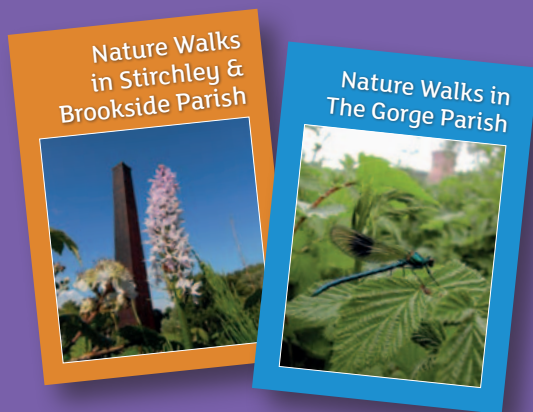


Acknowledgements

'Nature Walks' are produced by the South Telford Rights of Way Partnership (STROWP) with funding from 'Awards for All'.

Text/photographs/maps courtesy of Andrew Cutts and Alec Connah 2011.

Other walks in this series



Contact Details

STROWP

Progress House, Grange Avenue,
Stirchley, Telford TF3 1FA

Tel: 01952 525103



LOTTERY FUNDED

STROWP



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.

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

Nature Walks in Madeley Parish



Introduction

Welcome to 'Nature Walks in Madeley Parish' – three 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 across some fascinating old wooded pit mounds, past picturesque pools and historic sites, along lines of old hedgerows and through a varied mix of habitats where natural splendour abounds. Whether strolling through expanses of wildflower meadows, trekking through the trees, or pausing to listen to birdsong in a sea of greenery, we hope that this booklet will help you discover for yourself, and learn a little more about, our rich and varied local flora and fauna.

Public Footpaths and other Rights of Way are often the best, and healthiest, ways to explore a location, and there are over seventy different routes of this kind in Madeley Parish alone! In designing this guide, we have tried to use parts of this valuable network wherever possible and we do hope that this small sample will encourage further exploration and appreciation.

This booklet is suitable for locals and visitors alike – young and old, and provides an introduction and a key, to the wild riches on our doorstep. We hope that you will find this booklet enjoyable and easy to use, and that you will encourage friends and family to visit and revisit some of the valuable 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 you enjoy them as much as we do!

The South Telford Rights of Way Partnership, January 2012

Key to map symbols

--- Walk route

... Other footpaths

■ woodland

P Car park

Toilets

Visitor Information Centre

Viewpoint

M Museum

Church

Public House

Refreshments

S School

YHA Youth Hostel

Bus Stop

Madeley Park & Blists Hill

Start and parking: Legges Way car park

Distance: 3km / 1.9 miles • **Time:** 1½ - 2 hours • **Walk Grade:** Medium



An eye-opening amble through Madeley's 'secret' park and across a naturally wooded pit mound. Links are provided to some lesser known paths behind the Museum and a steeply stepped section on the leafy fringes of Sutton Hill. Canal remnants, scrub and grassland provide seasonal treats along the way.

1 Leave the car park heading towards 'The Gorge Connect' bus stop on Legges Way. Take the stone surfaced track and walk past the front of Madeley Police Station. Follow the track ahead, crossing the car park entrance, and keeping a line of trees and the road to your right.

Birds may be heard here singing from prominent points within the mature trees and shrubs. During spring male birds sing to claim a territory and to attract a mate. Watch out for butterflies including Meadow Brown, Red Admiral, and Small Tortoiseshell, feeding on nectar from flowers. The grasses and other meadow plants are allowed to flower and seed prior to being cut during summer.

2 Remain on the track as it sweeps gradually to the left and heads for the end of the tree line. Take the tarmac path to the right and follow directly ahead aiming for a black and gold fingerpost. Take the route to the left marked 'Blists Hill museums'.

The trees that you have walked amongst are part of an important "wildlife corridor". Looking from above, or on a map, you can see that this area of trees connects woodlands in the Ironbridge Gorge to those in Madeley, Tweedale, and beyond. Animals dependent upon woodland habitat can use such areas to

move further afield and forage for food. Birds, insects, and mammals such as Red Fox, Weasel, and Polecat all utilise this network of woodland which is otherwise surrounded by housing and human infrastructure.

