

# The History of Charnwood Forest

The origins of the name 'Charnwood' are uncertain. The area was known as *Cernewoda* in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century and as *Charnwode* by 1276. Given the landscape of the area, one of the more likely theories is that it comes from "chern", which is an old word for rocky or stony.

Originally, the rocky nature of much of Charnwood made it unsuitable for arable farming, so much of it was used for grazing. Deer parks were popular and were created at a number of sites including Bradgate Park. Grazing, along with a growing demand for timber, meant that by the 16<sup>th</sup> century much of Charnwood had lost its tree cover.

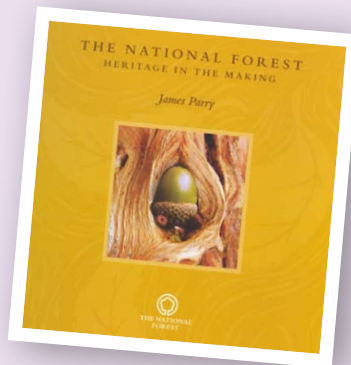
By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, advances in agriculture made Charnwood more attractive to landowners seeking to 'enclose' land for farming. The Act of Enclosure for Charnwood was passed in 1808 and demand was high, with 60,000 acres of claims made on just 11,000 acres of land. However, enclosure did not always mean that land was ploughed and farmed. Many areas were planted with trees, often to provide cover for gamebirds. Indeed, much of the 'old' woodland in Charnwood today can be dated back to these plantations.

Sadly, enclosure had a serious effect on the wildlife of Charnwood. Those areas that avoided felling or enclosure contain some of the richest habitats in The National Forest. But much of the land outside of these islands of wildlife lost many of its species.

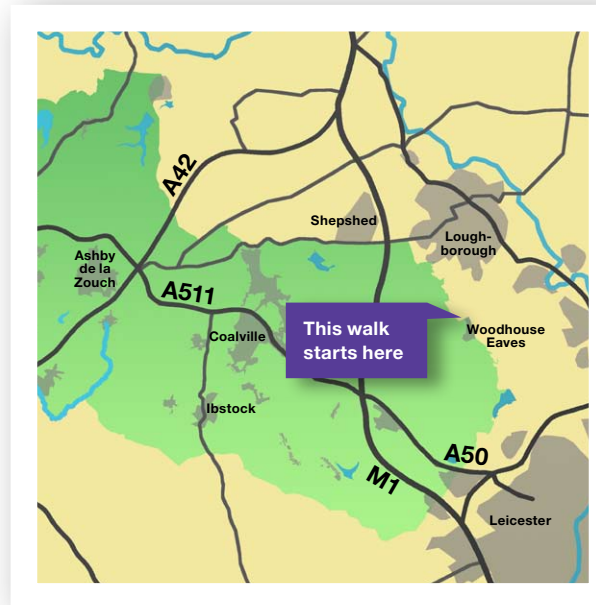
Now, following years of effort by a range of organisations, the wildlife of Charnwood is recovering. Birds such as buzzards and ravens are making a welcome return and rare plants are expanding out of the protected nature reserves.

More information on the history of The National Forest can be found in **The National Forest - Heritage in the Making** by James Parry.

Available from:  
[www.nationalforest.org](http://www.nationalforest.org)



This leaflet can be used in conjunction with OS Explorer 245 (The National Forest) and 246 (Loughborough).



