

## A circular walk around Helsby Hill and Woodhouse Hillfort



Discover the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge on foot

### Across the Valley

Almost opposite the house, turn right, off the road (before Bates Lane) on a signposted footpath to 'Burrows Lane' and 'Alvanley'. The path crosses the valley farmland ahead, alongside a deep field ditch, to emerge on narrow Burrows Lane. Turn left, and then right at the T-junction, uphill on the Ridgeway. Walk past the Foxhill pumping station, and turn left, off the road, onto a broad sandy bridleway signposted to 'Woodhouse Hill and Frodsham'.

For the next 1.5 kilometres, the path follows the waymarked Sandstone Trail gently uphill through **Snidley Moor Wood 5**. Together with Woodhouse Hill Wood and Frodsham Hill Wood, they represent the second largest continuous block of broadleaved woodland in Cheshire. As elsewhere along the ridge, buzzards nest in the treetops; watch for them circling overhead on outstretched 'V'-shaped wings, or listen for their drawn out 'pee-oo' cry.



#### Southern View

A pair of buzzards circle above Cheshire farmland with Beeston Castle in the distance

*"We would go up Helsby Hill as a gang, up the Gully or through the Quarry, with a jam butty and a drink, and stay all day."*

Barbara Foxwell, *Helsby Tuesday Club*

At the top of Snidley Moor Wood, turn left on a path just inside the trees, signposted for the 'Sandstone Trail'. Across the open fields to the north is low, wooded **Beacon Hill 6** topped by its twin microwave communication masts. The masts are the modern equivalent of the huge beacon fires lit on the hilltop throughout history to warn of imminent danger or invasion.

Follow the path as it curves to the right, then left, around the base of **Woodhouse Hill 7**. Up to the left are the tumbled ramparts of a late Bronze Age hilltop enclosure. Excavations in 2010 uncovered drystone walled facings to the ramparts, a possible stone slab lined grave, and two flint tools.

### Wooded Scarp

From the northern end of the hill, drop down the slope to the rock overhang, seat, interpretation panel, and viewpoint at Scouts Rock. Now turn left along the upper edge of the slope. At the southern end of Woodhouse Hill, bear right through a gap in the old boundary bank, immediately before a metal kissing gate into a new plantation. The path plunges down the wooded scarp, heading back towards Helsby Hill.

Leave the woods at the bottom of the slope, and follow the tarmaced drive gently downhill to Tarvin Road. On the left here are the grounds of **Foxhill house 8**. Built originally for Liverpool's Pilkington glass family, the Italianate-style Victorian country house is now a spiritual retreat and conference centre run by the Church of England. Its 30 hectare wooded grounds include an arboretum, or collection of exotic trees, and a lookout tower.

Turn left along Tarvin Road and immediately right, down sunken Chestnut Lane. When the lane narrows, continue ahead to cross a footbridge beside a **tiny ford 9**. Now a rare watery delight, fords are a reminder of a far older landscape, before the widespread bridge building of the Middle Ages.

### Up the Hill

Cross the field ahead and walk between gardens to emerge on unsurfaced Profitt's Lane. Across a second field, another path between gardens opens onto Bates Lane. Turn right here, downhill past the houses, and then left at the nearby crossroads, gently uphill on the Old Chester Road.

Almost immediately, turn left, off the road, on a narrow path signposted to 'Helsby Hill'. At the top of the slope, go over the stile ahead onto National Trust land, and take the steeper left-hand path ahead, signposted for 'Hill Top'. The path rises steadily around the steep, craggy northern and western flanks of Helsby Hill to cross the prehistoric ramparts back onto the summit. The sheer **sandstone cliffs 10** here were gouged into their present dramatic shapes by a vast icesheet pushing down from the north during the last Ice Age, around 22,000 years ago. Today, the sandstone crag is popular with climbers who test themselves on more than 140 routes up the three main buttresses.

Head for the Ordnance Survey 'trig point', then continue along the edge and down through the woods, to return down Hill Road South to the Helsby Quarry car park on Alvanley Road.



#### Iron Age Roundhouses

Excavations show that Iron Age homes were circular timber huts with roofs of thatch or turf

A series of other guides is available. Look out for four walks leaflets, four habitat leaflets, and six hillfort leaflets.

This leaflet was originally produced as part of the Habitats & Hillforts Project (2008-12) with the generous support of the Heritage Lottery Fund.

