

A circular walk around

Beeston Crag



Sacred Spring?

Still on the Sandstone Trail, turn right along this tarmaced private access road (ignore the farm track heading back towards Beeston) past several large traditional black-and-white houses, including the lovely **Bath House 5**. Deep within its private grounds are the remains of a spring-fed Georgian spa called Horsley Bath. Archaeologists suggest that a deliberately broken Late Bronze Age sword uncovered in the bath's inner chamber may have been placed there in the distant past as a sacrifice to the spirit of the spring.

Roughly 100 metres later, turn left, off Horsley Lane, and follow the broad waymarked estate track gently uphill into the woods. For the next kilometre, the track follows the Sandstone Trail across the lower slopes of the **Peckforton Hills 6**.



Recognised as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) since 1984, the ridge's lovely open sessile oak woods support breeding redstarts, wood warblers, and pied flycatchers.

When the Trail reaches a major crossroads of paths near Pennsylvania Cottage, turn left onto a lesser path

Rare Birds

Each summer pied flycatchers return from Africa to nest in Peckforton Woods

“The majestic views from Beeston Castle serve as a magical backdrop to the changing seasons, as I walk through the grounds each morning.”

Kate Potter, Site Manager,
Beeston Castle & Woodland Park, *English Heritage*

signposted for 'Stonehouse Lane'. The path soon rises steeply beneath the trees to climb the western scarp of the Peckforton Hills on a long flight of steps nicknamed the 'Witches Staircase'.

At the top of the steps, turn left onto a broad estate track. Within 50 metres, turn right, off the track, onto a narrow footpath through the trees. Over the crest of the ridge, the waymarked path winds downhill on the eastern flank of the hills. To the right of the path here, look for a huge **garage-sized sandstone block 7** that must have tumbled from the summit of the hill sometime in the distant past. Today, a mat of ferns and young trees covers the top of the rock like thick fur.

Veteran Oak

Follow the waymarked path downhill to join the tarmaced drive to Peckforton Castle. Turn right, down the drive, past the restored dovecote to the **Gatehouse Lodge 8** at the foot of the slope. The lodge is built of locally quarried sandstone in the same Gothic Revival style as the castle.

Walk through the arch and cross Stone House Lane to the ancient **Peckforton Oak 9** on its grassy knoll. Known locally as the 'Big Oak', this huge tree was already old when John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, preached beneath its branches in October 1749. The tree later survived the freak 'Peckforton Cyclone' in 1913, with the loss of a few mighty limbs.

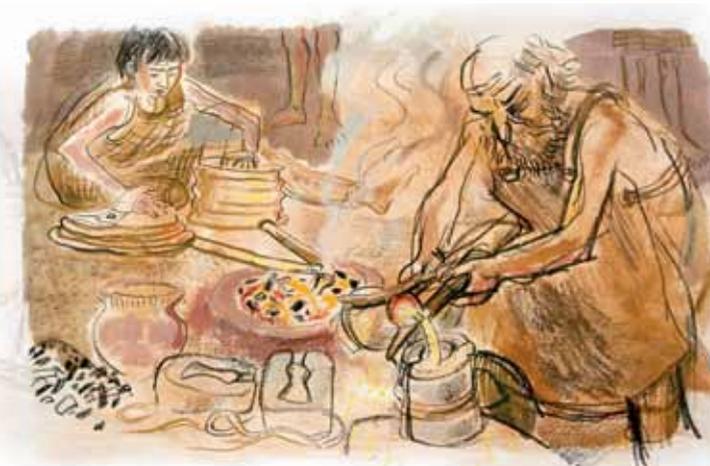
Turn right, along the verge, and then almost immediately left, over a waymarked stile between two sandstone posts. Bear left, and head diagonally across the huge undulating field towards the centre of Willis' Wood, ahead. To the left, Peckforton Castle peeps above the ridge's mantle of trees, with ruined Beeston Castle high on its crag ahead. To the right, hidden by a fringe of reeds and willows, is ancient **Peckforton Mere 10**.

Mossland and Meres

Until the area was drained for agriculture in the 1840s, Beeston Moss and Peckforton Mere were part of a much larger wetland, the source of two Cheshire rivers — the Weaver and the Gowy. Two thousand years earlier, the marsh protected a small rectangular prehistoric promontory fort on the far side of the modern mere.

