

Staffordshire Tolkien Trail



Three circular walks in the
footsteps of J.R.R. Tolkien

Revised 2nd Edition

Created by Scott Whitehouse & David Robbie

J.R.R. Tolkien in Staffordshire

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, the world-famous author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, spent an important period of his early life in Staffordshire when he was posted to the Army training camps on Cannock Chase during the Great War. In 1914 Lord Lichfield had given permission for two large training and transit camps to be constructed on Cannock Chase. The camps at Rugeley and Brocton were able to accommodate around 40,000 men and it is estimated that around half a million soldiers passed through the camps during the war. Cannock Chase became a new town of serried ranks of huts, occupied by officers and men of the British Army for the duration; there were also shops, a hospital, a power station and water tower serving the camps and a cross-Chase railway, known as the Tackeroo. In addition training grounds, practice trenches, drill squares and rifle and grenade ranges were constructed to prepare soldiers for the front line in France and beyond.

The Great War years were a formative period in the development of Tolkien's work on the mythology, languages, history and geography of what would become Middle-earth (his Legendarium) and references in some of his writings relate to Staffordshire - Great Haywood, Shugborough Hall, Gipsy Green near Penkridge and Cannock Chase - as well as to other places further afield such as Warwick, the Holderness Peninsula, Oxford and Cheltenham. Influences can be traced in his creative work, in particular his contemporary poetry and also *The Book of Lost Tales*, which was a forerunner to *The Silmarillion*.

From the spring of 1916 Tolkien stayed in Great Haywood with his wife, Edith. Great Haywood, with its confluence of the Rivers Sow and Trent at Essex Bridge, became *Tavrobel* where the Rivers *Gruir* and *Afros* of Middle-earth met, near *The House of a Hundred Chimneys* which is believed to be based on Shugborough Hall. The delightful little Essex Bridge became *The Grey Bridge of Tavrobel* in a ballad written during his stay.

Tolkien served as an officer in the Lancashire Fusiliers and was posted to France in June 1916 and served at The Battle of the Somme, returning to Great Haywood later that year to recuperate from trench fever. Here he began work on what would become *The Book of Lost Tales*, in particular the stories *The Cottage of Lost Play* and *The Fall of Gondolin*. After his extended period of convalescent leave in Great Haywood, Tolkien was posted away on 23rd February 1917 to a hospital in Harrogate, Yorkshire. Edith would follow him and the couple would not return to Staffordshire for more than a year.

In 1918 Tolkien was posted back to Cannock Chase and with his wife, and new-born son John, moved briefly to Penkridge. They rented a cottage at Gipsy Green on the Teddesley Park Estate, which later featured as *Fladweth Amrod*, or Nomad's Green, in his writings for *The Book of Lost Tales*. He regularly cycled between the camps and the cottage at Gipsy Green. He made several notable illustrations during his brief time there, one of the cottage that still stands and another, *High Life at Gipsy Green* detailing life at the cottage and in camp, before being sent to hospital in Hull following an unpleasant attack of gastritis in late June. Edith, exhausted by so many moves and her recent pregnancy, remained at Gipsy Green and then returned to Cheltenham. She later joined Tolkien in Oxford where he had found employment working on the Oxford English Dictionary.

The Staffordshire Tolkien Trail

The Staffordshire Tolkien Trail is a series of three linked walks that cover over 30 miles of the Staffordshire countryside on and around Cannock Chase. The walks focus on Staffordshire's J.R.R. Tolkien connection, but also offer lots of other local history interest, great Staffordshire views and are a fantastic way to stay healthy and enjoy Staffordshire's cultural and rural environment.

Some of the key locations visited in the following walks are:

- Great Haywood and Essex Bridge
- Shugborough Hall
- Brocton Coppice
- The Sherbrook Valley
- Oldacre Valley and M-Lines Officers' Huts
- Chase Road Corner and P-Lines Officers' Huts
- Rifle Ranges
- Marquis Drive Visitor Centre and Great War Hut
- Cannock Chase War Cemetery
- Gipsy Green, Teddesley Hay

Although three walk routes are suggested here the walks are flexible - you are free to walk in stages or drive to locations of interest. The walks include some moderately busy and quiet roads, sometimes with no footpath, so please take care for traffic, especially when crossing busy A roads. There are some minor to moderately steep inclines on the route. Take care when crossing fields occupied by livestock.

