

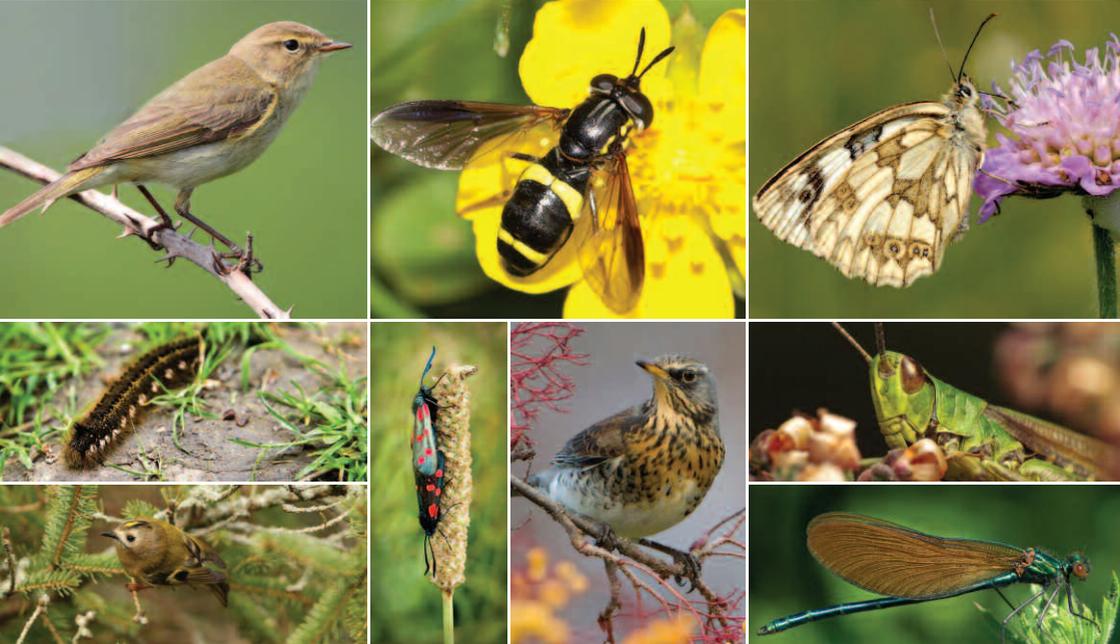


Worcestershire



A Worcestershire Woods & Wildlife Walk

Creating a Living Landscape



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

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Worcestershire Wildlife Trust relies on the support of its members and on donations and grants.

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 **The National Lottery**[®]
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- Knapp and Papermill Nature Reserve
- Blackhouse Wood Nature Reserve
- Crews Hill Wood Nature Reserve
- Ravenshill Wood Nature Reserve



Welcome



Before you set off...

Maps: Ordnance Survey Explorer 204, Landranger 149 & 150

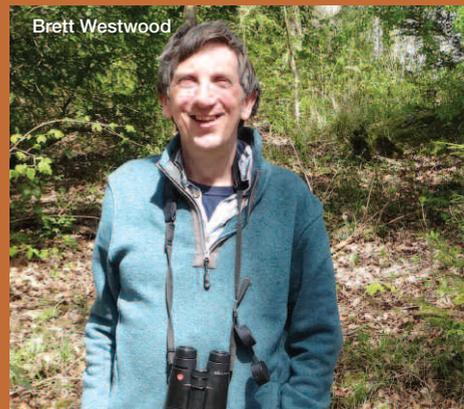
Total distance: 8 miles

Location: 6 miles west of Worcester, close to the villages of Alfrick, Suckley and Knightwick

Terrain: Mainly pasture and woodland, some steep slopes and stiles. Paths can become muddy and slippery during wet weather; during the summer some areas can become overgrown with nettles and brambles. Some fields may contain grazing animals.

Facilities: There is limited parking and toilets at both The Knapp and Papermill nature reserve and at Ravenshill Wood nature reserve. There is a community-run village store in Alfrick village as well as The Fold Cafe in Bransford, The Fox and Hounds public house in Lulsley and The Talbot in Knightwick.

