

A Walk around Newmillerdam



<http://www.theaa.com/walks/a-walk-around-newmillerdam-421279>

A pleasant oasis, close to Wakefield, and a chance to feed the ducks.

Distance 4.5 miles (7.2km)

Minimum time 2hrs

Ascent/gradient 164ft (50m)

Level of difficulty Easy

Paths Good paths by lake and through woodland, 2 stiles

Landscape Reservoir, heath and woodland

Suggested map aqua3 OS Explorer 278 Sheffield & Barnsley

Start/finish SE 331157

Dog friendliness Can be off lead on most of walk

Parking Pay-and-display car park at western end of dam, on A61 between Wakefield and Barnsley

Public toilets At start of walk

Newmillerdam Country Park lies on the A61 near the village of Newmillerdam, and just 3 miles (4.8km) south of Wakefield. The name refers, unsurprisingly, to a 'new mill on the dam' - a mill where people brought their corn to be ground. The lake and woods were created as a park for a 16th-century country house, which has since been demolished. From 1753 the park formed part of the Chevet Estate, which was owned by the Pilkington family. They used the lake for fishing and shooting and, in 1820, built a distinctive boathouse as a place for their guests to socialise and enjoy the lake view. This Grade II listed building has recently been restored and is now used as a visitor centre.

In 1954 Newmillerdam became a public park; local people come here to walk, fish, watch birds or just feed the ducks. The lake is surrounded by woodland. Conifer trees were planted here during the 1950s with the intention, once the trees had reached maturity, to use the wood for making pit props for the coal mines. These trees are mature now but, ironically, the need for the pit props has gone, as most of the Yorkshire pits are closed. The Wakefield Countryside Service is gradually replacing the conifers with broadleaved trees such as oak, ash, birch and hazel, which support a greater variety of birdlife.

A simple circuit of the lake is a pleasant 2-mile (3.2km) stroll, on a track suitable for push-chairs or wheelchairs. But this walk also takes you through Seckar Wood, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The woodland comprises a mixture of dry heath, wet heath and scrubland: another habitat rich in wildlife. During the late summer the heathland is a colourful profusion of purple heather.

1 Walk right, along the A61, to the far side of the lake, to join a path down the eastern side of the lake. Pass the ornate boathouse and a causeway across the lake. Where the lake narrows to a beck, take a bridge across it. Ignore paths to left and right, by walking straight ahead, up into mixed woodland.

2 Bear left when you come to a more substantial track, turning right after 250yds (228m) to take a bridge over the trackbed of an old railway line. Continue on a track ahead, soon following a chain-link fence on your right, to arrive at the A61 road again. Cross the road and walk right for 250yds (228m) before taking a path left past a metal gate and into Seckar Wood.

3 Pass a couple of ponds and make a gradual ascent up through the wood; at the top the trees give way to heather and heathland. Ignore all side-tracks and leave the heath as you meet another path.

4 Go right here, with a hedge on the left and a wall on the right. Soon you find yourself on a field path. Follow the edge of the wood downhill, as it sweeps right, down to a stile at the bottom of the field. Cross this stile and another immediately after; at the next field keep right until you come to a gap in the hedge. Now follow a grassy path at the field's edge, keeping the hedgerow to your left.

5 As you approach houses, follow the track and the hedge to the right. At a wide gap in the hedge, go left on a farm track that brings you out on to a road. Go right here, downhill, turning right after 200yds (192m) at a mini-roundabout, on to Wood Lane. Just past the Pennine Camphill Community take a footpath on the left between a fence and a wall. Meet a minor road by a sharp bend. Walk straight ahead, down the road, to reach the A61. Go left, back down to the car park at Newmillerdam.