

# Walkies in the wild - 2 miles Downs Banks



This little wilderness of woodlands and heath in the heart of the West Midlands is a fantastic place to explore with your dog. Take a little exercise and enjoy the fresh air on this 1½ mile route alongside the stream, or if you're both feeling energetic, add ½ mile more and climb uphill for fantastic panoramic views.


**Start:** NT Downs Banks car park – grid ref: SJ900365 – OS Landranger map 127

A great escape from the busy towns of Stone, Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford

**Walk:** 2 mile from Stone and Barlaston on footpaths, ½ mile from Trent & Mersey Canal

**Bike:** ½ mile from NCN route 5 (runs from Stoke-on-Trent to Stafford, through Stone)

**Bus:** service between Stoke-on-Trent  and Stafford  - alight at Barlaston or Stone

**Train:** Stone  3 miles

**Car:** 15 min south of Stoke-on-Trent and 10 min north of Stone off the A34

**Facilities:** this is a simple countryside site, with a car park and info panels, but no WCs

**Contact us:** 01902 782808 or [downsbanks@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:downsbanks@nationaltrust.org.uk)

## Doggie highlights

With cool pools, muddy puddles, woods and open grassland, the Clent Hills offer a doggy paradise! No need for leads if your dog behaves itself around other dogs, horses and people. Please remove dog mess and dispose of it responsibly. Bins and water bowls available at Nimmings Wood Car Park.

## Look out for...

### Downs Banks Brook

This babbling stream runs the length of Downs Banks along a serene rolling valley. Keep your eyes open and you may see the fantastic blue flash of a kingfisher.

### The Millennium Monument

This rock pillar stands at the highest point on the Downs and shows you what landmarks can be seen in the distance. On a clear day you can get some marvellous views across the Staffordshire countryside for almost forty miles.

### Grazing cattle

From spring to autumn much of Downs Banks is grazed by a small herd of non-inquisitive, dog-friendly beef cattle. They're helping us restore the heath by preventing too much bracken growth.



With the help of cattle, years of heathland restoration are beginning to make Downs Banks a better place for wildlife. Patches of plants like bilberry, heather and gorse are steadily growing – a great sign of a healthy heathland.

© NT / Rod Whiteman



Centuries-worth of discarded apple pips have planted themselves here and grown into some fine mature trees. Look out for spectacular displays of blossom in spring.

© NTPL / Mark Bolton



Have a closer peek around the trees or among the grasses and you'll find some fascinating wildflower communities in spring and summer. In autumn the area comes alive with colourful and weirdly-shaped fungi.

© NT / Rod Whiteman

## Walk terrain and accessibility

We suggest a **1½ mile** route along the valley floor here. It is easy-going on well-surfaced paths, suitable for rugged pushchairs and adventurous wheelchair users. We recommend a **½ mile extension** up on to hill tops, but this is a little more strenuous and uneven. Take care to avoid slips near stream.

