

Heritage Trails

The Stephenson Trail

Walk distance and time:

11 miles or 17.7km

5 hours (approx.)

Start point:

Hetton le Hill Community Golf Club

Finish point:

River Wear, Sunderland City Centre

Facilities and accessibility:

Toilets: Hetton Community Pool and Wellness Centre, Silksworth Community Pool, Tennis and Wellness Centre

Parking: Parking is limited, advise using public transport

Accessibility: Not suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs

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Summary

The Stephenson Trail follows the route taken by coal wagons on their way from the Elemore and Hetton Collieries to the River Wear. It takes its name from the Stephenson brothers who designed the railway in the early 19th century.

The sinking of Hetton Colliery began on 19 December 1820. After many months of excavation, in September 1822, the main coal seam was reached. The success paved the way for all later mining operations in the eastern side of the region, and new collieries were opened at Elemore, Eppleton and North Hetton in 1825.

Hetton Colliery's owners employed the great civil engineers George and Robert Stephenson to design a railway to exploit the coal reserves and transport them to the River Wear to be deposited into awaiting keelboats.

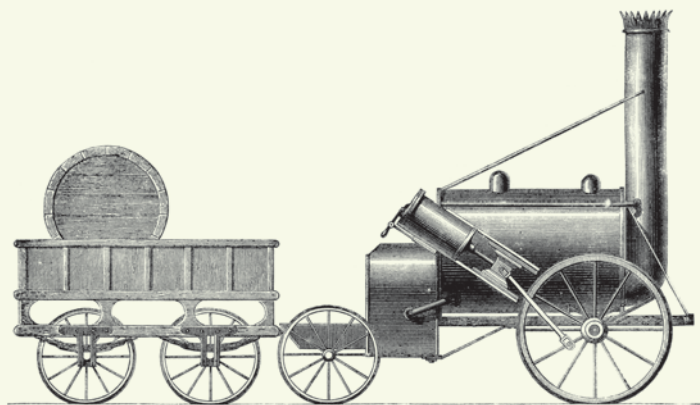
The result was quite revolutionary; at over 8 miles in length, it was the longest railway in existence and the first in the world to be specifically

designed to use locomotives. It opened on 18 September 1822 and was to remain in use for the next 137 years.

In the early days the average speed of the wagons was only four miles per hour, but by 1829 speeds had increased to twenty nine miles per hour and the railway was moving 2,880 tons of coal in an eight hour shift.

The success of the colliery and its innovative railway led to further extensions of the line to allow Eppleton and North Hetton Pits to take advantage of the route to the sea.

The Hetton Railway finally closed in 1959, closely followed in the early 1960's by the Hetton and Lambton staithes, the same staithes that had begun Sunderland's coal shipments some 140 years before.



Hetton le Hill to Copt Hill

As you face the golf course take the path to the right and follow this round to the left.

At the bend, look to the right and it is just possible to see through the trees the only surviving building of Elemore Colliery, the pit head baths.

Pass through the black metal barrier, continue straight ahead, down the slope, keeping the golf course on the left and a wooded dene and grassland on the right.

Continue straight ahead until reaching the bottom of the slope. Bear left and enter into a housing estate through black gates next to garages on the right.

Turn right along a residential street (Pimlico Road). At the junction turn left onto Gilesgate Road and head down the bank. At the junction turn right and continue straight ahead towards the main road and Lilywhite Terrace.

Take care crossing this busy road. Continue straight ahead on the path in between the pub and cricket club until reaching the next major road, Colliery Lane. Turn right without crossing the road, passing Hetton Lyons Industrial Estate on the left.

Pass “Lyons Cottages”, shortly after on the right, note “The Lyons” a short terrace of white cottages where Robert Stephenson once

lived. Note the blue plaque on the gable end.