3 Continue walking along the tarmac path with the road to the right (hidden by trees) and grassland to the left.

Hazel grows as a shrub amongst the taller trees on the right. During summer you may find hazel nuts developing in small clusters at the end of branches. These nuts ripen towards autumn and are often devoured by Grey Squirrels. Various flowering plants, including the trees, can be found along the margins of the grassland. In June look for the purple and yellow flowers of Bittersweet climbing amongst other plants.

4 Go straight ahead at the crossroad section and head for the roadside. Take the public footpath signed immediately to the left and walk into the woods. Follow the steps up the slope to your right.



Hazel nuts



Slow Worm

This woodland has developed on spoil from a former pit mound. Tree species including Oak, Birch, Hawthorn, and Rowan are present. These are all broadleaved and deciduous (leaves are lost in autumn and grow again in spring) trees. However, some coniferous trees such as Pine and Yew also grow here.

5 Follow the woodland path ahead. Climb the flight of wooden steps to the left and continue walking ahead. After 20m a fork in the path is met. Take the path to the right. Remain on the well-worn path which weaves through the trees for 100m.

Amongst the trees there are other plants of interest. Honeysuckle climbs as it grows and uses the trees as support. Heather grows in this area and has a bloom of purple flowers in late summer. Also purple in colour are the fruits of the locally rare Bilberry. These can be found on the low growing bushes during August. The Treecreeper is a woodland habitat specialist and is sometimes seen here. This bird is named after the way it moves around its habitat, 'creeping' up tree stems looking for insects to feed upon and then flying to the base of another tree ready to repeat the process.



Treecreeper

6 Go straight ahead at a small glade ignoring paths to the left and right. The path swings left and then right. A patch of exposed grey soil is met. From here follow the path as it gradually sweeps left.

During summer you may be lucky enough to see a creature called a Slow Worm in this location. It is not a worm at all but a reptile. Slow Worms are a kind of legless lizard and hunt for slugs, snails, and other invertebrate prey amongst the undergrowth.

7 Wooden waymarker posts with 'Woodlands for Health' discs are evident further along the track as the path widens. Take the track straight ahead and go down the wooden steps. You exit the woodland by the Blists Hill Victorian Town car park. Turn left and walk up the path heading for

another car park. At the top of the slope a section of canal can be seen by a bench on the left. Cross the road here and bear right through the trees on a narrow track to the right of a driveway, following a waymarker for 'The South Telford Way'.

Here the dark green leaves of Ivy carpet the ground and climb tree trunks. Ivy is one of the last plants to flower in the year and is a food source for many insects. Some birds and bats will roost up in the trees within the tangled stems and leaves of this evergreen plant.

- 8** Keep following the narrow path as it hugs the fence line to the right for approximately 400m. The route gradually climbs a slope and then bearing right begins to descend.

A walk on a sunny summer's day can become much more interesting with the aid of a basic wildflower field guide. Along this stretch you may find Garlic Mustard (Jack-by-the-hedge), Stinging Nettle, Hedge Woundwort, and several species of fern.

- 9** Remain on the path as you head down the slope. The path eventually levels out. Take a left turning into the trees, by a wooden marker post, after 40m on the flat. Head up the wooden steps and follow this route until you reach the top of the wooded slope.

Watch for birds moving about in the trees and on the ground. The Robin tends to flit about in the shrub layer, Wrens will move along the ground under cover of Brambles looking for food, and Long-tailed Tits will move through the canopy. Elder grows on the slope with the familiar elderberry fruits present in August. The peculiar Jews Ear Fungus can be found on decaying Elder branches in this location.



Jews Ear Fungus

- 10** Having climbed the slope a T-junction is reached. Take the path to the left. Garden fences are passed on the left. Follow the path to the left as you meet a garden fence at a junction. Walk straight ahead for approximately 200m with houses and gardens on both sides.

Various tree species grow here including Cherry, Field Maple, and Poplar. In the summer insects can be clearly seen on the wing as shafts of sunlight burst through the canopy. The neighbouring gardens provide further niches for animals to occupy. Hedgehogs will readily visit gardens looking for food, such as slugs, providing they can gain access through the property boundary.

- 11** Go past a metal field gate as the tree cover comes to an end. Turn to the left heading for a bus stop by the roadside. Carefully cross over Reynards Coppice road and follow the stone track ahead with gardens to your left. Go through a metal barrier

and continue down the slope through the wood. At the car park walk down the slope to the left heading back towards Blists Hill Museum.

