

## THE STRAWBERRY LINE



**The Strawberry Line Heritage Trail is a traffic free route through beautiful landscapes linking the North Somerset Moors to the Mendip Hills.**

The Cheddar Valley Railway was constructed by the Bristol & Exeter Railway Company and opened in 1869. It became an important line for passengers and freight, carrying dairy produce, stone and, of course, the famous Cheddar strawberries, from which it takes its name.

The line was busy for nearly a century until final closure in 1965. The line has since been reclaimed by nature and is now a Nature Reserve managed to protect and enhance a rich variety of habitats of wetlands, limestone grassland, woodland and scrub.

The Cheddar Valley Railway Walk Society voluntary organisation was formed in 1979 to secure and preserve the disused line as a long distance recreation route and nature reserve. It went on to set up the line for walking and cycling starting work in 1983. Today it forms an eleven mile, mostly traffic free corridor through countryside, orchards and picturesque villages. Improvements are still being made 30 years later and more exciting projects are planned for the future. The Society works in partnership with North Somerset Council and also has branches between Cheddar and Wells who are working to extend the route to Wells and beyond. (see [www.strawberryline.org.uk](http://www.strawberryline.org.uk)) Together we seek to instil a better understanding of wildlife and countryside, promote the region as a good place to visit and increase tourism revenues within the local

community. Supporters include Sustrans and Local Authorities along the route.

**The fully operational cycle-path from Cheddar to Yatton calls at Axbridge, Winscombe, Sandford, and Congresbury.**



**The track begins at Yatton Station**, which is well served by trains from Bristol, Taunton, Weston-super Mare and further afield. Exit the station from Platform One and turn right. At the end of the car park you will see the gateway artwork that marks the start of the path and it's a fairly straightforward route from here:-

Travel along the raised track overlooking open landscape under big skies and, at the occasional crossing in the path, simply continue straight on. After crossing the River Yeo, the path comes to the main A370 approaching Congresbury. Turn immediately left onto the new path alongside the river before using the pedestrian crossing to re-join the route. (For refreshments/toilets, continue on the main road into Congresbury taking care of fast, heavy traffic.)

The path now continues through leafy woodland before coming into open countryside. Keep straight on and pass through cider orchards to emerge on a quiet

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road. Go left over Nye Bridge and, shortly, a track on the right takes you to Sandford. You can stop for refreshments at the Railway Inn, or visit Thatchers Farm Shop before retracing to the Pelican crossing. Cross safely and follow the Strawberry Line signs.

The 'gem' of Sandford Station, housing the Railway Heritage Centre for the Strawberry Line, quickly comes into view left. This fully restored 1869 building with authentic interior, platform and a carriage opened in 2010 and should not be missed. It is run by dedicated volunteers, open at weekends from April to end of October and serves a welcome 'cuppa'. Access is direct from the line via a gate into the St Monica Development. (see [www.sandfordstation.co.uk](http://www.sandfordstation.co.uk))



After a pleasant woodland stretch you will reach the old station at Winscombe now converted into an environmental 'Green Space'. It is owned by the local community and has been created entirely by committed volunteers of Winscombe & Sandford Millennium Green Trust who keep it 'spick and span'. Here you will find picnic areas, a sculpture crafted from local limestone and a 'timeline' of brass plaques along the platform edge, marking historic events of the past 2,000 years. A May Fair has been held here each year since its opening in 2000.

You are now in the heart of Winscombe with toilets, café, pub, shops etc.



Back on the Strawberry Line – after another mile you will come to the dark and eerie Shute Shelve Tunnel for which you may want to switch on your bike lights, although there is some lighting to guide you through!

After emerging into sunlight, continue a short distance to the busy A38. Cross with care and regain the path. On reaching the by-pass, turn immediately right onto a quiet road heading downhill on the contraflow cycle lane. At the bottom, turn left and follow signs into Axbridge where you can enjoy picturesque streets, visit King John's Hunting Lodge Museum and a choice of pubs and cafes. Head south out of Axbridge. At the main road, turn right opposite St Michael's Cheshire Home onto to the last stretch of traffic free path to enjoy fine views over Cheddar Reservoir.

Finally the path winds through a housing estate before ending rather unceremoniously in an industrial estate. Return along the same route, or continue by road into Cheddar with its famous Gorge and cave system, and even more famous cheese!

*Photos courtesy of Lois Brenchley*