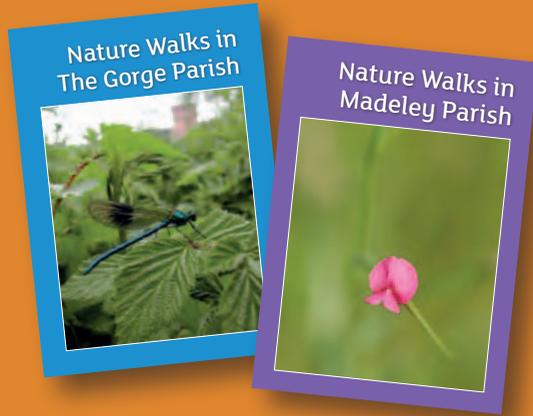


Acknowledgements

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Other walks in this series



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Disclaimer: No responsibility can be accepted by either the authors or publisher for any injuries which may be sustained whilst using information contained in this booklet.

Nature Walks in Stirchley & Brookside Parish



Artwork by MA Creative • www.macreative.co.uk

Introduction

Welcome to 'Nature Walks in Stirchley & Brookside Parish' – three very varied walks which take you into and around some of the special wildlife sites in this part of Telford. Following some or all of the routes in this guide will take you into Local Nature Reserves, over wooded pit mounds, past picturesque pools and historic sites, along old hedge-lines to dramatic viewpoints, and through a varied mix of habitats and green space where wildlife abounds.

Whether strolling through wildflower meadows, trekking through the trees, or watching a Buzzard soar over open countryside, we hope that this booklet will help you discover for yourself, and learn a little more about, our rich and varied flora and fauna.

Public Footpaths and other Rights of Way are often the best, and healthiest, ways to explore an area, and there are nearly thirty different routes of this kind in Stirchley and Brookside! In putting together this guide, we have tried to use parts of this valuable network wherever possible and we do hope that this sample will encourage further exploration and appreciation.

This guide is suitable for locals and visitors alike – young and old, and provides an introduction and a key, to the wild treasures on our doorstep. We do hope that you will find this booklet enjoyable and easy to use, and that you will encourage friends and family to visit and discover some of the special locations featured here. This is just a taster of what the area has to offer, there are many other miles of footpaths to explore and appreciate on future 'Nature Walks'.

We hope that you enjoy them as much as we do!