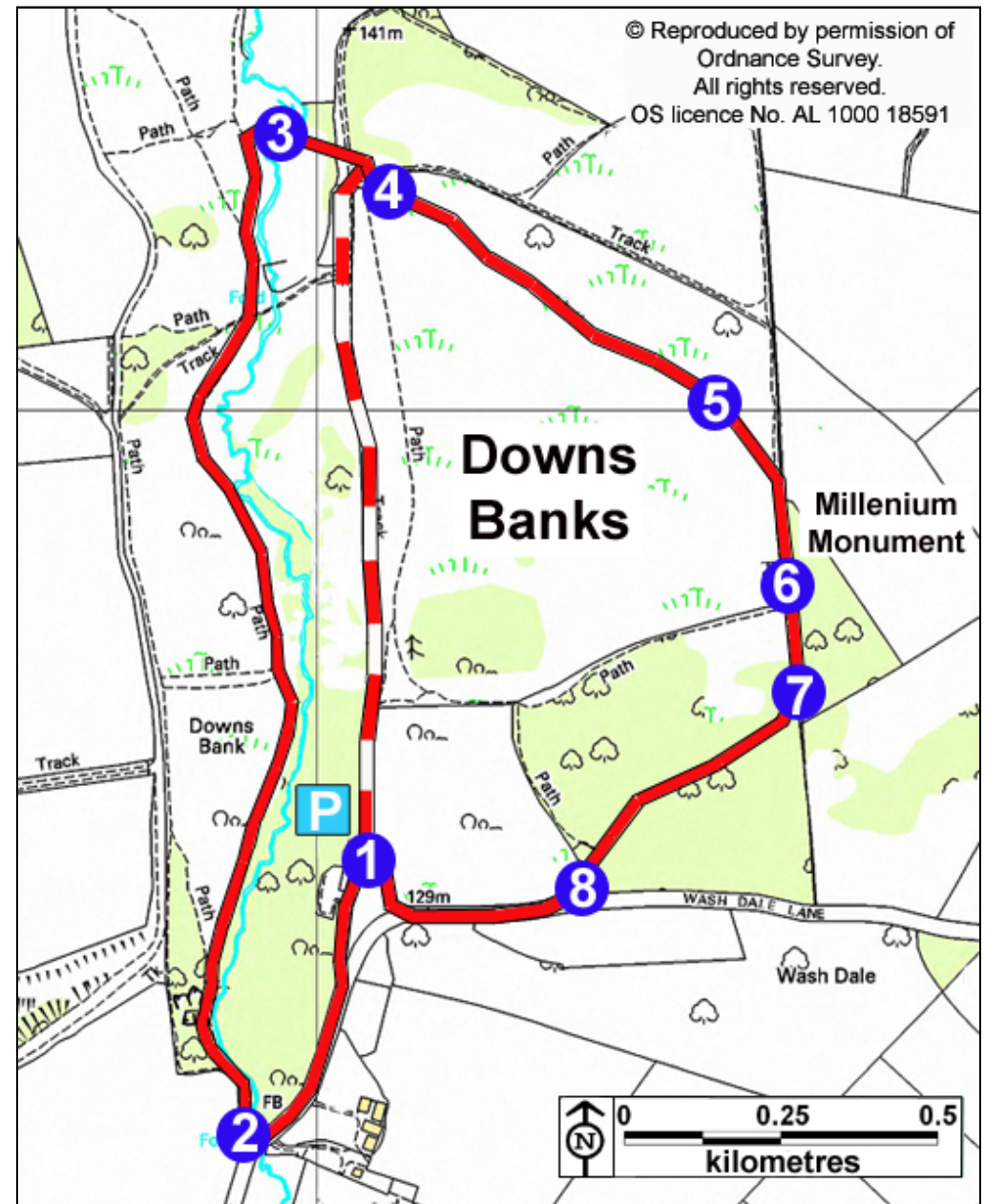
## Route and directions

1. Head south out of the car park and turn right on to Washdale Lane – keep your dog on a lead for now in case of traffic.
2. Carry on for a short distance until reaching the stream. Cross the footbridge and turn right into the woods. (If your dog is safe around people, other dogs and wildlife, you may wish to let it off its lead here).
3. Follow this path along beside the water's edge all the way to another footbridge and cross the stream again. (Last chance for dogs to paddle).
4. Once over the stream follow the path to a set of steps down one bank and up the other side. This hilly area was once the site of an ancient watermill.

You now have two choices: turn right and take the shorter, flatter route along the valley bottom, back to the car park, or follow the 'Ridge Path' up a steep hill to the highest viewpoint at Downs Banks.

5. If you choose to go uphill, follow a path that rises sharply ahead of you. There are benches on the way to the top, so take a rest anytime you like.
6. Pass the Millennium Monument (enjoy the view in good weather!) and stay on the same route. When you reach a fence, turn right and follow the path through a gate.
7. Once through the gate head straight on, back into woodland. Continue down steps along a wooded valley.
8. When you reach the next gate, don't go through it onto the lane. Turn right and this path will take you back to the car park.

**Come back again and make your own route via an extensive network of footpaths and bridleways!**



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