Welcome to Blanchland!

This short walk takes you from the village of Blanchland along the River Derwent to the hamlet of Baybridge. You walk back to Blanchland through lovely mixed woodlands. The path may be wet and muddy in places and tree roots are exposed.

Walk Distance: Approx 2km (1.25 miles)
Walk Length: 1 hour
Start/Finish: Blanchland car park (donations welcome)
Grid Reference NY964505
Public Transport: For journey and timetable information, please contact: North Pennines AONB Partnership, Weardale Business Centre, The Old Co-op Building, 1 Martin Street, Stanhope Co. Durham DL13 2UY +44(0)1388 528801
info@northpenninesaonb.org.uk www.northpennines.org.uk

You’d have to be lucky to get a view of Ratty like this, but there are signs that water voles (the more usual name for a water rat - not a rat at all) are present nearby.

Water voles eat plants such as rough grasses and rushes along the riverside. Unfortunately if these plants are grazed by farm animals, water voles can find it difficult to find food.

Sadly Ratty is having a hard time along British waterways. Whilst stoats and weasels are the villains in The Wind in the Willows, a new and more deadly predator has entered the story. The North American mink has joined native predators herons, pike and otters. Its introduction has spelled disaster for the water vole, as the size of the female means it is able to fit into the water voles’ underground tunnels, meaning that they no longer have a safe haven from predators.

As mole sat on the grass and looked across the river, a dark hole in the bank opposite, just above the water’s edge, caught his eye, and dreamily he fell to considering what a nice snug dwelling-place it would make for an animal with few wants and fond of a bijou riverside residence, above flood level and remote from noise and dust. As he gazed, something bright and small seemed to twinkle down in the heart of it, vanished, then twinkled once more like a tiny star. But it could hardly be a star in such an unlikely situation; and it was too glittering and small for a glow-worm. Then, as he looked, it winked at him, and so declared itself to be an eye; and a small face began gradually to grow up round it, like a frame round a picture.

A brown little face, with whiskers.
A grave round face, with the same twinkle in its eye that had first attracted his notice.
Small neat ears and thick silvery hair.
It was the Water Rat!

The Wind in the Willows, Kenneth Grahame

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© Darin Smith
© Andy Lees/NPAP
© William Richardson

Tail 1: The Water Vole

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When you reach the public road you are almost at the half-way point. Turn left and cross the bridge over the river. After a short distance turn left again into the woodland. Follow the woodland track, this time higher above the river, until you reach the road. In between the densely planted conifer plantations you can see a lovely birch wood with bushes dripping with bilberries in the late summer/early autumn. Look out for a picturesque waterfall near the end of this section.

At the road, turn left and retrace your steps through Blanchland to the car park.

1 Route description - start here!
Starting from the car park turn right, and go south into the village along the footpath on the right hand side of the road. Walk towards the archway and the Lord Crewe Arms Hotel. As you go through the arch you enter the village square formed by buildings that were part of Blanchland Abbey in the past.

When the river is high follow the path from the car park along the north side of the playing field and meadows to Baybridge.

3 A mix of woodlands
The woodlands you pass through on this walk are varied. The conifers (including Scots pine, Douglas fir and larch) have been planted because the land is too steep to farm. As you pass into a darker area of the woodland, you’ll see Sitka spruce is the dominant species here. These North American trees grow very well in Britain and planted close together they grow tall and straight. It is now an attractive part of the landscape and provides habitat for many woodland creatures, possibly even the rare red squirrel.

Other trees, including birch, rowan and alder grow freely and naturally. Some of the trees are very old and established. Younger trees, especially the rowan, show signs of browsing by roe deer and rabbits. Where this damage is severe the trees may die.

A natural bounty
Alongside the river you can see a fairly large shingle bank. Search amongst the shingle and you may find minerals such as galena and fluor spar which give clues to the mining heritage of the area. For more information on the geology of the area contact the AONB Partnership.