WALK 2: RAMBLING AROUND THE RUNWAYS

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This is a shortened version of the “Wilmslow to Castle Hill” walk in my book, “East Cheshire Walks”. It fits nicely into a morning or afternoon and, since it begins and ends at a pub, you can reward yourselves with lunch or just a well-earned pint at the bar.

As you’ll guess from the title, the walk takes you around and under the runways of Manchester International Airport so take a camera, as you’ll have some excellent views of aircraft taking off and landing. But there’s more to it than plane-spotting: fish can be spotted in the Bollin, and there’s an opportunity to find out about an important prehistoric site just a short distance from Manchester Airport’s second runway!

Starting Point: Car park in Racecourse Road, SJ833814

How to get there: off the A538 near the Boddington & Dragon. Use this only as a starting or meeting point; cars parked here are a prime target for thieves and vandals – park on a side road instead.

Map: OS Explorer 268 – Wilmslow, Macclesfield & Congleton

Length: 7 miles

Grade: Easy/ Moderate. Note that this walk can be quite muddy in the winter, so be sure to wear suitable footwear.

Duration: 3½ hours

Walk from the Boddington and Dragon pub (1) along the A538 in the Altrincham direction, past the Texaco petrol station and the futuristic office building. Turn left along Mobberley Road. Very soon, take the first turn right on a path signposted to Morley Green. Walk along this path, part of the Bollin Valley Way for 200m or so, then along a track to a tarmac lane. Cross this and go over a stile to the right of a farm (2). Head slightly to the right and follow a narrower rutted section. As the terrain opens out, keep the hedge on your right and head towards a bungalow to the right of the houses. Pass an old greenhouse on your left, then walk along the narrow hedge-lined corridor to Morley Green Road. Turn right here and, after about 100m, left into Dooleys Lane (3).

Walk down the lane, then continue on a grassy track (follow footpath sign), passing a house with yappy dogs and go over a stile. From here, bear right across the field towards the far corner of the field, ignoring the stile on your right but following the two-way footpath sign perched in the middle of the field; head for the far corner to cross a stile and a small bridge. Follow the path through the woods and above the Bollin. When you emerge from the trees and the path levels out, you come to a signpost (4) with three blank arms (very odd!) where you turn right through a gate.
Pass through a second gate with the runway tunnel temptingly ahead – but bear left from here and soon slant uphill on the same bearing, then follow the fence around the copse on your right. Ignore any stiles – these are nothing to do with the main route – just keep going until you reach a third gate. Here, turn right towards the tunnel again and drop down towards an excellent interpretation panel which includes information on a nearby prehistoric settlement dating from the Neolithic/Early Bronze Age; this is part of the Runway Two Trail published by Manchester Airport and is downloadable as a PDF from: http://tiny.cc/pnYjj.

Cross the footbridge (5) over the River Bollin, turn left and walk through the bright and airy tunnel. Surprisingly, there is no barrier between the walkway and the river, so keep an eye on any children in your party. Emerge from the tunnel, pause to read the panel about the ecology of the immediate area, then turn left at a T-junction and
follow the road. After 300m or so, turn left over a bridge and continue uphill as far as a cattle grid (6).

Ignore a signposted path to the right but continue straight ahead across a cattle grid, soon with the ILS (Instrument Landing System) area on your right. At the end of the tarmac, cross a stile and continue ahead on a main track, ignoring right turns. Eventually you reach a tarmac lane (7) to start a lengthy loop around the end of the runway, soon glimpsed over to the left.

Now for a tour of the crash gates – necessary for emergency access to and egress from the airport: continue around the runway, soon passing Crash Gate 11, after which you go straight ahead along a signposted track. After crossing the access road to Crash Gate 10, follow the bridleway past the far end of the runway, soon passing a large pond on the left and going through a gateway. Turn left (‘Runway 2 Trail’ waymark), walk along a tarmac lane and pass through a gate towards Crash Gate 9. Walk along the bridleway, ignoring a signpost to the right but passing buildings on the right. Note Crash Gate 8 on your left, then fork left off the tarmac through a kissing gate and along a public footpath (8), with a fine stand of bulrushes on the right. Go through a gate and continue with a fence on your left, with yet more bulrushes over to the left.

With your mind now on less scary matters than plane crashes, go through the next gate, over a footbridge and turn right. Cross a stile and turn left along the road (Woodend Lane). After 30m, turn right (9) towards Oak Farm, keeping the fence on your right. Use the electricity post in the middle of the second field as a sight line to guide you to the footpath and stile to the right of the farm.

Cross the stile, turn left onto a road and then right into the farm. The path passes to the right of the farm buildings. Go across a series of waymarked stiles, then follow the line of the hedge, alternating from left to right and back to left again, Important note: watch out for the final left turn that takes you to the left-hand side of the hedge. This turn is very easy to miss – in which case, you’ll end up on the wrong side of the hedge! You eventually emerge at the road (10). Turn left here and walk past Burleyhurst Farm, still with its Monkey Puzzle Tree. A strange tree – first found in
about 1780 in Chile, where monkeys are not native but the tree is sacred to the indigenous Mapuche people.

Turn right just before the landmark tree to go over a stile and into the remains of a tree nursery (11). Keep ahead and slightly left, then cross a stile by a gate and continue on a raised track, passing a sign (partly hidden in the trees) pointing to the right. Ahead is an old stile (12) leading to a lake. Turn left here along an ancient tree-lined track, past the mobile home park on the right and through a gap in the trees with a wooden gatepost embedded in the undergrowth. From here, the path bears slightly right, over a small rise and past more mobile homes on your right to a further stile in the top-right-hand corner of the field. Go through this and then turn left to walk along Eccups Lane (13) to Mobberley Road. Turn right here, then right again along a track opposite to Morley Green Road.

(Note: The Cheshire Smokehouse is a short diversion along Morley Green Road. Maybe the restaurant isn’t ideal for sweaty and/or muddy walkers, but their pork pies and other products are highly recommended for picnics!)

After a couple of minutes along the track, turn left at the first house (‘Sunnyside’) and continue (14) along a wide path. After about 400 metres, where the path bends left, turn right at a waymark through a gate on your right (15) and then go straight ahead with the hedge on your right until you reach a surfaced lane, Greaves Road. Follow this to Altrincham Road, where you turn right and return to the starting point.