



Sedgley

Cotwall End Valley
Local Nature Reserve

Critters Farm

Spout House Farm

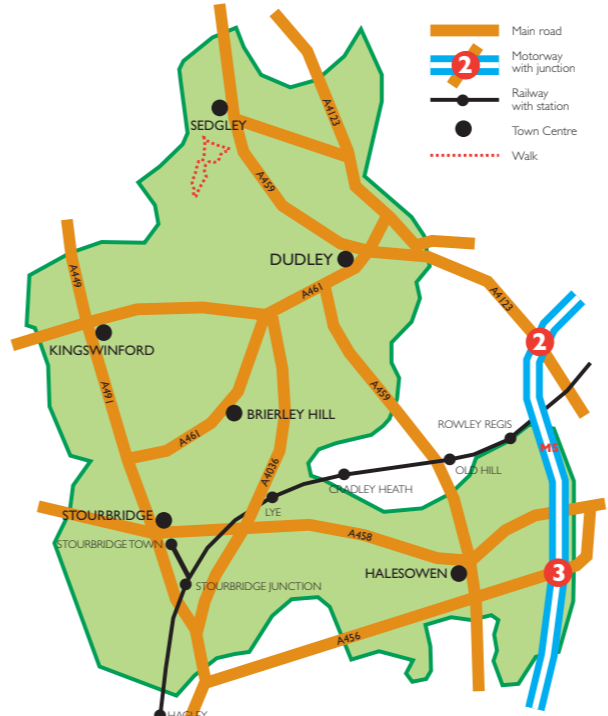
Golf Course



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Cotwall End Valley



Cotwall End Valley is a Local Nature Reserve and Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, comprising a variety of habitats including species-rich grassland, ancient and semi-natural woodland and lowland heath. The walk passes through picturesque wooded valleys with pools, brooks and natural springs. The valley has a rich history and geology associated with its agricultural and industrial past. The site has some important wildlife with nationally rare flora and fauna including several species of orchid and the endangered Great Crested Newt. In addition to wildlife, Turner's Hill geological Site of Special Scientific Interest provides important exposures of a sequence of strata of late Silurian age, including the Sedgley Limestone and Ludlow Bone Bed.

The Story of Cotwall End Valley

The history of the area is rich and fascinating. Cotwall End was originally a small hamlet of one or two farms established by the reign of Edward III. The reserve is well supplied with water and has numerous natural springs, which would have made it very productive farmland. 'Bob's Brook' in the Dingle is a head-water of the River Stour. Water from the valley was also used to supply Dud Dudley's revolutionary iron foundry in the early 17th century. In the past, the considerable geological resources such as clays and sandstones have been exploited for high quality bricks and grinding stones amongst other things. Four coal seams occur in the valley and were mined with varying degrees of success including the famous 9m (30ft) Staffordshire Thick Coal seam found 75m (80 yards) below the surface.

LENGTH	3.2km (2 miles)
TIME	2 hours
ACCESS	Car park off Cotwall End road behind Critter's Farm. Numerous access points on foot.
BUSES	Centro Hotline for information 0121 200 2700
LOCAL GROUPS	Cotwall End Volunteers, Friends of the Valley contact Anna Gorski, Wildspace Officer for details on 01384 815718

POINTS OF INTEREST

1. Critters Farm

A Thomas de Cattewall was mentioned as far back as 1300 and there has been a house on the site of Critter's Farm since before 1685. The site is now occupied by a new bungalow and few traces of the original house or farm buildings remain. The name Cotwall End is possibly made up of 'cot' meaning cottage, and wall, from the Anglo Saxon word 'wealh', meaning spring. 'End' refers to a settlement on the edge of woodland. The area to the west of the valley known as the Haye, was part of the old Royal Forest of Kinver.

2. Grazing Fields

Some of the species-rich grasslands at Cotwall End Valley are grazed by horses. Here two paddocks on the lefthand side, formerly known as 'Lower Moor', contain Self-heal, Meadow Buttercup, Red and White Clover and the regionally uncommon Yellow Rattle. Moor, from the Anglo Saxon 'Mor', was the name

given to an area of land that collected water. In this part of the reserve, small streams feed into Bob's Brook and eventually the River Stour.

3. Hay Meadow Management

Through a squeeze stile, these next fields are managed for hay and cut once a year in late summer. The western corner of the first field is particularly species rich with Meadow Vetchling, Lady's Mantle, Common Sorrel and Pignut. The second field was known as 'Rush Leasow', possibly meaning a meadow with rushes.

4. View of Spout House Farm

Good views over the valley looking west towards the former Spout House Farm worked by the Law family for over a century, and now in private ownership. Much of the 30 hectares (74 acres) of farmland is now a golf course. The farm was named after a spring that used to produce 900 litres (200 gallons) of water every 8 minutes, enough to power a nearby watermill. Himley Wood can also be seen on the skyline to the south-west, with the Malverns visible in the distance on clear day.

