

IN THE SHADOW OF THE STIPERSTONES

Darnford Walk

Ramble along the Shropshire Way to discover a hidden, golden valley. Then enjoy panoramic views whilst following a 3000 year old thoroughfare.

START The Horse Shoe Inn, Bridges (Grid Reference SO 393 964)

OS Explorer™ 217

Parking at Horse Shoe Inn

Allow 3 hours

6½ miles
Short cut 4 miles (1½ hour)

Pleasant walking through woodland, open farmland, and on quiet country lanes. Some gentle climbs. Can be very wet and muddy in places.

The walk starts from The Horse Shoe Inn, Bridges.

The route sets off following The Shropshire Way, Shropshire's 140 mile long distance footpath, which "passes through countryside as beautiful and as varied as any that can be found in the British Isles"*. The Way, which starts and finishes in the market town of Shrewsbury, explores the main uplands of the Shropshire Hills, designated in 1958 as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This identifies the Shropshire Hills as a place of national importance for its natural beauty and diversity. This walk will help you discover what makes this area so special as you experience the inspiring views, wildlife and history of the Golden Valley.

* From 'A Ramblers Guide to the Shropshire Way' by RW Moore

1 With the pub on your right, go to the junction and turn right (signposted Ratlinghope). Follow the road past the Youth Hostel to cross a stile on your left, just before the bridge.

Bridges, the settlement around the Horse Shoe Inn, was once the name of the inn itself. The inn served a major coaching road between Shrewsbury and Bishops Castle and boasted a smithy, which was working until 1940 and still survives on the corner of the road to the left of the pub. Working until 1940, the smithy's purple sandstone walls, quarried nearby, are obvious in many of the buildings locally. The Inn changed its name in 1890 to reflect the activity next door.

The Bridges Youth Hostel was a school, built in 1866. It became a youth hostel in 1931, one of the first 10 in England.

2 Continue along the track, with Darnford Brook on your right to cross a stile on your left opposite an old brick built bridge.

3 Continue on following the river into a conifer woodland known locally as Garden Coppice. Keep to the

river bank to reach a track going down to a ford. Cross the track and go over the stile into Rookery Wood.

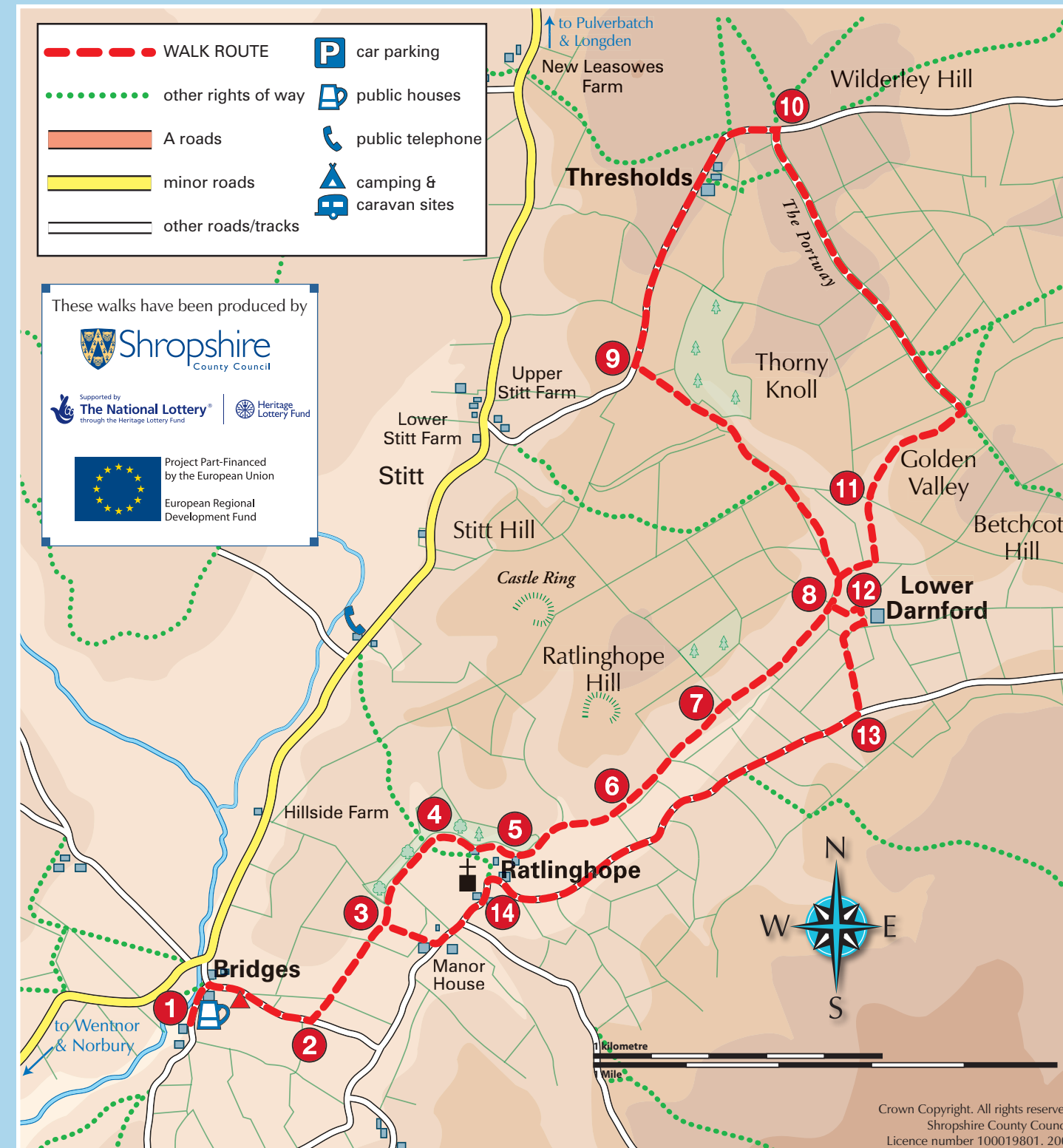
4 After the next stile continue through the garden with the stream on your right, (please keep to the path and keep dogs on leads).

