

THE STAFFORDSHIRE WAY

Long Distance Footpath



Staffordshire
County Council

Official
Guide

THE STAFFORDSHIRE WAY

Long Distance footpath

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ABOUT THE STAFFORDSHIRE WAY

The Staffordshire Way is a long distance footpath which has been established by Staffordshire County Council. It spans the length of the County for 92 miles from Mow Cop to Kinver Edge. The route is based wholly on public rights of way or paths on which access has been granted. The Way is not one of the national long distance routes designated by the Countryside Commission, but has been created by the County Council to respond to a recognised demand for access to the countryside. The route explores some of Staffordshire's loveliest scenery and several of its most interesting towns and villages, as well as linking country parks and picnic places.

Easy accessibility for as many people as possible was an essential factor in determining the route, so the Way starts just to the north of Stoke-on-Trent and later runs close to the West Midlands Conurbation. To many people the Staffordshire Way is virtually 'on the doorstep'. The first 32 mile section of the Way from Mow Cop to Rocester opened in the spring of 1977 and proved to be a great success, receiving a commendation in the British Tourist Authority's 'Come to Britain' awards for the best new tourist facilities of the year. The second stage of the Way to Cannock Chase opened two years later, and the route was completed in 1983. Since that time, the County Council has adopted a policy of progressive management and improvement of the route, in keeping with its status as a major recreational path. In 1995 the Ramblers' Association assisted with a major refurbishment of the Way, together with an update of this guide book, as part of their 60th Anniversary celebrations.

Staffordshire is a beautiful rural County of scenic contrast, and the Way explores it to best advantage. Starting among rugged gritstone hills on the edge of the Peak District, the Way turns south through the wooded valleys of 'Staffordshire's Rhineland'. In Mid-Staffordshire, Cannock Chase is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the Way explores the heart of this lovely area. Beyond, the superb landscaped parklands of the south of the County - the results of 18th century genius and creativity - have earned it the name of 'Parkland Staffordshire'. The area abounds with reminders of Domesday, Medieval England and tales of deeds of chivalry. The climax of the route is a lofty sandstone ridge, to journey's end at the County boundary.

The Staffordshire Way is an important link in the regional long distance path network. At Kinver Edge the Way connects with Hereford and Worcester County Council's North Worcestershire Path and the Worcestershire Way. The latter runs for 36 miles to Malvern, and may have a future link to the Cotswold Way. The Heart of England Way - an unofficial long distance path established by its own Association - provides an 80 mile route through Warwickshire, to link the Staffordshire Way at Cannock Chase with the Cotswold Way at Chipping Campden. In North Staffordshire, the Staffordshire Way joins with Cheshire County Council's Gritstone Trail, which follows the western edge of the Pennines to Lyme Park - only 10 miles from the start of the Pennine Way at Edale.

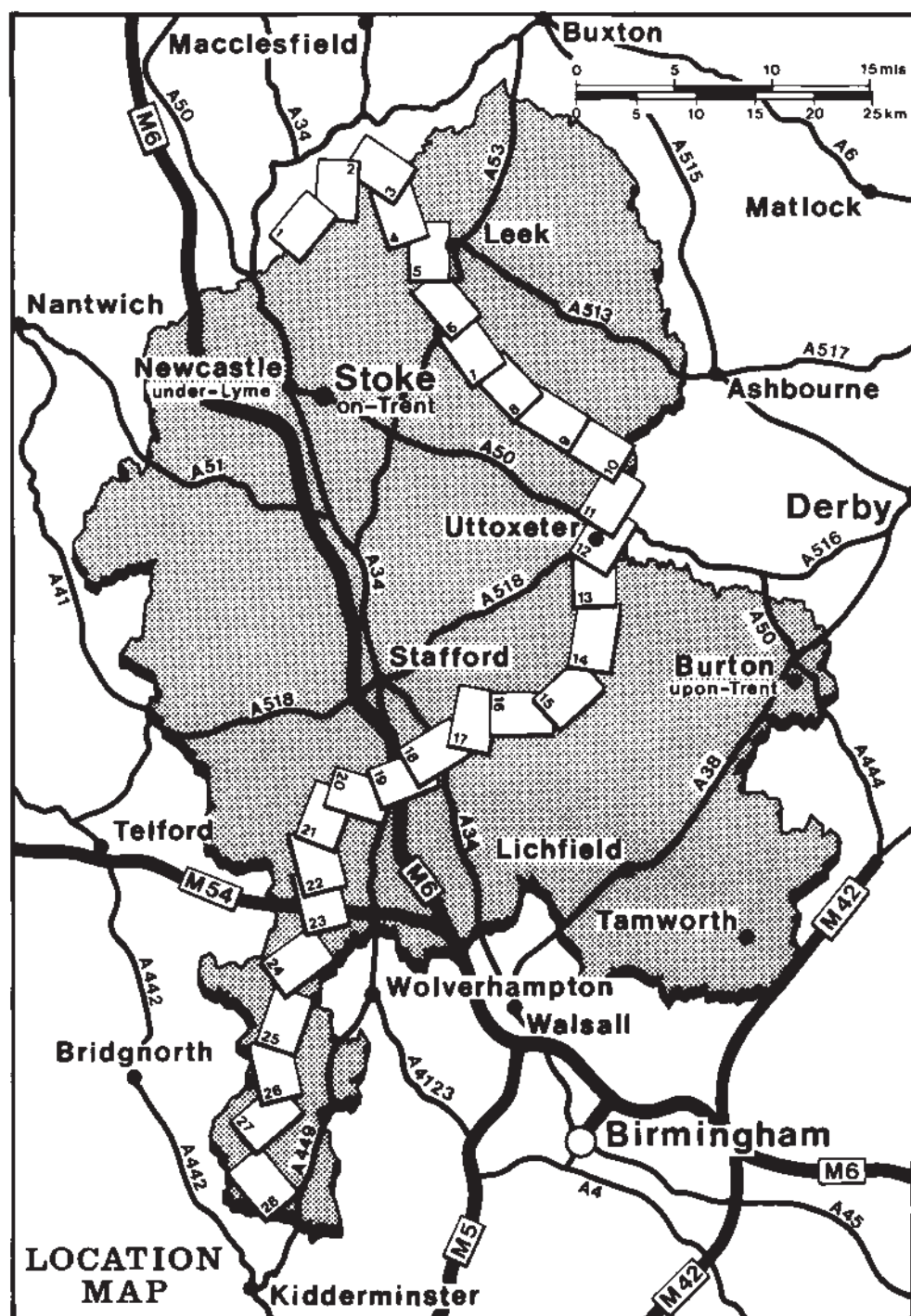
The Way is not just another challenge for the long distance hiker. The simple maps and comprehensive notes that appear later in the book have been designed so that anyone can follow the route without difficulty. The maps also indicate some adjoining public paths which can be used in conjunction with the Way to provide short circular walks. The Way itself has been signposted and waymarked to reassure the walker that he is on the right path. The waymarks take the form of a yellow or blue arrowhead (yellow for footpath, blue for bridleway) and incorporate the Staffordshire Knot symbol.

The route maps and notes indicate the location of country parks, picnic places, car parks and toilets. However, much of the Way is across private farmland and woodland, where the walker must not linger or stray from the path and where great care must be taken not to cause damage, particularly to crops, or to worry livestock. Fire too is a danger, particularly after prolonged dry weather.

Without the co-operation of farmers and landowners, and assistance from numerous public and voluntary bodies, the Staffordshire Way could not have been created. The County Council wishes to express its sincere thanks to all those people who have been involved in the Way's development, and its continuing improvement.



Follow the waymarkers - yellow and blue



The detailed route maps and directions included in this guide book should enable you to follow the route without difficulty. The maps are overprinted with additional information indicated on the key below:-

KEY TO ROUTE MAPS

	“The Staffordshire Way”
	Alternative route
	Walks on disused railways
	Some other public rights of way
	Country Park
	Nature Park
	National Trust Land
	Picnic Site
	Toilets
	Parking
P.H.	Public House
	Viewpoint

Scale of route maps 1 - 28: 2½” = 1 mile

Whilst no specialist equipment is necessary for any part of the Way, the route does include occasional rough walking and a few steep climbs. Some paths may also be wet, particularly in the winter months. The wearing of stout shoes or boots is, therefore, recommended.

Part One

GRITSTONE COUNTRY AND THE CHURNET VALLEY

MOW COP TO THE CLOUD ALONG THE GRITSTONE EDGE

The landmark of Mow Cop Castle, a sham built by Randle Wilbraham in 1754 to enhance the view from Rode Hall and poised 1,000 feet above sea level on the Staffordshire/Cheshire border, is the starting point for two long-distance paths, the Staffordshire Way and the Gritstone Trail. The six mile route to The Cloud is common to both paths and meanders between the two Counties. It has been christened the Mow Cop Trail and is waymarked with arrows, but with the addition of a letter “M” as its symbol within both Counties.

The Gritstone Trail has been created by Cheshire County Council and runs northwards for 19 miles to Lyme Park, Stockport. The Trail follows the westerly ridges of the Pennines, and earns its name from the angular sandstones or ‘grits’ which form these ridges.

The rocks of the Millstone Grit around Mow Cop have long been valued for a variety of uses and past quarrying and workings are much in evidence. Some were used, as the name implies, for making millstones as well as being a source of building stone for the Potteries. Others were valuable as refractories for lining furnaces and gas retorts, whilst a sandstone known as the Whetstone was used for grinding and honing. Shales were dug from the Lower Coal Measures in a brick pit at Mow Cop Village and there were shallow workings in coal seams along the outcrop of these Measures on the east side of the ridge.

Primitive Street, Mow Cop is a reminder of the birth of Primitive Methodism here in 1807 when Hugh Bourne and William Clowes held the first English camp meeting. When the Castle was given to the National Trust in 1937, 10,000 Methodists marked the occasion with a service on the hill.

The Old Man of Mow is the name given to a curious pillar of rock which was left after quarrying around it. From the trig point immediately above the Old Man there are superb views through 360 degrees which embrace the Potteries, the Cheshire Plain, the hills of Shropshire and Wales and, to the north, the Peak District.

On its way towards The Cloud, the Way follows the remarkably straight gritstone ridge of Congleton Edge which is part of the dramatic boundary between the Pennines and the Cheshire Plain. Much of the slope below the ridge on the west

side of the edge is covered by thin boulder clay deposited during the Ice Age. Numerous streams rise on this higher ground; the springs which feed them lie just below the grit scarp. At Corda Well (where a footpath to Mow Lane is signposted) a cistern has been constructed at such a spring.

At Nick i' the Hill the Way leaves the ridge and descends through the wooded slopes on the east of Congleton Edge to join the disused Congleton Branch railway line, now owned by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and managed as a walkway. An alternative path northwards from Nick i' the Hill does follow the top of the ridge, maintaining the fine views over the surrounding countryside and rejoining the main path at Mossley. **However, this route follows a narrow, unprotected ledge above steep cliffs in places and extreme care is needed.**

Acorn Lane, now with more ash and other species than the oaks that gave it its name, is the start of an ascent of 600 feet in less than a mile and a half up to The Cloud at almost 1,100 feet above sea level. Here the Chatsworth Grit is at about its thickest and forms a huge cliff right round the nose of the fold.

Approaching the trig point on The Cloud the Way passes the earthworks of an Iron Age hill fort, now hidden in the plantation on the right. A further reminder of ancient man is at Bridestones, a mile to the south of the Way and accessible from the road by a public right of way along a farm drive. This neolithic burial chamber is nearly 20 feet long and is divided into two sections by a "Porthole Stone" (now broken). To the east of the chamber is a forecourt, obscured by bushes, though the semi-circular platform is still visible and partly outlined by large stones. The mound which originally covered the stones is believed to have been more than 300 feet long and 40 feet wide.

The all-round views from the summit of The Cloud can only be described as magnificent. They can extend over the Cheshire Plain to Shropshire and the Welsh hills and to Merseyside and due north over the rugged hills of the Peak District. Closer at hand lies Jodrell Bank radio telescope, its huge reflector being a prominent landmark 8 miles to the north-west. In the valley of the River Dane below lies Bosley Reservoir and behind that the British Telecom relay tower crowns Bosley Minn. Looking back, Rudyard Reservoir can be seen down the valley in Staffordshire.

SOUTH FROM THE CLOUD - RUDYARD AND LEEK

From The Cloud the Way descends steeply for 600 feet to the River Dane which marks the Staffordshire/Cheshire border 2 miles below. Ravensclough Wood is a mixed deciduous wood of birch, oak, ash, elm, rowan and hawthorn clinging to the steep slopes of this water carved valley. Near the footbridge over the stream, at the bottom of the wood, notice the huge leaves of the butterbur which has large purplish pink flower spikes in spring.

The Way crosses the washland of the Dane to join the disused Churnet Valley railway line which suffered, like the Congleton Branch line, under the Beeching axe of the early 1960s. Beyond the busy Leek to Macclesfield road a feeder channel carries the waters of the Dane from Gighall Weir to Rudyard Lake and the Caldon Canal beyond. The limestone ballast still remains on the disused line, so you can expect to see lime-loving plants which are not normally found in the local soil. Alder and birch trees, pioneer species, assist in the line's colonisation. After ½ mile you pass Rushton Station, now converted to a private residence with its stonework splendidly restored. A little further along the line a stone bridge over the railway marks a public footpath to the quaint little church of St. Lawrence standing alone in the fields. The church has a most unusual structure, being a wooden building encased in stone.

South of Rushton lies one of Staffordshire's most lovely sights, Rudyard Reservoir. Constructed in 1831 to supply the Caldon Canal, the 2 miles of Rudyard with its wooded slopes is an attraction for yachtsmen, fishermen and those who come purely to enjoy its tranquil beauty. In 1863 two such visitors were so enchanted by the scene that they later christened their son after the lake: his name - Rudyard Kipling. The Way leaves the railway at the northern end of the Lake where the mud flats attract wading birds such as the curlew. Look for gulls on the Lake (mainly the black headed gull) and herons.

As the route turns away from the Lake, you can see a small clump of rather poor looking oaks in the field on the left. Their thin stems and gnarled and swollen roots show that they were once coppiced. As you climb towards the castellated Cliffe Park (c.1830) there are panoramic views over the water and to Barns Wood on the slopes by Rudyard's eastern shore. There are some good trees around Cliffe Park itself, particularly an upright growing Irish yew on the lawn below it and a fine weeping wych elm overhanging the gate to the south.

As you enter Reacliffe Wood notice the line of sycamore and lime. They are fully mature and some 150 to 200 years old. These trees are beginning to deteriorate, not aided by the senseless vandalism of people carving their names into the bark. Look for common woodland birds such as tits, finches, tree creeper, nuthatch and wren and in summer the breeding migrants such as warblers and the redstart. This is still gritstone country, so beneath the trees you will see acid ground flora such as wavy hair grass, bracken and bilberry. Beyond the wood, where the track turns sharp right, look for clumps of Indian balsam (also called policeman's helmet), whose seed pods have a peculiar explosive dispersal mechanism if touched. This plant was introduced into Britain last century and has spread extensively in damp places along rivers and canals.

Below Rudyard village the dam and overflow of the reservoir are well worth inspection. They are a tribute to the skills of the engineers and stone masons of the last century. From the dam the Way follows the canal feeder channel for 2½ miles to Leek. In the damp meadows along the feeder grow meadowsweet, thistles and other plants. The hawthorn hedges along its course attract flocks of small birds such as finches and tree sparrows in autumn and winter. This is also

a good area to see swallows and martins hunting for insects.

The trees fringing the feeder are alders, the commonest tree by the rivers and canals all along the Way. Alders are invariably found in wet places; one of the few trees whose roots can grow in completely waterlogged ground. Its wood is very durable and was formerly used for clog making.

The route runs parallel to the River Churnet along the valley floor before climbing through Longsdon Wood Nature Reserve to Longsdon village. The view from the main road at Longsdon reveals Leek, the gateway to the Peak District, clustering in a bowl beneath the surrounding hills, whilst 3 miles to the north the massive millstone outcrop of the Roaches and Hen Cloud dominate the skyline. The original settlement at Leek took place on a knoll within a loop of the River Churnet, and the ancient church with its sturdy tower crowns the tip of the promontory, with streets and alleys radiating from it. Long rows of newer terraced houses and the more recent estate developments are visible between.

Once the camp of Bonnie Prince Charlie, Leek remained a modest market town until the early 19th century, supporting local industries such as the corn mill at which James Brindley worked in his early years as an engineer. The mill has been restored and is open to the public. The silk industry brought wider prominence in the early 19th century and included the establishment locally of a dyeing industry noted for its “raven black” and silk printing in which William Morris later collaborated in the production of natural dyes and designs. The old multi-storey mills are still a prominent part of the street scene. Leek still holds a weekly open-air market and retains a textile industry with allied chemical processes. More recently a large food processing and packing concern has grown up in the town and a new industrial estate encourages diversity of light industry.

THE CALDON CANAL - RESTORED WATERWAY IN A SECLUDED VALLEY

The 17½ miles of the Caldon Canal from Etruria to Froghall dates from 1779 and was built both to supply water to the Grand Trunk Canal (now the Trent and Mersey) and to provide access to raw materials. In 1769, the same year that Wedgwood built his first factory at Etruria, the proprietors of the Grant Trunk Canal took a 999 year lease on the Cauldon Low limestone quarries and seven years later Parliament authorised the cutting of the Canal.

The North Staffordshire railway came to the valley in 1849. The route of the canal was altered between Consall and Froghall to make way for this, whilst a 13 mile extension of the Caldon from Froghall to Uttoxeter, completed in 1811, was obliterated by the new railway after less than 50 years of rather uncertain use. The Etruria to Froghall section, however, was spared and continued in commercial use for another century.

As you descend to the canal towpath at Wall Grange, it is worth remembering that the canal has not always been accessible to the tourist. Like many other waterways the Caldon suffered from the decline of water-borne commercial traffic and by the mid-1960s it had become a desolate relic, impassable to boats and pedestrian alike.

Any inspection in those days was a depressing experience. Lock gates had fallen into disrepair and lock chambers decayed; long stretches were silted up and reed infested; towpaths and hedges were overgrown and in several places seepage was occurring due to slipping and subsidence of the banks. Scarcely could the future of a canal have seemed more bleak. It was the sad state of the canal in the early 1960s that brought about the first steps in restoration. The Caldon Canal Society, aided by a growing number of other organisations, began an ambitious programme of work and many thousands of man hours of voluntary labour were put in by monthly working parties.

Despite the enthusiasm of the volunteers, however, the rate of progress was inevitably slow. The Society's resources were limited and the Waterways Board were unable to put enough money into the project to restore the canal to a cruising waterway. The Society therefore appealed to the local authorities for financial assistance and this resulted in a joint agreement between British Waterways Board, Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council to restore the whole canal to full navigational use. This long and sustained restoration effort reached its conclusion in September 1974 when the canal was formally opened to navigation.

It is a mile from Wall Grange along the towpath to Cheddleton Flint Mill, probably begun by James Brindley about 1756 - 1765. The mill is now splendidly restored to full working order and is a most fascinating museum. The River Churnet descends a weir alongside, whilst the two large under-shot wheels are turned by a mill race. Natural flint brought by canal was first calcined in the adjacent kilns to make it easier to grind. After grinding, the flint powder was sent by canal to the Potteries where it was added to the clay to give strength to and improve the whiteness of the pottery products.

The old Cheddleton village caps a steep rocky spur overlooking the site of the ancient ford of the marshy valley of the River Churnet. From the ford the Leek to Stafford route originally climbed upwards through a narrow sunken lane, now Hollow Lane, passed through the cluster of dwellings around the ancient church of St. Edward the Confessor and continued towards Stafford by the winding and equally narrow and sunken Ostlers Lane. Domesday survey records the village as one of the holdings of the Earl of Chester, who had considerable interests in North Staffordshire.

The Caldon Canal came to Cheddleton in 1779 and had an immediate effect on the village in the establishment of industries along its banks. A brewery, lime kilns, boat building yard, paper mill, wharves and quarries were opened. The nearby corn mill was enlarged and a tan yard established. All these activities have

now ceased, the last being the paper mill which until 1979, made tissue paper for pottery transfer printing.

The length of canal beyond Cheddleton is a good place to see a water plant known as arrowhead. This is so called from the shape of its leaf and in late summer it produces round purplish fruits. The canal banks support a mass of vegetation, with a profusion of meadowsweet and great hairy willowherb. The latter has an attractive pink flower with a white centre - known as "codlins and cream". Notice also the huge glyceria grass which is a common and troublesome plant which infests canals and needs regular clearing. Look out for moorhens hurrying across the water when disturbed.

Beyond Basford Bridge the skyline to the south is dominated by the large Forestry Commission plantation of mixed conifers, Consall Wood. After a mile you pass a restored drawbridge across the canal and soon reach Oakmeadow Ford Lock where the canal drops to the level of the River and uses its bed to Consall Forge. Notice once again the alders overhanging the bank on this section.

Half a mile south of Oakmeadow Ford Lock a mile post declares "Etruria 14 - Uttoxeter 16". Notice at its side a milestone with the figures 3 and 14 on its two faces. This 200 year old stone is a reminder that the canal finished at Froghall 3 miles to the south before 1811. Partially hidden amongst the trees behind these mile posts you can see one of the two Consall lime kilns. Limestone from Cauldon Low was brought here from Froghall and after calcining was transported by a plateway railway for over 6 miles to beyond Weston Coyney.

The next 3 miles of the Churnet valley below Oakmeadow Ford Lock, with its densely wooded slopes, is perhaps its most beautiful and certainly its most secluded section. Consall Forge is at its heart, lying in a bowl surrounded by a semi-natural woodland. Ash is the most prominent species with some alder, oak and wych elm. There is a great deal of young birch, various willows and some hazel and bird cherry, the latter being at the extreme southern end of its natural range in England.

Consall was once the site of a water-powered iron works from which bars of iron were transported on mules to Oakamoor to be made into tin plate. Here the canal and river part company whilst the railway squeezes its way between them and the Black Lion public house. Two flights of steps down the valley sides provide access to this delightful spot.

This beautiful area is now the site of a unique concept in nature conservation and public access. In 1989, the County Council opened the Consall Nature Park; the first in England. The term 'nature park' is a new one in countryside facilities, and reflects the fact that more emphasis is placed on nature conservation than in other countryside areas. At the same time, the public are welcome to visit and enjoy the walks that have been provided. A visitor centre provides displays and exhibitions of the varied and dramatic past of the valley, and its present natural history interests.

The towpath opposite Far Kingsley Banks has been raised by the dumping of dredgings in the past. Note the butterbur again, the great hairy willowherb and the invasive rosebay willowherb on the upper, drier parts of the bank. This is as good a place as any to see the water vole, often wrongly referred to as the water rat. This vegetarian is a good swimmer, living in small burrows at water level and can be found all along the canal and River Churnet.

The buildings immediately beyond the next lock were until recent years, a flint mill, originally with a wheel then later a water turbine. Just after the old mill notice the “trickle ridge” with its stream flowing across the towpath into the canal and building up an ever-higher deposit of mostly calcareous material over the years. The rock is always damp and is therefore a good place for mosses and liverworts.

The name of Cherry Eye Bridge, with its gothic arch, is said to be derived from the inflamed eyes of the workmen caused by airborne dust from the nearby industrial processes. The woods around Cherry Eye Bridge hide the remains of scores of small workings that contributed to the valley’s annual production of 150,000 tons of ironstone by 1730. The contrast between those industrial times and the tranquil beauty of the bridge’s present day setting could hardly be greater.

After Cherry Eye Bridge the Way leaves the towpath to climb out of the valley to Kingsley village. Keeping on the towpath, however, brings you to the County Council’s picnic area at Froghall Wharf. Here you can view the two banks of great stone lime kilns which once processed 100,000 tons of limestone each year. Still visible around the wharf are the remains of the four separate tramways built between 1776 and 1849 to bring the stone down from the quarries over 600 feet above. Also to be seen are the old lock chamber and canal basin leading into the long-abandoned Uttroter length of the canal.

As you climb steeply out of the valley towards Kingsley village, it is worth pausing on Banks Lane to admire the view across the valley to Ruelow Wood. The scene is a superb mosaic of conifers (Scots pine and larch) and mature hardwoods (beech, ash, sycamore, oak and birch) - a grand sight at any time of year, but surely the place to enjoy Keats’ “season of mists and mellow fruitfulness”.

KINGSLEY TO ALTON BY HILL AND VALLEY

Much of this section of the Way is over fields of mowing grass, an important and valuable crop. Please help the farmer by walking in single file over such fields.

The Way passes through St. Werburgh’s churchyard in Kingsley village and then over to Kingsley Holt before dropping down through the meadows towards the Churnet. These damp pastures around Ross Bridge support a mixture of herbaceous species such as devil’s bit scabious and self-heal, and a huge area of

the tough, tussocky, tufted hair grass. Notice also the invasion of the pasture by scrub from the woodland above - especially hawthorn and gorse. Left to itself with no grazing pressure, this grassland would eventually become woodland.

Two fields short of Eastwall Farm you will notice an earth embankment on your right. This marks the line of the Woodhead Tramroad which carried coal from the Cheadle collieries to a wharf on the canal. Beyond the farm buildings at Eastwall the Way passes through the 250 acres of the National Trust's Hawksmoor Reserve, a fascinating area rich in flora and fauna. Hawksmoor's semi-natural woodland of stunted oaks is a legacy from the days when the area was exploited by the numerous charcoal burners employed by the nearby copper works and no doubt the oak bark was used for tanning.

Walkers of the Staffordshire Way should keep strictly to the main public path through Hawksmoor, although guide books can be obtained locally for the Reserve's several nature trails. Across the valley from Hawksmoor is Moneystone Quarry, one of the most modern sand purification and processing plants in Europe. Moneystone supplies silica sand for the Lancashire glass industry. The County Council's picnic area at Oakamoor has transformed what was once a great copper works where the smoke from tall chimneys shrouded the landscape. The 20,000 miles of copper wire for the first transatlantic cable of 1858 is thought to have been drawn at Oakamoor by Messrs. Thomas Bolton and Sons. The works suffered from a lack of space to expand and in 1962 operations were transferred to the firm's Froghall works and copper working ended at Oakamoor after nearly 200 years.

Oakamoor is the centre of perhaps the most varied and beautiful wooded area in the County and this section of the Way shows it to good advantage. The area is a mixture of private and Forestry Commission woodlands containing a wide variety of species, both conifers and hardwoods. The broadleaf trees include alder, willows, poplars, oak, red oak, ash and beech, whilst the conifers show to better advantage here than perhaps anywhere else in the County. They include spruce, Scots pine, lodgepole pine and western hemlock as well as both European and Japanese larches. These are easily distinguished in summer or winter, the European has straw coloured twigs and bright green needles which turn yellow in autumn, whilst the Japanese has orange or purplish twigs and blue-green needles which turn a deep yellow and give a warm glow in the winter scene.

Close to the Ranger Youth Hostel the Way descends into Ousal Dale. Near the top of the Dale pear and plum trees grow amongst the mixed woodland. They were originally brought here by the small community that supported the now derelict Alton smelting mill which can be seen at the southern end of the large fish pond. Built around 1741 for smelting lead ore from Ecton, the site comprised "a certain smelting mill, refinery, slag hearth, smith's shop, two houses, a barn and about nine acres of land lying near the same with a pool of water". Shareholders after 1760 included the Duke of Devonshire and were the same as those of certain mines at Ecton "likely to produce large quantities of lead ore". By 1786 the smelting mill was a corn grinding mill where a 20 feet high breast water wheel

drove three pairs of stones.

Close to Alton village is Toothill Rock which offers magnificent views over the valley and from which it is easy to understand why this area has been called “Staffordshire’s Rhineland”. Immediately striking is the romantic grandeur of Alton Castle perched dramatically high above the River Churnet, at this point running through a gorge with thickly wooded sides. The Castle and nearby buildings have a place in the history of English architecture since they were designed by the Victorian champion of gothic revivalism, A.W.Pugin, for the 16th Earl of Shrewsbury. They were begun in 1847 on the site of a 12th century castle of which little now remains. Alton village lies behind the Castle. It is basically on three levels, with winding lanes and footways connecting them, and boasts numerous buildings of special architectural or historical interest.

The valley contains a reminder of Alton’s past as an industrial centre making use of the river for power. The long range of stone buildings north of the bridge was formerly a wiremill established in 1736 and abandoned in 1828; the course of the millstream remains. Nearby, the disused railway station is the only example of an Italianate design remaining in the County. Across the valley lie the magnificently situated buildings and gardens of Alton Towers, the work of the 15th and 16th Earls of Shrewsbury. The 500 acre estate is, of course, now one of Europe’s most celebrated leisure parks, and attracts over 2 million visitors every year.

