

Other walks from the farm gate

Start from the wooden gate in front of the farmhouse. Go through the gate, along the pathway, and through the second wooden gate.

1 Calwich and the Weaver hills

Turn left, and walk along the public bridle path through the Calwich grounds and see the ruins of the old manor house and stable block (site of Calwich Abbey, dating back to the 12th century and now destroyed). You can walk cross-country, on to upper Ellastone, Wootton, and for the more adventurous, onwards to the Weaver hills. We have a map and directions for this walk, in the cottages. If you want to enjoy the fantastic views from the Weaver hills, without the hike, then do the same as we do – jump in the car, and drive the 3 miles to Wootton. Park at the top and then walk the many paths that criss-cross the hillsides. Be prepared for cold temperatures and sudden weather changes.

Nb the oldest part of our farmhouse – now the kitchen, is strongly rumoured to be built with stone from the original Calwich Abbey. Stone was often taken by local people and used for their own building work, after the dissolution of the monasteries during the reign of Henry VIII.

2 Barrow hill (following river Dove downstream)

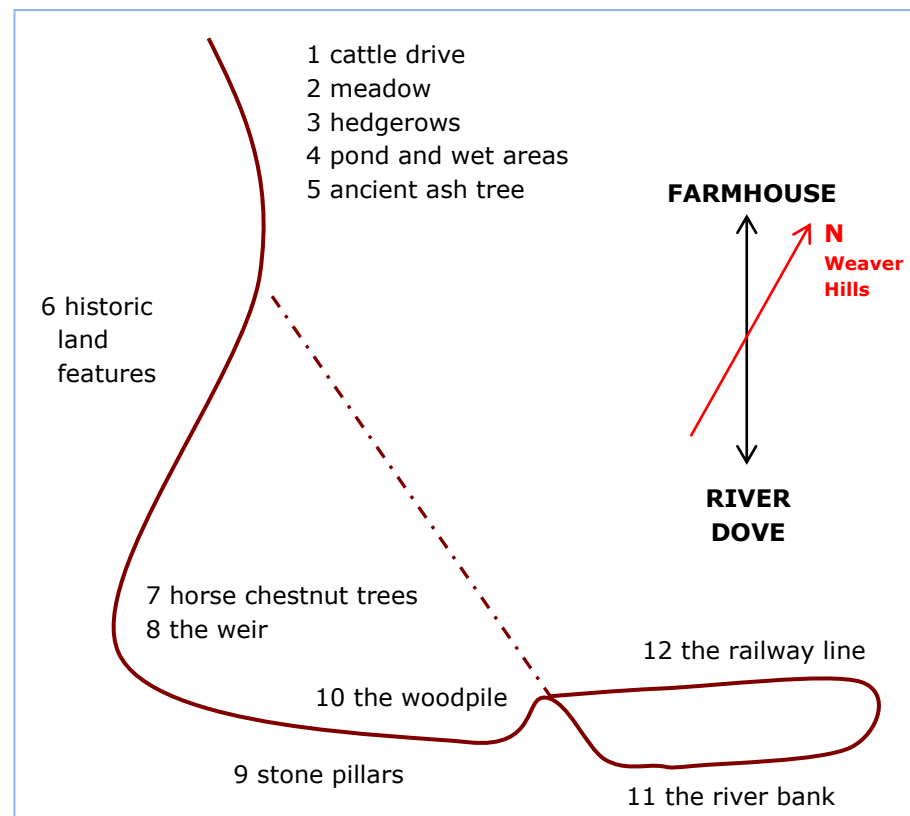
Turn right for Ellastone bridge. There is a gate just this side of the bridge, where you can get down to the riverside. Walk along for a mile or two. The walk passes at the back of Doveleys garden centre. You can go through the wooded walk at Doveleys, which takes you up from the river to the old manor house and the garden centre. You can buy an ice-cream from the garden centre shop, for your walk back to dove farm!