The South Telford Rights of Way Partnership, January 2012

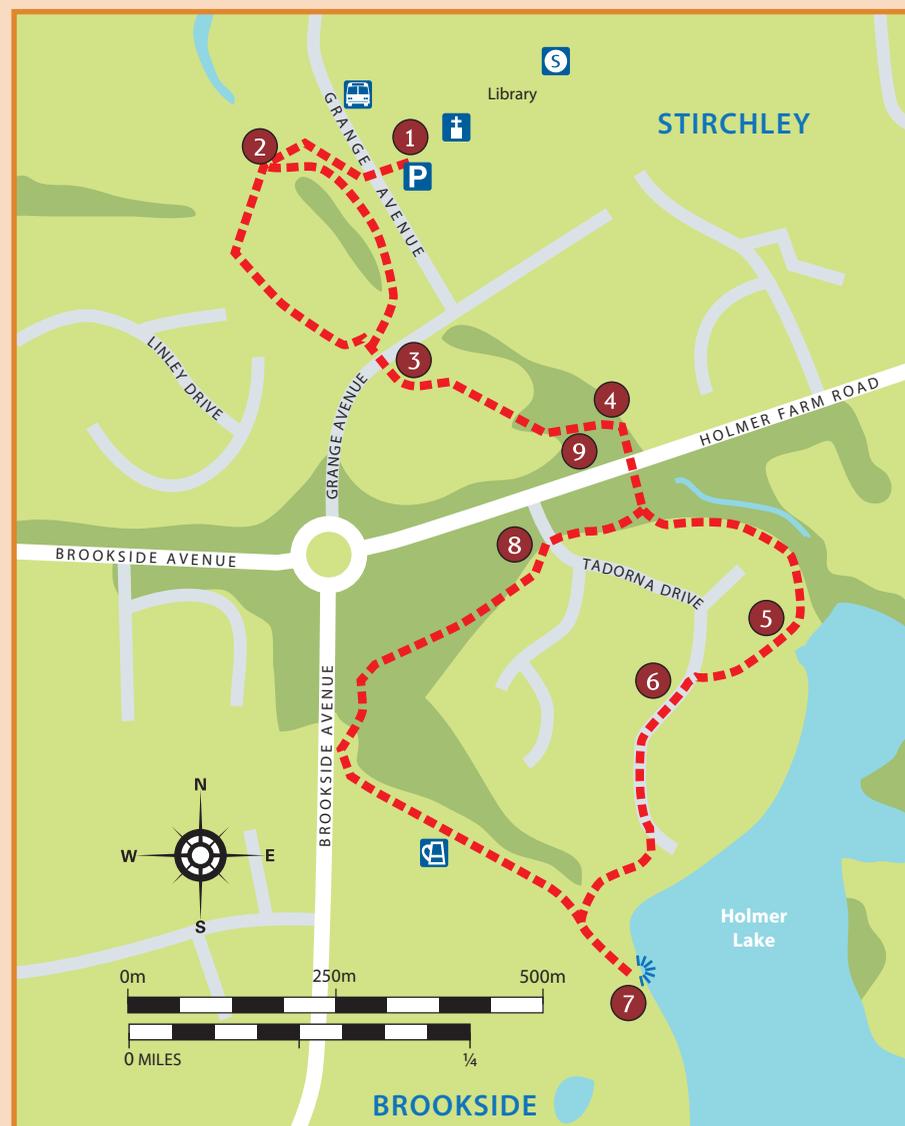
Key to map symbols

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------|---|--------------|
|  | Walk route |  | Viewpoint |
|  | Other footpaths |  | Church |
|  | woodland |  | Public House |
|  | Car park |  | School |
|  | Bus Stop | | |

Stirchley Dingle & Holmer Lake

Start and parking: Stirchley Centre car park

Distance: 1.9km / 1.2 miles • **Time:** 1-2 hours • **Walk Grade:** Easy/Medium



A few minutes stroll from Stirchley's supermarket and schools takes you through an amazing mix of wildflowers, woodlands, lakesides, hedges and streams. Look for migrant birds, waterfowl and grand old Oaks along the way as you explore around and beyond this freshly declared Local Nature Reserve.

1 Leave the Church car park and cross the road towards mature trees. Turn right and walk along the tarmac path for 50m before following the path and tree-line left to a bench. At the bench take a sharp left and go into a small wood passing an information panel on your right.

Several species of tree are found here including Oak, Alder, and Ash. A woodland plant known as Lords & Ladies or Cuckoo Pint grows under the trees. It is particularly noticeable from August



Snake's Head Fritillary

onwards when it has developed a cluster of bright orange-red berries. (Please note: These berries are very poisonous and should not be handled or eaten).

2 Walk along the sleeper edged path. Go straight ahead at the crossroads and follow the path. Having come out from cover of the trees turn left and go through the underpass.

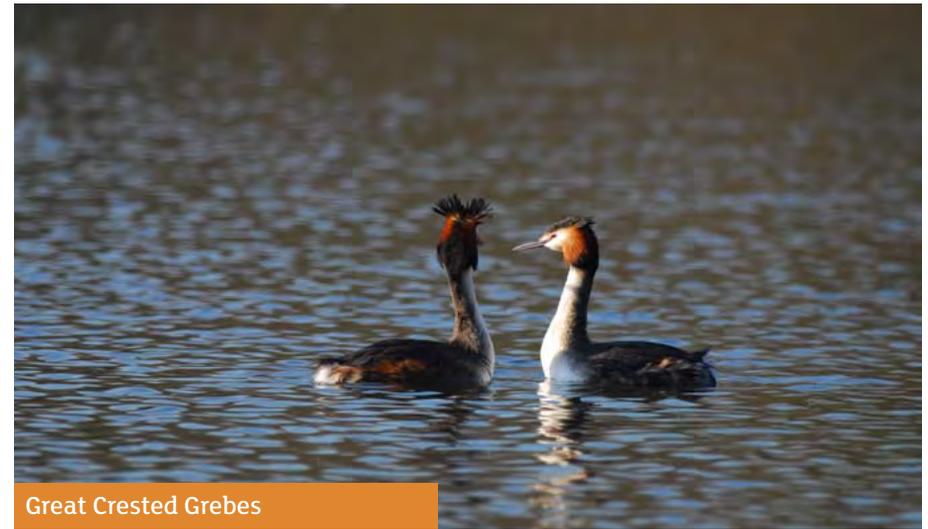
Upon leaving the underpass there is a small glade to your left. In April you may find flowering Snake's Head Fritillary here. The purple checked flower head hangs at the end of the stalk and bobs in a breeze. Willow trees grow along the line of the Mad Brook in the damp soils. Newts will breed in this location where shallow pools persist.

