

WELLINGTON, NEW WORKS AND WREKIN FOREST, SHROPSHIRE

A 7 mile circular walk connecting the historic market town of Wellington to the Wrekin Forest, part of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



Moderate Terrain

**7 miles
Circular
3.5 hours**

050419



The journey begins in the centre of Wellington and passes through the ancient Short Wood before reaching the village of New Works, which began life as a squatters' settlement during the Industrial Revolution. The scars of heavy industry, both old and new, are all too apparent across this landscape but time and nature have softened many of the harder edges. That process can be viewed first hand as the trail passes the quarries of Maddocks Hill and The Ercall on its return to Wellington through the Limekiln Wood Local Nature Reserve.

FACILITIES: Tourist information, a cafe and public toilets (which can only be accessed during booking office opening hours) are available at Wellington rail station. Pay toilets are located at the adjacent bus station on The Parade, while free facilities are available at Wellington Civic Centre in Larkin Way. Many cafes and restaurants can be found across Wellington town centre.

Getting there

The walk starts and finishes at Wellington rail station, making it ideal for arriving by public transport. If you are coming by car, the station only has a small car park for rail users, so the best parking is a long stay pay-and-display car park accessed from Tan Bank (the Belmont-Tan Bank Car Park), just a short walk from the station. Approximate post code for this parking, TF1 1HJ.

Walk Sections

Go ➔ **1** **Start to New Street**

Our journey begins at Wellington rail station. While it is still a busy stop on the commuter route between Shrewsbury and Birmingham, Wellington was once a much livelier rail centre. In its heyday lines radiated to all points of the compass, carrying goods and people to such far-flung climes as Stafford, Craven Arms, and Coalport. The trackless platform on the car park side of the station was once the place where passengers caught the direct train to Crewe (via Market Drayton), a mainline service that was curtailed by the Beeching cuts of the 1960s. In common with many other rural destinations,

Access Notes

1. The route comprises mostly gentle gradients but includes a short steep climb in section five and a steady climb through Limekiln Wood in section seven.
2. The total ascent of the entire walk is 328 metres. Most of the paths within the Wrekin Forest woodlands are unsurfaced and can become seasonally boggy and wet in places.
3. On many of these local byways, walkers share access with horse riders and mountain bikers. In section five, between Limekiln Wood and New Works, the trail passes through open farmland where you may encounter cattle and livestock.
4. You will need to negotiate five stiles (these are of variable quality and do not all have gaps for dogs), kissing gates and flights of steps.
5. The woodlands of the Wrekin Forest contain many well-concealed bell pits and old mine workings. Consequently, walkers are encouraged not to stray too far from the footpath, especially in Short Wood and Limekiln Wood.

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this was the era when Wellington was denuded of much of its infrastructure and, as you walk through the car park, you are in fact passing over what was once the engine shed. Happily, some evidence of Wellington's former glories does survive and if you look to your left beyond the billboard when you reach the King Street roundabout, you will be rewarded with a view of a rather fine Victorian stationmaster's house.

The railway brought an unprecedented era of prosperity to Wellington, which quickly ascended to the status of Shropshire's second town. Many large, lineside businesses became established locally including perhaps the first Smithfield market outside London. It opened in 1855 on the Bury Yards, now partially occupied by the bus station in Victoria Road. Cattle and livestock had been sold all across the town centre since medieval times, but this pungent mixture of muck and brass was not so easily tolerated in Wellington's streets by the Victorian age. The ground-breaking facility was opened by John Barber, a chartered surveyor whose firm still operates in Church Street, where it has been since the railway arrived in 1849.

DIRECTIONS: Leave Wellington rail station via platform one and walk uphill through the car park to the roundabout. Take the first exit on your right, Victoria Road, and walk over the railway bridge, past the bus station and Nailors Row car park, until reaching the pedestrian crossing at the top of New Street.

1 → 2 New Street to New Church Road



After traversing Victoria Road and turning left at the pedestrian crossing into the isolated eastern end of New Street, the fine façade of a former factory suddenly looms into view. This was once the Chad Valley Wrekin Toy Works, birthplace of Sooty and Sweep — who were manufactured here until the 1970s. Norah Wellings, widely regarded as the greatest ever British designer of soft toys, also began her career at Chad Valley in

the 1920s before establishing her own world-renowned factory in nearby King Street.