DENSTONE TO ROCESTER

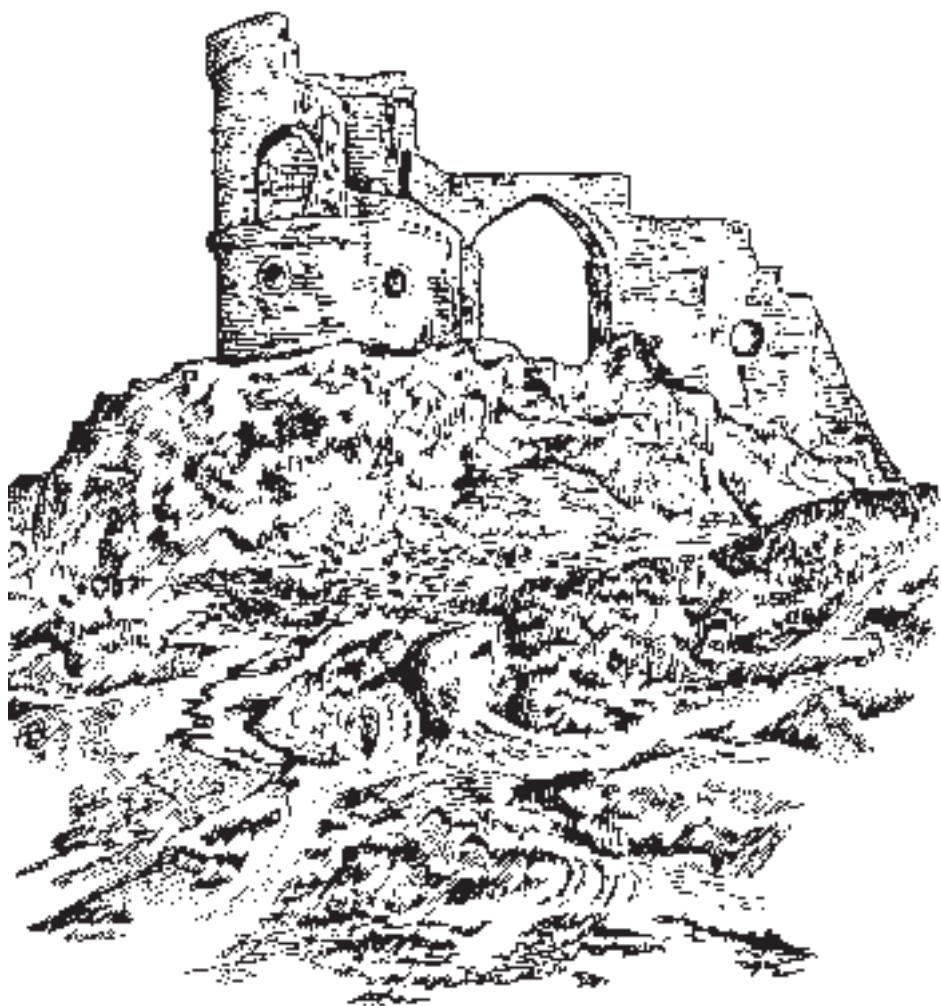
As you climb away from Alton towards Denstone the Way soon joins Saltersford Lane. The variety of trees and shrubs in its hedgerows (including hazel, holly, hawthorn, blackthorn, oak, sycamore, elder, bramble, bullace, elm, rowan, ash and maple) and its very name are clues to the ancient origins of this green lane. It was originally one of the country’s network of saltways when salt was an essential food preservative. East of Holebrook Farm the old stone packhorse causeway still exists.

Beyond Saltersford Lane the Way turns southwards and there are fine views across the valley to the Weaver Hills beyond. As the route descends alongside the disused railway a section of the ill-fated Uttoxeter branch of the Caldon Canal can still be seen. The Way skirts Denstone which is justly proud of its many successes in the County’s Best Kept Village Competition.

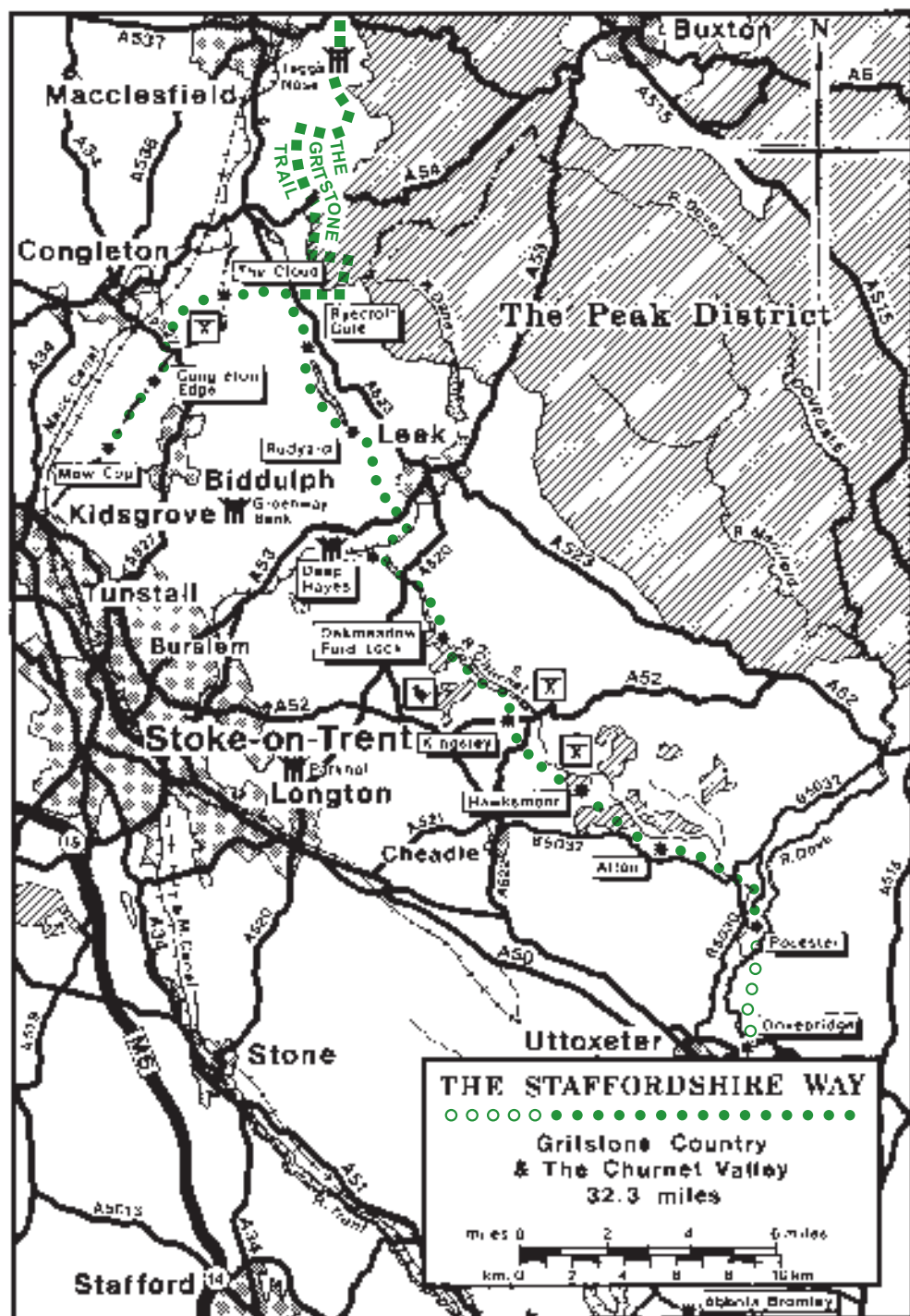
From Quixhill Bridge the route is a complete contrast to the dramatic scenery a few miles to the north. The path follows the Churnet on its way to its confluence with the Dove at Rocester through pleasant pastoral scenery. The meandering river is lined with the inevitable alders, amongst which are some white poplars, willow and ash, whilst a few Huntingdon elm survive in the fields. The route climbs through Barrowhill Wood, a strip of deciduous woodland with a variety of trees. Notice that where the cattle have grazed the lower slopes there is no ground

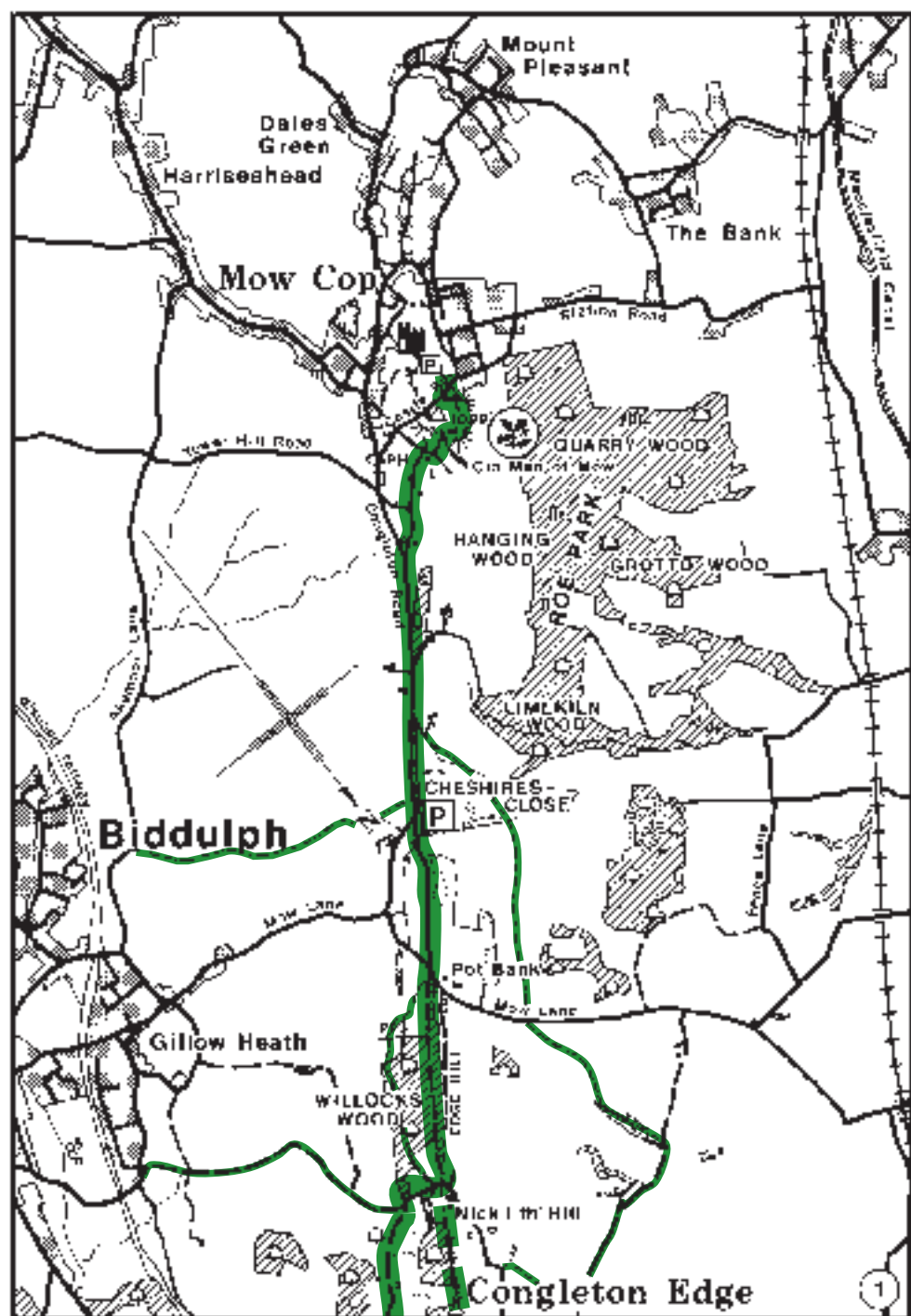
flora, but higher up typical woodland plants such as bluebells and dog's mercury are found. This wooded slope is sheltered from the prevailing east winds in winter and, therefore, spring flowers can be found here some weeks earlier than elsewhere in the area. Beyond the southern end of the wood notice below a fine example of an oxbow lake cut off by the river's "straightening" action.

As you descend towards the Rocester by-pass from Barrowhill, the large, modern factory of J.C.Bamford, with its lakes and landscaped foreground, dominate the scene. Excavating and earthmoving machinery leaves here for destinations all over the world. Notice the amazing 'JCB' sculpture on the open land on your right, as you cross to Rocester village.



Mow Cop Castle



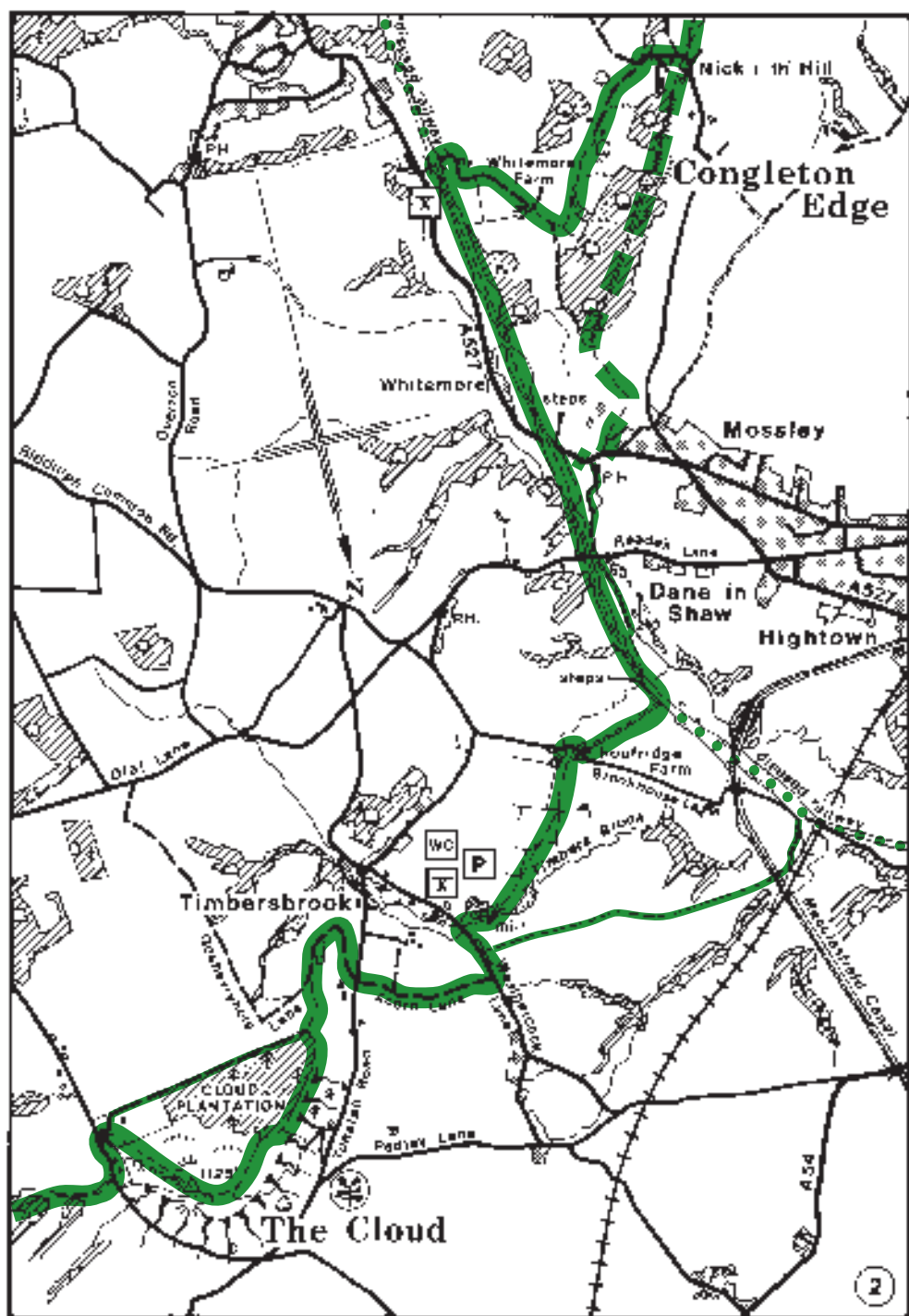


1. MOW COP TO CONGLETON EDGE (2 miles)

From the parking area at Mow Cop Castle take the path above the fence on the left, to emerge onto Castle Road. Turn right up the hill and left at the footpath sign on the right (Ackers Crossing 1¼). Follow the track for a short distance, then bear right across the open ground below the Old Man of Mow.

Rejoin the track, and follow it round to the right, ignoring the footpath sign pointing down the hill. Follow the rough road for 50 yards and then turn left at the crossroads of tracks which after ¼ mile brings you to Congleton Road. Turn left along the road (and make sure that you walk on the right of the road, that is, facing the oncoming traffic).

After ½ mile a verge opens out on the left. Cross over and follow the path at the back of the parking bays. At the last bay, by the road junction, follow an undulating path over a wide strip of rough land alongside the road. After about ¼ mile the verge peters out and the path drops down steeply to rejoin the road as it descends the bank on a bend. This section of road is fairly busy; it is narrow and visibility is poor - take care! After a further ¼ mile, where a road joins from the right, cross over to the footpath sign and take the track, over Edge Hill alongside the wall, which descends to Nick i' the Hill after ½ mile.



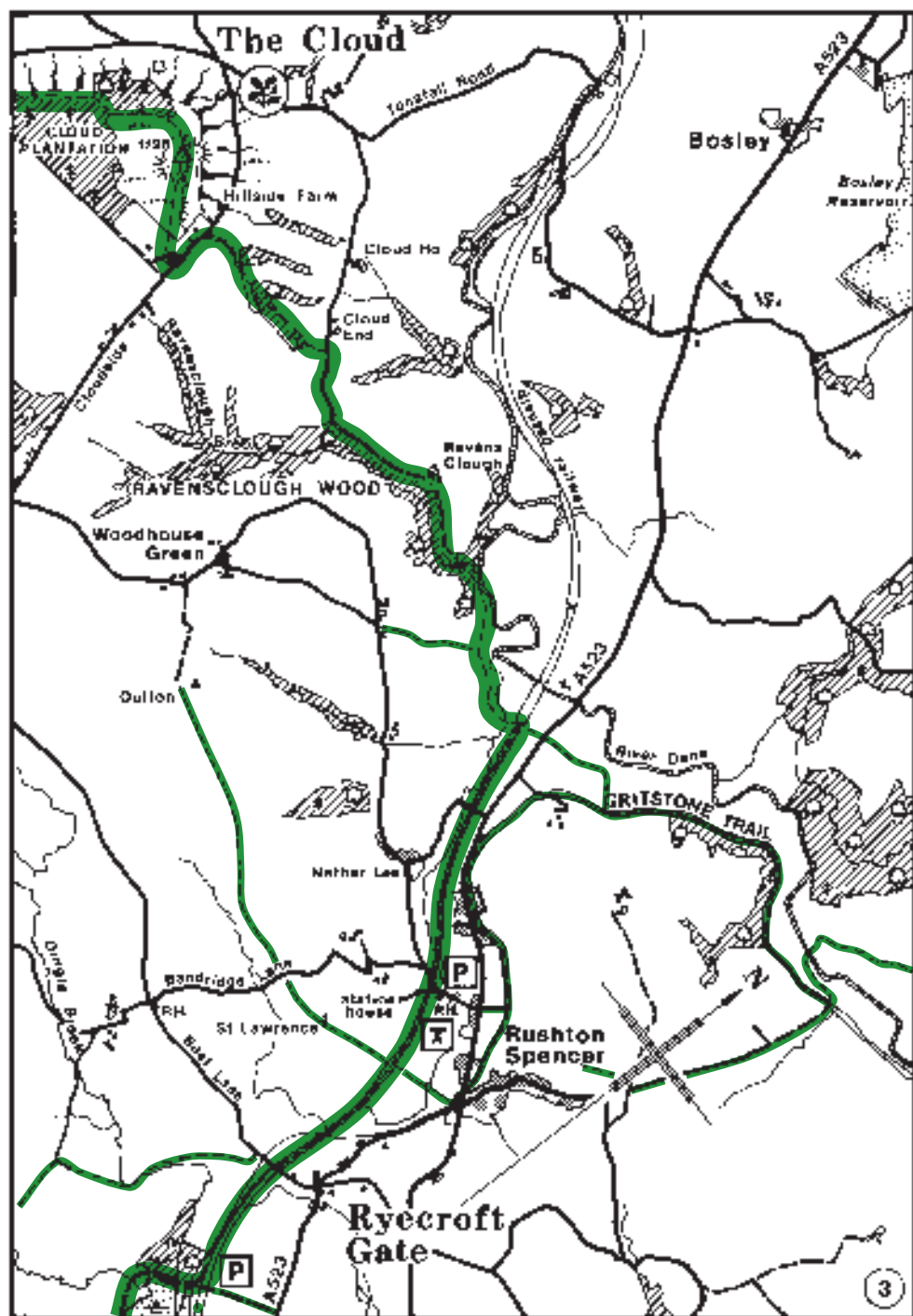
2. CONGLETON EDGE TO THE CLOUD (4.6 miles)

From Edge Hill turn right down the 'No Through Road' at Nick i' the Hill.

After 100 yards, where the road turns to the left, take the cinder track straight ahead and down the bank for 300 yards. Do not turn to the right down to the cottage but take the path straight ahead, past the compound on the left, and into the wood. The path emerges at the corner of the wood through a stile.

Go straight ahead for 80 yards and then turn down to a stile on the right. Follow the farm track down to the farmyard. Go straight ahead and follow the road down the hill for $\frac{1}{4}$ mile to the bridge under the disused railway. Under the bridge, go over the stile on the left, climb the steps up to the disused railway, and turn right along the track. After $\frac{3}{4}$ mile you pass over the A.527 and, after a further $\frac{1}{4}$ mile, over Reade's Lane, by a cottage on the right. Just over $\frac{1}{4}$ mile beyond Reade's Lane you cross a concrete bridge over a narrow underpass and 50 yards afterwards you leave the track on the right, down some wooden steps to a stile and footpath sign. Climb the stile and follow the railway fence to the field corner. Turn right and follow the hedge for two fields, passing through the farmyard onto Brookhouse Lane.

Turn right along the road for 50 yards and leave it from the left at the footpath sign. Cross a small paddock and go through a squeezer stile; then, with the farm on your right, cross two fields. At the next field cross a dip in the ground and veer slightly to the right to reach a stile in the far field boundary. Go over the stile and cross the next field to a stile above Timbers Brook. Cross the footbridge and go along the side of the old mill into a rough road which takes you to Weathercock Lane. Turn left along the road for 250 yards and then right up Acorn Lane, green lane. Cross into Gosberryhole Lane and follow it until you reach a National Trust sign on the left. Climb a steep path and turn left up the track. After nearly 200 yards you arrive at a gap in the stone wall, in front of the plantation. Paths divide here, and you bear left to the Cloud Summit.



3. THE CLOUD TO RYECROFT GATE (3.5 miles)

From the Trig Point at the top of The Cloud, take the path south-east down the hill for a quarter of a mile and descend the steps to a rough road. Turn left down it and then bear right to emerge onto the road at Cloud Side. Turn left down the road for 200 yards to a small clump of trees on a bank on the right. Climb the bank and go through a stile, following the field boundary on the right through two pastures. At the far corner of the second field climb the stile and bear left down the hill. The terraced path brings you gradually down to a stile onto the road.

Turn right along the road; after a few hundred yards the road bends round to the left down to the farm at Ravensclough. Just before the farm buildings, climb the stile at the end of the wall on your right and go diagonally across a small paddock and over a stile. The path descends through Ravensclough Wood to a footbridge over the stream and through a stile into a pasture on the valley floor. The path is straight ahead across the water meadow, between the river on the left and the wooded bank on the right. After 350 yards you climb a slight bank above the tree-lined watercourse on the left. The path comes close to a fence on the left, which you follow down to the corner of the field, through a stile and over the stone slab footbridge.

Climb the steps onto the embankment of the disused railway and turn right along it. It is $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to the old station at Rushton. Leave the railway at the old level crossing in front of the station house and pass the station on your right, to follow a track down to the picnic area. Rejoin the railway track and follow it for almost a mile to the parking area at the northern end of Rudyard Reservoir.

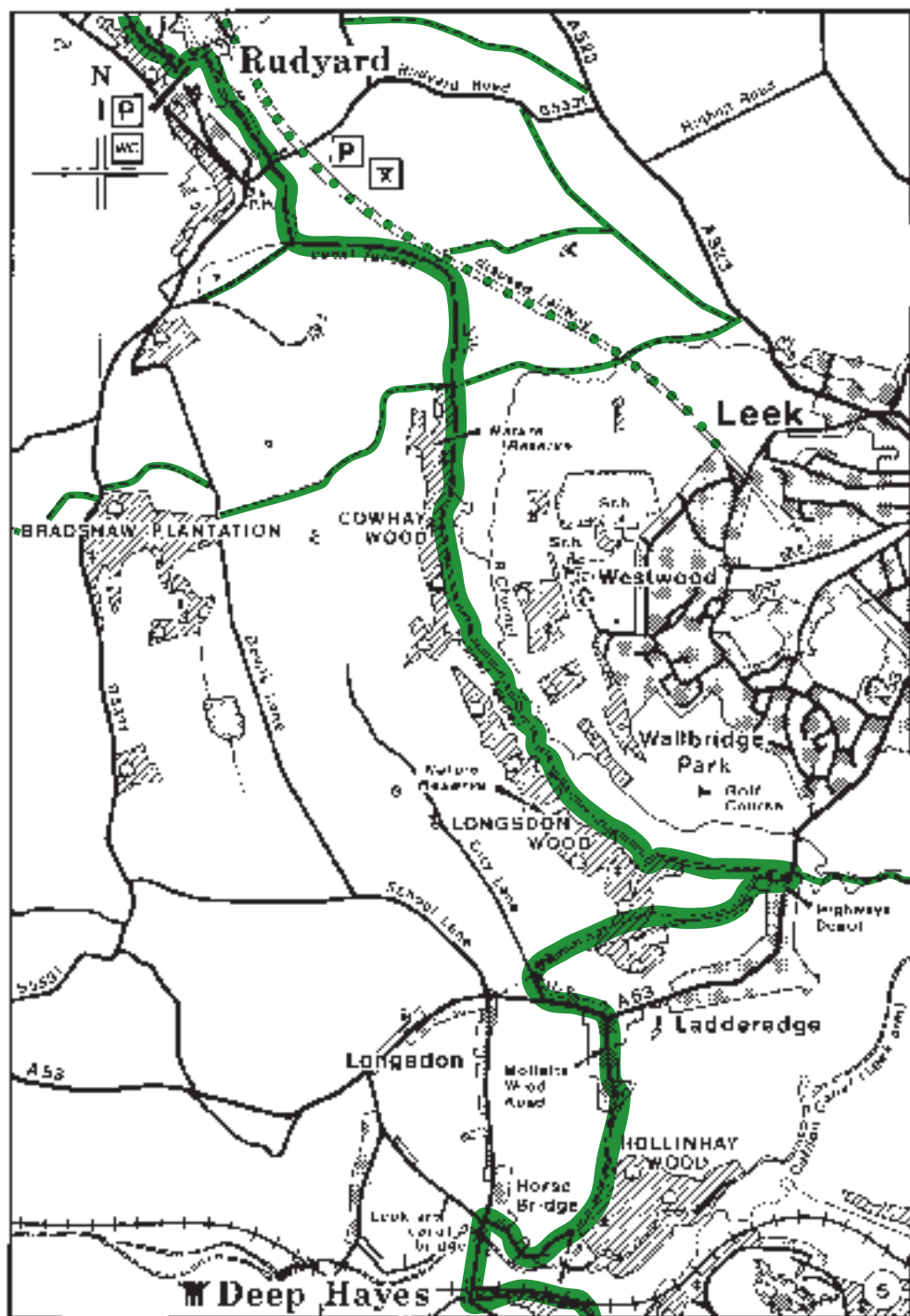
4. RYECROFT GATE TO RUDYARD (2.4 miles)

A $\frac{1}{4}$ mile beyond the road bridge at Ryecroft Gate, leave the disused railway line on the right, at the parking area in front of the stone bridge over it. Turn left along Reacliffe Road, which follows the shore-line round to the left for $\frac{1}{4}$ mile. Cross the stile at the side of a metal gate and follow the road sharply up to the right. After a few hundred yards the road divides and you take the rough track on the left up into the trees.

After $\frac{1}{4}$ mile go through a barrier in front of a large castellated house called Cliffe Park. Beyond the house is a second barrier which you pass through and continue along the rough road. After $\frac{1}{2}$ mile you pass in front of the Sailing Club House and after a further $\frac{1}{2}$ mile the road, here lined with lakeside chalets, turns sharply to the right.

After a few yards turn left over scrub land and at the end of the path turn left onto a track between walls. The track turns right in front of a caravan site and after a short distance you leave the main track and bear left along a walled path. The path widens into a track and descends past a row of houses on the left into Lake Road.

Turn right into Lake Road and after 100 yards turn left at the public footpath sign and down the path at the side of the cottage to the reservoir dam.



