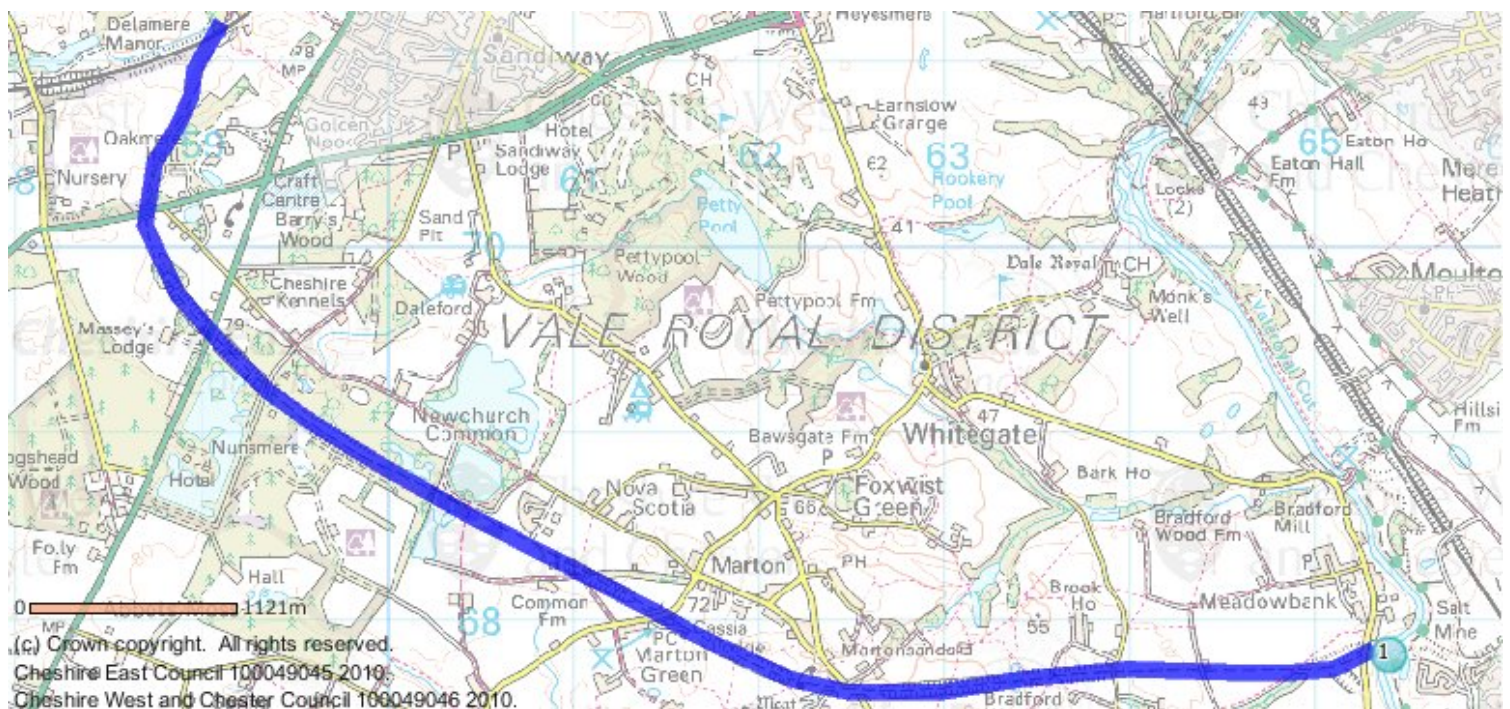


Whitegate Way

Walk, ride or cycle along the Whitegate Way, an ideal traffic-free link from Winsford to Cuddington, near Delamere Forest Park.

Grade	Easy
Distance	10 km/ 6 miles
Time	Approx. 1 hour 30 mins (walking from end to end). Several circular loops possible of varying length.
Start	Whitegate Station Car Park
Map	OS Explorer 267
Terrain	Firm, level surface of crushed stone
Barriers	Barrier free (though some adjoining paths may be inaccessible to wheelchairs)
Toilets	Whitegate Station picnic area (including accessible toilet)
Contact	Cheshire West and Chester Council Tel: 01606 271736



Route Details

The Whitegate line was opened 1st June 1870 to transport salt from the mines and works along the west bank of the river Weaver. It took the most direct route, avoiding all villages of Whitegate and Sandiway, from Winsford to Cuddington where it joined the main Chester-Manchester line.

A passenger service opened a month later but closed after only four years because of competition with the main LNWR line. It was re-started in 1886 with three passenger trains a day. The journey was slow and uncomfortable because the trains were mixed and passengers had to wait while goods wagons were shunted on and off, into the many sidings. The line almost closed in 1958 but a joint arrangement between British Rail and ICI kept it in use to transport rock salt until 1966.

Today there are a few reminders of the past. The load gauge is still at Whitegate Station, and sections of track remain at Catsclough and Newchurch Common. Both these were busy crossings and the rails were set in wooden blocks to provide an even surface.

The Way is managed for the maximum benefit of wildlife as well as providing an attractive environment for people to enjoy. Much of the work is carried out with the help of volunteers as there is always plenty to do.

Summer brings fresh flowers such as harebell and toadflax. Butterflies and dragonflies enjoy the shelter of the Way and can be seen either busy feeding or resting in the sunshine.

Sixes Hole and Marton Hole were both formed by subsidence due to salt extraction. Marton Hole appeared in 1870 when a huge area of land subsided overnight, causing great concern as the railway was just about to open. Sixes Hole lies in a Valley on top of a major brine run and is possibly still subsiding. It is good for bird watching, especially during the winter months when tufted duck, swans and little grebe are common.

The original Vale Royal Abbey was built in the late thirteenth century. Legend has it that when Prince Edward, son of Henry III, was returning from the Holy Land his ship encountered a violent storm. As the ship was about to flounder he made a vow that if the crew were saved he would build a monastery on his return. The storm abated and the ship safely reached port but broke up and sank as soon as everyone had disembarked. On his return the Prince kept his work and a group of Cistercian monks were transferred from Herefordshire to the Abbey at Darnhall. When Edward became king the monks were moved to Vale Royal and the foundation stone was laid in 1277.

Directions

Stretching for six miles (10km) from the heart of Winsford (1) to Cuddington (2), the Way offers easy horse riding along a varied route. Shady wooded cuttings contrast with open embankments offering spectacular views across the Cheshire countryside. Convenient access points for walkers, cyclists and riders allow you to walk or ride a length at a time.

The Way is level and has a wide, firm surface (crushed stone), though some areas can become muddy in winter. The route is free from stiles and gates, although some adjoining paths will be inaccessible; the access points for horses are at Kennel Bridge (3), south of Newchurch Common (4), Whitegate Station (5), west of Marton Bridge (6), Grange Lane (7), Catsclough Crossing (8) and Bradford Road (9).

Whitegate (5) was the only station on the line. Today it has been developed into a picnic area with car parking (includes parking for horse boxes; please park towards the far end) and toilet facilities (includes an accessible toilet). Take time to look around the station area or use it as a starting point to explore the attractive countryside around Whitegate. There is also a car park at Bradford Road, Winsford (9), where there is also room for horse boxes.

The Way provides an ideal starting point to explore the attractive countryside around as an extensive network of paths and permissive bridleways link with the Way. A leaflet is also available showing the adjoining routes (permissive and statutory). Several circular loops off the Way are possible, with varying lengths.

In the interests of safety for all users, horse riders are asked not to gallop along the Whitegate Way.