3 Follow the tarmac path passing a BMX track on the right.

Several mature Oak trees flank the path. This line of trees gives an insight to the history of the site. Many years ago the Oaks would have formed part of a hedgerow making up the boundary of a field.

4 Go through the underpass on the right and take the path to the left upon exit. There are now garden fences on your right as you walk. Ignore a bridge to the left and continue walking along the fence line.

Listen and watch for birds making use of gardens and the wider landscape including trees to your left. Several birds will be feeding from bird tables and feeders in the gardens where residents have provided food. However, some birds will be feeding on natural foods such as slugs, snails, earthworms, and caterpillars. Blue Tits can be seen delicately moving through rose bushes during summer feeding on aphids. Tapping noises coming from the undergrowth can give



Great Crested Grebes

away the feeding spot of a Song Thrush. This bird will take snails as prey and extract their fleshy body by smashing the shell against a rock on the ground.

5 A drainage channel is on the left which is passed as you walk past a metal bollard and into the end of a cul-de-sac (Tadorna Drive). Follow the road ahead and leave the cul-de-sac turning left.

Starlings can often be seen in small flocks feeding on lawns. They probe the grass with their beak looking for leatherjackets which are the larva of the European Crane Fly (Daddy Long-legs). This gangly insect emerges as an adult late in the year and sometimes enters houses accidentally. Other animals such as the Garden Spider will also feed on the Daddy Long-legs and other insects having caught them in their purpose made web.

6 Take the pavement until you can see Holmer Lake ahead. Here turn right passing another metal bollard. After 50m turn left and head down to the edge of the lake. There are great views across the water from this point.

A variety of water birds live on the lake and can be seen throughout the year. Perhaps the highlight of the year is the courtship display of Great Crested Grebes. Male and female sometimes join together in an amazingly synchronised water based 'dance' in early spring. As well as the familiar Mallard other water birds include Tufted Duck, Moorhen, and Mute Swan. Watch how each of these species makes use of a distinct part of the water habitat. The Mallard will dabble in the shallows feeding with their head under the surface. Tufted Ducks prefer deeper water and dive to feed on insects, molluscs, and plants underwater. Moorhens tend to skulk in the reeds typically avoiding detection until they call. On warm evenings at dusk you may see bats flying over the water and along the tree line catching prey such as midges, mosquitoes, and moths. A Common Pipistrelle bat may only weigh about 5g yet can eat about 3,000 small insects in a night!

7 Turn back and leave the way you entered. Head over the crossroads and up the path to the left in the direction of The Mallard public



Hoverfly on an umbellifer

house. Pass the pub on your left. Bear right and then take the path to the left. Follow this path around to the right until you reach Tadorna Drive.

Mature trees make up a small wood to your right. Birdsong can be heard as you walk past. Stand and listen to the calls and see if you can make out the location and species of the birds singing. Early May is the best time for hearing birdsong at its finest as this is breeding season for the majority of UK birds. Several birds are very colourful or striking in appearance including Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, and the male Blackbird. Some birds, including Starlings and House Sparrows, can be seen in the locality making use of cracks and open spaces in house roofs where they will readily nest. Opportunities like this are taken in the absence of natural cavities in trees.

8 Cross the road and pass through a metal gate. A loop around the housing estate has now been completed as you follow the path

down and turn left through the underpass.