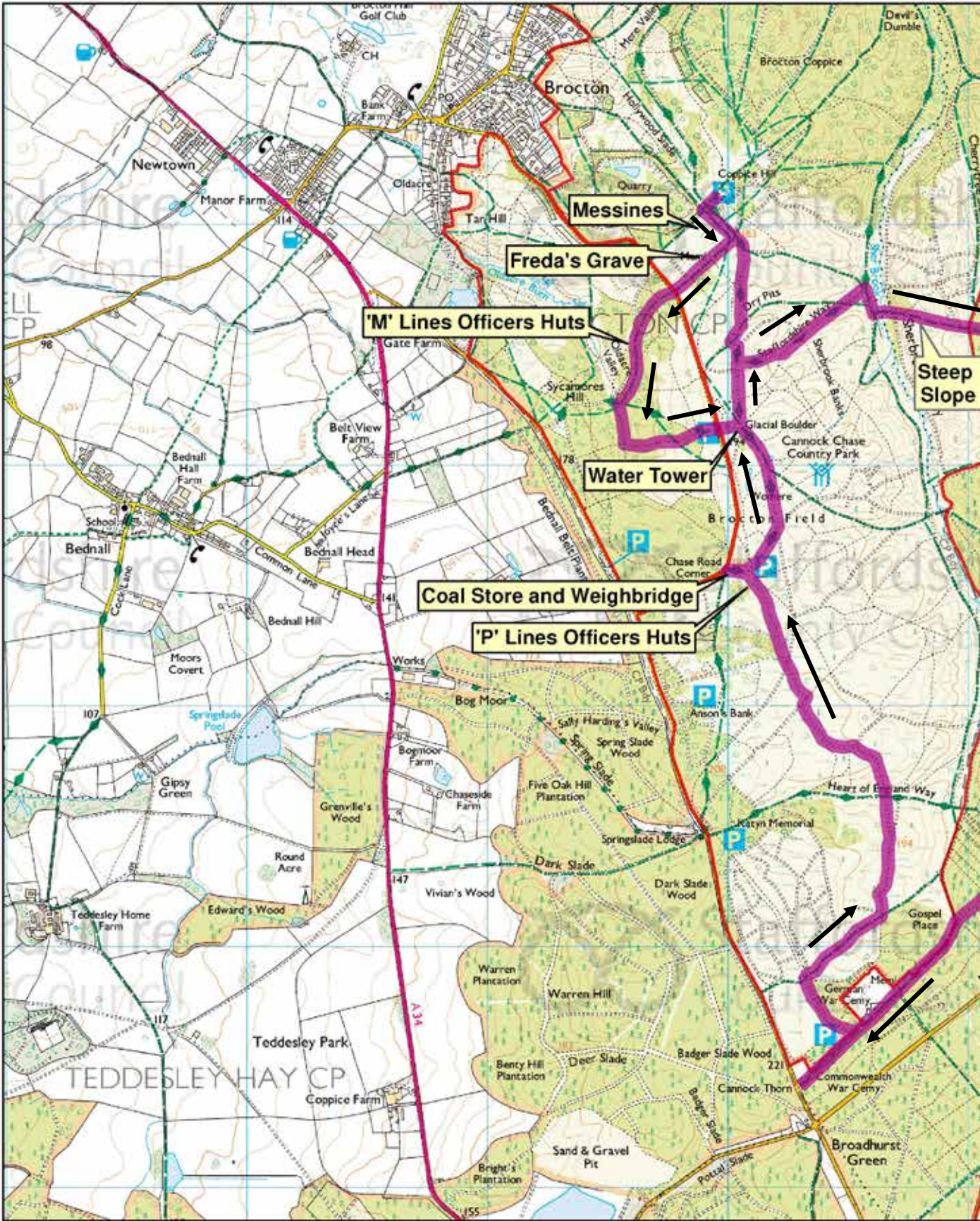
Please take your litter home with you and follow the Countryside Code.

Some of the sites visited do not contain obvious archaeological features and we would discourage anyone from leaving well trodden paths to explore. Most of the open heath in the Country Park and near Rugeley Quarry is designated a Special Area of Conservation for its rare and sensitive heathland and wetland areas (see maps for designated areas). Important and scarce wildlife can also be found here, including nesting birds, reptiles, amphibians and butterflies and moths. You can avoid harming or disturbing these habitats and the special animals living in them by keeping to paths, especially in the spring and summer months.

Contact number for County Ranger Service - 01543 871773

Cannock Chase is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. For further information please visit www.staffordshire.gov.uk (search for Countryside) or visit the AONB website at www.cannock-chase.co.uk





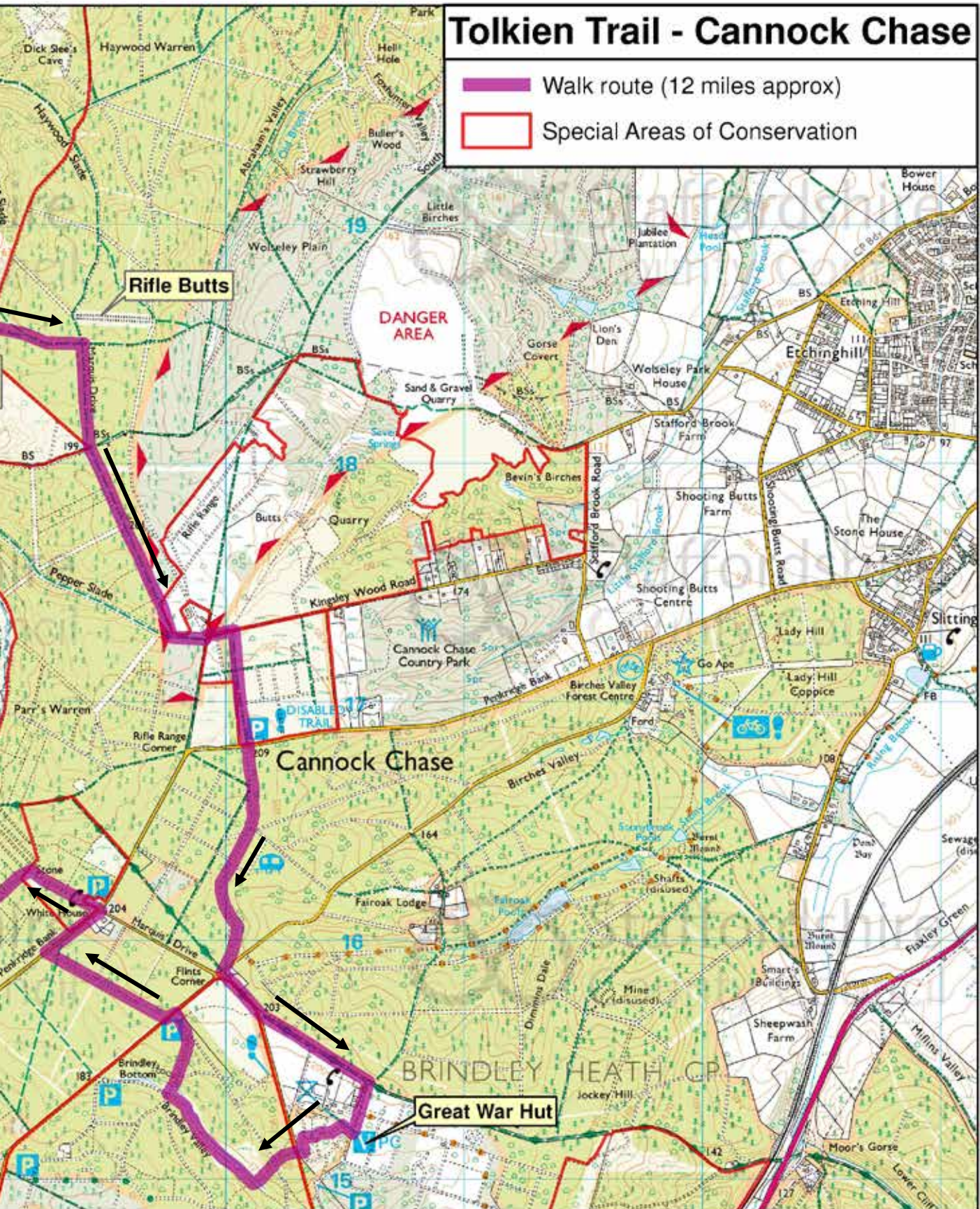


0 0.5 1 Kilometres



Tolkien Trail - Cannock Chase

-  Walk route (12 miles approx)
-  Special Areas of Conservation



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Tolkien Trail: Cannock Chase Walk