Once across the field, enter Willis' Wood over a broad waymarked stile. Follow the path ahead to the far side of the wood. Don't cross the stile into the fields here; instead, turn left on a narrow path that meanders through the trees to a stile beyond two ponds. Follow the field boundary ahead for 100 metres, cross the fence on a stile, and turn right towards another waymarked stile tucked into the right-hand corner of the field.

Turn left along the roadside footpath and then cross Stone House Lane to walk down Horsley Lane. Around 250 metres later, turn right through a kissing gate signposted for the Sandstone Trail and 'Beeston Castle'. Follow the Trail across two fields back towards Beeston Crag. Cross Tattenhall Lane and return uphill through Ettley Hill pinewoods, to emerge on Chapel Lane near Beeston Castle gatehouse and the car park.



Symbols of Power?

Excavations in the 1970s uncovered evidence of bronze casting on Beeston Crag

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

For other walks, visit

www.sandstonetrail.com

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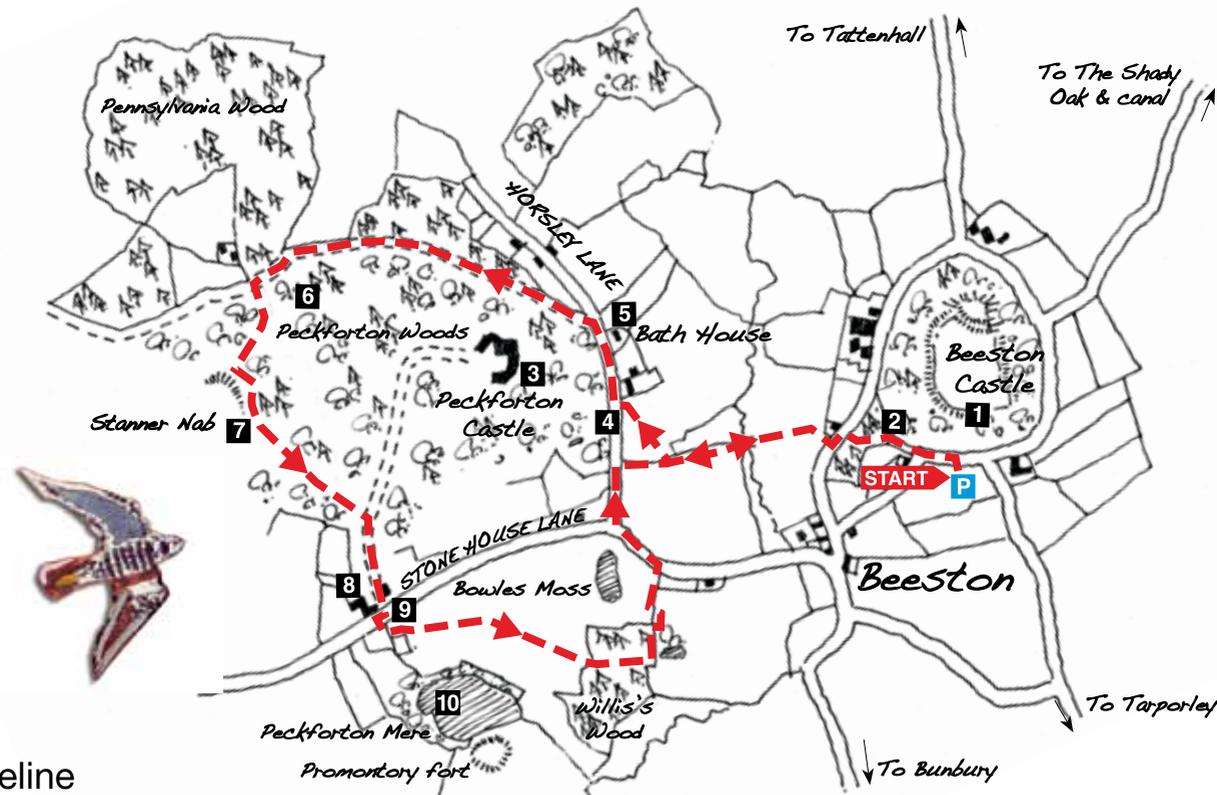
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Around Beeston Crag and the Peckforton Hills

A fascinating circuit exploring prehistoric Beeston, the Peckforton Hills and Peckforton Mere

THIS SHORT, INTRIGUING CIRCUIT explores the ancient landscape between Beeston Castle and the Peckforton Hills. Discover Beeston Crag's prehistoric past and spectacular views, before circling Victorian Peckforton Castle high on the wooded Peckforton Hills, and then crossing the fields near Peckforton Mere. Along the way are a sacred spring, the 'Big Oak', and a prehistoric lakeside enclosure. Fascinating!



