

Lower Lugg loop: connections in landscapes

BY NIC HOWES

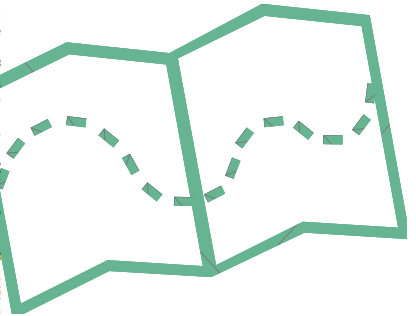
Distance: 8 miles

Estimated time: 5 hours

Underfoot: mostly flat on green lanes and footpaths with some sections of tarmac pavement; may be muddy or even under water on many sections after prolonged heavy rain.

Gradients: mainly flat, apart from the 60-metre climb and descent of Lyde Hill.

Food and drink: Legge's deli and the Swan Inn near the start, and the Golden Cross Inn in Sutton St Nicholas



Start (S) at Aylestone Park car park.

Leave by walking through the entrance barrier onto Aylestone Hill and turn right for a short distance and cross the road using the central refuge. Walk past the bus stop and then turn left on the footpath over a stile beside a metal farm gate. Follow the path by a tree-planted boundary on your left, aiming for an apparent “tunnel” opening in the hedge ahead; enter this and cross a footbridge over Lugg Rhea to emerge onto the wide-open space of Upper Lugg Meadows (point 1). This is a good place to consider this walk's theme of connectivity. You are still standing within the boundary of Hereford City, in Victoria Park ward; this area is what geographers call the rural-urban fringe, a transition zone celebrated in Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts' book *Edgelands*. Edgelands have enormous significance and importance as readily accessible, peaceful, green open space that support mental

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health for the vast majority of UK residents who are classified as urban. Frequent, regular opportunities to venture further into truly rural landscapes do not exist for many urban residents, and this has been underscored by the coronavirus/ Covid-19 pandemic. Edgelands are under tremendous pressure from developers, as will be seen later on this walk; the area in which you are standing has been subjected to plans for an eastern bypass for Hereford and for a Bovis Homes housing development, both opposed successfully at public inquiries by a wide range of individuals and organisations, including Herefordshire Wildlife Trust.

Head diagonally left to leave the meadow onto the Worcester Road and turn right to follow the road along taking great care on this busy road. (**To avoid this stretch of road: follow the path to the two closest power line pylons; beyond the second of these pylons you cross a ditch; note the Herefordshire Nature Trust 1994 boundary stone on your left and proceed to the bank of the Lugg, which incidentally marks the edge of Hereford City for administrative purposes. Turn left, upstream on the path that follows the riverbank. Cross another ditch on a bridge with metal safety barriers and arrive at a locked gate which you will need to climb over.**) Turn right on the path alongside the main road, cross Lugg Bridge and carefully cross the main road to access the bridleway with fingerpost opposite the entrance to Lugg Bridge Mill (point 2). This bridleway is an important connective corridor for walkers heading north out of Hereford and also for wildlife moving along the lower Lugg valley.

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Green Lane running towards Sutton St Nicholas

A short distance along the bridleway, go through a single metal farm gate and when you soon reach a pair of them side-by-side, go through the waymarked right-hand one of the pair and keep ahead on a narrow path with a fence on your left and a hedge on your right. At the next metal farm gate pass through and enter a green lane with a ditch on each side. Pass a gravel processing plant and reach a gated crossing over the single-track railway line from Hereford to Ledbury (point 3). STOP, LOOK, LISTEN. BEWARE OF TRAINS.

After crossing the railway, keep ahead along the green lane and follow the waymark straight on at the next junction, ignoring the turn to the right; you cross the unseen administrative boundary out

of Hereford City and then keep straight on at the next junction (point 4), again ignoring the turn to the right. About 400 metres beyond this second junction the vegetation opens up revealing a long line of tall trees ahead, crossing your path at right angles; this is the line of the long-abandoned Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal. After a hedge of blackthorn on your left, the green lane climbs gently to a crest, which is the canal itself (point 5); you can clearly see the sunken bed of the canal between distinct banks, heading off left towards the site of an aqueduct across the Lugg before bending to the left towards the City of Hereford. Like the two railway lines crossed on this walk, canals are well-known as corridors along which wildlife moves; the abandoning of the canal has meant that intensive farming has completely consumed sections of its line, so that it does not now form an unbroken corridor between the cities of Hereford and Gloucester.

