

Howwood

Access Pathways Initiative

Walks in and around Howwood

About Howwood

The name Howwood is derived from “The hollow in the wood” and the village was known as “Hollowood in the mid 19th century. The main employment then was cloth bleaching and texturing, and the Bowfield and Midton Works were open for much of the 20th century, when the area occupied by the village was smaller. The village doubled in size and population in the 1990’s; Howwood was by-passed in 1993 by a new road, and the the railway station re-opened in 2001.

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White Route

Round the village. Mostly on tarmac paths, but the park can be muddy, there are steps going up to Semple View and Dunallister path is uneven. Easy to moderate, steep in places

- a bit over 2km, allow 30 minutes.

Head towards Johnstone along the main road, past the Post Office. Just after the Howwood Inn you will see a path with a dog waste bin on your right, going up into the park. Take it, and go round the end of the football pitch, and up past the new playground. There are splendid views across to the Hill of Stake from here on a fine day. Head back towards the village centre, as far as the junction with Bowfield Road on your left. Go up Bowfield Road, but only as far as the steps with a barrier in front of them on your left hand side. Go up the steps, and round past the Primary school; do not go up Semple View, but continue past the Margaret Fraser Memorial Garden to Hillfoot Drive. Turn right up that road as far as Hill Road (you will see a letter box at this junction). Turn right along Hill Road, and back to Bowfield Road. At the junction of Hill Road and Bowfield Road, look to your left and you should see two "Scottish Rights of Way" signs. It is the further away one that you want (Beith Road via Dunallister Path).

Take a detour and have a look at the grottoes in the grounds of Christ the King Church: the one directly in front of the church is to Our Lady of Fatima, the one to the left is to Our Lady of Lourdes, and the one on the right is to Our Lady of Mt Carmel. The church was built in 1928: there are wonderful views from this point.

Descend the Dunallister path, which will bring you out opposite the Church of Scotland. The original building was put up in 1858, and extended in 1887; Howwood remained part of Lochwinnoch parish until 1903, although Howwood "called" its own minister from 1868 onwards. The church has three very fine stained glass windows, including two donated by John Macnab of Kinnell house and the Midton Works, and one (the west window) by the Harveys of Castle Semple House in memory of their daughter. The east window is a classic window made by Kier of Glasgow, some other examples of his work may be seen in Glasgow Cathedral. The windows can be seen to best advantage during church services. From there proceed back to the "Triangle".

Green Route



To Fancy Bridge or the Temple and back, on metalled roads apart from a short ascent to the Temple over grass. Easy to moderate but long - 5km, allow 1 1/4 hours, to go to both.

Head towards the railway station, cross the line and keep going across Garthland Bridge (built in 1767 by the lairds of Castle Semple). After the lay-by on your left, there is a gate onto a metalled road, take this road until it becomes a dirt road (about a mile), when there is a second gate at the side of the road to give access at all times. The road starts to climb and gives fine views across Castle Semple Loch; you can continue as far as the "Fancy Bridge", where there is a kissing gate that presently marks the end of this route.

Alternatively you can follow the sign for the "Temple" to the top of Deer Hill, which gives even better views. The "Temple" was erected in 1758-9; by the Macdowalls who had become the owners of the Castle Semple estate. One theory is that it was somewhere for the gentry to take refreshment while they looked out over the deer park that had been created there. It emulated the architecture that young aristocrats would see on their "grand tour" of Europe. The Temple could well be Knights Templar/Masonic in origin; its octagonal shape associated with the eight points of the Knights Templar cross. The Macdowalls were a leading Scottish Masonic family, very prominent in military field lodges in North America at this time. The walls are not safe, so on no account should anyone climb them.

A route has been marked down the far side of the hill, so people can walk down to the Sustrans Cycle way. The going is rough, and strong footwear is required, if you are going to attempt this.

These walks have been developed by Howwood Wildlife & Woodlands (Recognised Scottish Charity No SC033831) to promote enjoyment of the local area. The leaflet has been financed by SNH and the Clydesdale Bank.