5. RUDYARD TO DEEP HAYES (4.6 miles)

The path from Lake Road runs down the back of the dam and turns right along the canal feeder. After $\frac{1}{4}$ mile the path emerges onto Rudyard Road which you cross to rejoin the canal feeder through a gap in the wall. The $2\frac{1}{2}$ mile path along the feeder to Wall Bridge, Leek, is straightforward and you emerge onto the main road through a stile.

Turn right over the feeder and then immediately right down a rough road on the side of the Highway Depot to the stile at the side of a field gate. Turn left at the corner of the security fence. The path follows the fence line on your left up the hill and round the corner of the field to a stile and gate in the top fence. As you enter the trees the path bears left along the top of the bank, through a stile, and then climbs steeply for a short distance to a stile into the field above.

Turn left along the fence and up to a stile in the top corner. Over the stile the path runs between a conifer hedge and a fence and onto a drive, turning right. After a short distance you arrive at a metalled lane by a cottage on the corner. Turn left down the lane to the main road at Longsdon.

Turn left down the main road and after a few hundred yards cross over into Mollatts Wood Road. Beyond the houses the road becomes a rough track at the side of a stone wall and then a path against a green chain link fence. At the end of the fence you join a drive. Straight ahead is a wooden electricity pylon. Take the rough road down to the right of it which brings you out onto the road at Horse Bridge after $\frac{1}{4}$ mile.

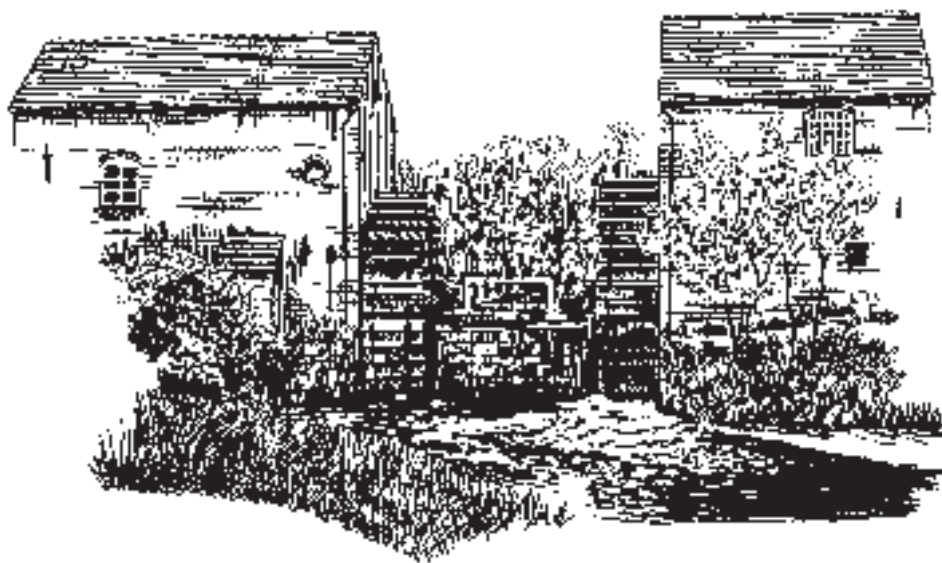
Turn left down the bank and cross over the Leek Arm canal bridge and the railway bridge, before descending onto the towpath of the Caldon Canal at the next bridge.



6. DEEP HAYES TO OAKMEADOW FORD LOCK (3 miles)

From Wall Grange it is a mile along the towpath to Cheddleton Flint Mill. From the Mill take the towpath under the road bridge, past two locks to Basford Bridge.

A mile beyond Basford Bridge you pass a restored drawbridge. Shortly afterwards the canal drops to the level of the River Churnet at Oakmeadow Ford Lock.



Cheddleton Flint Mill

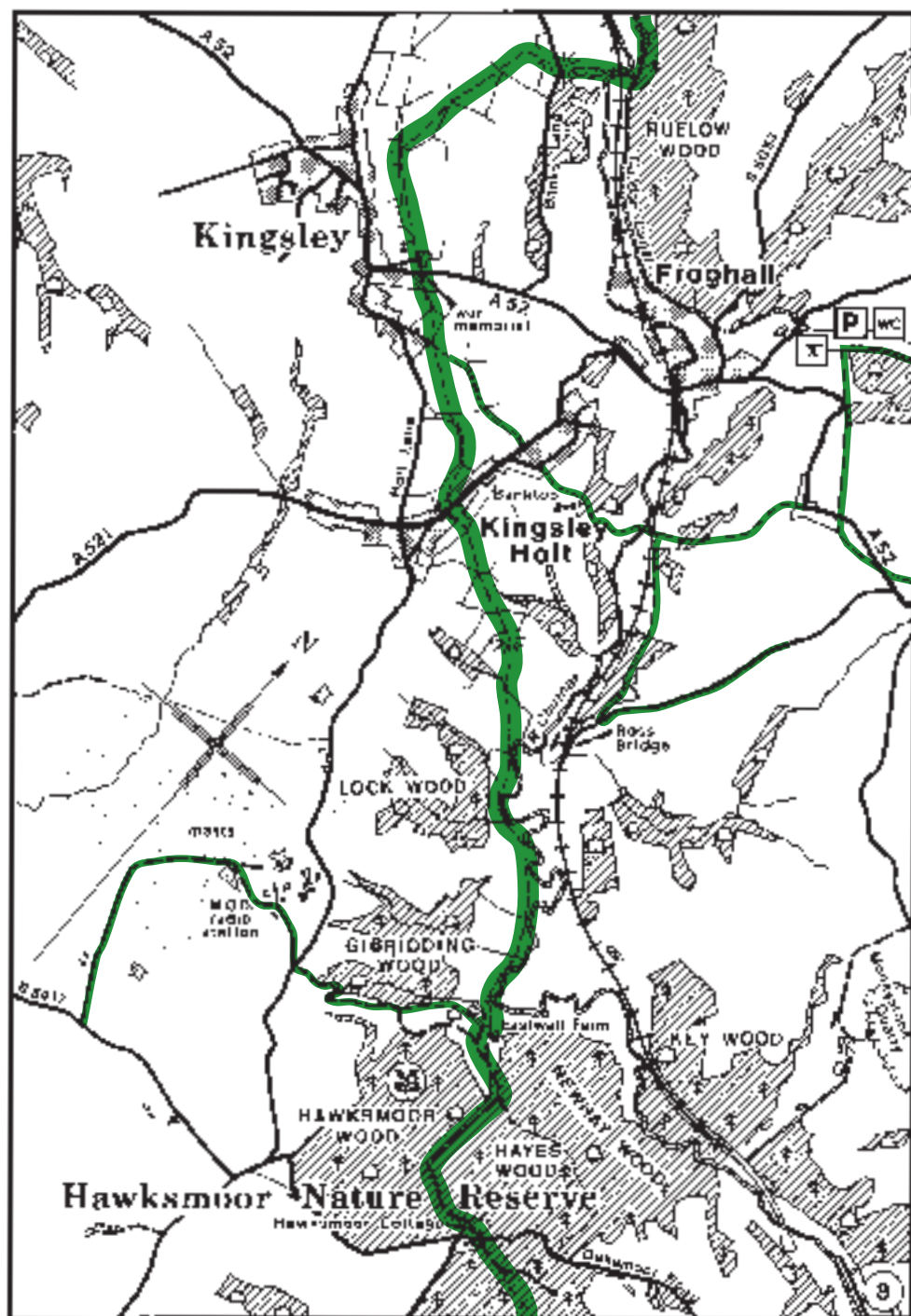
7. OAKMEADOW FORD LOCK TO KINGSLEY (3.2 miles)

At the lock the towpath crosses to the opposite bank by a small bridge. Half a mile further on, opposite Coalpit Wood, are disused lime kilns. From here it is ½ mile to Consall Forge.

At Consall Forge, cross the footbridge and then the stone canal bridge and turn right under the railway bridge along the towpath. After ½ mile you pass a lock at the flint mill and shortly afterwards the towpath goes under, and then back over, the footbridge. After ½ mile you pass under Cherry Eye Bridge, and 300 yards later climb the stile and go down to a footbridge over the river. Over the footbridge the path turns left under the railway arch and after 50 yards bears right and climbs steeply up to the stile in Banks Lane. Climb a short flight of stone steps and then steeply up the bank to a stile above the trees.

Beyond the stile the path is straight ahead to a large tree, and continues to a stile in the far fence. The path crosses through the middle of the next field to a squeezer stile at the side of the field gate. From here you should aim mid-way between a wooden electricity pylon in the centre of the field and another pylon in the fence on the left.

Do not go through the field gate at the far end of the field but turn left immediately in front of it and through the wooden stile on the bank. Follow the wall and then a hedge, to a kissing gate immediately before the gate into the farmyard. Pass through the kissing gate on your right and bear round to the left and through a second kissing gate into the graveyard of St. Werburgh's Church. The path turns left down to a kissing gate onto Church Street which takes you to the main road opposite the war memorial.



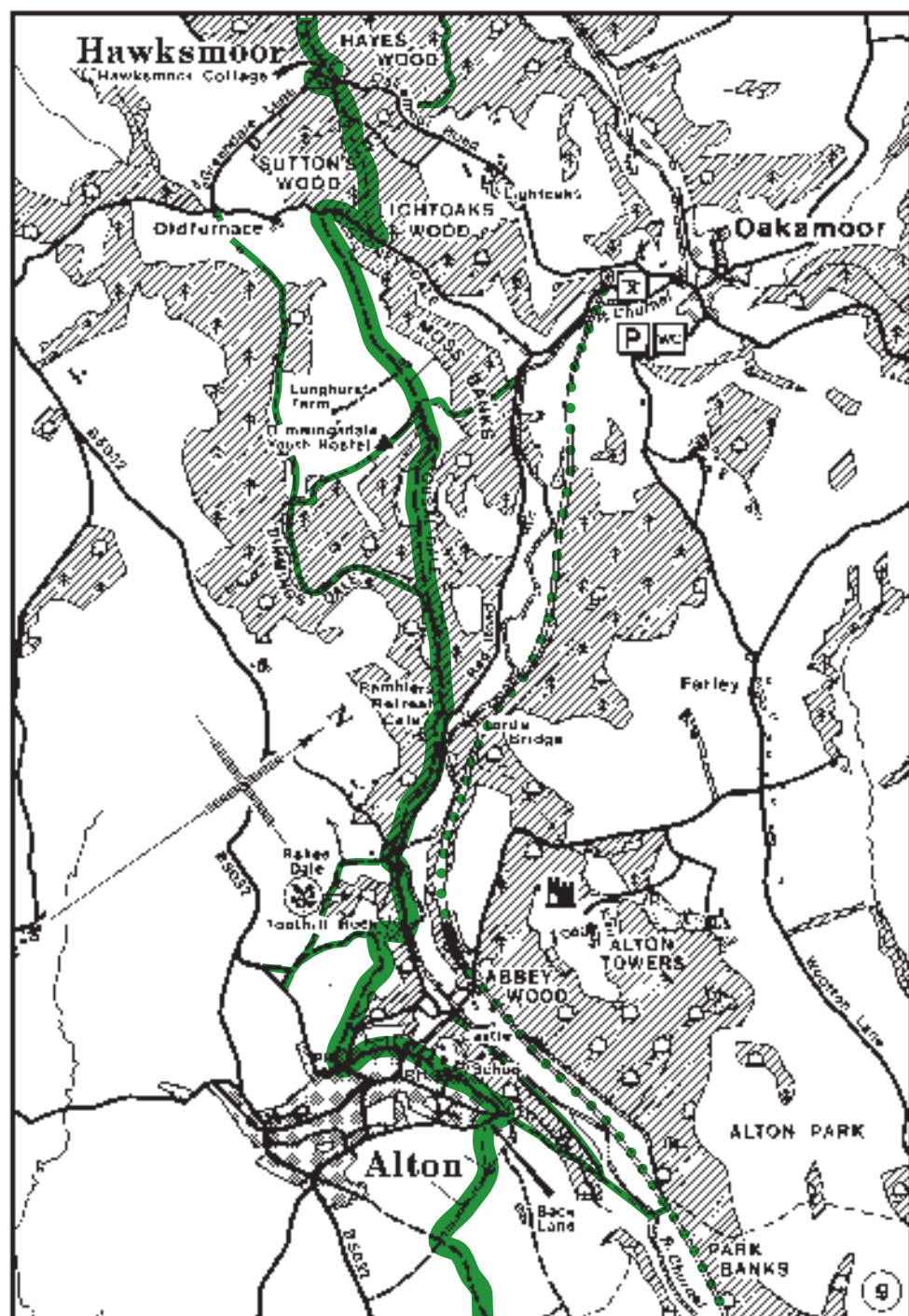
8. KINGSLEY TO HAWKSMOOR (2.5 miles)

From the war memorial at Kingsley climb the stile and after a few yards climb the stile on the right and turn immediately left down the side of the field and over a stile. Go diagonally across the next field and over a stile.

From here bear left to the corner of the recreation ground. Ignore the main path straight down the field and bear right up a slight bank and then down to a stile in the far fence. Follow the hedged bank on the right to a stile. From the stile aim directly for the squat tower of the Methodist Church at Kingsley Holt. As you approach the church, climb the stile at the side of a metal gate and go through the wide gap between the houses to the main road.

Cross the road, turning right along the pavement for a few yards, to a stile and walk between a fence and hedge to a stile in the far fence. Go down the field and across a stile and plank over the stream. Cross the next field to arrive at a stile through the fork of a tree. From the stile, walk to the electricity pole straight ahead, crossing a rough track. Immediately beyond the pole go through a gap in the old hedgerow. Do not follow the cattle track down the hill, but bear to the right of this, between two hummocks, to bring you to a plank bridge over the stream and a stile. Keep on the bank above the bushes to a stile just above the river. Go straight ahead to come close to the river after 200 yards.

The path follows the river for a short distance, over a stile, then go straight ahead up a wide grass bank, leading to a solitary stone post by the river. From here you can see a stile in the far fence. Cross this; the route is then straightforward through three fields to Eastwall Farm. Do not enter the farmyard but climb the stile in the fence to the right of the implement shed and walk up the slope keeping the fence on your left. After the fence follow a low brick wall to a stile at the side of a metal gate. Cross the stile and then turn right along the track into Hawksmoor Reserve. After 100 yards the track divides and you take the right-hand fork. After ½ mile you emerge onto Oakamoor Road.

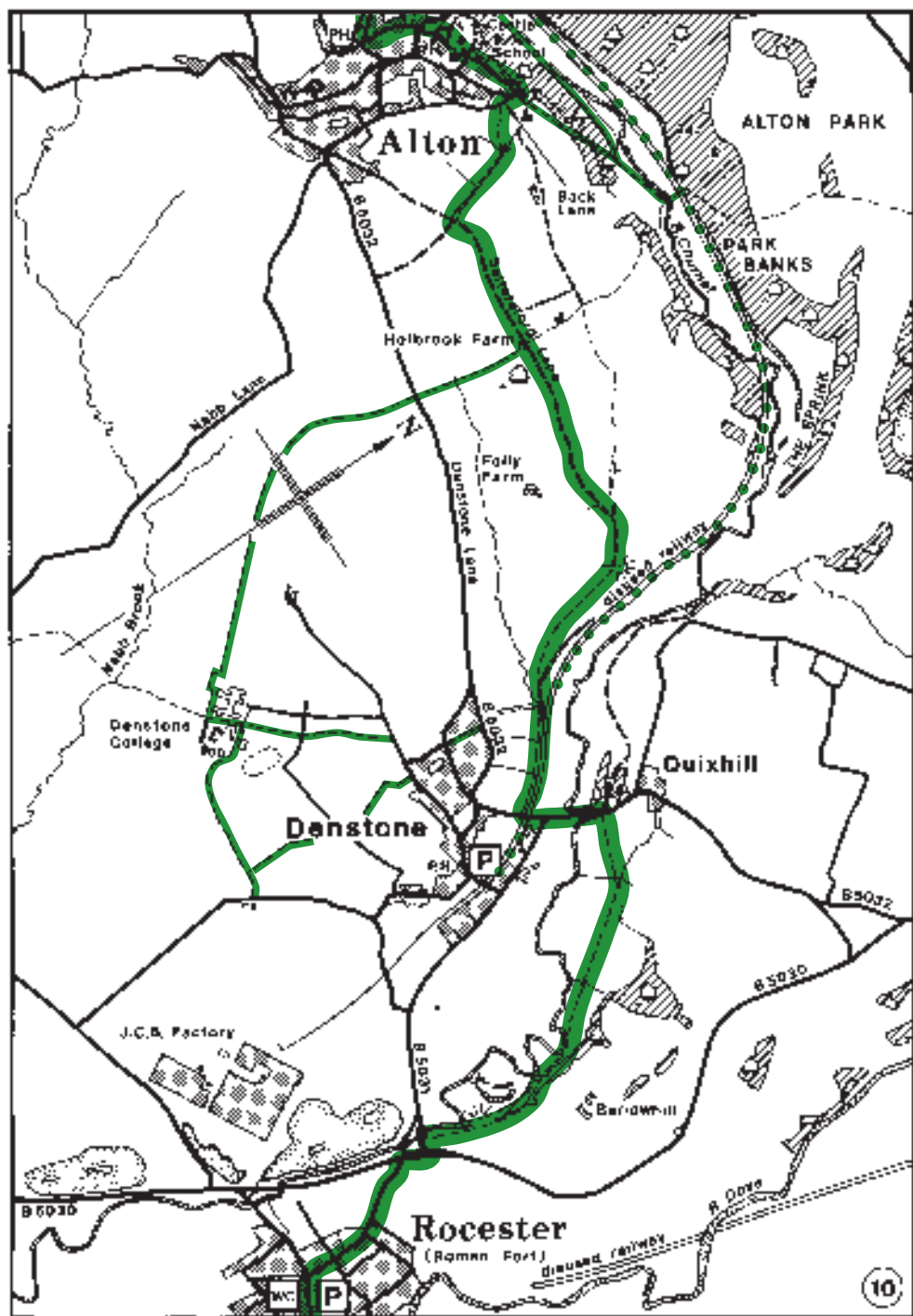


9. HAWKSMOOR TO ALTON (3.1 miles)

From Hawksmoor Reserve turn left along Oakamoor Road for 100 yards and at the footpath sign cross into the wood. Follow the track up the hill for 100 yards and take the right fork where the tracks divide. Go down steeply to the road at Stoney Dale. Turn right up the bank and then left at the footpath sign and along the tarmac drive for nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ mile. At the pond on the left take the rough track straight ahead. Pass the cattle grid at the entrance to Ranger Cottage and go down to the next cattle grid. Over the cattle grid the road turns sharply right, but take the wide path down into Ousal Dale. After 100 yards, tracks bear off left and right, but go straight ahead down the valley. After $\frac{1}{2}$ mile pass the pool, and shortly afterwards arrive at the Ramblers Retreat cafe at the road near Lord's Bridge.

From the footpath sign take the path parallel to the road, in front of the cafe. The path ascends a narrow gully before arriving at a rough road. Turn left down it for 200 yards, where a track comes up to meet it at a bend. Follow the track down hill to arrive at the road on a sharp corner. Go straight ahead along the road and ignore the footpath sign to Cheadle Road and the private road to Rakedale Cottages. Immediately afterwards, at the footpath sign (Alton $\frac{1}{2}$ mile), climb steeply up through the trees and follow the fence on your right. Climb for 200 yards; pass beneath a sandstone crag and immediately afterwards turn up to a stile into a field. Walk up the slope, bearing left for a few yards to a gateway in a stone wall. Go through the gateway and turn left down a short path between stone walls to reach the viewpoint at Toothill Rock.

Retrace your steps to the path between the stone walls and follow it for 30 yards. Turn left along a walled lane to emerge in Alton village by the Royal Oak public house. Do not turn immediately left down Horse Road but cross the road and up to the left along Malthouse Road. At the bend take the steps down to the road and cross to the car park of the Wild Duck Inn. Take the steep walled path on the left side of the Inn up to the road by St. Peter's Church and Alton Castle School. Follow the road to the sharp right-hand bend. Go round the bend, passing the end to Town Head Lane, and go over the stile at the footpath sign on the left.



10. ALTON TO ROCESTER (3.4 miles)

From the footpath sign at the stile in Back Lane (Hurstons Lane) climb up to the clump of trees at the top of the field. Pass the pond on your left to a stile in the hedgerow. Over the stile you pass down the left side of two fields to a stile 25 yards to the right of the field corner. Turn left through the stile along Saltersford Lane, green lane, which you follow for $\frac{3}{4}$ mile until it terminates abruptly at a stile.

Climb the stile and go ahead to a second stile at the side of the gateway in the corner of the field. The path keeps up against the hedge for 200 yards to the field corner. Ignore the cattle track which runs up the hill to the right and aim straight ahead above the wooded slope on the left, to a stile after 400 yards. Follow the fence on the left and descend the bank to a stile. Cross the stream on a plank to a second stile. Follow the fence on the left and walk along the bottom of three small fields to the road bridge at Denstone.

Turn left down to Quixhill Bridge over the river. Enter the field on your right through a stile and go straight ahead to a stile in the far fence, just right of two large trees. Go straight ahead across a large field to a stile and plank bridge, about 25 yards left of a gate by the river. From here the path is straight ahead to the far corner of the field, where the river turns against the slope. Climb the bank and follow the fence for 150 yards to a stile.

Climb the stile into the wood and follow the terraced path straight ahead. The path crosses a wooden footbridge and after another 100 yards turns up to a stile on the left. Enter a field and turn right along the bank above the fenced woodland. At the end of the fence line bear right down to the stile by the footpath sign, cross the bypass, and take the road into Rocester village.

Part Two

THE EASTERN VALLEYS AND CANNOCK CHASE

ROCESTER TO UTTOXETER ALONG THE RIVER DOVE

When a block of shops was erected in the centre of Rocester in 1965, the opportunity was taken to decorate the end gable with a mural motif. This takes the form of a Roman legionary standard on which are superimposed a crowned letter “M” and a weaver’s shuttle. Here is acknowledged firstly Rocester as a Roman settlement, secondly the foundation of an Augustinian Abbey dedicated to St. Mary and finally the establishment in the 18th century of a mill for spinning cotton. These are the three special influences in the history of Rocester and their combination endows the village with a range of historic interest unparalleled by any other place of comparable size in Staffordshire. This eastern corner of Staffordshire is George Eliot country and Rocester is the Rosseter of her novel ‘Adam Bede’.

Walking out from the centre of the village you pass, on your left, Abbey Fields, the site of the Augustinian Abbey founded in 1146 and dissolved in 1538. The earthworks that you can see are the remains of what may have been an ornamental garden. Beyond it is the Parish Church of St. Michael, mediaeval in origin but now predominantly late 19th century. In the churchyard is a beautifully preserved cross, believed to be 700 years old. The church marks the site of the Roman settlement, initially a small fort but later becoming a civilian community. Roman pottery was discovered in Abbey Fields in 1835.

Rocester lies between the River Churnet and the River Dove and both were exploited to power mills. That on the Dove was one of the two earliest cotton factories in Staffordshire and the plaque on the roadside wall reveals that it was built between 1781 and 1782 by Richard Arkwright. It was Arkwright who revolutionised the textile industry of the day by the invention of the ‘water frame’ for spinning cotton thread. The mill is known as Tutbury Mill because it was owned by the Tutbury Mill Company who also owned the cotton mill downstream at that village. In 1888 cotton production ceased at the Tutbury mill and production was transferred to Rocester. Before crossing the river it is worth pausing to glance back at the impressive view of Arkwright’s Mill and St. Michael’s Church beyond.

The five mile section of the Staffordshire Way from Rocester to Uttoxeter is a delightful walk along the Dove Valley. The river bank below Abbotsholme School has a fine selection of willows, including white, crack and the common osier. In

summer, sand martins perform their low-level aerobatics over the water, and nest in holes in the high banks on the bends in the river. The route passes into neighbouring Derbyshire to take advantage of a path through water meadows, below the beautiful wooded escarpment that rises high on the left. Dotted along the valley are red brick farmhouses; nostalgic examples of a disappearing rural architecture. Of particular note is Eaton Hall Farm, a predominantly 18th century building close to the site of an ancient manor house. From here the path climbs onto the top of the escarpment, giving splendid views back over the valley into Staffordshire. Especially striking is the sight of Alton Towers set against the backcloth of the Weaver Hills.

On the hilltop you can follow an alternative route to the charming Derbyshire village of Doveridge. Over the A50 trunk road, by the Cavendish Arms, you enter the village along Cook Lane. At the crossroads - featuring an old well - you can turn left along the main street of the village, which has numerous interesting buildings as well as a post office and village shops. The right turn leads to the lovely Church of St. Cuthbert, which has Derbyshire's second finest yew tree in its churchyard. The church originally stood in the grounds of Doveridge Hall, home of the Cavendish family, which, sadly, was demolished in 1934. There is a local tradition that the parson of Doveridge went over to Tutbury to perform the marriage service of Robin Hood!

Below Doveridge Church a path crosses the river on an elegant suspension bridge to rejoin the Staffordshire Way at Dove Bridge, which is on or near the site of a very ancient crossing. The crossing and Doveridge village appear in Domesday Book as 'Dubridge'. Three, or possibly four, arches of the present bridge appear to date from the 14th century but the two middle ones have been rebuilt. On the parapet is a stone inscribed '1691', possibly recording the date of that rebuilding. In 1977, this ancient structure was relieved from the rigours of modern traffic by the impressive new bridge alongside.

Crossing Dove Bridge brings you back into Staffordshire and to Uttoxeter, a typical thriving country town. The town's industries include a large bakery and a petroleum depot. It also boasts a National Hunt racecourse, operated by the East Staffordshire District Council. But it is its links with the surrounding farming country that gives the town its character. Uttoxeter has prospered as a market town since the 13th century and still holds weekly livestock and general markets.

The town has suffered two great fires in its history and largely because of these there are no secular buildings of earlier date than the 16th century. However, St. Mary's Church retains its tower of the 13th century church built by "the greatest English architect". Henry Yevele, son of a Uttoxeter freeholder, was responsible for the naves of Westminster Abbey and Canterbury Cathedral. The ill-fated Caldon Canal reached the town in 1811, only to be obliterated by the new railway after less than 50 years of uncertain use. The Churnet Valley Line met a similar end under the Beeching Axe of the 1960s, but the town is still served by the Stoke-Derby railway line.

The bustling market place has a memorial to its association with Dr. Samuel Johnson. In his youth, this renowned literary figure travelled with his father selling books. He once refused to assist his father at his Uttoxeter stall. But in his old age, Johnson returned in penitence to stand bare-headed, in foul weather, at the place of his disobedience.

BAGOTS PARK, ABBOTS BROMLEY AND BLITHFIELD

Little now remains of the ancient royal Needwood Forest, which in the 13th century stretched from Abbots Bromley to Burton upon Trent. The largest single woodland block remaining is Bagots Wood, to the south of Uttoxeter, consisting of nearly 1,000 acres of Forestry Commission pine plantations. Many relics of the old forest have been left, however, in the form of old 'stag headed' oaks and a large number of yews. The adjacent farmlands too have many isolated old trees and numerous small spinneys. **There is, however, no public access to the woodland and walkers should keep strictly to the public path.**

In 1966 the remains of an early 16th century glass furnace were found in the wood, together with fragments of glass and glazed crucibles. The produce of the site was Crown window glass, and glass making was associated with this area as early as the 13th century, enjoying the plentiful supply of local timber for firing the kilns. The woodland encircles Bagots Park, now a farm, but once one of ten ancient deer parks in the Needwood Forest, and the surrounding woodland still supports a herd of wild fallow deer. The Bagot family were landowners here before the Norman Conquest and the name still survives with Nancy, Lady Bagot of nearby Blithfield Hall.

So far the route of the Staffordshire Way has been through traditional farming landscapes, with field patterns that have changed little since the Inclosures. Bagots Park is dramatically different and demonstrates the scale and methods of modern farming. Bagots Park's 815 acres are divided into 100 acre blocks and farmed on an eight year rotation. Six years of winter cereals, oil seed rape and beans are followed by a two year ley of grassland. The grass supports a flock of 700 ewes with lambs. A manager, one shepherd and two tractor drivers work the farm and it is interesting to reflect that 150 years ago a farm of this size would have employed about 40 men, and an additional 50 women at hay making and harvest times.

Landscapes such as this are generally poor wildlife habitats but, even so, there are still features of interest here. The plantations that you can see within the farmland act as shelter belts and provide cover for pheasants, but they also provide valuable sanctuaries for wildlife. The open land itself attracts winter flocks of birds such as lapwing and fieldfare. The Story Brook, which the Way follows, has good fruiting thorn bushes growing alongside it and in autumn and winter tits, finches, redpolls and yellowhammers. In spring and summer you will see warblers and other typical hedgerow birds.