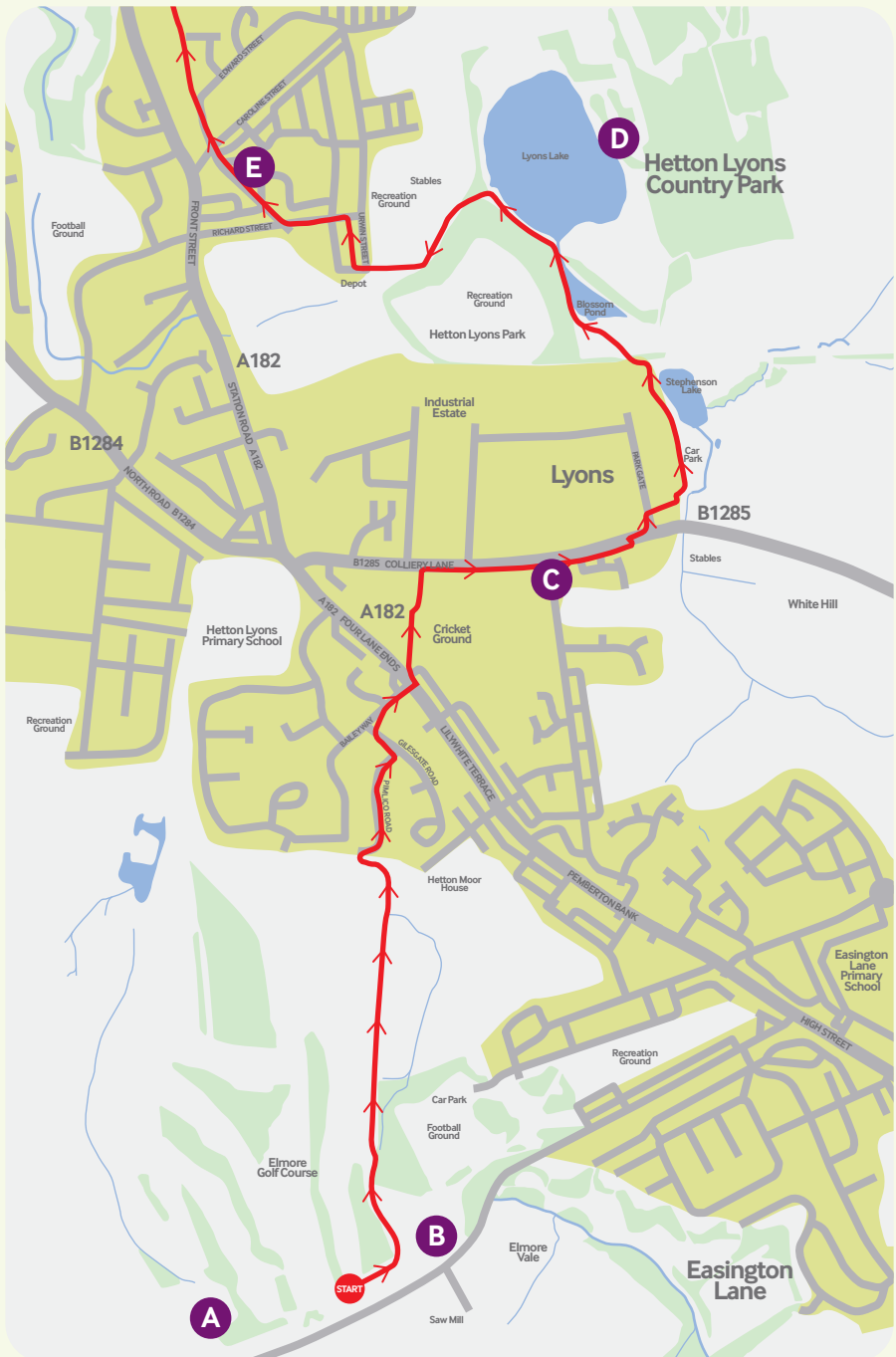
Continue forward passing Lyons Gardens. After Lyons Gardens cross the road and turn left into the industrial estate and take the immediate right down into the car park.

Pass through the green and yellow barriers, as the path splits keep left and follow the path round to the left, at the seat turn right. Head down the slope towards Blossom Pond and Lyons Lake beyond. Pass through barriers and take the path to the left of the lake.

