
Walk 3 Breedon to Melbourne and Staunton Harold

Fossil landscapes, Triassic deserts and ice-age sediments, historic stone buildings and an attractive reservoir

Distance: about 13 km (8 miles) This walk is generally unsuitable for the disabled although the part from Melbourne to Staunton Harold reservoir is suitable

This walk begins at the Priory Church of Saint Mary and Saint Hardulph, Breedon on the Hill [1][SK 40393 22847], but an alternative starting point is at Staunton Harold Reservoir [9]. Parking is free at Breedon church but there may be a charge at Staunton Harold.

The Priory Church is a dominant and impressive feature in the landscape.

It is visible for miles, perched on top of Breedon Hill and standing more than 120 m above the surrounding low ground. The hill is made of early Carboniferous limestones, in which the original calcite has been converted to dolomite. This dolomitisation process made the rock harder and thus more resistant to erosion.

The Priory Church has a lot of historical and geological interest, so you may wish to spend some time here. An excellent book detailing the history of the church is available to purchase inside. The site started as an Anglo-Saxon monastery around AD 676 (p.32), but the present church dates from the 12th century. Outside, in the churchyard, there are many headstones made of slate. There are two types: the local Swithland Slate (pp.5 and 22), displaying a rough back surface, and a Welsh slate, which is very smooth on both sides. The church itself is built of Triassic Bromsgrove Sandstone, from nearby quarries in the Trent valley or at Castle Donnington.

Inside Priory Church, there are two features of geological interest. There is a famous collection of Saxon carvings, seen in the walls; most are made from Jurassic rocks of the Lincolnshire Limestone, found 40 km away to the east of here. They were rescued from the Anglo-Saxon monastery when it fell into disrepair. Secondly, near the front of the church, carvings made from local alabaster can be seen. It was mined nearby at Aston and Chellaston.

Leave the church and walk back down the road you have just driven up. Around the first bend you will find a footpath on your right (there is no direction sign, just a post). Descend carefully down the first part of this path as it is steep and may be slippery when wet. Continue along the path, parallel to the road, and at the next yellow waymarker post turn right. You will then come to the viewing area that overlooks Breedon quarry [2][SK 40558 23174]. There are two interpretation boards here that tell you about the geology and the quarry operations here.

Return to the main path, continuing back the way you have just come for about 100 m. Walk past the house and look for a footpath on your right on the other side of the road. Take this path and enter the golf course, taking care to look out for golfers and flying golf balls. The path is well marked by yellow posts; after a small rise and down the hill, there is a ditch on your left [3][SK 40012 24133] in which you may be able to see some of the red clay from the Triassic mudstone bedrock. You can also see a good variety of trees, shrubs and wild flowers on this part of the walk. At the end of the golf course, cross a road and continue on up the hill. This next field is arable and if you look at the soil, you will see many pebbles [4][SK 39861 24222]. They are mostly made of quartz (quartzites) and flints that are derived from the extensive Anglian glacial deposits that once covered this area. A remnant of these glacial deposits (glacial till) caps the hill ahead. The quartzite pebbles are derived from older Triassic conglomerates. The flints are from chalk strata in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire; they tell us that the ice sheet that deposited them came down from the north-east.

Carry on over the hill and down the other side until you come to a track. Cross over the cattle grid and take a path that bears right across the next field. Notice here how scarce the pebbles are compared to the top of the hill. Continue across the next field [5][SK 39239 25039] (look out for the mature lime trees) until you reach the road, then turn left and head into Melbourne. Note the stone wall on your left has been constructed from the local Millstone Grit sandstones which we are now crossing over. There are several examples of such walls throughout the town.

At the next crossroads, turn left and visit Melbourne Parish Church [6][SK 38895 24998]. This fine church (dating from around AD 1120) and some of the surrounding buildings are also built of local Millstone Grit.

In the walls, many of the stone blocks contain well-defined bedding surfaces, dipping quite steeply in some cases. This feature is known as cross-bedding (pp.8 and 10). Inside the church, some of the architecture is unique, which is why the church has been described as a 'cathedral in miniature'. There is a booklet available describing the history of the church. Another interesting building that is well-worth visiting is the 12th century Melbourne Hall and gardens. The hall is only open to the public in August (afternoons only), whereas the gardens are open from April to September. The hall is hidden from view behind the building facing the church.

