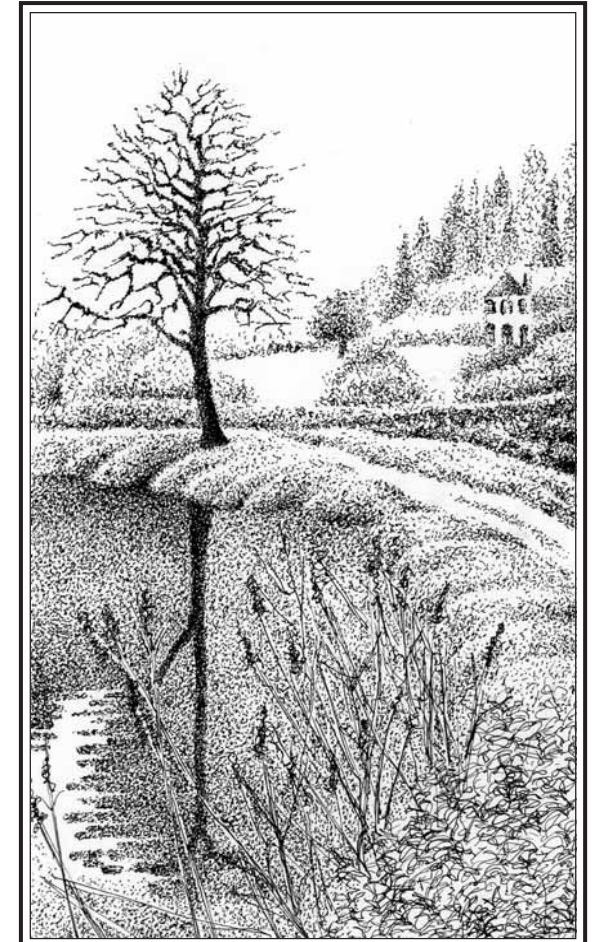
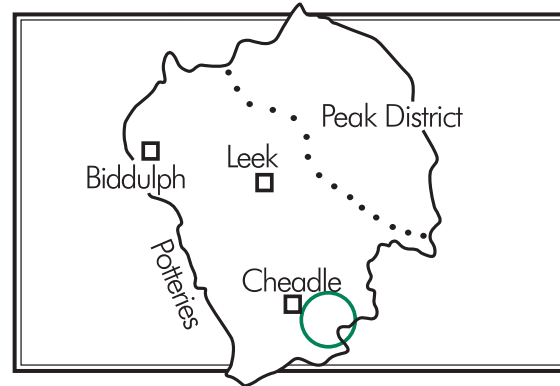


Furnace Forest

AROUND DIMMINGSDALE, ALTON



LOCATION OF WALK



How to get there

Dimmingsdale can be reached along a lane called Red Road from both Alton and Oakamoor. From Oakamoor (3 miles north east of Cheadle) turn of the B5471 at the Admiral Jervis Hotel. Follow the lane, bearing left at the fork, and the Ramblers Retreat is approximately 1 mile further. Parking is available. For information about buses to Oakamoor and Alton telephone Traveline 0871 200 22 33.

Furnace Forest

For centuries the forests around Dimmingsdale thrived with industrial activity. Within the woodland worked woodcutters, corders to chop the wood into appropriate sizes, and colliers to produce the charcoal. All paid rent to the Earl of Shrewsbury for use of the forests. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries local metal ores such as lead and iron were brought to Dimmingsdale and smelted using charcoal as fuel. Power to work bellows and hammers was harvested from fast flowing streams.

By the nineteenth century most of the remote industries had declined, leaving behind a legacy of disused mills, dammed pools and trackways. The fifteenth Earl of Shrewsbury, much impressed by this landscape of sandstone escarpments and narrow valley ravines, took up residence on the estate. He built the magnificent Alton Towers and spent much time in the forests now rich with wildlife and historical gems.

Enjoy the walk

The forest walk is about 4 miles (6km) long. Some moderately steep climbs must be negotiated to obtain splendid views over the canopy to Alton and the Churnet Valley. Allow 2-3 hours to complete the walk.

Remember, these paths cross private land.
Please follow the Countryside Code:

- Be safe plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Leave gates as you find them.
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people.

The Parks and Countryside Service,
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council,
Moorlands House,
Stockwell Street,
Leek,
Staffordshire,
ST13 6HQ.

Telephone: 0845 605 3010
countryside@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk
www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk/countryside

1. From the Ramblers Retreat follow the right hand track along the poolside passing the old mill on the left. On the far side of this building you can see the old water-wheel which harnessed the power of water for lead smelting in the eighteenth century and later grind corn. Continue past Earls Rock, through Ousal Dale.

2. At the path crossing, continue straight on, turn left at the top and pass the Y.H.A. buildings. Follow the wall side through "The Ranger". This is a particularly valuable forest pasture designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest to protect its wide variety of plants and associated wildlife. On the skyline, looking across the meadow, stands Alton Castle and the Gothic style Alton Towers to the left.

