

Exploring the Woolhope Dome

a guided walk around this patchwork landscape devised by Nic Howes

Why Woolhope Dome? Millions of years ago the layered sedimentary rocks of this area were pushed up at a single point to create an asymmetric dome with a teardrop-shaped plan form (think about pushing your toe up under a duvet). The central point is under what is now Haugh Woods and the rocks dip away from this point in all directions. The rock layers have been eroded (worn down) since the uplift, mainly by the action of running water in the streams that drain the area. The result of this erosion is that today we see the "stumps" of the dome in the form of two ridges of hard limestone that encircle a central dome of old, resistant rock; these harder rocks are separated from each other by vales of softer rock. During this walk you will encounter all of these rocks and see evidence of the landforms, habitats and land-uses that their presence has created.

Distance: Approximately 5 miles

Time: Approximately 3 hours

Terrain: Some rough terrain, occasional inclines and some long undergrowth to negotiate.

Start point: Broadmoor Common Local Nature Reserve Car Park

Directions: From Hereford, follow the B4224 towards Mordiford. In Mordiford take the second turn on the left signposted to Woolhope. Follow this road through Haugh Wood and across Broadmoor Common. The parking area is on the left before Woolhope village.

Grid reference: SO 60530 36221

OS Map: Explorer 189

Walk across the Common towards Haugh Woods

The Common's central position in the Dome means that it lies mostly on the oldest rocks of the area, the Silurian mudstones and sandstones of the Haugh Wood formation, that have weathered here to form an impermeable soil that is often waterlogged.

After passing Broadmoor Farmhouse follow the next waymark left across the Common, crossing two driveways, until you reach a surfaced road and turn left. **(point 1)**

Keep on this road until a cattle grid on your left, where you should turn left and follow the footpath down, through a gate and into a field. **(point 2)**

Continue across the field to its far right-hand corner, with a gate through into a field, head to the far right corner of the field until you reach a gate on your right into Wessington Pasture nature reserve. **(point 3)**

Go through this gate and follow the path ahead to reach a cross of paths, at which you should turn left and descend towards a gate (look out for a veteran pear tree set back on the left as you approach). Head out into open land and follow the path along the valley bottom, passing a pond site on



the left.

The pond (not visible in dry periods) needs "puddling" with impermeable material in order to prevent the water disappearing into the permeable Woolhope Limestone on which it lies.

Just after the pond you will reach the southern boundary of the reserve and should turn right into the woodland that will lead you through a gate and on to the vehicle gate and left onto a gravel track leading to the lane. **(point 4)**

Walk down the lane, passing Terrace Hall Farm with a square oast house among its buildings, used for drying hops in the past. Turn left at the junction and soon afterwards turn right into a field opposite a footpath fingerpost. **(point 5)**. Follow the path across three fields to meet a road near the woodland edge.

These fields lie on the Coalbrookdale Formation (or Wenlock Shale), which weathers to form heavy grey-brown clay that is suitable for permanent pasture and arable crops, land-uses that are responsible for the large fields in



this part of the Dome.
Turn right up the road and immediately right off it at the next fingerpost onto a path that climbs the steep scarp slope of the Wenlock Limestone through coppiced Buckenhill Wood.

Emerge from the wood at the crest of the limestone ridge and cross the field towards the group of buildings; walk between the farm buildings and

the farmhouse and through a gate on the left into the farmhouse driveway (beware of farm dogs). A stile a few yards along on the right gives you access to the Trust's Lea and Paget's Wood reserve, a large site of ancient semi-natural woodland.

Descend the path ahead, across the dip slope of the Wenlock Limestone to reach a meeting point of five paths. (point 6)



Turn right down the waymarked Wye Valley Walk (WVW) and follow this downhill along the clay vale, which is frequently muddy due to the impermeable clay soil derived from the underlying Lower Ludlow Shale; a narrow band here because of the steep dip of the rock layers on this side of the Dome.

The steep, tree-covered rise across the vale to your left is the scarp slope of the ridge of Aymestrey Limestone. The ash trees in this vale have grown tall, stretching towards the light from the deep valley between the two limestone ridges. The Trust is coppicing the woodland here to create a variety of habitats and the extra light has encouraged the growth of varied ground flora, including herb Paris. The disturbed ground on your right is evidence of limestone quarrying and just before a gate and stile it is possible to see the tops of the arches of a pair of limekilns in the bank on the right.

Follow the WVW waymarks after leaving the reserve, up a short slope to reach the road at the top of the Wenlock Limestone ridge. **(point 7)**

Cross the road and take the waymarked WVW uphill along the crest of the ridge (different to the WVW route shown on some maps); fork left at the gate to Yew Tree Cottage. Just before the covered local reservoir turn right through a small kissing gate and continue through woodland with further evidence of limestone quarrying, passing through another gate on the way. This path

emerges through a gate on the right onto the Trust's Monument Hill reserve, which has a rich limestone grassland flora. Descend the steep path diagonally across the reserve, pass through a gate and access an ancient way.

You should now turn sharp right to see a gate on the opposite side of the WVW; pass through this gate and turn left along the top edge of the Trust's North Meadow grassland and orchard reserve.

The view north is one of the finest in the Dome: you are looking across the curving Wenlock Shale vale towards the central dome of the Haugh Wood Formation and if you follow the skyline, the gently sloping shape of the dome is clearly apparent.

Keep walking along the edge of the reserve until you reach a gate to access the WVW again and turn right to a meeting of many tracks at which you should turn sharp right. (point 8)

Please note that from point 8 to point 9 there are some differences between the courses of the footpaths on the ground and those marked on the Ordnance Survey 1:25000 map.

Following this access track you will soon pass between the lower edge of North Meadow reserve on your right and Cider House orchard reserve on your left; continue on this track until you have passed 'The Sett' and through the next stile on the left giving access to an arable field on the Wenlock Shale.

Turn left into the arable field, keeping the trees and hedge on your left. You will reach a pair of waymarked stiles separated by a small footbridge; cross these, and follow the waymarks, through a gateway and over the brook that has carved this vale over thousands of years. Pass through a gate opposite Rudge End Cottage to meet a road. **(point 9)**

Turn left along the road and shortly turn right up a track and after another short distance follow the first fingerpost up a footpath on the right. Soon after starting up this path look for a rare, small exposure of the Woolhope Limestone in the roots of an ash tree on the right. Continue up the path across fields with woodland closing in on either side until you enter Rudge Wood via a stile. **(point 10)**

There is an association between domed layers of rock and the presence of trapped gas and oil; this led to an intensive geophysical survey and a test borehole being drilled near this point in the 1980s.

Follow the woodland path over a footbridge to reach a T-junction where you should turn left. Keep straight ahead and join a forest drive coming in from the right before you promptly branch off it on the right at a waymark and continue uphill along a path through the wood.

Emerging from the wood over a stile you should climb the track ahead, passing to the right of a small brick building before following the top of the slope left towards a distinctive oak tree with a waymarked stile beneath it.

Cross the stile and follow the path uphill to reach Broadmoor Common via another waymarked stile. You should walk across the common, joining a concrete drive and then turn left onto a surfaced road on the way **(point 11)** to meet the straight section of the Mordiford to Woolhope road; turn right along this and return to the start.



The view from Monument Hill, part of Common Hill Nature Reserve