During summer bumblebees can be seen in the vicinity feeding on flowers of Red Clover and White Clover. The bees take both nectar and pollen as food. Nectar is carried back to the nest in their stomach whilst pollen is attached to specialised hairs on their rear legs.

- 12** Below the terraced car park turn right and walk along the stone surfaced path. Remnants of a disused canal are to the left of the track. (During dry summers the canal can dry up.)

Mallard ducks can sometimes be seen on the canal foraging for food, whilst Yellow Iris grows at the waters edge. Other specialised plants that prefer damp soils also grow here including Pendulous Sedge and the prehistoric looking Horsetail.

- 13** At the end of this section of canal the path sweeps to the left



Umbellifers in flower

heading down a shallow slope. Follow the stone surfaced path ahead as it descends.

Song and calls of Chiffchaff, Blackcap, and Blackbird can be heard on the woodland edge during spring and summer. A profusion of white, due to flowering umbellifers, can be witnessed along the path edges in May. Look for creatures here such as snails seeking food and shelter amongst the stems and leaves of these plants.

- 14** Continue to follow the track to the left and then straight ahead towards the road. Turn right on to the tarmac path you came along earlier, now with trees and the road to your left. Follow the path ahead as it bends and then sweeps to the right under tree cover. Take the straightest route and exit as you see houses and gardens ahead. As you leave the cover of trees bear left across grassland towards an area of woodland 20m away.

During May the woodland edge is adorned with the pink flowers of Dog Rose. Come the end of summer bright red rose hips replace the flowers.

- 15** Walk along the right-hand edge of the wood and after approximately 10m turn left into the trees. Climb the slope on a worn path as it bears right. Follow this path, passing a bench, as it leads you along the top of an old pit mound. After 100m you will see a park via a clearing to the right. Continue as the path bears to the left through trees leading to a steep flight of steps on your left. Go down the steps and exit on to the car park and back to the starting point of this walk.

Rough Park

Start and parking: Newcomen Way (off Woodside Avenue)

Distance: 2.2km / 1.4 miles • **Time:** 1½ - 2 hours

Walk Grade: Medium



Paths through excellent wildflower meadows (May-July) and great views to Lightmoor and beyond – added attractions include streams and pools and a dash of woodland shade. Depending on the season – expect orchids, Skylarks, Buzzards and butterflies.

1 Start this route with woodland to your right, and fields to your left, at the end of Newcomen Way (off Woodside Avenue). Walk along the path and go through a metal kissing gate. Follow the path to a bench and go ahead at a crossroads in the path network.

Grassland habitat dominates Rough Park with patches of woodland interspersed. The entire site is flanked by further woodland habitat. During summer the area is full of sound and colour. Grasshoppers can be heard amongst the plants on warm days. They produce the sound by rubbing part of their hind leg against the forewing. Through May – August you may see and hear Swallows, House Martins, and Swifts as they hunt for insects over the open grassland.

2 Follow the stone surfaced path ahead through the grassland for approximately 300m, ignoring any turns. Keep woodland visible to your left-hand side.

The flower spikes of abundant Common Spotted Orchids and Southern Marsh Orchids can be seen protruding from amongst the sward in June and July, when these marvellous wildflower meadows are at their best. Numerous species of insect are also found here including bumblebees, butterflies, and hoverflies. Take the time to watch a patch of flowers for a few minutes



Common Spotted Orchids

and see how many creatures visit for nectar/pollen. A pair of binoculars is useful for watching not only birds and mammals, but insects too!

3 Remain in the grassland and continue to follow the path as it sweeps to the right. You now take a straight route leaving the surfaced path and heading across the grass for 150m along a well-worn route. Follow the line of wooden marker posts with 'Woodlands for Health' discs attached.

Open grassland as diverse in species as Rough Park is now nationally scarce. In the absence of grazing animals such as sheep or cattle the grassland can be rapidly encroached upon by scrub. Therefore it is managed through an annual 'cut and collect' mow (usually in late August) after the majority of the plants have flowered and seeded. In summer, listen and watch overhead for Skylarks here as they climb high into the sky singing on the wing.

4 On your right you will notice a steep slope (down to where ponds are due to be created in 2012)

and two wooden benches. Carry on straight ahead towards the wooden marker post in front of you. About twenty metres before the post turn left and head straight across and down to a wooden fingerpost. Follow the 'Park Lane' path turning right into the woods and down a 100 metre track which takes a sharp turn to the left as it descends.