A circular walk of about 12 miles departing from Coppice Hill Car Park, Brocton, exploring the remains of Brocton Camp, Oldacre Valley and the Glacial Boulder. The walk descends into the Sherbrook Valley and moves on to the Rifle Ranges, then follows paths across the remains of Rugeley Camp to Marquis Drive Visitor Centre. From here the route passes through Brindley Valley and visits the War Cemeteries via The White House before returning to Coppice Hill via Chase Road Corner.



The Coppice Hill Car Park is accessed from Brocton Village to the North or Chase Road Corner to the South. (Please do not leave any valuables in your car)

Directions:

- From Coppice Hill Car Park walk to Heart of England Way and follow signs to site of Freda's Grave. (A short detour can be taken to site of The Messines Model).
- Follow footpath SW, crossing road, and down into Oldacre Valley. The path passes through remains of M-Lines near the valley bottom.
- Walk along the Oldacre Valley and climb out to reach the Glacial Boulder (Water Tower site) and Tackeroo earthworks. Turn left onto the Heart of England Way, then right down the Staffordshire Way into the Sherbrook Valley.
- Cross the Sher Brook and climb steeply uphill and follow the path to the Rifle Butts on Marquis Drive. After exploring these, head south down Marquis Drive, turning right to cross the remains of Rugeley Camp once you have reached Kingsley Wood Road.
- Follow the footpath, crossing Penkrudge Bank and walking through the Tackeroo camp site (more remains of Rugeley Camp to be seen here) and on to Flint's Corner, crossing The Birches Valley road. Follow Marquis Drive to the Cannock Chase Visitor Centre and Great War Hut. Refreshments and toilets are available here. (Note: The Great War Hut operates limited opening hours)
- From the Visitor Centre follow the footpath, across Brindley Heath Road, into Brindley Valley. Walk up the valley to Brindley Bottom, turning right and walking up to Flint's Field Car Park. Cross the road and walk through the plantation until you reach Penkrudge Bank. Cross the road and carefully walk along the verge to car park opposite The White House and explore the remains. Walk on to the Bremen 25 Stone, turn left and cross the Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- Walk up to the German Military Cemetery and then on to the Cannock Chase War Cemetery. Double back from here and turn left until a small car park is reached. Turn right and walk down towards Gospel Place, turning left half way down the hill and following a well trodden path to Chase Road Corner where you can explore the remains of the P-Lines Officers' Huts and the coal store and weighbridge.
- Join the Heart of England Way and walk back to Coppice Hill Car Park, passing the Womere, Glacial Boulder and Tackeroo earthworks.



Tolkien Trail: Great Haywood Walk

A circular walk of about 10 miles departing from Coppice Hill Car Park, Brocton, exploring the route taken by J.R.R. Tolkien from Brocton Camp down to the delightful village of Great Haywood. This walk passes through Brocton Coppice and into the Sherbrook Valley, following the Staffordshire Way, past The Punch Bowl and across the National Trust's Shugborough Estate, entering Great Haywood, as Tolkien did, across Essex Bridge. It is suggested that the detailed map and guide, written by local historian David Robbie, on the following page is consulted for exploration of the village and then the route to Little Haywood, along the canal towpath, should be followed.

