

Country Walks Around Wrexham

No. 2 RUABON - Gardden Woods and Hill-Fort (3.5 miles)

Tatham - Hill-fort - Afon Eitha - Gardden Wood

Please note:

- The curate must be notified in advance if you wish to look inside the church.
- At times the route can be muddy, stout footwear is recommended

Transport

This walk starts in Ruabon, which is on several bus routes from Wrexham.

At the time of writing free car parking space is available at Station Road (grid ref. SJ 300438) but there is also parking in the village centre nearby.

Walk Directions

Starting from Station Road, turn left onto the main road, passing the **Roundhouse (1)**, an early 18th century jail. A few metres further on is the **Wynnstay Arms (2)**, an old coach-house.

Turn left by the 13th century **Church of St Mary (3)**. Soon you will pass the **Old Grammar School (4)** on your left and the almshouses on your right.

Just over the railway bridge turn right and follow the footpath along the edge of the cemetery. Cow parsley and rosebay willow herb grow here in abundance. There is a good view to your right of houses built from the famous local red brick, a clay-pit can also be seen to your left.

Turn left following the cemetery boundary. Look northeast and on a clear day the Peckforton Hills and Beeston Castle can be seen in the distance. Continue STRAIGHT AHEAD into the next field with the hedge on your RIGHT. You are now on what was probably an

original track from the hill fort, which you will see later. Follow the same line along a muddy lane to **Tatham Farm (5)**.

Go quietly through the farmyard, passing the recent barn conversions, to the road and turn right. Going downhill this lane runs adjacent to **Offa's Dyke (6)**, which is the bank on your right. There are some majestic old oak, beech and sycamore trees here. You will also pass a 'Ruabon Heritage Trail' information board. Turn left just before the Industrial Estate into a lane. Going steeply uphill, you may notice the great variety of plant life here. Herb robert, ramsons, hart's tongue fern, foxglove and woody nightshade abound; also holly, horse chestnut and elder trees.

Follow the bend round to the right past the chalet-type house. Further on note the **Ice-House** on the left and on the opposite side of the road the site of **Gardden Lodge (7)**. Up around the bend and past Pen-y-coed, the remains of the prehistoric **Hillfort (8)** come into view. Here there is a second 'Ruabon Heritage Trail' board, with some interesting natural & historical background information on the area.

There are some beautiful beech trees here as well as an abundance of bird life. Extensive, picturesque views to the right reveal the now restored and landscaped Delph opencast mine workings. Turn right by the semi-detached, Ruabon brick houses, go past the stone cottage and the path leads you left into '**Rocky Woods' (9)**

You will come to a sandstone quarry on your right. From the point where it is closest to the path count 80 average adult paces to a fork. (The fork is at approximately SJ 29442 44531; this could be useful if you have a GPS.) Take the path on the right and after 25 paces turn left down a small slope (SJ 29424 44539).

Keep going downhill to pass another quarry on the left. Here you find yourself on a narrow ridge, with a chain mesh fence to your left, between the quarry and the river valley. Once nearing the bottom continue in the same direction to find a broad cart track and waymarker.

Turn left and in a few metres take the right fork to reach the famous 'Devil's Bridge' that crosses the Afon Eitha, a notorious spot for suicides in the 18th century. The wood is rich with plant

life: bluebell, ramsons, yellow archangel, and oak, beech and rowan trees to name but a few.

Go over the bridge and follow the path to the right up the hill. Turn right onto the B5097. Across the road notice the clinker in the wall. There was a foundry nearby and 'clinker' or slag is the waste from the furnace.

Continue past **Wynn Hall (10)**, and just after the house 'Brooklyn' (large white house) turn right onto a footpath that leads almost immediately to a gate and stile. Once over the stile the footpath then descends gradually to a footbridge.

Go over the footbridge and follow the obvious path diagonally right across the field and up to the top of the embankment. Head straight on passing a path to your right, to cross over a culvert and on through a few trees and into an open field.

