
Walk 9 Thornton to Bagworth circular walk

Distance: about 8 km (5 miles) Time: about 2½ hours

The walk starts from the car park at Thornton Reservoir [1][SK 47058 07405], but being a circular walk could also commence from Bagworth Heath Woods car park, where free parking is also provided. Thornton Reservoir was constructed by the Leicester Water Board in 1854 as the first reservoir in the county to supply water to the city. The water is now piped to Cropston Reservoir, 10 km to the east.

The reservoir is underlain by the Mercia Mudstone Group, mainly consisting of impervious red Triassic mudstones but with harder beds of sandstone and siltstone that form features on the landscape. One such prominent bed is the Cotgrave Sandstone (formerly known as the 'Thornton Skerry') and it forms the hill on which the village of Thornton is situated. On leaving the car park, turn right into Reservoir Road and as you approach the T junction you are walking over the landform created by the Cotgrave Sandstone. Turn left at the T junction into Merrylees Road and continue to the end of the built up zone where you turn right along the signed footpath. When you start to descend the hill [2][SK 46734 07046] keep on the left side of the hedgerow and go straight down the hill, heading towards the brickworks across the valley. Looking back, and to your left, you can see how the harder sandstone layer has created a marked escarpment on the hillside.

Follow the yellow waymarker posts and cross the small footbridge over a stream, then immediately cross the railway, taking great care to observe the 'stop, look and listen' instructions. This is the route of the Leicester and Swannington Railway, the first major standard gauge steam railway in the Midlands, completed between Leicester and Bagworth in July 1832. Note the sandstone steps either side of the railway track that consist of the original stone railway sleeper blocks.

Pass round to the right of the balancing pond and head directly towards the Desford brickworks fence boundary [3][SK 46167 06776] where you turn right along the track. Balancing ponds were constructed to control flood waters in river valleys. The Thringstone Fault lies beneath you at this point, and runs in a north westerly direction roughly paralleling to the railway line. This fault is a major fracture in the Earth's crust, separating the much older Charnian rocks to the east from the Carboniferous Coal Measures to the west. At this point, the hill rising to your right consists of colliery spoil from the nearby former Desford Colliery. Walk up this slope to gain a view across the brickworks and the associated clay pit, cut deep into the hillside. The red Triassic mudstone brick clay (p.25) visible in the quarry face is about 100 m in thickness and sits on top of the Coal Measures to the west of the Thringstone Fault. Today, the only way to see the coal-bearing strata is in the spoil material from the old colliery. This reveals a variety of rocks, including grey shaly mudstones, siltstones and sandstones together with sporadic coal fragments. On some of the mudstone surfaces, fossilised plant fragments may be found.

Follow the path between the brickworks boundary and the spoil tip and you soon emerge into the area now landscaped as Bagworth Heath Woods. This 75 hectare woodland (185 acres) was once the site of the large Desford Colliery, which closed in 1984. About 200 m after passing the line of tall conifers, and just before the path opens into grassland, the former sites of the two Desford Colliery shafts are indicated by large concrete marker blocks [4][SK 46071 06845] amongst the bushes a few metres to your right. These shafts, sunk in 1900, were both 4.25 m in diameter and reached a depth of 199 m, from where the Lower Main Seam was worked.

As you walk across the grassed area, you will encounter the metalled path which leads to the right and up the hill to the north. Before following this path, you may wish to walk farther across the grass to the small lakes, where an information board provides some details of the former colliery. The lakes and the area to the west resulted from mining subsidence, known as 'subsidence flashes', and they provide wetland habitats for wildfowl and aquatic plants. A row of houses along the nearby Heath Road were also badly damaged by the subsidence and had to be demolished. After closure of Desford Colliery, the whole area was landscaped and became the Bagworth Heath Woods. Up the hill (landscaped colliery waste) to the north of the valley, the path goes through trial planting areas of native species woodland. This demonstration

woodland shows different techniques for woodland establishment and maintenance on reclaimed colliery spoil. As you continue along this track you emerge from Bagworth Heath Woods into a new woodland area, Manor Wood, where an information board describes the planting. After 200 m, the path meets the long-distance footpath, the 'Leicestershire Round'. Turn left and follow the Leicestershire Round for about 250 m until you meet Heath Road [5][SK 45302 07581]. At this location, a number of houses and terraced miner's cottages once existed, known as Little Bagworth. No trace of this settlement remains, again following extensive mining subsidence damage, all were demolished.