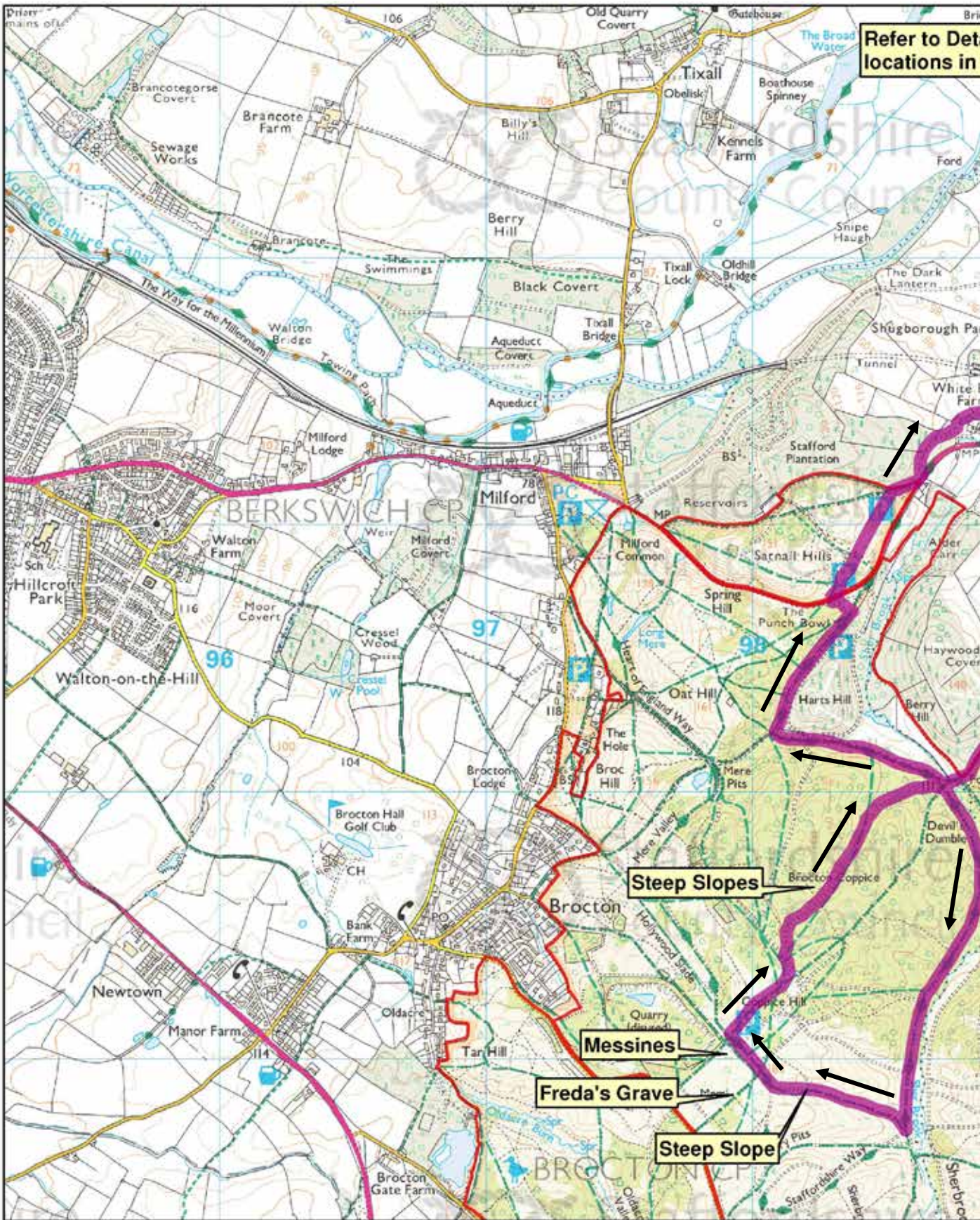


The route then makes its way back to Coppice Hill via Seven Springs and the Sherbrook Valley.

Directions:



- From Coppice Hill Car Park walk NE to the edge of Brocton Coppice, turn left then soon after right and walk gently down hill through the ancient woodland until you emerge into the Sherbrook Valley. Please keep to the paths to avoid spreading infectious fungi - *Phytophthora pseudosyringae*.
- Follow the footpath around Harts Hill to The Punch Bowl Car Park. Cross the A513, taking great care on this busy road and, after walking through the Satnall Hills Car Park, follow the path through woodland parallel to the road for about a mile. You will eventually emerge on a quiet road, passing White Barn Farm before re-joining the Staffordshire Way.
- Follow the Staffordshire Way down across the Shugborough Estate enjoying views as you walk. Look out for a great pine tree near the farm; could this be Tolkien's *Great Pine of Tavrobel*?
- Continue along the Staffordshire Way, passing Shugborough Hall itself, Tolkien's *House of a Hundred Chimneys*, arriving at Essex Bridge (*The Grey Bridge of Tavrobel*) at the confluence of the Sow and Trent Rivers. Now Read 'Tolkien's Great Haywood.'
- Upon completing Tolkien's Great Haywood tour walk to Little Haywood along the canal towpath, en route to Cannock Chase via Weetman's Bridge and Seven Springs. Take care crossing the road.
- Walk to the Sherbrook Valley, crossing the stepping stones and walk upstream, enjoying the scenery and babbling brook.
- Eventually turn right, walking uphill until you join the route of the Tackeroo railway which you can follow back to the Coppice Hill Car Park.

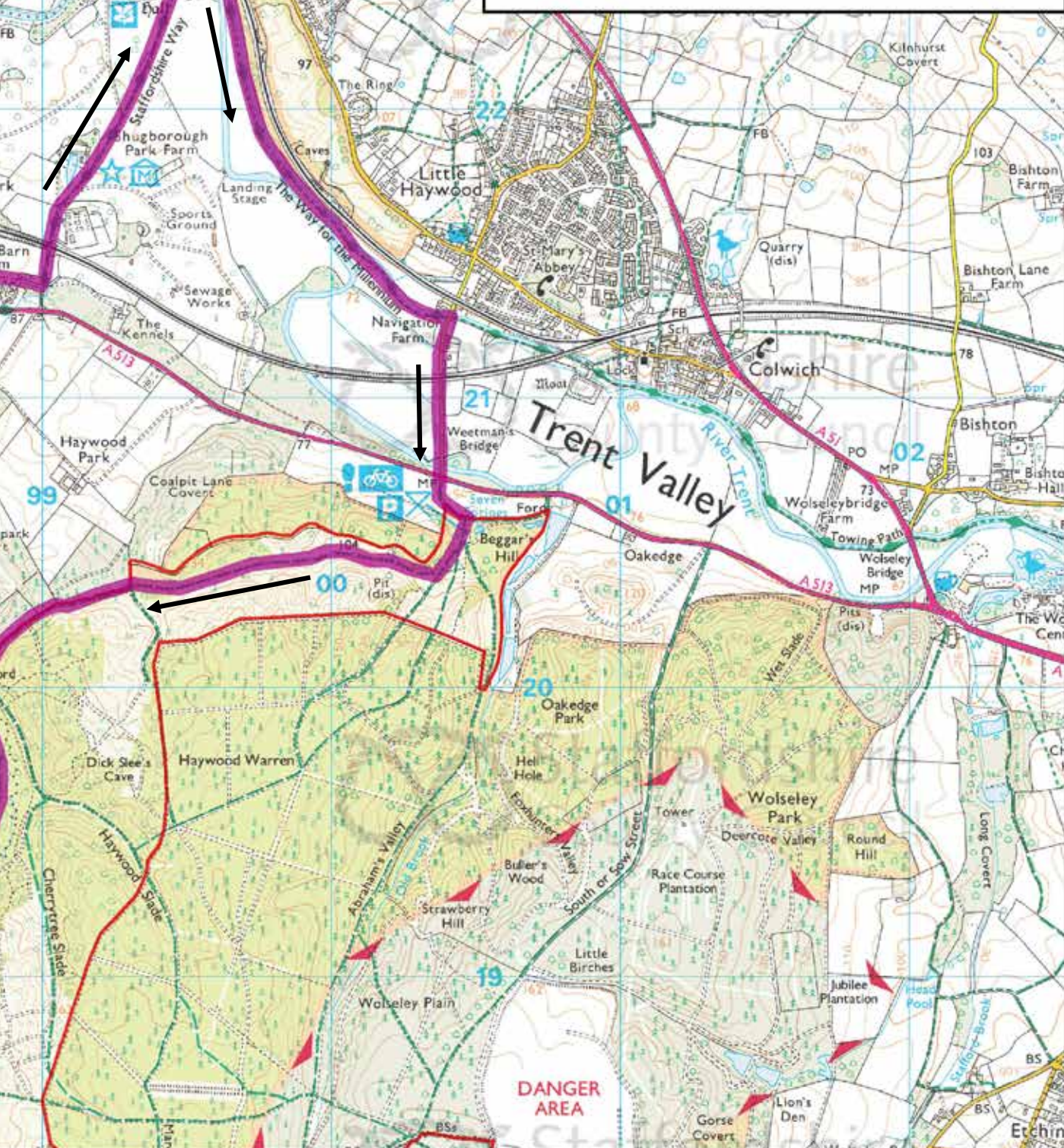




Trail Map for Great Haywood

Tolkien Trail - Great Haywood

-  Walk route (10 miles approx)
-  Special Areas of Conservation



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Tolkien's Great Haywood 1916 - 1917