Glancing along St John (pronounced 'sinjen') Street, which runs adjacent to the building, it is possible to decipher three distinct phases of development on the site. The building began life as a Methodist Church (opened in 1836), which stands behind the austere façade of the toy factory, terminating at the far end in a Sunday school. Beyond, the minister's manse associated with this former place of worship provides an elegant bookend to an unusual, and possibly unique, stylistic combination!

After New Street merges seamlessly with High Street (which never truly fulfilled that function) the trail passes New Hall Road, which takes its name from the red brick building poking out into the street just beyond the junction. Opened by Dr J Edward Cranage in 1862, who also founded Old Hall School (more about that later), it was possibly the first mission hall in Britain. During Dr Cranage's lifetime, it hosted lectures and adult learning classes where hundreds, if not thousands, of young Wellingtonians passed through its doors to hear luminaries of the day such as Dr Barnardo.

DIRECTIONS: Turn left at the pedestrian crossing and then continue straight on, heading eastwards. A few hundred yards on your left, a footpath called Chapel Lane diverges — this is the point at which New Street becomes High Street. Ignore the path and continue along High Street, past New Hall Road, until you reach a roundabout.

2 → 3 New Church Road to Holyhead Road



New Church Road takes its name from Christ Church, which is located at the top of a short drive just under half way along the street. Thomas Smith, who designed the strikingly similar gothic edifice of St Luke's at Ironbridge, completed it in 1839. Christ Church is notable for having a solitary bell, known as 'Great George', which owing to its sombre tone was once better known locally as the 'gruel bell'.

Before reaching Christ Church the trail passes an elevated semi-detached property on the left-hand side of the road, with a blue plaque mounted near the door. This was the birthplace of Victorian landscape artist Cecil Lawson, whose family resided here in the 1840s and 50s, when the house was known as Fountain Place. While premature death at the age of just 32 robbed him of wider fame, Cecil's younger brothers Malcolm

and Wilfred (who, too, were Wellingtonians) also achieved recognition; the latter as a painter and illustrator, and the former as a composer and arranger of traditional Scottish music: his credits include the popular arrangement of the Skye Boat Song.

The talented Lawsons were not the only notable residents of New Church Road. For a few months in late 1943 and early '44, Philip Larkin lodged here after taking a post as the town's librarian. The British literary giant enjoyed a difficult but productive relationship with the town during his three-year stay. A change of street numbering has robbed us of the identity of the house in question, but it was from his digs here that he famously complained (in a letter to a friend) of spending his days doling out 'tripey novels to morons'! However, he wrote his only two novels and published his first collection of poetry in Wellington and returned in 1962 to open an extension to the library he did much to help modernise during his time in charge.

At the junction of Roseway, the unusual sight of a Georgian-style lodge marks the former entrance to the Priory, the Vicarage of All Saints parish church. Located some distance from the town centre, this elegant property's origins date back to the railway era when the original vicarage was demolished to make way for Wellington's new station, which lies adjacent to All Saints. Sadly, a similar fate also befell the Priory, which was knocked down around 1970, leaving the lodge sadly bereft of purpose.

DIRECTIONS: At the roundabout where High Street meets Glebe Road, cross straight over into New Church Road (which is blocked off at the end for vehicular access) passing a row of shops. Continue walking, passing the side roads of Roseway and School Lane, until you reach the main T-junction with Holyhead Road.

3 → 4 Holyhead Road to Steeraway Farm



At the junction of Limekiln Lane and Holyhead Road stands what is probably Wellington's oldest building. Although the earliest surviving timbers in Old Hall date from around 1620, it's likely a dwelling has stood on this site since at least the end of the 1100s — when the Crown granted land to the Forester family as reward for policing the Wrekin Forest. The Foresters remained in their ancestral home for over 300 years but, from 1845 until 2006, the building was a private school established by Dr J Edward Cranage (who later opened the New Hall Mission). Inspired by the example of Thomas Arnold's Rugby School, he was aged just nineteen years at the time but, incredibly, had already completed an MA and PhD!

On The Wrekin side of Holyhead Road, the land surrounding Old Hall once formed a 1000-acre royal deer park, known as Wellington Hay. Evidence of its existence survives in several place names, including Haygate Road and The Wickets pub, which commemorate the locations of entrances into the former

enclosure. It seems likely The Wrekin was a royal forest before the Norman Conquest but William I greatly expanded the size and the scope of his portfolio, introducing a raft of draconian measures protecting the 'venison and vert' (the deer and their habitat). What this effectively amounted to, was a power grab in an era before taxation and many illegal practices, such as the clearing of woodland, were permitted in return for money.