Light levels change as you enter the woodland. The temperature can also vary compared to the open aspect of Rough Park. Look for shade tolerant plants, including Hard Fern and Wood Sorrel, as the species mix now differs notably to that of the grassland only metres away.

- 5** Continue following the track downhill until you reach a wide flat track at the bottom.

A stream runs here and issues into a catchment area known as New Pool. Here you will find several tree species including Willow and Alder which grow particularly well in wet areas and flourish in damp soils. Watch for Kingfishers and Grey Herons at this location.

- 6** Turn right and follow the wide track with the stream and railway line to your left. Walk for approximately 200m and take the first right marked 'Rough Park'.

Ramsons (wild garlic) flower along the edge of the stream during May. A steep exposed soil bank is to the right of the track. When damp the soil can give clues to what animals have previously visited. Badger, Red Fox, and Rabbit frequent the area and their tracks can be identified with use of a field guide. Bear in mind though that many dogs are also walked along here every day! Several kinds of fungi can be found within the woodland. They come in various forms including brackets, balls, and the familiar toadstool.



Liverwort

- 7** Follow the path through the woodland known as Oilhouse Coppice as it crosses a footbridge and then climbs a flight of wooden steps.

Look for tiny plants known as Liverworts growing on the wooden steps. Sparrowhawks patrol these woodland rides hunting for prey. This bird of prey flushes smaller birds from the undergrowth as it flies low and close to the ground. The alarm calls of the Blackbird can give away the presence of a predator nearby. However, during breeding season of April – July these calls may be triggered by your presence as you stroll through their territory.

- 8** Remain on the track and climb the gradual slope until you come to a wide set of wooden steps.

Mature trees including Oak, Sweet Chestnut, and Birch flank the woodland path. Leaves are often the easiest way to identify tree species. However with time, and dedication, identification skills can be developed to include bud shape and arrangement, bark pattern, and shape of crown. Stop and touch the bark of various

trees. Note how the colour and texture of the bark varies from tree to tree.

- 9** Having climbed the steps the cover of woodland is gradually left behind. Follow the path straight ahead with woodland to the left.

The grassland habitat of Rough Park is home to several species of butterfly and moth. Dingy Skipper is a locally rare species of butterfly that frequents this area of grassland. Watch for the dramatic colouration of the black and red Five-spot Burnet moth. This day-flying moth can be seen on flowers amongst the meadow plants during May and June. Its caterpillars feed on Bird's-foot-trefoil and related plants. Their hardened straw coloured cocoon cases can sometimes be found on grass stems if you look closely!



Five-spot Burnet moth



Pendulous Sedge and spider web

- 10** Remain on the surfaced path for approximately 600m ignoring a turning on the left. The final 200m of the path passes through trees to both sides as it gradually climbs.

Large tussocks of Pendulous Sedge can be seen alongside the path in damp shaded areas. This plant can grow to 2m tall and flowers from May to June. The simple flowers are borne on drooping flower spikes and are best observed with a hand lens. The male flower spikes hang from the stem above the generally larger female flower spikes. Spiders sometimes spin their web at this prominent point to catch their prey.

- 11** A large green bench located to the left of crossroads marks where you earlier entered Rough Park. Turn left here and head back to the start point on Newcomen Way.

Madeley Court

Start and parking: Car park next to Madeley Court Hotel entrance

Distance: 1.8km / 1.1 miles • **Time:** 1½ hours

Walk Grade: Easy/Medium



Only a short distance from Madeley Centre, a compact mix of different habitats awaits – open water and reed beds, woodlands and old hedgerows, all linked by old footpaths and a section of the Silkin Way. Good for birds, bats, and wildflowers in spring and summer months!

1 Leave the car park and walk in the direction of fenced sports fields. Cross over a footbridge and turn right at a marker post showing 'Woodlands for Health'. Go through a metal barrier and follow the path ahead.

The two pools ahead are known as Madeley Balancing Pools. The first of the pools, seen on the route to the left, has open water surrounded by Reedmace

and Yellow Iris. These wetland plants provide a refuge for water birds, reptiles, amphibians, and many invertebrates. On warm evenings at dusk bats may also be seen in the vicinity, catching insects flying above and near the water.

