Brandon to Bishop Auckland Railway Path

What is special?

The line was built mainly to carry coal and coke and closed to passenger traffic in 1964. It is now a route enjoyed by both people and wildlife. All along the line you will see a host of birds including chaffinch, blue tit, blackbird, kingfisher and kestrel. On an evening listen for the hooting of owls. In sunny glades butterflies such as peacock and comma feed on flowering plants and nettles. You may also spot the red bushy tail of a fox or, more likely, smell its strong musty odour.

Broom park is an ideal starting point with its woodland walks, large picnic area and plentiful parking. A new route has been created which minimises the steep drop down to the river. New ponds and wildflower meadows have also been created. As you cross the footbridge keep an eye out for movement in the River Deerness, it may well be an otter.

Waxwings, with their distinctive reddish-brown crest, have been seen at Brancepeth. They are winter visitors and feed on the berries, which are in abundance on the hawthorn trees lining the Railway Path. Brancepeth Station was part of a 19th century estate village which was created to improve the approach to Brancepeth Castle.

The section between Willington and Sunnybrow is urban and the route is less obvious. Follow the blue signs through the streets until you reach countryside once more. At Sunnybrow there are deep wooded ravines with rushing streams. Look out for jay and kestrels. At Rough Lea a missing bridge causes the Railway Path to dive and twist to get back on course. Shales and clay were dug here for brick making. There were six brickworks in a four mile stretch of the valley downstream from Hunwick.
As you approach Bishop Auckland, there are superb views of Auckland Castle, the residence of the Bishop of Durham since the 12th century. The route ends at Newton Cap Viaduct. In 1995 the viaduct became a road carrying traffic across the River Wear and it is thought to be the first example of such a conversion. If you wish to keep away from the traffic, continue from the car park along a bridleway under the viaduct until you reach the 14th century Skirlaw Bridge then turn left over the bridge to reach Bishop Auckland town centre.

Accessibility Statement
This 9 mile linear walk gently rises from Broompark to Bishop Auckland and is relatively flat along its entire length. There are several steep gradients where bridges once stood but only those which are particularly steep have been noted on the map so you are advised to also look at the route profile. The path is mainly a hard, unsealed surface with some large stones and loose material on some of the slopes. There are short sections of tarmac. The path width is between 1.8 and 3 metres. There are a number of seats along the route and picnic tables at Broompark and Newton Cap.

Photographs: I Henry, www.northeastwildlife.co.uk