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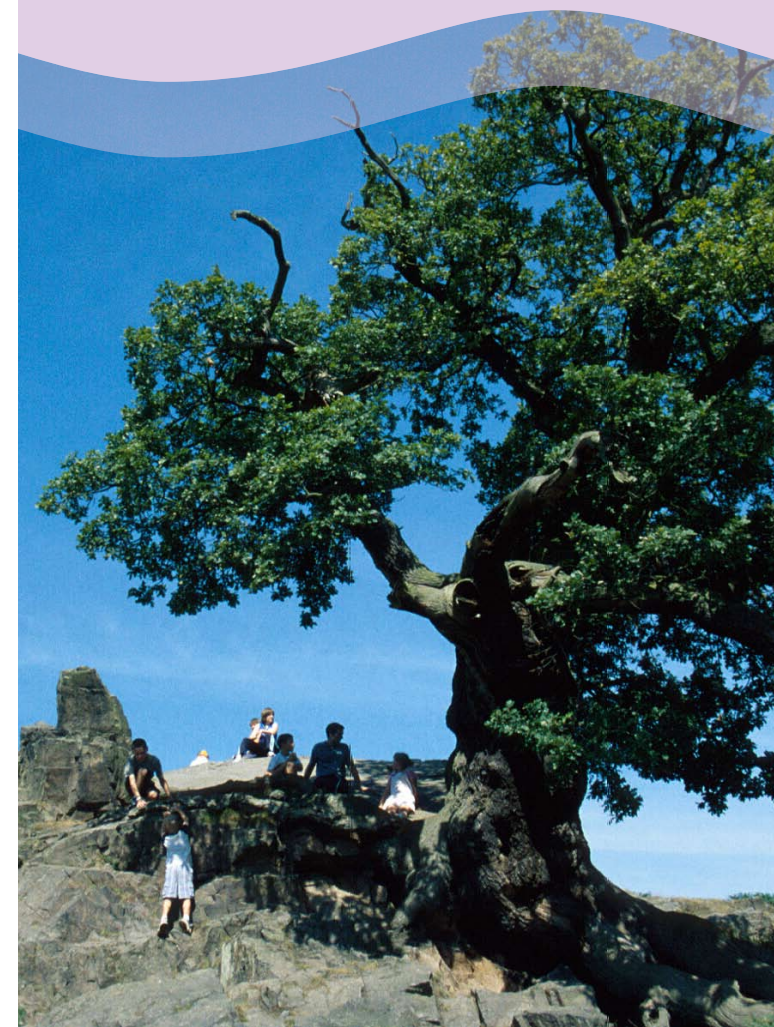
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*Route design and research: Greg Jones  
Photos: Christopher Beech, Greg Jones & NFC*

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# Charnwood Peaks

15 mile long walk



# Charnwood peaks

- 1 Start from the **Bradgate Park** car park. From the main entrance to the Park, turn immediately left and follow the track that runs roughly parallel to the estate wall until it goes through a gap in a second dry-stone wall. From here there are many tracks that can be taken through the bracken, woods and rocky outcrops but as the intention is to reach the highest point in the park – uphill is the key!

Climb the first hill to a spinney (marked Tyburn on the map). Walk through the spinney and then uphill towards a prominent obelisk – 'The Prince Albert's Own Leicestershire Yeomanry Regiment memorial'.