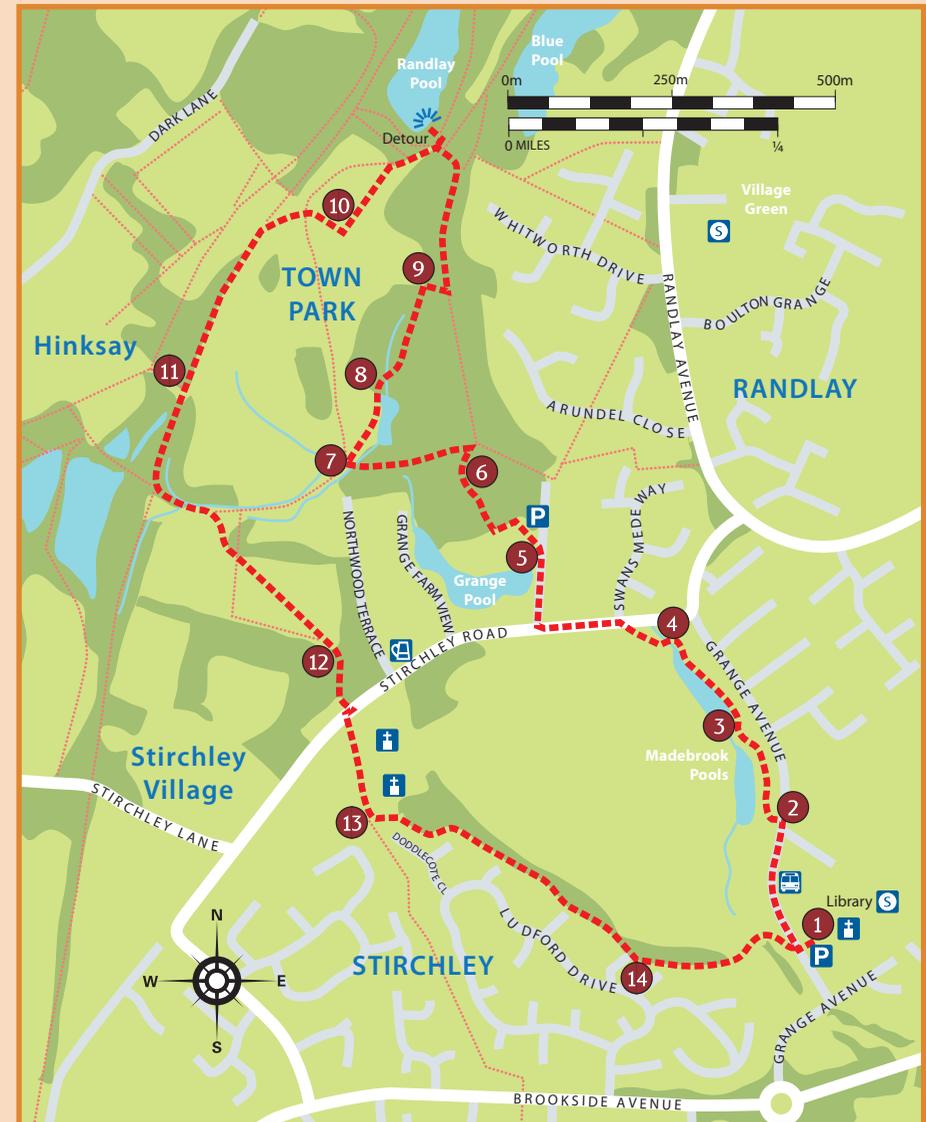
Insects may be seen on the wing here including hoverflies, butterflies, beetles, and flies. A pair of binoculars is very useful for watching these creatures without disturbing them. The white flowers of umbellifers along the edge of the path are good places to watch insects. There are many species of umbellifers and quite a few are found in this location. They are generally quite tall with the majority having round clustered domes of white flowers. Species include Cow Parsley, Ground Elder, and Hogweed. Identification of this family of plants typically requires use of a wildflower ID book.

9 Leave the underpass and turn left and retrace your steps towards the next underpass. On exit take a left and then immediate right. Gardens are now to your left. Take the first right and head back to the bench and then car park where you began the walk.

Madebrook Pools & Telford Town Park

Start and parking: Stirchley Centre car park

Distance: 4km / 2.5 miles • **Time:** 2 hours • **Walk Grade:** Easy/Medium



An ideal 'taster' walk for Telford Town Park/Madebrook Local Nature Reserves through a mix of wildlife habitats – pools, scrubland, meadows, and pit mounds. Panoramic views with lots to see, including many bird species, on this 'All year round' route through an industrial landscape which over time has turned green again.

- 1** Start at the Church car park. Walk to the road and cross over towards the trees. Turn right and walk along the roadside. Pass the bus stop with a grassy area to your left.

The grassland has been mown on a very regular cycle for many years. A short sward allows for birds such as Starlings and Blackbirds to search for prey on, and in, the soil. However, a blanket of short grass is not particularly rich in biological diversity (biodiversity) therefore Telford & Wrekin Council has decided to alter the mowing regime. Fewer and less regular cuts throughout the growing season

of April – October will allow the grasses to grow taller, flower, and eventually seed. Given time this area will become more diverse in plant species therefore attracting more animal species.

- 2** Keep walking until you reach a hedgerow and paths leading to the left. Take the final turning to the left indicated by a fingerpost for the 'South Telford Way'. Walk along the surfaced path with an information panel to your left and the mature hedgerow flanking the road over to the right.

