

Walk No. 3 Hazel Pear Walk

A Circular Walk to Acton Bridge and Return

A longer ramble taking you away from housing and across open farmland, with plenty of opportunity to observe wild birds. Parts of this walk can be muddy in wet weather.

6 miles, say 2½ to 3 hours.

Start at Norley Road Playing Fields car park, grid ref. SJ 602715.

On leaving the car park turn left down Norley Road, soon passing an old house on your right called Portobello and dating from 1777. Reaching the cross roads, Sandiway Primary School are on your left. You will also see Bryn Chapel on the right-hand corner, and St John's Parish Church is ahead of you.

Turn left at these cross roads to go along Weaverham Road, crossing Greenfield Way, and then fork left down Smithy Lane. Cross the railway bridge and then continue through a gate down the old lane, now free of traffic. To your right there are good views over the Weaver valley. Smithy Lane meets the A49 at the old village of Bryn, long dominated by the yoghurt factory. This has now been demolished and the site is to be redeveloped for housing.

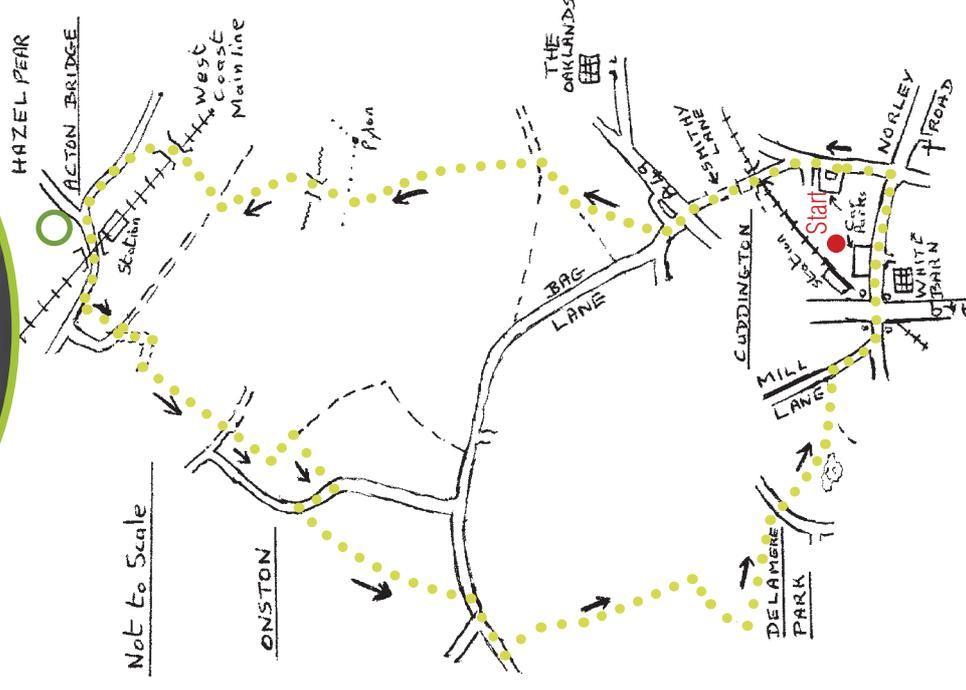
Carefully cross over the A49 to enter Cuddington Lane and very shortly find a stile in the right hedge adjacent to stables. After crossing a second stile and skirting the yard, cross the field heading for the far right-hand corner, then go over the stile at the side of

the gate. Cross the next field to find a stile in the opposite fence, then cross the right-hand corner of the next field to find a sign with a footbridge and a stile at the parish boundary.

During the winter months, thrushes can be numerous and also large flocks of redwing and fieldfare in the fields anywhere along this walk. Their flight calls make them easy to detect as they move around the fields. The blackbird population, as with the song thrush, is probably supplemented by European winter migrants.

After crossing the stile, head across the field, between the pylons, towards the house on the far side, where you will find the next stile. Cross the compound then turn left alongside the garden hedge and over a stile in the corner. You now come to the junction of four footpaths. Go ahead and slightly left on a path between two fences. Cross a stile into a field, then keeping the stream on your left follow the path across three fields and three more stiles.

