

WALK 5

A Walk Around the Bollin

Graham Beech

The River Bollin is your constant companion for most of this walk and there's plenty to see along the way, including Styal Mill and the varied woodland, birdlife and rolling rural landscape that surround Wilmslow. This is pretty much unchanged since the first (1985) edition of my 'East Cheshire Walks' – but in more recent editions I altered the route through Styal's Northern Woods so that you can see the attractive old bridges built for the mill owners.

Starting Point: Twinnies Bridge car park at the western end of The Carrs, Wilmslow. OS grid ref: SJ839823.

How to get there: the entrance to the car park is off the B5166 road, part-way from Wilmslow to Styal.

Map: OS Explorer 268 – Wilmslow, Macclesfield & Congleton

Length: 5 miles

Grade: Easy, but with a few short climbs. Some parts very muddy in the winter!

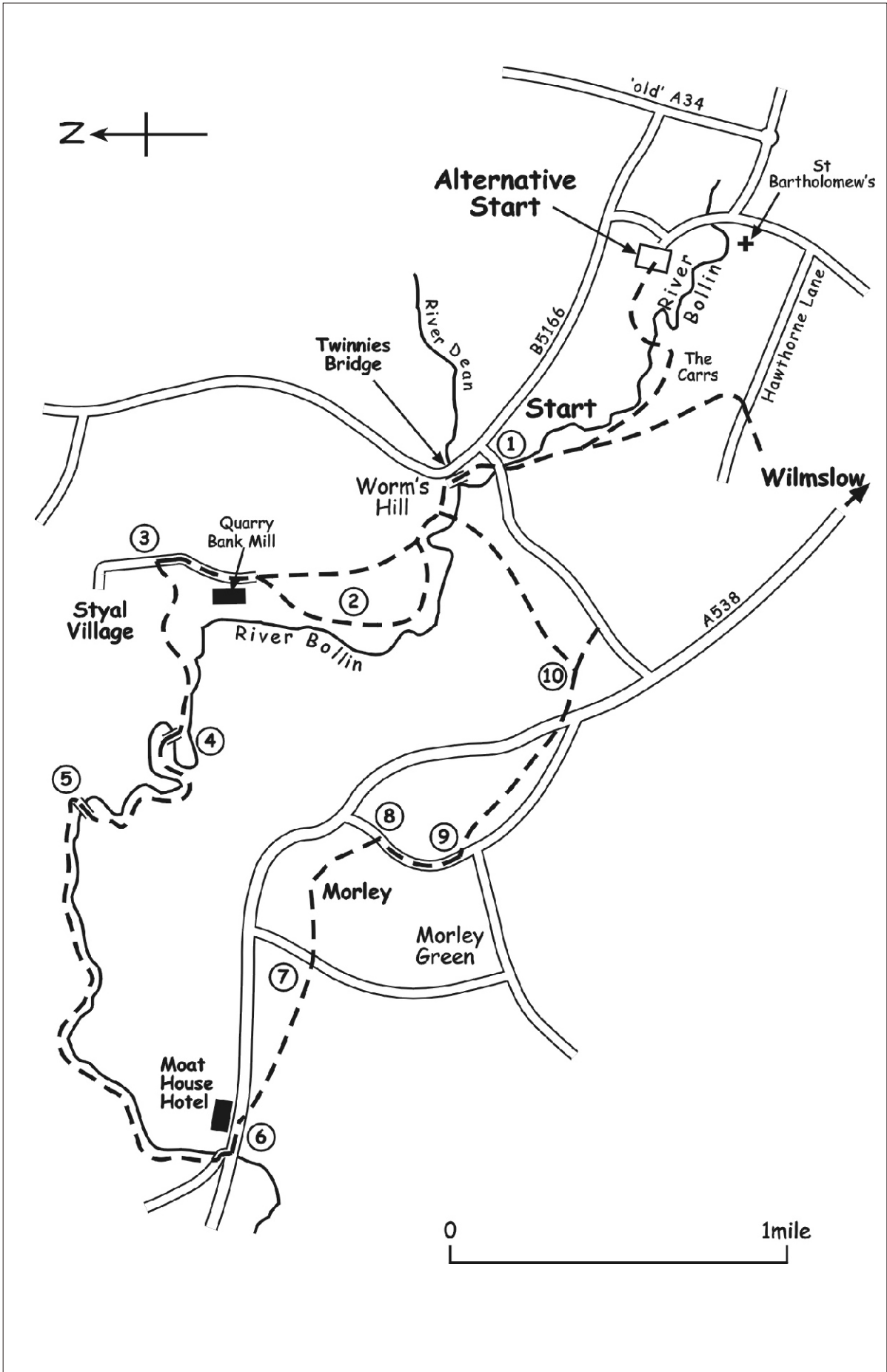
Duration: two and a half hours

From Twinnies Bridge car park (1) walk between the toilet block and the River Bollin to the bridge across the River Dean. Head for Quarry Bank Mill and **either** go straight ahead to keep close to the river (2) **or** cross Worm's Hill (to the right and uphill), along the path used by the mill apprentices for their Sunday treks to and from Wilmslow's parish church

When you reach the mill, note the mill yard. The cobbles are 'erratics' – stones displaced from their usual locations by glacial action. Workers were paid to collect them during the 'Cotton Famine' of the early 1860s when supplies of cotton had dwindled due to the American Civil War and cotton spinning had been suspended.