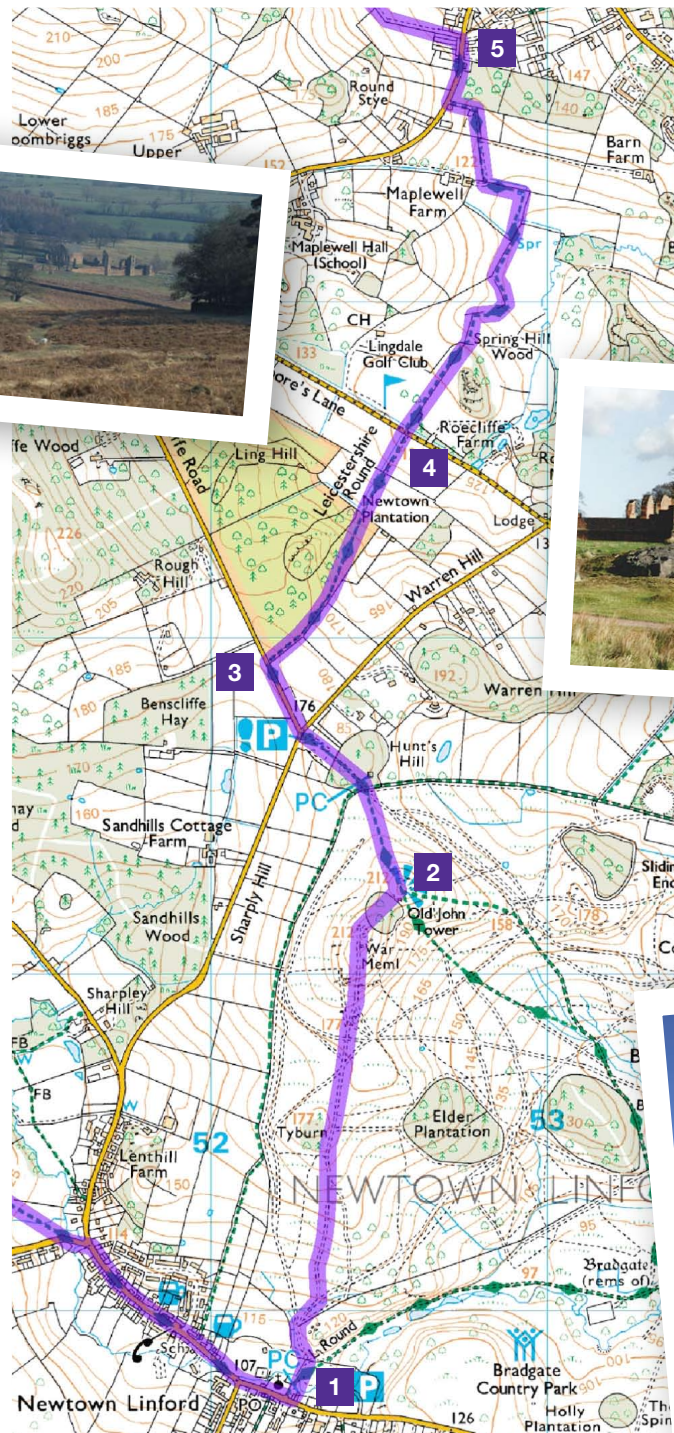
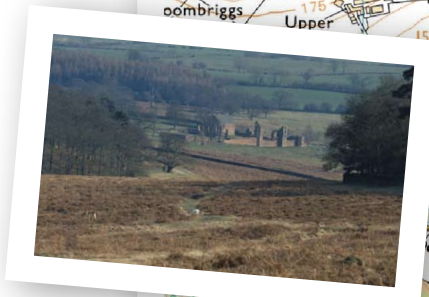
From the memorial, continue in the same direction through the walled copse to the summit of the hill and **Old John Tower**.

- 2 From Old John Hill, join the Leicestershire Round and descend the hill along the well-worn footpath to the Hunts Hill car park. At the car park exit, cross the road and proceed along Benscliffe Road.

- 3 After 200 metres, turn right at the public footpath sign. The Leicestershire Round follows a well-marked route through Rough Hill Woodlands. Follow this obvious path down to a gate into the Lingdale Golf course. Follow the intermittent hedge and ditch to Joe Moore's Lane.

- 4 Cross the road and continue along the Leicestershire Round. Keep to the right of the fairway. There is soon a short detour from our straight route, first to the right along a hedge then after 50 metres bear left around a small copse. Walk with the hedge on your left as far as the stile, where you leave the golf course.

The Leicestershire Round continues on, past Maplewell Farm and out on to Maplewell Road, on the outskirts of Woodhouse Eaves. Turn right along the road for 200 metres to the entrance to **Broombriggs Farm Country Park**.



## Bradgate Park

It is difficult to imagine what the English countryside looked like back in the Middle Ages. But in Bradgate Park we have a glimpse of the 'wasteland' that comprised Charnwood Forest back in the days of the Norman Conquest. Too poor for cultivation, the land has been preserved as a deer park for at least 800 years. The mixture of heathland, grassy slopes, rocky outcrops and small woodland spinneys looks today much as it would have done a millennia ago.

Bradgate features strongly in England's history – its most famous occupant was probably Lady Jane Grey who has the dubious distinction of being England's most ephemeral Monarch.

The Park is noted for its stunted oaks. A local legend says that the oaks were pollarded as a sign of mourning when Lady Jane Grey was beheaded and have never recovered since. No doubt rooting into thin soil over volcanic rocks has its effect too!



## Old John Tower

Crowning the highest hill in Bradgate Park is Old John – a folly in the shape of a huge tankard. Built in 1784, it replaced a windmill that had stopped working and was

originally used as an observation tower at the centre of a mile-long practice horse gallop. Set into the rocks to the south of the Tower are the surviving portions of stables built in the mid 19th century for the Seventh Earl of Stamford's racehorses.