2 Follow the path to the right as it passes by the perimeter wall of Madeley Court Hotel and sweeps left. Go over the footbridge between the pools.

Look for a Grey Heron, sometimes stalking or standing motionless in the shallows here, as it patiently waits for a fish or frog to get close enough for capture with its great spiked beak! Along the edge of the water you may see dragonflies on the wing. They spend the majority of their life in the water as a nymph. During summer they emerge as a fully developed adult. Dragonflies are agile hunters and will capture insects in mid-air on the wing.

3 Remain on the path and head through the trees. Go through the metal kissing gate and turn right. Follow the track to the next gate near the woodland in the distance.

Trees and shrubs flank this long thin area of grassland. Birds such as Robin, Dunnock, and Greenfinch will nest in this woodland edge habitat. The unmistakable Bullfinch can also be seen in the vicinity. The male bird has a bright pinkish-red chest and cheek patches that contrast strongly with his black cap. Masses of red berries hang from the Hawthorn bushes during autumn.

4 Go through the metal gate and turn left. Head uphill and under an old bridge. Take a sharp right at the top of the stone track and join the tarmac surface of the Silkin Way. Follow the path as it sweeps left up a slope. Continue for approximately



Reedmace seedhead

200m before taking the first tarmac surfaced path to the right. A red marker disc for 'South Telford Heritage Trail' shows the way.

Woodland is to both sides of the path. Listen for a rapid drumming sound coming from the tree tops during spring. You may be lucky enough to hear, and watch, a Great Spotted Woodpecker as it announces its presence by hammering with its beak on a tree trunk. You may also be fortunate and see a Jay here - quite a large bird which can remain very elusive in its favoured woodland habitat. During autumn Jays collect acorns fallen from Oak trees and stash them in the ground. Come winter when food is scarce the Jay will return to where it buried the acorn for a meal.



Banded snails

5 Follow this path with playing fields to the right and gardens to the left for 200m until you reach a road.

An old hedgerow runs along the right of the path. Mature Ash and a veteran Lime tree stand proud within its line. Slugs and snails are generally active during darkness but can sometimes be seen amongst the vegetation. Other invertebrates such as woodlice, millipedes, and centipedes can be found residing under logs and stones nearby.

6 At the road turn right and head down the road taking care to avoid traffic.

Listen for the chirps of House Sparrows coming from the hedges surrounding gardens as you walk down the road. These once common birds have declined significantly in number over the last 25 years. Gulls are typically associated with the sea and coast, however in modern times they have moved further inland. Black-headed Gulls can often be seen on the playing fields searching for earthworms to feed upon.

7 Remain on the road/track and as it reaches the woodland take the first track on the left. Go through a black metal barrier and into the woods. Follow the woodland path up the slope. Ignore the first flight of steps to the right and continue past three wooden sculptures. Take the next right, immediately after the sculptures, and climb a flight of wooden steps following the 'Woodlands for Health' marker disc.

Large glossy leaves of Sweet Chestnut dominate the canopy here. They can also be found underfoot having fallen during autumn and strong winds. Throughout summer a number of species of ferns



Herb Robert

can be found on the slopes. Their leaves are known as fronds. The shape and arrangement of fronds helps to identify different types.

8 Having climbed the steps follow the path as it bears to the right.

Puddles cover the woodland path following heavy rain storms. On occasion you may see birds such as Song Thrush and Woodpigeon drinking and bathing in these small pools of water. The dainty pink flowers of Herb Robert, one of our commoner woodland plants, can be seen on the path edges here throughout summer.

9 Go straight ahead for 50m and you will find a bench at the top of more wooden steps. Take care as you head down this section as the steps are quite steep.

Note how nature is trying to reclaim the area where the steps have been installed. Mosses, ferns, and other woodland plants colonise any available niche given time. Stop for a moment and listen for bird calls in the trees. Consider an early morning visit perhaps - dawn chorus in May is an experience you will never forget!

10 Exit the wood on to the driveway for Madeley Court Hotel. Turn right and follow the tarmac track back down to the car park on the left and the start of your walk.

Glossary

Cocoon: The covering made of soft smooth threads that surrounds and protects particular insects during the pupa stage as they develop into adult form.

Conifer(ous): One of various types of evergreen (= never losing its leaves) tree which produce fruit in the form of cones.

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

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

Scrub: Short trees and bushes, growing on dry ground of low quality.

Sward: A lawn or meadow.