At the blue railings turn left. Continue forward through two more sets of blue railings, keeping allotments on your right. Continue on this tarmac path, passing through black gates.

Take the second right towards the Independent Methodist Church. At the Church, turn left and continue forward towards Hetton town centre. Take the second turning on the right, pass the Prince of Wales pub and Primitive Methodist Chapel.

Cross the road and continue straight ahead passing McMurchie's butchers on the right. Continue straight ahead on the tarmac path keeping modern houses on the right. Note that the fence opposite St. Bede's Close is made of railway sleepers.



Copt Hill to Doxford

Cross the road and continue straight ahead on tarmac path. At the houses take a left and follow the path in between the wall and metal fence.

Continue along here and up the steps to All Saints Drive, continue ahead for 150 yards and take the left path off Paul's Green. Cross the path and continue straight ahead. Note the sign for the River Wear.

Where paths meet continue straight ahead up a long incline up to Gillas Lane. Copt Hill and the Seven Sisters can be seen on the right.

At the top of the bank turn right and continue up along the B1404 Seaham Road, passing the golf club and then the entrance to the Eppleton Quarry on the right.

Pass a long strip of forestry plantation that runs alongside the road on the right. After passing this look to the right and notice a collection of farm buildings, formerly an engine house on the Londonderry Railway to Seaham.

At the next set of buildings, turn left, cross the road and take the track marked "private road".



Copt Hill to Doxford (continued)

Follow the private road up the slope and around as it turns sharply to the left. Take the first right up the slope, then first right again to re-join the railway line.

Follow this path as it bends round to the left and continue straight ahead. Notice the Stadium of Light in the distance.

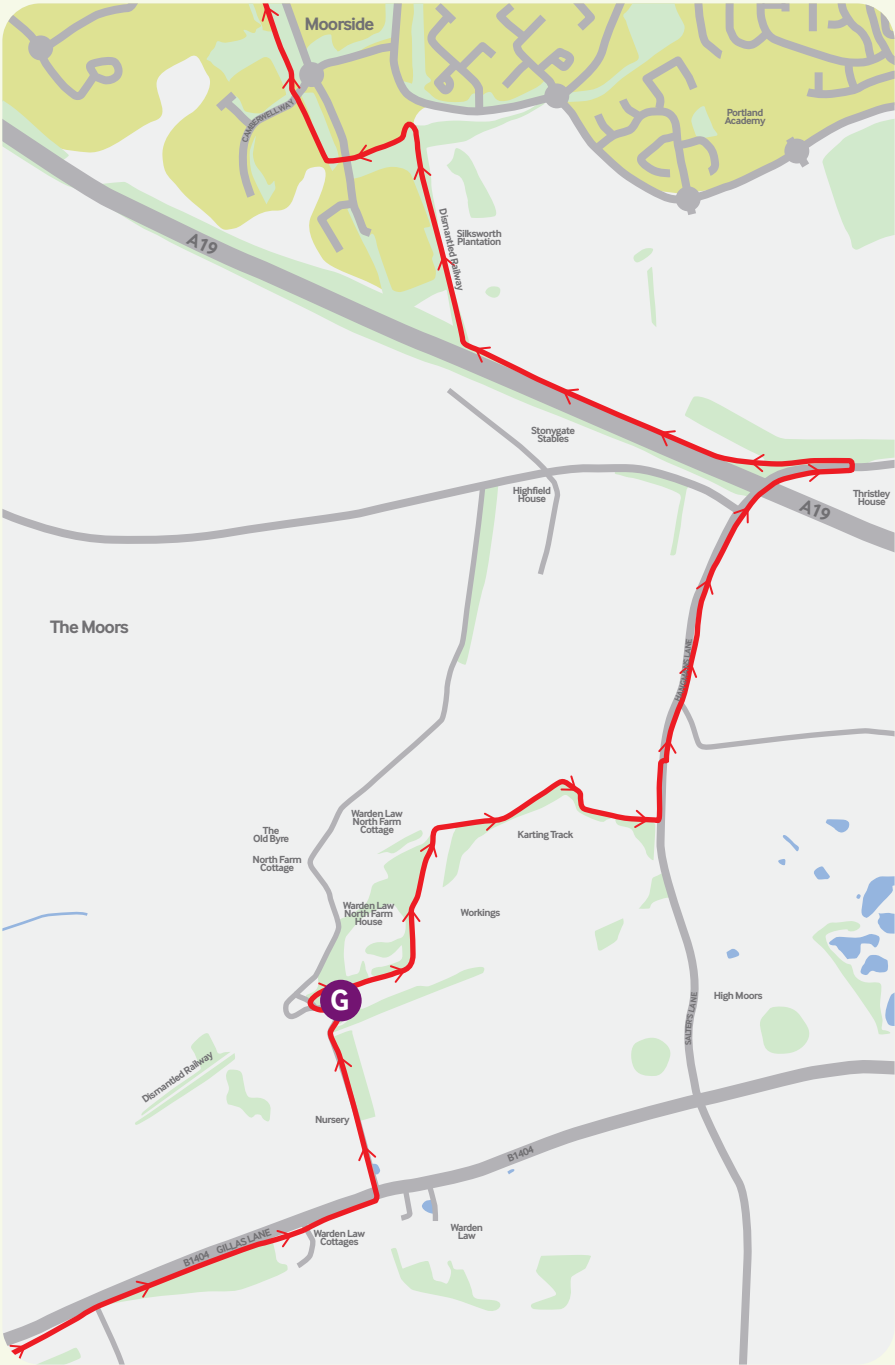
Take the path to the right up to the summit of Warden Law, continue forward and descend down to Hangman's Lane.