At its greatest extent, the Royal Forest of Mount Gilbert (for the Normans renamed The Wrekin in honour of a local hermit!) extended for over 120 square miles across central and eastern Shropshire. Place names ending in 'ley' provide a clue to settlements that grew up in its many clearings but much of the forest included towns, villages and large swathes of farmland with little tree cover. Inevitably, this became a bone of contention among the landed classes and the Charter of the Forest effectively abolished many royal forests, including The Wrekin, in 1217.

DIRECTIONS: At this T-junction, turn left into Holyhead Road and then, almost immediately, right into Limekiln Lane (Old Hall, now private houses and apartments, is situated on the junction). Continue straight ahead along Limekiln Lane, heading southwards. After passing John Broad Avenue, the lane largely consists of a rough and uneven restricted byway with a short stretch of tarmac shortly before reaching the M54 overbridge. After passing underneath the motorway, continue along the lane until reaching a small group of cottages and the entrance to Steeraway Farm.

4 → 5 Steeraway Farm to New Works



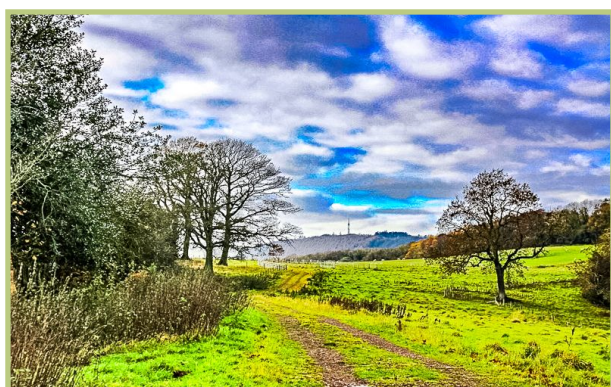
The fact the Wrekin Forest is still with us at all is testament to an enduring ability to pay its way. No more was this so than during the Industrialisation of east Shropshire, when its trees and considerable mineral wealth helped put the area at the forefront of a revolution. At Steeraway, the trail reaches the edge of Limekiln Wood, where evidence of those heady days survives deep amid the foliage. The impressive remains of the kilns in question are set back well away from the footpath, which itself follows the line of a primitive railway. Among the very first in the UK, it once formed part of a network transporting raw materials to Abraham Darby's nearby Horsehay Ironworks.

Timber was another key industrial ingredient, providing pit props for local mines and charcoal for 'smelting' iron-ore. This process often took place in the woodlands themselves within primitive earthen mounds known as coke hearths, the remains of which litter the Wrekin Forest. Many older trees also display a multi-trunked appearance that is the product of centuries of cutting back and regrowth for commercial use. This practice, known as coppicing, can be very beneficial for plants and shrubs that thrive in woodland glades, creating gaps in the canopy that allow light to flood in, producing a rich understorey that enables many birds and insects to flourish.

As we enter the dark, long neglected expanse of Short Wood the value of regular management becomes all too apparent! This area overlies rich seams of carboniferous coal, formed in swamps and deltas over 300 million years ago, which were heavily exploited during the Industrial Revolution and beyond. While natural reclamation has done much to disguise the remains of old bell pits and mines in these woodlands (some of which are now scheduled ancient monuments), wandering away from the main track is not recommended!

DIRECTIONS: At the end of Limekiln Lane, enter Limekiln Wood and continue along the rising path before taking the first exit on the left. Follow the waymarked route through the wood, over a stile, and along a former tramway that crosses an open field and passes an old reservoir along the way. After negotiating another stile, the path wanders by a chalybeate spring before arriving at a forestry track. Cross the track, clamber over yet another stile, and ascend a steep bank, which leads to a stile at the perimeter of the woodland. Bearing right, follow the path to a stone restricted byway. Turn right again, heading up a slight incline (where two information boards can be found adjacent to the path). Take the first waymarked footpath on the left, which widens before reaching the woodland edge. Walk through the kissing gate on the left, and down a short flight of steps to the minor road at the edge of New Works village.

