

About the Woolhope Dome

What is the “Woolhope Dome”? Millions of years ago the layered sedimentary rocks of this area were pushed up at a single point to create an asymmetric dome with a teardrop-shaped plan form (think about pushing your toe up under a duvet). The principal point of uplift is under what is now Haugh Wood and the rocks dip away from this point in all directions. The rock layers have been eroded (worn down) since the uplift, mainly by the action of running water in the streams that drain the area. The result of this erosion is that today we see the “stumps” of the dome in the form of two curving ridges of hard limestone that encircle a central dome of old, resistant rock; these harder rocks are separated from each other by curving vales of softer rock. The asymmetry of the dome means that the limestone ridges are more widely spaced on the eastern side of the Dome than on the western side. During this walk you will encounter all these rocks and see evidence of the landforms, habitats and land-uses that their presence has created.

If you are a member of Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, we suggest taking along the Nature Reserves guide on this walk to be alert to wildlife to look out for; the interpretation boards will also be informative.



Butterfly orchid (c) Paul Lloyd

About the walk

Distance: 7 miles

Getting here: It is possible to access this walk by bus and start either from Woolhope or Fownhope; both villages have an occasional bus service.

Start: start in the car park at Wessington Pasture nature reserve: SO 604 353

Dogs: Restrictions to access with dogs apply on our nature reserves and these are detailed below. Throughout the walk, please keep dogs under close control at all times, on leads around livestock and always pick up and take home any dog poo. At Nupend, Wessington and Lea & Pagets nature reserves, dogs must be on a lead at all times and dogs are excluded from areas being grazed. At Common Hill and Ail Meadow dogs are allowed only on public rights of way and must be on a lead.

Facilities: there are no toilets or other facilities at the nature reserves, the villages of Woolhope and Fownhope are nearby.

Accessibility: this route includes rough ground and some inclines and is unsuitable for those with limited mobility.



Herefordshire
Wildlife Trust



enquiries@herefordshirewt.co.uk
www.herefordshirewt.org

The Herefordshire Wildlife Trust Limited
Registered Office: Queenswood Country Park & Arboretum,
Dinmore Hill, Nr. Leominster HR6 0PY
Registered Charity Number: 220173

A Guided Walk through Herefordshire's Woolhope Dome by Nic Howes



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Start (S) in the car park at [Wessington Pasture nature reserve](#). Go through the farm gate beside the container, into the meadow and turn right uphill towards its top corner. At the corner, enter woodland and follow the path beneath trees to emerge onto a ride, with the open valley of The Warren downhill to the right. Turn uphill along the ride, away from The Warren to a crossing of rides, turn right to a gate through which you exit the reserve (point 1).

Walk 45 degrees left across the narrow field to a gap in the vegetation, leading to a crossing over a small stream. Once over the stream turn right to exit the strip of woodland and walk along the old metal fence at its edge to a gate near a powerline pole (point 2). Once through the gate, aim to the left of the large oak tree and across the field to a gate beside a farm gate that brings you into the Broadmoor Common to Woolhope lane.

Carefully cross the lane and the stile opposite and turn right along the edge of the cricket ground towards the gate into the church car park. Cross the car park to access the churchyard via a gate and walk down the path with the church on your left, to the lychgate. Go through the lychgate and down the steps to the road into a 4-way road junction (point 3).

Turn right and keep ahead, passing the Crown Inn, ignoring the right turn to Broadmoor Common and then looking out for a fingerpost and stile on the left, where a long wall alongside the lane ends by the gates to "Fairlea". Cross the field ahead on a well-trodden path to a gate and stile opposite. You are walking down the slope of the oldest central part of the Dome; beneath your feet is the Woolhope Limestone, of which there are few exposures. Go through the gate and keep the hedge on your left until it turns 90 degrees left, at which point you should continue straight ahead to a gap just after the outside corner of [Ail Meadow nature reserve](#) (point 4). This gap is waterlogged for much of the year, a result of the fact that you have left the Woolhope Limestone and now have the Coalbrookdale Formation – a fine-grained siltstone – beneath your feet. Ail Meadow itself is also a waterlogged site on the Coalbrookdale Formation, with cold water tufa springs and associated plants, including the **bog pimpernel**.