The green lane descends gently and continues as a farm track straight ahead for about 500 metres before bending to the right and meeting a tarmac lane (point 6).

Turn left along the tarmac lane into Sutton St Nicholas; at the 'T' junction just beyond the sewage plant turn half-right across the lane to enter the churchyard via an iron gate with a footpath fingerpost. Pass between the hedge on your left and the church on your right and enter a narrow path via a wooden gate. The walled garden of Sutton Court is off on your left before the path continues between board fences to emerge on a housing estate road. Turn left then right and immediately look out for another path leading off between board fences on your left across the road. This path leads through to the main road into the village, by a safety barrier (point 7).

Turn right along the pavement towards the village centre and carefully cross the main road to the stile and fingerpost when you reach them, on the other side of the road, just beyond the crossroads warning sign. Cross the stile and follow the footpath ahead that soon descends to cross a lane to a waymarked gate and fingerpost opposite. Once through the gate, continue to a waymarked footbridge and keep ahead along the edge of the field with the hedge close on your right.

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Upper Lugg Meadow



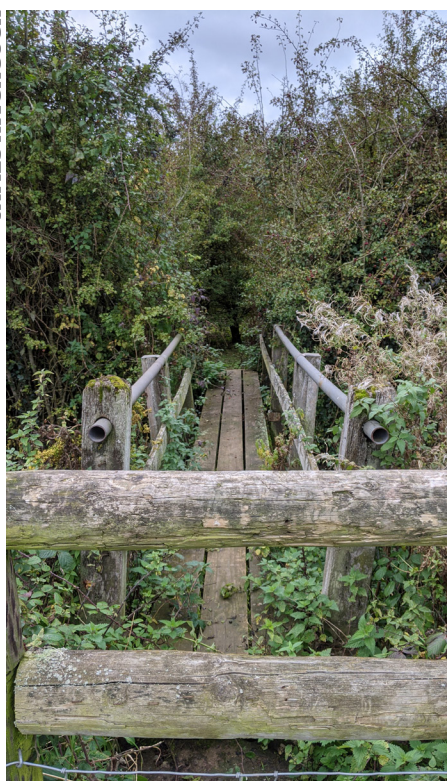
Crossing the River Lugg
over Wergins Bridge

Turn right through a metal gate where the hedge ends and cross a small field diagonally towards a stile in the opposite corner. Cross this waymarked stile, pass close to a house and garden on your left and emerge on the end of a tarmac lane (point 8).

Turn left down the track that descends gently to the right of the gate to Rathays. Cross a stile by a metal farm gate and be sure to close and fasten the next one by a pond, heeding the warning of £1000 fine for not doing so! In season, this stretch of the Lugg floodplain to Wergins Bridge may be rich in dragonfly and damselfly sightings, and possibly some elusive birds and mammals too. The riverbank footpath between Sutton St Nicholas and Wergins Bridge is one of hundreds across the County that serve as interlinked sections of a web of Public Rights of Way that are car-free and delightful for that, part of the connective tissue that makes great walking one of the core attractions of Herefordshire to residents and visitors alike. Keeping the ditch on your left, proceed beyond the securely fastened gate towards the bank of the Lugg and go through the metal farm gate there. Follow the (potentially overgrown) path along the riverbank to a stile marked with yellow tape and follow the riverbank downstream across fields towards Wergins Bridge (point 9), using yellow tape on two more stiles to help guide you.

A final stile steps down directly onto the tarmac of the dangerous main road, so great care is needed here for a short roadside walk to the right, across Wergins Bridge and on to the first batch of yellow-painted rumble strips. Here you should look for the stile through the hedge on

your right and cross it. Aim slightly left across the field towards the stile in the fence ahead and keep on this line across the next field towards its far corner, which lies beneath the closest large tree. A metal farm gate appears on the left of the corner; go through it to then cross the nearby stile on your right onto a footbridge followed by a patch of waste ground and another footbridge before steps and a stile up to a rail crossing over the double railway line from Hereford to Manchester (point 10). STOP, LOOK, LISTEN. BEWARE OF TRAINS before crossing. Descend the steps after the railway crossing and aim for the corner of the field ahead, where the hedge on your right appears to meet a large tree. When you arrive at this corner it becomes clear that there is a stand of seven beech trees



(point 11) with a wooden stile backed by a large, thick stone slab stile. Beyond the stand of beech trees, take the right-hand side of the hedge and follow it uphill along the edge of an arable field towards the crest of Lyde Hill (point 12).

