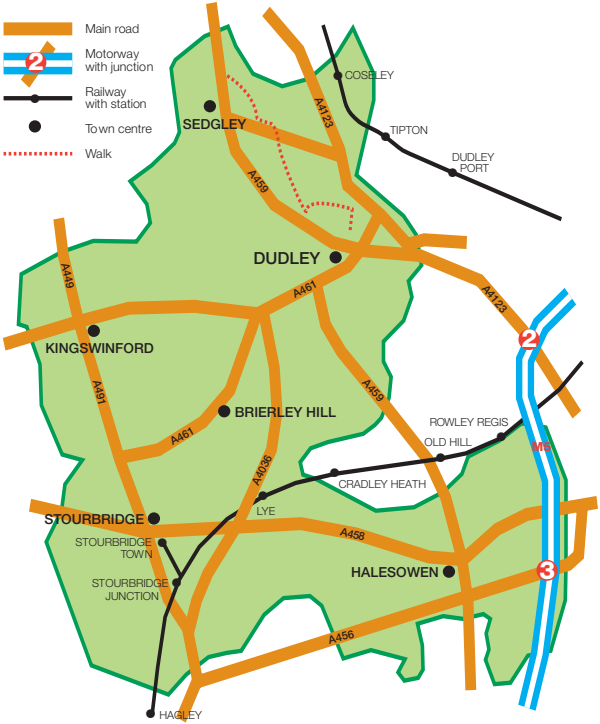


The Limestone Way

Countryside walks in Dudley



The Limestone Way



The walk is a linear route from Dudley to Sedgley via the four limestone hills: Castle Hill, Wren's Nest, Hurst Hill and Sedgley Beacon. Mining and quarrying of the rock over the centuries has helped shape the Dudley we see today. The origin of the rocks lies over 400 million years ago in the Silurian period of geological history. The Dudley area, and much of the Midlands, was at that time covered by a shallow tropical sea in which there were coral reefs. Gradually the shells of sea creatures settled on the lime rich mud of the sea floor. In time this mud became limestone whilst the shells were preserved as fossils. Immense earth movements squeezed the rocks into huge folds, making the four hills that you will see today.

All the hills have been quarried in the past. In early times the stone was used for building, notably at Dudley Priory and Dudley Castle. Later it was discovered that lime, made by burning limestone in kilns, was a good fertiliser. During the Industrial Revolution, limestone was used in the iron industry as a 'flux' to absorb impurities from the molten ore.

- Length** 8 kilometres (5 miles)
- Time** 4 hours
- Parking** Street parking near the Priory; Forest Road in Dudley; zoo car park off Castle Hill
- Buses** Centro Hotline for information
0121-200 2700.
- Pubs** The Caves, Wren's Hill Road; The Brook, Brook Street; Beacon Hotel, Bilston Street
- Leaflets** The Wildlife of Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve; The Geology of the Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve. Both available from Dudley Council.
- Other contacts** Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve wardens (01384) 812785, Keeper of Geology, Dudley Museum (01384) 815575
Dudley Council Plus (01384) 812345
Dudley Canal Trust (01384) 236275
- Websites** www.dudley.gov.uk/countryside
www.dudley.gov.uk/wrensnestnrr
www.dudley.gov.uk/walks



Quarry view

Inset: *Calymene blumenbachii*, the 'Dudley bug'

Points of interest

1 Dudley Priory

The Priory was founded in the 12th century by Gervase Paganel, Lord of Dudley Castle. Old documents give us an insight into life in the Priory. In 1360 Prior William was caught in pursuit of the King's deer in Kinver Forest and was sent to Stourton Prison. The ruins of the church and chapel built of local limestone are still standing. Foundations of the chapter house, the dining hall and the monks' living quarters around the central cloister can be seen.

2 Castle Hill

In the 18th century Lord Ward of Dudley began to extract the limestone underneath Castle Hill to use in his ironworks and furnaces. By the late 19th century the hill was riddled with tunnels and caverns. Some of these have collapsed over the years causing 'crown holes' or 'crowners' ends' to appear at the surface. In 1800 the Earl of Dudley planted trees on Castle Hill to conceal the devastation caused by his limestone mines. Ash, sycamore and beech are the commonest trees and Castle Hill is now a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation.

3 Castle Mill Basin

In 1778 Lord Ward constructed an underground waterway joining the Birmingham Canal with his mines deep under Castle Hill and ending at the old Castle Mill. When it was decided to link the mines to the Stourbridge Canal the roof of the cavern was removed creating Castle Mill Basin.

