

Green spaces and reserves

Stone based Rambler and photographer, Paul L.G. Morris, shares some photo's from his walks around Whitfield Valley Nature Reserve, Wetley Moor Nature Reserve and Biddulph Grange Country Park

In Stone and the surrounding areas we are fortunate to have, not only beautiful countryside around us, but green spaces and reserves (such as Crown Meadows and Stone Meadows Nature Reserve) within the town. But if I was to ask you to name the top British green cities would Stoke be in the list?

No? Well, according to the Ordnance Survey report 'National #Get Outside Day 2023', Stoke-on-Trent is fourth with 23.82% green space.

Time to investigate: Looking at the OS map shows a number of reserves and country parks in Stoke and the surrounding areas. The distribution is not uniform so there are some very developed regions as well as more open areas. I decided to take my camera and start visiting some of these spaces most of which are within 10-20 miles of Stone.

First up is Whitfield Valley Nature Reserve which appears to be managed by the city council.

This is the view that greeted me in my visit in back in May....



The car park is off Ford Green Road next to the Ford Green Hall museum. I must admit, driving through industrial and urban Stoke to get there made me wonder if my directions were correct. The information board at the entrance tells me that north end was a coal mine with a railway line running through the length of the reserve. There are well surfaced paths through the reserve with many paths coming in from the surrounding housing estates. Around the lake you may encounter waterfowl of different types



A swan sleeping by the lake



Coots nesting on the lake



There are good paved paths through the reserve (although there are also rougher tracks)



From some places, across the countryside, you may glimpse the surrounding housing estates.

This was a surprisingly beautiful place to visit and well worth seeing again.



Another place to visit is Wetley Moor Nature Reserve to the east of Stoke on the outskirts of Werrington.

This reserve is now managed by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and is mostly lowland heath although some farms and fields are embedded within the reserve. Accessing it from the small car park on the higher part of the moor gives some stunning vistas with Stoke low down in the valley and, on clear days, extended views to the Wrekin in Shropshire (or, as one regular said to me: 'Have you seen our volcano!')

Here's a view east across the moor. Stoke is just visible below the horizon to the right of the centre. At this magnification the Wrekin is not visible but it is on the horizon about 1110th of the way in from the left



Obviously it depends on the season, but we saw plenty of wild flowers



There are a few benches so that you can sit and enjoy the view



The paths can be a bit rough and, in some places, rather muddy. Fortunately, one of the worst patches has a bridge over it



The third place we visited was a bit further north - Biddulph Grange Country Park.

For those who know it, it is next door to Biddulph Grange Gardens (run by the National Trust) and was part of the original estate. This country park has also come into the care of Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. It is in this area that the River Trent has its source. From the car park for the Country Park, paths take you past a part-time visitor centre and into the woods.