The folly is well known for its mug shape, the 'handle' of which was added later - reputedly in memory of a beer-loving family retainer who died in 1786 when a great pole, set up in the middle of a celebratory bonfire for the coming of age of George Harry (the future Sixth Earl of Stamford), toppled over.



## Broombriggs Farm Country Park

In 1970, Mr. & Mrs. Charles Frears of Woodhouse Eaves purchased Broombriggs Farm at auction and gave it to Leicestershire County Council "for the quiet enjoyment of the people of the county and city of its natural beauty and fine views and to encourage their interest in farming". It is a 55ha mixed arable and stock farm, and has a 1.5 mile farm trail with information boards explaining the working of the farm.

### Beacon Hill

At 248m (814ft), Beacon Hill is the second highest point in Leicestershire and commands a wonderful view. A toposcope shows the landmarks that can be seen from the summit. The panorama is made up of the Soar and Trent valleys to the north and Charnwood Forest and Leicester to the south. On a clear day, you can see the spire of Lincoln cathedral. Directly north is Ratcliffe Power Station, with what appears to be two cooling towers. Seen from any other direction it is clear that the power station has 8 towers but they have been specifically aligned to give a reduced profile in the view from Beacon Hill.

The hill probably takes its name (along with most of the other Beacon Hills in England) from its use as a site for a signalling beacon and it is thought to be part of the Elizabethan early warning system for the approach of the Spanish Armada.

Look out for an unusual formation in the rocks below the summit to the northwest, which has been christened the 'Old Man of Beacon Hill'.

Earthworks on the hill are the remains of a hill fort constructed in the Bronze Age (around 3,000 years ago). Bronze bracelets, an axe mould and spearheads have all been found on Beacon Hill in the vicinity of these prehistoric earthworks and are all on display at the Jewry Wall Museum, in Leicester.