At the road turn left and follow the path down the bank. Cross to continue on the path down the bank. Follow this as it curves to the right and crosses the A19.

Cross the road taking the path to the left following the blue "W2W" sign. Follow this alongside the A19 and as it bends to the right down a tree lined avenue.

At the junction of paths turn left skirting around the edges of Doxford International. Cross the road and continue straight ahead.

Note the artwork "inter alia" on the right. After the artwork turn right and continue straight ahead crossing two roads before reaching "City Way".



Doxford to Silksworth (continued)

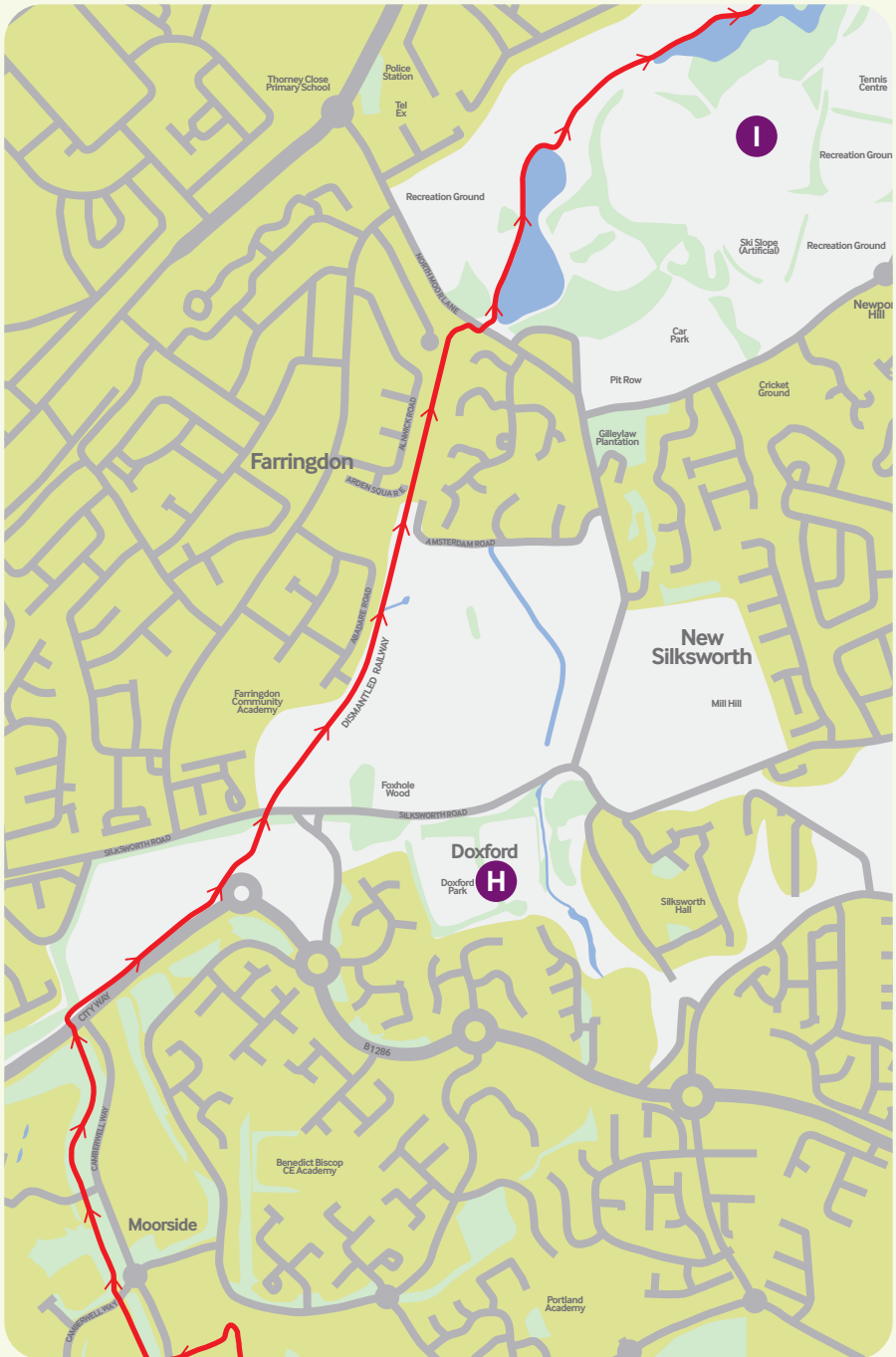
Take care crossing this fast, busy road, descend the slope and turn right along the footpath and continue as far as the footbridge. Descend down to Silksworth Road. A short detour to the right will lead to Doxford Park.

Otherwise continue straight ahead and cross the road and follow the blue “W2W” signs along the old railway line path. To the right are Gilley Law Flats.

Cross the road at the crossing and enter into the Silksworth Sports Complex. Take the path to the left of the lake. Follow the path round to the lake to its farthest point. Five paths converge here.

Take the second path on the left to continue straight ahead to the second of the park’s lakes. Walk to the end of the lake keeping to the left side and cross the small bridge, turn left then left again, crossing the stream and take the immediate right.

Follow the path all the way up to Premier Road.



