Dyffryn Gwy Tirwedd Cenedlaethol
Wye Valley National Landscape

The Willow Walk



Enjoy a peaceful riverside walk along the Wye to find a hidden giant.







A 6 ½ mile/3 hour barrier free route walk suitable for off-road wheelchairs between Ross-on-Wye and Townsend Farm at Brampton Abbotts.



Walking & Wheeling Info

All-weather Route
Ross on Wye to Townsend Farm and return

Red on the map

Distance/Time: **4 ½ miles | 2 hours**

Accessibility: **Suitable for all-terrain wheelchairs.**

Riverside Extra

Yellow on the map

In dry conditions extend your walk by adding this peaceful riverside section.

Distance/Time **1½ miles | ¾ hour**

Accessibility: **Suitable for all-terrain wheelchairs except after heavy rain/ flooding.**

Combine the All Weather and Riverside Routes to make a 6.5 mile/ 3 hour walk.

Townsend Farm Loop
starting at Townsend Farm

Red on the map

Distance/Time **3 miles | 1½ hours**

Accessibility: **Suitable for all-terrain wheelchairs, on farm tracks not usually affected by flooding.**



Craig's Photo Trail for wheelchair users

Want a sneak peek before you roll?
Craig Grimes from Experience Community tested the Willow Walk for off-road wheelchair users. Check out his photo trail here:





Walking with your dog

Keep your dog on a lead as you will be walking through farmland. Cattle, sheep, pigs, rheas, goats and horses may be grazing in adjacent fields.



Why the Willow Walk?

Photo: Historic England

The lady in the centre of this photo is peeling the bark off the willow, to prepare it for the weavers. The gentleman on the right stands beside woven fish and eel traps, and bundles of withies.

Willow weaving and basket making was an important local industry. Before the age of plastic, willow was the go-to material for making baskets and containers for transporting goods. Coracles, fish traps, furniture and even invalid carriages were woven!

Willow weavers in Ross-on-Wye rented land at Townsend Farm, known as the 'Withy Beds', where they grew willow for basket making. 'Withy' was the name given to the harvested willow, which was loaded onto Wye trows and transported to Ross. The area in front of the Hope and Anchor was the town dock, a bustling place where trows unloaded their cargo. It was here that the willow weaving industry was located.

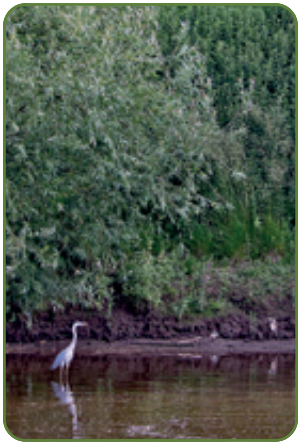




How to identify willow

There are many varieties of willow, but one to look out for here is **Osier Willow**. It is a very bendy willow, making it excellent for basket making. It has long, thin, glossy dark green leaves and silvery hairs underneath. Its flowers are catkins, blooming in late winter/early spring. The male catkins are yellow. The female catkins are green and once pollinated they develop fruit capsules which release tiny seeds.

Other varieties of willow to spot include **White Willow**, which is used for making cricket bats. It is the largest native willow growing up to 80 feet tall. **Pussy (or Goat) Willow** is another common variety, with fluffy yellow-green catkins in Spring.





Route Instructions

Numbers in the copy relate to numbers on the map

START: Willow Arch 1 near the Hope and Anchor, Ross-on-Wye

What3words: ///wriggle.quote.upstairs

Walk through the willow arch to begin the Willow Walk.

Follow the riverside path and cross a footbridge beside Ross Rowing Club 2, bearing left around the club to cross another bridge, which leads into fields beside the Wye.

Stay on the riverside path, passing under the road bridge. Continue until you reach a fork in the path after 1 mile 3.

Go right and immediately left to walk along the old railway line 4 to reach the Railway Carriage Bird Hide 5 and access-for-all picnic bench - a great place to spot birds, especially in winter.



This riverside area was the town dock, where flat-bottomed Wye trows unloaded cargoes and the willow weaving industry was located.



Floodplain Meadows

These riverside fields are floodplain meadows where hay was traditionally grown. Until World War II they were alive with wildflowers and wildlife, but in 1940 they were compulsorily ploughed up to grow food crops for the War effort. Since then, 97% of these precious meadows have been lost across the UK.

They acted as a natural sponge, helping to prevent flooding, but ploughing, to grow crops such as potatoes, means the bare soil is easily washed away. Some of these traditional meadows are now being reinstated, using local seed collected from meadows further up the Wye.





You have a choice here:

To follow the YELLOW (Riverside Extra) ROUTE

Turn left across the fields to reach the Wye and follow the river upstream to the remains of Backney Bridge 6. This bridge carried trains between Ross and Hereford until the railway's closure in 1965.