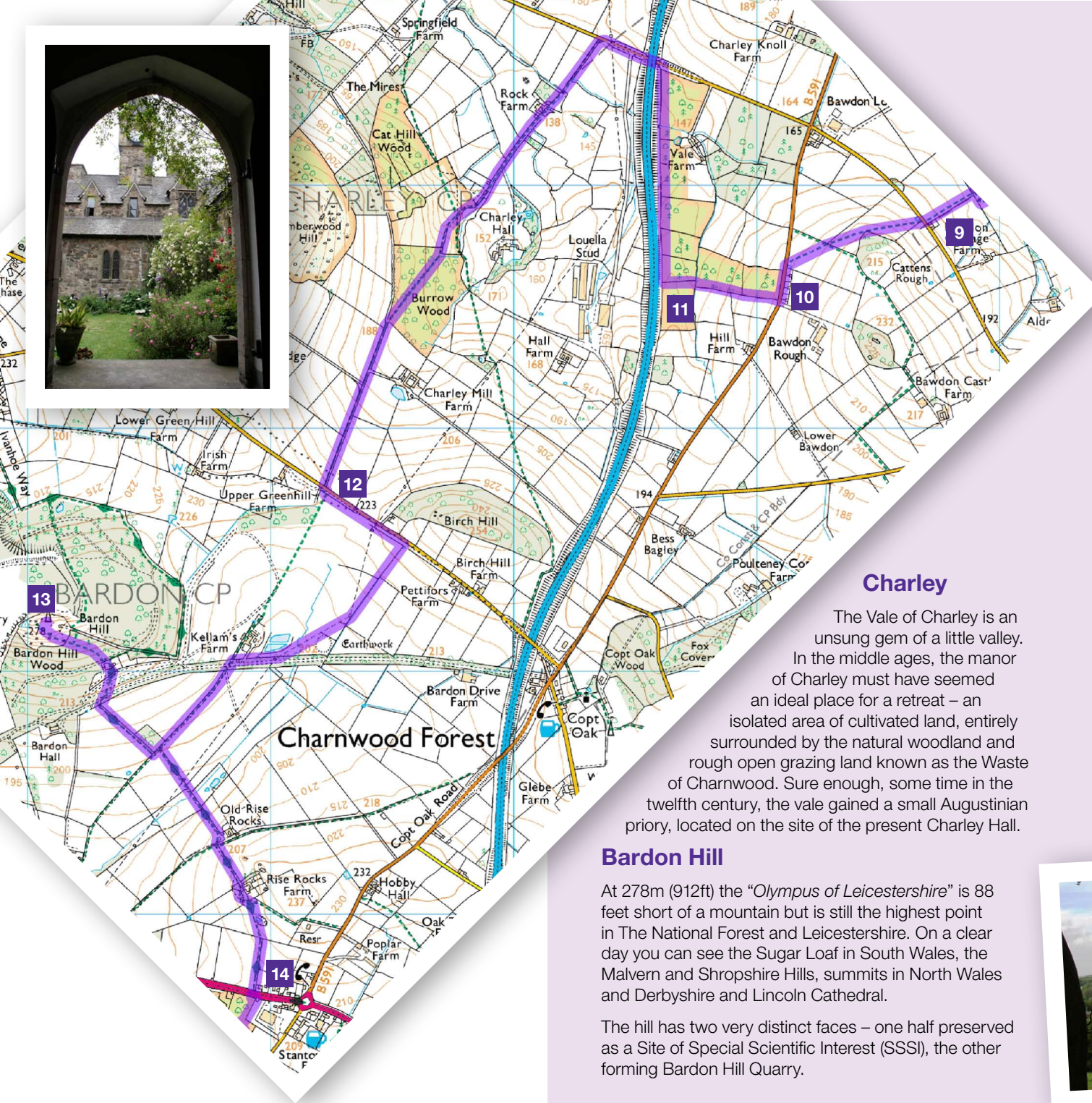
- 5 Go through the bridle gate and follow the well-used path up the hill. At the end of the second field, where the path reaches a small wood and turns right, go through the 'lock gates' on your left (twin gates with a weighted closing system). Turn right again and follow the wall to the corner of the wood. Now strike off diagonally to the left following the line of two chestnut trees, ending up at a metal gate in the top right hand corner of the field. Go through the gate joining the drive from Broombriggs House. Follow the drive to Beacon Road.
- 6 Cross Beacon Road and continue straight ahead into **Beacon Hill Country Park**. Ignore the first track you come to as this is a bridleway/cyclepath, but continue a little way further where you meet the main footpath through the wood. Turn left and take the steady climb uphill to the summit of Beacon Hill.
- 7 Head away from the summit, descending between the rocks towards the nearby twin wind turbines. After a few steps you reach a clear path by a wall. Turn right onto the path and stop at the information board to admire the 'Old Man of the Beacon'.



Go through the metal gate opposite the board and follow the path down to the far right hand corner of the field. Go through another metal gate and follow the PEDESTRIAN ACCESS signs through the trees. Go through the gate and continue along Jubilee Walk to Deans Lane.

- 8 Turn left along Deans Lane to the T-junction with Shepshed Road. Carefully cross the road and take the marked footpath opposite. Follow this footpath to Charley Road.





## Charley

The Vale of Charley is an unsung gem of a little valley. In the middle ages, the manor of Charley must have seemed an ideal place for a retreat – an isolated area of cultivated land, entirely surrounded by the natural woodland and rough open grazing land known as the Waste of Charnwood. Sure enough, some time in the twelfth century, the vale gained a small Augustinian priory, located on the site of the present Charley Hall.

## Bardon Hill

At 278m (912ft) the “*Olympus of Leicestershire*” is 88 feet short of a mountain but is still the highest point in The National Forest and Leicestershire. On a clear day you can see the Sugar Loaf in South Wales, the Malvern and Shropshire Hills, summits in North Wales and Derbyshire and Lincoln Cathedral.

The hill has two very distinct faces – one half preserved as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the other forming Bardon Hill Quarry.