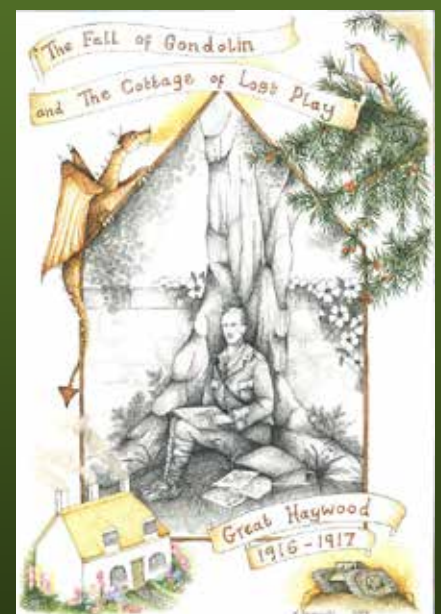
Between November 1915 and June 1916 J.R.R. Tolkien was stationed at Rugeley and Brocton Military Camps on Cannock Chase. After his marriage to Edith Bratt in March 1916, the couple came to Great Haywood to look for accommodation for Edith. It was quite common for officers to find lodgings for their wives near their camps and the Tolkiens probably chose Great Haywood because it was quite close to Brocton Camp and also had a Catholic church, St. John the Baptist.

On their first visit they may have stayed at the **Clifford Arms** or at **Mrs. Asbury's boarding house** while they looked for lodgings. They met the local parish priest, Father Augustin Emery, and Edith and her cousin Jennie Grove, who was to accompany her, may have stayed briefly at **St. John's Presbytery** as his guests. Fr. Emery was to become a personal friend ('Uncle Gus') of the Tolkiens and they were to enjoy several musical evenings together at the Presbytery. Edith was a fine pianist while Fr. Emery played the violin.

