

Swepstone Parish Walks

Swepstone is a small village about 8km south of Ashby de la Zouch, in western Leicestershire. If travelling from Ashby, the village can be reached via the B5006, B4116 and finally the B586. Alternatively, from Ibstock via Heather

Walk 1:

6.5km (4 miles), allow 2 hours, mostly hard surface paths,

Parking: nr. Saint Peter's Church, Church St, Swepstone

To start this walk, stand on the pavement facing the church and walk left down the pavement. After a short distance take the left fork in the road, then immediately left down a track. After walking about 150 yards take the bridleway on the left and continue along here until you reach the main Swepstone-Heather Road.

A. Be careful crossing the road as you continue to the bridleway on the opposite side. *As you walk along this bridleway leading to Upper Fields Farm take in the views of the open countryside to your left. Pass the farm and continue with the hedge on your left.* You will soon see the spire of Normanton le Heath Church directly ahead. At the bottom of this field you will leave the bridleway to follow the footpath straight on over a footbridge. The hedge is now on your right.

Once you pass under the power lines look out for a yellow topped marker post that will direct you left across the field to a gap in the hedge. Cross this and walk uphill heading slightly to the left of the spire of Normanton le Heath church. A gate leads onto a track and eventually onto a country lane.

B. Turn left and follow the lane (as you walk along this the outline of Swepstone's church tower comes into view). When the lane bends sharply to the right, turn left along the track. *This track was formerly the milk road from Swepstone to Ashby de la Zouch.* Carry on along this track, then take the left gate and walk to a bridge with the fence on your right. From here bear slightly left for a gap in the hedge adjacent to three trees. Once through the gap, turn right and proceed with the hedge on your right. At the next field, head slightly left and uphill to a stile. Another path crosses at this point. Once over the stile continue walking along the path with the hedge on your right.

C. Just beyond the overhead powerlines cross over the farm track continuing with the hedge on your left. The path eventually becomes enclosed with hedges on both sides. Pass through the gate and turn right.

At the main road turn right for 150 yards and just past the entrance to Dishley Grange cross the road (careful! this is a busy road), and go over the stile in the hedge on your left. Head for the tower of Swepstone Church, over the stile into the church yard and back to your starting point. *Note. The blocked north door to the church is known as Black Prince's Door.*

Walks 2 & 3 start at the 12th Century Belper Arms, on the main street of Newton Burgoland. The Belper Arms is thought to be haunted by "Five to Four Fred" who is reputed to appear at that time to feel women's faces and slap their bottoms!

Walk 2:

5km (3 miles), allow 1.25 hours, relatively easy

Parking: nr. the Belper Arms, Newton Burgoland

From the Belper Arms cross the road, turn left and continue along Main Street to where the pavement ends.

After passing Grange Farm on your left, follow the signpost left, over the stile, then head for the right hand corner of the field. With the hedge on your left, follow the path until you reach a waymarker post directing you to cut across the field corner to a stile in the hedge. Bear right, heading for the stile midway along the hedge. Once over this stile, continue in the same direction, aiming for the house ahead. From the bridge, go to the gate in the right hand corner of the field. This leads onto Heather Lane.

1. Turn left, past Tuckers Holt Farm. Where the road bends sharply to the right follow the footpath sign left. With the hedge on your right, pass through three fields.

You are now entering Church View Wood. This 28 acre mixed woodland was planted in 2002 as part of the National Forest and incorporates an avenue of the rare native Black Poplar.

With the hedge still on your right continue to where the power lines cross over head. Follow the path in the same general direction of the power lines and with the hedge now on your left.

Continue over the stile in the corner of the field, and then turn right. When the track bears left, go straight ahead over a sleeper bridge. Follow the path across the next field to meet the hedge and down to an enclosed bridleway.

2. Turn left, and follow this path leading to Swepstone village. Turn left just before the village, at the point where the bridleway heads right, up another enclosed track. Follow the right hand field boundary to reach a stile and continue around the back of a large green factory building.

Continue with the stream and hedge on your right. At the field corner continue straight ahead, across two more fields to the hedge before turning right to meet the road. Turn left and follow the road back to the pub.

Walk 3:

6.5km (4 miles), allow 1.5 hours, relatively flat, mostly hard surface paths.

Parking: nr the Belper Arms, Newton Burgoland

Cross the road from the Belper Arms, onto the Nethercote, follow around to the left, past the barriers to meet Francis Lane.

Turn left and follow the lane until it bends to the left. Go straight ahead between Corner Farm and Drayton Fields Barn. *This bridleway was once used by hat makers from Atherstone to reach Ashby de la Zouch.*

In 300 yards ignore the lane to the left and continue straight ahead. During wet weather this section can be muddy. The bridleway meanders in a southerly direction enclosed by hedges, bushes and some old oak trees. *During the summer there is an abundance of birds in this area.*

Eventually a field is reached, continue with the hedge on your right. Cross the lane, go over the stile and with the hedge on your right, continue onwards to reach Bridge 54 on the canal.

i. Turn left along the canal towpath towards Shackerstone. *As you walk along, have a look at the canal bank opposite. Live willow has been woven to form a living fence to protect the bank from erosion. This old country technique is known as "spiling".*

Pass under Bridge 53 and walk past all the moored canal boats with the old Motte and Bailey castle beyond. At Bridge 52 walk up onto the road and turn right to head towards Shackerstone village.

A steam train operates from Shackerstone Station. The line extends from Shackerstone station (where relics of Royal visits are on show) to Shenton station adjacent to the Bosworth Battlefield area.

ii. At the 'T' junction, turn right. Beware of vehicles when walking along this narrow road. Pass over the canal bridge and the old railway bridge and turn immediately left onto Derby Lane. After passing two fields go over the stile on the right, then head for the extreme left hand end of the hedge which projects into the field from the right approximately 100 yards ahead.

Keeping the hedge on your left follow the path until you reach a small footbridge and stile.

iii. Continue with the hedge now on your right. Pass to the right of Fields Farm where you will meet a farm track. This farm track eventually leads into a lane, continue along this until you reach a 'T' junction and turn left to return to the pub.

There are many other walks available in the area. Contact Leicestershire County Council or the National Forest for more information.

Useful Information:

Buses: services to Sweptstone and Newton Burgoland are infrequent. No. 97 Ibstock - Coalville (liable to change) & No. 20 Ibstock - Nuneaton (Saturdays only). Please confirm with Traveline (0870 608 2 608) before you travel

It is advisable to wear suitable footwear when walking. Stout shoes or walking boots are recommended.

Some stretches of the route follow minor country roads. Beware of traffic approaching from both directions. If possible stay on the verge, if not walk in single file on the right hand side of the road.

Enjoy the walks, whilst observing the Countryside Code.

Walking - Be fit and well

The benefits of walking regularly include; reduced risk of heart disease, stroke, bowel cancer, breast cancer, osteoporosis and obesity. In addition, many people feel better in themselves. Regular exercise is thought to help ease stress, anxiety and mild depression.