Buses: For the most up to date information visit Worcestershire County Council's website www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20021/buses



Brett Westwood

Welcome to our Worcestershire Woods & Wildlife Walk, which covers almost eight miles of beautiful Worcestershire countryside on the edge of the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Our walk takes you through a diverse landscape created by complex geology and geomorphology, through ancient woodland, traditional orchard, meadows, pasture and farmland. As well as the nodding flowers and dancing butterflies, keep a lookout for geological and historical evidence as you walk.

Ancient Silurian rocks outcrop here, limestone and sandstone form the wooded ridges of the Suckley Hills and the rounded hilltops above the nearby Teme Valley. The Knightsford Gap at Knightwick was formed by glacial meltwater in the last ice age, cutting into hills and causing the River Teme to change its north-south course to flow east.

The walk takes you past old houses, through farmsteads and along old holloways, passing hand-dug quarries and ancient boundaries.

Download

There is also an audio version of this walk, narrated by Worcestershire naturalist, author and radio presenter Brett Westwood, available to download from the Blackhouse Wood pages of our website www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk



Wild garlic at The Knapp and Papermill's orchard

Beginning at the Knapp and Papermill nature reserve entrance (SO 75070 52157) walk up the path, past the small pond on your left and the information centre on your right. Go through the garden gate beyond the house and down a steep track to the orchard.

Our first stop is the orchard...

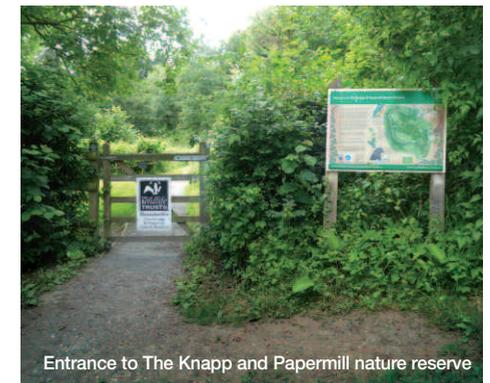
1. The Orchard (SO 74867 52121)

The reserve, including the orchard, was donated to the Trust in 1971 by Hugh and Shifa Doncaster who, as keen naturalists, had moved here in 1954.

There are 88 old fruit trees of two varieties – Annie Elizabeth and Bramley. Both are late flowering and fruiting so they are well suited to the cooler conditions in this part of the reserve.

In May the woodland floor is carpeted with wild garlic and there are plenty of wildflowers and butterflies. Later in the year, festoons of mistletoe adorn the upper branches of the trees and the berries provide food for mistlethrushes, blackbirds and blackcaps. Kingfishers breed along the Leigh Brook; there is a viewing screen to your left and you may be able to see them from here.

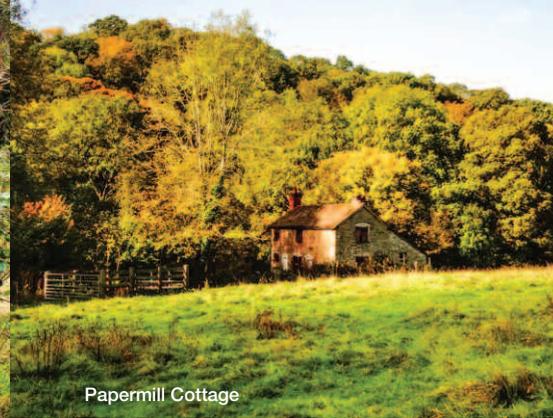
As you walk through the orchard, you'll see a pond on your right; this is a relic of an old river course, providing a home for frogs and newts.



Entrance to The Knapp and Papermill nature reserve



Pivany Bridge



Papermill Cottage



Treehouse

When you're ready, follow the path with the Leigh Brook to your left, past the 200 year old weir at the end of the orchard. Go through the gate and along the edge of the field about 150m to another gate leading into Big Meadow. Just on your left, through the other gate is the old, stone Pivany Bridge.