The mill, together with the 500-acre Styal estate, was given to the National Trust by the Greg family in 1959. Live demonstrations and hands-on displays, combined with a magnificent 50-ton restored waterwheel and noisy, working cotton machinery recreate the spirit of the Industrial Revolution. The mill is open from 11am to 5pm every day in the summer and from 11am to 4pm, Wednesday to Sunday, in the winter. The garden of Quarry Bank House first opened its gates to the public in 2008. For current hours phone 01625 527468 or visit the website at tinyurl.com/a3pz44.

Carry on past the mill and up the tarmac drive. Along the way, look out for a cobbled footpath, signposted to Morley, on the left. This was part of a packhorse route from Northwich to Yorkshire, used for the transport of salt in one direction, and wool on the return journey. A particular advantage for the packhorse masters ('jaggers') was that it avoided crossing the Lancashire boundary and thereby escaped two sets of





Styal Mill

tolls. Nowadays, you can use it as a short cut – see note at end of the walk description.

Pass Quarry Bank House and continue uphill, noticing the occasional large cobblestones set into the side of the drive: these enabled horse-drawn carts to pause for a while, so that the horses could have a breather. 100m or so up the drive, turn left (3) as indicated by the 'Northern Woods' sign and turn sharp, hairpin left at the National Trust sign ('Styal – To the Woods') along a footpath that leads above Quarry Bank House.

Pass the entrance to Norcliffe Gardens and, with a wood to your left and a field to your right, proceed to a T-junction with a notice board. Turn right here, then left across the arched wooden bridge. Turn left again and follow the path which soon zigzags down stone steps and crosses Chapel Bridge, constructed for Robert

Greg as a convenient route to the mill from nearby Norcliffe Hall. Having crossed the bridge, keep left again on a path with a steep ravine on your left and go generally downhill, above the lovely stone-arched Folly Bridge, all the way to Kingfisher Bridge (but there's no guarantee of seeing a kingfisher!)

Don't cross this bridge but instead turn right, following the Bollin downstream and continuing on a wide, obvious track – keep left at a fork in the path to stay alongside the Bollin. The river is getting cleaner nowadays with fish and wildfowl along its entire length; chub, dace and trout are increasingly common. The next bridge is Oxbow Bridge (4) – oxbow lakes are created by the constant erosion of soft riverbanks by a meandering river such as the Bollin. There's no oxbow lake here as yet and you'd have to wait many years for one to form, so cross the bridge and turn left (upstream for a short distance), then up and down flights of steps to reach the river again. Follow the path to 'Giant's Castle Bridge' (5), largely paid for by the proceeds of a sponsored walk from Land's End to John O'Groats some years ago. Note the brick arch in the far bank of the river: this is the end of the tailrace tunnel from Styal Mill, some three-quarters of a mile upstream from here.

Cross the bridge then climb 135 steps to the rocky outcrop of Giant's Castle. Not sure about the 135? Run back down and count them again! Continue and descend 92 steps (how odd!) and follow the path between the river and the woods, all the way to the 'old' road leading to the Holiday Inn hotel (6).

Immediately before the car park of the hotel, turn right along a narrow snicket, keeping the high wooden fence on your left. If the snicket is too overgrown, walk

through the hotel car park instead. Either way, emerge onto the pavement and cross the busy A538 to a kissing gate and signpost to the right of a bus stop. The path goes across the field with the river far to your right, through another gate and then up a steep slope and almost straight across a large field. Bear slightly left and cross a footbridge, then turn left to follow the field edge. This leads to a stile with a Bollin Valley Way marker and then towards the hamlet of Shady Grove. Continue along a track, past a house with yapping dogs, to Dooleys Lane and then on to Morley Green Road. Turn left here for 250m and then right at a tarmac drive (7) with signpost.

Continue along the drive on what soon becomes a cobbled surface, and pass some handsome white-painted cottages. Keep to the right of a garage, cross a stile and follow a waymark (45 degrees left) across the field to the next stile. Go straight ahead to another stile leading onto a country lane (8). Turn right here and continue for about 200m to Moss Grove Farm (9) where you turn left and follow an ancient green lane to Mobberley Road. Turn left here and walk to the A538, which you cross to join a track.

Shortly before a bridge (10), turn left (Bollin Valley Way sign) and follow the pleasant path through the woods behind King's Road and Wilmslow Rugby Club. This stretch is a delight in springtime, with wonderful displays of bluebells on the banks and Pigginshawe Brook far below. How surprising that such a small stream can have cut such a deep ravine?.

There's a helpful stretch of boardwalk through a particularly damp area (lots of water-loving wild flowers to identify) before you re-join the Bollin. Very soon, you cross the bridge over the river and you're back at Twinnies car park.

Notes

Alternative start: you can start from the Parish Hall at the other end of The Carrs, but note that the car park is now pay-and-display with a two-hour limit except on Sundays. From here take either the dog-walkers' route alongside the river, or the less-well-used public path through the wooded slope on your extreme left of The Carrs. This latter path leads you below the ruins of the private chapel of Pownall Hall (St Olaf's), then drops down to Twinnies car park.

Short cut: to cut a mile and a half off the route, after walking through the mill yard at Styal Mill, turn left at the cobbled footpath, signposted to Morley. Follow this up to a farm and go through its often muddy farmyard to the A538. Turn right, pass the Honey Bee pub then take the first turn left towards Morley Green. Follow the rest of the walk from point (7), having turned left along the tarmac drive.