

STEPPING OUT – a series of walks around the East Leake Area.

A walk to the highest point of Leicestershire.

This month's walk is rather farther afield and includes a climb of Bardon Hill – the highest point of Leicestershire.

Bardon Hill was once a very large and active volcano. But that was about six hundred million years ago. Since then it has been worn down to a more modest hill and spent millions of years covered with desert sand and dust – it is unlikely to erupt again any time soon!

All the ancient rocks of Charnwood Forest were created from the eruptions of this and several other volcanoes in the region. The rocks of Bradgate Park probably formed from the clouds of dust erupted by the Bardon volcano.

Warren Hills, Bardon Hill, Timberwood Hills and the Charnwood Lodge nature reserve.

11 km ; 7miles allow a good four hours.

A good place to leave your car is at the Mount St Bernard's Abbey. Take the A512 from Loughborough. Turn left at the second traffic lights at Shepshed. Turn right at the second cross roads and the entrance to the abbey is on the left.

Please leave a suitable donation for your parking at one of the boxes in the car park.

Before leaving the car park it is worth taking a look at the abbey building. There is a marked contrast in the two kinds of stone used. The dark stone is the local six-hundred-million-year-old volcanic material. It is very tough and is not trimmed into regular shapes. It is built in a kind of crazy paving. The white stone on the corners of the building is a much softer limestone – probably from Lincolnshire. It has been sawn into regular shapes.

Leave the car park by the gate to the left of the toilets. Turn right along the farm track. In about 500m at a T-junction turn left. This track emerges onto the road. Turn right and at the brow of the hill take the footpath on the left. This takes you through the area of the Warren Hills, an area of open moorland with lots of outcrops of the local volcanic rocks. After about 1 km the path turns right down hill and comes out onto the road.

Turn left along the road to the next road junction where you turn right down the hill. In 500m turn left into Romans Cres and then third left into Vercor Close. At the end of the close take the track indicated by the fingerpost as the Ivanhoe Way. After about 400m you enter Bardon wood by a metal gate near a warning notice about quarry blasting. Keep to the track which bears left and at the next path junction turn right through a gate.

This track goes straight up the hill. It is quite steep and there is a welcome wooden seat for you to recover your breath and appreciate the view. Below you is the enormous hole of the Bardon Quarry. The volcanic rocks make excellent road stone and this area is the nearest source of hard rock to the south east of the country. In the other direction the two large radio masts are at Copt Oak and to the right of these you can see Old John and the war memorial at Bradgate Park. From the seat you can see the Bardon radio mast further up the hill and to the right of this the trig point. There is an information panel near the trig point and to visit this carry on from the seat over the brow of the hill, go through the gate and take the path to the right.

The track passes a stone hut on the right and the radio aerials on the left and then becomes less well defined but if you keep to the ridge of the hill you will soon arrive at the trig point and the information panel.

To go down the hill take the path to the right of the trig point and make for the right of the radio aerials. About 20m to the right of the radio mast follow the path which forks to the right down hill. Cross a track where there is an information board about nature conservation on Bardon Hill. Follow the waymark posts down hill across a massive quarry road with warnings about heavy plant. The path now crosses a narrow metalled track. You then cross a ditchboard and follow the path down hill with the wall on your left.

Just over a stile where the path divides you take the left route. At the next stile you go straight on - with the wall and a ditch on your left. This will bring you out onto the same metalled track you crossed earlier. You are now at Kellam's Farm and the path here has been diverted and is not easy to find. Go into the farm area and keep to the right of all the farm buildings.

You need to take an unmarked path which follows the line of the electricity pylons to the right of the ponds. At the stile bear left following the line of the pylons until you reach the path which goes up the field edge with the hedge on your right. At the top of the hill the path turns through a right angle to the left and continues with the hedge and road to your right. It comes out onto the road at Upper Greenhill Farm.

Cross the road and go down hill along the bridleway towards Charley Mill Farm. As the drive swings right towards the farm carry straight on. At the next path junction keep left along the permissive path, ignoring the path to the right into the woods. Shortly there will be a metal gate across the track and you turn left uphill. As you enter the moorland area of Timberwoods Hill take any available path uphill - your aim is to make for the highest point which is very near the right hand corner of the plantation which you will see as you make your way onto the ridge. You now follow the wall down hill to your right keeping the wall on your left. At a path junction towards the bottom of the hill take the left fork towards the corner of a copse.

Go through the gate to your left and turn right to walk along the wall on your right. Go through the gate at the end of the field and take the left hand path at the junction. Follow the waymarks with the wall on your left all the way round until you meet up with a well marked track where the waymark points right.

You however turn left through the gate where there is an information board about the nature reserve. Carry on along this track and you will emerge onto the road. At the road turn right and in 100m you will find the footpath on your left that will take you back to Mount St Bernard's Abbey.

Dennis Fox