To learn more about the work of the Sandstone Ridge Trust and its partners, visit

[www.thesandstoneridgetrust.co.uk](http://www.thesandstoneridgetrust.co.uk)

For other walks, visit

[www.sandstonetrail.com](http://www.sandstonetrail.com)

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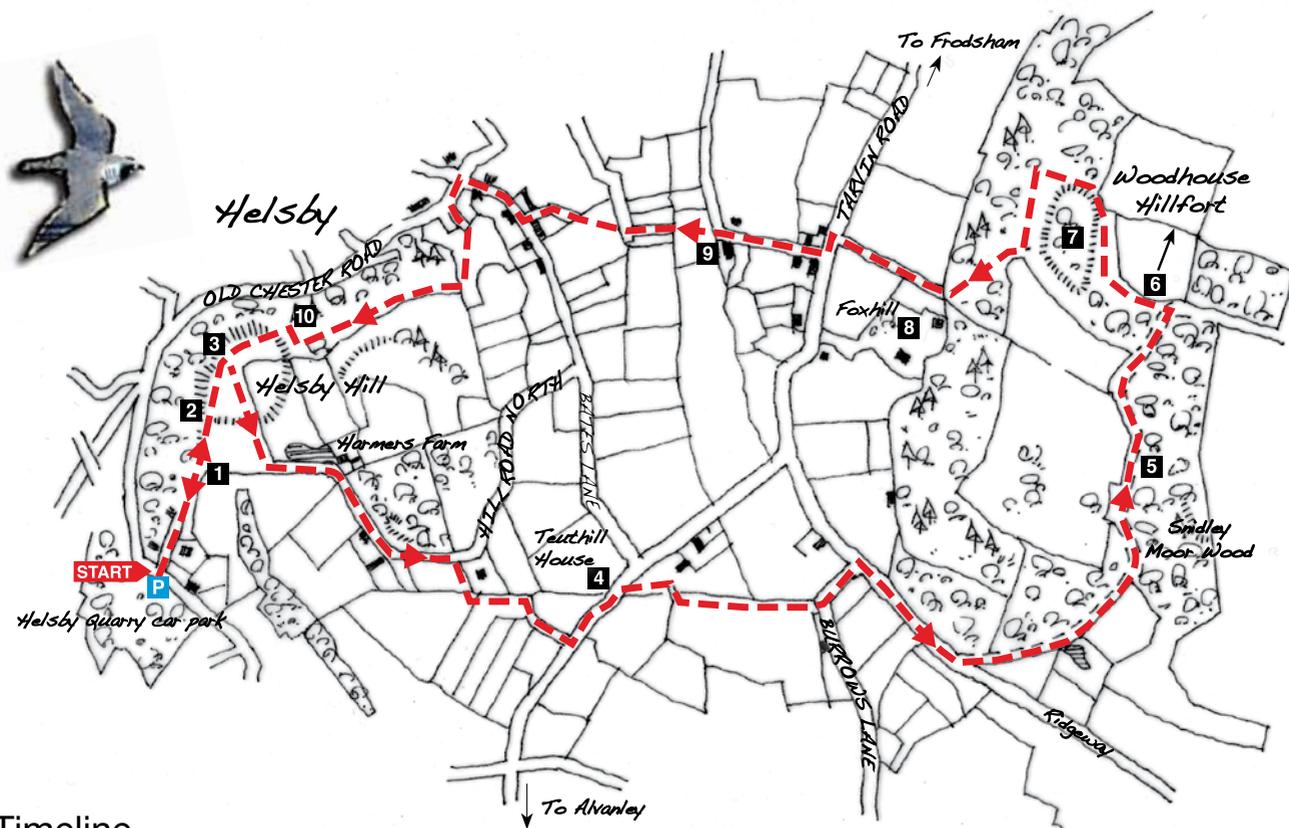
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# From Helsby Hill to Woodhouse Hillfort

An exhilarating circuit exploring two of Cheshire's most northerly hillforts

THIS POPULAR HALF-DAY CIRCUIT takes you to two of Cheshire's loveliest prehistoric hilltop enclosures. Enjoy breathtaking panoramic views from the rocky summit of Helsby Hill with its ancient defences, before crossing the valley to the tumbled ramparts of Woodhouse hilltop enclosure, high on the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge. Together, they provide the focus for a perfect walk.



