

Autumns colour in and around Stone

Stone based rambler and photographer, Paul L.G. Morris, shares some of his favourite nearby spots

When you think of autumn colour what do you think of: The magnificent spectacle of the New England Fall or perhaps, closer to home, the golden autumn colours of the Westonbirt Arboretum near Tetbury?

I think more of the everyday closer to home: The hedgerows bordering the fields, trees that line our streets, even the drive along a road in the countryside on a sunny autumn day gives a fine display of colour. I believe that many areas of the UK have something to offer – at times this is an achingly beautiful country – but mostly, I keep nearer to home.

Taking my home town of Stone as an example, here are some places of interest:

The A34 between Stone and Stafford:

Yes, really. When we were moving here from Norfolk a few years ago we were house hunting in the autumn and this was one of the attractions: a dual carriageway with mature trees at the sides and along the central reservation that gave a wonderful display of colour.

National Trust properties: Near to Stone we have a choice:

For the formal parkland there is **Shugborough**: I visited them one November morning and the trees were just glowing with colour in the sun. It was a bit late in the season, some trees were bare of leaves, others partly denuded which had the benefit of showing the amazing architecture of the branches whilst still giving a display of colour.

With some, especially the beech trees, they were still hanging onto their leaves showing tones ranging from yellow through gold to copper-coloured hues.

Closer to home there is **Downs Bank**: A small woodland with open access on a hillside that is popular with walkers, cyclists and dog walkers. This is a more natural environment than the formal parklands but still has plenty of interest along with some glorious views across the countryside. Did I say this is an achingly beautiful country?



Trent and Mersey Canal near Stone

Biddulph Grange Gardens: The clue is in the name. Not parkland like Shugborough, nor natural in the manner of Downs Bank, but a more formal garden full of splendid trees. It does have a wild side as well.

Local Arboretums:

We have the large **National Memorial Arboretum** about a 50 minutes drive away to the east, but we also have the **Lovell Quinta Arboretum** 50 minutes away to the north.

Never heard of the Lovell Quinta Arboretum?

Nor had I until recently. You may have heard of the Jodrell Bank Radio Telescope in Cheshire (*which in itself is worth a visit*), created by Sir Bernard Lovell. Well, this arboretum was initially created by Sir Bernard in the village he lived in a couple of miles from the telescope. Now run by a charity, this is a relatively small arboretum of about 28 acres but it packs a lot into the area: Some wonderful tree-lined avenues, 3 national collections of trees, along with some outstanding views. *Did I say this is an achingly...*

Canals and Rivers:

We are fortunate to have both canal and river running past Stone:

The Trent and Mersey Canal: At all times of the year it is pleasant to walk along, passing both the countryside and the town (*townside?*) Along many stretches of it are hedges and trees, even through the town, all of which succumb to the seasons.

Much of the canalside has surfaced paths so are easy to access and walk on although in other places there may just be a muddy footpath. But along these paths you can see the landscapes from a different perspective (*and see some of the gardens of those properties adjoining the canal, these may be colourful in their own right*). In places there may be an adjoining nature reserve which are often worth exploring.

The River Trent: Don't forget the small riverside park of Crown Meadow which is across the road from Westbridge Park and the flood meadow with paths to the south of the park.



Avenue in the Lovell Quinta Arboretum



Autumn at Shugborough



Cholmondeley Castle Gardens



Footpath at Downs Bank

Nature reserves:

I am a member of, and a volunteer for, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. This Wildlife Trust owns, or manages, many nature reserves which give you access to both spectacular, and more modest, countryside. These are not all in remote areas but can be found in, or close to, urban areas. Two examples near Stone are:

Westport Lake: A reserve on the edge of Stoke-on-Trent. A pleasant park with treelined paths around the lake that is also adjacent to the Trent and Mersey canal. A walk along here takes you through the urban 'The Potteries' of which some are more modern, others derelict both of which which are worth a visit any time of the year. But along the path there is plenty of wild space with hedges, trees and other wildlife.

Wolsley Bridge: This is a small reserve that is also the Headquarters of the Wildlife Trust. You can easily miss it when you drive into the adjacent garden centre but it is well worth a visit being next to the River Trent.

Although not specifically a Nature Reserve, try **Stone Common Plot** to the north side of the town. Meadows, trees and wooded footpaths with some outstanding views of the rural scene.

Gardens:

There is the **Dorothy Clive Gardens** close to the Staffordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire borders. This garden, managed by a charity, is another hillside gem with some amazing views. For me, Spring and Autumn are the best seasons but it does have continuing interest.

About 40 minutes away, across the border into Cheshire is **Cholmondeley Castle Gardens**. These are attractive in their own right but have many beautiful trees that in autumn... well, need I say more! Should you have your own garden, even if it is only of postage stamp size, look therefor signs of autumn. There is much to see the closer you look.

Public footpaths:

These are often overlooked and under used. Some councils (*both district and parish*) publish footpath guides although the district councils hold the definitive right-of-way maps.

There are other organisations that can help such as Stone Ramblers and (*for those of a more mature age*) Stone U3A has a walking group

If there is one thought I wish to leave with you, it is to appreciate the beauty that this county, and country, has to offer.

As I said, **'This is an achingly beautiful country'**.

Appreciate these photos for what they show in just this area of the country.

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