2. Pivany Bridge (SO 74897 51775)

The name probably derives from 'Epiphany' because the rent for this area was payable on January 6th – Epiphany Day. It is a packhorse bridge built to reach Big Meadow, which in the 18th and 19th centuries was partly a hopfield. From the bridge you can often see grey wagtails chasing flies over the water and you may be lucky enough to spot a dipper.

Big Meadow has not been ploughed since the hops were grown and a complex community of 120 species of flowering plants has developed. From late May to early July you can see several varieties of orchid here, including the rare green-winged orchid.



Dipper



Big Meadow



Green-winged orchid



Bluebells

Continue along the main track along the bottom of Big Meadow and through another gate on the far side.

You will pass through a small, often muddy, coppice with the brook continuing to meander to your left. The path eventually leads upwards, through another gate into Papermill Meadow. (From here you may be able to see a little bridge, steeply below to the left.) Cross the field, which slopes upwards away to your right, and walk about 100m to the old Papermill Cottage. To your right, the field is backed by woodland with a steep bank where bluebells can be seen in spring.

3. Papermill Cottage (SO 74378 51388)

(SO 74378 51388)

There has been a mill on this site since at least the mid 17th century although it's believed that the milling finished in the 1850s. Here, rags from the Black Country were used for making a very coarse grade of paper. This old, stone cottage is perched on the lip of the brook; it was lived in until 1960 and you may be able to spot an old cider press and a stone well in the abandoned garden.

One of the windows of the cottage has been left open deliberately for rare lesser horseshoe bats to use the cottage as a roost; small numbers of female bats can use the building during the summer to have their young.



Lesser horseshoe bat

Continue along the path through the field, with the wood up on your right, towards a gate and a break in the woods. This leads down a steep slope and on to a clearing beside the Leigh Brook (keep a lookout for animal prints in the mud). Another wooden gate marks the end of the reserve. Carry on through this and about a quarter of a mile further on you will arrive at a metal gate. There is a wooded slope behind you. About 50m before the gate look up to your right where you may be able to spot a treehouse up in the oak trees.

4. Treehouse (SO 74308 51718)

This private woodland is light and has a nice show of spring flowers thanks to the coppicing that is carried out by the owners and, indeed, on many of our nature reserves. This practice used to be the mainstay of rural life, with hazel providing timbers for wattle and daub, fencing and fire lighting, while sweet chestnut and ash provided larger timbers. The tall oak standards were used for building. Cutting down trees in this way revitalises the woodland by allowing light to reach the woodland floor - primroses, wood spurge and bluebells thrive in spring and it is a good place to see a number of butterfly species.



Leaving The Knapp and Papermill



Otter



Brimstone

Now walk through the metal gate and across the lower side of the field, which rises on your right to a small row of houses, to a stile leading into a small wood. The path turns immediately right up a short, steep bank to a remarkable, large, pollarded lime tree.

5. Lime Pollard (SO 74048 51702)

The great, warty trunk of this small-leaved lime splits into several smaller trunks and above these sprout more, even narrower branches. Pollarding involves cutting the trunk of a tree above the head height of grazing cattle; coppiced timber can then still be produced without damage.

Small-leaved lime is an indicator of ancient woodland, thought to have arrived from the continent before Britain split away. It needs hot summers to germinate so young trees are fairly rare here now. However, 'walking' limes can be seen in some parts of the country where limbs have fallen from the original tree, rooted, grown and the process repeated over 2-3000 years.

Lime provides a hard, white wood which is good for carving. The famous wood carver Grinling Gibbons often worked in lime and Worcestershire is home to some of the best trees in the country. In late July the honey-scented flowers are a magnet for bees.



Lime tree pollard

Now leave the wood and follow the edge of the field round towards some houses with conifer hedging, down a few steps and onto the road.

Turn left, go down the road and over the Mousehole Bridge towards a large field on your left, with the entrance just after the track. Keep to the right of an old willow and pond in the middle of the field. Go through two metal gates on the far side to a large, modern barn, near Lower Tundridge Farm.