Silksworth to River Wear

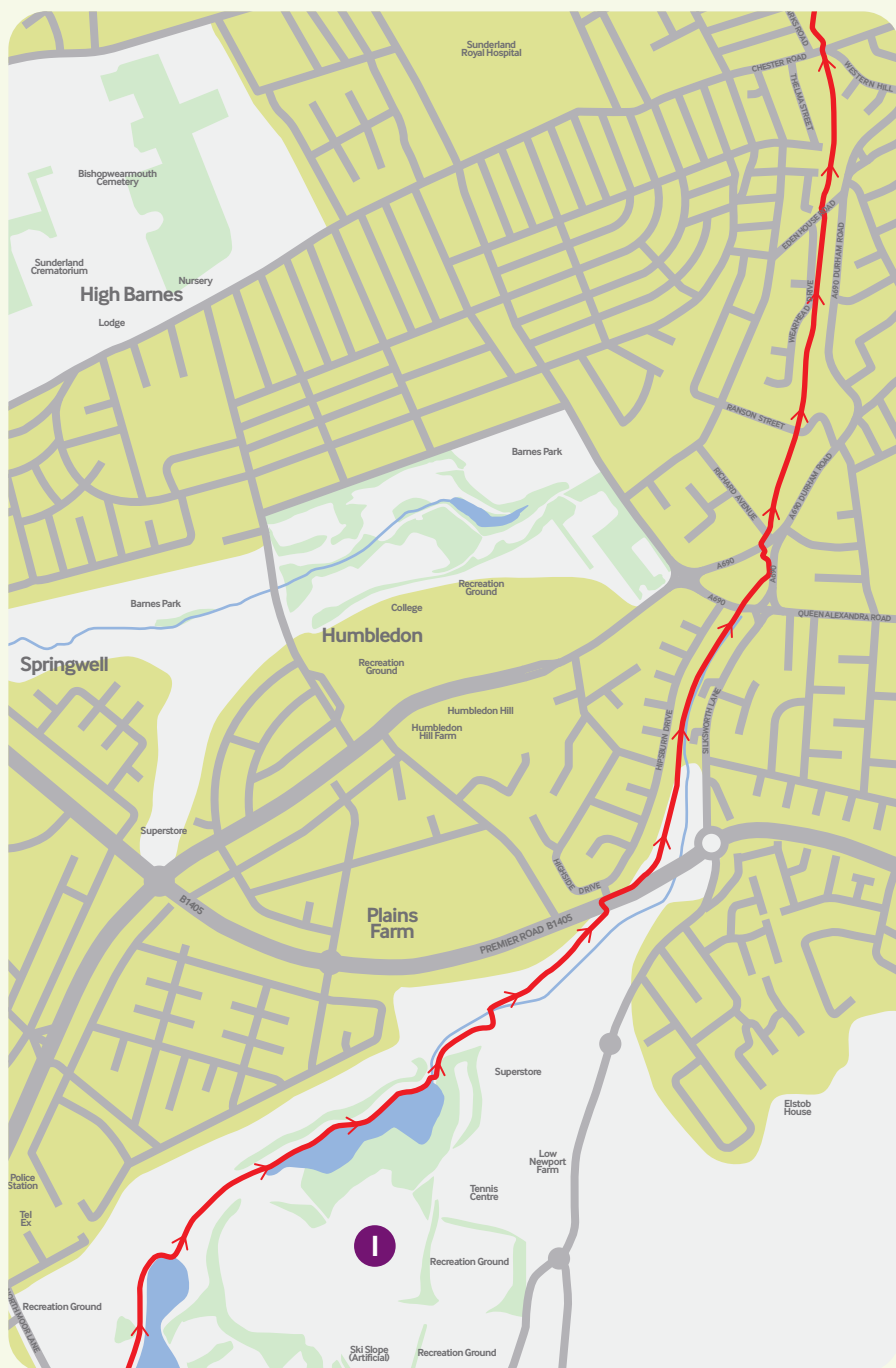
At traffic island cross Premier Road with care. Bear right and take the path on the left down the slope.

Look back to the right and note the sculpture which shows the outline of an early train set in the grassy embankment.

Continue on the path as it bears to the left passing behind houses. Pass through an underpass and observe the artwork of local artist Frank Styles.

At the top of the slope turn left around the car park and cross Durham Road using the two stage pedestrian crossing. Bear right, crossing Richard Avenue and back onto the Stephenson Trail.

Note the blue post indicating the River Wear some 1.5 miles distant. Continue on this line, crossing two roads all the way to Chester Road.



Silksworth to River Wear (continued)

Cross Chester Road and continue ahead on the path. At the road turn right and continue forward keeping the embankment on the right.