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Timeline

c. 12,000 BC Peckforton Mere and Beeston Moss formed by retreating glaciers at end of last Ice Age	c. 900-400 BC Iron Age ramparts built to defend long-established prehistoric hilltop enclosure on Beeston Crag	1225 Beeston chosen as site of new castle by Ranulph de Blundeville, 6th Earl of Chester	1353 Parts of the Peckforton Hills enclosed as a deer 'chase' on orders of the Black Prince	1399 Richard II hides vast royal treasure at Beeston Castle en route for Ireland, according to legend	1643-45 Parliamentarians reformatory Beeston at start of Civil War. Royalists later hold castle for over a year	1842-51 Peckforton Castle built on open treeless heathland on Stonery Knoll	1840s-80s Special trains bring thousands of visitors to Beeston Castle for annual two-day Temperance Festival	1885 Ditchers discover three Neolithic polished stone axes below Beeston Castle	1887 Huge beacon fire blazes on Beeston summit to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee	1913 Freak 'cyclone' batters Peckforton Hills on 27th October; hundreds of trees uprooted and cattle killed	1914-18 Wholesale felling of trees on Peckforton Hills to provide pit props for WW1 trenches	1959 Beeston Castle taken into state guardianship by Ministry of Works; English Heritage takes over in 1984	1975-76 Excavation of Bronze Age metalworking site within Beeston Castle's Outer Bailey	1989 Peregrines return to nest on Beeston Crag after a long absence. Chicks protected by 24-hour 'Peregrine Watch'
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Start: Beeston Castle car park (pay and display), opposite Beeston Castle gateway, Chapel Lane, Beeston, near Tarporley CW6 9TX. Opens 8am, gates closed 6pm. Map ref: SJ 541592

Distance: 6 kilometres/3¾ miles

Difficulty: Easy-Medium.

Duration: Allow 3 – 3½ hours

Map: OS 1:25,000 Explorer 257 *Crewe & Nantwich*

Dogs: Dogs should be kept under close control, and kept on a lead at all times. Please consider other walkers and clean up after your dog.

STARTING FROM BEESTON CASTLE CAR PARK, turn left and walk along Chapel Lane. (Don't forget to visit **Beeston Castle 1**, opposite, either now, or at the end of the walk. Beeston was an established prehistoric site long before Ranulph de Blundeville chose the crag for his state-of-the-art medieval castle in 1225. Neolithic stone tools and pottery, and Bronze Age hut circles have all been found on the hill; while excavations in the 1970s and '80s showed that the outer bailey's curtain wall overlies the ramparts of an important Iron Age hillfort.)

Less than 100 metres from the car park, before the road bends, go straight ahead on a narrow waymarked footpath alongside the **castle's perimeter wall 2**, signposted to 'Whitchurch'. The wall originally enclosed a prestigious 50-acre eighteenth-century deer park belonging to the Peckforton Estate.

Follow the path downhill through Ettley Hill pinewoods to emerge on Tattenhall Road, opposite Tabernacle Cottage. Turn left, cross the road and go up the bank on the Sandstone Trail, signposted to 'Burwardsley'.

Victorian Castle

The Trail heads across the fields towards the wooded Peckforton Hills, with **Peckforton Castle 3** jutting above the trees. Recognised by English Heritage as 'one of the great buildings of its age', the Grade I listed building is an authentic Victorian replica of a medieval castle. Now a hotel and restaurant, it was built for Cheshire's largest landowner, John (later, Lord) Tollemache, between 1842 and 1851.

To the right, the view opens out across the Dee valley to the distant Welsh hills. Cross the stream and continue ahead over a second field. Within 300 metres, bear right and cross the next field diagonally to emerge on **Horsley Lane 4**. For centuries, this ancient cart road continued along the western foot of the hills to join Pennsylvania Lane at Higher Burwardsley.

Rock of Ages

Beeston Crag was probably a sacred prehistoric site for thousands of years before Beeston Castle was built in 1225

