

THE WALK

Preston has always been proud of its parks. From the Victorians the city has been bequeathed a magnificent heritage of open space – proportionately the largest of any town or city in the north of England. Continuing our occasional series of winter walks based on parks we visit Avenham Park and its near neighbour Miller Park to demonstrate that poor weather need not restrict you from going out for a decent walk.

Start: Avenham Lane Entrance of Avenham Park. From the railway station walk up to Fishergate and turn right towards the city centre. Turn right into Chapel Street which leads onto Winckley Square and Avenham Lane. The park is on the right.

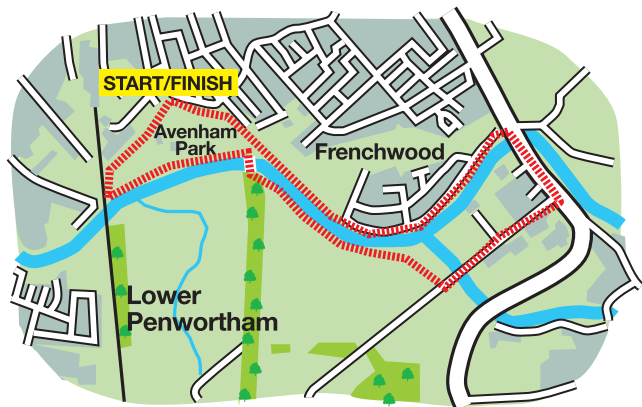
Directions: At the time of writing Avenham and Miller Parks are coming to the close of an extensive programme of improvement funded by National Lottery money and the North West Development Agency. On weekdays there is a great deal of work activity going on which may necessitate diversions here and there. On entering the park bear right past the Swiss Chalet and continue on a broad walkway. The first feature to attract attention will be to a fine obelisk monument dedicated to the servicemen who died in the Boer War fought in South Africa at the turn of the 20th century. Keep ahead beneath the old railway bridge to enter Miller Park. This is laid out more formally than its neighbour with extensive flower beds and fountain.

Walking along the terrace above the fountain you will come to the statue of Edward Stanley, 14th Earl of Derby and three times Prime Minister who had close connections with the city. Incredibly when this statute was unveiled in 1873 four years after his death, 40,000 people attended the ceremony. Now it is doubtful that even in Preston 40 people would have heard of him.

From the statue descend to the fountain and continue to the riverside walk. Turn left. Until early last year this section of the park possessed a magnificent avenue of horse chestnut trees. Unfortunately they became diseased and the local authority was forced to remove them. Further along pass beneath the railway bridge to re-enter Avenham Park. Here you may wish to avail yourself of refreshments in the Pavilion a striking modern addition to the park, designed by Ian McChesney. From the Pavilion continue upstream and climb the slope by the Old Tram Bridge. Turn right and cross the River Ribble. On the far side turn right to access the river bank. Turn right under the bridge and continue upstream with the Ribble on your left. Now in



Parklife in city stroll



South Ribble you are presented with a different scene – open fields on your right. At first on a good cycle track but as you near the confluence with the River Darwen in 700m join a farm track. This is where you'll encounter mud. The track bends to the right and then turns left over the Darwen. Now you enter a commercial zone – not really country walking as you pass behind the Capitol Retail Park, Walton-le-Dale. If you do not wish to shop keep ahead until you reach the A6 London Road. Turn left. Almost immediately you'll cross the river on this broad thoroughfare. At the far side turn left into Ashworth Grove that leads onto the Boulevard. The way is obvious – walk back with the river on your left. Though a residential area the townscape though not unattrac-

FACTFILE

Distance: 5k 3m
Time: 1.5 - 2 hours
Map: OS OL Explorer 286 Blackpool & Preston
Summary: Very easy. Some parts may be very muddy indeed

tive, is relieved by the lovely avenue of plane trees on the pathway. As you near the Old Tram Bridge follow the sign for Avenham Walk. This will take you up a flight of stone steps to a broad terrace. Providing ornament on either side are two impressive replica cannons of the Crimea War. These were presented to the city in recognition of the crucial role played by two Preston based regiments during the siege of Sebastopol. In the opinion of this writer the view from here over the river is the most attractive in Preston. Further up the walk is Preston's most attractive house – Avenham Villa once home to Edwin Booth the founder the well regarded supermarket chain. From here you can keep ahead to reach the city centre or else take a path to the left to return to the start of the walk. *Walk devised and described by John Griffiths and Bob Clare. Hit www.lancashirewalks.com for an illustrated version of this walk.*



NATUREWATCH

With Blackpool's sustainability manager David McGrath

You are about to share a day in the life of a naturalist.

Every day I take the dog out for a walk around my local park and as a naturalist I call it my 'patch'. While the dog sniffs and plays ball we keep an eye, and an ear, out for whatever wildlife is around. With spring approaching we hear the dawn chorus of Robins, Blackbirds and the now scarcer Song Thrushes. Our local woodland, actually it's only a few trees, holds a magpie roost which I try to count daily. Numbers vary from one night to the next. Where do they disappear to and what makes them come back? I like magpies, many people don't as they have ill-informed prejudices against them – yes they do take other birds' eggs and chicks which can be distressing to witness but they cause much less damage to our wildlife than domestic cats.

Plants are beginning to show signs of life, snowdrops are almost in flower and the daffodils' leaves have broken through the soil. Tree buds are swelling, as are the flower buds of shrubs like Forsythia and Flowering Currant in the gardens. During a mild spell we may see a queen bee or a butterfly that has woken from hibernation looking for dandelions to drink nectar from.

My second 'patch' is the beach opposite the office where we record the comings and goings of the different wildlife depending on the tides. The beach is a busy place full of gulls (above) feeding on the washed-up shells. Did you know along our coast you might see five or more species of gull in a day but in all of Australia you'd struggle to see more than three? Wading birds are also present. Listen for the clamouring call of oystercatchers and watch the sanderlings, their legs moving like clockwork as they run from the incoming waves. If the tide is in be on the look out for porpoises, seals and sea birds. Wherever you are keep your eyes and ears open, enjoy the wildlife around you and let us know what you find.

For BEAT Naturewatch details email solaris.centre@blackpool.gov.uk or ring David at Blackpool Council's Solaris Centre on (01253) 478020. Learn more about the Fylde's wildlife at David's blog <http://lalows.blogspot.com>