

## ALVELEY: the rocks beneath your feet

Exercise your body and your mind on a healthy walk around old Alveley village and the restored landscape of 20th century coal mining. The walk will help towards your daily exercise routine. At the same time think about how the landscape has come to look as it does, because of the rocks on which it is built, and the natural processes that have shaped the area.

The most noticeable scenic feature of the area today is the valley of the River Severn, cut into a broad valley immediately west of the village. But rather than descending gradually to the river, the valley side clearly has a broad central step in it. 25,000 years ago this step was the flood plain of a young River Severn. The river had been following this course for only a few thousand years, since the melt-water from glaciers over the Shropshire Plain carved a new gorge through the hills at Ironbridge. As the river flowed cleaner and faster it cut down through earlier flood plains leaving them abandoned as terraces on the valley sides.

Only 70 years ago the main terrace provided a level platform from which to exploit a much older geological feature, but one totally hidden from view: the coal seams of the Highley and Alveley Collieries. From 1936 to 1969 the colliery waste from the workings east of the river was piled up on this terrace. In the 1980s, the considerable amount of remaining spoil that had not been removed for use as aggregate elsewhere, was landscaped into the smoothly rounded contours that we see today. Much of it was seeded to grassland, some areas were planted with trees, and the larger hollows were left as pools to create the very varied habitats of the Severn Valley Country Park. Part of the Country Park is over the river on the Highley site but the Visitor Centre and main facilities are on the east.

### Keep fit along the Geopark Way

This is one of four circular Health Walks that have been devised from localities on the Geopark Way, a 110 mile long-distance footpath from Bridgnorth to Gloucester. It runs down the length of the Abberley and Malvern Hills European Geopark. [www.geopark.org.uk](http://www.geopark.org.uk)

This "Walk for Health" has been researched and written by Herefordshire & Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust. © 2008. For further information:- telephone 01905 855184 or see: [www.earthheritagetrust.org](http://www.earthheritagetrust.org)



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## Features along the route

As you follow this walk you will find there are many features related to the rocks and landscape that you can literally "take in your stride". Letters correspond to locations of features on the map over-leaf.

**A** Downstream from the Visitor Centre (*see front cover*) notice how the valley narrows as the harder Highley Sandstone crops out on the valley side. It was quarried at Stanley Quarry, the area now housing the Severn Valley Railway museum. Stone from here went up and down the Severn for many stone buildings since medieval times, including Worcester Cathedral and Bridgnorth bridge. But in the last century the main product from here was aggregate for use as local roadstone.

**B** You cross the first of a number of streams that are fed by springs a short distance to the east and follow a fairly direct course to the river. In the storms of July 2007 these streams became rushing torrents.

**C** This field has been undisturbed for years and the sandy soil is clearly well suited as a home for ants. Lift the lid carefully on the sectioned ants' nest to see the occupants at work.

**D** The steep valley side here is stepped as it falls over alternating layers of hard sandstones and thinner beds of soft impervious clays. The latter cause springs to flow out and also 'lubricate' landslips. But in part the sandstones themselves have been removed by quarrying. Millstones were an important product of Alveley sandstone quarries (*see front cover*). This gives a rather chaotic appearance to the valley side, suitable only for woodland. The trees have been coppiced here over the centuries. The woodland skills related to this management technique, which involves cutting down the main stems every few years and allowing the stumps to re-grow, are demonstrated on occasions in the area by the path.

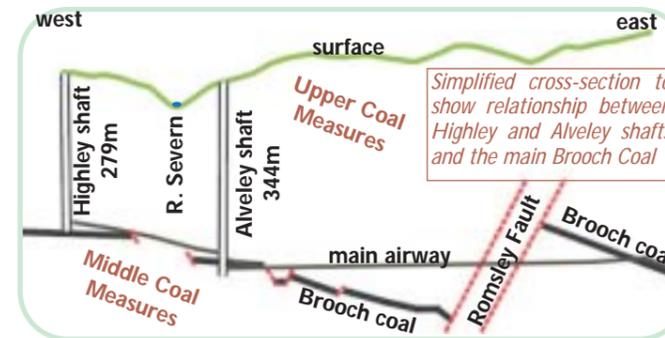
**E** Before the Country Park was created this was the area of greatest desolation with mounds of colliery spoil (*right*) stretching up the hillside. This was partly reused elsewhere and partly re-shaped to give the even slopes we see today.

**F** The bridge is a new structure replacing the old Miners' Bridge (*right*): a clue to the history of the area and the rocks below the surface. The bridge connected the Alveley Colliery to the sidings on the Severn Valley Railway for taking away the coal mined east of the river. Around the footings of the bridge the ground has been made-up from colliery spoil and reveals the typical mixture of the Coal



Measures sequence of rock: sticky grey clays, black shales and occasional fragments of coal, brown nodules of ironstone.