Madebrook Pools provide a home, and a source of water, for many species of plant and animal. During the 1980s a programme of management works were carried out to improve the appearance and habitat value of the pools. The bed of Common Reed was planted during the works and this tall species of grass has successfully established in the shallow margins. Access to the water body has always been easy for water birds, however in the past there was little scope for refuge places. Nowadays the reed beds are utilised by several bird species



Mute Swans and cygnets

for breeding. Moorhens build a nest from water plants and reeds amongst the reed stems for privacy and away from eyes of potential predators. The much bigger Mute Swans regularly build a huge nest of broken reeds in April where they lay and incubate about six greyish-green eggs. Mute Swans can live up to 20 years and tend to remain with the same mate for life. Migrants such as the Reed Warbler also nest here returning in May from wintering grounds in Africa.

- 3** Remain on the surfaced path and continue to walk by the second pool on your left.

Swathes of pink flowers adorn the banks of the pool in August. The flowering plant is Great Willowherb which prefers damp soils. Following flowering season tufts of seeds are released into the wind for dispersal further afield. Trees alongside the water provide cover for birds such as Tree Sparrow, Greenfinch, and Collared Dove. Coming to water to drink or bath can be dangerous for such birds as they are more prone to predation. Sparrowhawk and Kestrel will readily take small birds as prey. Therefore the tree cover offers a relatively safe haven for retreat.

- 4** Follow around the far end of the pool and head for the road via a metal gate in the corner of the site. Turn left at the road and follow the path passing a row of houses. Cross the road for the first exit to the right marked 'Leading to Grangemere'. Walk on passing Grange Pool to the left.

Shoals of fish including Roach and Perch can sometimes be seen here swimming in the shallows. Damselflies and dragonflies patrol above and around the water hunting for insects. One of our rarer birds, the notoriously shy Bittern, has been reported skulking within the reeds during harsh winters. During May and June numerous pink spikes of orchid

flowers can be found amongst the sward in the neighbouring grassland.

- 5** Enter the car park and walk across taking a diagonal route towards the opposite corner. Follow the public footpath sign to the seating area then bear right up wooden steps which climb the slope of an old pit mound.

Nature has reclaimed this industrial spoil heap with Oak and Birch growing well here. Developing acorns can be found on the Oaks in late summer. Pedunculate Oak (English Oak) has acorns with stems and leaves without stems. The opposite is true when identifying Sessile Oak.

- 6** Having climbed the steps walk to the absolute highest point on the pit mound. Now turn to the right and follow a well-worn track through the trees. Leave the trees via a slope and exit on to a hard surfaced track. The wide track has 3 routes forming a T-junction. Turn left and follow straight ahead passing through a gate.

Views to the sky are closed here as the tree canopy closes over the track. Birds can be heard calling and moving within the trees and shrubs. Dogwood grows well here as does Bindweed which produces white trumpet shaped flowers throughout summer.

- 7** Having followed the wide track you will reach a crossroads with six exits. Take the exit immediately to the right flanked by an information panel for Fletcher's Pool.

Common Spotted Orchids and Southern Marsh Orchids can be found flowering in the meadow from May to July. During summer the flowering plants of the meadow are visited by an array of insects searching for food. Grass Snakes frequent

this area searching for amphibians to eat. This is the longest of the three snake species native to the UK and can grow over 1m in length. *Note:* It is completely harmless to people.

- 8** Having followed the worn path across the meadow you now enter an area of dense scrub. Go across two small wooden bridges to cross the shallow channels of water. Head left from the second bridge and follow the path.

During summer it can feel quite dark amongst the Hawthorn scrub due to the reduced light levels because of shade from the canopy. Ivy blankets the ground and grows up trees with its leaves hanging from the tree branches. Birds will nest amongst the scrub and gain some protection from predators because of the thorny branches. Ferns grow under the tree cover in the shade. Their fronds look particularly majestic in summer when shafts of sunlight pierce the canopy and illuminate them, giving the location a rainforest-like appearance.

- 9** The huge bulk of Stirchley Chimney greets you as you leave the scrub. Turn right and climb a shallow and wide flight of steps. Go left and walk along a surfaced track with views of the chimney to the left. Follow the path to the left as it begins to climb. (At the top of the slope a short detour can be taken for views across open water. Turn right and swing immediately left down a steep flight of steps to a concrete walkway and viewpoint over Randlay Pool. Watch for water birds including the magnificent Great Crested Grebe.) Turn left at the top of the slope and follow ahead. Leave the surfaced track which leads to the right and follow the worn path over the grass straight ahead.