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**Start:** Helsby Quarry car park (free), Alvanley Road, Helsby WA6 9PU. Map ref: SJ 491749

**Distance:** 7.5 kilometres/4¾ miles

**Difficulty:** Easy-Medium. Field and woodland paths and bridleways; short sections of country road. Two steep ascents onto Helsby Hill; sharp descent from Woodhouse Hill. Unsuitable for pushchairs and wheelchairs.

**Duration:** Allow 3 – 3½ hours

**Map:** OS 1:25,000 Explorer 267 Northwich & Delamere Forest

**Dogs:** Dogs should be kept under close control, and preferably on a lead – especially near livestock. Please consider other walkers and clean up after your dog.

STARTING FROM HELSBY QUARRY CAR PARK, cross the road and walk up Hill Road South, opposite. At the top of the road, follow the path ahead, uphill through National Trust woodland, passing an **old quarry cutting 1** once known as the 'Black Cut', on your right. Thousands of tons of hard Helsby sandstone were ferried across the Mersey from the 1830s onwards to build the Liverpool Docks. Now largely filled in for public safety, the lower workings were reopened as Helsby Quarry Woodland Park in 1990, and designated a Local Nature Reserve in 2002.

Look for the waymarker at the junction of paths. The path ahead traces the lip of the wooded slope uphill to pass through the original entrance to **Helsby hillfort 2**. Fortified sometime between 800 and 400BC, this late Bronze Age/early Iron Age hilltop enclosure was protected on two sides by cliffs that plunged 120 metres to the surrounding marshland. A double arc of earthen ramparts faced with drystone walling enclosed the hilltop to the south and east.

## Panoramic Views

Out on the open, rocky summit of Helsby Hill, head for the concrete Ordnance Survey 'trig' point'. Breathtaking 360° **panoramic views 3** span the Frodsham Marshes, M56, Manchester Ship Canal and Mersey Estuary far below. To the north are the Liverpool skyline and planes rising from Liverpool John Lennon airport, with the Welsh hills pale to the west. On a clear day, the Shropshire Hills and Long Mynd stand out to the south.

From the summit, turn sharp right, away from the edge, downhill on a sandy path that re-crosses the ramparts. Turn left at the next junction of paths, and walk past Harmer's Lake and Farm. Continue downhill on Hill Road North, around the bend to the left, to the lower end of Harmer's Wood.

Turn right here, off the road, on a path signposted for the 'Sandstone Trail ¾'. The waymarked path drops around field edges, then follows a sunken way to Tarvin Road.

Turn left, downhill on Tarvin Road for 200 metres, past curiously-named **Teuthill House 4**. Its ancient place name comes from the Old English *teutian*, meaning a 'lookout place', and may refer to either nearby Helsby or Woodhouse hills.

## Beneath the Sky

High above the Mersey Estuary, peregrines prey on pigeons passing Helsby Hill



## Timeline

<b>c. 280-250 million years ago</b> Helsby and Frodsham sandstones formed during Triassic Period	<b>c. 22,000 BC</b> Helsby crag shaped by vast ice sheet pushing in from Irish Sea basin	<b>c. 12,000 BC</b> Early Stone Age hunters watch for prey from Helsby and Frodsham hills	<b>c. 900-400 BC</b> Hilltop enclosures built on Helsby and Woodhouse hills	<b>c. 79-410</b> Chester to Wilderspool Roman road passes foot of Helsby Crag	<b>c. 900</b> Viking settlement at Helsby named Hjalldby — 'the village on the ledge'	<b>1066</b> Saxon manor of Frodsham becomes part of Norman Earldom of Chester	<b>1798 &gt;</b> Criminals hung in 'irons' from a gibbet on top of Helsby Hill	<b>1800s</b> Ravens nest on Helsby Hill, ring ouzels and nightjars on Frodsham Hill	<b>1830s &gt;</b> Hard Helsby sandstone shipped from Ince Pier to build Liverpool Docks	<b>1949-64</b> Excavations examine defences at Woodhouse and Helsby hillforts	<b>1950s</b> Cold War underground nuclear observation post built into summit of Helsby Hill	<b>1988-90</b> Old Mountskill Quarry transformed into Helsby Quarry Woodland Park	<b>2000s</b> Wooden cross erected on Helsby Hill each year to celebrate Good Friday
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