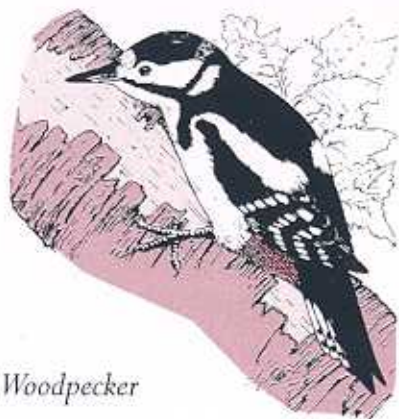


## ANCIENT WOODLANDS

Cooper's, Twiland, and Ell Woods, are all examples of 'ancient' semi-natural woodland; remnants of the vegetation which covered Britain after the last Ice Age, c. 8,000 years ago. They may not have been cleared, because the many streams here make the land unsuitable for agriculture, but they would have been coppiced for wood and used for hunting. Their long history and management makes these woods important for wildlife today with plants like Bluebell, Wood Anemone, Wood Sorrel, Yellow Archangel and Ramsons flowering in spring, and birds such as Sparrowhawk, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Treecreeper.

Unfortunately, many of these woods have received little appropriate management in recent years, and non native conifers have been introduced into some, thereby reducing their ecological value. Correct woodland management includes regular coppicing and thinning which encourages wildlife.



Great Spotted Woodpecker

## WASELEY HILLS COUNTRY PARK

150 acres of woodland and pasture managed by Worcestershire County Council. From the toposcope on Windmill Hill you can see the Malverns and Cotswolds. There is an information centre and cafe housed in an ancient timber framed barn. There is a childrens play area.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ART

During 1996 the Illey Way was the subject of a 'gateway art' initiative which aimed to celebrate the varied countryside encountered on the route by creating sympathetic pieces of environmental art. Using locally cut limestone blocks, artist Mick Farrell produced 10 sculpture 'stepping stones' and a stone squeeze stile. Over 200 people were involved in designing, sketching and carving the stones. A metal sculpture evocative of the former railway also stands at the site of the railway viaduct at Dowry Dell.

## CARING FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE

Worcestershire County Council's Countryside Service and the Dudley Countryside Management Project are working to help improve the countryside of this area. If you would like to find out more about their work or other walks in the area, please contact either:

WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE

Tel: 01905 766407 or

DUDLEY COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Tel: 01384 814189

## USEFUL INFORMATION

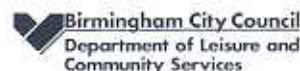
Distance: Approximately 4.5 miles (7.2km)

Be prepared for all kinds of weather, wear comfortable strong footwear and please keep dogs under control. There are hilly and difficult sections on the walk.

Public Transport: The Illey Way is accessible via public transport. To find out the best connections for you call the Worcestershire County Council County Bus Line on 0870 6082608 or the Centro Bus and Rail Line on 0121 200 2700.

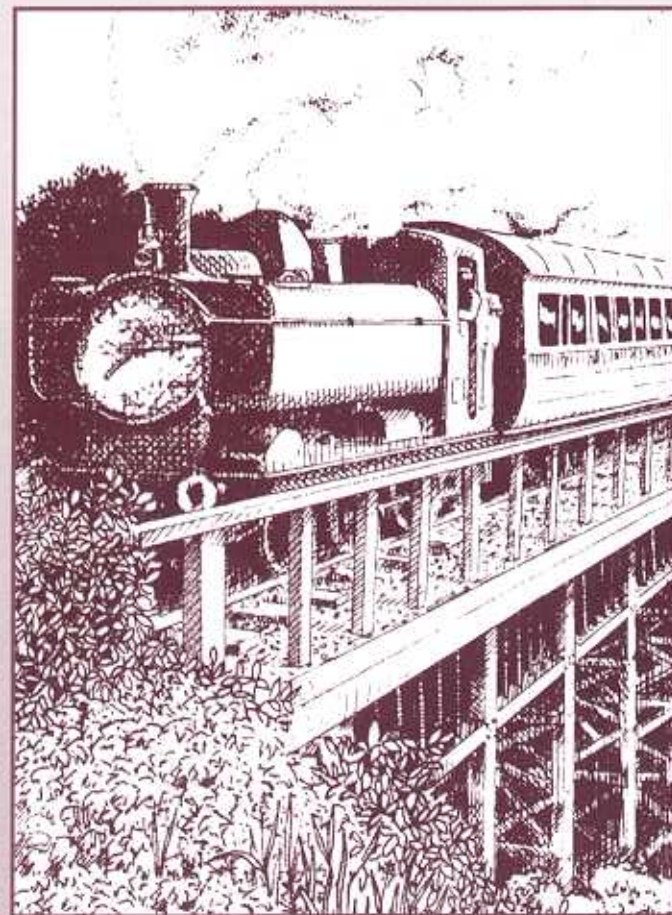


worcestershire  
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# ILLEY WAY

# Walkers Guide



Discovering Worcestershire

## PLACES OF INTEREST



A Green Lane

### GREEN LANES

These double-hedged sunken lanes or 'hollow-ways', may have been formed by water erosion after use by heavy carts and other traffic over many years. They could be medieval in origin, forming part of a network that served the Manor of Hales. The diversity of hedgerow plants suggests an ancient origin.