Coming out of the church, go back to the crossroads and turn left towards Melbourne town centre [7][SK 38650 25176], passing the Methodist Church on your right (also built of the local sandstone). You might like to explore the town a bit more, find some refreshments and look at the famous Georgian architecture.

Starting from the monument in the town centre, bear left along the road and go up the hill, passing the United Reformed Church also built of local stone. Continue along the road, past the Melbourne Arms and hidden away on your left [8][SK 38132 24649], is one of the main quarries that supplied building stone for the town. Go across the road signposted to Calke Abbey and take the next turning on the right to Staunton Harold reservoir and visitor centre [9][SK 38031 24284], where toilets, a refreshment kiosk and picnic areas can be found. The reservoir was created in 1964 with a capacity of 1400 million gallons, supplying water to around 800 homes and factories. It has a maximum depth of 25 m. If you explore the woods at the back of the visitor centre, you will see some outcrops of Millstone Grit sandstone. This particular bed is called the Rough Rock and represents the uppermost bed of sandstone in the Millstone Grit. If you look closely at the top surfaces of some of the outcrops you will see how coarse and gritty the sandstone can be.

The next part of the walk can be left out but is well worth it if you have time; allow about 45 minutes to complete it. This section of the walk is suitable for wheelchair users and an 'Access for All' leaflet is available from The National Forest Company. Go to the bottom corner of the car park, farthest away from the visitor centre and follow a path that will take you close to the northern shore of the reservoir, with wonderful views looking south across the water. This part of the walk has a wealth of flora and fauna with a wide variety of trees and shrubs, birds on the water, and a beautiful wild-flower meadow [10][SK 36902 23761] created by Severn Trent Water. You will pass an interpretation board along the way telling you about the meadows and some of the flowers that can be observed. In places, there are paths down to the waters edge.

At the end of the path [10A][SK 38455 24072], there is a barrier and another interpretation board that tells you about the tree-planting in the area. Turn around and head back to the visitor centre.

From the visitor centre, return to the main road and turn right. At the end of the pavement, there is a short stretch with no path before a footpath on the left signposted to Pool Farm [11][SK 38455 24072]. Take great care on this stretch as the road can be very busy. Walk along the track to Pool Farm and at the entrance to the farm, take a right turn over a gate and into the field. The path is shown to go diagonally across the field but depending on the time of year and the crop, you may get diverted along the hedgerows. If you look at the soil in this field, you will see many blocks of sandstone, reflecting the Millstone Grit sandstone bedrock. At the far corner, go through into the next field and follow the path down a gentle slope, cross over a stile and head along the shore of The Pool [12][SK 38948 24634]. This was originally the mill pond for the mill at Melbourne Hall. Again, you can see a range of bird life here and a good view across the water to Melbourne Parish Church.

At the end of The Pool, turn right along a track and then after 40 m, turn right again onto a footpath. This part of the walk runs along Carr Brook valley [13][SK 38937 23682]. Continue for about 1 km, crossing a small tributary valley. The short climb beyond the valley takes you up on to the Pennine Coal Measures. These rocks contain the workable coal seams that fuelled the industrial revolution, but the small outcrops around Melbourne have never yielded any workable coals.

Approximately 150 m beyond the fence on your left at the top of the hill, you will come to a gate with a path signpost [14][SK 38937 23682]. Follow the footpath going off to the left and proceed down the hill back into Carr Brook valley. Go

through the woods in the valley bottom, then climb the steep escarpment on the other side. At the top of the next field turn right and about 40 m along the footpath turns left through the next woods. Be careful not to miss this as there is no signpost. The steep climb continues through the wood and over the Bromsgrove Sandstone Formation. These are the oldest Triassic rocks in this area and blocks can be seen on the woodland floor. Beyond the woods, the climb continues onto the younger Tarporley Siltstone Formation which overlies the Bromsgrove Sandstone and forms the lowest part of the Mercia Mudstone Group. If you look at the soil in the field, you will see numerous small pieces of sandstone. In sunny weather, you will be able to clearly see grains of mica glistening in the rock. At the top of the hill, Breedon Church comes into view [15][SK 39316 23341].

At the bottom of the hill, turn right at the hedge and go back on to the golf course. Continue along the fairway and turn left by the teeing ground. The path then proceeds across the edge of the course until you reach the main road. Proceed towards the village and take a left fork as you reach Breedon. This will take you back to the church.

Figures

(Figure 69) Breedon church and quarry from the air.

(Figure 70) Walk 3 route map. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2011.