Cross the road and immediately follow the signposted arrow to the right, towards Bagworth. Follow the yellow waymarkers through the gate and into the church graveyard, then across to the next waymarker and turn right following the outer boundary of the church land. Bagworth church [6][SK 45035 07942] is modern, replacing the old Norman church that was severely damaged by mining subsidence in 1968. Cross the road, turning left and continue up the hill to the junction with Station Road, where you turn right, following the long straight road through Bagworth. About 600 m along this road, you will notice the extensive area of newish housing on the left hand side, all built on the former site of Bagworth Colliery [7][SK 44450 08672]. There is also a miner's memorial alongside the road and behind, the main shafts to the colliery were located. They are now the site of the children's play area.

Bagworth Colliery (p.19) had a long history; the first shafts were sunk in 1825, and the colliery was the last north-west Leicestershire mine to close in February 1991. The presence of many thick coal seams, and the adoption of modern mining methods following nationalisation, resulted in high efficiency. However, extensive coal removal also created the wide- spread problem of mining subsidence, and many buildings were damaged beyond repair and unusual features were created on the landscape. One such feature is the marked slope change in Station Road, close to its junction with Park Lane [8][SK 44365 08876]. Turn right here, and follow Park Lane until you reach the footbridge over the railway. Looking north from this bridge [9][SK 44463 09112], the scenery in days past would have been very different. The whole area to the left of the present line was an extensive array of railway sidings serving Bagworth Colliery, with Bagworth and Ellistown Railway Station (closed in 1964) near to the footbridge seen in the distance. The view ahead would have included the prominent buildings, chimneys and headgears of Ellistown Colliery, which closed in 1989. Here can be seen the Ellistown brick and tile works, part of the Ibstock Brick Company (p.27). Bardon Hill forms the skyline with a telecommunications relay station on its summit. It is the highest point in Leicestershire at 278 m above sea level, comprising hard Precambrian rocks which continue to be extensively quarried, Turn right after crossing the footbridge and you come to the top of the Bagworth Incline. When the original Leicester and Swannington Railway was constructed in 1832, the track alignment included a 1 km-long incline at a gradient of 2°, which had an Incline Keeper's House at the top. Although a Grade 2 listed building, this was allowed to fall into disrepair and collapsed in recent years. The incline worked on the principle of gravity — the weight of full wagons (loaded with coal or rock) descending the incline pulled the empty ones back up to be refilled. In 1848, the railway was realigned and a more sensible gentle rise to Bagworth was achieved by the construction of embankments, viaducts, bridges and excavations of cuttings between Thornton Mill and Bagworth Station. Descend the incline, now a pleasant wide 'green lane', and on reaching the bottom, follow the yellow arrows across the road leading to Bagworth Park Estate [11][SK 45373 08582] (the former home of Lord Maynard, original developer of the Bagworth Colliery). You have now crossed over to the east side of the pre-Triassic Thringstone Fault and because the Coal Measures strata are no longer present at depth, there is no evidence of any mining or related subsidence. Cross the field, over the small stream and skirt the left side of the field until you reach a stile. Step over and immediately bear right, heading up the hill towards the electricity pylon where you can enter Thornton Plantation [12][SK 45864 08475], part of The National Forest's broadleaved native planting scheme. Started in 1998, the trees are already becoming well established. You are now back on the hill top underlain by the relatively hard Cotgrave Sandstone.

As you approach Thornton Main Street, notice the stone walls contain large blocks of diorite and Charnian rocks, which were most likely quarried from the outcrops near to Markfield and Stanton under Bardon. Proceed straight along the Main Street until you reach the primary school on your left. Immediately past the this school, turn left [13][SK 46429 07890] back on to the Leicestershire Round. Away from the Main Street, the hill slopes down towards the reservoir, which can be reached by passing through the hedge beyond the playing fields and then on to the main reservoir path round to the right. Refreshments and toilets can be found at the visitor centre [14][SK 46942 07666] 300 m farther along this path. Beyond this, a tarmacked road leads you back to your starting point, the reservoir car park [15][SK 47058 07405].

Figures

(Figure 107) View over Thornton reservoir.