6. Tundridge (SO 73691 51096)

Many of the buildings in this area date from the 17th and 18th centuries and you're in a very old, traditional farming landscape; the rich agricultural land is sheltered by the Malvern Hills.

The pond in the field is now silting up but, as in most old fields, it would once have provided water for grazing livestock.



Mousehole Bridge



Keep to the right of the trees and pond

Follow the path between pond left and Tundridge Farm. Turn left, then right up the single track road over the brook and up the hill past the old houses. The oast houses indicate that hops were once grown in the vicinity. On the way up the steep slope you will pass a pair of white and red poles designating the Roadside Verge Nature Reserve (RVNR).

7. Roadside Verge (SO 73253 51265)

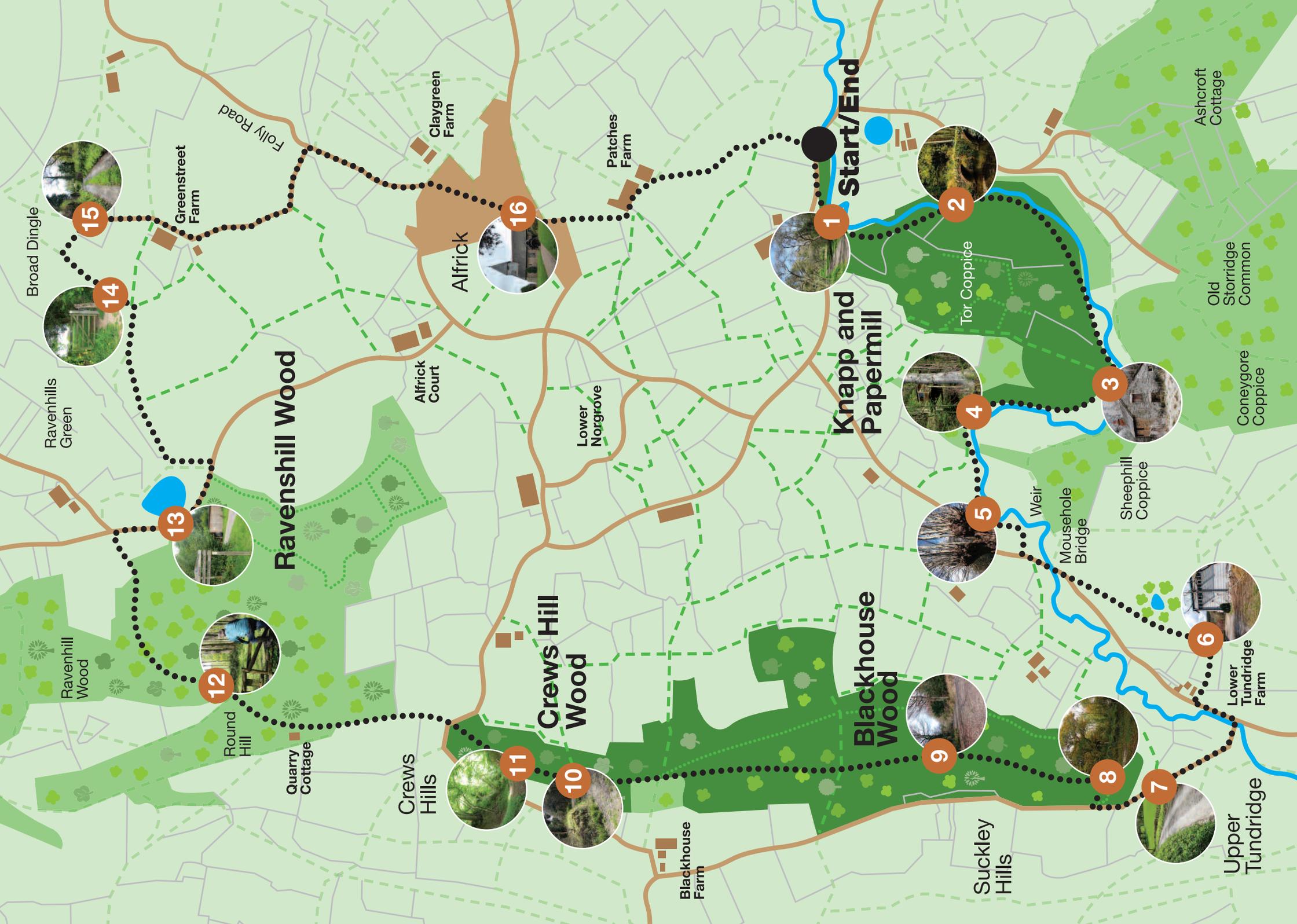
This is one of about 100 Roadside Verge Nature Reserves (RVNRs) across the county. With advice from Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, these have been designated by the County Council. Each has its own management and cutting schedule to ensure the conservation of the wonderful assemblage of plant species found at each one. Amongst this RVNR you may spot toothwort, a white-flowered parasitic species that grows on tree roots; it was once claimed that this was a cure for toothache.