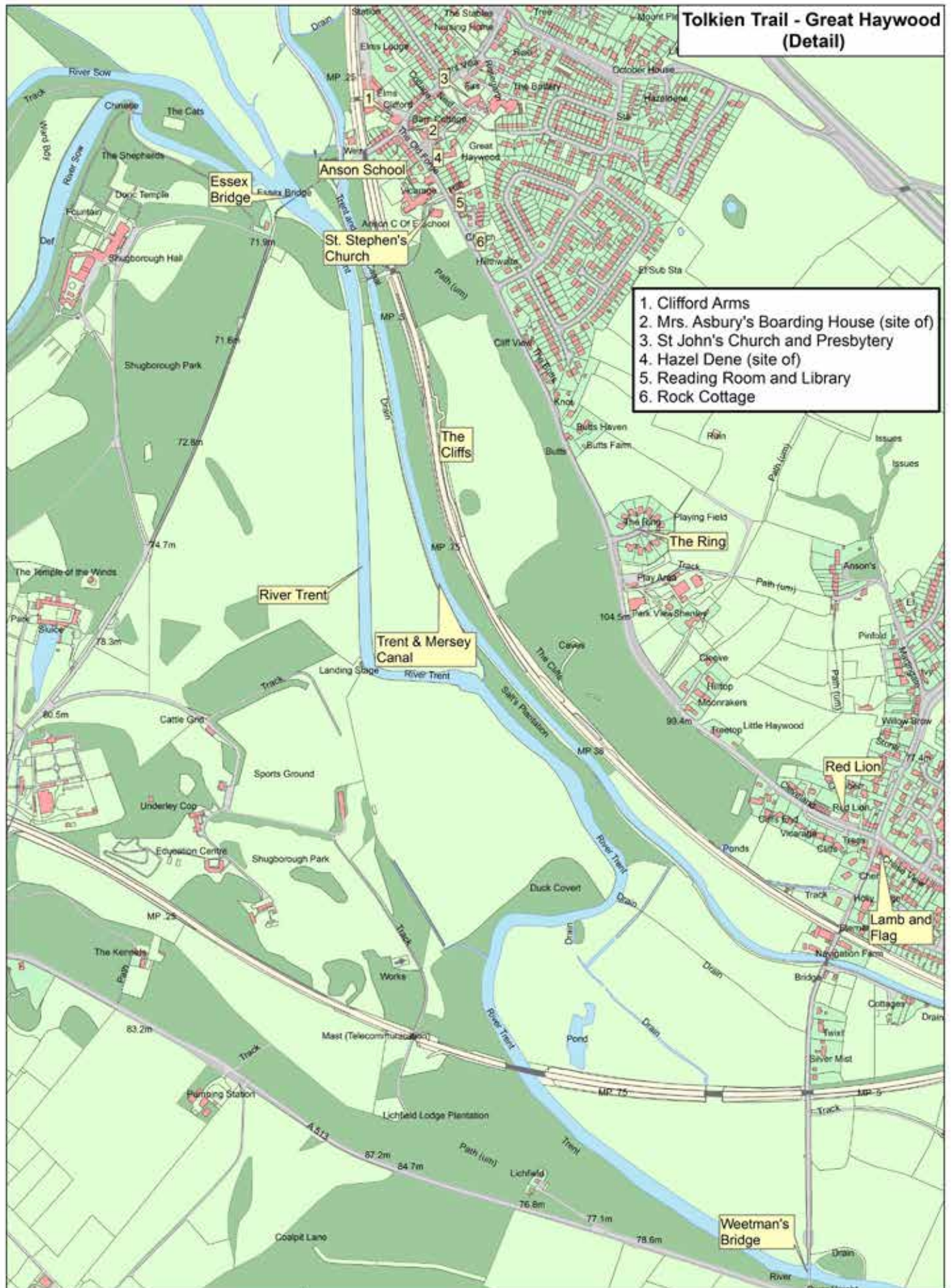


Edith and Jennie later moved to some furnished rooms at the home of a Mr. and Mrs. Kendrick, at **Hazel Dene**, where they were visited on the weekend of 27th-28th May by Ronald's close friend from schooldays, Geoffrey Bache Smith, who described it as a 'splendid two days'. They also received a Nuptial Blessing for their marriage from Fr. Emery. On Ronald's return to Great Haywood on the 9th December 1916 after the Battle of the Somme, he and Edith lived together for almost three months either in rooms at Hazel Dene or in a rented cottage, which may have been what is now called Rock Cottage. There is some circumstantial evidence and literary allusions that support this idea. During this time in the village Tolkien recovered from his experiences in the trenches and a serious bout of trench fever.

Edith and Ronald did their best to put the war and the cold winter out of their minds and to make the most of their short time together here. During the day, wrapped up against the cold, they went on long walks in the village and along the Trent and the canals, and close to Shugborough Hall. In the evenings they made log fires in their lodgings, where Edith played the piano while Ronald read poetry, sketched and wrote. It was here that Ronald was able for the first time since he left university to concentrate his mind on writing the mythological stories that were, in time, to evolve into ***The Hobbit***, ***The Lord of the Rings*** and ***The Silmarillion***. His most important writings here were ***The Fall of Gondolin***, which was very much influenced by his experiences on the Somme battlefield, and ***The Cottage of Lost Play***, the foundational story for all his later writings. Both stories were later published as parts of his ***Book of Lost Tales***. The Tolkiens finally left Great Haywood on 23rd February 1917, when a still poorly Ronald was transferred to a hospital in Harrogate, Yorkshire. They would not return to Staffordshire until 1918.



Tolkien Trail - Great Haywood (Detail)



1. Clifford Arms
2. Mrs. Asbury's Boarding House (site of)
3. St John's Church and Presbytery
4. Hazel Dene (site of)
5. Reading Room and Library
6. Rock Cottage

0 250 Metres



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Tolkien Trail - Gipsy Green



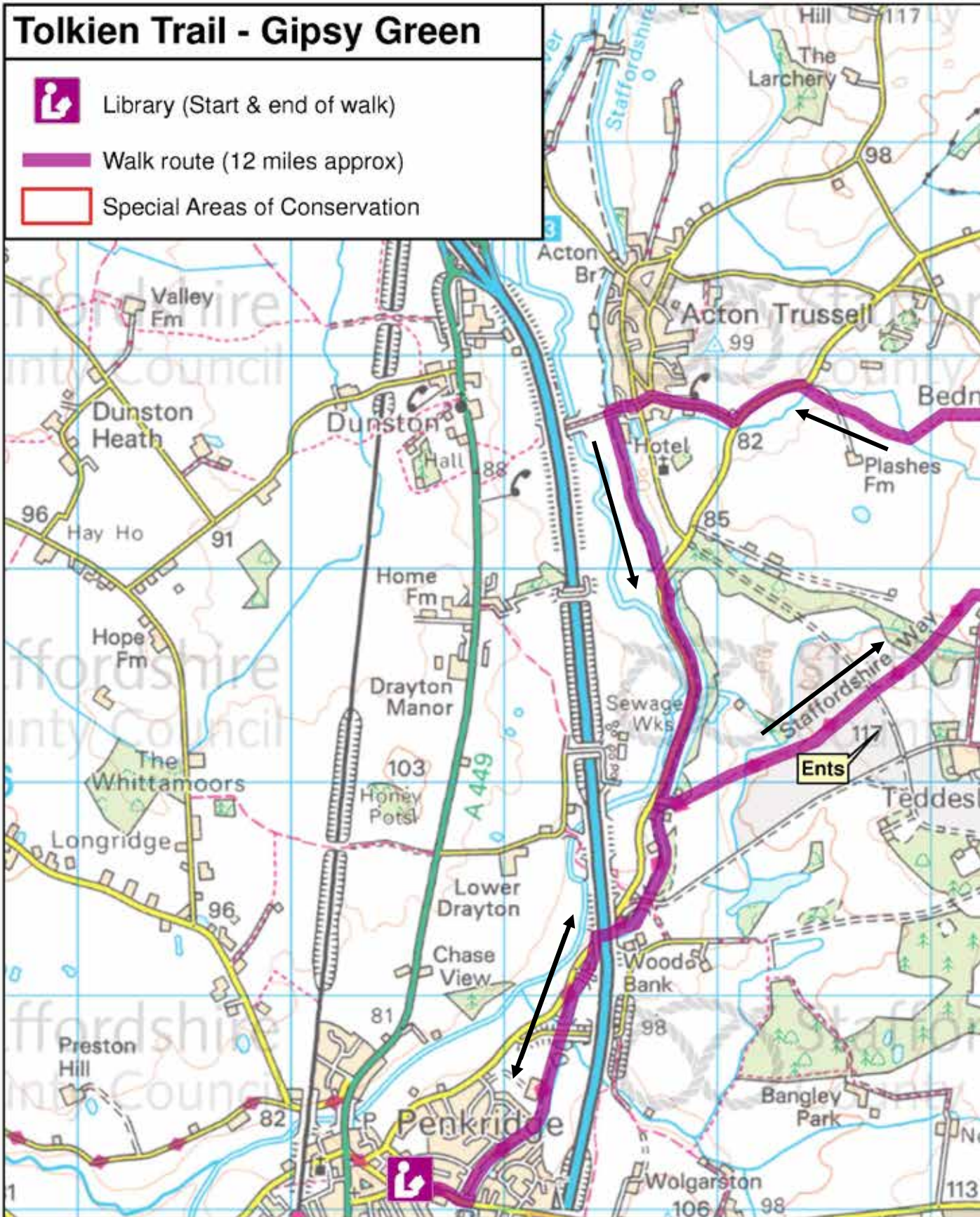
Library (Start & end of walk)



Walk route (12 miles approx)