(Figure 108) Desford brick clay pit in the Mercia Mudstone Group.

(Figure 109) Walk 9 route map. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2011.

(Figure 110) Concrete block marking the site of the Desford Colliery mine shaft. The manhole in the foreground covers the shaft.

(Figure 111) Bagworth church. The old Norman church here collapsed due to mining subsidence. It was rebuilt in 1968.

(Figure 112) Subsidence flash at Bagworth Heath with the old Desford Colliery headstock wheel on the island.

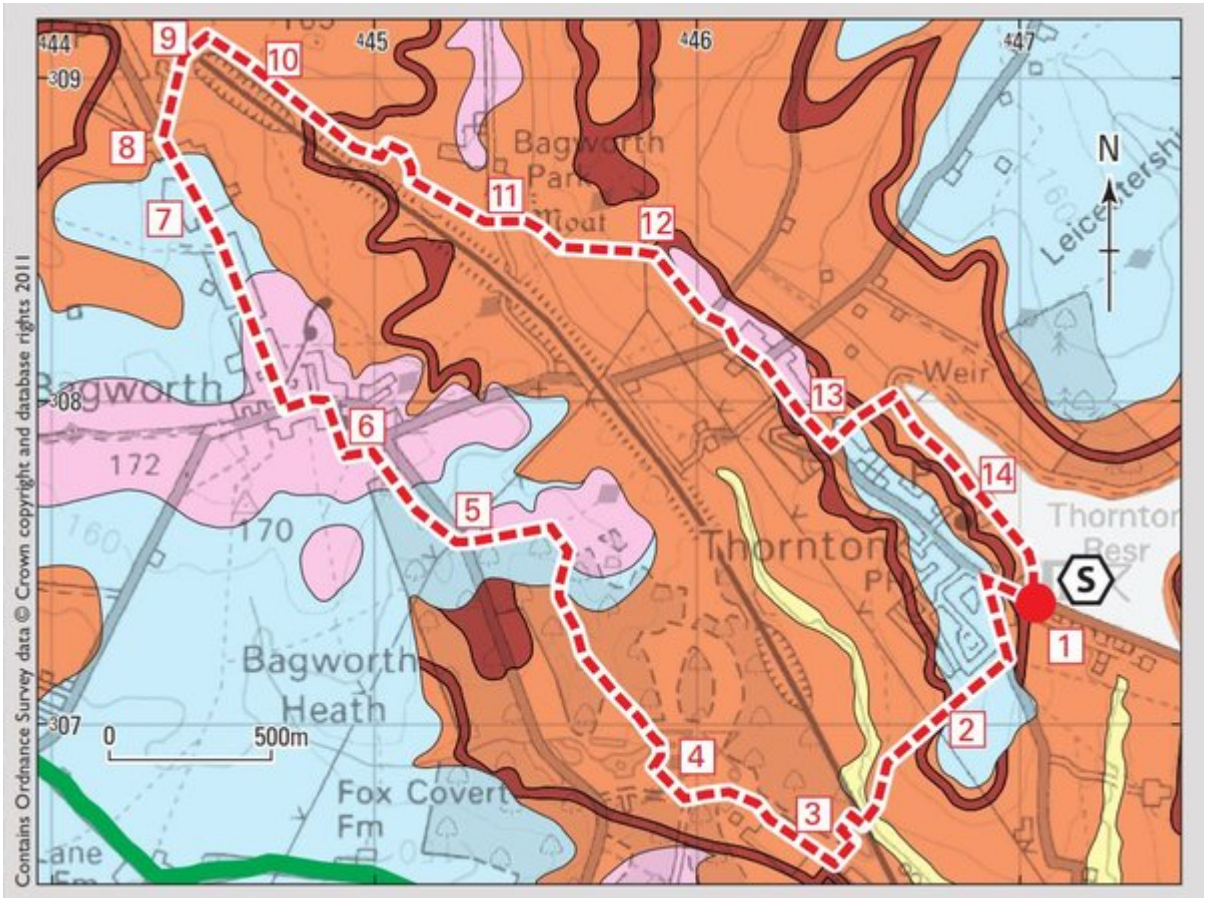
(Figure 113) Miners' memorial at Bagworth Colliery.



(Figure 107) View over Thornton reservoir.



(Figure 108) Desford brick clay pit in the Mercia Mudstone Group.



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