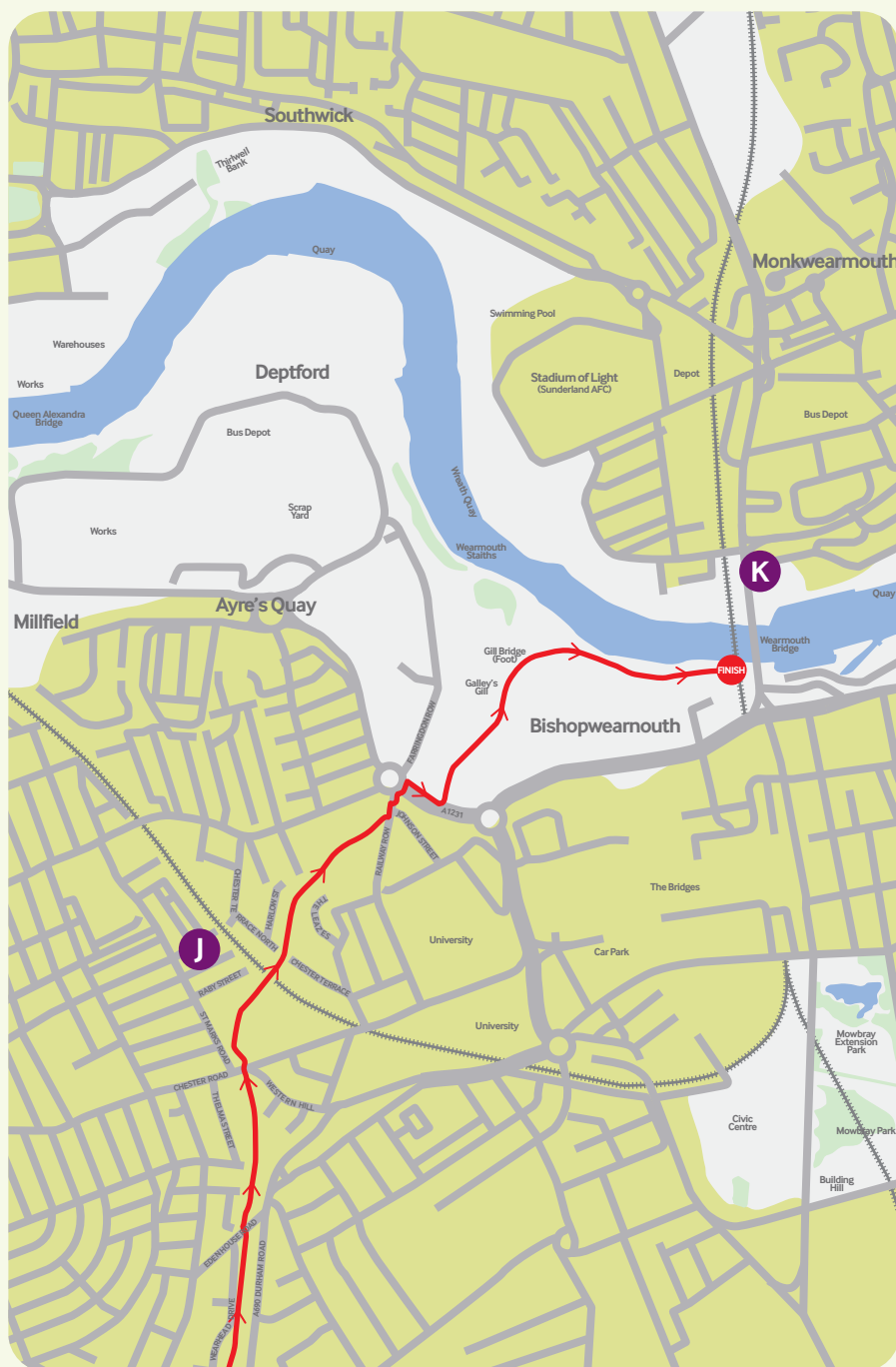
Cross over the metro line (formerly Penshaw to Pallion railway) and continue straight ahead towards the busy road and roundabout.

Cross this road using the traffic island to the right of the roundabout and head in the direction of the city centre. Take the road to the left marked with blue “C2C” signs that descends down to the river.

You are now passing through Galley’s Gill. Descend the Gill and pass under the bridge. On the left are two disused railway tunnels.

Continue until reaching the end of the path overlooking the river beneath the Wearmouth Bridges.