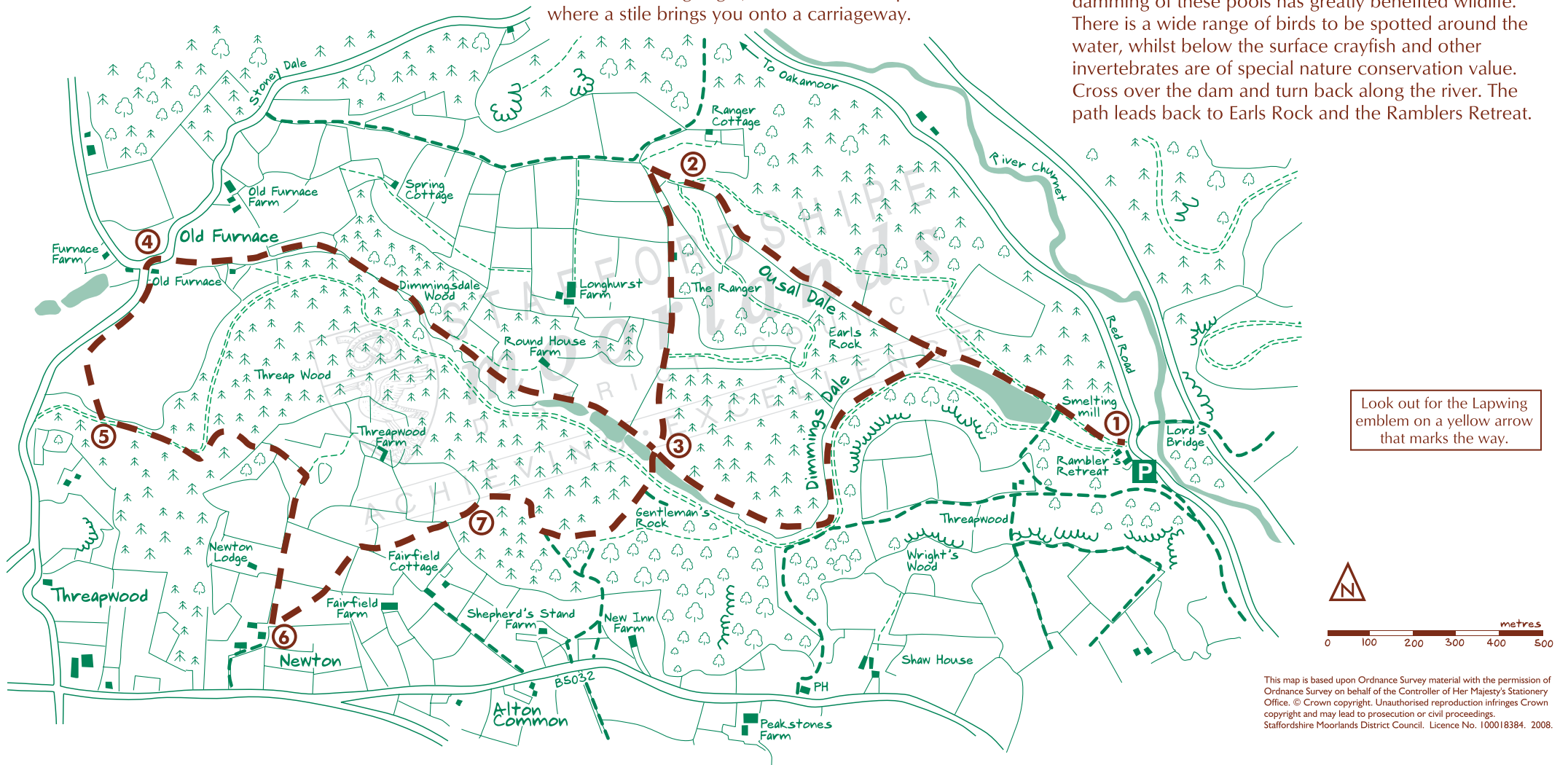
3. The path winds steeply down to the valley bottom. Turn right in front of the pool and continue along the bridleway. This was once used to bring charcoal from Alton Park to Old Furnace and later as a carriageway for the Earl of Shrewsbury to travel to Cheadle. The curious round house on the right was built by the Earl as a hunting lodge, with views of the impressive scenery in all directions.

4. At Old Furnace turn left along the lane, after 50m turn left into a field. Bear right along the left ridge of a sunken packhorse lane that carried stone to build the first furnace in northern Britain. The furnace at this site operated between 1593 and 1608 producing 1200 tons of iron bars during that time for Staffordshire and further afield. As the lane swings right, bear left to the top of the field where a stile brings you onto a carriageway.

5. Follow the carriageway left then take a path to the right where the carriageway bends steeply round, and follow the path through the woods until you emerge into a field by a gate. Cross the field and turn right along the track.

6. After 1/4 mile look for a stile on the left opposite a cottage. Bear left across the fields. Follow on through three stiles then bear left to the bottom field corner in the direction of the woods. Here, fine views stretch across the landscape, demonstrating a strong contrast between high bleak moorlands and the richly wooded Churnet Valley. In the next field a stile on the right takes you back into the woods.

7. Follow the path downhill to the mill ponds. The early damming of these pools has greatly benefited wildlife. There is a wide range of birds to be spotted around the water, whilst below the surface crayfish and other invertebrates are of special nature conservation value. Cross over the dam and turn back along the river. The path leads back to Earls Rock and the Ramblers Retreat.



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