The old marl pit that you pass on the Park boundary is a good example of a hydrosere - where plants and trees colonise a former area of open water. This quaking mass of vegetation includes woody nightshade, water plantain and forget-me-not. Note also the range of plants growing on fallen tree trunks in the pool (epiphytism) - not only mosses, but grasses, willowherb, buttercup, thistle and many more. This thicket is also a good example of how elm can invade woodland by sending out suckers. It probably survived from field trees which were victims of Dutch Elm Disease, which has destroyed 600,000 elms in Staffordshire alone.

Beyond Bagots Park the landscape returns to one of traditional field patterns and hedgerows on rolling hills down to the village of Abbots Bromley. The Way emerges in the market Place of this picturesque and historic village and immediately striking are the ancient Butter Cross and the half-timbered Goats Head Inn. However, the village is rich in buildings of architectural or historical interest and an unusually high proportion are Listed. This is also the home of St. Mary and St. Anne boarding school for girls and its presence is much in evidence in the daily life of the village.

Abbots Bromley is, of course, most famous for its annual Horn Dance, which takes place on the Monday after the first Sunday after the 4th September! From early morning the dancers perambulate an eight mile course around the parish, before returning to the village to dance until dusk under the Butter Cross. The dance probably dates from the 12th century, when the Abbot of Bromley granted hunting rights in the Needwood Forest. Indeed, the six sets of reindeer horns used in the dance have been carbon dated to within 30 years of the Norman Conquest.

The Staffordshire Way leaves Abbots Bromley by way of the Church of St. Nicholas. There has been a church on this site since Saxon times, but the earliest parts of the present building are Norman. The church has been rebuilt and restored over the centuries and there was a massive restoration in 1853 under the guidance of George Street. The church also houses the ancient reindeer horns used in the Horn Dance.

On the field paths to the south of Abbots Bromley, you begin to catch glimpses of Staffordshire's largest expanse of water. This is Blithfield Reservoir which supplies drinking water to a large part of south Staffordshire. In 1953 the River Blithe was dammed and part of Blithfield Park inundated to create the reservoir's 800 acres, which impound 4,000 million gallons of water. Anything up to 20 million gallons are drawn off daily, whilst 5 million gallons daily are released down the Blithe as compensation water. In the severe drought of 1976 the water level fell drastically, to reveal old river bridges and a mill pool that had been flooded for over twenty years. The reservoir is stocked with rainbow trout and its waters provide good sailing, although both fishing and sailing are restricted to club members only.

Blithfield is the most important wildfowl refuge in the West Midlands and such is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The reservoir is particularly important for species such as wigeon and goosander. Several thousand wildfowl will be found here in the winter months, joining a resident population of ducks, geese and grebes. Also in winter time a flock of bewick swans is sometimes present, occasionally being joined by the large whooper swans. An impressive sight on winter evenings is the enormous flock, often numbering up to 20,000, of gulls that fly in each night to roost in safety on the water.

To guard against water contamination and in the interests of wildlife conservation, access to the land surrounding the reservoir is by permit only. Walkers of the Staffordshire Way must keep strictly to the waymarked path.

The wet meadows below the reservoir dam hold a variety of wildlife. Badgers, foxes and rabbits are common in this area, as are herons, moorhens and kingfishers. Here are also the plants of wet places and the inevitable alder trees, whilst damselflies and dragonflies will be seen on warm summer days. The name of the Blithe is derived from an Old English word meaning 'pleasant'. This lovely meandering stream was the inspiration for a book by W. H. Canaway, "A Creel of Willow". Watch carefully and you are likely to see the flash of a rainbow or native brown trout in the clear waters. The Way climbs from Blithfield towards a brick barn on the skyline. From here the true size of the reservoir is revealed and there are panoramic views over the valley.

THE TRENT VALLEY

No sooner do you leave one river valley than you begin the gradual descent into another - the Trent - and the first sight to dominate the view is the cooling towers of Rugeley Power Station. Rugeley Power Station is one of a series along the River Trent that utilise its waters. Across the valley lie, invitingly, the afforested hills of Cannock Chase.

The Way descends to the small, peaceful linear village of Colton, by the old smithy and forge. Colton has several buildings of interest, and just over to the right is Colton House, the village's finest secular building, having Grade 2 Listed Building status. A little further along the road lies the Parish Church of St. Mary which, unusually, has no walled churchyard and gives you the impression of being planted directly into the surrounding village green. From the church there are fine views across the water meadows and, nearby, there is access to a network of local paths.

As you join the towpath of the Trent and Mersey Canal, beyond Colton, it is worth remembering the origins of this waterway, now so important for recreation. James Brindley had earned prestige as the engineer of the Bridgewater Canal. He had lived near Leek, in Staffordshire, since his boyhood and was the natural choice as engineer when the promoters of the Bridgewater Canal conceived an

even more ambitious scheme, a link between the Rivers Trent and Mersey. Josiah Wedgwood was one of the project's keenest supporters. His industry needed to import raw materials and to be able to carry their fragile finished products to the ports without damage - something which the roads of the day could not manage!

Brindley christened his project The Grand Trunk Canal, because he envisaged it providing the backbone for a whole network of branch canals. The canal was authorised in 1766 and by June 1770 was opened from Derwent Mouth to Shugborough. The whole canal, however, was not completed until 1777, due largely to the enormous task of excavating the one and two-third mile Harecastle Tunnel in North Staffordshire. Brindley did not live to see the canal completed, but by 1790 a waterway system existed that linked the four main rivers of England, and at the heart of that system was his Grand Trunk Canal.

The canal is a rich wildlife habitat and from Colton to Wolseley Bridge the canal banks carry masses of typical vegetation, such as sweet grass, great hairy willowherb and meadowsweet. Woody nightshade, march woundwort and the much smaller skullcap are also present. In some places there are clumps of less common wetland plants, such as brooklime, celery-leaved crowfoot and gipsywort, with its characteristic toothed leaves and whorls of tiny greenish flowers. Opposite Bishton Hall, note and compare the two types of chestnut - sweet and horse - growing together in a copse behind the towpath. Herons and kingfishers are a common site on this length of canal. Beyond Wolseley Bridge, bur-reed and pond sedge are found in the reedswamp vegetation, whilst freshwater (swan) mussels can be seen on the canal bed. Water voles and moorhens inhabit these waters and the alder trees are full of warblers in spring and summer, being followed by siskins and finches in the winter months.

All the way from Colton the canal and railway have been close neighbours but at Colwich they could not be closer! Here is the junction of two historic railway routes. Firstly the Trent Valley Railway, which crosses the canal, was opened in 1847 between Tamworth and Stafford. Its purpose was to shorten the journey time between London and Lancashire and its construction enhanced the importance of Stafford as a railway centre. Two years later a second line struck north from Colwich to Stoke-on-Trent and Macclesfield. This route was part of the network of the famous North Staffordshire Railway Company 'The Knotty'. The story of this small company, with its Staffordshire Knot emblem and crimson livery, is one of a constant struggle to resist the take-over ambitions of the major railway companies. The Knotty, founded in 1845, succeeded in preserving its independence until the general amalgamation of the railways in 1923.

With the coming of the railway, Colwich and Little Haywood enjoyed a spate of rapid building. Of particular note is the former railway station house in Colwich, whilst two rows of railway cottages can be seen nearby. However, the origins of these settlements are far more ancient than the railway era. In the reign of Richard I the land of the parish was held by the Colwich family. Possession later passed to the Bishop of Lichfield before becoming inseparably connected with the

Anson and Wolseley families, who established their great houses and landscaped parks nearby. That of the Ansons, Shugborough, caused the displacement of a whole village. Little Haywood grew as a result, with part of the old community being re-housed there. Two blocks of cottages are still known as Shugborough Terrace and Anson's Row. Overlooking the canal, St. Michael's Church, Colwich contains numerous family memorials, but its finest possessions are the monuments belonging to the Ansons and Wolseleys.

The canal towpath from Little Haywood to Great Haywood provides a beautiful 1½ mile walk. On the one side are steep wooded slopes of beech and oak, whilst on the other you glimpse between trees and across hedgerows, over the water meadows of the meandering Trent, to the hills of Cannock Chase beyond. Great Haywood originated as development along the London to Liverpool Road, now bypassing the village on the A51, and the Clifford Arms public house stands on the site of a posting-house for coaches. But the village's strongest links are with the Anson family and their home, Shugborough Hall. The resettlement of villagers from Shugborough has given Great Haywood the character of an estate village. This impression is at its strongest in Trent Lane, which crosses the canal, with its workers' cottages and railway bridge both with classical detailing.

Great Haywood is linked with Shugborough Park by a superb structure - Essex Bridge. This 17th century packhorse bridge takes its name from the Earls of Essex who built it. Originally the bridge is believed to have had over forty arches; only fourteen remain, but it is still the longest packhorse bridge in England.

SHUGBOROUGH AND CANNOCK CHASE

Over Essex Bridge, Shugborough Hall, in its magnificent parkland setting, soon comes into full view. The house, which is of various dates, has been the seat of the Anson family since 1624. The Ansons were later to receive the title 'Earls of Lichfield' and the fifth Earl, photographer Patrick Lichfield, lived in the house until his death in 2005. Shugborough was re-modelled in the 1760s by the architect "Athenian" Stuart for Thomas Anson, brother of George Anson the famous Admiral who circumnavigated the world in his ship "The Centurion". Stuart earned his nickname through his reproductions of Greek antiquities. A number of such works can be seen in the grounds and perhaps the most striking is the Triumphal Arch (after Hadrian's Arch in Athens) which commemorates Admiral Anson and his wife. Between 1790 and 1806 the house was altered in the Regency style by Samuel Wyatt. It was Wyatt who conceived the superb portico that you see from the drive, each column being a single oak tree clad in slate.

Shugborough is now the property of the National Trust and is managed by the County Council. The mansion house and grounds are open to the public and the house, now completely restored, contains a fine collection of 18th century French and English furniture and portraits by Reynolds. The former stable block and kitchen wing now house the County Museum, which is open all year and portrays

many aspects of Staffordshire's social, domestic and industrial history. Of particular interest are the State Coach of the Earl of Shrewsbury, a domestic brew house and a reconstructed railway station. Shugborough also has a 'live' farm museum. Not only does it have a collection of farm implements and machinery, and a working mill producing flour and bread made in the original brick oven, but it also preserves historic breeds of livestock, some of which are now rare such as Tamworth Pigs and Bagot Goats.

The railway came to Shugborough in 1847 but its effect was minimised by putting the line in cutting and a tunnel. The designs of the tunnel portals acknowledge their special setting. The one that you see from the drive has an Egyptian theme, whilst the western one is 'mediaeval'. To the east, the bridge over the former Lichfield Drive is built in classical style. The walk along the drive enables you to view the many fine examples of large open-grown oaks, sycamores, limes and horse chestnuts that contribute so much to the park's beauty. The hall itself is surrounded by fine trees, both broadleaves and evergreen, whilst the main drive from Milford passes through mature woodland with magnificent specimens of oak, beech, sycamore, sweet chestnut, Scots pine, larch and some fine young Wellingtonias. The County Council operates a system of selective felling and replanting to ensure that the character of both park and woodland is preserved. Shugborough Park lies within the northern boundary of Cannock Chase. This unique area of about 26 square miles, designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1958, owes its survival as an open space mainly to the fact that much of its soil is poor quality for agriculture. Today it is a gravelly plateau ranging from 250 to 800 feet above sea level. After many centuries as a hunting preserve its natural forest cover was almost entirely removed for industrial purposes. Now, the dominant landscape feature is the man-made forests of Forestry Commission plantations. The Commission manage 6,700 acres for commercial timber production, chiefly of Scots and Corsican pines. The County Council owns and manages over 2,500 acres of public access land which, since 1973, has been designated as a Country Park.

Because of its siting and special resources, the Chase is subject to a whole range of conflicting pressures. It provides a "breathing space" for the 3½ million people who live within twenty miles of it. In addition to its commercial timber it has large reserves of sand and gravel, coal and underground water. Part of the Chase is also used as a military training area. All these interests, and more, have to be balanced against each other and the protection of the landscape and nature conservation. In its management of the Chase, therefore, the County Council's aim is to secure its effective use, conservation and public enjoyment.

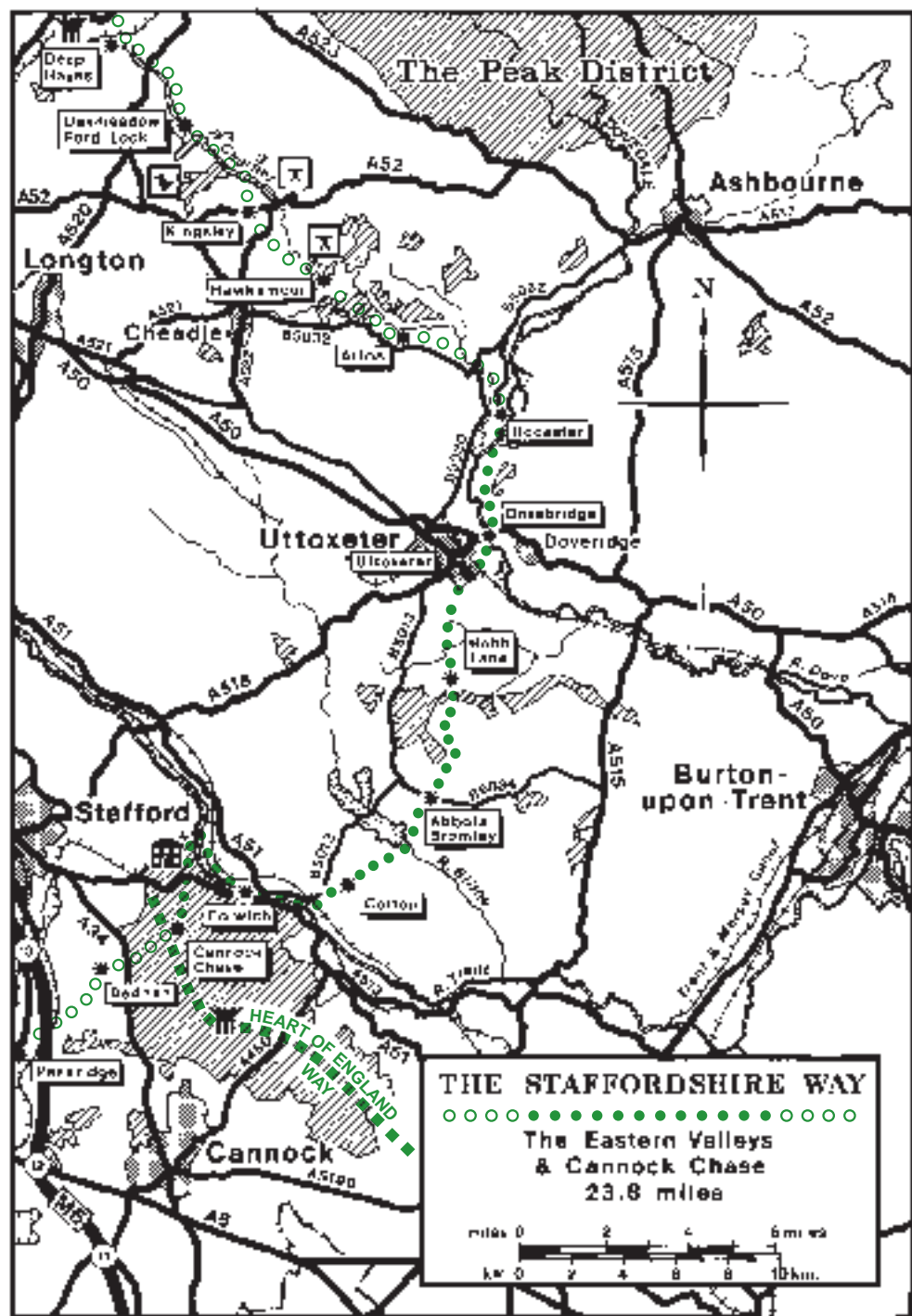
As you enter the Sherbrook Valley motorless zone the track first runs below the wooded slopes of Brocton Coppice. This is the last remnant of the natural oak forest which existed before charcoal burning took place on a large scale. This woodland is of outstanding wildlife value and is a particularly important habitat for fallow deer. There are several hundred fallow deer on the Chase and there are smaller herds of red deer and muntjac. You arrive at the Stepping Stones, a popular beauty spot, where the Sherbrook is lined with alders and a huge tussock

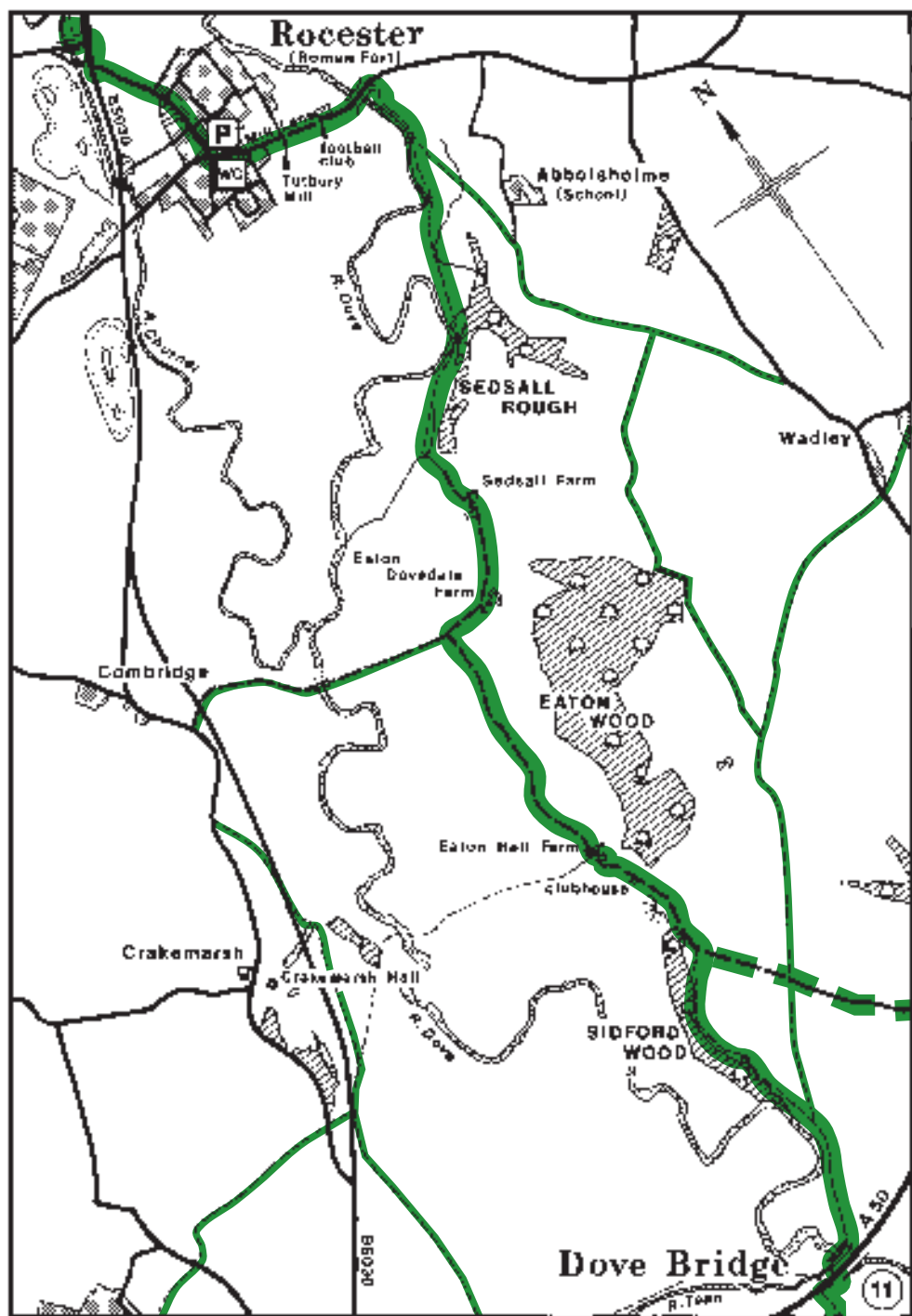
hedge grows all along its banks. The Sherbrook is still quite pure and caddis, mayfly and stonefly larvae are found there, also crayfish, bullheads and the occasional small trout. Higher up the valley the alder woodland gives way to the Chase's typical dry heathland of heather, bracken and wavy hair grass. This is in sharp contrast to the 'wall' of Forestry Commission plantations which dominate the valley's eastern slopes. The heathland has suffered from public pressure and accidental fires, particularly in the drought of 1976.

Above the valley, sitting at 650 feet above sea level, is the Glacial Boulder. This familiar local landmark arrived on Cannock Chase in the Ice Age from south west Scotland. The Boulder is a fine viewpoint, particularly into the Shropshire Hills and the Welsh border country. To the north, Morridge and Ipstones Edge in the Peak District are usually visible. The views to the south and east are enclosed by Forestry Commission plantations, but the British Telecom tower at Pye Green is a prominent feature on the southern sky line.



Fallow Deer



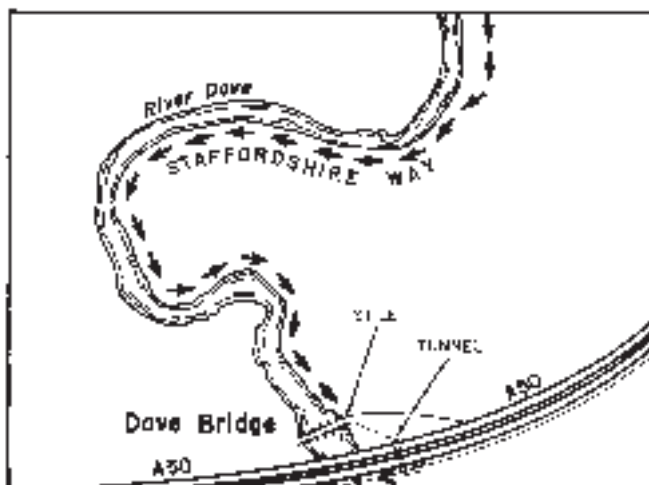


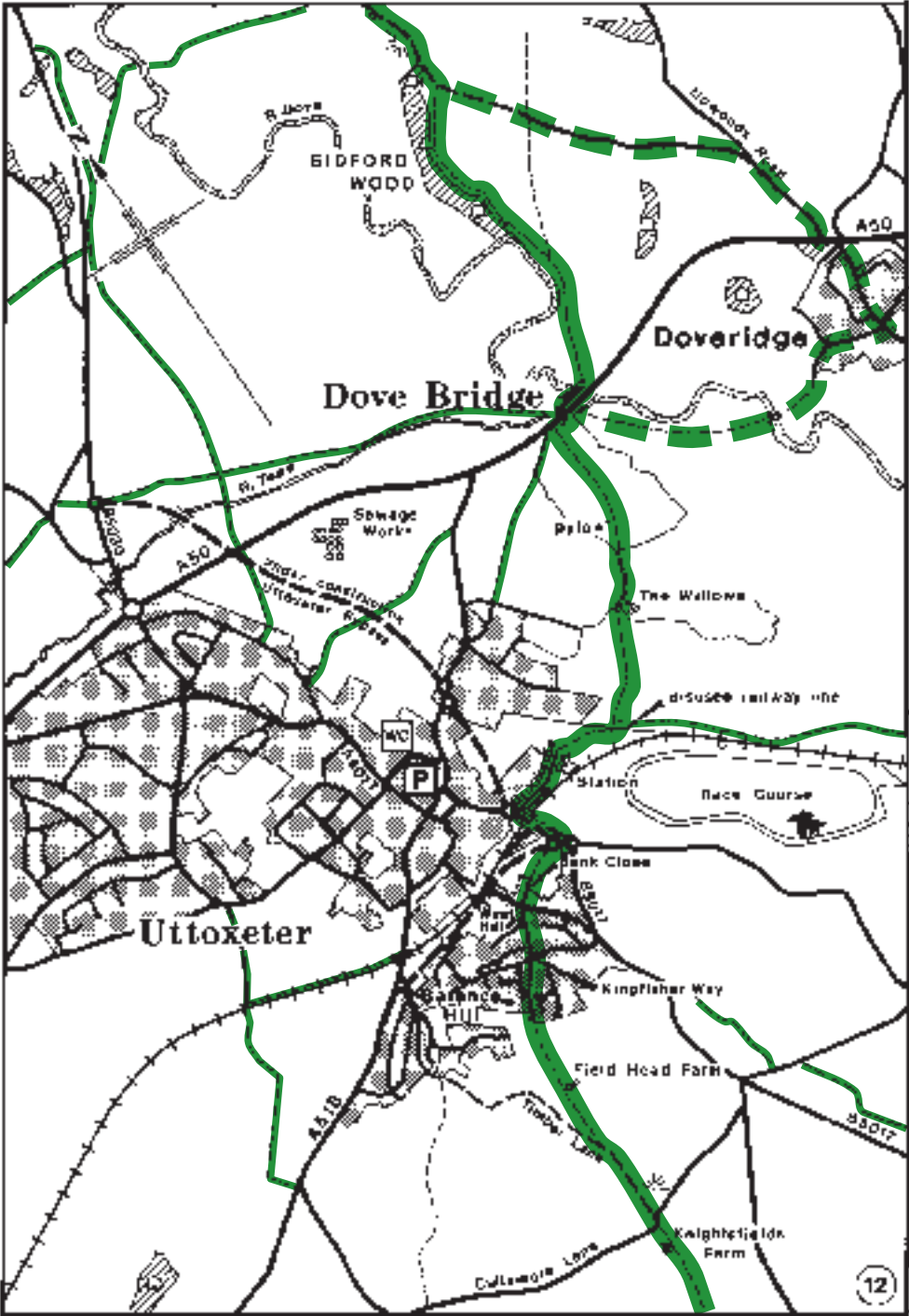
11. ROCESTER TO DOVE BRIDGE (3.8 miles)

From the car park in Abbey Road turn left past the block of shops, then left into Mill Lane. Go past the mill and over the river bridge. On the right is a stile and a flight of steps down to the meadow. The path follows the river bank through three fields to a stile in the field corner, near the river. Cross the stile and follow the track, keeping the tennis court on your right. Continue along the edge of the playing field, following a tree-lined brook on your left. Where the brook turns sharply left the path goes straight ahead to a stile in the far fence, close to the river, and then over another field to a footbridge.

Over the footbridge follow the river for about 200 yards and then bear left towards a group of trees that stand just apart from the wooded hillside. Pass to the right of these trees, which line a drainage ditch, and after 200 yards turn left and cross the stile by some stunted willows. Join a track up to a field gate which leads into a lane climbing to a farm. Pass in front of the farm buildings and turn right to join a gravel track. At the next farm the track turns right. After 200 yards turn left along the bridle track.

Follow the track for just over half a mile to Eaton Hall Farm. The track swings left past some farm buildings and then right, past the club-house of the Doveridge Sporting Club. Follow the track up the hill and through an archway at the top. Turn right across the corner of the field and follow the field edge above the wooded slope. After a quarter of a mile, climb the stile and follow a wide strip of grassland between hedges. Go round the edge of a hollow and, keeping up on the ridge, walk down the nose of the hill to a stile. From here bear right, towards the river, then follow the river bank to a stile at the side of the Dove Bridge.



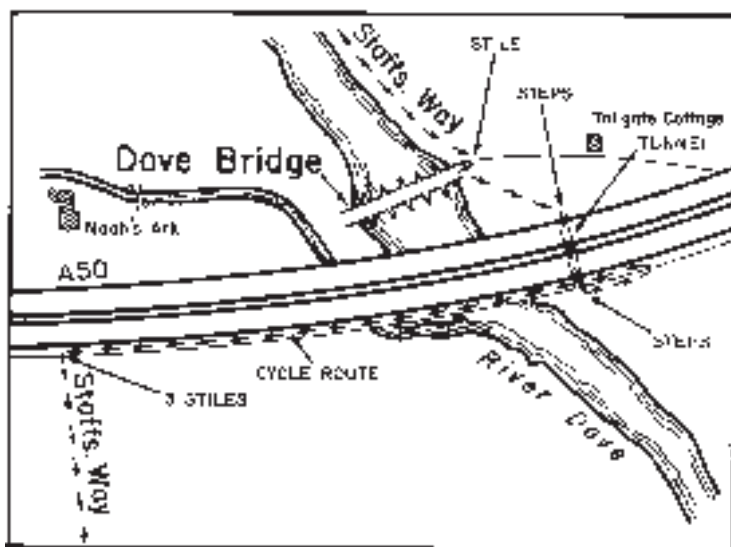


12. DOVE BRIDGE TO UTTOXETER (1.0 miles)

Do NOT cross the Dove Bridge. Follow the waymarked track through the wooded area towards the A50, down the steps and turn right through a tunnel under the dual carriageway, then turn left up the steps and follow the gravel path to its junction with the cycle way. Turn sharp left and follow the cycle track adjacent to the dual carriageway over the River Dove. 180 yards past the River climb the three stiles on your left and use the electricity pylon in the centre of the field as a waymarker. Pass to the left of the pylon and then bear right to bring you to a kissing gate in the field corner. Through the gate turn left over a stile and follow the hedge on the right to the stile in the corner of the field, by the farm buildings. Turn right along the farm track and cross the bridge over the stream, to a stile immediately on the left by the field gate.