**G** The main operation of Alveley Colliery, working between 1936 and 1969 was on the broad terrace about half way up the valley side. Some of the typical 1930s colliery buildings remain here, now part of the Industrial Estate. The mine was an easterly extension of the older Highley Colliery, opened in 1870 west of the river. The Alveley shaft went down over 300 metres to the seams of coal (*see front cover*) that dipped gently from west to east.



In theory by working on eastwards the mine would have joined up underground with the workings of Baggeridge Colliery, but this was frustrated by geological faulting which made following the seams uneconomic.

**H** Look out over the fields to appreciate the expanding terrace of the Severn upstream towards Bridgnorth.

**I** The Church of St Mary the Virgin (*see front cover*) was started in 1140 and is largely of local stone, but from different sources at different times since, giving rise to a very mottled appearance. The red sandstone probably came from the quarry in the woods across the field to the north west (*photo above*). The creamy sandstone is more likely from just downstream



at Stanley Quarry. But most intriguing are the curious blocks of rough white stone with numerous cavities (*left*). This is tufa, a form of hard re-deposited limestone, found where water percolating through limestone rocks has flowed out of a spring and the limestone has crystallised out again as the water evaporates. The source of this tufa is unknown, but it was also used at Quatford church.

**J** The stone cottages down the old village street show a number of features of the local red sandstone. In particular you can compare random or rubble stone (rough hewn blocks of irregular shape and depth) with ashlar walling (neatly squared blocks with thin joints between them).

**K** The viewpoint toposcope shows clearly how the River Severn has cut down into a more ancient landscape that rises steadily to the Clee Hills and Wyre Forest. The ditch around it is cut into waste with a high coal content (*right*).



# ALVELEY & SEVERN VALLEY COUNTRY PARK



## Walk through the past for a healthy future



## See how rocks have shaped the landscape



## The Walk

**Distance** - 4.2km or 2.6 miles for the full circuit.

**Time** - don't overdo it, but as fitness builds aim for about an hour, allowing for the steep gradients in places.

**Surface** - Walking from 6 to 15 is on surfaced paths or roads. Between 1 and 6, and 15 to finish is on reasonable footpaths which may be slippery or muddy when wet. Between 4 and 5 is a long flight of well made woodland steps. Strong walking footwear is recommended

**Gradient** - The Visitor Centre is half way down the valley side. There is a steady drop on the path from 4 to 5 with steep steps within the wood. And shorter drops on the woodland path between 6 and 7. From 8 to 10 is steadily up hill on the Industrial Estate road. This continues up the lane to the church. From 14 to 16 is almost level, gently down to 17 and level to the viewpoint (18), then steeply down the field back to the Visitor Centre.

**Short Cuts** - If you are short of time (or energy) there are several short cuts that can be worked out. In particular, to avoid the rougher path and steps to the river, follow the surfaced paths from the Visitor Centre to the Industrial Estate road.

## Public Transport

**Buses** - serve Alveley village from Bridgnorth and Kidderminster. Pick up the walk at the Post Office (between 15 and 16) and follow the circuit clockwise.

**Rail** - The Country Park is served seasonally by the Severn Valley Railway from Kidderminster (where there are main line connections) and from Bridgnorth. Join the walk at **8** by using the Miners Bridge to cross to cross the river. For bus and train times phone Traveline: 0870 608 2 608

## Further information

**Tourist Information** - from the Visitor Information Centre in the library, Listley Street, Bridgnorth. Tel: 01746 763 257 : [www.visitbridgnorth.co.uk](http://www.visitbridgnorth.co.uk) Local information for the Country Park and surrounding area is available on 01746 781192 during office hours.

**Maps** - OS Landranger 138, OS Explorer 218 Geological Survey 1:50,000, sheet 167

**Other Trails** - *The Severn Way* is a long distance footpath which here follows the river towpath on the west bank. *Woodland, Poetry* and *Riverside Trails* are waymarked around the Country Park. *The Highley Heritage Trail* explores both the Country Park both sides of the river. There is a Health Walk based on Highley Village.

**The Abberley and Malvern Hills Geopark** embraces the Severn Valley in Shropshire as far north as Bridgnorth. For details of the Geopark and the *Geopark Way* see [www.geopark.org.uk](http://www.geopark.org.uk).



## Disclaimer

This Walk is a suggested activity to add interest to a publicly accessible route. Herefordshire & Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust is not responsible for the state of any land or paths used. Walkers follow the routes entirely at their own risk and should take due care at all times.

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure that this leaflet is accurate at the time of printing, no liability can be accepted by the authors or publishers for any errors, omissions or misrepresentations of fact contained herein, nor subsequent changes to condition or status of any of the route.

## A Healthy Lifestyle

**Regular exercise** of at least 30 minutes five times a week is recommended. This walk can be part of your routine. Before significantly increasing your normal physical activity it is recommended that you seek your doctor's advice.

**We suggest** you familiarise yourself with the route of the walk first, and take in the points of geological interest a few at a time each time you follow it. Otherwise you might find yourself stopping more than you are walking, with little benefit to your physical health!



