

Circular Walk from Lilleshall Monument 3.6 miles (5.8km)

Total ascent 83.6m Stiles: 11

Begin the walk at the Lilleshall Monument. Turn your back to the Wrekin and walk, on the T50 clockwise towards the white trig point. Continue down the wide slope to the parking area at the bottom. Leave the T50 here, turning right down a narrow footpath with a hedge on both sides, towards a stile [1] which opens onto a grassy play area, with the school beyond. Cross the play area to a gate and turn left onto a lane. When you reach a pond on your right, just about opposite a house called 'Wind Crest', veer right on a narrow path keeping the pond on your right. This path then crosses a field towards an electricity pole by a stile [2], follow the obvious path beyond the stile.

This area is the site of opencast limestone workings. On your right and now hidden from view there used to be access points to some of the underground limestone workings; all filled in with concrete and closed up now.

Cross the main road and go straight ahead. Follow the road as it bears left and changes from tarmac to gravel. Look out for a footpath sign that directs you to the right between outbuildings. Continue through a gate to 'Old Coppice Lodge' and then through another gate that leads to 'Rock House' and Barrack Lane. When you reach the tarmac road bear right along Barrack Lane.

On your right you will notice a white gazebo. This covers a capped 45m deep brick-lined shaft used to access the underground limestone workings. You will shortly pass a stone-built building on the left - this was originally a square block of stables for the quarry horses.

Just beyond the old stables, pause and look right through a narrow entrance into the woods – you will be walking back through this woodland shortly. As the road bears round to the left turn right down Sylvan Close. Continue along the track, then turn right through a narrow access alongside a 5-barred gate. Turn right again down to the water. You are now on The Hutchison Way. Cross the bridge and bear sharply right up a steep narrow track.

This attractive lake is the flooded remains of the limestone quarry known as Collier's Side. The limestone extracted here was of superior quality and was used primarily as a flux for the iron industry. The steep narrow track was a tramway constructed across the quarry floor to link the inclines with the Lilleshall canal.

When you reach a fork in the tracks, look to the right and you will see a gate. Beyond here is the point where you paused a few minutes ago. You could spend a very happy 20 mins or so exploring the lime kilns and flooded quarry by walking down towards the gate and bearing right towards the restored kilns. There are a variety of walks and tracks in this area – none too strenuous and all interesting.

Back to the fork in the track – take the left fork to a kissing gate. Go slightly left beyond the gate then bear right on a narrow path between a fence on your right and a building on your left. When you emerge into the farmyard turn right across a short (often muddy) section to a narrow opening straight ahead of you. You are now following the line of the late C18th Lilleshall canal used to transport limestone to the blast furnace at Donnington Wood. After about 400m you join a wider track. Turn right and then almost immediately you come to a lane. This is Willmoor Lane. If at this point you want to return to the village, you can turn right here, then left on the tarmac road to reach the school where you can retrace your steps to the monument. However, if you want to carry on, cross the lane and follow a footpath to the side of what is actually a bridge crossing the canal. Follow the field divide towards some trees. Walk alongside the trees and after a few metres you'll see a well-walked path turning into the trees, picking up the line of the old canal again.

Climb the stile [3] and a second stile [4]. The old canal now opens up into what was a basin for tub boats. Pause before the third stile [5] and look to your left where you will see the remains of a tunnel and then look up the slope alongside - this is the Lilleshall Incline.

The earliest canal went through the tunnel. At the far end of the tunnel was a shaft where a crane was used for lifting the cargo from the tub boats to the top canal. The tunnel was replaced at the end of the C18th with an inclined plane up which the entire tub boat was hauled, using a carriage on rails, and then slid into the top canal going to the Donnington Wood furnaces.

Now climb the stile and turn left to walk up the slope (the Incline) to another stile [6] passing between the outbuildings on your right and private house on your left. Turn right onto the tarmac lane. On your left is the remains of the upper canal heading towards the Donnington Wood furnaces (now in Granville Country Park). You'll soon see on your right another of the old canal buildings – this was the stables for the ponies. At the T-junction turn right, leaving the old canal, and walk about 250m to a footpath on the left with a sign directing you across several fields. This is still the Hutchison Way. If at this point you don't want to walk across the fields, carry on straight up this lane and you'll join Church Rd in Lilleshall. Turn right, then follow the track by the school to retrace your steps to the monument.

To carry on across the fields, follow the footpath aiming for the stile [7] beyond the telegraph pole. Climb the stile and turn right following the field edge for about 100m. Close to the point where the hedge gives way to a fence, the footpath veers off to the left towards a stile in the far fence-line. Sometimes it is easier to walk around this field, the trick is to pick up where the locals have walked! Climb the stile [8] and follow the signs across the next field to another stile [9]. Walk straight ahead towards some fencing and a metal gate ahead of you. Go through the wooden kissing gate onto the track and then turn right onto Church Rd. (At this point you are joining the T50 anticlockwise which you follow back to the monument.)

Follow the road past the church and cemetery. Just beyond Church Meadow you'll see a footpath on your left. It crosses a small field with a good view of the monument. Climb the stile [10] and walk along the field edge to a stile [11] in the far corner.

There is Medieval ridge and furrow in this field – not such a common sight in this area.

Turn right onto the tarmac lane. Once you reach the parking area at the base of the hill, climb back up to the monument and celebrate completing 3.6 miles (5.8km).

To learn more about the area you could read David Adams' book - 'The History of Limestone mining and the Early Connecting Canals in Church Aston and Lilleshall' which should be available from the library, the author, or via Shropshire Caving & Mining Club.