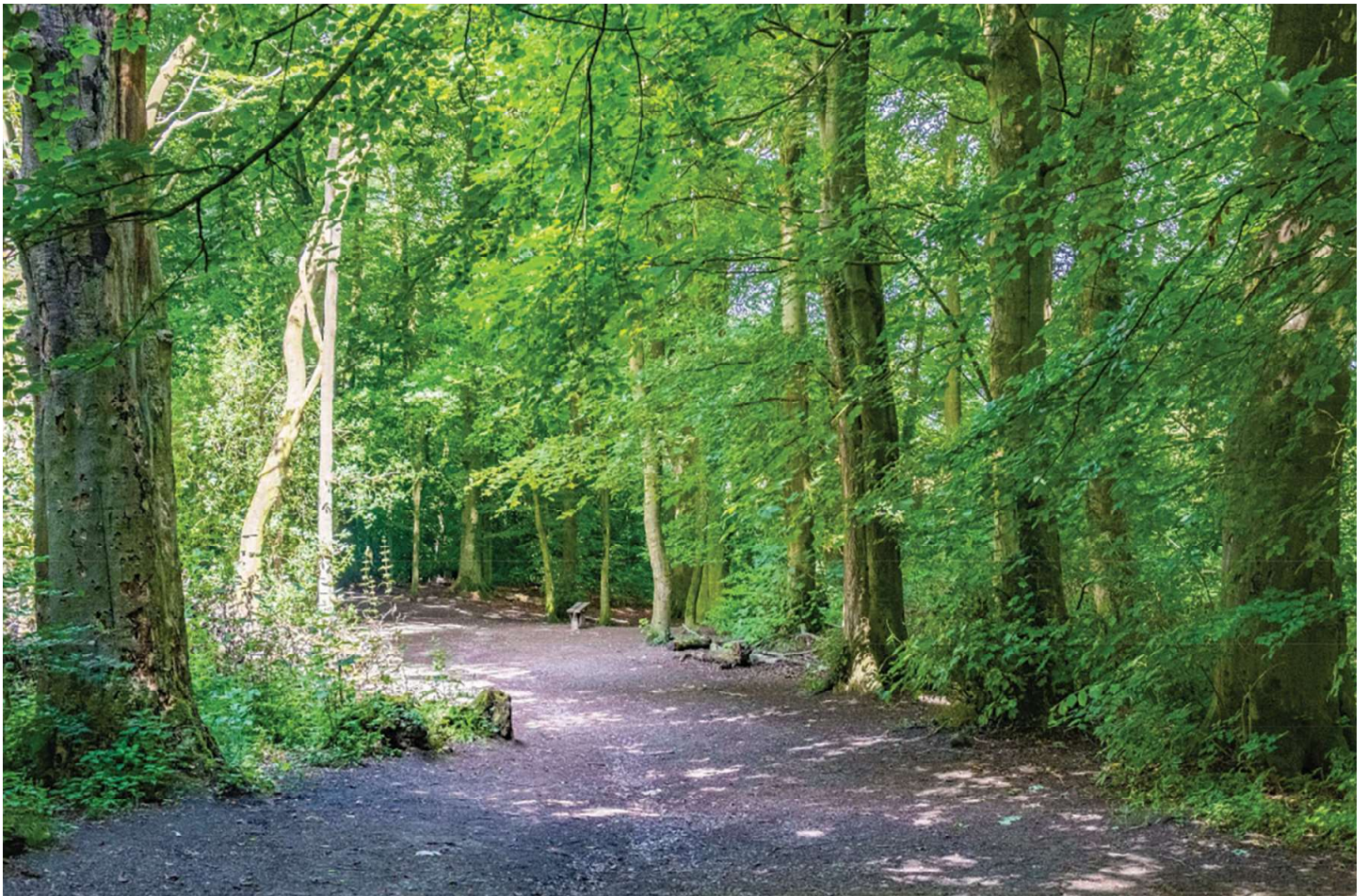
For the first part the path follows a stream uphill as it winds through the woods where a bridge takes the path across the stream.