Red Route



Bowfield and the Linister, all on pavement or road. George Street steps and the rest of this route is steep in places. Good views. Easy to moderate

- 3.5km, allow 50 minutes to do the circular route

From the Railway Inn, walk up the unmade George Street as far as the steps which you will find on your left immediately at the end of the terrace of houses on that side. This used to be the main access road to the village, and the village school was at the end of this road until the 1960s. Follow the steps up the side of a burn until you reach Bowfield Road. Turn right going past Christ the King Church and continue on the pavement out into the countryside. The road climbs quite steeply, and you will get views to Hill of Stake, across Castle Semple Loch, and right over to Ben Lomond and the Argyll mountains on a clear day. Beyond Muirdykes Waterworks in front of Bowfield Country Club, take the road on your right, which descends sharply with an unspoilt piece of wilderness on your left. At the second sharp bend you will see Elliston Tower. It dates from the 15th century, built by the Sempill family, as the first castle on land granted by James III. There is a tradition that the family obtained the lands earlier, for helping Alexander III at the Battle of Largs in 1263. The family moved from "Ellistoun" as it was called, to Castle Semple circa 1500 and remained there till 1727 when the Macdowalls bought the estate, demolishing the old castle, and erecting a new one in 1735. The ruin is part of the grounds of Elliston House, and is not open to the public, so please respect their privacy. From here go down to the B787 and turn right back to the village

Orange Route



Newton of Belltrees and back, as the Red route, then on old coach road. There is a footbridge or a ford across Linister burn and the path there can be muddy. Very peaceful but no dogs please between May 1 - July 1, cows with calves. Moderate - 8km allow 1 3/4 hours

Follow the red route as far as the house "Misty Law", and its kennels. You will see the old coach road on your left, just below this property. Go round or over the two "hunt" gates and cross the Linister Burn. Follow the track of the old coach road on the other side of the burn. This is a great area for wildlife: deer, foxes, grey squirrel and many species of birds (resident and summer visitors), see how many you can hear/see and recognise! There is a perfect viewpoint next to some beech trees: from there the path has not been improved, but is reasonably level. Continue as far as the mobile phone mast, and please do as you are requested and do not progress beyond this point if you have a dog with you between May 1 and July 1. Cows with young calves in the fields on either side of the road, see dogs (not humans) as a threat and may want to see them off. You do not want to get caught in their path! So please turn back at this point if you have dogs with you, there are plenty of places for them to roam free by the burn where there is no livestock.

From the mobile phone mast keep on the rough road as far as Earlshill farm, where you will come back onto public roads. Continue down the road as far as the quiet settlement of Newton of Belltrees. From here retrace your footsteps: alternatively continue beyond Newton of Belltrees taking the second road on your right (Auchengrange Hill). This will bring you down to the Road head Roundabout. Take great care crossing the A737, and keep to the pavement on the right hand side of the A760. You will come to Lochwinnoch Station and the RSPB reserve in a short distance, and can always take the train home, but check train times before you set off! Allow 20 minutes walking time from Newton of Belltrees to Lochwinnoch station.

Blue Route



Whittliemuir Walk is mostly on quiet roads, but 3km of the walk across the moor can be very boggy and there are 2 burns to cross. Wonderful views, and some steep road climbs. Strenuous - 11 kms allow 3 hours

Head towards Johnstone along the main road, past the Post Office. Just after the Howwood Inn you will see a path with a dog waste bin on your right, going up into the park. Take it, and go round the end of the football pitch, and up past the new playground. Now turn left along Midton road, as far as the first road on your right, which you should take. It goes past the former Midton Works, and climbs steadily towards the hills. At the Ranfurly Kennels you should take the metalled road on your left which has a burn running down its right hand side. The area on your right is Skiff Wood, and people can walk round its circular track if they wish, but it takes a while and is not part of this route. As you climb higher there are great views of Ben Lomond, and when you reach the road end that leads to a ruined farm steading, you should keep to the track that follows, then crosses the burn. The hill on your right is Walls hill, and was the main settlement for the Damnonii tribe of Britons who lived in this area at the time of the Roman conquest. You will come to the start of the moor, where the Whittlemuir Dam used to be. It was built in the early 19th century to supply water for the Midton bleach works, but deemed to be "unsafe" and controversially drained in the 1980s with local environmentalists saying it would have an adverse effect on wildlife, especially wading birds. Follow the bollards, keeping away from the bed of the former loch. You will cross a burn, then in half a mile come to the boundary with Hartfield Farm. This is where you will need proper footwear! The path is being improved, but the land is very boggy in places. Head for the houses at Mid Hartfield, at the end of a farm track. From there you are back on metalled roads: turn right, and right at the next two junctions, past the Trout fishery, and right again onto Bowfield Road. This road is busier than the ones you have just been on, take care. At the entrance to the Bowfield Country Club go straight ahead down the steep brae, (see the Red Route, and follow directions for it, until you reach the village).