Common Spotted Orchid

Pigeons often perch at the top of the chimney to the left. Watch and listen for Buzzard and Raven overhead. Buzzards may hunt for Rabbits that live in this area. Foxes, Polecat, and Weasel will also prey on Rabbits. Should you not see a Rabbit while walking you may notice signs of their presence including droppings, burrows, and defined runways amongst the tall grasses and patches of Bramble.

- 10** At the Jubilee Column/Wind Vane sculpture turn right and follow the parallel tracks of iron castings down the slope. Take the second exit to the left and go downhill to the Silkin Way path. Follow the surfaced track ahead to the left as it levels out.

Open grassland and pastures where horses graze can be glimpsed to the right. This path was formerly a railway line and evidence of this persists in the stone bank to the right. Ivy, ferns, and mosses now cover the bank and grow well in the shade of the overhanging trees. Listen for high-pitched squeaks of Common Shrew coming from the

undergrowth. This tiny mammal can occasionally be seen foraging for insects amongst the leaf litter.

- 11** Continue along the track passing under a footbridge. Take the first left by a sculptured seat and continue along a stone surfaced track. After 30m a track is to be found on the right leading into an area of grassland. Follow this footpath as it meanders diagonally across the field to the far right-hand corner.

During late summer birds begin to flock together in search of food. Finches and tits will often group together and can be seen feeding in the scrub and amongst vegetation. They will search out invertebrates and seeds. Goldfinches can be seen in this location during late summer and autumn delicately teasing out seeds from the fluffy head of thistles. Insects including butterflies and beetles can be found here throughout the warmer months. Watch for flower heads featuring clusters of ladybirds feeding on aphids as you follow the path.

- 12** Leave the field and enter the scrub and woodland via a small slope. Follow the well-defined route ahead and through the trees. Take a left down the footpath at the edge of a derelict brick wall and go down steps to the road. (Turn left here and head down Stirchley Road for 200m should you wish to end the walk at Grange Pool.) Cross the road to the right and take the wide stone surfaced road opposite. Walk on and past St James' Church and the Old Rectory.

Potholes in the road surface fill with water after rain. Birds come to the puddles to drink and bath. Look out for a variety of birds, including Robin, Dunnock and House Sparrow, in the gardens and churchyard which flank the old road.

- 13** At the end of the road turn left and down the tarmac path. Garden fences are on the right all the way down this part of the route. Trees and scrub are to the left.

At dusk bats can be seen flying along the edge of these trees and over the gardens searching for prey. Once darkness falls an occasional Tawny Owl can be heard calling from the taller trees in the vicinity. This species of owl sits in a tree scanning the ground below looking for small mammals and other prey items. Once it spots something of interest it swoops to the ground from the branch in near silence. After rain the tarmac path is criss-crossed by slugs and snails searching for food on either side of the track.

- 14** Remain on the tarmac path and at the end of the straight section follow the path to the left and down a slope. The path now leads back to the car park where this walk commenced, and links to the start of the Stirchley Dingle & Holmer Lake walk as an optional extension.