- 9 Cross the road and slightly to the right, join the sign-posted footpath that climbs diagonally across the field over the brow of the hill, passing the walled copse of Cattons Rough on your left. Continue straight ahead along the footpath to the B591.
- 10 Turn left and walk along the verge, past the houses. At the end of the cottages, cross the road and stile to enter Wetton Wood. Descend along the clear path with the hedge on your left. At the bottom of the hill you reach a small stream crossed by a tiny bridge. Go over the stile and continue in the same direction until the M1 blocks your way.
- 11 Turn right and continue parallel to the motorway for about a kilometre until you reach **Charley Road** (again). Turn left under the M1 and, after 300m, take the signed public footpath left along the tree lined tarmac drive to Rock Farm. Follow the footpath past the farm until you reach a kissing gate into Charley Woods. The footpath bends slightly right and reaches a signposted T-junction. Turn left and follow a clear path up the hill to enter Burrow Wood. Keep straight on through Burrow Wood to a kissing gate that opens onto a walled grassy track. The track soon becomes a metalled road which leads you to Warren Hills Road.
- 12 Cross the road and take the footpath opposite to Kellam’s Farm. Turn left and follow the short farm track to Bardon Drive. Cross the Drive and continue on the footpath to a small wood where it meets the Ivanhoe Way. Turn right and ascend **Bardon Hill**.
- 13 From the top of Bardon Hill return the way you came, crossing the wide quarry road to Bardon Drive. This is also where you join the Ivanhoe Way. Cross the road to the footpath opposite and follow the Ivanhoe Way past Old Rise Rocks to Rise Rock Farm. Just past the houses turn right onto a farm road that takes you to the A511.



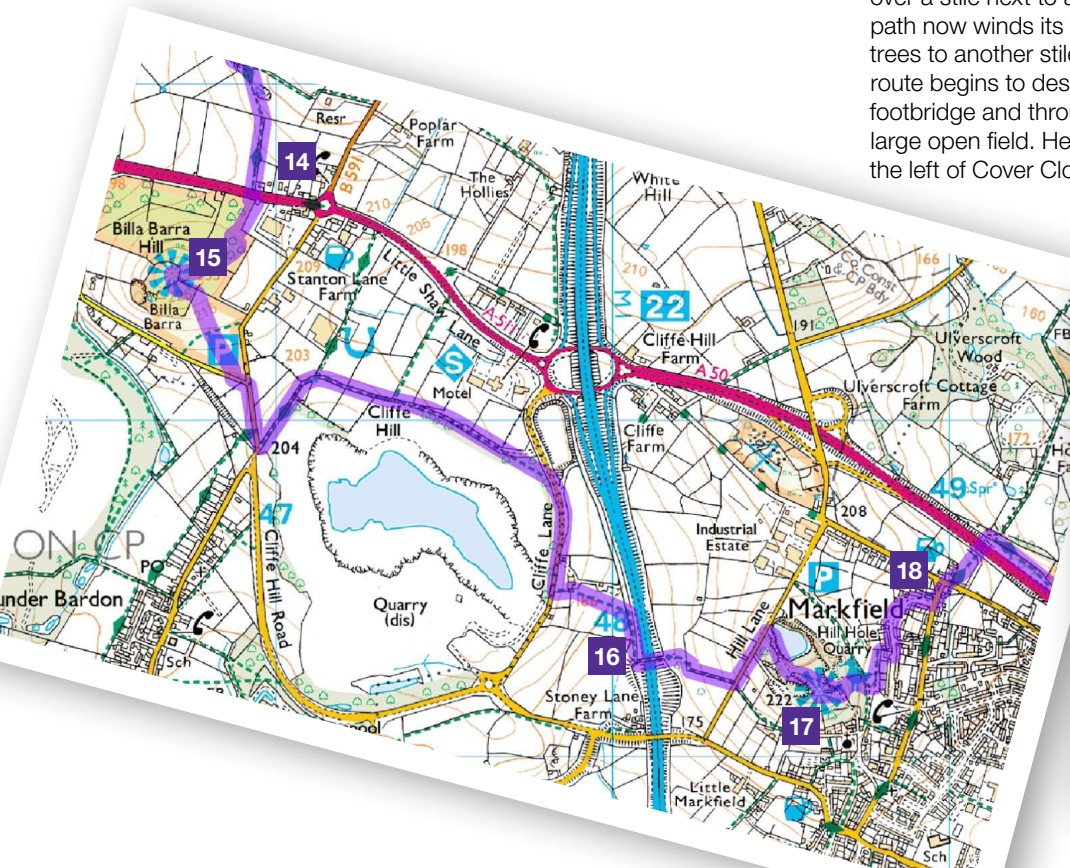
**14** The A511 is a very fast dual carriageway and the safest way to cross is to turn left, and proceed to the traffic lights at the roundabout, returning on the south side of the A-road to a stile into the **Billa Barra** site. Go through the wood and ascend the hill. Continue over the hill and descend to the Noon Column, which is on the left hand side of the field below the summit.