Standing in the open area at the crest look back north, along your route; the wooded rim of upstanding Sutton Walls hill fort is clear in the view. Beyond the left-hand end of Sutton Walls lies Dinmore Hill, with the faint line of the A49 cutting up through its trees at a slight angle. Below the line of the A49, two sets of white-walled buildings are apparent, the left-hand group being Oak Tree Farm; 30 acres of land here has recently been bought by the Trust thanks to a successful fundraising appeal. The land will be transformed into a wetland nature reserve, forming a stepping-stone between Wellington Gravel Pits and Bodenham Lake Nature Reserve. This will allow wildlife to move more freely through the landscape, increasing feeding, breeding nesting and sheltering places, another example of the importance of connectivity through landscapes for wildlife. If you turn to the view left, the theme of landscape connectivity continues as your eyes sweep across Wellington Wood, Westhope, Pyon Hill and Badnage Wood, all with distinctive forms visible from many points in Herefordshire. Ignore the farm track and hedge on your right - down towards Lower Lyde Court with its hop kilns (the term oast house is reserved for Kent and Sussex) - and proceed along the farm track on the line on which you ascended, with a hedge now on your right. Hereford Cathedral should be clearly visible half left.

Descend the farm track to the end of the hedge on your right and look through the gap to see Lower Lyde Court again before crossing the crop field ahead, uphill towards a gap in the opposite hedgerow. Climb the short bank below the hedge, cross a stile, skirt round an oak tree and follow the hedge on your left uphill. Pause by the waymarked stile (point 13) and turn to look at the view north. Cross the stile and continue to climb to the summit with the hedgerow on your left; at 116 metres above sea level this is one of the highest points in the lower Lugg valley.

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Follow a right/left dogleg in the hedge and then descend along its right-hand side before finally turning left through it (beware low-lying strands of wire) to access a surfaced lane opposite a pair of houses on the drive to Lyde Court. Turn left along the drive to reach the public lane at Lyde Cross. Cross the surfaced lane to go straight ahead on the footpath to the right of Lyde Cross Tree Farm, through a metal farm gate (point 14).

Proceeding along this footpath there are good views of Hereford City to your left, before the hedge begins on that side. At the far top corner of the field turn left over a stile (point 15) and follow the hard-packed earth path across an arable field with further good views south – slightly to your left – of the City and beyond. Meanwhile, over to your right there are views of the large Hereford Point housing development being undertaken by Bloor Homes on what were once fields northwest of Starting Gate roundabout. This development is an example of the pressure on the “edgelands” between urban and rural areas. At the far side of the arable field cross the waymarked stile and proceed towards the City, keeping the hedgerow close on your right; look left to pick out the distinctive escarpment of Backbury Hill, on the northwest margin of the Woolhope Dome, another landscape connection with an area containing a concentration

of Herefordshire Wildlife Trust reserves.

Pass through two waymarked metal farm gates in quick succession (point 16) that lead to a stony track into Holmer village; note the unusual triple chimneys in the architecture of Highfield House on your left. At the foot of the track turn right along surfaced Coldwell Lane; just past the warning sign for ducks, look out for a pond on your right as the surfaced lane bends to the left (point 17). **This pond appears to be the source of a stream that feeds into Lugg Rhea that you crossed just before point 1; this is an example of connectivity in the form of water courses – for aquatic life, flood water and pollution among other things.**

Continue along Coldwell Lane to a T junction and turn left along Attwood Lane and at the next T junction turn right. Walk a short distance along this road then follow the fingerpost beneath the tall poplar tree along a path beside an overgrown pond and emerge opposite Old School Lane (point 18). Cross Roman Road to the left-hand pavement of Old School Lane, using the central refuge. Walk along this pavement down Old School Lane, pass Three Mills Trading Estate and then cross the railway lines on a footbridge. Immediately after crossing turn left onto a footpath (point 19) that leads through to College Road at the entrance to Holmer Trading Estate.

Cross College Road and turn right along the pavement; you are now crossing the northern portal of the short Aylestone Tunnel on the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire canal. Immediately after the boundary of the bungalow on your left, turn left along a footpath without a waymark but with a litter bin. This tree-covered path turns left then right and runs close to the line of the canal, with the abandoned Holmer Trading Estate visible across it through occasional gaps. After a while you will notice water in the line of the canal (point 20) before you emerge into the open space of Aylestone Park. Continue walking beside the canal as far as the slipway and then cut across the park towards the start point (S) by the vehicle entrance barrier.

Further reading:

Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness: Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, Jonathan Cape, 2011