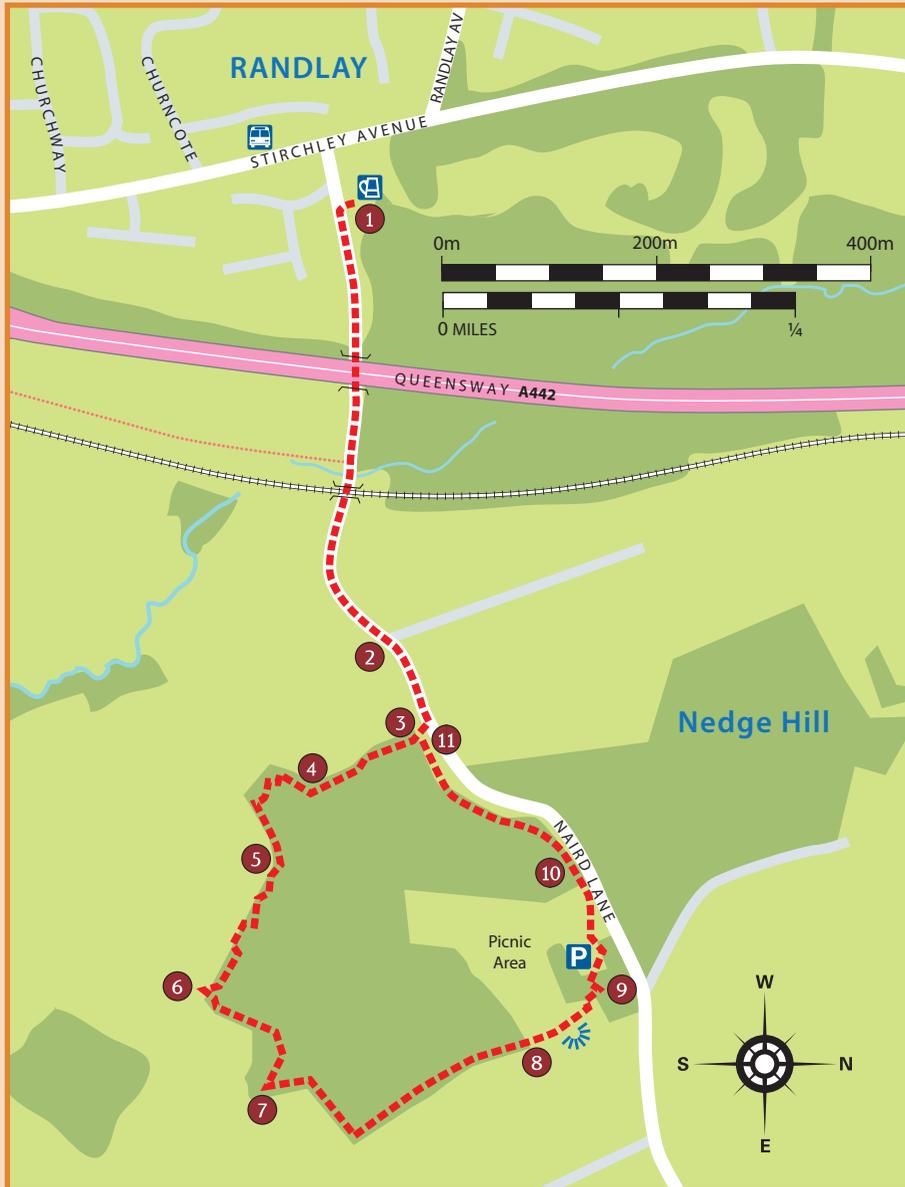
Small Tortoiseshell butterfly

Nedge Hill Loop

Start and parking: The Nedge Tavern car park (patrons only)

Distance: 3.2km / 2 miles

Time: 1-2 hours • **Walk Grade:** Easy/Medium



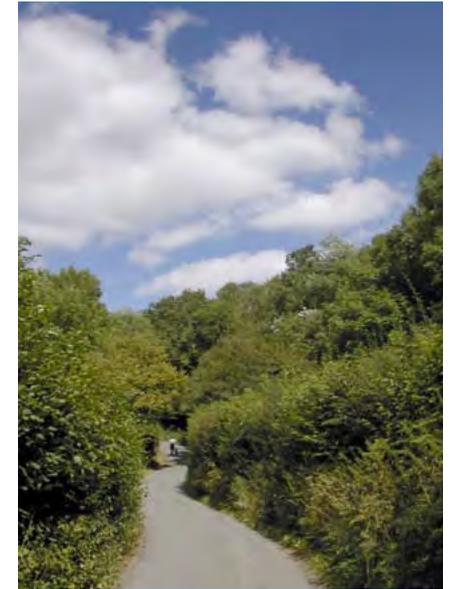
This really is the countryside on your doorstep! Easy access to old farm lanes leading to and from woodland edge routes around the hill. On a clear day you can see for up to 25 miles from here, whilst Buzzards circle above and Rabbits scurry along the hedgerows. Come and experience this lovely picnic location for yourself.

1 Commence your walk from The Nedge Tavern car park (patrons parking only in car park). Turn left out of the car park and walk down Naird/Nedge Lane. Pass through the tunnel and continue along the road. Pass through a second tunnel. Take care as the road narrows as there is no footpath along the roadside. The road sweeps left and upwards.

Flanking the road are several tree species. Growing along the verge are Elm, Birch, Oak, and Holly. Just before the second tunnel there is a small watercourse. Alder trees are typically found growing in wet habitats and can be found here along the banks of the brook. Stinging Nettles can be seen growing in the vicinity also during the summer months. Several species of butterfly including Comma and Peacock lay their eggs on this plant as a food source for their caterpillars.

2 Stay on the road passing the turning on the left. There are hedgerows on both sides of the road as you approach woodland in the near distance to the right.

This stretch of the road has a sunken aspect and is considerably lower than surrounding farmland. Hedgerows line the road and comprise of woody shrubs such as Hazel, Hawthorn, and Dogwood. Watch for birds singing from the top



A winding country lane

of the hedges during spring and early summer. Yellowhammers proclaim their territory through song and readily nest in mature hedgerows.