Descend to the hedge on your right, which you should then follow. This grassy bank is unimproved meadowland - a sanctuary for wild flowers - including vetch, sweet vernal grass, field woodrush and birdsfoot trefoil. Head for the large beech tree in the bottom corner of the field and once over the stile you are back in Rocky Woods.

Follow the main track through the woods. You'll soon re-join the track you previously walked on to reach Devils Bridge. This time continue past the bridge along the track, passing the red brick cottages to the road.

Diagonally across to the right you'll see six steps up the roadside embankment. Go up these and through the kissing gate and walk along the top of the steep bank, near to the hedge. The curious ridges in this field are the result of landslip, a common feature of clay soils on steep slopes.

On the other side of this field follow the path, over the stile, along the boardwalk, into some trees to reach the road. Turn right.

Take the lane to the left of the Great Western public house signposted for the station and follow it to the footbridge across the river. By the waterfall look out for sycamore, willow and rowan trees, and in the spring, ramsons, bluebell and cow parsley. Go under the railway bridge and follow the path back to Station Road.

Places Of Interest

(1) The ROUNDHOUSE is one of three of its kind in North Wales. It was used to imprison drunks and undesirables overnight.

(2) The WYNNSTAY ARMS HOTEL is an old coaching house named after the Wynn family. It was here that the stagecoaches would change their horses for the next part of their journey.

(3) St MARY'S CHURCH has a fascinating churchyard, some notable monuments, and a 14th century fresco entitled 'The Works of Mercy'. It also has six bells each bearing a different inscription.

(4) The OLD GRAMMAR SCHOOL was founded in 1618 and was used as a school until 1858.

(5) TATHAM FARM takes its name from Richard Tatham who was tenant around 1784. It was originally two farms.

(6) OFFA'S DYKE was constructed in the 8th century by Offa, King of Mercia. It is approximately 138 km (80 miles) long and provided a boundary between England and Wales.

(7) GARDDEN LODGE was the home of the High Sheriff of Denbighshire, Edward Rowland, in the early 19th century. ICEHOUSES were a feature of 19th century estates. Built for the storage of meat, these buildings were usually constructed with thick walls and often partly underground for extra insulation. The large bulk of ice collected in the winter would keep the meat edible for up to a year.

(8) GARDDEN FORT possibly dates back to the early Iron Age. Extending to four acres, and partly enclosed by a drystone wall, it was defended by two banks and three ditches on the south side. No excavation has been made of the fort but it is possible that it may still have been occupied in the 8th century.

In 1167 a battle was fought on this site between Owain Cyfeliog, Prince of Upper Powys, and the English and Normans. This battle

was won by the Welsh and the poem 'Hirlas Eucin' was written to commemorate the event.

'Hirlas' is the name given to the long, blue horn, which is used for celebrations and can still be seen in ceremonies at the National Eisteddfod. This battle is also credited for the naming of the Afon Goch, which is reputed to have overflowed with the blood of the English - 'goch' being the Welsh word for red.

(9) GARDDEN WOOD. The woodland is known locally as 'Rocky Woods' because of the three old sandstone quarries, which supplied stone to North Wales, Lancashire and Cheshire until 1952.

The wide variety of bird-life in and around the wood includes jay, spotted flycatcher, pied flycatcher, little owl, tawny owl, great spotted woodpecker, nuthatch, dipper, pheasant, grey wagtail and long-tailed tit.

(10) WYNN HALL is a 17th century house named after the family who built it. In 1670 William Wynn lived at the Hall; he was a commissioner named in the 1650 Act of Propagating the Gospel in Wales. He served Parliament during the civil war between Royalists and Roundheads. He died in 1692 and was buried in the Dissenters Graveyard, Wrexham.

His granddaughter married the Rev. John Kendrick, minister of Chester Street Presbyterian Chapel, Wrexham. So began the long association between the Kendricks and Wynn Hall, which ended in 1970 when the remaining members of the family sold up and emigrated to Australia.