5. Old Coach Road

At the entrance to the nature reserve, on the left, are cast iron railings that are a remnant of the gateway that led into the Ellowes Hall estate. The walk takes you along the old Coach Road, a tree-lined avenue which was the driveway up to the original Hall, the site of which is now occupied by a school. Mature Lime and Beech trees characterise the route.

6. Gornal Stone

Leaving Moden Hill and entering into the nature reserve, a well-maintained Gornal Sandstone wall can be seen on the right. The stone was used extensively in local building and probably originated from a local quarry.

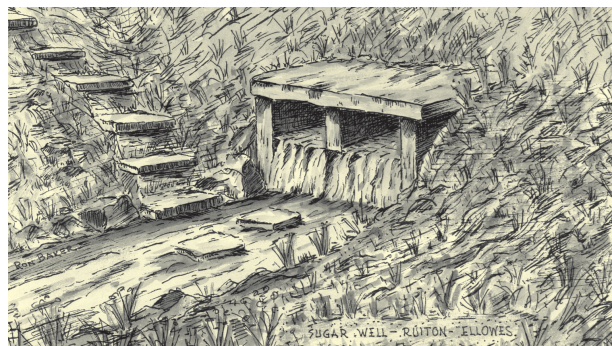
7. Harper's Quarry

Halfway along the Old Coach Road on the left was Harper's Quarry from which sandstone was extracted until new housing was built, now aptly named Old Quarry Drive.

8. The Sugarwell

The presence of natural springs at Cotwall End would have been of great interest to early Anglo-Saxon farmers. This 'Sugarwell' pool is fed by a natural spring that was renowned locally for its sweet water. The spring originates from a junction

between the Carboniferous and Devonian rock strata. It flows gently downslope into a chain of ornamental pools that were part of the Ellowes estate. The pool contains Yellow Flag, Brooklime and Watercress.



*"Children with sugar sweet would come,
Their tiny hands to take,
The crystal liquid here to quaff,
Fresh from the little lake."*

E. A. Underhill

Please note it is not recommended that the water be drunk today

9. View of Ellowes Hall

View of Ellowes Hall secondary school, former site of Ellowes Hall estate built in 1821 by John Turton Fereday but demolished in the 1960s after a fire. 'Ellowes' is a corruption of 'Ellenvale'. The name 'Ellen' may have come from 'ellern' meaning elder or 'alor' meaning alder, both of which still grow in the nature reserve. 'Vale' was added after the Norman Conquest. The grounds were said to be a model of landscape gardening complete with fish ponds, hermitage and grotto which had a floor laid out in bones. Bistort grows along the woodland edges here, as do Bluebell, Dog's Mercury, Yellow Archangel and Enchanter's Nightshade. On the opposite side of the stream the scrub woodland, formerly a field named "Far Ellows", is good habitat for Ringlet butterflies in the summer.

*"Have you never seen sweet Ellen Vale,
Or roamed the spacious park?
Or sensed the perfumed clover,
Or heard the trilling lark?"*

E. A. Underhill

10. Horse Chestnut Glade

The walk passes through a glade of Horse Chestnuts which is quite species-rich at its southern end. Self-heal, Common Catsear, Oxeye Daisy and the regionally very rare Pale Sedge can be found in this area.

11. Turner's Hill Wood

It is likely that the hill was named after a family called Turner who were recorded in the area at least as early as the sixteenth century. The wood is made up primarily of Sycamore, young Oak, Silver Birch and Hazel. Turner's Hill provides important geological exposures of late Silurian age including Sedgley Limestone which has well-preserved remains of shelled sea creatures and microscopic fossils from 415 million years ago, as well as the Ludlow Bone Bed containing early fish remains. In past times Turner's Hill was quarried for its limestone and buff-coloured Gornal Sandstone. The famous 'Gornal' stone was used locally in the building of churches, houses and field boundaries.

12. The Old Quarry

The hummocky ground of a partly infilled quarry indicates this was an important area for the exploitation of minerals. Clay was extracted here from 1620, later followed by coal, sandstone and limestone. The sandstone outcrops at the top of the quarry are of Carboniferous age and are much younger than the Silurian Rocks of Turner's Hill above. A branch of the Western Boundary Fault, running roughly along the line of the path, has brought the Carboniferous rocks down several hundred metres relative to the Silurian rocks. The area now supports a diversity of wildflowers such as Bird's-foot Trefoil, Meadow Vetchling and Oxeye Daisy.

13. Habitat Creation

These relatively new ponds either side of the path were created to increase the diversity of habitats in the nature reserve. The surrounding grassland contains plants such as Grass Vetchling, Goatsbeard, Red Bartsia and Musk Mallow. Numerous butterflies are associated with these open sunny patches of long grass including Ringlet, Small Copper and Meadow Brown.