Toothwort



Roadside Verge Nature Reserve



Start/End

Knapp and Papermill

Ravenshill Wood

Crews Hill Wood

Blackhouse Wood

Tor Coppice

Sheephill Coppice

Upper Tundridge

Lower Tundridge Farm

Mousehole Bridge

Weir

Coneygore Coppice

Old Storridge Common

Ashcroft Cottage

Alfrick

Crews Hills

Suckley Hills

Blackhouse Farm

Lower Norgrove

Claygreen Farm

Patches Farm

Greenstreet Farm

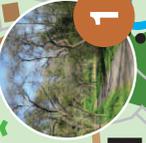
Broad Dingle

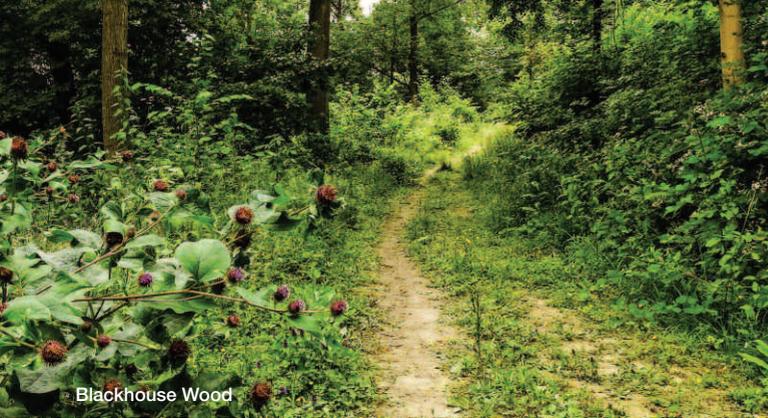
Ravenhill Green

Ravenhill Wood

Quarry Cottage

Round Hill





Blackhouse Wood



Lesser spotted woodpecker

You are between two wooded ridges with a sheep field on your left and Blackhouse Wood on your right. Continue to follow the road steeply up, along the coppiced limes to your left, then turn right onto a wide track to enter the wood (there is a 'Welcome to Blackhouse Wood' sign here). Follow the path up to a T junction and turn left.

8. Blackhouse Wood

(SO 73224 51464)

Blackhouse Wood is one of the Trust's most recent acquisitions, bought in 2015 thanks to a huge public appeal and donations from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Severn Waste Services through the Landfill Communities Fund.

As an ancient woodland it had mainly deciduous species but the Forestry Act of 1919 was passed to provide post-war Britain with the increasing amounts of timber needed for the construction industry. Large areas of native woodland across the UK made way for huge quantities of fast-growing softwood trees but the dry, limy soil of Blackhouse Wood was not particularly good for these acid-loving species. Over time we'll be removing most of the conifers and replanting Blackhouse Wood with native trees; we'll leave some standing for birds such as goldcrests and coal tits.