### WOODGATE VALLEY

Owned and managed by Birmingham City Council, the 450 acres (175 ha) of countryside were designated a Country Park in 1984. There is an urban farm by the Park and pony trekking is available. Refreshments are on sale in the visitor centre.

### HALESOWEN ABBEY (St. Mary's Abbey)

Although the Abbey ruins are not visible from the Illey Way the route does cross some of the 10,000 acres (4000ha) formerly controlled by the Abbot. The Abbey was founded in 1215 by the White Canons of the Premonstratensian Order (from France), but was ruined after its dissolution by Henry VIII in 1538.

### DOWRY DELL VIADUCT

Also known as Frankley or Hunnington Viaduct, it was built in 1881 to carry the Old Hill - Halesowen - Longbridge railway, which opened 2 years later. The viaduct was 600ft (180m) long and 100ft (30m) high and consisted of two stone abutments and eight cast iron piers resting on blue brick bases (these are the only visible remains today). Originally called the Halesowen Railway, the Halesowen to Longbridge section became a joint line between the Great Western Railway and Midland Railway in 1906. After transport nationalisation in 1948, the line became part of the Western Region of the newly created British Railways.

Passenger services on the line ceased in 1919 but workmen's services for the Austin Motor Company's factory at Longbridge continued until 1958. Goods traffic ended in 1964 when the railway south of Halesowen closed due to the building of the M5. The Dowry Dell Viaduct was dismantled a year later.



Environmental Art at Waseley Hills Country Park

### BOUNDARY STONES

At the base of many of the stiles in the area is a large boulder that may have been a boundary marker for Halesowen Abbey land or, more recently, Manor Abbey Farm.

### 'RIDGE AND FURROW'

#### Illey Meadows

It was medieval practice to allocate farmers strips of land rather than extensive holdings. To show ownership and improve drainage, each was ploughed by oxen which produced a raised ridge with furrows at either side for drainage. Surviving 'ridge and furrow' indicates that the land has not been deep ploughed by modern techniques. Illey Meadows is also a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation - plants include Common Spotted Orchid, Carnation Sedge and Quaking Grass.



Wild flowers at Illey Meadow

### ILLEY PASTURES

These two ancient meadows contain a variety of rare plants including Common Spotted Orchid, Sneezewort, Yellow Rattle, Pepper Saxifrage, Dyer's Greenweed and Quaking Grass, and are now designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. In order that the meadows remain botanically rich, they are grazed in a traditional manner and receive no fertilisers or herbicides.

## WOODGATE SECTION

From the main car park follow the path through the urban farm and, turning left at the gate onto Watery Lane, walk up the slope and cross with care over Woodgate Lane into Lye Close Lane (Old Crown Pub is on the right) then proceed over the M5 bridge and turn left following the sign to Illey.

## GREEN LANES SECTION

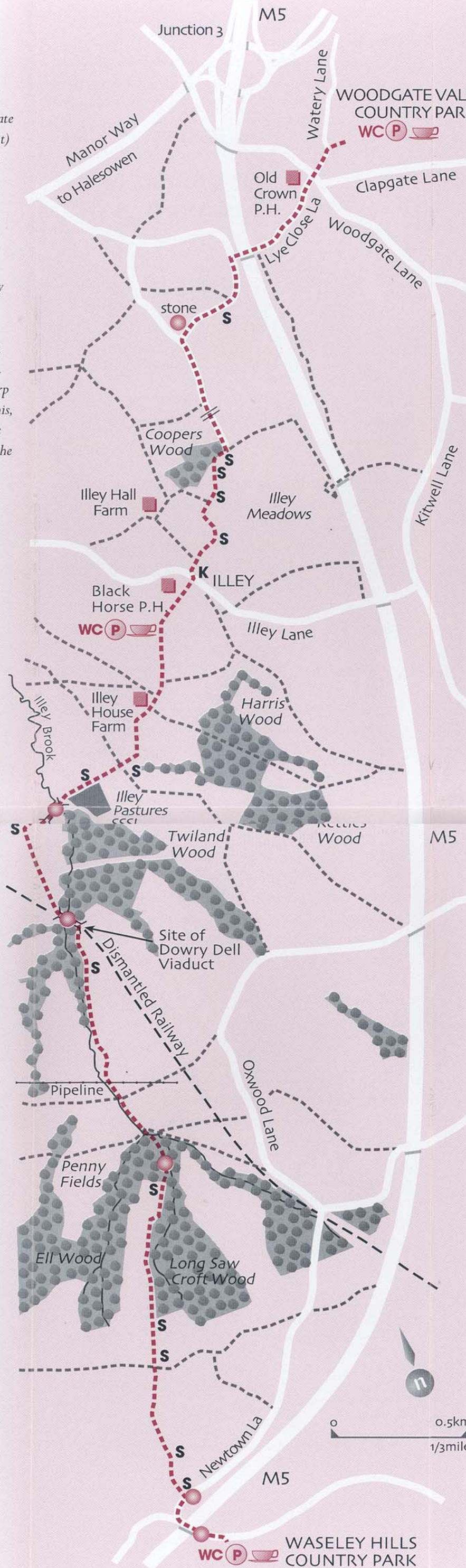
At the end of the lane turn right and go over the stile by the gate (signed Illey and Waseley) into the green lane. Turn left at the junction at the foot of the hill and continue along the green lane through the horse barrier, then walk down the slope and cross the culverted stream. Go over the stile at the edge of Cooper's Wood, turn sharp right and follow the field edge to the next stile. After this, veer left across the field to a stile in the hedge, and cross the 'ridge and furrow' field known as Illey Meadows to the corner. Continue onto the surfaced track and over the stream and stile into the green lane. Follow this uphill, passing Lowlands Farm, then through the kissing gate onto Illey Lane. The Black Horse Pub is on the right - last refreshments before Waseley!