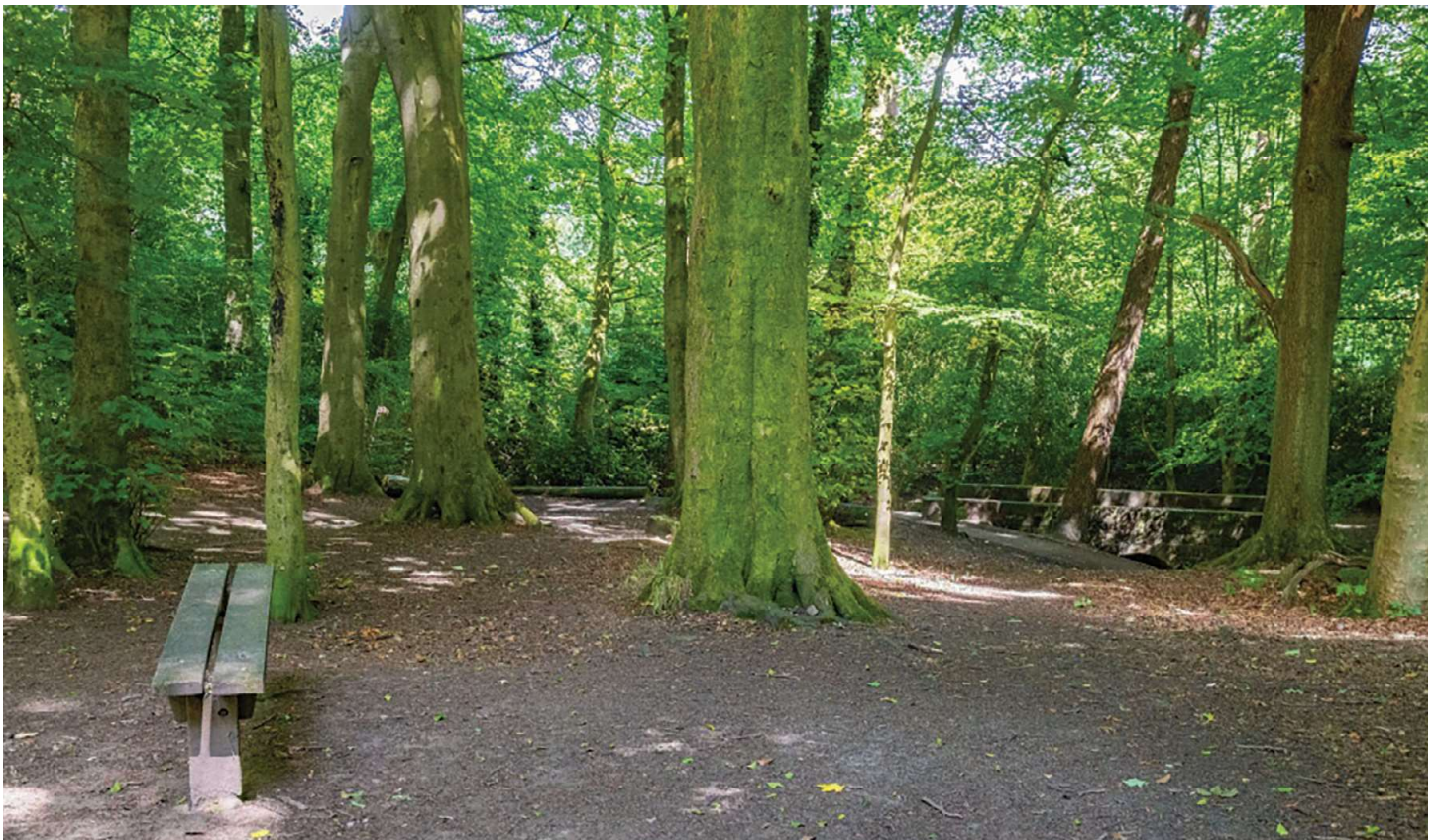
As you walk along the paths, depending on the route you take, you may come down this steep path with steps, cross over the stream, and ascend the steps the other side



One of the paths takes you back downhill along a straight path known as 'the Mile' or 'Obelisk Walk' which ends at gates to the National Trust Gardens. I have walked up this path from the gardens side but never knew that just yards away is a small lake known as 'The Fish Pool'



From the far side of the pool are other paths; I took this one down through the woods



And eventually came to this seat next to the bridge we crossed on the way up.

This was a quite pleasant woodland walk although the route we took did cross a stile and was steep and rough in places. However, the lower parts do have better paths. And for us the bonus was to go next door the Biddulph Grange Gardens and have a cuppa and cake!

We shall be visiting these places again but before that there are numerous other parks and reserves to visit in the Stoke area. But we are also visiting the reserves in Stone (so far I have 4 on my list!) which are providing me with plenty of other photography opportunities.