5 Cross the next stile and go left past Ratlinghope ford to follow an obvious track past a small quarry.

Ratlinghope (often called Ratchup and marked Ratchop on 19th century plans) is a settlement of much less importance today than in the past. Across the stream, the old mill building probably dates from the 18th century. There are records of a mill here from 1291, that last worked about 1900.

6 Keep going as the path skirts the bottom of Ratlinghope Hill weaving through bracken sloped, often boggy, open country to eventually reach an impressive stand of beech trees.

These beeches were planted at least 150 years ago. You can tell this by measuring their girth at chest height. An unpoll-arded beech is aged at approximately one year per inch of girth.



Further Information

Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre,
School Road, Craven Arms SY7 9RS.

Tel: 01588 676060

www.shropshirehillsdiscoverycentre.co.uk

Discover the wonders of the Shropshire Hills from the splendour of the scenery to the complexity of their history and heritage.

Travel Information

For bus and train information

call: 0871 200 2233

Guidelines for walkers

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



Other walks in this series

Adstone Walk: An inspiring 5½ walk following the Shropshire Way over the summit of Adstone Hill. If you love a good view, you'll love this walk!

Mucklewick Walk: Wander the hills and valleys of this quiet borderland. If you want to get away from it all, this is the walk for you!

Flenny Bank Walk: The view from Flenny Bank is one of the finest in the land! Discover the story of this landscape, said to have been shaped by the devil himself!

To find out more about walking in Shropshire visit
www.shropshirewalking.co.uk

To explore more of Shropshire's beautiful landscape and to find out more about its people, nature and history go to

www.discovershropshire.org.uk

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- 7 Carry on with the trees on your right, to cross a stile and continue until you reach the old county road at Lower Darnford (now a rough track).

If you wish to cut your walk short at this point and return to The Horse Shoe Inn, turn right and go to point 12, otherwise continue below.

- 8 Go left up the track through the gate, cross the next stile then bear left following the track up the hill. Follow this track through a series of gates and stiles, passing fishing pools on your right, until you reach the road.

Keep looking back along the ridge of Stitt Hill behind you until you can see Castle Ring, the earthworks of a small Iron Age enclosure dating back some 2500 years. To the west stands the jagged skyline of the Stiperstones – the landscape which inspired the writings of local author Mary Webb (1881-1927) in *The Golden Arrow* and *Precious Bane*.



- 9 Turn right along the road, passing the Thresholds Centre on your right. Stop when you reach a turning on to the Port Way on your right and admire the view.

Thresholds is an isolated farmstead dating back 300 years or more, high on the northern flank of the Long Mynd, now used as a craft-based activity centre.

Cutting across the tops of the hills, the Port Way, thought to be Bronze Age in origin dating back 3000 years, runs close to several burial mounds or "tumuli". This ancient track has been a vital route, perhaps initially linked to the trade in bronze age axes from the axe factory on Corndon Hill to the west and later as a main drovers road.

Look over the gate opposite the junction and you will see a solitary standing stone. If you walk over to the stone you will see that it bears a plaque dating to 1791 and appears to be a gatepost left isolated by the disappearance of a field boundary.