The Black Horse Pub at Illey

## ILLEY SECTION

Carefully cross Illey Lane and follow the track that runs along the left-hand edge of the pub car park (signed Romsley and Waseley). Continue along the track for about half a mile passing Illey House Farm and Lower Illey Farm. From there views of Clent, Walton and Romsley Hills and the Bluebird Toffee Factory chimney can be seen to the right, and Frankley Beeches looking over to the left in the distance. At the end of the green lane go over the stile and follow the track to the right down to the stream. Cross the bridge and walk up the bank and carry on through the Illey Pastures Site of Special Scientific Interest to a stile in the hedge. Continue straight on with the line of field trees to the left (these trees mark a previous hedgerow). Follow the path down to the Illey Brook (which marks the boundary of Dudley and Worcestershire). Go over the footbridge and stile into the open field. Head up towards the brow of the hill, following the fenceline. Cross the stile in the fence on the left. Cross an open field to an enclosed narrow strip of land. Go over the two stiles here and carry on towards the wooded valley at the end of the former railway embankment.



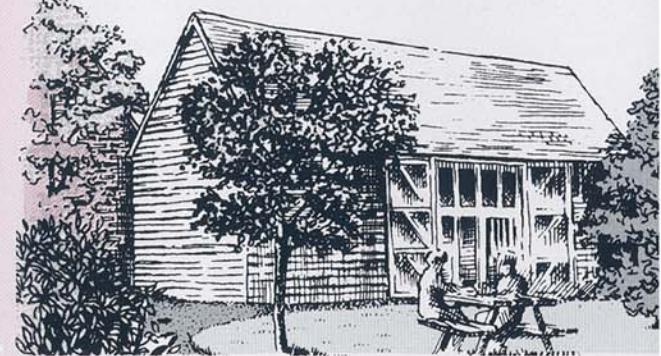
Sheep

## WOODED SECTION

At the gap in the former railway embankment, leave the open field and follow the steps down to the small stream and brick bridge. This is the site of the former Dowry Dell Viaduct. To the right you can see the old blue brick bases of the viaduct (look out for the metal sculpture). Follow the winding steps up the embankment and bear right along the wooded path, then cross the stile into the open field. Bear right along the edge of the field with the wooded river valley to the right. Carry on along the field edge, cross over before passing over the Elan Valley pipeline which carries drinking water from mid Wales to Birmingham. When you come to the farm track, cross over and continue along the line of the stream, then bear right uphill through Pennyfields. At the end of the track cross the stile to the right of the gate and follow the left hand field boundary along the edge of Long Saw Croft wood. Crossing a further two stiles, close together, walk across the corner of the field, with the field gate to the left, and follow the path uphill keeping close to the hedge. From here you can see the British Telecom Radio Mast with good views of Romsley Hill in the distance.

## WASELEY SECTION

Continue along the field edge and cross two more stiles on the way before emerging at the road. Here turn right and follow the road to the junction, cross over carefully then left over the M5 road bridge and ahead is Waseley Hills Country Park.



Waseley Hills Country Park Visitor Centre

## Key to Route Map

- Illey Way
- (P) Parking
- WC Toilets
- ☕ Refreshments
- ≡ Horse Barrier
- Other Paths
- K Kissing Gate
- S Stile
- ≡ Bridge
- Position of Environmental Art

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to the various voluntary groups, in particular the Halesowen Abbey Trust, who helped to prepare the text and who have undertaken much practical work on the public footpaths in the area.