

AUDLEM TO WHITCHURCH

This route was 'discovered' only in 2014 by joining up existing footpaths in Shropshire and Cheshire; the first 'expedition' involved finding lost footbridges and literally hacking back enough vegetation to enable the passage of a person. Since then the footbridges have been cleared of vegetation, stiles repaired or replaced, and way marking improved. There is a regular bus service that enables the route to be done as a linear walk from Whitchurch.

Audlem is a large village (in the old county of Cheshire), mentioned in the Domesday Book as *Aldelime*. We will go through part of the village, cross the Shropshire Union Canal, and follow the River Weaver (just a small stream at this point) for a short way. The village gets its name from many lime trees in the vicinity.

After leaving the undulating terrain the route is through an area of mixed farming, with a lot of arable fields. It is very rural, and there is variety in the landscape with the odd copse of trees.

On reaching the Shropshire border (demarcated by a footbridge over a deep ditch), the farming becomes predominately pastoral. Crossing grass fields to reach the Farm Nature Reserve of Molverley with its wild flower rich meadows. From here it is a short way to the village of Ash, walking down its main street.

The path goes to the important Nature Reserve and SSSI of Brown Moss. This is a shallow mere surrounded by a small area of moss (a little bit of *schwingmoor* or quaking bog), and edged by woodland. It is home to several rare plants.

Leaving Brown Moss a combination of lanes and fields, and after crossing the Whitchurch bypass we are back to Whitchurch.

Although about 11 miles, it is not strenuous – no hills, and there is variety along the way.