left. Scattered concrete blocks make an ideal basking place for lizards and snakes on a warm summer's day. On the wall of a triangular sludge bed you can see an inscription with the date '1916'. The ground nearby, enriched by effluent, has encouraged the growth of hawthorn shrubs.

From post (6), walk down the track which now crosses the original effluent ditch to post (7). The embankment of the former Tackeroo railway runs through the trees on the left. Turn right and notice the purple moor grass and soft rush, indicative of the former marsh in this area (8). Heather on the left is gradually succumbing to invading self-set pine here.

Walk on across the car park to the barrier on the left (9) and up the slope through the trees. Emerging from the trees (10), cross a patch of open heath, once the playing field of the former hospital and later, Brindley Village and school. Look out for puffballs along the track.

(11) Cross the tarmac of the former school playground, noticing the concrete bases of the earlier hospital buildings (12). Turn right along the curving track, past the mains water manhole cover (not cast in the Black Country).

At (13), turn left round the former Officers' quarters, along the main drive lined by laurels and rhododendrons – most likely planted by recuperating soldiers. In the old willows on the left, both green and greater-spotted woodpeckers may be seen and heard. Post (14) marks the entrance to the hospital reception block; the concrete flagpole base a few metres on the left marks the centre of this area.

At (15), if you are flagging, turn left and follow posts (7) to (1) back to the Visitor centre. Otherwise, turn right to (16); concrete remains on the left show the site of the hospital Sisters' quarters. Continue downhill to (17), then left along the valley bottom track (Duffields Lane), with banks of heather and bilberry on either side. At (18), heather used to be cut for packing in the Potteries up to the 1940's.

Continue along the valley to post (19). Turning left, you are now on the Tackeroo railway embankment. Over on the right at the roadside are posts marking tank crossing points used in trials of Army vehicles assembled in Stafford after the last war. In a hollow on the right is a cluster of mature elderberry bushes, with their white, heavy-scented flowers in May and profuse black berries in autumn. On the left, once an extensive marsh, rushes and purple moor grass can be seen.