14. Conqueror's Farm

Conqueror's Farm held by the Caswell, and later the Timmins families, was situated towards Straits Green Colliery, and maps of 1900 show Sedgley Council's Infectious Diseases Hospital was also located in this part of the nature reserve. Patients with tuberculosis and scarlet fever were isolated from the rest of society at the turn of the last century. Great Crested Newts have been recorded in the large pool beside the path.

15. Bob's Brook

During the 20th century up to four or five small mines operated in the valley, one of which was Ellowes colliery, located on the opposite side of the stream. Old maps show an engine house stood near this location. The pit started in 1926 during a miners' strike with a series of 'bob' holes that were just a few yards deep.

These holes gave the stream its name 'Bob's Brook'. The coal was hauled up in buckets and sold in the local villages. A huge crater remains from the 1944 fuel crisis when production had to increase for the war effort, even though it became uneconomic to extract.

16. London Fields Colliery

London Fields Colliery was one of the most productive coal-mines in the valley. It had plenty of capital invested in it and employed the best miners. Apparently the timbering supports were impressive as they were built on a very steep angle. Output from the mine was reputedly astonishing.

17. The Dingle

The Dingle marks the boundary between Gornal and Cotwall End townships. Parts of the valley include ancient woodland with a mix of native species such as Oak, Ash, Elm, Beech and Hazel. In springtime these woods are alive with carpets of Bluebells and Wild Garlic. Other woodland flowers found here include Wood Anemone, Common Dog Violet, Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage and Wood Sorrel, many of which are ancient woodland indicators.

*"I know a dell where bluebells grow,
In a bed of verdure green.
A brook divides the carpet fair,
Whilst the sunbeams glint between
Leafy trees, that tower around,
To light up the beauteous scene."*

E. A. Underhill

18. Mill Pond

The largest pond in the valley now lies within the boundary of Critter's Farm. It was originally a mill pond constructed to power a wooden water mill just near Spout House Farm and was in operation from as early as 1291. The mill used to grind corn until it fell out of use by the end of the medieval period. It is thought that it was never replaced with a stone building.

References:

Extracts of poetry from E.A. Underhill (1932) *Patchwork*, Dudley.

Illustrations:

R. Baker (1970) *A Pictorial History of Sedgley*, Wolverhampton.
R. Baker (1991) *Sedgley manor: A Pictorial History*

Photographs:

Anna Gorski

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The Country Code

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
- Guard against all risks of fire
- Fasten all gates
- Keep your dogs under close control
- Keep to public footpaths across farmland
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls
- Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone
- Take your litter home
- Help to keep all water clean
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees
- Take special care on country roads
- Make no unnecessary noise

Dudley's Wildspace! Project

The New Opportunities Fund has allocated £125 million to its Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities programme, to help urban and rural communities to understand, improve and care for their natural and living environment. It is working in partnership with English Nature to deliver over £5 million of funding under Wildspace! - a grant scheme for local nature reserves.

In August 2001, Dudley MBC applied to English Nature for a Wildspace! grant towards the management of three nature reserves, Cotwall End Valley in Sedgley, Bumble Hole in Netherton and Barrow Hill in Pensnett. The application was successful, with the Council being given a grant towards management over a three-year period. This funding has enabled the Council to appoint a dedicated Officer to oversee and co-ordinate a range of habitat and access improvements.

The project is largely concerned with promoting access to green spaces, raising awareness and encouraging communities to get actively involved in looking after their local nature reserves.

For further information on Dudley's Wildspace! Project guided walks, and volunteering opportunities please contact:

Anna Gorski, Wildspace Officer on 01384 815718



This walk is part of a network of 14 walks throughout the many areas of meadow, wetland, farmland and woodland within the Borough of Dudley. All the walks put you in close contact with the attractive local countryside. The leaflets fully illustrate the route of each walk and give information about points of interest along the way. You can usually join the walks in several places and link with other public rights of way and canal towpaths.

The walk leaflets printed so far include:

Blackbrook Valley; Pensnett Railway; The Stour Valley; Buckpool and Fens Pool; Illey and Lapal; Leasowes and Coombeswood; Bumble Hole; The Limestone Walk; Lutley Walk; Pedmore Walk; The Shenstone Way.

Some of the paths along The Cotwall End Valley are surfaced; many are grassed or bare. All may be muddy when wet. Gradients and cross-falls are typically shallow, but some short sections have steeper inclines or are stepped. There are gates or stiles at some entrances or where paths cross some boundaries.

For further information about these walks or any aspect of the countryside in Dudley, please telephone (01384) 814189.



Volunteers at Cotwall End Valley (Anna Gorski)



Wildspace!



Cotwall End Valley