Humps, hollows and rocky outcrops are remnants of hand-carved limestone quarries (Worcestershire was once covered by a

shallow tropical sea). At least six limestone kilns remain on a local farm, illustrating how powdered lime was produced for spreading onto fields to reduce soil acidity. The quarries in Blackhouse Wood are mainly sheltered and inaccessible, helping to protect delicate plant species and insects that abound here.

Carry on up the hill until you reach the first junction of tracks at a forestry turning circle half way along the ridge.

9. Turning Circle (SO 73398 51807)

The track leading down the hill to your left was once used to carry logs away from the wood. This area is light but sheltered with a great variety of mainly deciduous tree species, in turn providing great potential for a wonderful diversity of bird life. You may even be lucky enough to see a lesser spotted woodpecker here.



Dormouse

Another species the Trust is working hard to encourage is the dormouse. Dormice are scarce across the whole of the UK but are known in this area so the Trust is deliberately managing the woodland to maximise their success. Dormice benefit from the rich woodland structure and use stripped honeysuckle to line their nests.

Continue walking along the ridge to the next intersection, where a wide track leads off to your right. If you're visiting in summer, look out for the bank of common spotted orchids on your right as you walk.

10. Ride Intersection

(SO 73311 52612)

This triangular area, with a path leading down the hill to your right, is part of the Blackhouse Wood circular walk. It is light and airy so, again, it's a good place to delay your walk in search of plant and insect diversity. You will find a number of calcicole species, such as wood vetch and yellow wort, which are specially adapted to living in the limestone-rich soil.



Wood vetch

Carry on straight ahead, along the ridge and into Crews Hill Wood. Keep going, straight over at a crossroads of paths, until you come into a large quarry in a hollow, with tree roots showing on the ridge above you.



Common centaury



Silver-washed fritillary



Crews Hill Wood nature reserve

11. Quarry (SO 73374 53050)

Up to your left are more indications of the ancient nature of the woodland. The roots of a multi-trunked small-leaved lime intertwine with yew and there are coppiced large-leaved limes, a species extremely rare in Britain but native here. There are wild service trees, a species with brown berries that were once used to make beer. It is thought that either the chequered appearance of the cut berry or the nature of the bark gave rise to the pub name 'Chequers'.

150 years ago, it would have been very different – the scale of quarrying would have made a stark contrast to the peace and quiet of today. And life at the quarry face was tough - the quarries were worked by hand with picks and shovels.

Blackhouse Wood forms part of a chain of woodlands up to the Wyre Forest that includes Ravenshill Wood to the north, Martley Ridge and the Abberley Hills. This forms a continuous strip of woodland, acting as a corridor for bird, plant and animal species, especially dormice, to travel through without interruption. Building these networks into our landscape is vitally important for wildlife.



Holloway stop

Follow the path until you reach the road. Take care crossing the road but before you cross, you might like to admire the view to the right and spreading out below you. Once over the road, head straight on, up the track towards Quarry Cottage. Just before the cottage take the grassy path down through the woods, keep to your right and walk down an old holloway. Stop when you can see the remains of a brick building in a field on your left.

12. Holloway (SO 73532 53837)

Ravenshill Wood is species-rich with an almost cathedral-like quality as the light filters down through the trees. The Holloway you've just walked down is the result of continuous trampling that has worn a groove into the landscape.

It has been suggested that the name Ravenshill was based on 18th century folklore that a Viking encampment here once had a raven on its standard but it's more likely that it reflects the abundance of ravens once living in the wood. Ravens were persecuted, particularly in Victorian times, and disappeared completely from the area in the 1950s and 60s. Happily, they have made a spectacular recovery and you will hopefully be able to watch their playful flight in the area.



Holloway



Raven

Toad crossing

Follow the path down through the wood onto the road. Turn right past the cottage and right again into Ravenshill Visitor Centre and car park.

13. Ravenshill Centre

(SO 73999 53950)

This is a privately owned nature reserve with a free visitor centre and toilets. If you're up for a diversion, you can borrow wellies here and follow a trail around the woodland and past a pool; there is always plenty to see.

