

SWAD WALKS

Rural South Derbyshire

By Dot Morson

This month's walk takes you west of Swadlincote to visit the villages of Rosliston and Coton-in-the-Elms and the hamlet of Botany Bay. There are five teenage woodlands to pass through, church spires to glimpse and a number of choices for refreshments. Binoculars would be useful not just for bird spotting but to pick out distance places on the horizon. There are a number of benches on the route where you can rest or enjoy a picnic. As it is a circular route there are other places to street park if you wish but the village streets are narrow.

Starting point: Rosliston Forestry Centre DE12 8JX (Car parking charge)

Distance: 5 miles

Stiles: 3 stiles

Terrain: Field and woodland paths, country lanes and tracks that can be muddy after rain. Walking boots are essential. Dog friendly but they need to be able to get over the stiles.

From the car park walk to the Visitor Centre.

Rosliston Forestry Centre covers a mix of woodland and meadow, ponds and play areas is open all year round. It is managed by a partnership between South Derbyshire District Council, Forestry England and Rolls Royce. Make use of the facilities at the Visitor Centre before starting the walk.

Find your way to the signpost between the cafe and the centre. Take the path indicated "Adventure trail" following the surfaced path down to the bird hide. Spend some time here watching the antics of grey squirrels trying to reach the bird feeders. There is usually plenty of activity here. When you are ready to continue carry on along the surfaced path and straight over at the cross of paths. Pass a small fenced pond on your right and then Fox covet (mature woodland) is on your left as you continue ahead. The next feature is Kate's Pond on your right. Just before the fenced bridge bear left on a grassy path to access a gap where you leave the Forestry Centre to enter an arable field. Keep the hedge on your right; the way is clear on the ground soon reaching a tarmac lane. Turn right and at the next corner pass through a narrow gap where you join



the National Forest Way. Follow circular orange waymarks with arrows showing your direction of travel. First along a field headland; next a drive; then cross the road to access a huge arable field. Again the path is wide and clear on the ground leading to a wooden bridge. You have entered Penguin Wood. Keep the overgrown hedge on your left and use a wide gap where the hedge ends. Now keep the woodland on your left and follow the path up to another gap by a metal gate passing an interpretation board about Penguin Wood planted by The Woodland Trust.

Turn right to walk into the hamlet of Botany Bay. Cross the road by the junction and take the path to the right of the wooden garage. This leads into Beehive Farm Woodland

Beehive Farm Woodland

The earliest planting of Beehive Woodland in 1995 was one of the first schemes in The National Forest. The site is a mix of nature conservation interest and recreation. Areas of wildlife habitat exist alongside fishing lakes and trails. Some of the fishing jetties have been specially designed for disabled anglers. Wetland areas are home to dragonflies and a variety of waterfowl. Heron visit and occasionally common tern fly overhead in the early summer.

Walk straight ahead keeping the fencing on your right, ignoring tracks to the left. The way is clear on the ground; on entering a field keep the hedge on your right. Follow it round and cross another stile leading into another large field. The next stile can be seen in the distance in line with a white cottage that you need to aim for. (The path crosses the field diagonally). Lullington church spire can be seen in the distance on the left and Coton spire on the right. Cannock Chase is ahead on the horizon. At the

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road turn right and walk into Coton-in-the-Elms. Turn left along Mill Street where you can take a rest on one of the seats on the village green. Cross the road and walk parallel to the brook passing through an arch and then the War Memorial on your left. Turn right up Church Street.

Coton in the Elms is on the Walton Way, a salt route, and is first mentioned in 942 in a charter giving the land to a Saxon – Wulfrige the Black. The route was at a crossroads between Burton and Tamworth. Burton Abbey owned the land at the beginning of the Norman period but it was seized by King William due to Earl Morcar's rebellious ways. Most villagers in the past were farmers or miners. Today it is a commuter village for Burton, Swadlincote, Lichfield and Tamworth. The church is dedicated to St. Mary and was built in 1844-7. It has a narrow tower with a recessed spire. Until this time parishioners had to walk to Lullington to worship.

As you pass the church note Corporal Russell Aston's grave to the right of the church door. Russell was killed in action when serving in Iraq. Then take care when the pavement finishes. After 200 metres turn right to join a public footpath.

Lad's Grave is ½ mile further down the road at the cross roads of Catton Road and Coton Road. An entry dated 31st March 1644 in Lullington's parish register states that Philip Greensmith was executed for desertion. Gell's men, parliamentarians, apprehended Greensmith in the Lullington area. He was hung from a tree on the edge of Coton and buried in a nearby field as he was not worthy of a plot in the graveyard at Lullington. The lad had little experience of life beyond the village and went off to fight in the Civil War. The pay was good, much better than a farm labourer. However he had an unfortunate end.

A finger post shows the way. Keep the overgrown hedge on your left. Rosliston church spire is just visible half right. Turn right signed permissive path; now with woodland on the left and an overgrown hedgerow on the right. Turn left at the woodland corner just after a power pole. A hedge is on your right. Take a narrow path on



the right just after another power pole. This soon leads to a rickety wooden bridge; cross it and keep the pond on your left as you follow the path that is clear on the ground. Bear right at a bench and continue on the path meandering as it goes. Enter Betts Wood just beyond a kissing gate. Again keep the hedge on the left. Stay on the well worn path that leads to a corner by a gate. Once through the gate a gap at the side of a metal gate leads you onto the road. Turn right to enter Rosliston village. Ignore Vicarage Walk.

Rosliston - In the Domesday Book the manor was called Redlauseton and had a church and a mill. During World War 2 a prisoner of war camp was built near to the village to hold German and Italian prisoners. After the end of the war the camp was used to accommodate Polish servicemen. St Mary's Church was built of grey sandstone in the 14th century but was re-built in 1816.

Turn left at the junction walking towards Burton. Pass the Bull's Head on your left. Then cross the road and take a footpath on the right signed "Forestry Centre". Use the path crossing the field diagonally to reach a wooden gate and enter the Forestry Centre. Turn left and follow the surfaced path to the Visitor Centre and the end of the walk.