- 10 Continue along the Port Way, to eventually cross a stile on your right, taking you down the Golden Valley so named because it is aflame with yellow gorse in summer.

- 11 Go left at the bottom of the hill to cross a stile in a fence. Continue down hill bearing right at the bottom to cross a footbridge. Then bear slightly left, heading for the stile and gate by an old beech tree. You were at this point earlier. Retrace your steps for a short distance, heading back to Lower Darnford.

Darnford from "dearne-ford" meaning "hidden ford". Certainly this is a hidden valley yet the sunken lane descending to the ford suggests a route that has seen much use in the past.

- 12 Keep on the track towards Lower Darnford, crossing over the stream and following the track to cross the stream again. From the bridge, bear right to follow the track up the hill to meet the road.

- 13 Turn right and follow this quiet country lane all the way to the village of Ratlinghope.



The Long Mynd is known for its harsh winters. One locally famous tale is that of Reverend Donald Carr who nearly lost his life crossing the Mynd in the snows of 1865. The story "A Night in the Snow" details his epic journey.

Stop in Ratlinghope and take a look at the church.

The ancient yew trees in the churchyard and field to the east of the church reflect the antiquity of this religious site which can be traced back to a 13th Century priory. The interesting inscription on the south door dates the present building to at least 1625, though it was probably old then. The churchyard is managed for conservation under the "Caring for God's Acre" scheme.

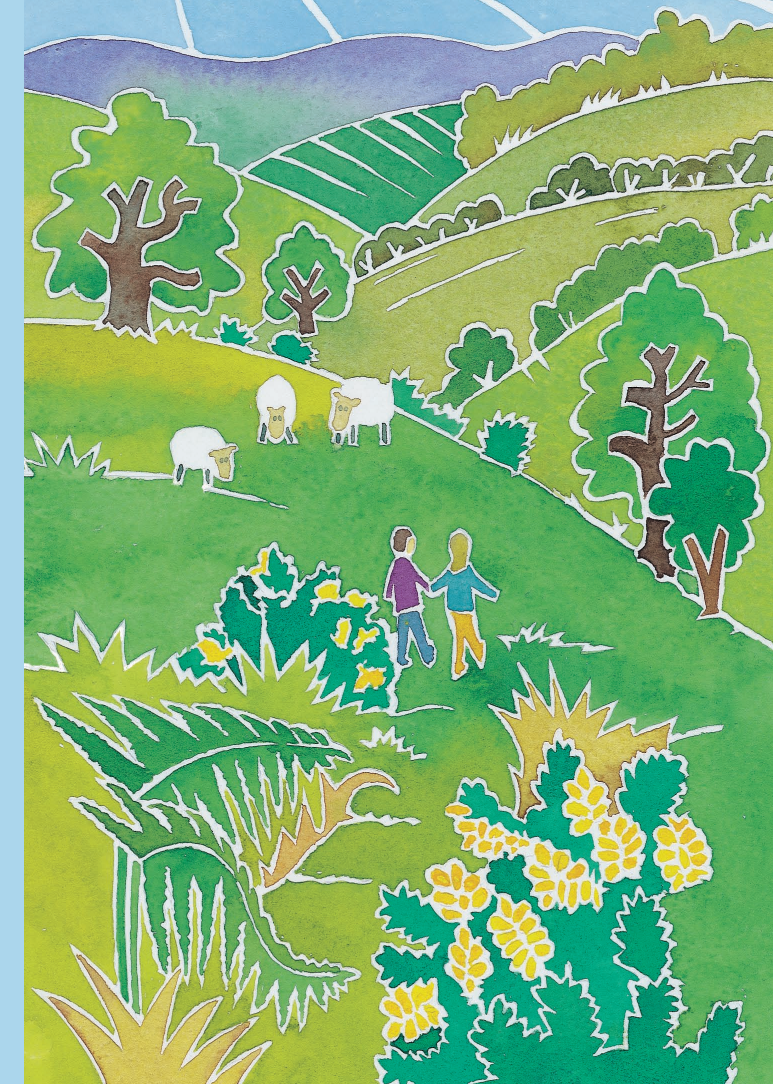
- 14 Go on through the village, going straight ahead at the junction at the top of the hill (signposted Medlicott & Bishop's Castle). Continue to cross the next stile on the right, just before Manor House. Go on down the field to cross the Darnford Brook, turn left and retrace your steps back to Bridges.

"The Horse Shoe Inn at Bridges has always been a haven for travellers. At the end of a good walk it's a great place to stop for a drink and a bite to eat"

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Discover Shropshire
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DARNFORD WALK



One of four walks exploring the rugged beauty of the Stiperstones

50p