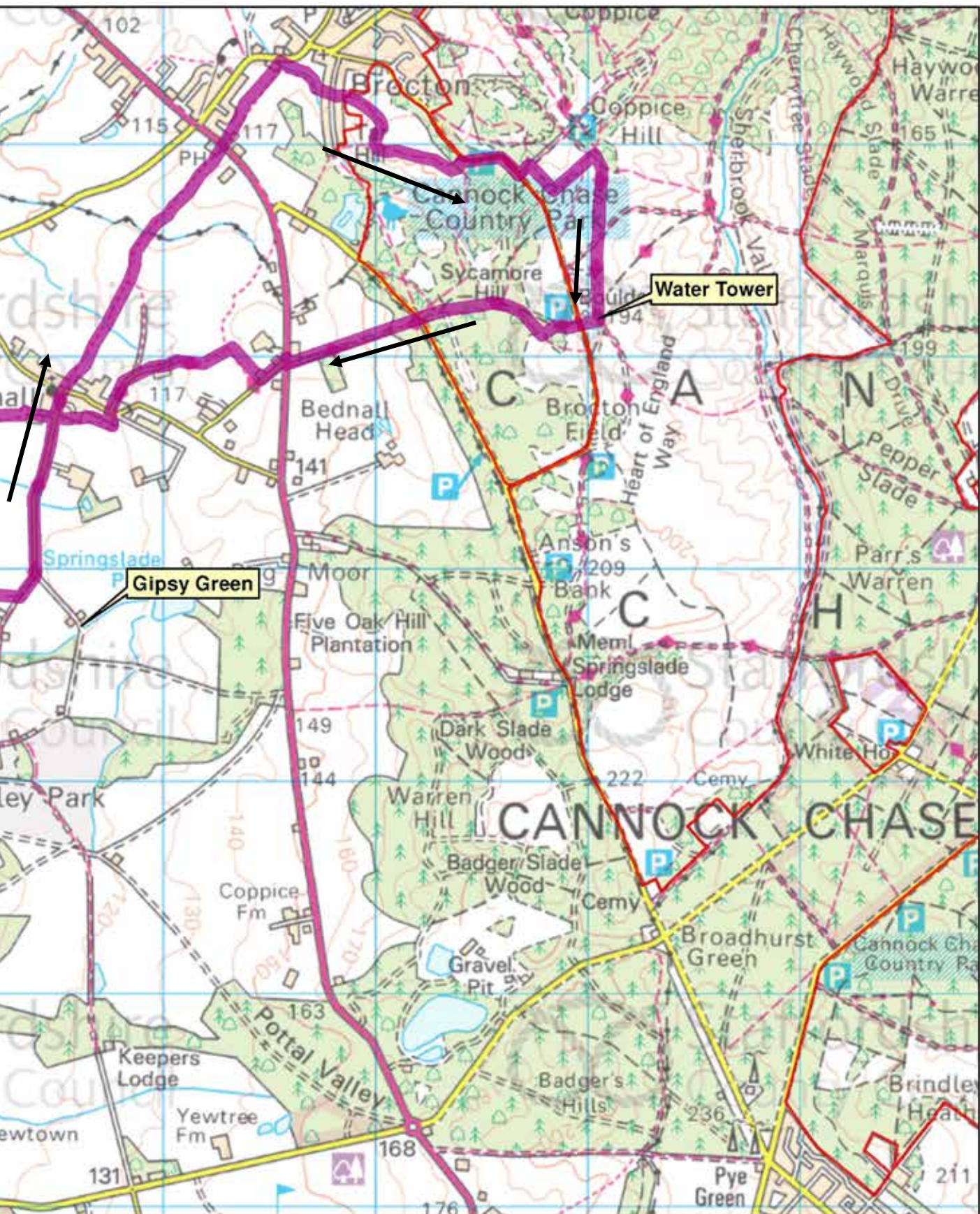


Special Areas of Conservation



0 0.5 1 Kilometres





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Tolkien Trail: Gipsy Green/ Brocton Camp Walk

A circular walk of about 12 miles departing from Penkridge Library follows the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal and the Staffordshire Way to Gipsy Green, on to Bednall and then to Brocton via footpaths. From Brocton the walk heads up on to Cannock Chase and the site of Brocton Camp. It then heads back down to Bednall and on to Acton Trussell following footpaths, returning to Penkridge via the canal towpath. Much of the route is well trodden and there are a great many stiles. Take care when crossing fields occupied by livestock. Penkridge Library is situated at Bellbrook; there is lots of free parking at the nearby Haling Dene Centre.



Directions:

- From Penkridge Library walk up Cannock Road, pass The Haling Dene Centre and turn left down on to the canal towpath at The Boat public house.
- Follow the towpath to Parkgate Lock. From here follow the Staffordshire Way over Teddesley Park, enjoying fine views of Staffordshire and Shropshire, until reaching Gipsy Green where Tolkien's cottage of 1918 can be seen.
- Follow Cock Lane into Bednall passing the school and 19th century Church.
- Cross Common Lane and follow the well-signposted footpath to Brocton, emerging on the A34. Cross carefully here and continue to follow the footpath, taking a right turn in front of a playing area after the stables. Follow this footpath up quite a steep hill on to Tar Hill, briefly crossing Oldacre Lane en route.
- Follow the main footpath around Tar Hill, eventually crossing Chase Road. Proceed towards Coppice Hill car park, but turn right to view the site of the Messines Model, then down a green path, following signs for Freda's Grave. A little further on, amidst the ruins of Brocton Camp, is Freda's Grave, a monument to the mascot of the New Zealand Rifles, a harlequin Great Dane that died in 1918.
- Follow the Heart of England Way and Staffordshire Way south to the Glacial Boulder, site of the water tower which served the camp during the Great War
- From here follow The Staffordshire Way down Sycamore Hill, crossing Camp Road and the busy A34 back to Bednall.
- At the end of Richfield Lane, cross Common Road and walk up Smithy Lane to a footpath. Follow this footpath, crossing Cock Lane, across fields to Teddesley Road.
- After a brief walk down this quite busy road, turn right down Meadow Lane and walk into Acton Trussell. Bear left on to Barnfield Road, cross Penkridge Road into Moathouse Close, pass The Moat House and turn left on to a footpath which crosses the canal.
- Follow the towpath all the way back to Penkridge Library where you can explore the J.R.R. Tolkien Collection