As you climb the stile you can see the modern grandstand block of the racecourse, two fields away. Take a line across the field between the grandstand and the large tree to the right in the far hedgerow, to bring you to a stile in the hedge. Cross the next field to a kissing gate beside a tubular steel gate. Cross the disused railway line and follow the cinder track as it curves away from the water course. In a few yards there is a tubular steel gate on the left. Pass through the gap on the right of the gate to enter Brookside Road near the railway station.

NOTE: The first section of this route is often waterlogged during wet weather conditions.

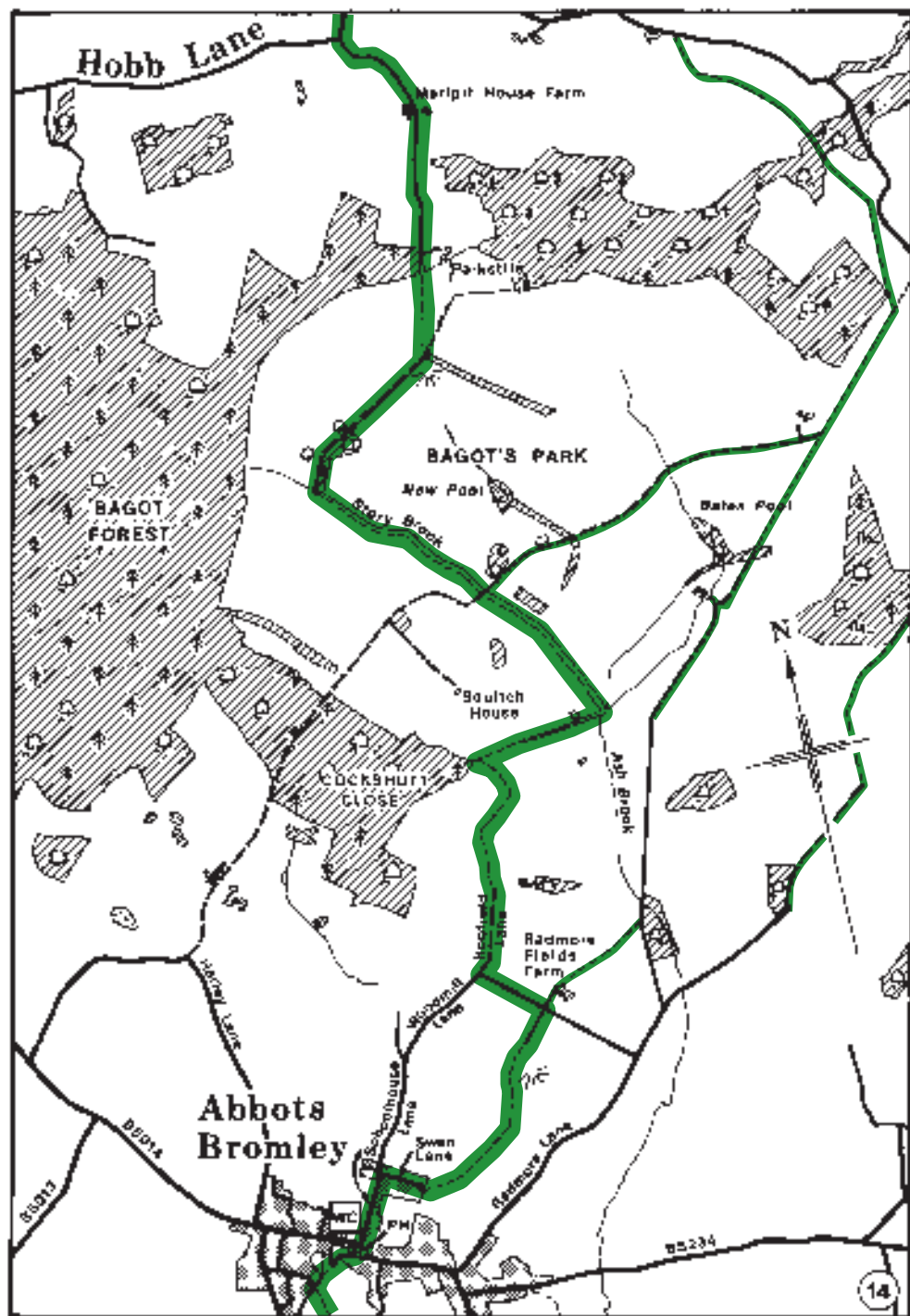


13. UTTOXETER TO HOBBS LANE (2.8 miles)

At the end of Brookside Road, turn left and cross the railway bridge to the traffic island. At the far side of the island, take the footpath up the bank and along Bank Close. Turn left into Leighton Road and immediately right into West Hill. As the metalled road bears right, go straight ahead along the path to arrive at the estate road, Kingfisher Way. Cross the road and go straight ahead up the track to Field Head Farm. Just before the farm buildings bear right, past the electricity pole, and climb the stile. Go straight ahead up the bank to a stile against a wooden gate in the top field corner. Over the stile turn left along Timber Lane, green lane. At the top of the lane cross the road and go down the fenced path at the side of the farm track.

After the farm buildings, turn right through the hedge and left along the ditch. Go down the bank to a plank bridge over the stream. Climb up to a stile and cross the next field to another stile. Over this stile the path now follows the hedge on the right through three fields to a footbridge over the ditch at Knightsland Farm. Bear left across the farm track; climb the stile and follow the ditch on the left down to a stile and turn right along the road. Climb the stile by the first gate on the left and follow the hedge. After 200 yards climb the stile and cross diagonally to a stile by the gate in the far field corner.

Cross the road to a stile on the left and bear right to a second stile. Go left up the field to a stile in the fence and then cross the field diagonally to a double stile to the right of an ash tree in the fence line. Cross the stile and turn right down to the field corner, then left to the next field corner. Cross the plank bridge over the stream and follow the hedge on the left to a stile by the field gate. Turn left and then right in front of the next field gate and follow the hedge line on the left. At the next field corner cross the plank bridge against the field gate. Follow the hedge on the right to a stile into Hobbs Lane.

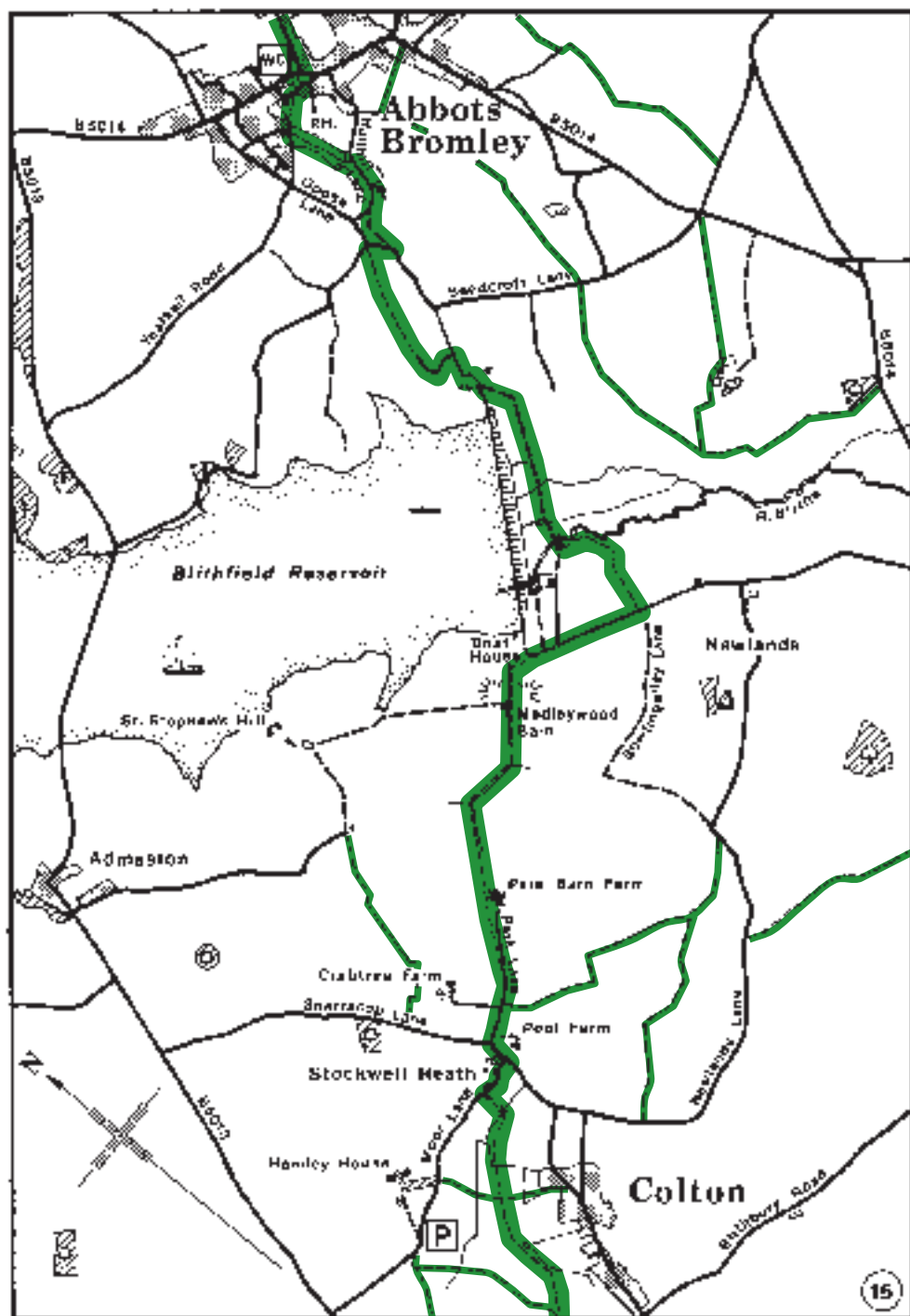


14. HOBB LANE TO ABBOTS BROMLEY (4.1 miles)

Turn right along Hobb Lane and as the road bends to the right, turn left down the drive to Marlpit House Farm. At the farm buildings is a double gateway. Climb the stile by the right-hand gate; go through the farmyard and continue along the track. Beyond the farm the track becomes a tarmac road. Where the road bends left towards the next farm, go straight ahead along the wide grass track to a stile beside the field gate on the boundary of Bagots Park. The path goes straight ahead up the bank, to the right-hand end of the conifer plantation on the skyline. Over the brow of the hill you see a plantation belt and at the end of it is a gate and stile in the field corner. Climb the stile and turn right along the track for almost half a mile. Pass the plantation on your left and cross the Story Brook.

Turn left along the Story Brook. Cross the concrete road and continue along the brook to the field corner. Turn right along the fence line; go through the thicket and climb the hill. At the top of the hill go over a stile on the left and turn right along the hedge to the field corner. Turn left and follow the hedge to a stile by a gate. Over the stile, follow the hedge on the right for 200 yards and climb the stile. Turn left; climb the stile at the gate and follow the track up the hill. Go along Hobfield Lane, a wide green lane, to emerge on a bend in the road.

Turn left along the road for 300 yards and then right down a track between barns. The track enters a field, which you cross, climbing a stile in the hedgerow opposite. Climb a second stile on the left and turn right along the hedgerow, down the hill to a stile. Cross the stile and descend to another stile in the field boundary, at the side of a large tree. From here bear slightly right to a footbridge and continue to the top right-hand corner of the field, which brings you to a housing estate. Climb the stile by the field gate and go left along Swan Lane. At the 'T' junction turn left into Schoolhouse Lane, which leads to the centre of Abbots Bromley.



15. ABBOTS BROMLEY TO COLTON (3.1 miles)

Cross the forecourt of the Goats Head Inn and turn right to the lych gate of St. Nicholas' Church. Bear left in front of the church, along the metalled path which goes diagonally across the churchyard and through the kissing gate by the stream. Continue along the path for 50 yards and climb the stile on the left. The path goes straight ahead across the field, midway between the stream and the hedge. Cross the bridge over the stream at the far end of the field; climb the stile ahead and turn right along the lane. Bear left in front of the cattle grid and climb the stile at the side of the gate. Follow the grass track to the road. Turn right and, after 80 yards, climb the stile on the left. Go straight ahead across two fields and over the stile at the bottom of the second field. Over the stile, go straight ahead and follow the hedge on your left, which brings you into a grass lane and to a stile at the end of it. Climb the stile and turn left along the lane and then right along the road towards the Blithfield Reservoir Engineer's Office.

At the end of the hedge on the left, turn left along the track for a few yards and then right between the posts. Climb the stile and, ahead, turn left along the shale track. After half a mile you cross a concrete bridge over the River Blithe and turn left along the river bank. After 200 yards the river loops left and you bear right across the field to a stile. Climb the stile and follow the hedge on the left to the next field corner and turn right along the fenced road. After 400 yards, climb the stile on the left and turn right along the fence.

As the fence bears right, go straight ahead to the fence line on the bank and turn left along it up the hill. Climb the stile by the brick barn and continue along the fence on the right to the next field corner. Climb the stile by the field gate and follow the hedge for 200 yards to a footbridge on the left. Over the bridge, follow the ditch on the left through two fields to a stile leading into a lane. Go straight ahead along the lane and turn left at the road junction to bring you to the pond at Stockwell Heath.

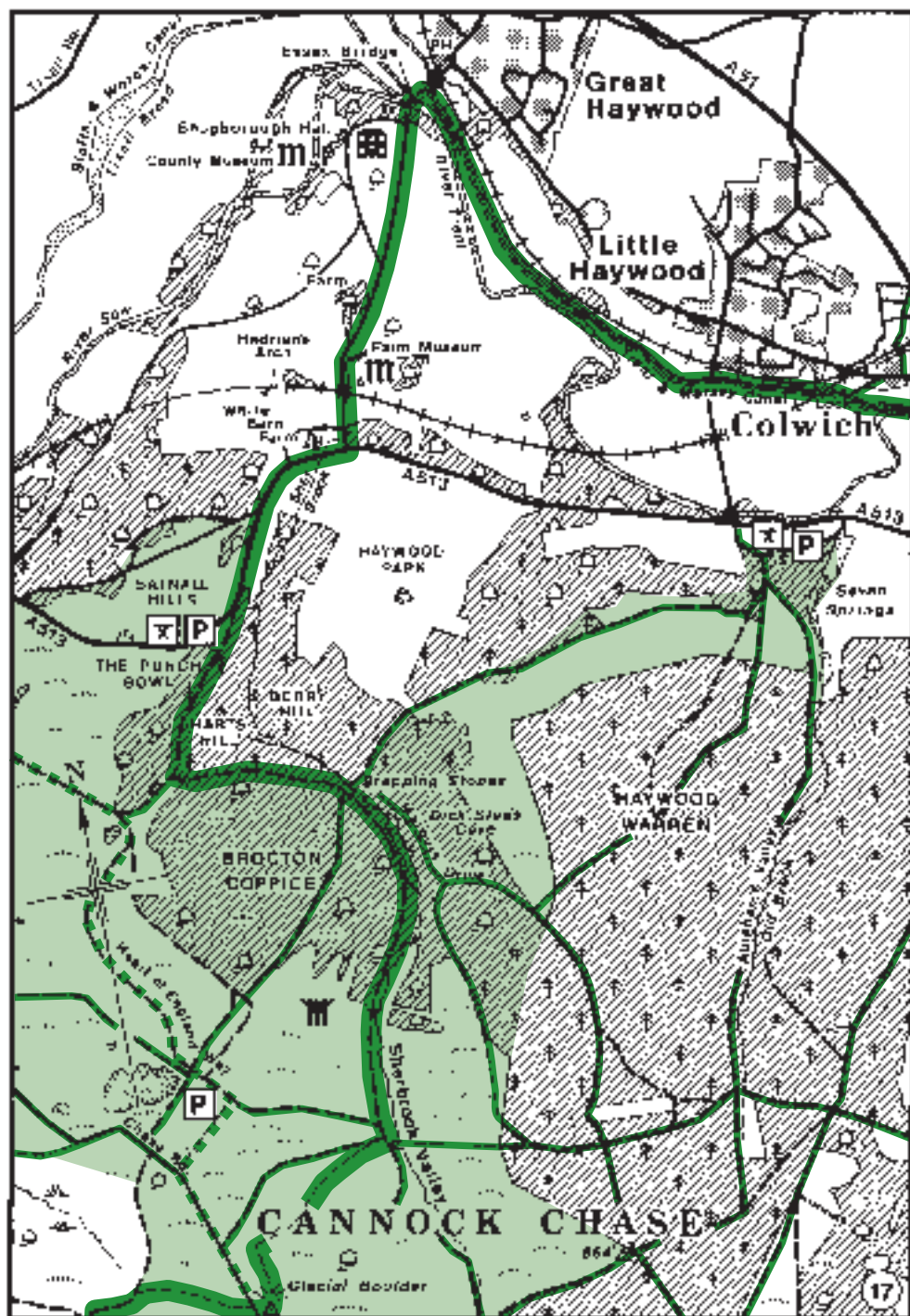
16. COLTON TO COLWICH (3.8 miles)

Turn right past the pond, along the lane (Moor Lane) signposted to Rugeley. Pass Hamley Lodge on the right then after the next pair of cottages enter the field on your left at a stile. Cross another stile and then go down to a footbridge over the stream and bear right to a stile. Cross a small field to a second stile, then go straight ahead across four fields to a stile. From here bear right down to a stile visible in the fence line, then bear left to a stile approximately 30 yards left of the field gate. Cross the narrow field to another stile, and go straight down the next field to emerge in Colton by the village hall.

Turn right along the pavement and follow it to the hump-backed bridge over the Moreton Brook. Immediately over the bridge, enter the field on the left at the stile by the gateway. Bear right across the field towards a clump of trees at the far side. Go through a gap in the hedge and cross the road to the pavement and turn left. Pass Rugeley Lodge on the right and just beyond it turn right down a rough track. Over the railway bridge you turn right down the bank and cross the canal bridge. Turn right along the towpath for 2¼ miles to bridge 71 at Colwich Lock.



Kingfisher



17. COLWICH TO CANNOCK CHASE (5.2 miles)

From Colwich Lock continue along the towpath for 1½ miles to bridge 73 at Great Haywood Lock. Immediately before the bridge a path goes off to the left and through a gap in the wall onto the road. Turn left and cross over Essex bridge. From here the path follows the straight tarmac drive through Shugborough Park for three-quarters of a mile to the Stafford - Rugeley road. Turn right along the pavement and after this finishes, cross the road and walk along the wide grass verge.

As the road bends sharply to the right, in a dip, a track leads off to the left at the entrance to the Punch Bowl picnic site. Take the track up the hill, following the fence on your left. The track descends and the fence turns at a right angle to the left. Take the track alongside it and go through the pole barrier into the motorless zone. After half a mile you pass some stepping stones across the Sherbrook but you keep to the main track up the valley. Follow the brook for nearly a mile to a broad area of open heathland.

Turn right along the wide gravel track up the side valley. After approximately 100 yards the tracks divide and you take the left-hand fork. The track climbs gradually for a few hundred yards and then bears right. Secondary paths lead off on the left, but ignore these and continue along the main track. The track bears left and joins a wide gravel track, which you follow with the prominent British Telecom tower straight ahead on the skyline. Continue for 200 yards, to arrive at the Trig Point on the right, a few yards off the track. Walk across to the Glacial Boulder, which is just behind the Trig Point.



Triumphal Arch, Shugborough

Part Three

PARKLAND STAFFORDSHIRE AND THE SOUTHERN UPLANDS

THE PENK VALE

On the west side of Chase Road, overlooking the Oldacre Valley, the Way crosses the site of the First World War army camp. The effect of this activity can still be seen on the vegetation today - a mixture of grasses with much scrub (hawthorn, gorse, birch and bramble, with an occasional elder and holly) - all indicating better soil conditions here. This area is good for birds (various finches and, in winter, fieldfares, redwings and great grey shrike) as well as deer, which find both food and shelter in this open scrub. However, in the valley the number of birch trees increases and purple moor grass (*Molinia*) appears. Rabbits are generally uncommon on the Chase but they thrive here, bringing with them their associated predators, the weasel and stoat. Bednall Belt, mainly Scots Pine, on the ridge alongside Camp Road, marks the western boundary of the Chase. The Way now begins its gradual descent into the agricultural land of the Penk Valley.

Bednall, Bedehala in Domesday, is a quiet little village. All Saints Church was rebuilt last century and its west window, containing 25 figures, is particularly notable. The vicarage was the home of Great War poet Philip Alsoop, whose father and grandfather between them were incumbents here for 60 years.

South of Bednall lies Teddesley Park. Sir Edward Littleton, the first Lord Hatherton, built Teddesley Hall in the mid 18th Century and laid out its park in preference to the family home of Pillaton Hall, nearer to Cannock. The cost of building is said to have been largely funded by hoards of coins found behind panelling at Pillaton Hall, which realised over £15,000. The Hall is now demolished but the Home Farm survives. Teddesley is now a modern mixed farm, but the sheep pastures and gaunt trunks of dead and stag-headed oaks still retain a parkland atmosphere. On the northern edge of the park the Way passes through a woodland belt, mainly of sycamore. The ground flora contains some typical woodland plants such as hedge woundwort, red campion, yellow archangel and enchanter's nightshade, as well as a variety of grasses. The tree tops hold a large rookery, and the birds' noisy chorus is an ever-present feature.

By following the Trent and Mersey Canal - the "Grand Junction Canal" between Colton and Great Haywood the Staffordshire Way has already explored the engineering feats of the greatest of the early canal pioneers, James Brindley. On the western boundary of Teddesley Park is a further example of his skill, the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal. The enormous historical importance of

canals in general, and of this canal in particular, in transport and civil engineering terms is acknowledged in its designation as a linear Conservation Area. The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal was one of the components of Brindley's "Grand Cross" design for canals linking the Mersey with the Thames and the Trent with the Severn, and the only one he lived to see completed. The south-western arm of the "Grand Cross" ran from Great Haywood to Stourport on the Severn and the name of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire canal was adopted. Like the other canals of the "Grand Cross", the Staffordshire and Worcestershire was an immediate success, providing for both local and long haul transport.

The Way emerges through the stand of trees known as Wellington Belt, at Parkgate Bridge (No. 90) Lock and Wharf, where a busy marina is now located. This bridge was the original entrance to the Teddesley Estate. The coal wharves here flourished, however, and the main entrance was removed to a more secluded position, taking advantage of New Bridge (No.89), better known as 'Fancy' or Teddesley Bridge. This is undoubtedly one of the most charming bridges on the canal. Faced with sandstone and embellished with octagonal columns, it still retains fragments of its iron railings and is now entwined in ivy in a delightful sylvan setting.

Typical reedswamp plants are found on the water's edge, such as great hairy willowherb, gypsywort and valerian, with occasional patches of the less common marsh woundwort and water figwort. Away from the water, common wayside plants such as bush vetch and yellow meadow vetchling are found. Swallows and martins will be seen in summer, hawking for insects. The water vole may be seen on the canal bank or swimming in or under the water.

The canal enters Penkridge past recent housing and the existence of yet another marina at Penkridge Wharf is an indication of the recent boom in canal cruising, a leisure pursuit which Staffordshire's 120 miles of cruising waterway is well able to accommodate. The full canal assemblage of lock, wharf and lock cottage is completed by the canalside pub, the Boat Inn, and enables Penkridge to boast a very complete and unspoilt waterway heritage.

Penkridge, with its good rail and road links to the Black Country, has undergone rapid growth as a residential centre and also boasts its own light industrial estate. However, it is a short walk from the canal into the old part of the village and its natural centre, the Market Place. Penkridge is of Saxon origin, its name being derived from the Celtic and meaning "end of boundary". The village owes its location to the convenient crossing point of the River Penk (one of England's few north-flowing rivers) where the low marshy river valley is at its narrowest between the higher lands to the east and west. The central part of Penkridge remains remarkably recognisable from early plans and descriptions and retains many of the characteristics of a market village. A market was held intermittently from 1244 in Market Place, but the cattle market was resited in Pinfold Lane in late Victorian times to cater for the increasing livestock market trade. Penkridge was also famous in earlier times for its horse-fair, held on land just to the north of the Market Place.

Across the A.449 the area around the Church of St. Michael and All Angels provides a quiet and attractive 'backwater'. The Church itself is a large, fine building mainly in perpendicular style, including the tower. Notable internal features are the series of table tombs to the Littleton family and the late 18th century wrought iron chancel screen. The area around the church retains an historic atmosphere and has some notable buildings. The Old Deanery on Pinfold Lane dates from the 15th century, whilst the three-storey Littleton Arms gives a bold Georgian emphasis to the corner of St. Michael's Square.

Beyond Penkridge is the small hamlet of Mitton, called Mutone in Domesday and one of ten places collectively assessed with 74 villagers or smallholders with land for 17 ploughs. There was a mill at Mitton in the early 15th century and a large depression (surrounded by a mass of daffodils in spring) to the north-west of the bridge over the Church Eaton Brook, suggests that this was the site of the former mill pool.

The Way climbs the rise between the Church Eaton and Whiston Brooks, where the cultivated sandy soils attract basking butterflies in summertime. Beyond the footbridge over the Whiston Brook you walk through the low-lying ungrazed meadows of the Bickford Nature Reserve, with a very rich and varied tall grass-herb vegetation. This luxuriant and colourful proliferation of flowering plants, attracts an equal diversity of insects. The butterflies that may be seen include the wall brown, small skipper, green-veined white, red admiral and peacock, whilst the local dragonfly population includes the common ischnura, common blue damselfly and brown aeshna. A little further along is an old marl hole, overgrown with alder and oak. Above the edge of this, on the eastern side, is a spectacular drift of another plant of wet places - Indian or Himalayan balsam - also called policeman's helmet from the strange shape of the pale pink flowers.

LAPLEY AND BREWOOD - CANALS, KINGS AND CAVALIERS

The gently undulating countryside above the Whiston Brook provides fine retrospective views of Cannock Chase and the British Telecom tower at Pye Green. However, the walker's attention is soon held by an equally prominent, but much more ancient tower ahead, that of Lapley Church. Lapley is one of Staffordshire's loveliest and historic small villages, and walkers approaching from either north or south can appreciate its setting to best advantage.

There was almost certainly a Saxon community and church at Lapley before the Conquest, but the present church is of Norman origin and owes its existence to the pilgrimage to Rome of Aldred, Archbishop of York in 1061. Among the young Saxon nobles who accompanied him was Burchard, youngest son of Algar, Earl of Mercia and grandson of Lady Godiva. On his return journey Burchard became mortally ill at Rheims and was cared for by the monks of the Abbey of St. Remy. Before he died he asked that he should be buried in the Abbey and in return promised land from his estates, a promise, which was honoured by his father.

Thus it was that around 1063, Benedictine monks from St. Remy formed an alien cell at Lapley and began building a church and priory. Immediately to the north of the churchyard, the Way runs through a meadow where a deep depression clearly defines part of the priory moat.

As far as Lapley church itself is concerned, the early building work of the monks has dictated its general proportions to this day, although it is hard to say how much of their original work remains. The top storey of the tower is perpendicular in style and dates from the 14th century. The extra weight of this, and the loss of the earlier transepts, led to many later problems with the tower. The real crisis came in the middle of the last century when the church was declared unsafe, was closed, and services were held in a local barn. The essential repair works were partly funded by an appeal by the Churchwardens in 1855 which pleaded, "The noble tower of the Church at Lapley, even in its dilapidated state, is the admired object of surrounding miles, and, if not absolutely necessary, is even as a monument what no one could wish to be lost to us. And yet, unless considerably supported, it must soon positively fall."

Lapley has several fine houses, including Lapley Hall, with its tall chimneys, and Lapley Castle. Lapley Manor, cheek-by-jowl with the church and within the priory site, and Lapley Court are two old timber-framed houses. Lapley Hall was the scene of a swashbuckling drama in the Civil War. On a December night in 1643 the commander of the Royalist garrison at Chillington Hall, with his musketeers, stormed the Parliamentary garrison holding the Hall (then called Lapley House) and the church. Four hundred 'Roundheads' were dispatched from Stafford to avenge this defeat, but after a short siege of the Hall they too were put to flight by Royalist cavalry sent to assist their comrades. An account of this colourful episode can be found in the British Museum in "The Kings Pamphlets" and headed "Court Intelligence December 26th 1643".