As you follow the path down from 16 to 17 you get a good view ahead, which clearly illustrates the structure of the Severn Valley with matching terraces of the pre-glacial landscape and the present river cut deeply into the valley. Also note the development of Highley. The medieval village is at the south end by the church. The opening of Highley Colliery led to the construction of Victorian terraces, and later a Garden Village was built at the north end.

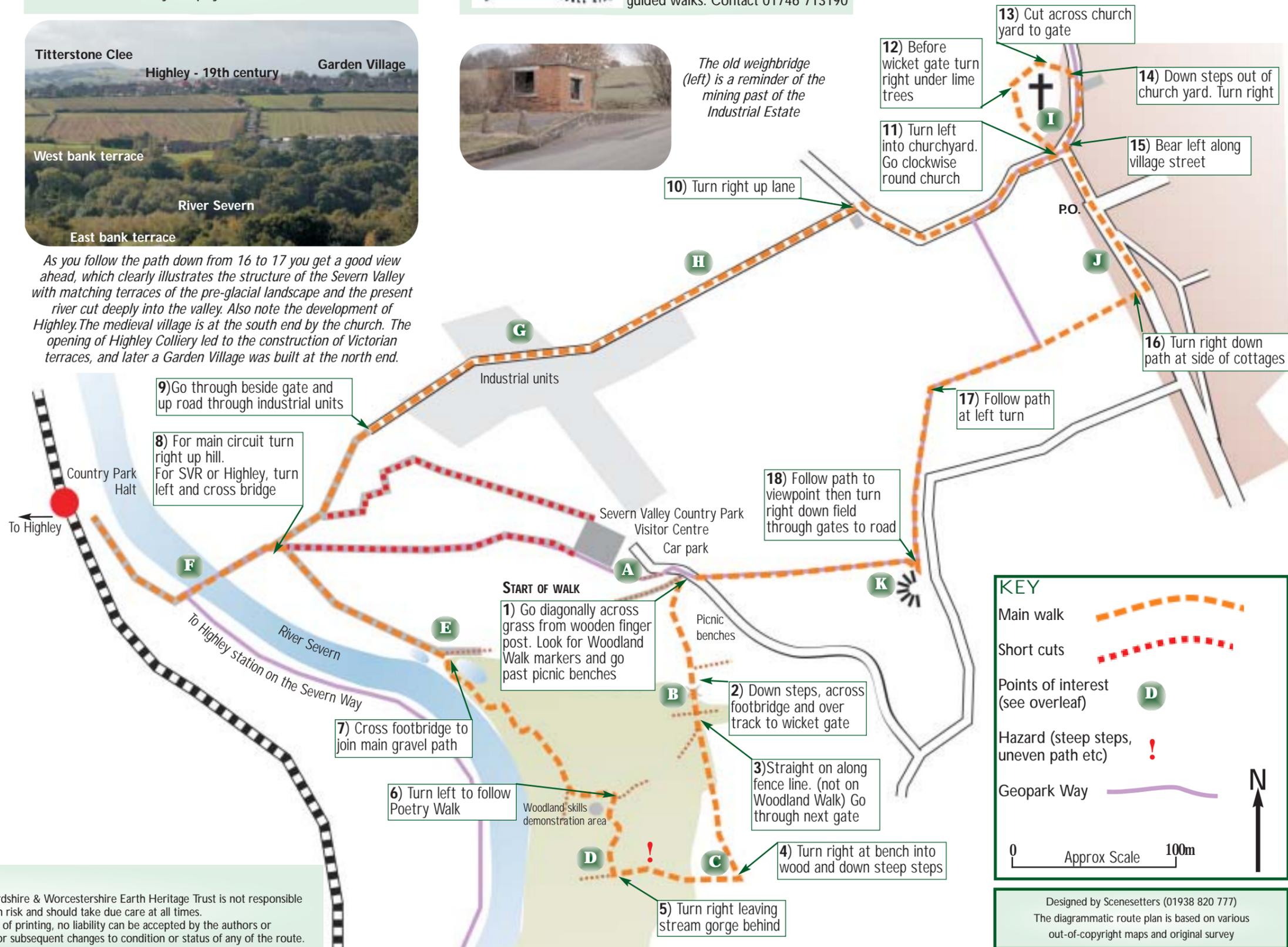
**Walking the Way to Health** is a joint initiative between Natural England and the British Heart Foundation to encourage people to take short walks in their local area as part of a healthy life style. For more information see the web-site [www.whi.org.uk](http://www.whi.org.uk)



Severn Strollers are the official Walking for Health groups in the Bridgnorth area, organising weekly guided walks. Contact 01746 713190



The old weighbridge (left) is a reminder of the mining past of the Industrial Estate



Local sandstones of variable quality have been used for the older cottages. At point 10 note the random stone on one wall and trimmed "rusticated" stone on another. A barn near the church shows serious weathering of the softer layers within the stones.