A 'Tolkien in Staffordshire' Wartime Chronology 1915 - 1918

- 19 July 1915 to August: Basic Training in Bedford. Assigned to 13th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers
- August: Posted to Whittington Heath Camp, Lichfield. Rewrites poems *The Happy Mariners* and *Thoughts on Parade* (begun in Bedford)
- 12 September: Poem *A Song of Aryador (The Book of Lost Tales)*
- 14 September: Poem *Dark are the Clouds about the North*
- 25 to 26 September: The T.C.B.S 'Council of Lichfield' at The George Hotel. Last meeting of Tolkien, Smith, Wiseman and Gilson
- 27 to 30 September: Attends musketry camp at Newcastle-under-Lyme
- November: 13th Battalion moves to Rugeley Camp, Cannock Chase
- 21 to 28 November: Poem *Kortirion among the Trees (The Book of Lost Tales)*
- 28 November to 4 December: Poem *The Pool of the Dead Year (and the Passing of Autumn)*
- December: 13th Battalion moves to Brocton Camp. Tolkien billeted in P-Lines Officers' huts, near Chase Road Corner
- December: Poem *Habbanan beneath the Stars* (completed at Étaples June 1916)
- December 1915 to February 1916: Poem *Over Old Hills and Far Away*
- 3 February: By this time billeted at M-Lines Officers' huts, Oldacre Valley, Brocton Camp
- March: Completes poem in Qenya called *Narqelion*, which translates as 'Autumn', inspired by *Kortirion among the Trees*
- 16 March: Degree ceremony in Oxford
- 22 March: Marriage to Edith at Church of St. Mary the Immaculate, Warwick, followed by a week long honeymoon in Clevedon, Somerset
- 6 April: Still billeted at M-Lines, Brocton Camp
- Mid-April to mid-May: Attends signalling school at Otley, Yorkshire
- 13 May: Qualifies at signalling school
- 26 May: Edith and Jennie arrive in Great Haywood
- 27 to 28 May: Geoffrey Smith in Great Haywood - 'a splendid two days'
- 28 May: Fr. Emery gives Ronald and Edith Tolkien a Nuptial Blessing for their marriage
- 2 June: Informed of posting to British Expeditionary Force in France
- 4 June: Farewell to Edith in Birmingham
- 6 June: Crosses English Channel to France, joins 11th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers
- 1 July: The Battle of the Somme commences (officially ends 13 November)
- 14 July: Edith and Jennie go to Llandudno for summer
- 29 September: Edith and Jennie return to Great Haywood
- 27 October: Contracts trench fever
- 9 December: arrives in Great Haywood to convalesce
- December: Poem *The Grey Bridge of Tavrobel*
- 25 December: Writes poem *G.B.S.* in memory of G.B. Smith who has died of wounds
- 9 December 1916 to 23 February 1917: Recovering at Great Haywood. Begins writing first prose version of his mythology, *The Book of Lost Tales* with the stories *The Cottage of Lost Play* and *The Fall of Gondolin*, and compiles a list of the races and beings that will inhabit his Legendarium
- 27 February: Transferred to Furness Auxiliary Hospital, Harrogate, Yorkshire
- February 1917 to May 1918: Postings on the Holderness Peninsula
- May: Posted back to Rugeley Camp. Edith, baby John and Jennie Grove lodge at Gipsy Green, which becomes *Fladweth Amrod* (Nomad's Green) a place in *Tol Eressëa* visited by Eriol and mentioned in *The Book of Lost Tales*
- May to June: Illustrations of *Gipsy Green*, *High Life at Gipsy Green* and *A Road nr. Stafford*
- June: Transferred to Brocton Camp
- 29 June: Contracts gastritis and sent to hospital in Hull
- 11 November : War ends
- Late November: Family reunited at new home in Oxford

Further Reading

Below are some key titles that contain information about J.R.R. Tolkien's life during the Great War years or about the military camps on Cannock Chase. All are available from Staffordshire Libraries:

Robert S. Blackham, **Tolkien and the Peril of War** (2011)

John Garth, **Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-Earth** (2003)

Wayne G. Hammond & Christina Scull, **J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist & Illustrator** (1995)

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service, **World War I Camps on Cannock Chase - A Short Guide** (2012)

Christopher Tolkien (Ed.), **The Book of Lost Tales Part One** (1983)

Christopher Tolkien (Ed.), **The Book of Lost Tales Part Two** (1984)

C.J. and G.P. Whitehouse, **A Town for Four Winters: An original study of military camps on Cannock Chase during the Great War, 1914-19** (1983)

OS Explorer Map 244 Cannock Chase and Chasewater

Suggested web sites:

Staffordshire Libraries - www.staffordshire.gov.uk/libraries

Staffordshire Past Track - www.staffspasttrack.org.uk

Archives and Heritage - www.staffordshire.gov.uk/archives

Cannock Chase Country Park - www.staffordshire.gov.uk/environment/eLand/Countryside/OpenSpaces/Chase-Park/

The Tolkien Society - www.tolkiensociety.co.uk

Do you have a story to share about Staffordshire's Great War? Let us know at www.staffordshiregreatwar.com

Why not visit the Marquis Drive Visitor Centre to discover other Great War walks on Cannock Chase?

Staffordshire Libraries, through Penkridge Library, has celebrated the local connection with J.R.R. Tolkien over recent years with a variety of events, including the 'Tolkien in Staffordshire' touring exhibition, talks from Tolkien scholars, educational activities for local school classes, family fun days and this Tolkien Trail, which has been created in conjunction with David Robbie (Haywood Society).

Visitors to Penkridge Library can browse a collection of Tolkien stock, including copies of his own published works and many other books relating to all aspects of Middle-earth, from literary criticism and biography to *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* film trilogies, directed by Peter Jackson. Artwork and a fantastic community created mosaic are also on display at the library.

"Tolkien's connections to Staffordshire are well-documented, and I am very pleased that you have taken it upon yourselves to join with the community of Tolkien fans around Britain, and the world, to celebrate and educate people in all matters Tolkien" - Sir Peter Jackson

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