(Figure 71) Breedon quarry form the viewing area.

(Figure 72) Melbourne church.

(Figure 73) Melbourne Hall and gardens.

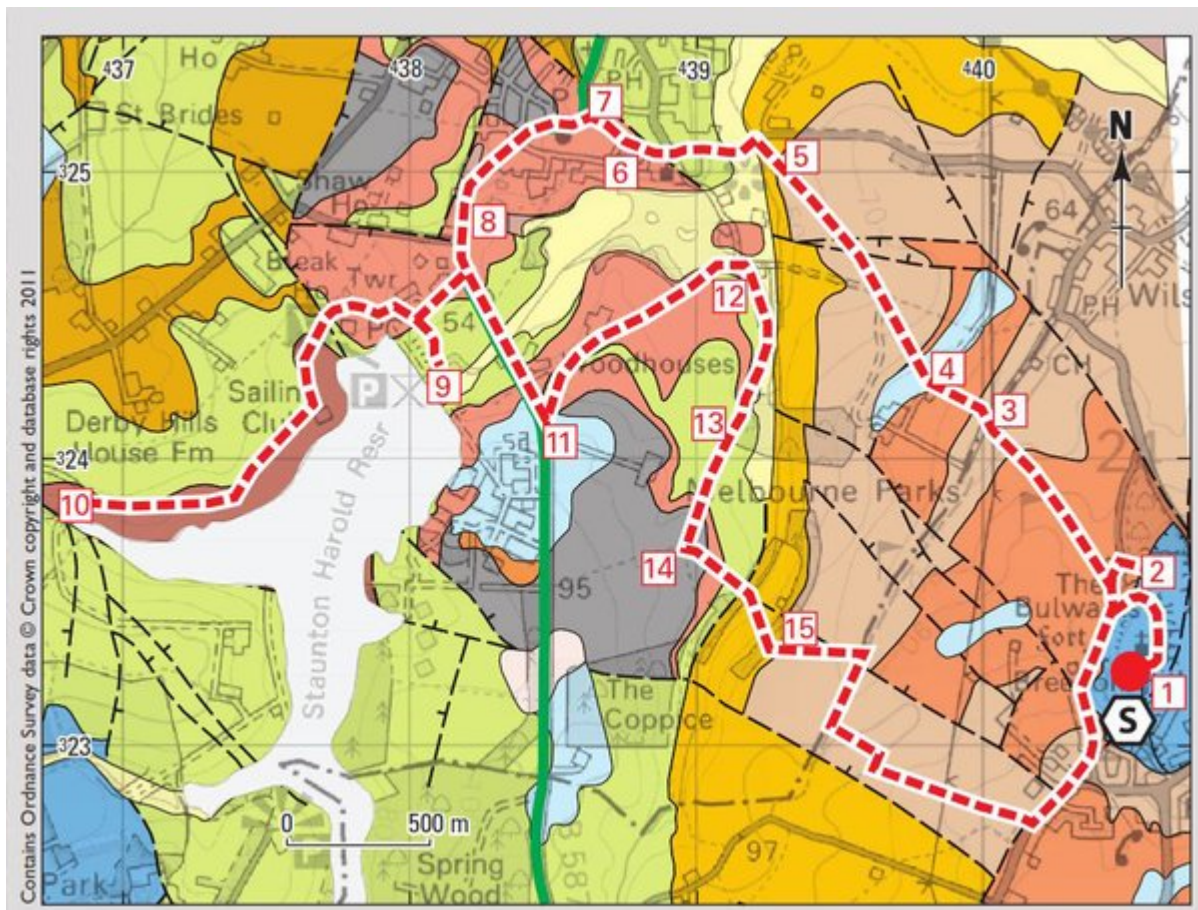
(Figure 74) Centre of Melbourne with a typical Georgian building in the background.

(Figure 75) Northern end of Staunton Harold reservoir.

(Figure 76) Pond at Melbourne with the parish church in the distance.



(Figure 69) Breedon church and quarry from the air.



(Figure 70) Walk 3 route map. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2011.



(Figure 71) Brendon quarry from the viewing area.



(Figure 72) Melbourne church.



(Figure 73) Melbourne Hall and gardens.



(Figure 74) Centre of Melbourne with a typical Georgian building in the background.



(Figure 75) Northern end of Staunton Harold reservoir.



(Figure 76) Pond at Melbourn with the parish church in the distance.