A natural phenomenon takes place here in February or March; toads hole up in the woodland over winter but need to get across the lane to Lulsley Lagoon (an artificial pond) in order to breed. To avoid the many potential road fatalities, the owners of the woodland have built a fence alongside the road and laid out containers into which the toads fall as they migrate to the pond. Every morning these are transferred safely across the road and the toads emptied onto the side of the pond; between 300 and 600 are rescued in this way each year.

When you're ready, turn right out of the wood and walk down the lane, keeping Lulsley Lagoon to your left. Just past the end of the pool on the left is a public footpath and bridleway sign where a gate opens into a field. Take the public footpath across this field and on towards two oak trees in the middle. At the far side you will reach a gate where two hedges meet.

14. Ghost Hedge (SO 74693 54148)

You are now standing in a modern agricultural landscape surrounded by pasture and arable fields. But there are relics of more ancient countryside. Through the gate to the right is a stand of wild service trees in the hedgerow, a species associated with ancient woodland. These have not been planted but have probably been 'assarted'; farmers would have carved out sections of the original woodland for agriculture, leaving a strip to form a hedge. This is sometimes called a woodland ghost and is a reminder of a much bigger wood - a ghost of the ancient landscape.



Ghost hedge



Wild service leaf

Wild service fruit

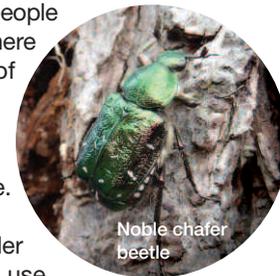


Plum trees

Go through the gate and, after a short distance, turn right through another small field. When you reach a cattle grid, turn right onto the track (Green Street).

15. Green Street (SO 74860 54170)

This is a very old road with a few traditional dwellings and remnants of many old orchards. These would have had a mixture of fruits - damsons, apples and pears; from the 1850s, fruit growing was carried out on a much bigger scale. With the coming of the railways fruit could be picked one day and on sale in towns the next, so orchards became larger and more specialised. Most people don't realise that there are 2000 varieties of apple in Britain including 30 that are known only from Worcestershire. Most farms would make their own cider or perry and would use this as part of their workers' pay.



Noble chafer beetle

Sadly, Worcestershire has lost more than 85% of its orchards since World War Two. In the 1960s, the railway branch lines were lost and in the 1970s, the Common Agricultural Policy resulted in a flood of cheap fruit into the country. The old remaining orchards are still important to wildlife though; beetles such as the beautiful but rare noble chafer feeds on the decaying wood of fruit trees.



Alfrick church

Carry on along Green Street then turn right onto Folly Road and into Alfrick village. Go over the crossroads to St Mary Magdalene church.

16. Alfrick (SO 74856 52976)

The church was begun as early as the 12th century with additions in the 13th century. The ornate timber porch was added in the 14th century, whilst the transept and north vestry were 19th century additions, designed by the architect Aston Webb who also created the front of Buckingham Palace. Charles Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, the author of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, preached here and visited several times when his brother was the parish curate.

There is even a link with the supernatural: the folklorist Jabez Allies, author of 'The Folklore of Worcestershire', was born nearby. He visited local cottages and listened to stories around the hearths, which he then wrote down. A claim was made that Alfrick was named after Alfred the Great of Elves ('Alfar' is Danish for 'elves'), and that there were Poake (or Puck) - mischievous spirits who would waylay travellers on foggy nights and lead them into bogs!

Stay a while and admire the superb views of your completed walk and also the whole length of Worcestershire, north to the Lickey Hills and the twin peaks of Clent.

Leave the churchyard and turn right along the road. As the road bends to the right, you'll see a no through road to your left – follow this past a farm then go down between the trees into a holloway, which will lead you back to the road where you started. Turn left here on this road and you will be back at your car.



Alfrick church window

Worcestershire's wildlife needs your help!

We care for more than 75 nature reserves across Worcestershire – woods and heaths, pools and marshes and meadows of international importance. But without our members, this wouldn't be possible. Our members already help us to make a huge difference for wildlife; with your help we could achieve even more.