3 Turn off the road and into the wood on the right via a metal barrier/gate. Take the track straight ahead keeping the field margin on your right. This section of the walk is a loop following a public bridleway around the perimeter of the wood in an anti-clockwise direction.

Thick scrub is to your left just within the woodland. Several bird species can be heard calling from here in the breeding season (March – July). Blackbird, Robin, and Dunnock song is complemented by that of returning migrants including Chiffchaff and Blackcap.

4 After 100m the track slopes down to the right and then climbs once again to the left. The field boundary is constantly to your right.



Veteran Oak

Amongst the Hazel and Hawthorn of the field boundary there are some mature Oak trees. Pedunculate Oak, also known as English Oak, can be found as veteran specimens in hedgerows often having been planted as boundary markers many years ago. A huge Oak tree stands here with a great girth. Give it a hug to appreciate just how big this ancient tree is! Look closely and you will see pockets of deadwood in the crown. The tree develops scar tissue around the base of any dead branches and often continues future growth regardless.

- 5** The path reaches a junction where you continue right and maintain the presence of the field boundary. Go straight ahead for another 100m along the woodland edge.

Cherry trees, with their recognisable horizontally banded bark, grow along this section of the route. Rabbits can often be seen here where they utilise both woodland and grassland habitat. Woodland provides cover from predators

and the elements whilst the grassland provides food. The white of their tail can be seen as they bolt away for cover following any disturbance.

- 6** Having reached a corner of the woodland climb the slope to the left. Follow the track as it turns right above a dip in the terrain. A small pond can be seen in the dip surrounded by trees. This pond was once a field pond used for watering livestock, prior to the wood being created through planting.

This woodland was planted by Telford Development Corporation in the 1960s and has an extremely diverse mixture of tree species including Oak, Ash, Willow, Poplar, Maples, and Cherry. A variety of dead wood is visible on the ground here. This is a valuable part of the habitat and many species of invertebrate and fungi depend upon it as a food source. As dead wood is broken down the resulting matter and nutrients are returned to the soil.

- 7** Take a sharp turn to the left and continue up the slope.

Small flocks of tits and finches move through the countryside searching for food during autumn and winter. You may see and hear them as they move through the trees above you. Watch for the spectacular pinkish-red plumage of the male Bullfinch.

- 8** Light levels increase as you approach grassland. Leave the wood behind and follow the path across the grass staying to the right through a stand of Maple trees. Keep the hedgerow close on your right.

In the distance over the agricultural landscape you can see as far as Dudley on a clear day. Listen for the iconic calls of Skylark high in the sky above the fields during spring and summer. Buzzards can often be seen here, soaring high

overhead on summer thermals. The Raven is the largest member of the crow family and can often be heard before being seen as it calls from the sky during flight. Several invertebrate species can be found amongst the tall grasses and nettle bed alongside the hedgerow. Small blobs of white foam can be found on stems of some plants here in early summer. Commonly called Cuckoo Spit, this liquid is secreted by the immature nymphs of a sap feeding insect known as a Froghopper. The nymphs develop within this frothy substance which provides protection from predators, dehydration, and the climate. Froghoppers, when mature, are able to jump great distances in comparison to their body size.

- 9** Leave the grassland and walk into the car park to your left. Cross towards the car park exit/entrance. Go through a metal kissing gate on the left and move to the hedgerow over on the right. Keep the hedge on your right and follow the path into and along the edge of the wood.



Cuckoo Spit

There is one species of animal here that many people recognise signs of but may never get to see. The Mole produces the recognisable molehill when removing excess soil from its network of tunnels. Moles feed chiefly on earthworms but also take insect larvae during summer months. The dark molehill is particularly evident against the green grass in fields. However, they also frequent woodland habitats so keep an eye out for them on your walk.

- 10** Follow the gradient of the land downwards remaining on the path. Keep the hedgerow and road to your right as you descend.

Leaves change colour during autumn before falling from the trees. Many beautiful shades of red, orange, and yellow can be seen throughout the season on Nedge Hill. Fruits and nuts also hang from the branches at this time of year. Look for red berries on Hawthorn, dark purple berries of Elder, and the green acorns of Oak.

- 11** After approximately 200m you will reach the point where you initially entered the wood from the road. Exit the wood and turn left along the road retracing your steps to the start point.

Glossary

Glade: A small area of grass without trees in a wood.

Invertebrate: An animal with no spine e.g. earthworm, midge.

Nutrient: Any substance which plants or animals need in order to live and grow.

Sward: A lawn or meadow.