Bog pimpernel (c) Cumbria WT

Continue along the outside of the eastern edge of Ail Meadow to reach a waymarked stile beneath overhead power lines; cross this stile, ignore the next one visible to your left and instead keep straight on across a short section of field to find a hidden, waymarked footbridge with a stile at each end (point 5). Cross this footbridge, ignore the metal farm gate off to your left and instead pass to the right of a clump of willows to reach a hidden waymarked stile into a narrow, surfaced lane. Cross the stile into the lane and turn right along the latter, uphill at first and then down to a stream beside a bridleway indicated with a fingerpost on the right (point 6). Go through the metal farm gate as indicated by the fingerpost and keep the fence and stream on your left until you meet a crossing with a prominent tractor way. Follow the tractor way off to the right to a pair of wooden farm gates; go through these gates and turn left up the surfaced lane. Much of the going underfoot since Ail Meadow will have been waterlogged due to the underlying Coalbrookdale Formation.

Turn right off this lane at the fingerpost (point 7) that points up a path that climbs the steep scarp slope of the Wenlock Limestone, through coppiced Buckenhill Wood. Emerge from the wood at the crest of the limestone ridge and cross the field towards the group of buildings; from the yard behind them you should look for a waymarked stile that gives you access to the Trust's [Lea and Paget's Wood nature reserve](#), a large site of ancient semi-natural woodland. Descend the path ahead, across the dip slope of the Wenlock Limestone to reach a meeting point of five paths (point 8).

Turn right down the waymarked Wye Valley Walk (WVW) and follow this downhill along the clay vale, which is frequently muddy due to the impermeable clay soil derived from the underlying Lower Ludlow Shale; a narrow band here because of the steep dip of the rock layers on this side of the Dome. The steep, tree-covered rise across the vale to your left is the scarp slope of the ridge of Aymestry Limestone. The ash trees in this vale have grown tall, stretching towards the light from the deep valley between the two limestone ridges. The Trust is coppicing the woodland here to create a variety of habitats and the extra light has encouraged the growth of varied ground flora, including **herb Paris**. The disturbed ground on your right is evidence of limestone quarrying in the Wenlock Limestone and just before a gate and stile it is possible to see the tops of the arches of a pair of limekilns in the bank on the right. Follow the WVW waymarks after leaving the reserve, up a short slope to reach the road at the top of the Wenlock Limestone ridge (point 9).

Cross the road and take the waymarked WVW uphill along the crest of the ridge; fork left at the gate to Yew Tree Cottage. At the covered local reservoir turn right through a small gate and continue through woodland with further evidence of limestone quarrying, passing through another gate on the way. The route then passes above the upper edge of [Round's Meadow](#), part of [Common Hill nature reserve](#), to which there is no access from this side. The route emerges through a gate on the right onto [Monument Hill](#), which has a rich limestone grassland flora. Descend the steep path diagonally across the reserve to reach an access gate by an interpretation board; if you wish to take a short detour to Rounds Meadow, the access to it is off to your right along the bottom fence line as you approach the Monument Hill access gate. To continue the route, exit Monument Hill via its access gate to enter an ancient bridleway.



Marbled white (c) Paul Lloyd

You should now turn sharp right to see a gate on the opposite side of the WVW; pass through this gate and turn left along the top edge of the Trust's [North Meadow](#) grassland and orchard reserve. The view north is one of the finest in the Dome: you are looking across the curving Coalbrookdale Formation vale towards the central dome of the Woolhope Limestone and Haugh Wood Formation and if you follow the skyline, the gently sloping shape of the dome is clearly apparent. Keep walking along the edge of the reserve until you reach a gate to access the WVW again and turn right to a meeting of many tracks (point 10). At this point you can make a short detour by turning sharp right down a vehicle track to view [Old Cider House](#), that lies on the left of the track beyond Keel Cottage and before The Sett; on the right of the track lies the orchard in North Meadow. Back at point 10 you should walk uphill and westwards, following the WVW along the ridge crest and not descending any paths to either side. At point 11,

note the steep quarried rock face falling away on your left; this rock face follows the steep dip of the Wenlock Limestone on this side of the Dome. Continue along the WVV on the ridge crest as it descends, becomes a rough vehicle track and eventually meets the Fownhope to Woolhope road, with a large quarry on the right, just before this road ([point 12](#)).

Follow the WVV across the surfaced road and descend a track a short distance to cross a stream on a concrete bridge. The WVV forks half right from this bridge, but our route includes a loop round Nupend reserve, for which you should carry straight ahead, up a stony forestry track accessed through a wooden gate to the right a metal farm gate. Ignore the steps to the interpretation board and keep ascending along the track, looking left across a field that lies in the narrow vale of Lower Ludlow Shale, with the steep wooded scarp face of the Aymestry Limestone beyond. The track ascends to a flat area where several tracks and paths meet ([point 13](#)); as you cross the outer lip of this flat area, look right for a Herefordshire Wildlife Trust-branded wooden gate to a steeply ascending path up into [Nupend Wood nature reserve](#). This picturesque narrow path winds beneath trees and crosses the top end of a deep, narrow quarry. The path eventually reaches a wooden gate that you pass through to access a path along the crest of the Wenlock Limestone ridge, along which you should turn right.