There are four tunnels that start from the basin. To the east Lord Ward's tunnel goes to the Black Country Living Museum, the west one to Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve and the south one to Parkhead Locks and Stourbridge. A further tunnel was constructed in 1984 linking the Dudley Tunnel with Singing Cavern and is used for boat trips into the subterranean world of Dudley. For further information on boat trips and special tours, please contact Dudley Canal Trust on 01384 236275.

4 Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve

As the quarrymen worked the limestone, they found beautiful fossils of the creatures that lived 420 million years ago in the tropical Silurian sea. During the 19th century, many of these were sold in fossil shops in Dudley. The most famous fossil was a trilobite known as the 'Dudley Bug' which appeared on the town's coat of arms. Many of

the best fossils were found at Wren's Nest, which was declared a National Nature Reserve for its geology in 1956. Abundant brachiopods and sea-lily fragments may still be found in the fossil trench and in the quarry.

National Nature Reserve fossil collecting code

- The use of hammers is not permitted anywhere on the reserve
- Fossils may not be collected directly from rock faces
- Please only collect fossils from the loose material on the ground
- Please only take away a few small samples



Thank you

5 Murchison's View

Sir Roderick Murchison was a renowned 19th century geologist who defined the period of geological time known as the Silurian. His book the 'Silurian System' published in 1839, was based on the study of Dudley's fossils. The view before you was featured in this great scientific work. It is dominated by Dudley Castle founded in the years following the Norman Conquest and built in the 13th and 14th centuries from local limestone. Although the Castle had its defences demolished by Order of Parliament during the Civil War, the domestic buildings survived until 1750 when they were gutted in a huge fire that lasted three days. Dudley Zoo was built in 1937 in the wooded surrounds of Dudley Castle. The Zoo buildings were some of the first to be made of reinforced concrete and are now listed buildings. To the left of the Castle you can see Birmingham city and to the right are the Rowley Hills and Dudley town centre, with the Clent Hills also visible on a clear day.

6 The Seven Sisters

The Seven Sisters Caverns are currently closed to the public due to essential engineering and restoration works. Visitors are kindly requested to continue their walk via the alternative path to point 7. The name 'Seven Sisters' refers to the massive limestone rock pillars left behind by mining of which there are now only five remaining. These once supported the roof of a vast cavern complex descending 100 metres beneath the hill and linked by canal tunnel to Castle Mill Basin. The Seven Sisters are the focal point of an ambitious project. Plans have been developed to stabilise the caverns which will once again allow public access and also provide new visitor facilities for the nature

reserve. Subject to funding being secured it is anticipated the caverns will re-open in 2011. We apologise for any inconvenience caused during these essential works.

7 Marsh's Quarry and limestone grassland

Marsh's Quarry is one of the best places on the reserve to look for fossils. It is also a good place to find locally rare plants which have adapted to grow on the limy soils. Early summer here is marked by a beautiful show of wild flowers like small scabious, milkwort, fairy flax, bee orchid and quaking grass which thrive in the abandoned quarries. From the top of the quarry steps is a view of Hurst Hill, and beyond that Sedgley Beacon.

8 Ripple Beds

From the quarry, before continuing north to Wren's Hill Road, turn left for a short diversion to visit Wren's Nest's famous Ripple Beds. Here there is a viewing platform where the cliff face displays ripple marks made by the ancient Silurian sea. These were formed by identical wave processes that are still active around the coasts of Britain today.

9 Mons Hill

Limestone extraction on this part of the reserve ceased in the middle of the 19th century, and the hill has now colonised with mature ash woodland. It is particularly attractive in the spring when the woodland floor is carpeted in dog's mercury, bluebells, wood anemone, enchanter's nightshade and sweet violet.

10 Parkes Hall Pool

This Victorian reservoir is now no longer used for drinking water but provides a secluded haven for waterfowl such as great crested grebe. It is also a popular pool for fishing and provides a much-loved and well used recreational space. Dudley Council lease the reservoir from Severn Trent Water Limited and manage it as part of the Wren's Nest Local Nature Reserve. Not only does the pool support a diversity of birdlife, it also provides important foraging habitat in the summer months for large numbers of bats including the pipistrelle and Daubenton's which feed over the surface of the lake at dawn and dusk.

11 Turls Hill and Hurst Hill Wood

The walk follows an old lane called Turls Hill Road from which there is a good view of Wren's Nest Hill and Castle Hill behind it. North of the road is the third hill on the walk

Hurst Hill, which was also quarried for limestone. In spring it is full of nesting woodland birds like nuthatch, treecreeper and woodpeckers.