5 ➔ 6 New Works to Maddocks Hill



The mining industry was an increasingly prominent blight on the Wrekin Forest from at least the 1400s onwards. However, the scale and intensity of production reached its zenith in the 17th and 18th Centuries, with much of the development taking place on Forester family land. People flocked to the area in search of employment and New Works is typical of many local settlements where miners simply built cottages on any scrap of available land. That industry, and the people it employed, had all but disappeared by the late 1800s but surface mining continued in the area until very recently and several of the footpaths on this route have only just reopened. At nearby Smalley Hill, Shropshire Wildlife Trust manages a nature reserve on a former opencast mine that now provides tussocky, damp grassland habitat for an array of plants, insects and animals that thrive in damp conditions.

As the trail rounds the edges of Birch Coppice and Black Hayes, Maddocks Hill provides another stark example of more recent industrial extraction in the Wrekin Forest. A stone quarry was active here as recently as the 1980s, carving a wide path through the centre of the hill akin to a grub munching through an apple! What has taken place since not only demonstrates the restorative power of nature, but the role brownfields can play in wildlife conservation. They are capable of mimicking a variety of different habitat conditions, all in very close proximity. This enables many species to live out their lives in a way they never could in the wider countryside, where conditions have become

widely degraded. Consequently, these places are often safe havens for a wide array of wildlife that includes orchids, numerous butterfly and moth species, and reptiles such as Common Lizard and Slow Worm.

DIRECTIONS: At the roadside, turn right and walk through New Works village. At the junction with Church Hill, turn right again and head along the minor road towards Huntington, passing the entrance to Smalley Hill nature reserve on your left. At New Works Farm, turn right off the road and follow the wide stone path, bearing left around the southern edge of Birch Coppice and through the gate at the edge of Limekiln Wood. Walk through yet another gate and follow the track to a redundant kissing gate, turn left and follow the woodland path until you reach a wide path. Turn right and head downhill along the rough track. To the left, the woodland soon opens up to reveal open pasture and fine views of The Wrekin. A set of five large, trackside boulders and a multi-coloured waymarker post marks the point where our trail diverges to the right (if you reach the minor road at the bottom of the track, you've gone too far!). Head up hill on the steeply winding footpath around the edge of Maddocks Hill Quarry.

Maddocks Hill to Steeraway Reservoirs



While the path from Maddocks Hill back to Wellington never veers far from the relative civilisation of Wrekin Golf Club, the wild botanic wonders of Limekiln Wood are always reassuringly close at hand. Owing to the complex geology that attracted the attentions of the extraction industries, this area has an extremely varied soil profile capable of supporting a wide variety of plantlife within a very small area. Spring is the best time to view woodland plants but there is always something to see here from numerous fern and fungi species to increasingly rare trees such as Wych Elm, which still suckers well in these woodlands. The forest's resident deer population is also much evident, and a fleeting glimpse of the spotted flanks and black horseshoe patterned rump of a fallow buck or doe is not uncommon (Muntjac and Roe are present here, too). Woodland deer tend to behave very differently to the mixed herds found in ornamental parks, leading a more solitary existence in much smaller, single sex groups and only coming together during the mating season in October and November.

DIRECTIONS: Follow the waymarked route uphill around the edge of Maddocks Hill Quarry, which is visible in a few places above the small, earthen bank on your right. The footpath eventually reaches the Wrekin Golf Course. Follow the sign to head left across the fairway, where a set of white marker posts guide your passage across the course. On the other side, turn right and follow the tree-lined path downhill. At the back of the clubhouse, turn right and follow the winding path into Limekiln Wood. Turn left at the next T-junction and follow the main path

(ignoring any turns to the right) until you reach the edge of the wood. Turn left at the T-junction and follow the path until you reach the smaller of the two former Wellington Urban District Council reservoirs.

7 ➔ 8 Steeraway Reservoirs to Golf Links Lane



The two reservoirs, which were constructed in the late 1800s and early 1900s, once helped to channel local woodland stream water into Wellington's drinking supply, a role from which they are now officially retired. As the trail meanders back out onto the golf course, the jagged lines of The Ercall's exposed rocks form an eye-catching backdrop to the journey alongside the fairway. Like Maddocks Hill, quarrying took place here until the mid-1980s but nature has since fought back strongly and the site is now an important Local Nature Reserve harbouring a wide variety of plants, animals and insects.

The exposures themselves are of international significance because they reveal a geological unconformity. Here, a subtle colour change in the rock from pink to grey marks the transition from the pre-Cambrian to the Cambrian era. This is important because it is illustrative of a time when life on Earth became more numerous and varied, and there are few places on the planet where that change is recounted so graphically.