3 Norbury, leading to Norbury Manor house and hall and Church.

Turn right for Ellastone bridge. This time, go over the bridge out of the village, and head straight on for Norbury manor and hall (about half a mile on the left.) The Church is of great medieval architectural interest, and the manor house is a grade I listed medieval building. Viewings are by appointment only (National Trust property which is lived in.) You can also walk along the riverbank on the opposite side to dove farm. There is an easy climb over a wall, on your left, immediately you are across Ellastone bridge. If you follow the riverbank, the pathway will eventually take you out onto the lane which leads to Clifton and Snelston (signposted as Sidesmill from the B5033.)



Farm and Riverside Trail



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Farm & Riverside Trail



The walk takes you across farmland, semi-woodland and riverbank habitats, highlighting a variety of features that make Dove Farm a natural haven for wildlife of all kinds. The farm trail is approximately one and a half miles, there and back. There are additional areas that can be walked, to add to the overall distance.

The farm trail is a fairly easy walk, with no hills. There is one stile, but also a gate to the side of it. The ground is generally soft going, uneven and can be muddy in parts. Stout footwear is recommended, or borrow some wellington boots. We have a variety of sizes for guests to borrow.

The wooden gate in front of the farmhouse marks the starting point of our recommended route, which leads down to the river Dove.

- Walk along the pathway, between the paddocks, with the chicken pen to your right, and the house behind you.
- Go through the second gate at the end, and turn left. You are now on a public path and bridleway. This route is detailed in walks featuring the Calwich Estate and the Weaver hills.
- When you reach the back of our farm buildings, turn right, opening the wide metal gate that is to your right. You are now on a private farm track that belongs to Dove farm.

12 the railway line



About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way along the riverbank, there is a choice of route. You can either continue along the river, and then retrace your steps back to this point, or you can head back now, and 'take the high road,' back along the disused railway line. If you do continue onwards, please note that the railway line beyond the barbed wire strand of fence, belongs to a neighbouring landowner.

Walking the extra bit of riverbank, gives an interesting view, when you reach the end. If you stand on the higher railway embankment, and look across the open fields, you will see a green dome. This is the top of a little summerhouse, known as the 'fishing temple'. It sits at the edge of a lake and belongs to the Calwich Estate. It is private land. It is well documented that Handel wrote his famous 'water music' here.



Now you will need to retrace your steps back to where the barbed wire fence goes across the old railway line, and take your position on the 'high road' as you head back. Walking back along the old railway line, feels more like a woodland walk and has a distinctly different look and feel to the riverbank, which runs parallel to it. Birch trees have established themselves and created their own leafy canopy. Hardy, invasive plants are also taking hold on the stony surface that was originally laid down as base for the rail track.

The beech tree embankment is now to your right. Look out for badger setts and rabbit burrows. Take care as you walk along the track – it is very 'potholed' and uneven underfoot, thanks to the badgers digging and rooting.

The railway line brings you back to the stile and gate. If the grass is short and has been mown, you can walk back diagonally across the field back to the cattle drive and homewards. If the grass has not yet been cut, please respect that this is a crop. It is food for our animals in the winter and we need to look after it. You will need to walk back downstream along the river as far as the weir, and then follow the fence line back.

the wood pile continued

Feel free to turn over some wood, and go searching, but **please** remember to put each piece back carefully – after all, it is 'home' to the creatures you find there. Beyond the woodpile, you will see a row of magnificent beech trees, clinging on to an eroded embankment. The planting of these trees was commissioned by the owner of the Estate, when the railway was being built. Their purpose was to hide the ugly railway line from view. Nowadays, the network of roots, supports all manner of underground burrows and holes, which are home to rabbits, mice, badgers and foxes.