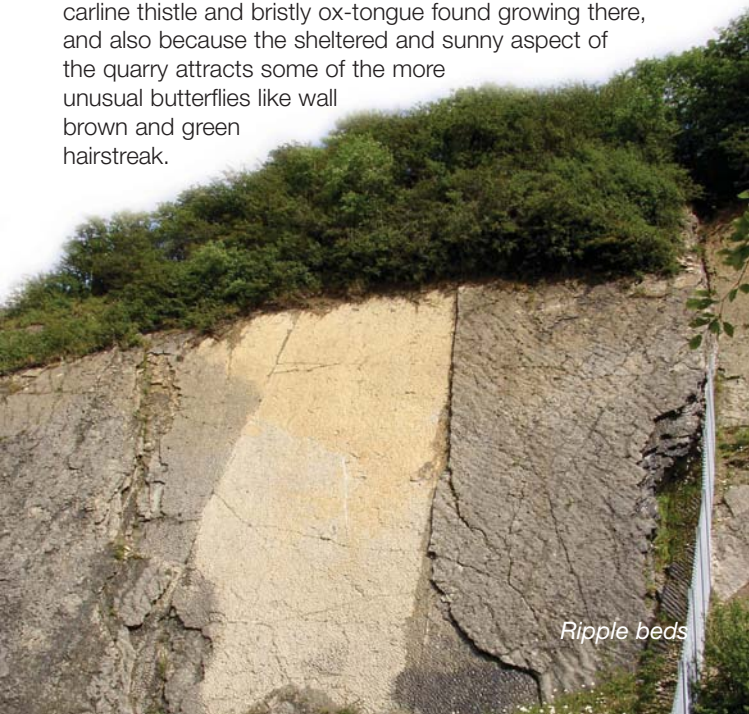
12 Sedgley Beacon

At 230 metres above sea-level, the beacon is one of the highest hills in Dudley. There is a panoramic view from the summit, with the Staffordshire countryside on one side contrasting with the industrial Black Country on the other. The stone tower was built as an astronomical observatory by Lord Wrottesley in the early 19th century. There are several water storage reservoirs under the summit of the beacon managed by South Staffordshire Water.

13 Beacon Hill Quarry

Beacon Hill is the fourth limestone hill on the walk, and like the others was also quarried from the 17th century to around the time of the First World War. The limestone here is a different formation to that of the other three hills, being some 10 million years younger, although still from the Silurian period. The rock is a different colour to the pale grey limestone of Wren's Nest and Castle Hill, and the impurities that it contains made it less valuable. There are still fossil brachiopod shells to be found in the rocks and scree.

Beacon Hill Quarry is now a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation because of rare plants like greater knapweed, carline thistle and bristly ox-tongue found growing there, and also because the sheltered and sunny aspect of the quarry attracts some of the more unusual butterflies like wall brown and green hairstreak.



Ripple beds

The Countryside Code

- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people

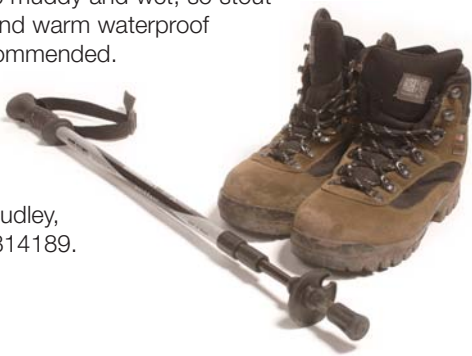
The Limestone Way is part of a network of walks through many areas of meadow, wetland, farmland and woodland within Dudley borough. The series features some of our most attractive local countryside. The leaflets illustrate the route of each walk and give information about points of interest along the way. You can usually join the walks in several places and link with other public rights of way and canal towpaths. An up-to-date Ordnance Survey map is also recommended.

The walks are: *Barrow Hill, Blackbrook Valley, Buckpool & Fens Pools, Bumble Hole, Cotwall End Valley, Illey & Lapal, Leasowes, Limestone Way, Lutley Walk, Pedmore Walk, Pensnett Railway, Shenstone Way and Stour Valley.*

Please keep to designated routes at all times and observe any signs, fencing or barriers restricting access to areas. Many of the routes follow surfaced paths, but others are grassed or bare. Gradients and cross-falls are typically shallow, but some short sections may have steeper inclines or be stepped. There may be stiles or gates at entrances to sites or where paths cross boundaries, especially in areas of open countryside. At certain times of the year, parts of the walk may be muddy and wet, so stout walking shoes and warm waterproof clothing are recommended.

For further information about these walks or the countryside in Dudley, phone (01384) 814189.

Happy walking!



This leaflet is available in large print on request