Continue beside the river, passing a memorial cross just before reaching the Wye Valley Walk bench 7 on the left.

Rejoin the Red Route as the path becomes a farm track and turns right at 8 towards The Cot.

To follow the RED ROUTE

Turn right along the farm track taking the next turn on the left and following it down to the riverside track. (The Wye Valley Walk bench 7 is just to your left).

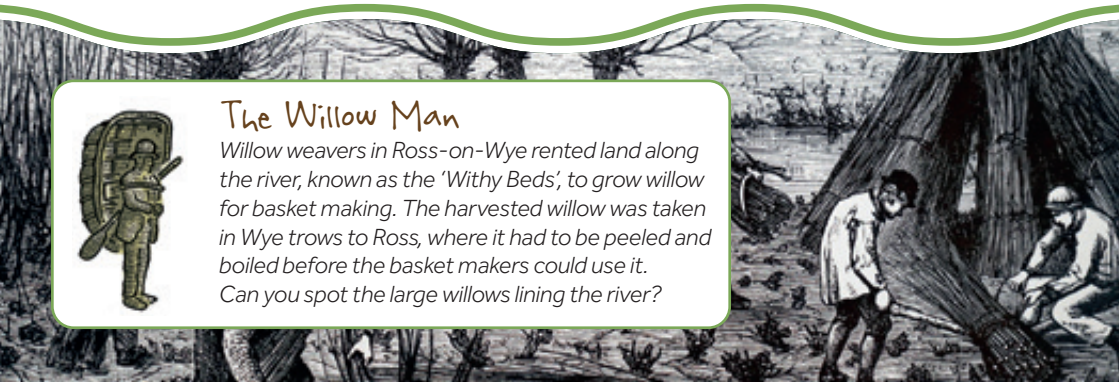
Turn right and very soon turn right at 8 towards The Cot.

Straight after Brampton Barns 9 turn left down a farm track following it around to the left and uphill to arrive at the Willow Man 10.



The sandy banks on the far side of the river are the perfect habitat for sand martins who dig small tunnels to nest in. Once their chicks have fledged, they fly over 4000 miles to winter in sub-Saharan Africa.





The Willow Man

Willow weavers in Ross-on-Wye rented land along the river, known as the 'Withy Beds', to grow willow for basket making. The harvested willow was taken in Wye trows to Ross, where it had to be peeled and boiled before the basket makers could use it. Can you spot the large willows lining the river?



Enjoy the view over the old 'Withy Beds' from the access-for-all picnic bench. Continue along the farm track, passing Monks Grove, full of bluebells in Spring. Soon you will see the colourful silo building (11), an outdoor classroom and picnic area. Look out for the vineyard on the left as the track goes downhill.

The Hands-Off Vineyard, planted 20 years ago, is managed with only two human interventions a year, pruning and harvesting by hand. Sheep help keep the grass short.

Follow the track uphill and left into another field. To your left is the Agroforestry Orchard. Look out for a series of small fields on the left - the 'mob grazing' paddocks.

Growing trees and arable crops together is called Agroforestry. 1400 fruit and nut trees have been planted to help prevent erosion, improve soil health and support wildlife.

In mob grazing large fields are divided into smaller paddocks so the sheep, cattle and pigs can be moved on, often daily, to graze a new patch. This helps to improve the soil and the nutritional value of the plants as well as reducing pests.



Have you noticed how wide the hedges are?

14 miles of hedges have been planted here with native trees. Their berries provide winter food for birds. Insects are catered for around the field edges, where 20ft wide wildflower margins are planted. Linnets, brown hares, swifts and song birds have all returned to Townsend Farm in recent years.







When the farm track meets the road go straight on to reach Townsend Farm 12 on the right. Turn right to walk through the farmyard, where there is an accessible toilet and a small self-service farm shop and mini café.



Townsend Farm is home to the Taylor-Davies family, where 'Regen Ben' practices regenerative farming, working to reduce pesticide use, improve soil health, reduce the farm's carbon footprint and help nature recover and flourish.

Walk past the New Horizons mural and picnic benches on your left.

Created by Ollie Gillar, the mural shows 45 years of change at Townsend, from a traditional mixed farm, to intensive arable, to an evolving farm for the future.



Pass the hedgehog sculptures as you leave the farmyard along the farm track to your left 13. After another picnic bench the view to Ross-on-Wye opens up on the left. Stay on this track which takes you back to the Bird Hide 5. Turn left to retrace your steps along the old railway line and the riverside path back to Ross-on-Wye.



The Hereford, Ross & Gloucester Railway opened in 1855. Along its 22 ½ mile route Isambard Kingdom Brunel had to cross the River Wye four times and cut four tunnels through the surrounding hills.























WILLOW WALK

Funded by UK Government

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Photo Credits: Richard Stanton, Herefordshire Libraries, Historic England. Thanks to Heather Hurley.