11 the river bank



This stretch of the river Dove never disappoints, in offering a beautiful, tranquil space. It is a little oasis of peace. We keep land management to a minimum, so the path may sometimes be a little overgrown. Watch for trout rising – the river Dove is stocked by fly fishing clubs up and down its length. There is a fishing syndicate that operates at dove farm, which is private fly fishing only. We can arrange day permits for enthusiasts. This stretch of river bank is wide, with fertile soil supporting many wild plants and flowers, and of course insects and birds. (There is a plentiful assortment of biting flies at certain times of the year, and insect repellent is strongly recommended for summer walks!). If you are lucky, you may catch a glimpse of a kingfisher. There is usually a breeding pair, which can be seen darting back and forth, upstream from the weir. Take care as you walk along the riverbank – dense undergrowth can make it difficult to distinguish where the riverbank ends, and the water begins! Ensure that children stay well away from the edge.

1 the cattle drive

Depending on the time of year and the weather, this track can either be muddy and full of deep puddles, or dry and dusty.

The cattle drive has been a main artery of the farm, ever since the first farm dwelling was recorded here in the 1500s. As the farm has been a dairy farm for a large part of its its history, the cattle drive will have been used twice a day for most of its life – imagine how many cows have trod its path. These days, it is mainly used as a footpath and has quickly grassed over.

Look out for 'tunnels' through the undergrowth, beneath hedges and fences. These are created by foxes and badgers to link up their many pathways which zig-zag across the fields.

Soft muddy ground reveals the tracks of creatures, which have been up and down. Other than our dogs, these include tracks of badgers, foxes, pheasants and mice, and then moorhens, ducks and coots at the bottom end of the track.

Thistles and nettles that edge the driveway, are an important food source for butterflies and their caterpillars – and then once seeded, they attract flocks of gold and green finches.



2 the meadow



As you walk down the cattle drive, the small fields to your left, are known collectively as the meadow.

This is rich, traditional pasture. As the years go by, this area of farmland is getting wetter, mainly due to neighbouring man-made water courses, silting up and then leaching water into our farm pasture. Bad news for farming but welcomed by wildlife.

You will see a fenced off area of scrubland, and lots of reed beds which we are protecting, as a conservation site for wetland and ground nesting birds. It is a favourite nesting area for snipe. Small mammals too, benefit from the cover, and this creates good hunting ground for birds of prey. The piercing cry of buzzards is a common sound as you walk around the farm. There is usually at least one breeding pair.

Part of this meadow is designated as a Staffordshire Site of Biological Interest, and surveys have revealed an interesting mix of rare and unusual plants, including the common orchid, which flowers in June. (Ironically these small, but exotic flowers are actually not so common.)

Two thirds of these meadow fields, now form part of our Higher Level Agri-environment scheme. In return for a modest conservation payment, we allow the land to revert to marshy wetland, and remove it from mainstream farm production. We use cattle to manage the land at specific points in the year.

9 stone pillars



Walk up-stream from the weir, until you reach the stile. There is also a gate here, for the not so sprightly! On the way, you will notice two large stone pillars sticking out of the water, like manmade islands. This is what remains of the supports for the railway bridge, that used to be here. The railway track continued on this side of the river for about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile before crossing back again. This section of railway line connected Ashbourne and Uttoxeter. It carried passengers and freight, and was finally dismantled around 1962. Many hundreds of miles of rural railway lines were shut down during the 1960s, as a result of the Beeching report, which set out to reform and rationalise the rail transport system. Another set of pillars, and remains of a stone wall can be seen at the very far end of the walk. Please note that the section of disused railway line, at the far end of the walk is owned by a neighbouring landowner.

10 the wood pile



Just before you climb over the stile and walk alongside the river – it's worth taking a look at the wood pile in the corner of the field, if you like creepy-crawlies. These rough logs have been left here, to enhance and provide habitat – it is certainly a paradise for all manner of mini-beasts, including of course, woodlice in their hundreds, with a good sprinkling of millipedes and lashings of slugs.

horse chestnut trees continued



We have fenced off an area around three of the trees to provide a section of ungrazed, natural riverbank cover - valuable habitat for small mammals, and appreciated by otters too, which have now been spotted on the river Dove.