*From Paul L.G. Morris
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CONTENTS



NEWS

- Celebrating Olympic Triumph: Paris 2024 Congratulations to Joe Clarke, Adam Burgess, and Dan Bingham
- Campaigning Charlotte
- Eccleshall Show 2023 Profits Donated
- Smooth resurfacing of Station Drive
- Brave brothers raise funds for RNLI
- Better Lives - at Stone Alzheimer's Club

IN PICTURES

- Rising Festival Success
- Green spaces and reserves by Paul L.G. Morris
- Mumbles Art Exhibition at Sandon Hall
- Stonefield Park floral displays
- Stone Classic Car Event
- Burma Star Ceremony and Band Concert
- Puppet Tree Jamboree 2024
- Stone Town Council's Civic Sunday and Mayor Making



HERITAGE

• QUESTION TIME

In this edition, local historian, and New Stone Mayor, Philip Leason answers a few readers questions relating to Stones' rich and deep history

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Once you've finished enjoying your Gazette, please recycle it, by giving it to a friend!

2 of these 3 Olympic Athletes used to deliver the Gazette!

Congratulations go to our local athletes Joe Clarke, Adam Burgess, and Dan Bingham, who have etched their names into sporting history, and returned home with a clutch of Silver Olympic Medals.

Did you know that 2 of these 3 Olympic Athletes used to deliver The Stone and Eccleshall Gazette magazine!

Now I'm not saying it had anything to do with their success, but you have to admit, it's quite a coincidence!

Congratulations also to the new Stone Town Mayor, Councillor Philip Leason MBE JP, who was presented with the Chain of Office, for the civic year 2024-25 at the towns Civic Sunday service, he also answers a few readers questions relating to Stones' rich history in our Heritage pages.

Congratulations too, to Stone Lion Glenys Sanders, becoming their new President for the year.

In news, Stone's Crown Wharf Theatre will finally be opening on 8th November with their debut show 'Shakespeare in Love'. Well done to all the team there for years of hard work to give Stone its first proper Theatre. The show runs from Friday 8 to Saturday 16 November, and tickets are selling fast, get yours now, and be a part of Stone history.

If you want to get out to stretch your legs, Stone Ramblers have your Walk of the month, or if you fancy venturing a little further afield, Paul L.G. Morris shows us around Whitfield Valley Nature Reserve, Wetley Moor Nature Reserve and Biddulph Grange Country Park.

There's some other great photo spreads from Martin Robinson, who attended the Stone Classic Car Event, the Burma

Star Ceremony, Stonefield Park floral displays and Stone Town Council's Civic Sunday for us.

Some dates for your diary:

In September Heritage Open Days take place on 7th September, then later in September we also have Bingo and Baps, Harvest Supper, Tina Turner comes to the Gatehouse, Jazz Concert at Newport Music Club, Staffordshire Historic Churches Trust Sponsored Ride & Stride, Mike and Mary's Fun Quiz, Matilda the Musical at Stone Library.

In October events include Stone Lions Proms, Sandon Autumn Walk, An Elizabethan Christmas, Beware of Dragons! At Stone Library, Grand Singathon and Broughton Quiz Night. Plus dates for Stone C & D Garden Club Autumn programme, National Trust Staffordshire Centre Talks, and full details for many more events inside, there's too many to mention here.

If you're struggling to find the perfect Christmas present for your partner this year? Look no further. Hedley Studios create iconic, driveable artworks, from scaled down versions of Ferrari Testa Rossa J Series to Bentley Blower Jnr's! Yes please, finally, cars made in my size!

Staying with motoring, if you're looking for a new workhorse, the Gazette's Syd Taylor takes the brand new, ruffty-tuffty, Isuzu D-Max DL40 Double cab out for a spin, and has high praise indeed, for not only its looks, but the performance too.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition, and please email us your news, stories and events to go in the next one, take care until then.

Dan Mitchell 1/9/24

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