DIRECTIONS: Pass the reservoirs and, keeping the hedgerow to your right, follow the footpath uphill to the edge of the golf course. Still keeping the hedgerow to your right, continue straight ahead and walk down a set of wide wooden steps to reach the side of the M54. Here, the footpath turns left and runs adjacent to the carriageway for a short while before terminating at a short flight of steps. At the bottom, turn right onto the road (Golf Links Lane) and pass under the bridge carrying the M54 motorway.

8 ➔ 9 Golf Links Lane to Roseway

As the intrusive din of the M54 recedes and we return into Wellington, a little-known piece of transport heritage awaits the weary traveller at the end of Golf Links Lane. At the corner of its junction with Holyhead Road, we pass the old Hollybush coaching inn, a reminder of the days when this was the principal through-route between the busy north Wales port and London. Before the trade was decimated by the railways, many carriages and carts would regularly have plied this strip, stopping for refreshments or a change of horses at The Cock Hotel or The Falcon Inn, which Queen Victoria is once rumoured to have visited while that very process took place. The Hollybush was slightly different in that it catered for merchant travellers, a role it performed until around 1860, later becoming a farmhouse.



A few hundred yards to your right, you will also find the entrance to Sunnycroft, Wellington's sole National Trust property. With a more opulent past altogether, it owes its existence to the newly wealthy mercantile classes who, unlike the landlords of the Hollybush, profited from the coming of the railways. Building a well-appointed, edge of town estate in miniature was very much the thing to be seen doing for these Victorian up-and-comers and Sunnycroft survives as a very rare, almost perfectly preserved, example.

DIRECTIONS: Follow Golf Links Lane to its junction with Holyhead Road. Cross over and take the waymarked footpath ahead that runs alongside Sunnycroft, back towards Wellington town centre.

9 ➔ 10 Roseway to End



Like New Street, Tan Bank has been bisected by Wellington's inner ring road but that is far from all the two thoroughfares have in common. For both were also part of the town's original medieval street grid, laid out after it received its first market charter in 1244. Tan Bank is one of a number of local street names that point to lost trades that enabled the town to thrive in

the Middle Ages. In this case, the occupation in question was leather making, a characteristically smelly pursuit (involving copious amounts of urine to soften and remove hair from animal hides) that was understandably practiced on the outskirts of town!

At the bottom of Tan Bank, the road divides into three smaller pedestrianised streets. This area was originally part of Market Square but the stalls that stood here in medieval times acquired a degree of permanence over the ages to the extent that they eventually became streets in their own right. Beyond Bell, Crown and Duke Street the trail returns to the station via the Market Square proper.

At the heart of the town for the best part of a millennium, many events have unfolded within its confines, not least during the English Civil War, when King Charles may have raised his standard here. Although the exact location has been lost in the mists of time, it was in the area that the infamous monarch, at the head of his army, declared war on Parliament in September 1642. So momentous was his speech that the Royal Mint issued coins marking the 'Wellington Declaration', which could have taken place on the edge of town at Orleton Park or Apley Castle.

DIRECTIONS: When the footpath reaches Roseway, cross over and take the connecting footpath on the opposite side of the road to Tan Bank. Turn left, cross over Victoria Road, and continue walking down Tan Bank until you reach Crown Street. Walk straight on, cross Market Square and turn right into Station Road which takes you back to the rail station.

Disclaimer

This walking route was walked and checked at the time of writing. We have taken care to make sure all our walks are safe for walkers of a reasonable level of experience and fitness. However, like all outdoor activities, walking carries a degree of risk and we accept no responsibility for any loss or damage to personal effects, personal accident, injury or public liability whilst following this walk. We cannot be held responsible for any inaccuracies that result from changes to the routes that occur over time. Please let us know of any changes to the routes so that we can correct the information.

Walking Safety

For your safety and comfort we recommend that you take the following with you on your walk: bottled water, snacks, a waterproof jacket, waterproof/sturdy boots, a woolly hat and fleece (in winter and cold weather), a fully-charged mobile phone, a whistle, a compass and an Ordnance Survey map of the area. Check the weather forecast before you leave, carry appropriate clothing and do not set out in fog or mist as these conditions can seriously affect your ability to navigate the route. Take particular care on cliff/mountain paths where steep drops can present a particular hazard. Some routes include sections along roads – take care to avoid any traffic at these points. Around farmland take care with children and dogs, particularly around machinery and livestock. If you are walking on the coast make sure you check the tide times before you set out.

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