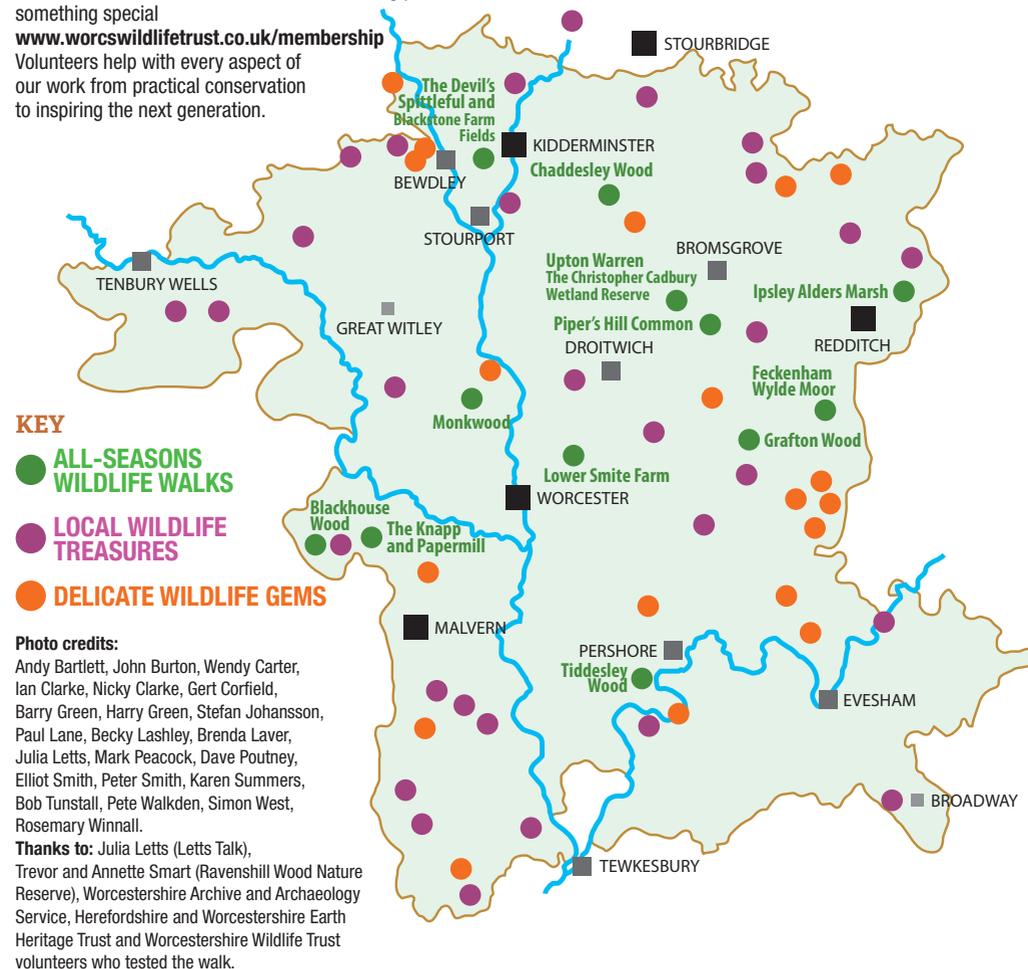
In return you'll get:

- Information on events, walks and talks in our magazine and e-newsletter
- The knowledge that you're playing your part in securing a future for wildlife and wild places near you
- An excuse to explore the great outdoors and have fun
- The chance to meet like-minded people at your local group at events

Visit our website for information about becoming part of something special

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/membership

Volunteers help with every aspect of our work from practical conservation to inspiring the next generation.



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust Nature Reserves

The nature reserves that are cared for by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust form part of our vision of a **Living Landscape**. By working with other landowners, managers and communities we aim to **restore, recreate and reconnect** fragmented habitats to achieve a landscape where wildlife can flourish and people can live happier and healthier lives.

We are one of 47 Wildlife Trusts, protecting wildlife across the UK.