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The Hazel Pear

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In the next field the path bears away from the stream diagonally across the field (leaving the pylon on your right). Go over the rise and the next stiles at the footbridge over Grange Brook will come into view. Cross this, and go up the field edge keeping the hedge on your left. At the far left-hand corner of the field take a sharp right turn into the next field, where there are two footpaths indicated, one straight ahead and one to the left. Take the left-hand path across this field keeping to the left-hand hedge. This path takes you across two fields to a stile and a bridge over the railway.

Cross the railway and continue along this path (with private gardens on your right) until you reach the lane. Now turn left and you will see the Hazel Pear pub.

The Hazel Pear was formerly the Railway Hotel serving Acton Bridge Station on the main Liverpool line.

Now proceed left along the road and over the railway bridge, continuing for about a quarter of a mile past the houses and church on your left until you see a stile on your left just before Sandfield Lane. Go over this stile and down the edge of the field to another stile with steep steps down onto Sandfield Lane. Here you are joining the Delamere Way. Turn right and immediately sharp left down the hill, and then bear right over a stream.

The Delamere Way is a 21 mile waymarked trail that runs from Frodsham to Stockton Heath via the Delamere Forest, Cuddington village and Dutton Locks on the River Weaver.

After passing a pond on your left and Brookside Cottage on your right, bear left to go through a gate and up a straight path across a field to meet a farm track at the top. Cross the track, briefly leaving the Delamere Way, to go over a stile opposite. After about 60 yards look out for a stile on the left; cross this stile and follow the marked path across the field to another stile. Go over the stile, turn right and follow the field hedge on your right to meet Onston Lane.

Turn right and after 200 yards, where the lane bears right, there is a stile on the left to rejoin the Delamere Way. The path leads across a field to another stile. From here head for a steel gate approximately 20ft to the right of an oak tree in the opposite hedge line and thence to a stile in the right hand corner of the next field. From here, keeping the stream on your right, cross two more fields to Bag Lane where you turn right along the lane.

A good flock of around 50 rooks have been seen in the fields alongside Bag Lane.

Keep left at the junction with Bent Lane and at the first house on the left (North Lodge) turn left down a track at the side of the house to cross back into Cuddington. Shortly go over the bridge crossing Small Brook.

North Lodge, Ruloe: This was at the north end of the second carriage drive to the former Delamere House (see below). The other entrance was South Lodge, now marked by the Wilbraham Gate, at the junction of Norley Road and Cuddington Lane.

Bear right keeping alongside a fence on your left, cross a stile and continue until the fence turns away left at a gate. At this point head right and uphill across the field aiming for a stile next to a tree on the skyline. From here go diagonally left towards houses and a large oak tree, and continue alongside a fence to join another path at a stile.

Turn immediately left, leaving the Delamere Way, and follow this path along the side of the field with gardens on your right. At the end of the field cross a stile with steps leading down a wooded slope, then take another stile ahead to continue following the field edge around the back of the houses of Delamere Park.

Delamere Park is the old parkland of Delamere House, developed by the Wilbrahams from 1784. The house was demolished in 1938 and during the 2nd World War Delamere Park was a military camp. Later it housed displaced persons, many from Poland, prior to the building of new council estates in Cuddington and the surrounding villages.

Enjoy the extensive views to the left along this stretch. The conspicuous concrete tower of Daresbury Physics Laboratory is visible in the distance due north from here and also the water tower at Norton, near Runcorn. Finally you will reach an unmade track leading out into Cuddington Lane.

Three species of pigeon were noted on the fields behind Delamere Park (collared dove, wood pigeon and a sizeable flock of stock dove. Also around 30 meadow pipits were seen with a couple of skylark and several piped wagtail.

Turn left at the lane and immediately turn right onto a concrete track leading to another footpath. Here there is a good view over Cuddington village before you descend to a bridge over the stream leaving Merlewood Pool. Here you can see the remains of the sluices which once controlled the water supply to the mill downstream. Follow the path, keeping the pool on your right, and then at the end of the fence continue straight ahead through a kissing gate and over a bridge to join Mill Lane.

Merlewood House was built in the late 19th century by a member of the Thompson salt family of Northwich, hence the old local name for the pool, Thompson's Pool.

On Merlewood Pool several coot, moorhen, mallard, tufted duck and heron and occasionally a pair of swans may be seen.

Turn right up Mill Lane to Norley Road, where you turn left towards the traffic lights with the White Barn pub ahead of you. Use the pedestrian crossing on the left to cross the busy A49 and then go straight ahead down Norley Road with Cuddington Station on your left. Shortly cross the railway bridge and arrive back at your starting point.