Pause for a sit-down on the bench we have placed under the first chestnut tree, and admire the weir in front of you. You may find conkers still lying around on the ground. If you wish to explore the area around the other horse chestnut trees - you may do so. You will have to climb over the fence. Please note where cattle are, before entering a field, or fenced off enclosure.

8 the weir



You can usually hear the weir before you see it. It is a visible indication of the 'mood' of the river. It can be either a silvery, summery ribbon of water, or an angry, reddish brown torrent - and everything in between. The weir and its 'raceway' on the far side, were originally created in the early 1700s to provide increased water flow for a sawmill, which was situated about half a mile downstream.



The last few years, have seen salmon returning upstream along the river Dove, and from mid-October to early November, both salmon and trout can be observed, leaping - trying to push their way to the top of weir. It is now an annual, spectator event. Sympathies should lie with the fish, as they rarely make it up this very steep weir. A salmon ladder is badly needed.

3 hedgerows



Hedges have two main purposes on farms. They mark field boundaries and they act as a barrier to keep animals in or out. For wildlife, they are a lifeline. As well as providing a food supply and cover, a network of hedges, links together different areas of habitat.

We have a good mix of hedge plants on the farm. They are mainly hawthorn, dotted with dog rose, hazel, black thorn, holly and field maple. Each plant contributes something different to the hedge.

All hedgerows on the farm are included in a conservation agreement. They are cut on a rotational basis, every three years. This can result in 'gappy' hedges, which don't make very good barriers for livestock, but managing farming activity and care of the countryside is all about balance and compromise!

4 ponds/wet areas



At the bottom of the cattle drive you come to the first of the two pond and wet areas we have created. It doesn't look very dramatic, but it is a popular spot for all kinds of water birds, from ducks to moorhens, as well as insects.



The other pond area is further along to your left, and can be seen, next to a wooded coppice. This small pond is frequented by the heron, who can often be seen, sitting on the fence, looking out for frogs and small fish.



The two ponds are linked by a narrow stream, often overgrown, but that doesn't matter. It supplies an essential water flow, preventing the pond areas from becoming stagnant.

Depending on where the cattle are – you are welcome to go and look at this second pond, but please note that cows may have young calves with them, and the bull may be in the field too. Please check with us first.

5 ancient ash tree

When you reach the bottom of the cattle drive, you will see an old, hollowed out ash tree, in the field ahead of you. This is by far, the most ancient tree on the farm, and is estimated to be several hundred years old. Even though there is not much left of it, it is an important roosting, hunting and nesting site for all sorts of birds, from jackdaws to owls, and bats too. There are nearly always owl pellets to be found at the base of the trunk – including barn owl pellets. We have put up barn owl nesting boxes, in association with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. It is often a Little Owl that takes up residence in the box, with the barn owls preferring to nest in the tree.

Head onwards, in the direction of the river. You should now be in the field to the right of the ash tree, following the wire fence-line that diagonally cuts the big pasture in two.



6 historic land features



Look across the field, to the right of the cattle drive. You will notice an undulating, faintly corrugated appearance to the land. This is called 'ridge and furrow' and is an historic, archaeological feature dating back to medieval times. It is a strong characteristic of historic farming sites in the Midlands.

In medieval times, most peasant farmers worked on the large estates, but had a small amount of land allocated for their own use. They farmed it in long, ploughed strips. The ridges were cultivated as fertile, self draining strips of soil, which were cropped in rotation, and the furrows helped with drainage, and acted as boundaries, to distinguish ownership of the ridges.

This field, and the one in front of you, that you will walk through, to get to the river, are also believed to be ancient water meadows. This was a system of managing natural watercourses to irrigate the land. The practice was widespread in this area until the 1600s. The river was either encouraged to flood, or when it did, water was collected in man-made channels, to keep ground wet. Fields were 'floated' or covered in water, in late winter, to stop the grassland frosting. They were sometimes flooded again, mid-summer, to prolong grazing.

7 horse chestnut trees



As you near the river Dove, you cannot miss these four magnificent trees, standing in a line.

Not much to say about them, except that they are a distinguishing feature of the farm landscape.