After passing through Lapley Wood farmyard the Way descends to the towpath of the Shropshire Union Canal, which provides an opportunity to compare the pioneering canal engineering of James Brindley, seen earlier at Penkridge, with that of another great transport engineer, Thomas Telford. For this is Telford's Birmingham and Liverpool Junction Canal of 1835, constructed almost at the beginning of the railway era. The difference between Brindley's earlier work and Telford's is immediately obvious here. Early canal construction was dictated by cautious investment and limited engineering techniques. Consequently, contours were followed, even where tortuous, tunnels were wide enough to take a boat and no more (no towpath), locks were liberally introduced and river beds might be used or crossed on the level. Telford's uncompromising engineering approach shortened the route from Birmingham to the Mersey by 20 miles and 30 locks and allowed goods to travel from Birmingham to Liverpool in about 45 hours. The great cutting of Stretton Spoil Banks is typical of the scale of earthworks on the canal and was the price paid for a straight wide canal on the level.

The canal cutting passes through thick clay soils which are evidently fairly rich in

base elements. This results in a varied woodland canopy with ash, sycamore, oak, willow and elm (mainly dead) with hawthorn, hazel and rose scrub beneath. The ground flora includes characteristic woodland plants such as dogs mercury, enchanters' nightshade, wood avens, herb robert, wild arum and false fox sedge, and near the milepost, a colony of woodland brome grass. The wetter seepages across the towpath have plants such as brooklime. Beyond the cutting the woodland flora gives way to a variety of typical wayside species, such as burdock, nipplewort, hedge woundwort, hogweed and hedge parsley. Various butterflies and dragonflies can also be seen. Beyond the Stretton Spoil Banks the canal crosses the Watling Street A.5 on Telford's splendid cast-iron aqueduct of 1832.

A mile to the south of the Watling Street is Brewood, and no route claiming to be a 'Staffordshire' Way could bypass it. This lovely old village is rich in history and, with its many buildings of Special Architectural or Historical Interest, retains an unspoilt timeless quality even today. In fact, Brewood is a good example of a small medieval market town and it continued to flourish until the end of the 18th century. After this it grew little, giving way to nearby Wolverhampton, only to be 'rediscovered' in recent years as a commuter base, bringing new growth and prosperity.

Brewood's early prominence and location in a Royal Forest resulted in several royal visits. Henry II came to the town in 1165, whilst after a visit in 1200, King John declared the locality disafforested and no longer subject to the punitive forest laws. At the same time, King John granted the Bishop licence to inclose a deer park "2 leagues in circumference within the woodland of the manor". This deer park lay to the south-east of the present village, its location and part of its perimeter still being traceable in field boundaries and surviving in place-names such as Park Farm and Park Lane. King John's earlier generosity saved the life of a local nobleman in 1276, who had shot a deer that another royal visitor, Edward I, had been hunting. Charged before the Forest Court, the nobleman was able to point to the earlier disafforestation of Brewood and so escaped with only a fine.

Ascending from the canal towpath the Way enters Brewood along Bargate Street. Immediately catching the attention on the west side of the canal bridge is St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church designed by Pugin. On the north side of Bargate Street is Brewood Convent, which was originally the union workhouse. At the end of Bargate Street, on the northern corner of the Market Place, is one of Brewood's most charming buildings, with an equally charming history. 18th century Speedwell Castle (described by Pevsner as a "delectable folly" and "the peach" of Brewood's secular buildings) was built out of the proceeds of betting on 'Speedwell', the Duke of Bolton's horse. The interior has one elaborate plaster ceiling and a Chinese - Chippendale staircase.

The Market Place and the adjacent Parish Church of St. Mary and St. Chad provide the village's focal point. Although much older in origin, the Market Place is now predominantly Georgian in appearance and it is not difficult to picture the "Emerald", the London - Liverpool coach, making its daily calls to the Lion Inn in

the early 1800s. Brewood was first granted a market in 1921 and according to Hicks Smith's 'Brewood', the ancient market cross collapsed in 1810, whilst by 1817 the decayed market house had been pulled down and markets were no longer held. Apparently, the market pump was destroyed by fire on Bonfire Night 1837! Despite a revival in the middle of the last century, the market was soon discontinued, due to the growing importance of Wolverhampton.

Brewood is dominated by the soaring spire (168 feet tall) of the sandstone parish church. The village is recorded in Domesday as being held by the Bishop of Chester, and there was a Bishop's Palace here until the 14th century. The grand proportions of the present church are due to this early association, the church acting as a sub-cathedral to Lichfield. It dates mainly from the 13th and 16th centuries but includes alterations of the late 19th century by G. E. Street. The chancel contains some fine alabaster monuments.

PARKLAND STAFFORDSHIRE

After Brewood the Way passes through gentle pastoral scenery towards Chillington, the home of one of Staffordshire's oldest and most notable families - the Giffards. Three Giffard brothers came across with William the Conqueror from Normandy, where one of them, Walter, was Count of Longueville. At Domesday, Chillington belonged to the Corbesun family and passed to the Giffards by marriage in 1186. Thus began an unbroken association between land and family of 800 years.

The Giffard motto, "Prenez haleine, tirez fort", is derived from an amazing feat of bowmanship by Sir John Giffard, who lived at Chillington from 1486 until 1556. One day a panther escaped from Sir John's private zoo in Chillington Park. Accompanied by his son, he cornered the animal as it was about to attack a woman and her baby. "Take breath, pull strong" was the son's advice at Sir John loaded his crossbow and slayed the animal. A wooden cross in the garden of the Avenue lodge, reputedly marks the spot of this dramatic incident. The fine alabaster tomb of Sir John and the tombs of three succeeding members of the Giffard family can be seen in the Chancel of Brewood Church.

During the Civil War the Giffards fought for the King. One of them, Charles Giffard, guided Charles II, after his defeat at Worcester in 1651, to Whiteladies and Boscobel, which are just over the Shropshire border. It was at Boscobel that William Careless, assisted by the Pendrell family, hid Charles II in the Oak Tree. The Pendrells were rewarded with annuities which are still paid to their descendants. The original deed which secured the annuities is in the safe keeping of the County Record Office in Stafford.

The present day beauty of Chillington Park owes much to the work of the Giffard family. The present owner, Peter Giffard, applies a policy of careful management and conservation of the woodlands and stands of trees - so much a feature of the

park - by planned felling and replanting. The Way crosses the superb mile-long Avenue of oaks which provided the eastern approach to Chillington Hall, a fine view of which is obtained from this vantage point.

The original medieval house was completely rebuilt in Tudor times by Sir John Giffard, but only a stone chimney piece, dated 1547, is now the main evidence of his work. Little more remains because of the further rebuilding that took place in the 18th century, with the result that Chillington Hall as it is today presents the external appearance of a Georgian mansion. The impression given of a single design is however, illusory. The south wing and the offices behind are attributed to the architect Francis Smith, and belong to the time of Peter Giffard whose initials, with the date 1724, appear on the rainwater heads. The second phase of 18th century building is associated with Thomas Giffard who employed John Soane, then a young architect, for the purpose. It was Soane who built the front of the house, which can be seen from the Avenue. Since the 18th century there have been few alterations, so that Chillington Hall in its present form is largely of Soane's design and represents a fine example of the work of one of England's most notable architects. The national importance of Chillington Hall is recognised by its Grade I Listed Building Status.

As at Shugborough, Weston, Enville and other estates in Staffordshire, the architectural interest of Chillington is not limited to the principal mansion. The landowners of the 18th century were concerned to create for themselves an environment that would reflect their love of precision and orderliness. At Chillington 'Capability' Brown enlarged the Park by sweeping away many of the cottages that formed the village of Chillington and created one large lake out of three smaller ones and planted many trees and plantations. Temples were added and vistas made. The architect, James Paine, built a beautiful little bridge, and a fine wrought iron gate was designed by Bakewell. In all, Chillington was transformed into one of the loveliest landscaped Parks in the County.

The labours of Capability Brown and James Paine created a 'natural' beauty that is still to be enjoyed, notwithstanding the construction of the M54 motorway across the southern portion of the park. This motorway links Telford with the M6, providing a direct road link to the industrial heartland of the West Midlands Conurbation.

Beyond Gunstone the Way crosses the Moat Brook and climbs through a series of small meadows towards the village church of Codsall, enjoying a fine hilltop position. The church is modest in appearance, being small and simple in style with the 14th century tower as its major feature. The church was largely rebuilt in 1846, which explains its excellent external condition. The area around the church is the oldest part of the village and provides a peaceful corner away from the busy centre.

Codsall appears as Codeshale in Domesday, which records that "Cherwin holds of the King in Codeshale three hides. He also held them in the time of King Edward (the Confessor). The plough land is three carucates. There are six villeins with

two carucates". A hide was the amount of land necessary to support a peasant family and a carucate was a measure of arable land, the amount of land necessary to support a peasant family and a carucate was a measure of arable land, the amount an oxen team could plough in a season. Old Codsall has long been assimilated in greater Codsall which, since the turn of the century, has been a popular semi-rural suburb to the north-west of Wolverhampton, but separated from it by the narrow Green Belt. Due to its central location Codsall became the administrative centre for the new South Staffordshire District Council after local government reorganisation in 1974, based at the attractive purpose-built civic offices in Wolverhampton Road.

At the southern end of Church Street, across Baker's Way, is Codsall Square, an attractive group of old buildings assembled around the crossroads, and very much the focal point for shopping and business activity. Just along Wolverhampton Road, to the left, is "Ye Olde Croft", now an Indian restaurant. This building was formerly the Manor House and it is believed that Cromwell's troops were quartered there in 1651, in their search for Charles II.

Beyond Codsall railway station, on the Wolverhampton-Shrewsbury line, the Way follows the old carriage drive to the hamlet of Oaken. The drive is the starting point of a 2 mile Nature Trail established by Codsall Civic Society, and for which a guide leaflet is available locally. The first few hundred yards of the drive also provide the access to Springfield House. The entrance is flanked by Scots pines on the right and some fine horse chestnuts on the left. The chestnuts also line the railway embankment on the right and make a fine show in spring.

South of the A.41 the Way enters Wrottesley Park. Wrottesley was a prosperous manor before the Conquest, and for many centuries was held by the Wrottesley family, until the estate was sold and fragmented in the 1960s. Much of the former park is now a 'pick-your-own' fruit and vegetable farm, and there is also a private golf course. Just to the south of the golf course, where the Way enters a large orchard, is the location of a lost medieval village and moated manor house. In the Civil War the moated manor house, strong and defensible, was garrisoned by Parliamentary forces, who improved its defences by pulling down tenants' houses. A new hall was built to the west of the village in 1696, and any surviving houses probably disappeared then. The new hall was an imposing three-storey building, but it was gutted by fire in 1897, destroying amongst other treasures a first folio of Shakespeare's works and a set of ancient English Chronicles. The house was rebuilt in the same style in 1923 but on a smaller scale. It can be viewed by taking a short detour along a public footpath on a farm track immediately outside the hall grounds.

On the southern edge of the park the Way joins a section of old green lane with thick hedges of a variety of species, intertwined with wild rose and bramble. This is a good area for birds, including mistle thrush, blackbird, jay, robin, wren and large numbers of tits. The end of the adjoining woodland belt contains field maple, rowan and Scots pine. The buildings and tracks beyond are the remains of a huttred army camp established for Dutch troops in 1941. In 1950 the camp

was converted into dwellings by Seisdon Rural District Council and occupied until 1962.

At Nurton the Way descends the curiously named Toadsnest Lane, a sunken bridleway with edging shrubs of elder, hazel and holly, with several well grown field maple, as well as oak, ash and hawthorn. The strangely coloured *verdegriis agaris fungus* can be found here in the autumn. The lane also contains a wide variety of common ground plants, such as dog's mercury, yellow archangel, red campion, ground ivy, cleavers and white deadnettle. Local legend has it that Toadsnest Lane was part of Charles' escape route after the Battle of Worcester.

THE SOUTHERN BORDERLAND - SEISDON TO KINVER

The Way crosses the Wolverhampton-Bridgnorth Road, A.454, at Trescott, sited above the Smestow Brook. The name means a settlement by the 'Tresel', an early name for the brook. Furnace Grange Farm derives its name from ironworking which apparently took place on the site at one time. Excavations for modern farm buildings exposed black soil, cinder and iron-slag. The 1839 Tithe Map for Penn also refers to local names such as "Cinderbank Meadow" and "Furnace Field". There was also a water-driven cornmill at Furnace Grange.

The valley of the Smestow Brook is an area which is extensively used for the extraction of sand and gravel. These materials were laid down by the glaciers which covered the area during the Pleistocene, or Glacial period. In this part of Staffordshire, sand and gravel deposits of glacial age are closely associated with outcrops of the Bunter Sandstone of the Triassic period, from which they originate.

The Way descends to the village of Seisdon, whose name means 'Hill of the Saxons' and probably refers to the 300 foot hill at the west end of the village. The Seven Stars at the crossroads at the west end of the village is an old inn which existed by 1714, when the justices held a monthly meeting there. The Way climbs out of the village to a notable landscape feature. Abbots Castle Hill is a 2 mile escarpment of the Bunter Pebble Beds, rising to over 400 feet. The northern part of the escarpment forms the County boundary and the ground falls away sharply on the Shropshire side. It has been suggested that earthworks at the northern end of the ridge are of British or Romano-British origin; they consist of an entrenchment and ditches extending along the ridge.

The scarp edge is joined halfway along its length, where the road plunges down a break in the sandstone by a colour-washed house with the delightful name of Tinker's Castle. There then follows a mile of airy ridge walking with fine views. To the east lies the Black Country and the edge of the West Midlands Conurbation, whilst to the west are the Shropshire Hills, with Titterstone Clee Hill, Brown Clee Hill and Wenlock Edge particularly prominent. The town of Bridgnorth is only 6 miles due west of the ridge, but it is hidden in the deep valley of the River Severn.

Much closer, just to the south-west, you can see the former Second World War R.A.F. airfield of Halfpenny Green. The field now operates commercially and the ridge provides an excellent viewpoint for the sports of parachuting and skydiving which take place there. It was at Halfpenny Green that Prince William of Gloucester was tragically killed in an air race in 1972.

Near to Tinker's Castle the woodland on the west side of the ridge is mainly oak, birch, sycamore and Scots pine, with much planted larch and holly. There are a number of crab apples in the field hedgerow, with many foxgloves on the bank beneath. Further along is an area known as Old Gorse, but with no gorse left now, being dominated by bracken and bramble. The active sand quarry on the far side of the main road provides a good illustration of the underlying soils of the area, which like those on Cannock Chase, Highgate Common, Kinver Edge and the whole of this Abbots Castle Hill ridge are very poor, thin and acid, resulting in a restricted ground flora.

Highgate Common was formerly the northern part of the manorial waste which covered the eastern edge of the parish of Enville. The waste was inclosed in 1746 but remained uncultivated. A golf course was laid out over the southern part of the common in the 1930s. This attractive area of heath and woodland has always been popular with Black Country people. In 1957 the County Council acquired 280 acres of the common for development as a country park, and has provided car parking, toilet facilities and a series of marked trails.

The main tree species of the country park is birch, which has seeded naturally everywhere throughout the common, together with smaller quantities of oak, holly and rowan. The densest woodland is in Fox Covert, and this has developed since the last war when three large enclosures were ploughed up and used for growing potatoes. Remains of the old boundary ditch and bank can be seen and in places, these still have hazel and hawthorn shrubs from the old hedges. Ground flora beneath the birch is limited, with quantities of bramble and also rosebay willowherb in places. Watch out for occasional patches of honeysuckle and wood sage, and in autumn for the abundant fungi, especially the attractive, but poisonous, fly agaric.

The route passes through two more open areas, with remnants of heather. The first one is mainly grassy, with occasional heathland plants such as heath bedstraw and tormentil; near the woodland boundary on the east side of the glade is a strip of wetter ground with rushes, rosebay willowherb, tufted hair grass and marsh thistle. Look out for the commoner butterflies in summer such as hedge brown, large and small white, common blue and small copper.

The second more open area, to the south of the route near the western end of the common, is more peaty and has a different vegetation with much cross-leaved heath and purple moor grass. Between this and the track some of the birch has been cleared to encourage oak regeneration. The wetter areas are good for grass snakes; also look out in summer for dragonflies such as the common Aeshna and damselflies such as the common Coenagrion, green Lestes and common

Ischnura. The whole woodland area and fringes is good for birds - especially the finches and buntings (including linnet, redpoll and yellow-hammer), the warblers (including chiffchaff, willow warbler, wood warbler and blackcap), redstart, tree creeper and all three woodpeckers.

South of Highgate Common the landscape begins to change to a succession of wooded hills and valleys. The three manors which covered Enville parish lay in the Royal Forest of Kinver. Even today the pattern of settlement, which comprises a small village and numerous scattered farmhouses, is characteristic of a forest area. The parish still retains over 400 acres of woodland, which contribute so much to the attractiveness of these final stages of the route. Two miles south of Highgate lies the village of Enville itself, and the first building to greet the eye is the Church of St. Mary standing in a fine position above the village. The church is of Norman foundation but was restored and enlarged by Sir Gilbert Scott in 1872-75. These works included the building of the imposing tower, which followed the style of Gloucester Cathedral.

The development of Enville village has been linked by history and ownership with the Grey Family, Earls of Stamford, and their home, Enville Hall. Most of the present buildings in the village are of 19th century origin but contrary to what might be expected of an estate village, there is no standard architectural style. Most of the village lies at the foot of the slope below the church, straddling the Stourbridge-Bridgnorth Road. The central feature of this cluster of buildings is the picturesque 18th century Cat Inn with its six-day licence, apparently imposed last century because horse-drawn traffic blocked the village street.

Between the Cat Inn and the enclosed village 'green' is the entrance to Enville Hall itself, and the route through its grounds is one of the highlights of the Staffordshire Way. Pevsner describes Enville as "a fine house with glorious grounds". The Hall is basically 18th century but in a mixture of architectural styles, with two fronts. The south front, which can be seen from the Way, is 'Georgian Romantic' with turrets, battlements and Gothic motifs, whilst that facing north is conventional classical Georgian. The Hall was badly damaged by fire in 1904, which led to extensive internal renewal.

Enville's marvellous natural assets of woodlands, streams and rolling hills were exploited by the Earls of Stamford in the 18th and 19th centuries to create a beautifully landscaped park, with work by Shenstone and in part by Sanderson Miller. A series of ponds and monuments were built in the extensive woodlands and a network of formal and informal walkways laid out. Below the woodland is a contrasting area of parkland containing magnificent specimen trees.

An ancient sunken pathway connects Enville with "the Switzerland of the Midlands", or at least that was the name given to the area around Kinver by visitors at the turn of the century, attracted by the magnificent scenery hereabouts. The area is dominated by the lofty wooded ridge of Kinver Edge, with the magnificently sited church of St. Peter poised high above the village. Kinver was a royal manor at the time of the Conquest and the area was the centre of a

royal forest. Kings visited Kinver on several occasions between the late 11th and early 13th centuries, probably when hunting in the forest. The Staffordshire Way skirts the edge of Kinver to climb onto the heights above, but the short diversion into this attractive and fascinating old village is highly recommended. Kinver was formerly a market town of some importance, and in the mid 18th century it was said that woollen manufacture was carried on "pretty briskly". The prosperity brought by trade is reflected in the considerable length of High Street, with continuous frontages of substantial buildings. The village also stood on an old route between the South-West of England and Chester, and the inns in the village were noted at the time for providing good accommodation for travellers on that road. For those wishing to discover more of Kinver's rich and varied history, and to explore the area, descriptive booklets by local authors and leaflets for walks prepared by the Civic Society, are available locally.

Kinver Edge not only dominates the village at its foot but the whole of this southern extremity of Staffordshire, and provides the perfect climax to the Staffordshire Way. Much of the Edge is now owned by the National Trust and Staffordshire County Council owns 47 acres of public access land between the Trust land and the County boundary. Over the boundary lies Kingsford Country Park, which Hereford and Worcestershire County Council have provided with car parks, toilets, and waymarked walking and horseriding routes. This country park is also the starting point of the Worcestershire Way and the North Worcestershire Path.

Kinver Edge is a southerly continuation of the Bunter Sandstone Ridge seen at Abbots Castle Hill. The strongly cemented rock, with its high proportion of rounded pebbles, caps the crest of the ridge. The west facing escarpment beneath this cap reveals the soft, red "Lower Mottled Sandstone" which underlies the Bunter Sandstone. The soft nature of this sandstone leads to its rapid erosion and in places this has resulted in an undercutting of the more resistant cap above, and its consequent collapse with the formation of "cliff" faces. The superb natural defensive site at the northern end of the ridge was an Iron Age hill fort, one of seven remaining in Staffordshire. The site has an overall area of 11 acres and is defended on two sides by a substantial bank and ditch, while the other two sides follow the natural edge of the escarpment.

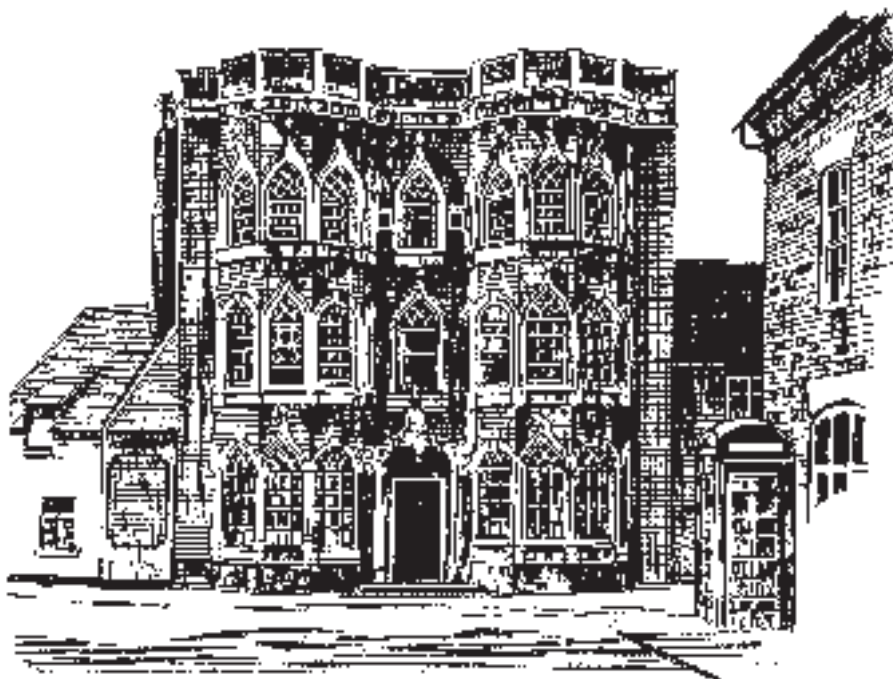
The Edge is perhaps more famous, however, for the series of "rock houses" carved out of the soft sandstone outcrops. These dwellings were inhabited over several centuries, and by the 19th century some of them became quite sophisticated and comfortable buildings. The most prominent and extensive example of these dwellings is Holy Austin Rock, below the northern end of the Edge and approached by a flight of stone steps. The last families to reside at these dwellings were rehoused in the 1950s, but a tea room in one of the caves was in business until 1967.

Due to erosion and vandalism over the years the dwellings had reached an advanced state of decay and some dangerous chambers had to be sealed. Recently, with the aid of European grant, some of the dwellings have been partly

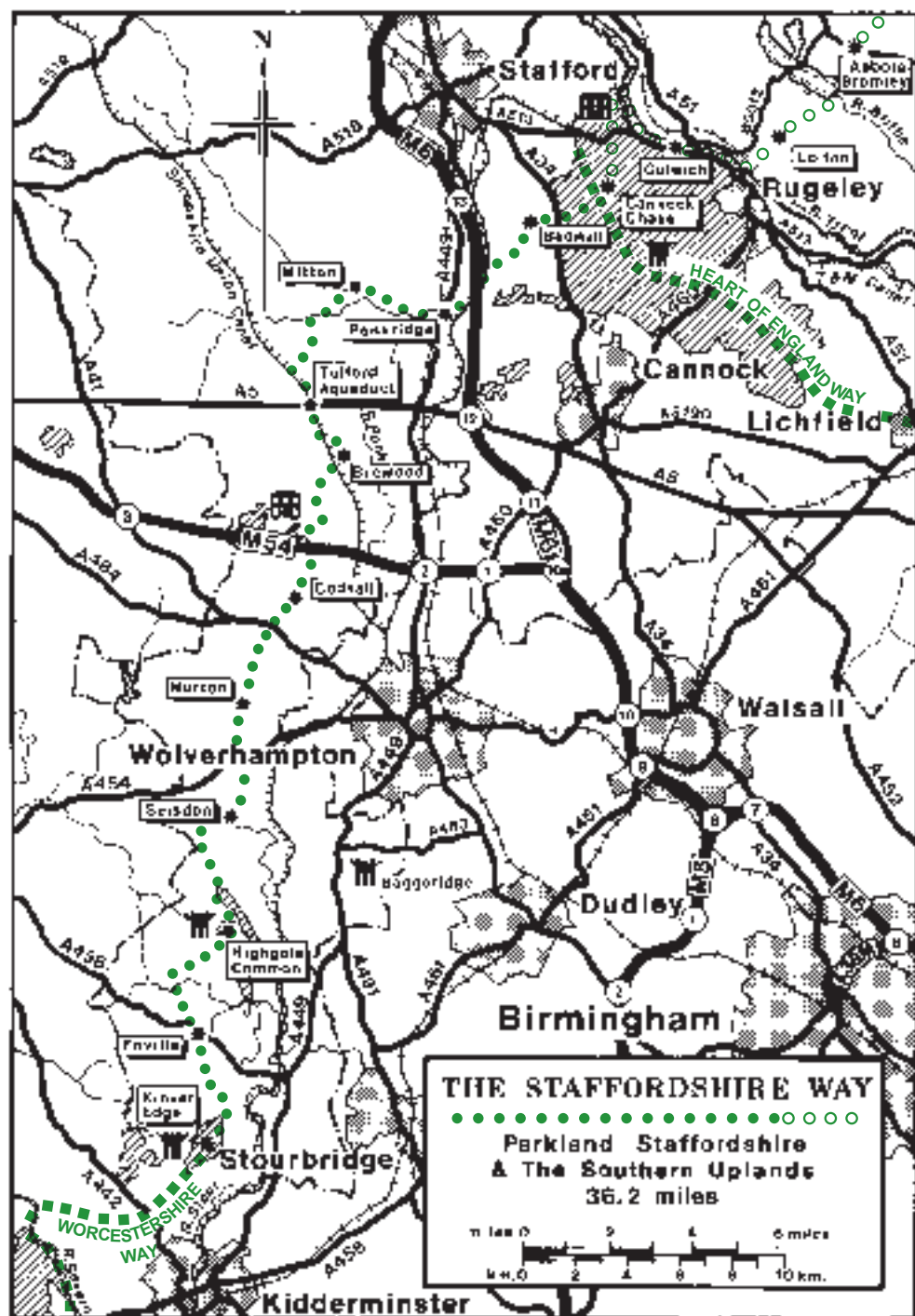
restored and are in the care of the National Trust. **Visitors are asked to exercise great care and not to worsen the already fragile state of the dwellings.**

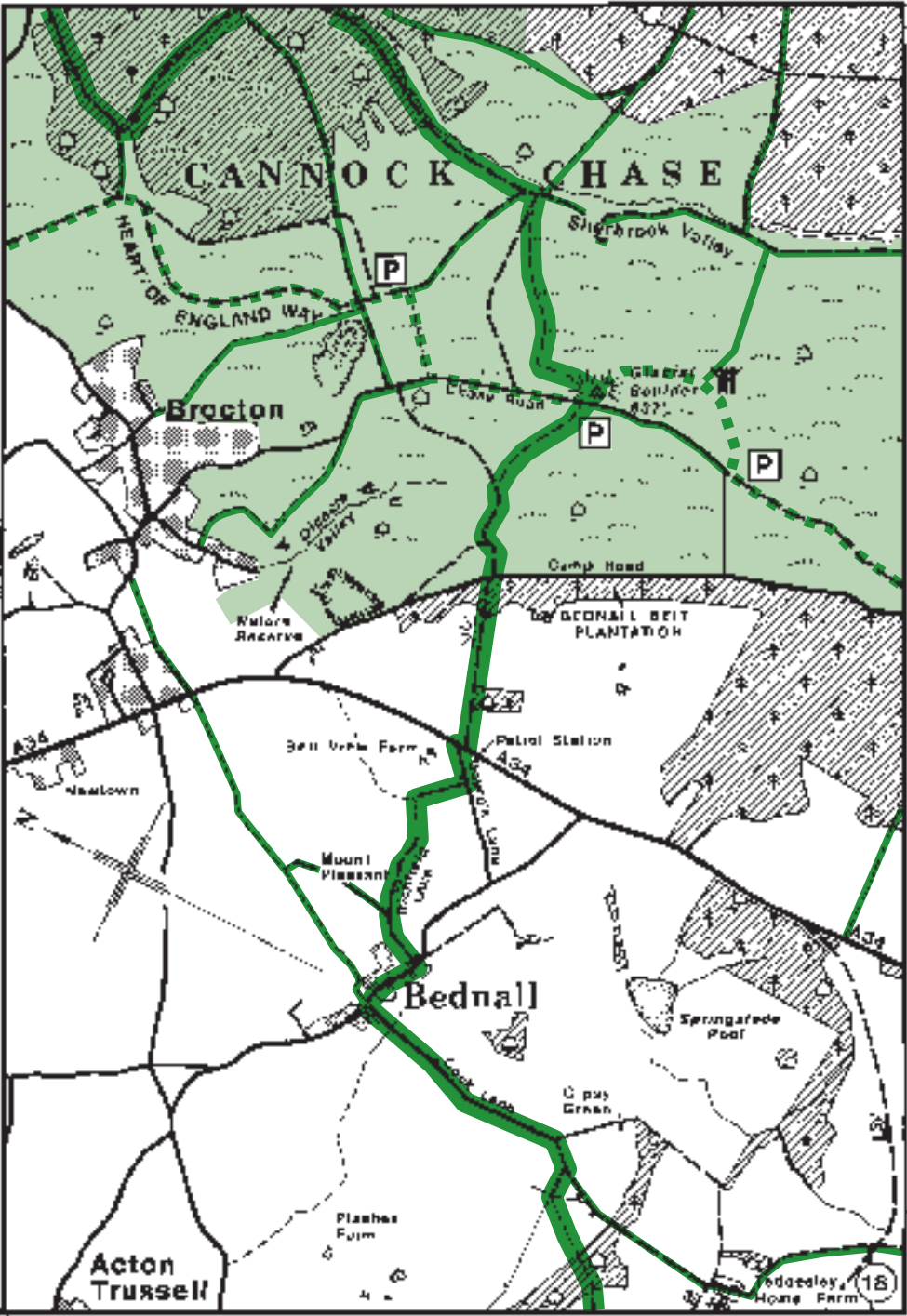
The sharp climb to the 500 foot top of the Edge is justly rewarded by the superb panoramic views over the surrounding countryside. An exhilarating mile-long ramble along the Edge - with views over the Wyre Forest towards the distant Malvern Hills - leads southwards to the County boundary and journey's end.