Yew trees, Nupend Wood (c) Paul Lloyd

Follow the gradual descent of the ridge, passing through one deer fence via a wooden gate and another via a metal gate to reach a fine stand of yew trees for which the reserve is rightly noted (but by no means its only attraction). After the yew trees the path bears right down to an interpretation board before dropping onto the forestry track where you should turn left, through the gate to face the concrete bridge by [point 12](#). Now turn round to follow the continuation of the WVV, through

a waymarked metal farm gate visible to the right of the wooded southern tip of the reserve.

Another stony track curves to the left, with a house and garden on the right; the steep wooded slope of the Wenlock Limestone in Nupend Wood lies off to the left. Beside an external field corner on your right is a waymarked post ([point 14](#)); after passing this post bear half right at 45 degrees across the field towards the lower end of the distant hedge ahead. Once over the brow, a distant stile appears in the corner of the field, for which you should aim and then cross onto a footbridge with another stile at its far end. Cross the stile off the footbridge and then walk straight across the field, under power lines, to another stile in front of Haugh Woods. Cross the stile onto a stony track and turn right along it, following the southwest edge of Haugh Woods. Look half right to see the ridge of Common Hill, along which you walked earlier. Cross a cattle grid on the track and then go through a metal farm gate, ignoring the finger posted footpath on the right. Ascend a short rise to join a forestry maintenance track coming in from over your left shoulder and look out for a substantial bank coming down through the woods on your left; this marks the western edge of Rudge End quarry, a large, deep, narrow exposure of the Woolhope Limestone ([point 15](#)). Entry to Rudge End quarry reserve from the side of the track is prevented by brash and barbed wire, so continue along the track for a short distance to a junction with another forestry track descending from your left. Walk round the barrier on this track to access the reserve via a wooden gate, above and to the left.

Return to the level, stony track on which you first approached the quarry and turn left to continue along it, towards a nearby house. Just before reaching the house, turn left up a finger posted footpath ([point 16](#)). Soon after starting up this path look for another rare, small exposure of the Woolhope Limestone in the roots of an ash tree on the right. Continue up the path across fields underlain by Woolhope Limestone, with woodland closing in on either side until you enter Rudge Wood via a stile at [point 17](#). There is an association between domed layers of rock and the presence of trapped gas and oil; this led to an intensive seismic survey throughout the area and a test well being drilled in the 1980s.

Soon after entering the wood, you cross onto the oldest underlying bedrock, the Haugh Wood Formation that consists of layers of sandstone and mudstone, the latter giving rise to some waterlogged conditions. Follow the woodland path over a footbridge to reach a T-junction where you should turn left. Keep straight ahead and

join a forest drive coming in from the right before you promptly branch off it on the right at a waymark and continue uphill along a path through the wood.

Emerging from the wood over a stile you should climb the track ahead, passing to the right of a small brick building before following the top of the slope left towards a distinctive oak tree with a waymarked stile beneath it. Cross the stile and follow the sunken path uphill to reach Broadmoor Common via another waymarked stile. You should walk across the Common, joining a concrete drive that then reaches a surfaced road on which you should turn right ([at point 18](#)).

Keep on this road until a cattle grid on your left ([point 19](#)), where you should turn left and follow the footpath down, through a gate and into a field. Continue across the field to its far right-hand corner, with a gate through into [Wessington Pasture nature reserve](#) ([point 1](#)).

Go through this gate and follow the drive ahead to reach a cross of drives, at which you should turn left and descend towards a gate (look out for a veteran plum tree set back on the left as you approach). Head out from the gate into open land and follow the path along the valley bottom, passing a pond site on the left. The pond needs "puddling" with impermeable material to prevent the water disappearing into the permeable Woolhope Limestone on which it lies. Just after the pond you will reach the southern boundary of the reserve and should turn right along a path that will lead you through a gate and back to the start.



Herb Paris (c) Paul Lloyd

Additional reading:

- *Herefordshire Wildlife Trust Nature Reserves guide*
- *Explore Woolhope Dome; Landscape and Geology Trail*, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust, 2004
- *Herefordshire Rocks and Scenery*, Editor John Payne, Logaston Press, 2017

