

# Heritage Trails

# Sunderland BIG Walk

## Walk distance and time:

11.5 miles or 18.5km

5 hours (approx)

## Start Point:

National Glass Centre

## Finish Point:

Herrington Country Park

### Facilities and accessibility:

**Toilets:** National Glass Centre, Wetland Centre (entry fee applies) and Herrington Country Park

**Catering:** National Glass Centre, Wetland Centre (entry fee applies) Penshaw Tea Rooms and Herrington Country Park

**Accessibility:** Some stretches not suitable for pushchairs and wheelchairs

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## Walk directions

After leaving the National Glass Centre (NGC) turn right along the riverside and follow a path that will take you to the Washington Wetland Centre.

This stretch of the river Wear between the NGC and the university buildings was once home to J.L. Thompson's shipyard.

As you pass the university buildings on the right, look left to the south side of the river to see the quayside exchange building, recognisable by the clock on the top of the building.

Further along the south side of the river just before the Wearmouth Bridge is the Panns Bank area, site of some of Sunderland's earliest industrial activity.

Follow the riverside path underneath the Wearmouth bridge and railway bridge and follow this along the riverside. Continue along the length of the river passing Liebherr on the opposite bank, as the river curves to the left, look back to see the Stadium of Light.

Continue forward passing the lime kilns on the right, follow the path up the bank then left through the black gates following C2C blue sign onto the road. Take the first right up the bank then at the top turn left and remain on this path until reaching a road. At the road turn right then crossing the road at the crossing point continuing ahead on the C2C path. The path will bring you back to the main road.

An excellent view is to be had here of Timber Beach, the Cretehawser and Claxheugh rock. This part of the river will soon be home to the new river wear bridge.

Turn left along the footpath and take the first left down the path to the river. Follow this path passing behind the office buildings.

After passing these buildings take the path to the left following blue C2C signs. To the left is the prominent rock outcrop known as Claxheugh rock.

Follow the path as it rises and at the top of the bank next to the main road (opposite the petrol station), turn left and continue to follow the C2C path. You will then reach a road at which point you turn left. Keeping to the footpath turn again down the bank towards the river. Turn right through the small car park just before the Shipwrights pub and head up the bank.

Pass through a tunnel underneath the A19 road, take the first right along a gravel track marked with blue C2C sign. This path runs alongside the A19, looking left one can see the site of Woodhouse farm. Keep on this path until reaching an access track. At the track turn left. Then take the second turning on the right. Follow this path to the Wetlands Centre, taking the path on the left through trees to the car park. Cut through to the overflow car park and follow the signs for public footpath down to the river.

Refreshments can be bought at the Wetlands Centre and toilets are available however there is an entry fee.

Continue on this riverside path until it drops down, turn right then left into a car park. At the car park turn right following the blue C2C sign. Follow this path and bear to the left on the path closest to the river, passing through some black railings.

Continue forward on a dirt track passing underneath the Victoria Viaduct, then forward onto a road.

Continue along this road passing Biddick Pumps on the right, once the site of Girdle Cake Cottage. At the junction turn left and cross the Wear over the Fatfield bridge.

After crossing the bridge take the immediate left and follow this along the length of the river, passing underneath the viaduct. After the viaduct take the path on the right heading uphill and follow this through woodland.

At the top of this path turn right and pass through the tunnel under the viaduct continuing forward passing houses on the left before crossing the bridge over the disused railway line. After crossing the bridge take the immediate left down the steps onto the disused railway line. Stay to the right and follow the line along until the path opens up between the two low level black gates and a public footpath sign appears on the right. Cross the road and take the path up the hillside towards Penshaw Monument. At the top turn left and follow this track round to the front of Penshaw Monument.

At this point you can descend on the public footpath to Herrington Country Park or ascend the path up to the monument then down to the park.

# Route Map





## Points of interest

### A) NGC

National Glass Centre (NGC) is one of Sunderland's premier cultural attractions. This iconic building is a centre of national excellence encouraging an enjoyment, interest and understanding of contemporary glass making. It also tells the story of Sunderland's long history of glass making, dating back to Anglo Saxon times.

### B) Shipyards

Sunderland is a place synonymous with ship building. Ships have been built on the Wear since at least 1346, when Thomas Menvil had a yard at Hendon. The export trade played a central role in the development of shipbuilding. In the mid nineteenth century the local paper, the Sunderland Herald proclaimed the town to be "the greatest ship building port in the world". This stretch of the river was home to J.L Thompson's shipyard.

### C) Quayside Exchange

Throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries Britain was in a near constant state of war with France. This provided a boost to Sunderland's economy and as a result the Exchange Building was built (1812-14). The Exchange was believed to be essential to the town's future prosperity. Designed by John Stokoe of Newcastle, it was built by George Cameron, grandfather of noted Sunderland inventor Joseph Wilson Swan.

### D) Panns Bank

In the late 16th century sea salt was produced here, hence the name Pann Lane which refers to big iron pans in which saltwater was boiled. In 1644 during the Civil War a large Scottish Army occupied Sunderland and encamped here.