Happy walking!



Speedwell Castle, Brewwood

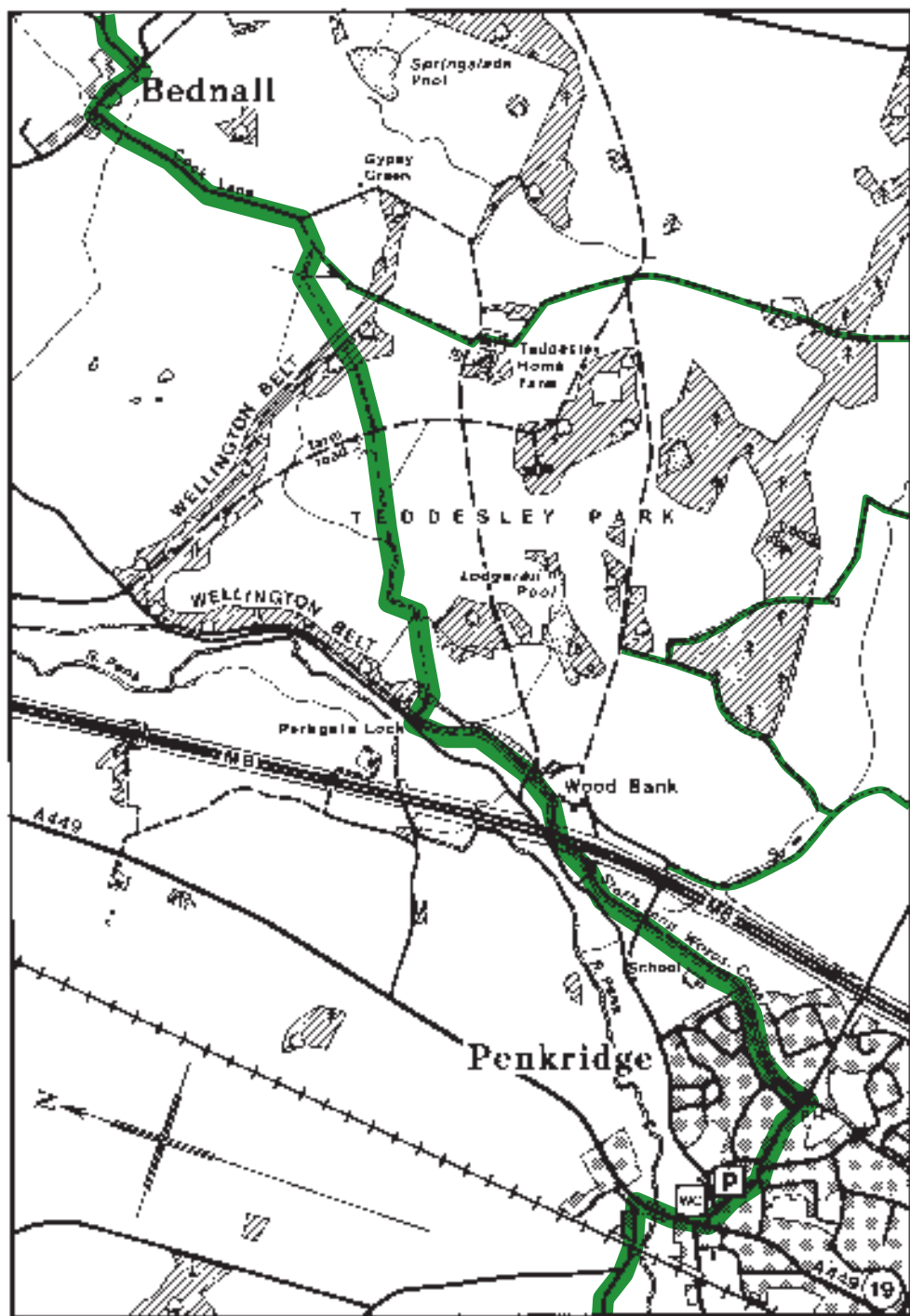




18. CANNOCK CHASE TO BEDNALL (1.8 miles)

From the Glacial Boulder, go straight across the Chase Road to the parking area. At the back of the parking area follow a narrow grass path. After 75 yards cross what looks like a path, but is actually a fire trace. After a further 25 yards a narrow path goes straight ahead down into the Oldacre Valley; do not follow this but turn right along a narrow path through the gorse bushes. Beyond the gorse the path follows an obvious, straight line down through the heather. After 300 yards the path goes straight ahead across the valley floor to join a wide track, which bears left, steeply up the hill. The slope soon eases and the track bears round to the left. Just ahead turn left at the junction of tracks and then right after a few yards towards the forestry plantation. The track emerges on Camp Road at a pole barrier.

Over Camp Road, just to the right, is a gate with a stile at the side. Go down the ride between the pines, which becomes a green lane beyond the trees. After $\frac{1}{4}$ mile climb the stile at the side of the gate to emerge onto the A.34. Cross the road, turn right and then left down Joyce's Lane. Immediately after Pine Trees Cottage, the first house on the right, climb the stile by the field gate and go straight ahead along the field boundary to a stile in the corner. Cross the stile and continue to the next field corner. Climb the stile and follow the hedgerow on the left, to bring you to a stile by a field gate and into a green lane. The lane becomes a metalled road, which brings you into Bednall village after $\frac{1}{4}$ mile. Cross the road and turn right along the pavement to Bednall Church.

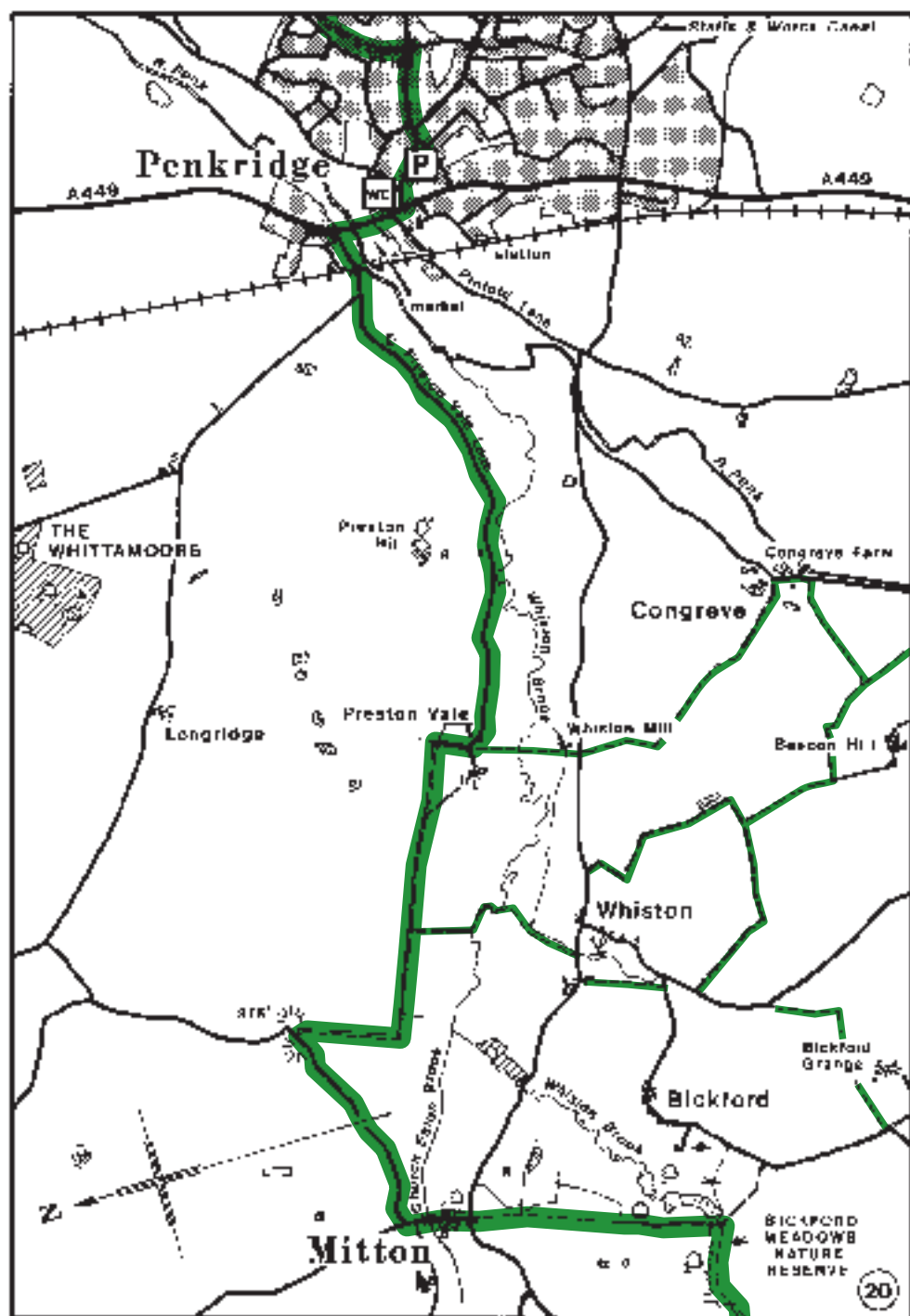


19. BEDNALL TO PENKRIDGE (3.2 miles)

At Bednall Church go down the road signposted to Teddesley. After just over ½ mile the road divides and you take the right-hand fork. Climb the stile by the field gateway on the right after 150 yards, and follow the unploughed headland to the far field corner. Climb the stile and bear left across the pasture field to a stile into the wood. Go straight ahead through the wood, cross the brick culvert over the stream, to a stile into Teddesley Park.

Follow the fence on the left and, at the end of it, cross the farm road. Go straight ahead across the sheep pasture to bring you to the corner of a fence line on the left after 250 yards. Follow the fence line down the hill to the field corner by the stream. Climb the stile behind the fallen willow tree and turn right along the field boundary, following the course of the stream.

After 400 yards, cross the wooden footbridge over the stream. Over the footbridge bear left down the field towards the boatyard, visible in the gap in the tree belt below, and climb the stile at the side of the wooden gate. Over the stile, go straight ahead over the canal bridge and immediately turn right down onto the canal towpath. Double back under the bridge to the lock. From here follow the towpath for 1½ miles to Penkridge, where you leave the canal at the bridge by the side of the Boat Inn.

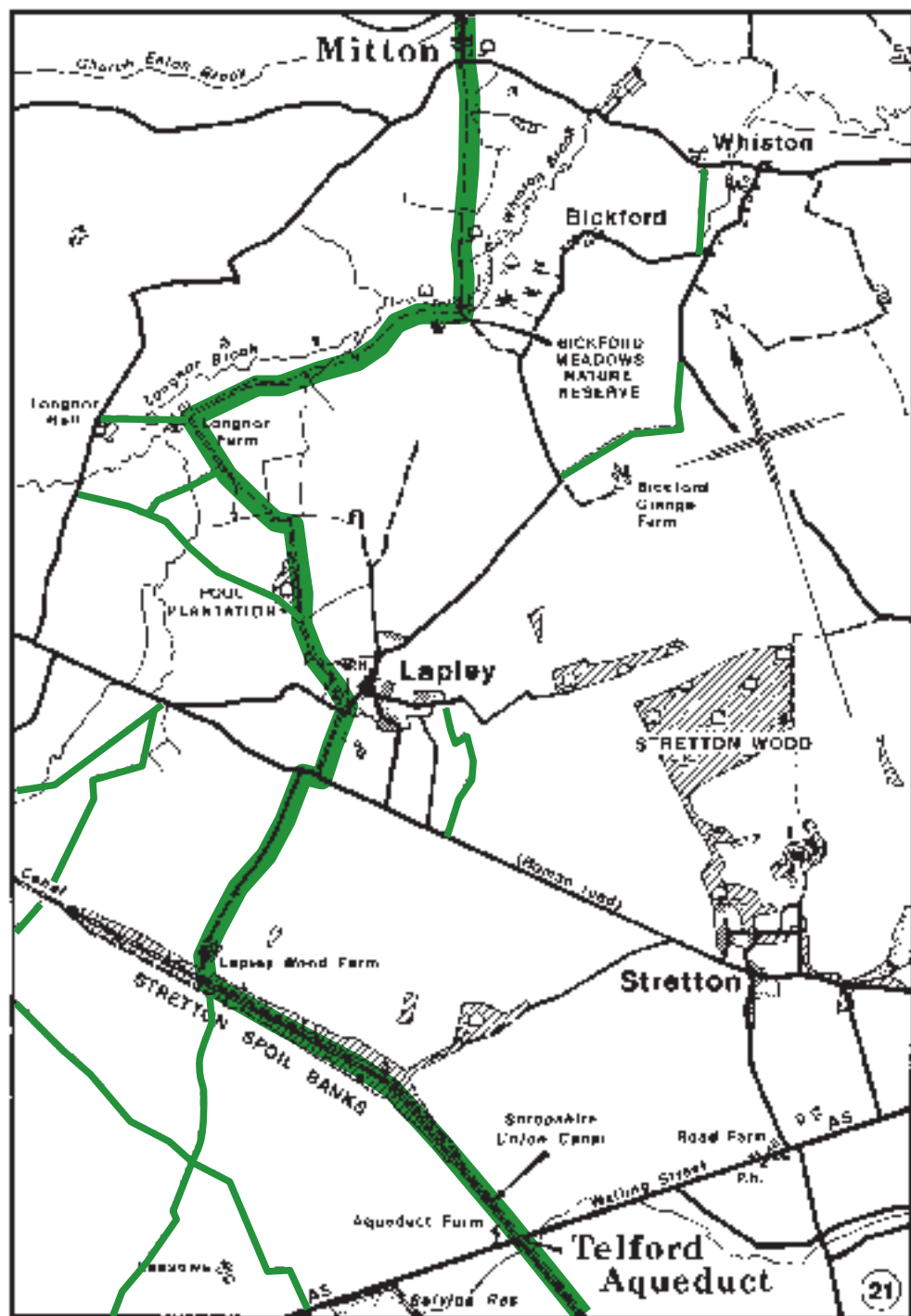


20. PENKRIDGE TO MITTON (3.5 miles)

From the canal bridge at the Boat Inn, turn right along the pavement to the Market Place. Continue down Market Street into the open area immediately in front of the Stafford-Wolverhampton road, A449. Cross the open area and bear right along the pavement of the main road, past the White Hart public house. Go over the River Penk bridge and cross the main road. Immediately after the bridge bear left down the pavement and turn left along the lane, and under the railway viaduct. 100 yards beyond the viaduct, you turn left down the 'No Through Road', which you follow for 1 ¼ miles to its termination at Preston Vale.

Just before the end of the road at Preston Vale Farm there are public footpath signs on each side of the lane. Climb the stile of the path on the right, which is signposted "Mitton 2 ¼ miles". Go straight ahead along the field boundary on the right and continue to follow it as it bears to the left by a clump of willows. Continue along the hedgerow on your right, which has a drainage ditch behind it. After 250 yards a farm road comes in from the left and you follow it straight ahead between the hedgerows.

The track terminates after ½ mile and you go straight ahead through the gateway, following the hedge on the right. After 100 yards, turn right at the field corner, following the hedgerow up the hill. Turn left at the next field corner to a stile on the right. Over the stile you turn left along the road to arrive at a 'T' junction after ½ mile. Turn left and cross the bridge over the Church Eaton Brook.

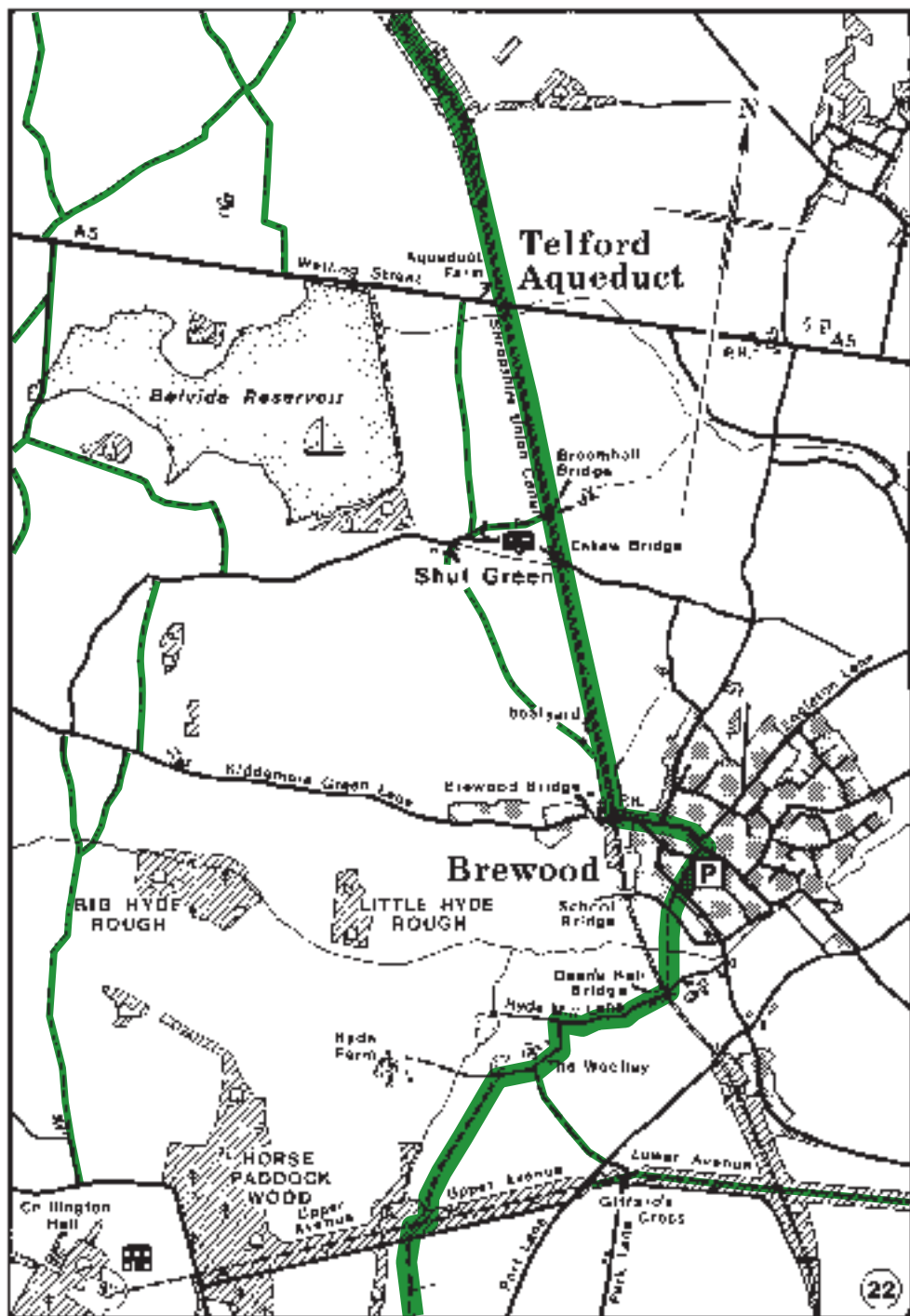


21. MITTON TO TELFORD AQUEDUCT (3.9 miles)

South of the bridge, follow the road to the 'T' junction. Go through the field gateway opposite, immediately to the left of the pole-mounted electricity transformer. Follow the track up the large arable field for 600 yards, to a gap in the top hedgerow. Go through the gap and follow the hedgeline on the left. In the field corner, cross the footbridge on your right, over the stream. Bear left, then right, and follow the path through the nature reserve to a bridle gate. Through the gate, follow the field boundary above the stream. After 300 yards climb the stile at the side of the bridle gate on the right. Go straight ahead through a gap in the trees and climb the stile at the side of the gate in the hedgerow on the left. Turn right to a gate in the next field corner, in front of the farm.

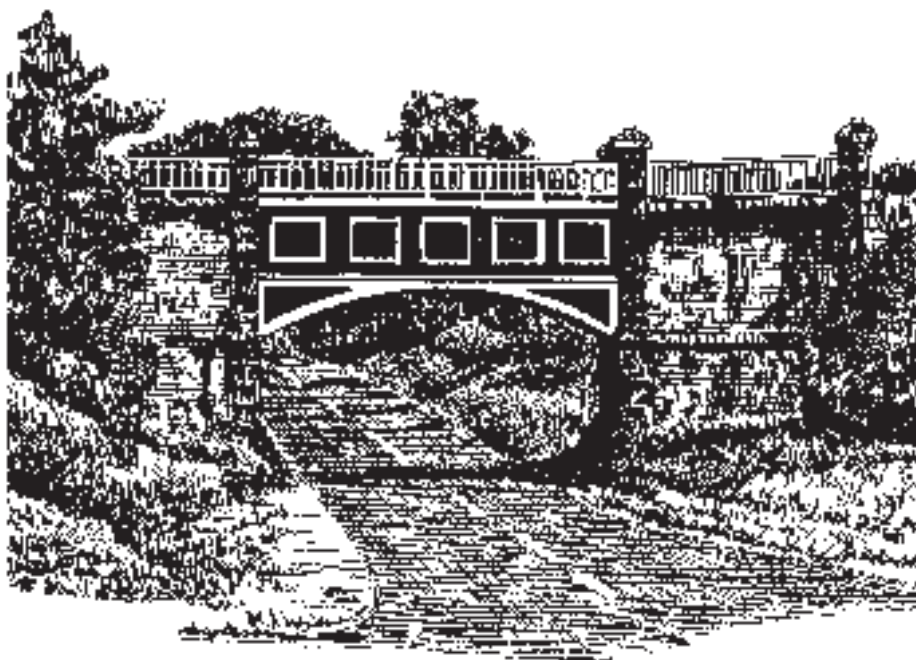
Turn left in front of the gate and walk along the hedgerow. Cross two stiles, keeping the hedge on the right. Where the hedge turns right sharply at an oak tree, bear left to a small gate in the field corner. Through the gate, and a second one immediately behind it, follow the hedge round to the left to a gap in the field corner. Go through the gap and turn right along the hedgerow, past the pond on the right. Go through the gate at the next field corner and follow the hedgerow on the right towards Lapley Church.

Go through the bridlegate in the field corner and straight ahead along the hedgerow and railings on the right. Pass the buildings on the right and climb the stile into the churchyard in the field corner. Turn right through the churchyard and through the gate onto the road. Turn left and, on the bend, enter the field on the right. Follow the hedgerow on the left to a gap in the bottom field corner. Turn right along the road and go down the farm drive on the left. After ½ mile go straight through the farmyard and bear left down a track between hedgerows. Turn left down the ramp in front of the canal bridge to the towpath, to arrive at the A5 aqueduct after 1 mile.

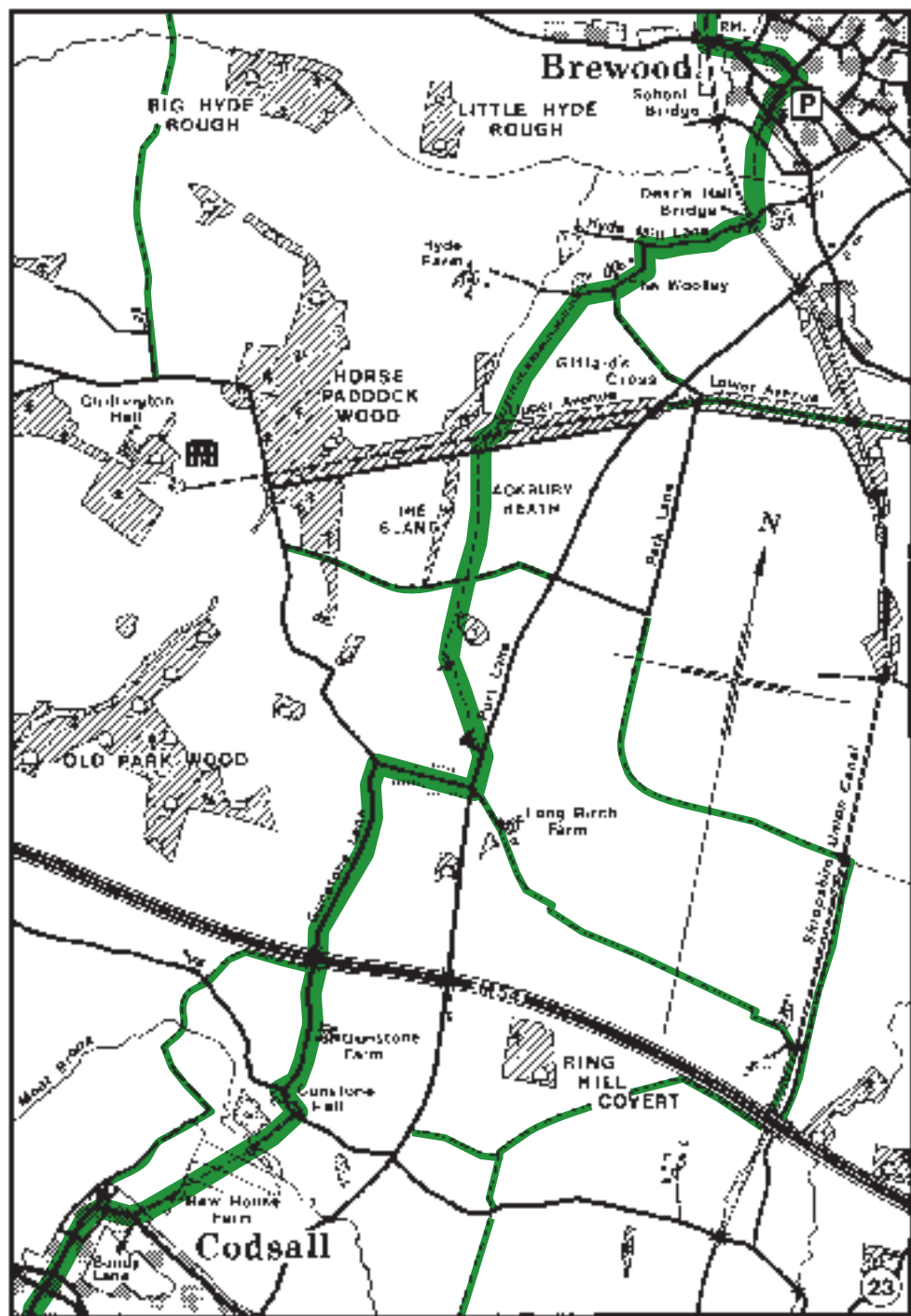


22. TELFORD AQUEDUCT TO BREWOOD (1.5 miles)

One mile south of the A5 aqueduct you pass the Countrywide Cruisers boatyard on the opposite bank. Immediately beyond the next bridge climb the flight of steps and turn right along Bargate Street into Brewood village. Turn right into the Market Square at the Lion Hotel.



