

## A summer walk around Llyncllys Common

Distance: Approx. 2 miles / 3.5 Km

Time: 2 hours at a leisurely stroll

Terrain: Steep and uneven in places

At over 50 hectares, Llyncllys Common is Shropshire Wildlife Trust's largest reserve in the wonderful limestone landscape of the Oswestry Hills. It offers a variety of habitats along with ancient history, industrial archaeology and panoramic views.

Start the walk from the layby on the A495, about 400m west of Llyncllys Crossroads. There is a panel showing the Trust's reserves in the area. Walk along the grass verge and then up Turner's Lane. Ignore the first path off to the right by the Map Panel and turn right along the bridleway about 10m further on. Keep on the main bridleway, forking left where the Shropshire Way forks right. When you reach a stone surfaced track with another Map Panel, take the path to the right, shortly passing through a kissing gate to join the Shropshire Way.

After a short while you emerge from the scrub woodland into the open grassland of the common. This open land was created and maintained for centuries by the grazing of cattle, sheep and ponies by the commoners. It is now a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its different habitats, especially the grassland flowers. Unfortunately, with the decline of commoner grazing, scrub has taken over much of the grassland. The Trust is working hard to take back the scrub and maintain the grassland by grazing with its own stock.

Stay on the path until you reach a crossroads of paths. Here, turn left, leaving the Shropshire Way and head across the open common. Common Spotted Orchids may still be in flower along with the rarer Greater Butterfly Orchid along the woodland edges. Other summer flowers to look out for include the yellow Bird's Foot Trefoil, Tormentil and St. John's Wort, and the purple heads of Black Knapweed.

The path takes you through scrub to a kissing gate. Go through the gate and on through the wicket gate out onto the track by Lake Cottage. Turn right along the wide track through the woodland. You will soon notice a dry stone wall on your left. You emerge from the woodland in front of "The Firs". Turn right to pass in front of the property and take the concrete steps up the bank to the right of "The Firs." This is known locally as "Jacob's Ladder". Follow the path a short distance until you find the opening to the viewpoint on the right. From here you can see the working Llyncllys Quarry and the rest of the Oswestry Hills to the left of it and beyond. The highest point is the summit of The Moelydd, below which is the Trust's Jones' Rough Nature Reserve. Further to the left you have fabulous views up the Tanat Valley into Wales and on the horizon, the ridge of the Berwyn Mountains.

Retrace your route back down the steps and then straight across onto the narrow path through the trees. At the staggered crossroads of paths go straight on (not following the Shropshire Way) and then left at the next path junction to go through a gate. You once again emerge into the open common. Look out for butterflies such as the beautiful Dark Green Fritillaries or the more common Gatekeeper, Peacock, Comma or Holly Blue. You may also see the small brightly coloured Small Copper.

When you reach the next path turn right, back on to the Shropshire Way and along to Oliver's Pool on your left. All three species of UK newts breed here. After the pond, fork left along the Shropshire Way to the wicket gate. Turn immediately left after the gate. When you reach the waymarker post head left, down the bank and through the gate in the corner of the grazing area. Head straight across and follow the path downhill through the woodland. Much of this woodland was coppiced in the past. Clearings would be cut for firewood, fencing materials, tool handles and other products. This would then be allowed to grow back and would be re-cut some years later when the re-growth was the right size for what was needed. The by-product of this was a woodland rich in wildlife as the variety of age structures and open areas provided for a greater range of insects, birds and flora. The Trust, working with a local commoner, has been re-coppicing parts of this woodland. Look out for the large Silver Washed Fritillary butterfly and Speckled Wood.

Soon you will reach the embankment of Offa's Dyke. Named after the King of Mercia who built it, this 8<sup>th</sup> Century earthwork once stretched all along the English / Welsh border. The Trust has begun to clear most of the trees from the dyke so that it is protected from damage and easier to see and enjoy.

Care is now needed as the path becomes quite steep as it descends to the lane at the bottom. Turn right on the lane and continue to the main road, crossing part of the Cambrian Heritage Railway line that once served the commercial quarrying industry which thrived in this area. Turn right to follow the pavement passed the Porth y Waen Silver Band Hall. When the pavement runs out you will need to take great care in crossing the road to join the pavement on the other side. You then follow this pavement along the road back to the layby.

#### Alternative Return Route:

After crossing the main road, walk to the white field gate by the railway line. You then need to carefully cross back and head through a narrow gap in the trees to follow a narrow path up through the woodland. You will soon enter the former limestone quarry known as Butcher's Quarry. Look out for limestone flowers such as the purple Devil's-bit Scabious, the mauve and delicate Harebell, Salad Burnet and the small but beautiful Eyebright. There may even be Pyramidal or Fragrant Orchids still out.

Look out for a barely defined path going up the bank on the right (across a narrow wet flush). Follow this path up and round to the left. You will see where trees have been taken out to link the Upper and Lower quarries for butterflies and other wildlife.

The next path you need is to the right of a very small pond on the right hand side of the path you are on. Follow this up into the woodland. Where the path later forks, take the left fork up the bank. Turn left along the path that crosses before the stile. You soon meet another path where you turn right and go through the kissing gate. Follow the path out into the main open area and then turn left, back along the Shropshire Way to the stone surfaced track you met towards the start of the walk. Go straight on to follow this track until it becomes a tarmac lane back to the main road. If the weather is good you will enjoy views across the North Shropshire Plain to the Nesscliffe Hills and The Wrekin beyond.