### E) Wearmouth Bridge

The first Wearmouth Bridge opened on 9 August 1796. It was built in response to Sunderland's growth as an important industrial centre. Prior to the construction of the bridge, the River Wear could only be crossed by ferry or at the nearest bridge at Chester-le-Street.

### F) Railway Bridge

This opened on 3 August 1879. Designed by Thomas Elliot Harrison, it provided the first direct rail link between Sunderland and Newcastle. When first built it was the largest hog back iron rail bridge in the world.

### G) Wearmouth Colliery/ Stadium of Light

First sunk in 1826 and called the Pemberton Main, after one of the founders, the colliery opened in June 1835. It was the largest colliery in Sunderland and one of the most important in the Durham Coalfield. At 264 fathoms (1,584 feet) it was also, at the time, the deepest pit in England and the deepest below sea level in the world.

In all, four shafts were sunk (A, B, C and D) and the seams extended over two miles below the North Sea.

It was the last pit in the Durham Coalfield to close, with the last shift leaving on 10th December 1993.

Sunderland AFC's Stadium of Light and the Sunderland Aquatic Centre now occupy the colliery site.

### **H) Leibherr Crane**

Liebherr Sunderland Works Ltd is the last remaining heavy engineering site in Sunderland. It is a manufacturer of ship cranes and offshore cranes and occupies the site of Sunderland's oldest shipyard: Laing Shipbuilding.

### **I) Lime Kilns**

Sunderland was the only exporter of lime between the Humber and the Forth. Whilst the industry can be dated back to the 17th century, these kilns date from the late 18th and early/mid 19th centuries. Locally quarried magnesium limestone would be burned, usually using the poor quality 'dross' coal from local mines and the resulting lime was used in construction and agriculture. The lime kilns are now Grade II listed buildings.

### **J) Timber Beach**

The area owes its name to the time when large quantities of timber for shipbuilding was stored there. It now forms one of the largest remaining stretches of salt marsh in the north-east.

### **K) Cretehauser**

The Cretehauser was one of twelve concrete tug boats built on the Wear in 1919. Concrete was used due to a scarcity of steel caused by the First World War. Launched at Southwick in

March 1919, the Cretehauser was towed up river and gutted in 1935 for use as an emergency breakwater and beached at South Hylton in 1942. It is now an important nesting site for sea birds.

### **L) Claxheugh Rock**

This is a prominent rocky outcrop above the River Wear, formed over 200 million years ago in the late Permian period. As a result of its magnesium limestone content, it is now a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), home to herb-rich magnesium limestone communities such as blue moor-grass, crested hair-grass and meadow oat-grass. Old disused lime kilns can still be seen at the foot of Claxheugh Rock.

### **M) Shipwrights**

The very name of this pub is a reminder of this area's ship building past.

A ferry operated between here and South Hylton, and the original ferry steps can still be seen just to the west of the pub.

### **N) Hylton A19 Bridge**

This bridge was built between 1970 and 1974. The opening of the bridge was delayed by several months as a result of concerns about the structural safety of a similar bridge in Australia.

### **O) Woodhouse Farm**

From the mid to late 19th century a quarry operated from the site of Woodhouse Farm. Sandstone from the quarry was taken to barges on

the river to be transported to Sunderland and the river mouth for building purposes.

### **P) Wetlands Centre**

Washington Wetland Centre lies on the banks of the River Wear and provides an inspirational example of how sound conservation management allows wildlife to thrive in the midst of a largely urban landscape. Here members of the public can get close to nature and learn more about wetland habitats and the wildlife they support.

### **Q) Victoria Viaduct**

This bridge is one of the most impressive stone viaducts in Britain. Named after Queen Victoria, the final stone of this bridge was laid on her Coronation Day on 28th June 1838. It is said that it's design was inspired by a 2nd century Roman bridge in Spain.

### **R) Girdle Cake Cottage**

The Biddick Pumping Station stands on the site of Girdle Cake Cottage. This quaintly named dwelling was reputedly the refuge of the Earl of Perth, James Drummond. The Earl is said to have taken sanctuary here after the Jacobite Army was defeated by the Duke of Cumberland's Government forces at the Battle of Culloden in 1746.

### **S) Fatfield Bridge**

Designed by D. Balfour of Houghton-le-Spring, this bridge was built in 1889 at a cost of £8,000. It was officially opened on 29 January 1890 by the 3rd Earl of Durham.

### **T) Penshaw Monument**

Penshaw Monument was built in honour of John Lambton, the 1st Earl of Durham. It's foundation stone was laid on 28 August 1844. The monument is based on the design of the Theseion, the Temple of Hephaestus in Athens. It was built using £6,000 raised by public subscription and is one of Wearside's most iconic landmarks.

### **U) Herrington Country Park**

Herrington Country Park is one of the largest parks in Sunderland. The park opened in 2002 and occupies the site of what was once Herrington Colliery.

The colliery itself operated from 1874 to 1985 employing at its peak 1800 men and boys from the local community.

Many of the art and sculpture pieces within the park represent the link to the parks mining origins. This artwork forms part of a 4km sculpture trail, which offers an excellent opportunity to get active and explore the park.