Telford Aqueduct, Shropshire Union Canal

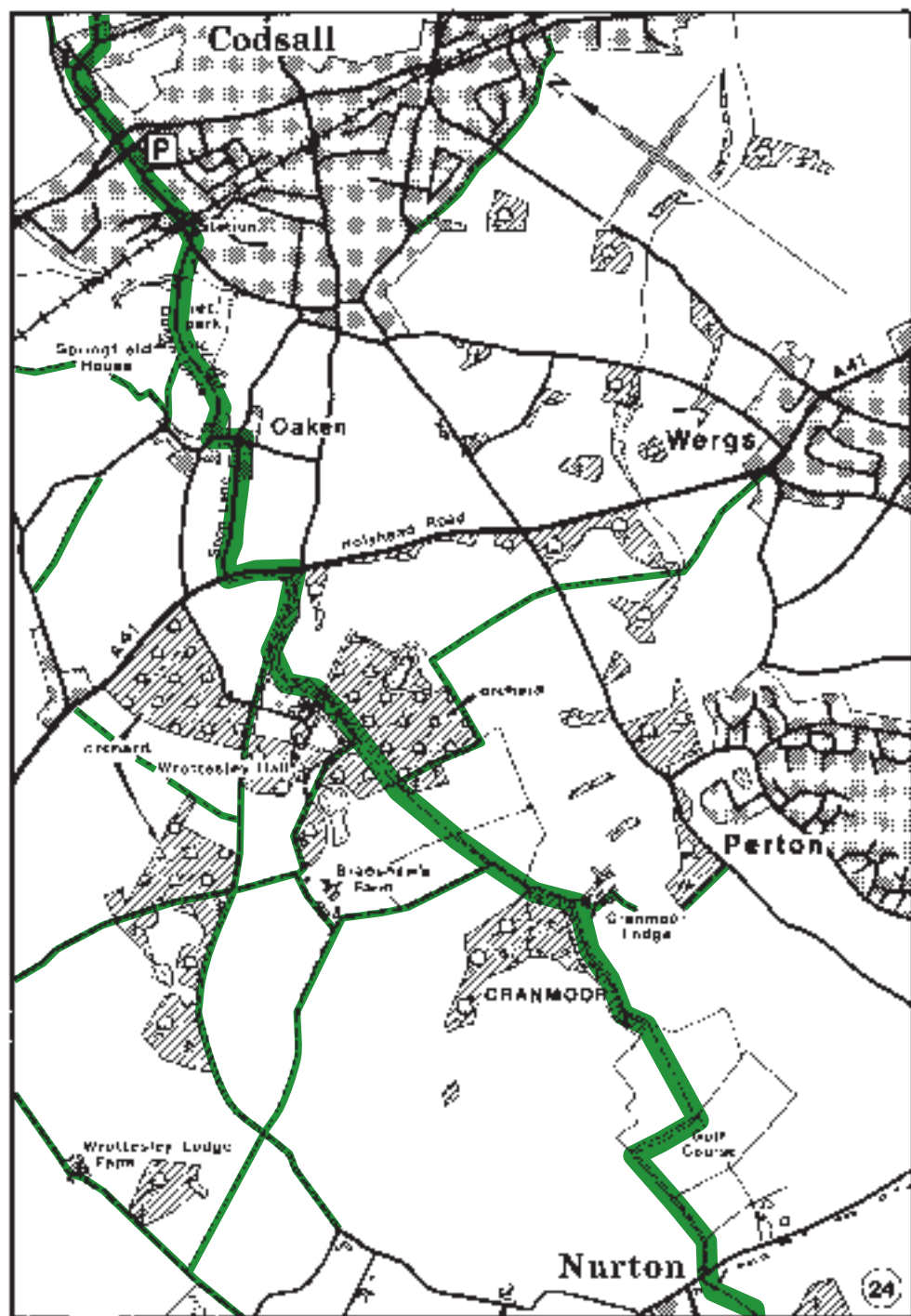


23. BREWOOD TO CODSALL (3.8 miles)

From the Market Place walk south along Church Road, passing the church on the left, to the 'T' junction. Over the road, to the left, is an alleyway. Follow the alleyway to emerge onto a rough road, and climb the stile just to the left. Cross three fields to arrive at a canal bridge. Climb the stile and the steps at the side of the bridge and turn right along the lane. After $\frac{1}{4}$ mile turn left at the junction of the lanes, and shortly afterwards go straight ahead past The Woolley Farm on your right. Just beyond the farm is a large pool on the right. Climb the stile opposite and go straight ahead along the field boundary to bring you to a stile in the field corner after 600 yards. Pass between two fences to a second stile and bear right across the Avenue to a stile onto the road. The Avenue itself is not a public right of way, and walkers should keep strictly to the waymarked path across it.

Go through the kissing gate opposite and straight ahead to arrive at a stile in the field corner, at the side of a gate, after 500 yards. Cross Chillington Street, green lane, and in the next field, again follow the hedge straight ahead to the field corner. Cross the stile and plank bridge on the left, pass the pond on the left and climb the stile. Go straight ahead across the field, following the line of oak trees. At the far side, pass the fenced pond on the right to bring you into the field corner. Climb the stile and turn right along the grass verge of Port Lane.

Turn right at the road signposted to Chillington, and then after 400 yards turn left and climb the stile at the side of double gates to enter Gunstone Lane. Over the motorway bridge, pass Gunstone Farm and turn left at the 'T' junction. Climb the stile on the right after a few yards. The path goes straight ahead along the fence to a footbridge and is well defined up the fields beyond. At the farm, climb the stile onto a rough lane and turn left, to emerge onto Sandy Lane after 250 yards. Turn right up the hill to Codsall Church.



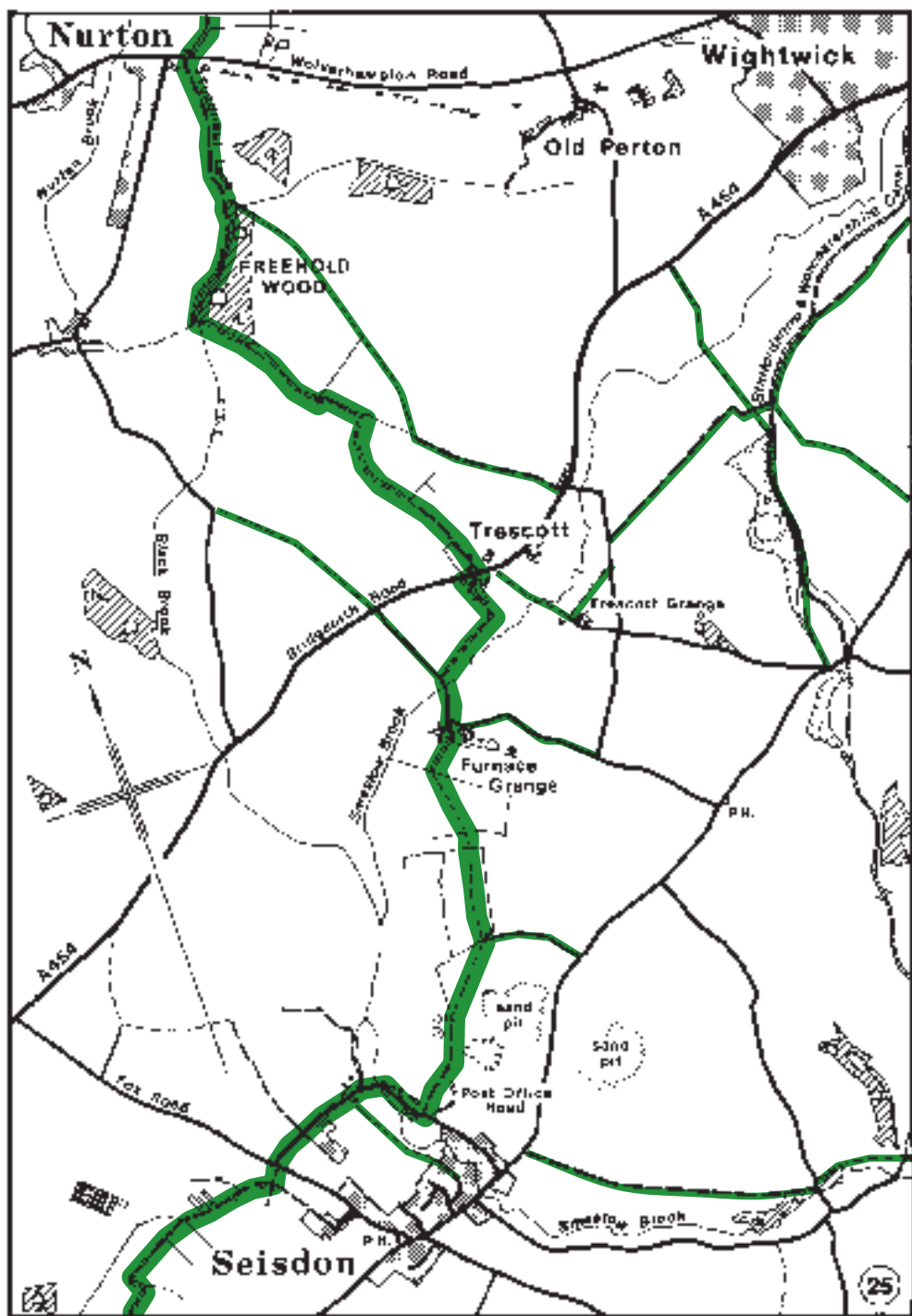
24. CODSALL TO NURTON (3.6 miles)

From the church, bear left down Church Road and cross Baker's Way into Codsall Square. Go straight ahead down Station Road and pass under the railway bridge. Just beyond the bridge turn right down the drive with the nature trail and footpath signs. Follow the drive, which narrows beyond Springfield House, for $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to Oaken. Turn left along the road, and then right at the staggered crossroads along Shop Lane. Shop Lane joins the A41 after $\frac{1}{3}$ mile and you cross to the steps up the embankment opposite.

Climb the stile and turn left along the hedgerow to the field corner, by the bungalow. Turn right and follow the hedgerow, past a pool on the left. 100 yards beyond the pool go through a gap on the left and cross the ditch. Turn right through the woodland and follow the path round to the left to the back of the golf club house. Go past the club house and turn right down the tarmac drive. Follow the grass verge for 150 yards, then climb the stile on the left. Turn right along the farm track and where it turns right, leave the track and bear slightly to the left, passing just to the right of a large tree to reach the corner of a plantation. Continue, with the plantation on your left to arrive at the outside corner of a field (behind an oak tree) after 350 yards.

Go straight ahead along the hedge on the left to a bridle gate set in the hedge. Go through the gate and turn right, following the headland track against the right-hand hedgerow. In the next field corner the track joins a green lane which you follow for 150 yards. Where the lane widens, go through the gap by the field gate on the right and follow the track against the belt of trees through one field and into a second field. Where the belt of trees finishes, go through an open gateway to enter a large field on the right.

Go through the centre of the field, up the bank and a wide gap becomes visible in the far hedgerow. Go through the gap and immediately turn right along the wide path on the edge of the golf course. Turn left at the next corner and continue along the well-defined path for 600 yards to the road at Nurton.



25. NURTON TO SEISDON (3.2 miles)

Just over the road to the right you go down the green lane bridleway, signposted "Trescott 1¾ miles". The enclosed land ends in front of a fenced woodland after a mile, and you climb a stile into the field on the right. Pass a small pond on the left and follow the fence against the woodland, to arrive at a rail in the far field corner after 550 yards. Climb the rail and cross the footbridge on the left. Go straight ahead along the field boundary, above a drainage ditch on the left, to arrive at a farm track after 250 yards. Turn right along the track to bring you to the main A454 at Trescott after ¾ mile.

Turn right along the pavement and, where it ends, cross the road and go down the field boundary at the side of the cottage. Follow the field boundary behind the cottage garden and down the hill to the field corner. Turn right and climb the stile on the left after 60 yards. Turn right along the hedgerow to a stile onto a farm road after 300 yards. Turn left along the road and then right across the farmyard when you reach a pole-mounted electricity transformer on the left. At the far side of the farmyard, enter the corner of a field and follow a headland track on the right. Go through the gap in the next field corner and bear left across the open field to arrive at a stile after 300 yards. Cross a narrow meadow to a double stile opposite.

Go straight ahead up the next field, parallel to the hedgeline on the left, to arrive at a plank bridge over a ditch, by the corner of a fenced yard. Climb the stile immediately ahead; go between the fence lines and through a gap at the side of a steel gate on the left. Turn right through the gateway onto a rough fenced track. Turn right along the track to descend to Post Office Road, Seisdon after nearly ½ mile, by the side of Seisdon House.

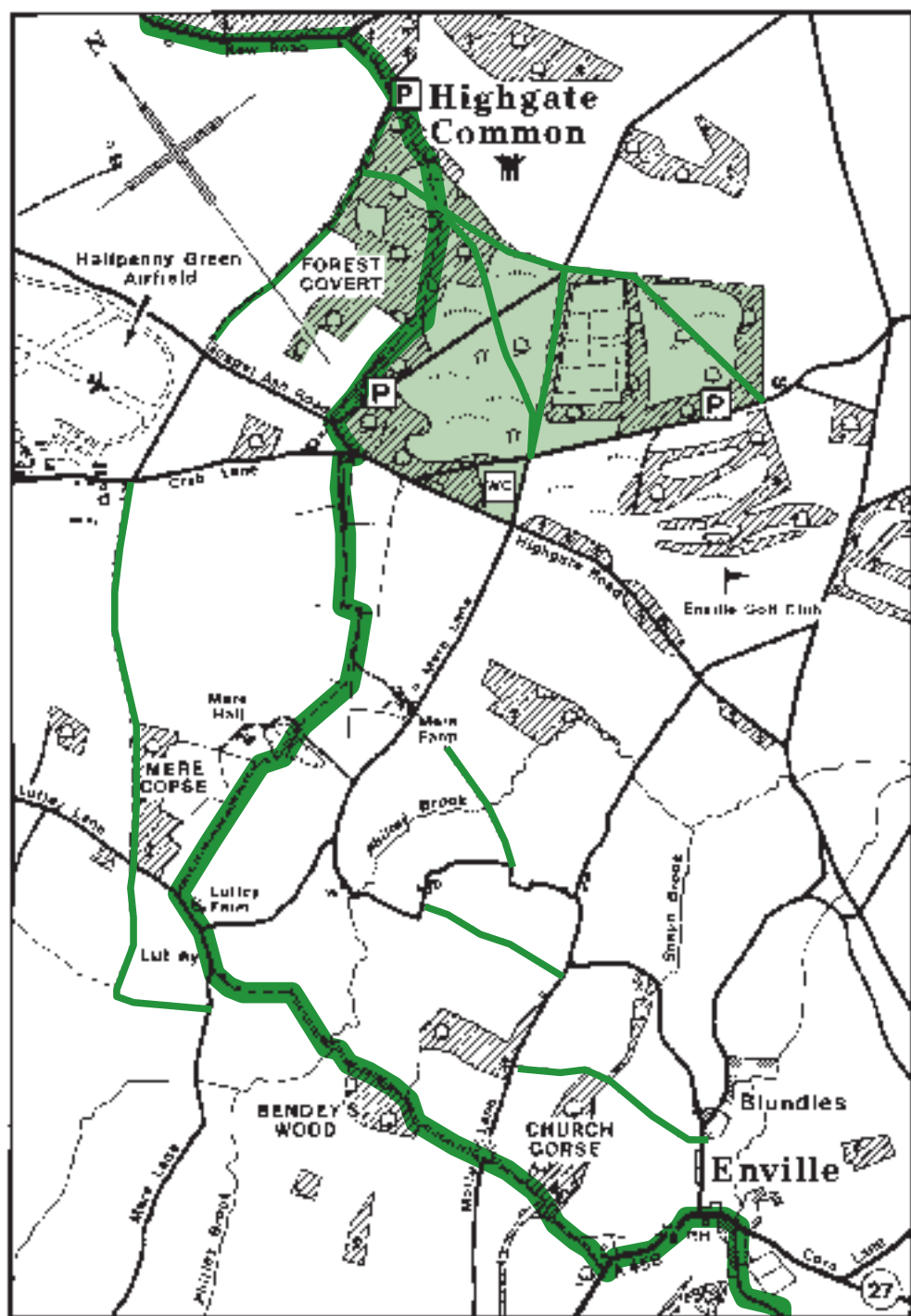


26. SEISDON TO HIGHGATE COMMON (4.1 miles)

Turn right along Post Office Road to arrive at a 'T' junction after nearly ½ mile. Turn left, then immediately right down a rough road, which turns right by an electricity sub-station after 80 yards. After 300 yards the lane passes some large agricultural buildings on the right and 50 yards beyond, go straight ahead through a bridle gate. Follow the hedge on the left, which turns left into the field corner after 300 yards. Go through a gap in the field corner and turn right along the hedgerow, to arrive at a bridle gate onto a farm road. Turn left along the tarmac farm road to the junction with the public road. Turn right up the road. At the top of the hill, turn left down the fenced path in front of the castellated house.

Follow the path along the top of the ridge, against the farm land on the left, to descend gradually to the B.4176 after one mile. Cross the road and go down the farm track immediately opposite. Where the overhead electricity lines cross the track turn left, following the field boundary on your left. Go through the gap in the next field corner and follow a track between the hedgerow on the left and the steep bank of the sand quarry on the right. After 200 yards you go straight past the quarry buildings on the right and emerge onto the public road.

Turn left, then immediately right along New Road. After ½ mile the road bends sharply left in front of a conifer plantation, with a house to the right. Bear right down the track between the plantation and the house, to arrive at the parking area on Highgate Common after 300 yards.



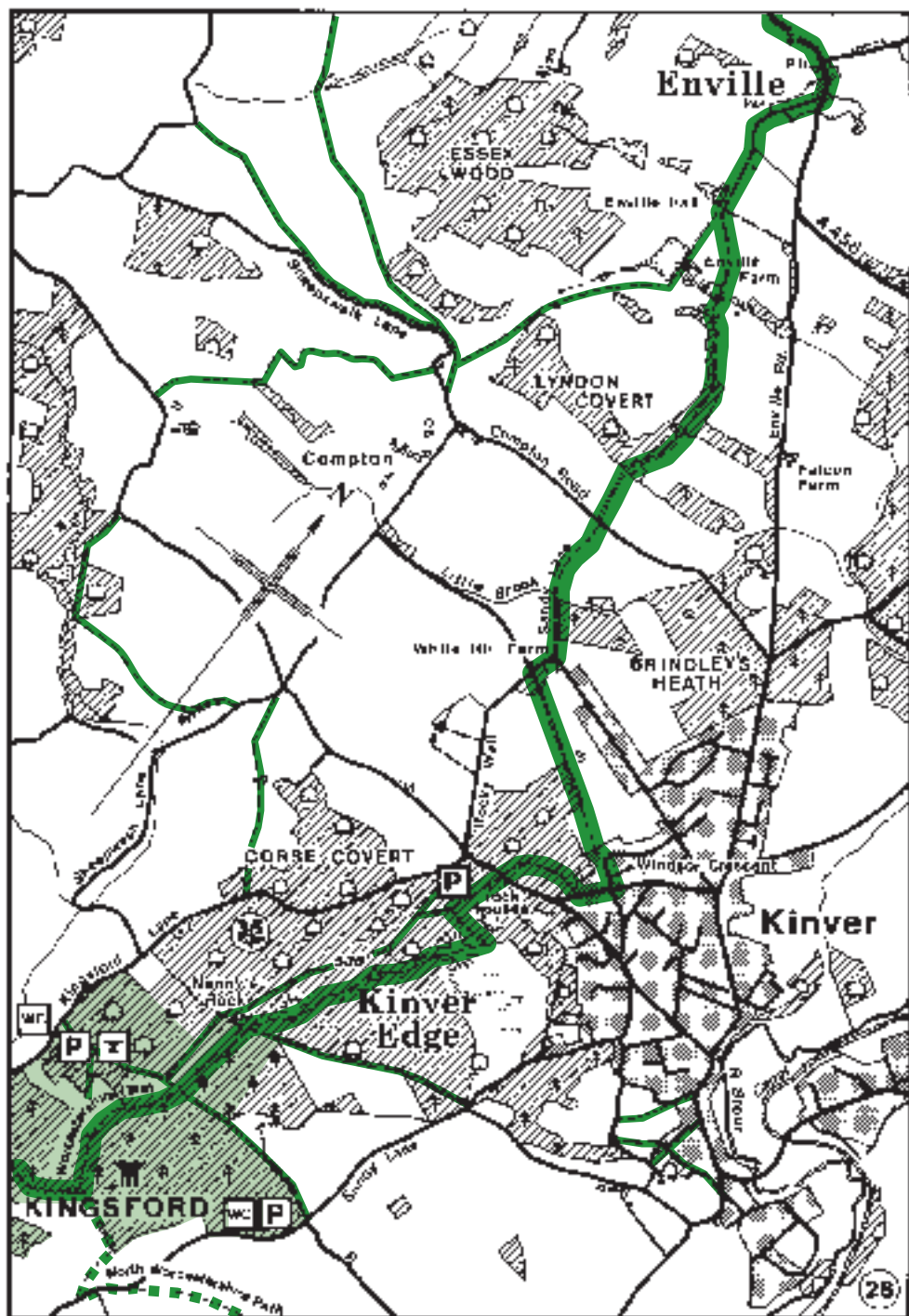
27. HIGHGATE COMMON TO ENVILLE (4.0 miles)

Go through the parking area; pass the pole barrier, and follow the track for 200 yards. Turn left at the junction of tracks. After 100 yards turn right in front of a barrier, along the edge of a clearing. After 200 yards, a wider sandy track is reached. Turn left along the track for 20 yards to where the path splits three ways and bear right. After nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ mile, where the main path turns left up towards the road, you bear right along a narrow track to emerge onto the road after 350 yards. Turn left along it and pass the road junction on the left. Follow the road for 150 yards, then turn right down Crab Lane.

Immediately beyond the cottage on the left, turn left through a gateway onto a fenced track. After $\frac{1}{3}$ mile the track turns left into the field corner and then right along the field boundary to the next corner. Turn right and then left through a gap in the hedge and continue straight ahead between the fences to a gate and stile. Cross the farm road and walk between the pools. Bear right to a gate, and follow a short section of fenced path to a second gate. Follow the left hand hedge through two more fields to the road at Lutley.

Turn left along the road and then bear right at the road junction after 150 yards. After 200 yards turn left down the track at the side of the cottage. Go through the gateway at the end of the track and follow the hedge on the left for 200 yards to the field corner. Turn right and climb the stile in the next field corner. Follow the fenced ditch on the left and drop down to a wicket gate in the next field corner. Cross the stream and follow the path on the embankment into the corner of a field. Keep to the right-hand field boundary through 3 fields, to arrive at the road after $\frac{1}{2}$ mile.

Cross the road and follow the signposted path opposite, down the field boundary on the left. Enter the wood at the bottom of the field and cross the footbridge. Go through the gap and turn left along the fence. After 50 yards bear right up the short length of green lane, which terminates at a white iron handgate. Go through the gate and turn right along the fence, to emerge onto the A458 after 200 yards at Enville Court. Turn left along the verge, and then a pavement, into Enville village.



28. ENVILLE TO KINVER EDGE (3.6 miles)

Immediately after the Cat Inn, cross the main road and go down the drive between the Inn and the enclosed Green. Go through the large white gate ahead and follow the drive past the sports field on the left. Immediately past the Stable Block and the private entrance to Enville Hall on the right, go straight ahead between white gate posts and along a fenced road. Follow the road for 350 yards and pass a pool on the right. Immediately beyond the pool the metalled road turns right and you go straight ahead up a sunken, sandy lane. Various tracks branch off along the lane but continue straight ahead to arrive at the public road after just over $\frac{1}{2}$ mile.

Cross the road and continue along another sunken lane to arrive at a road corner after $\frac{1}{3}$ mile. Turn right down the road for 100 yards to a footpath on the left, immediately opposite the road junction. The path is well defined up the hill and becomes an enclosed path, which terminates at a stile after $\frac{1}{3}$ mile. The path is well defined down the hill, through the trees, and follows the fence on the left to emerge at a gap in the field corner by a wooden electricity pylon. From here bear right across the field to arrive at a stile at the rear of the houses. Follow the path between the houses and turn right along Windsor Crescent.

At the 'T' junction, turn right along the pavement of Meddens Lane, up the hill. Just beyond the last house on the right, go through a gap in the hedge into the wood. Take the left-hand path, which is well defined up through the trees. The path descends and crosses a track. Just afterwards, turn left up through the pines to emerge onto the road opposite a wooden pedestrian safety barrier. Go through the barrier and follow the surfaced path up the hill. Twenty yards beyond where the path begins to descend, you come to a cross path. Turn left to follow this path steeply up onto Kinver Edge. Turn right along the wide path and pass the Trig Point after $\frac{1}{3}$ mile. Continue along the wide path on the Edge to a pole barrier on the County boundary where there is a display board and signpost at the junction of the Staffordshire Way, Worcestershire Way and North Worcestershire Path.

Staffordshire Way and the Way for the Millennium Accommodation Guide Annual Guided Walks & Events Programme

Free leaflets available from:
Staffordshire County Council
Wedgwood Building
Block A, Tipping Street
Stafford ST16 2DH
Tel: 01785 277261
Enclose 50p for postage

Various trail walking and Country Parks leaflets, 30p
12 Staffordshire Way Circular Walks leaflets (30p each)
Staffordshire Way Circular Walks booklet of 12 walks (£2.50)
Cannock Chase Map (£1.20)

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Staffordshire County Council
Wedgwood Building
Block A, Tipping Street
Stafford ST16 2DH
Tel: 01785 277261
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Make cheques payable to
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Cannock Chase Map (£1.20)

Illustrated map and information notes for the whole of the Area of Outstanding natural beauty and public access land. Available from local bookshops and information centres. Also available from:
Staffordshire County Council
Wedgwood Building
Block A, Tipping Street
Stafford ST16 2DH
Tel: 01785 277261
Enclose 50p for postage
Make cheques payable to
'Staffordshire County Council'

Worcestershire Way (map pack)
North Worcestershire Path (leaflet)

Available from:
County Hall, Spetchley Road
Worcester WR5 2NP
Tel: 01905763763 (send SAE)

Gritstone Trail Walkers Guide
Mow Cop trail Walkers Guide

Available from:
Cheshire East Council, Westfields
Middlewich Road, Sandbach
CW11 1HZ
Tel: 0300 123 55 00
or
Cheshire West & Chester Council
HQ, Nicholas Street, Chester
CH1 2NP

Staffordshire Moorlands Walks (£3.00)

Pack of 12 guides, some linking
with the Staffordshire Way.
Available from the Tourist
Information Centre, 1 Market
Place, Leek, Staffordshire ST13
5HH
Tel: 01538 483741
Includes 50p for postage

South Staffordshire Walks

Free Leaflets from South
Staffordshire Council, Council
Offices, Wolverhampton Road,
Codsall, Wolverhampton, South
Staffordshire WV8 1PX
Tel: 01902 696000 (send SAE)

Ordnance Survey Maps
(for coverage of the Staffordshire Way)

1:25,000 Explorer Maps –
219, 242, 244, 258, 259 and OL24

1:50,000 Landranger Maps –
118, 119, 127, 128, 138, 139

Burton upon Trent

Tourist Information Centre
Coors Visitor Centre, Horninglow Street
Burton upon Trent DE14 1NG
Tel: 01283 508111
tic@eaststaffsbc.gov.uk
www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk

Cannock

The Museum of Cannock Chase
The Valley Heritage Centre
Valley Road, Hednesford
Cannock WS12 5TD
Tel: 01543 877666
museum@cannockchasedc.gov.uk
www.museumofcannockchase.co.uk

Leek

Leek Tourist Information
1 Market Place
Leek ST13 5HH
Tel: 01538 483741
tourism.services@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk
www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk

Lichfield

Tourist Information Centre
Lichfield Garrick, Castle dyke
Lichfield WS13 6HR
Tel: 01543 412112
info@visitlichfield.com
www.lichfield-tourist.co.uk

Newcastle-under-Lyme
Tourist Information Centre
The Library, Ironmarket
Newcastle-under-Lyme ST5 1AT
Tel: 01782 297313
tic.newcastle@staffordshire.gov.uk
www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk

Stafford
Tourist Information Centre
Stafford Gatehouse Theatre
Eastgate Street
Stafford ST16 2LT
Tel: 0871 716 1932
tic@staffordbc.gov.uk
www.staffordbc.gov.uk

Stoke-on-Trent
Tourist Information Centre
Potteries Shopping Centre
Quadrant Road, Hanley
Stoke-on-Trent ST1 1RZ
Tel: 01782 236000
stoke.tic@virgin.net
www.stoke.gov.uk/tourism

Tamworth
Tourist Information Centre
29 market Street
Tamworth B79 7LR
Tel: 01827 709581
arts+tourism@tamworth.gov.uk

For rail and coach information, contact the National Travel Line
0871 200 22 33

Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone.

Take your litter home.

Help to keep all water clean.

Protect wildlife, plants and trees.

Take special care on country roads.

Make no unnecessary noise.

Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work.

Guard against all risk of fire.

Fasten all gates.

Keep your dogs under close control.

Keep to public paths across farmland.

Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls.