This completes the 11 mile trail; you have now retraced the journey made by the very first steam-hauled train over 170 years ago.



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Points of interest

A) Hetton le Hill Community Golf Club

The golf course is built upon the reclaimed site of Elemore Colliery. The colliery had been founded in 1825. It was built on land leased from the Baker family of the nearby Elemore Hall.

B) Pithead Baths

The only surviving buildings of Elemore Colliery are the grade II listed pit head baths designed by F.G. Frizzell and built in 1933. The central tower contained the water tank and the impressive external design of the building was complimented by an interior of considerable quality – all achieved at a reputed cost of £1,500.

C) The Lyons Cottages

George and Robert Stephenson were tasked with designing the railway that would help to facilitate the movement of coal from Hetton to the river Wear.

“The Lyons”, are a short terrace of white cottages typical of the early 19th century. It was here where Robert Stephenson once lived.

D) Hetton Lyons Colliery and Country Park

After Hetton Colliery was closed in 1950, the land was set aside for the development of a country park. The reclamation process began in 1986 and the park is now an important place for wetland birds including, coot, moorhen, tufted duck and reed bunting.

E) Hetton Primitive Methodist Church

In 1823 Primitive Methodism entered Hetton. However, work on this building began in 1856 and it officially opened on 22 May 1858. A bottle containing the names of the trustees is believed to be in the foundations. The completion of the building owes much to the contribution and co-operation of the Hetton Coal Company who supplied building materials, stone, sand and lime.

F) Copt Hill

This famous local landmark is steeped in history and is a scheduled ancient monument. The barrow that lies at its heart is a prehistoric burial mound, known locally as the seven sisters, due to the seven (now six) beech trees on the summit. Excavation of the barrow in 1877 by Canon William Greenwell revealed that the primary burial was a Neolithic cremation believed to be an example of an axial mortuary structure.

G) Warden Law

This is the highest point in Sunderland. From here one is afforded fantastic views in all directions, the Cheviot Hills that mark the border with Scotland in the north, the Durham Fells to the west and the North York Moors to the south.

H) Doxford Park

Doxford Park is a hidden gem. Originally the grounds of Silksworth (now Doxford) House, it has a history stretching back to 1775, when the house was built by William Johnson. Over the years the house has been occupied by a number of inhabitants, including a General Beckwith who served in the British Army at the Battle of Waterloo. It is however most well known for being the home of the famous Doxford shipbuilding family, whose yard at Pallion developed into one of the greatest anywhere in the world.

The park itself is home to a number of fine mature beech trees and in the spring and summer it is noted for its beautiful display of flowers such as Siberian Squill, Glory of the Snow and Autumn Crocus.

The area to the east of the park, along Warden Law Lane has its roots firmly in the Anglo Saxon age. Indeed it is believed that Silksworth is first referenced in a land grant of King Athelstan, the grandson of Alfred the Great and the first King of all England.

I) Silksworth Sports Complex

Soon after Silksworth colliery closed in 1971 work began to transform the site into a huge sporting and woodland area.

The site is currently home to a running track and artificial ski slope. The surrounding woodland and lakes are home to a variety of birdlife including mute swan, mallard and sparrowhawk.

J) Penshaw Railway

The metro line is built on the old Penshaw railway line which was established in 1852 to carry freight to Hendon. In 1853 it began operating a passenger service into Sunderland town centre. The metro line was extended to Sunderland in 2002.

K) Galley's Gill and the River Wear

This area was once one of the busiest and most intense industrial landscapes in the country. Coal wagons and locos would have been arrayed across this small plateau above the river. Note the disused railway tunnels to the left. Wooden staithes would stretch out and overhang into the ships below, waiting to fill their holds with the “black diamonds”.

It is a very different scene today. The absence of industry has resulted in the return of wildlife. Keep an eye out for common seal, otter and wetland birds such as the cormorant.

Notes:

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Funded by East Sunderland Area Committee SIB

For more information on walking in Sunderland visit:

www.activesunderland.org.uk