**15** Continue past the Column to the car park and exit on to Billa Barra Lane. Turn left, then right on to Stanton Lane. 200 metres along the lane turn left onto the marked public footpath. The footpath skirts around the northern side of Olde Cliffe Hill Quarry and emerges onto Cliffe Hill Lane. Turn right and continue along the lane for about 350 metres looking out for a stile. Cross the stile and follow the yellow way-markers along the right hand side of the field. Continue towards the M1, passing a deep pond on the way. Cross a stile and footbridge over a ditch and proceed along the side of the motorway to the farm bridge over the M1.

**16** At the far side of the motorway follow the footpath to Hill Lane. Turn left and, at the top of the hill, turn right into the **Hill Hole Quarry Nature Reserve**. Follow the tall green fence with the quarry lake on your left. At the far end of the lake you reach a small meadow. Climb the steps out of the old quarry. At the top, turn right and climb to the summit and a fine view.

**17** Return to the top of the steps and continue in the original direction. After a few metres turn left along a smaller path. This path turns sharp right and descends to the main track through the nature reserve. Cross this major thoroughfare to a smaller path that leaves the reserve along the side of the allotments and emerges onto Upland Drive.

**18** Turn left and continue up the road to the end of the Drive where we turn left onto Main Road. Rejoin the Leicestershire Round and follow it under the A50. At the end of the tunnel turn left and immediately right following the sign to Newtown Linford. This good path continues parallel to the A50 until it turns left over a stile next to a large yellow marker post. The path now winds its way through a patch of young trees to another stile. Keeping to the main path, the route begins to descend then turns right over a small footbridge and through a kissing gate, emerging into a large open field. Head for the far corner of the field to the left of Cover Cloud Wood.



## Billa Barra

This small area of rock and surrounding meadow is actually part of the rim of an ancient volcano and a regionally important geological site due to its rock outcrops of Markfieldite.

Long before William the Conqueror fought his way across England, "Billa" was a popular name in Old English. It has been suggested that Barra could be a corruption of barrow, meaning burial ground, which would link the location with the stories of a Saxon battle on the adjacent land and burial of the dead on the hill. However, the quarrying that occurred on the hill up until the 1950s would have destroyed any physical evidence.



During the 1990s, Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council purchased the site. About 10,000 trees, mostly local English oak and silver birch, have been planted on the flatter areas around the hill.

In the south-east corner of the site you will find a Noon Column.

Created by internationally renowned artist David Nash, this sculpture is aligned so that the sun shines through a vertical slot at 'true' noon each day, creating a line of light in the shadow cast by the column. Made of English Oak and standing beside a section of dry-stone wall built by local volunteers, the scene captures the rugged upland character of the Charnwood Landscape.

## Hill Hole Quarry Nature Reserve

Markfield Knoll Hill was once one of four granite hills in the area, the other three being Billa Barra, Cliffe Hill and Bardon Hill. Each has been extensively quarried for their stone. Hill Hole Quarry was opened in 1852 and many houses were built to accommodate the new employees – the stone built terraced houses behind the Parish Church known as 'New Row' being good examples. The quarry was a dangerous place to work and at least 6 employees died there in the latter half of the 19th century. These days the water filled quarry is still a hazard and no diving or swimming is allowed.

