Work to restore the parks was completed in 2014 following a successful £7 million bid from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

3. The East Lancashire Railway Bridge was built in 1846. The railway previously approached the river over 52 arches. Most of these have been filled in to make the embankment stronger, but two survive. On the north side of the river, the line of the railway intersects Miller and Avenham Parks.

4. A shortage of money prevented the Lancaster Canal from being carried across the River Ribble on an aqueduct. In 1804, a tramway was opened. It led from Walton Summit, across the river, and into the centre of Preston to meet the canal at the Coal War, near Corporation Street. Ribbleton Road runs today just across Fishergate. Wagons pulled by horses would be kept on the track by rails that were L-shaped. They transported agricultural produce, coal and limestone. The current Old Tram Road Bridge was built in 1966. It was designed to look like the original old timber truss bridge that crossed the River Ribble at the same point.

5. The earliest records of the Frensham wood area describe it as pasture and willow fields, mostly owned by the Walton family. Anne Walton married Edward French in 1657, and the surname is thought to be the source of the area’s name.

6. The London Road Bridge was built between 1779 and 1791 and was later widened in the 1930s. It replaced an ancient five arch bridge.

7. Flatts Mill was located off Winery Lane where part of the mill is now the building. It originally spun cotton, and in 1901, it was used to grow grain. The mill was later used to manufacture paper. The bridge that crosses the River Darwen on Winery Lane is recorded on a map from the mid-19th century as Flatts Bridge.

8. The Whitehouse Triangle was formed by junctions connecting the West Lancashire Railway line to the East Lancashire Line between 1863 and 1900. Since the closure of the lines, the triangle has been managed for wildlife within Preston Junction Local Nature Reserve.

9. Before the Old Penwortham Bridge was constructed, a ferry carried passengers across the River Ribble. At the time, this was the only way to cross when the tides were too high to pass on foot at the ferries.

10. The remains of a bridge that carried the West Lancashire Railway until 1964 can be seen supporting a waste pipe across the river.

11. Built in 1759 to replace a bridge that collapsed three years after completion, the cobbled Old Penwortham Bridge is the oldest still standing on this route. It carried the main road from Preston through Leyland and on to Southport, but it is now closed to vehicles.

This route follows paths through formal and informal landscapes, and includes built remnants of a lost industrial heritage gradually being reclaimed by nature. The various bridges follow the Ribble and provide dramatic backdrops to the start of the river’s tidal character.

Distance: 7.8 km / 5 miles
Difficulty: Easy
**Ribble Rivers Trust Projects**

The Trust’s work in the tidal zone is primarily focussed on improving water quality by working with farmers, landowners, industry and schools to reduce faecal matter and other pollution.

One project has been determining the sources of faecal matter through extensive monitoring of local water courses. Another has carried out a study to identify further key issues to target in future projects.

**THE RIVERS:** The River Ribble was known in Roman times as the Belasica, but the origin of the name Ribble is unknown. The source lies north of the iconic Ribblehead viaduct and flows west - unique for a large Yorkshire river. It is fed by four main tributaries: the Hodder, Calder, Darwen and Douglas. The estuary is a major wetland area and the river is tidal for 11 miles inland as far as Walton-le-Dale. Flood alleviation measures have been introduced in recent years, but the river has long been noted for breaking its banks along this stretch.

The confluence of the Ribble and River Darwen lies between the Old Tram Road Bridge and the Ribble Bridge. Its source is Jacks Key Clough, to the south of Darwen. Historically polluted until the 1970s, the Ribble Rivers Trust’s main focus for improving the River Darwen is now re-connecting stretches of river. Historic weirs, like those at Highton Bottoms and Lower Darwen, were constructed along the Ribble’s course to supply power and water to cotton and paper mills. These have created barriers to migrating fish and in many cases, the weirs no longer serve the purpose that they once did.

**WILDLIFE:** The walk passes through Preston Junction Local Nature Reserve, rich in birds, butterflies and wild flower species. Look out for blue tits, herons and willow warblers. The LNR is also a great place to spot butterflies, like gatekeepers and small coppers. Plants, like great burnet, yellow rattle and hoary ragwort are also regular sights.

As the tides from the Irish Sea still affect this area, this stretch of river accommodates fish that you would expect to find in saltwater, like flounders, as well as those adapted to freshwater, such as chub and roach. Others, like salmon, eels and sea trout pass through this area to spend part of their life cycle in both the rivers upstream and the sea downstream.

**B. Across to South Ribble**

Cross the River Ribble, start at London Road Bridge. *At Ashtone on Ribble Nursery, turn right to head through the carpark avoiding the cobble slipway to the river bank and bear left. Follow the sign for a concessionary footpath leading to a set of stone steps to the right of a brick wall. Follow the unsurfaced path along the riverbank until it turns left (at the confluence of the River Darwen and River Ribble) and head along the River Darwen to Winery lane.*

*The stretch of the route between the brackets is largely unsurfaced; if you have difficulty negotiating it, return to London Road and continue towards Winery Lane. Follow the public footpath and yellowway signed to Penwortham, down Winery Lane, passing the former site of Flat’s Mill (7). This will lead you to Flat’s Bridge where you will meet the other route.*

**C. Ribble Bridleway**

Cross Flatts Bridge over the River Darwen and turn right at the farm track junction. The track leads back to the River Ribble. When the track veers left into fields, take the stile or gate on your right to remain on the bridleway. This stretch offers lovely views of the river, its bridges and access to the parks. Pass under the bridge and take a sharp left up to the Old Tram Road.

**D. Old Tram Road**

Where four tracks meet, by a carpark, take a sharp right onto the Old Railway Line following a sign to Preston. Head along the former route of the East Lancashire Line (which opened in 1846 to link Blackburn and Preston by rail). This stretch offers wide views across the Preston skyline. A brief detour to the left leads you through the picturesque Triangle (8).

**E. Lower Penwortham**

Pass under the West Coast Rail Line Bridge and keep the houses on your left as you remain by the River Ribble (passing the historic site of the Penwortham Ferry (9)). Once past the remains of the West Lancashire Railway Bridge (10), turn right onto the cobbled Old Penwortham Bridge (11). When you reach the northern end of the bridge, turn right down a flight of steps and follow the road back upstream to the North Union Railway Bridge where the route began.

This is a great place to explore the parks more fully and pop into the Avenham Pavilion (which is the official start and end of the Preston Guild Wheel) for a welcome drink and bites to eat.

**ROUTE DIRECTIONS**

**A. Miller and Avenham Parks**

From The Continental on South Meadow Lane, follow the Ribble Way and Guild Wheel beneath the North Union Railway Bridge (1). Continue on the tree-lined riverside avenue through Miller and Avenham Parks (2). Along the way, you’ll pass the East Lancashire Railway Bridge (3), Avenham Pavilion, the Old Tram Road Bridge (4) and Frenewood (5) before reaching the London Road Bridge (6). You can detour around the parks along this stretch, or leave them to explore when you have completed the route.

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