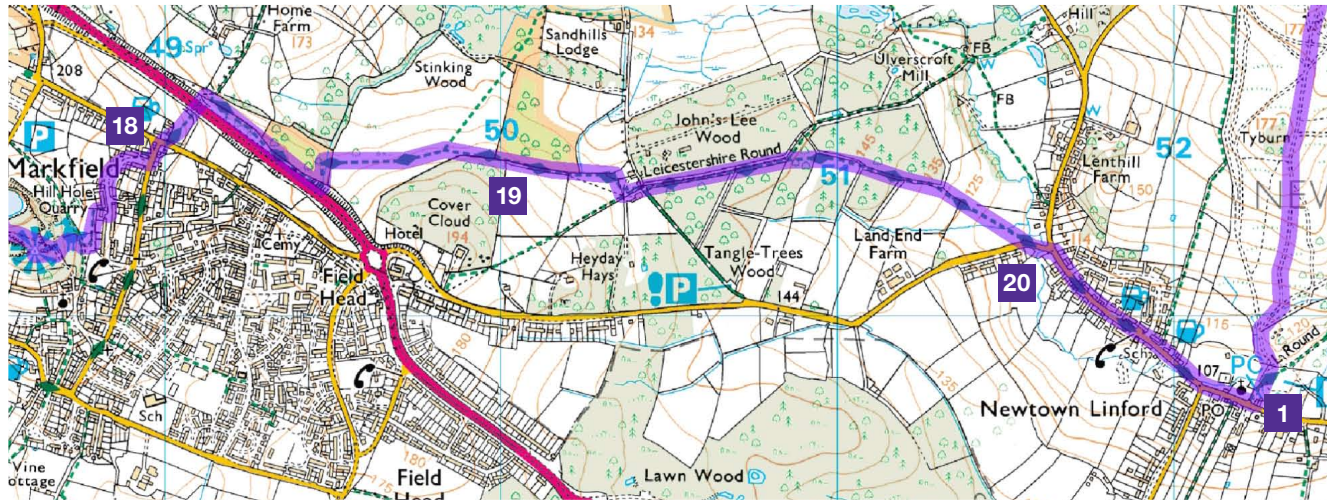


# Rock of ages

## The geology of Charnwood

The Alps are about 20 million years old; the Himalayas are about 40 million years old and are still growing; the Rockies are older still at about 70 million years. These are all mere youngsters compared to the Charnwood hills, which came into being hundreds of millions of years ago.

The rocks of Beacon Hill were formed about 560 million years ago, from layer upon layer of volcanic ash that swiftly cooled as it sank into an ancient sea. The source of the eruption was a volcano four miles to the west (near to where Whitwick is now).



## Newtown Linford

Newtown Linford is a pleasant village, with many timbered and thatched roofed cottages and several fine examples of local Swithland slate roofs. Even the cricket field behind the church is regarded as one of the most attractive in the country.

The Main Street winds alongside the River Lin, which flows out through Bradgate Park and into Cropston Reservoir. At the junction of Markfield Lane and Main Street there was once a ford across the Lin, from which the village derives its name.

The village and its development is closely associated with that of Bradgate Park. The first documented reference to both the village and the park was in the 13th Century. The village now benefits from its proximity to Bradgate Park through local tourism and is home to several popular cafes and hotels.



- 19** At the far side of the field, cross the stile and enter Sandhills Lodge Woods. The clearly marked path starts along the edge of the wood then crosses over a ditch and through a metal gate to the far side of the hedge. Continue with the hedge and ditch on your left through a series of five small fields until you reach a T-junction onto a major track. Turn left towards Sharpley Hill and pass to the right of the barn. Here, you reach another major junction of tracks. Continue straight across, through the gate, onto a long, straight and broad footpath with a well established wood on your left (John's Lee Wood Scout Camp) and a young mixed wood on the right.

After half a kilometre of straight path, ignore the path on the left and bearing slightly right head for and through the metal gate. To the left is Bailey-Sim Woods, 3ha of mixed woodland, part of The National Forest planted in 1997. The clearly marked path continues through five fields, with one right/left kink through a kissing gate, to emerge onto Markfield Lane at the edge of Newtown Linford.

- 20** Turn left onto the lane and cross the river Lin. This is the site of the former ford that gives the village its name. Turn right onto Main Street and continue for 800 metres through the village back to the Bradgate Park car park.



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About 150 million years later, intense geological activity caused the rock strata to buckle and fold, resulting in the development of a mountain range that over time has been eroded down to form the characteristic landscapes of the surrounding crags.

This folding is clearly apparent on Beacon Hill where the layers of rock around the summit are seen to be tilted steeply from the horizontal plane in which they were formed. This greenish-grey, very flinty rock (known locally as the 'Beacon Hill Hornstone'), is amongst the oldest in Britain.