

# A Walk Round Bradgate Park

Bradgate Park is located in the heart of Leicestershire in the small village of Newtown Linford. Newtown Linford's records date as far back as 1214 when the first reference to Bradgate Park was documented. In the records, The Earl of Winchester is given the rights to take deer with nine bows and six hounds.

If you walk around the village you will see a range of buildings from lavish fairly new builds to quaint cottages with thatched roofs. There is a small primary school for the local children, a post office, coffee shop and of course an ice cream stand!

To get to the car park use Post Code LE6 OHB for Satnav's, there is ample parking with a pay and display car park, the money raised from the parking fee is used for the management, conservation and improvement of the park, as the park is owned by a trust and independent charity.

If you are travelling via public transport a bus can be caught regularly from St Margret's bus station in Leicester City centre to Newtown Linford, the bus is the 120 ran by Roberts Coaches. This will drop you outside of the park entrance near the post office.



We start our walk at the Newtown Linford entrance to the park; this is usually considered to be the main entrance; the park boasts this gives the most picturesque walk, however there are two other entrances one at the back of Old John and the other close to the village of Cropston.

The first mile of the walk is on a good surface, however we will be venturing into the bracken and through a mini stream so please ensure your footwear is suitable.

Walk straight ahead towards the main gates which are around 10ft. tall. You will then enter into the enclosed park.

You are now in Bradgate Park. As soon as you enter there is no sign of modern life, it's amazing that just a few miles out from the hustle and bustle of Leicester City centre the grounds of this medieval deer park which dates back to almost 800 years ago must look almost the same as it did back then.

The large steep hillside to the left of you creates a canopy of treetops, providing shade in the summer as this relatively open park becomes a suntrap and shelter in the winter from the harsh British rainfalls.

To your right you will see the river Lin which runs to the side of the footpath up until it flows into Cropston reservoir which we will see in about a mile.



*(The river plays a vital part in the way the park works. Within the park there are almost 400 red and fellow deer roaming free, as they have done since records began. The river allows the park to separate some land for a deer sanctuary; no visitors are allowed over the opposite side of the river as this allows for a quite place for the deer to hide away from people. This is often where mums will have their calves and they usually stay on the right of the river until they stop suckling at around 7 months old. Depending on the time of year you will be able to hear the deer rutting, the young crying and of course their mating call.*

*Please be aware if you are walking with a dog to keep it under control).*

As you walk along, you will see several mini waterfalls, the third being one which is around 5 feet tall, you can access closely, during the spring you will see the mother duck 'encouraging' her ducklings to take the plunge. In the summer children play on and under the waterfall.



As the hillside on the left slopes down to expose a meadow you will see ahead the ruins of the Bradgate House, the red and orange brick work with the deep gray slate roof stand out from the lush green backdrop.

By now you will have reached the stone of remembrance to Charles Bennion who purchased the park to be kept in its natural state for the people of Leicester and Leicestershire to enjoy.

A little further on as the river returns from its u-bend you will see a lot of small rocks as the river Lin shallows, this is where you will find children in the summer with fishing nets trying to catch some of the wildlife. At one time you would find crayfish.

You will see on your right a fairly new looking (in comparison to the rest of the park!) stone wall, this is the parks store where they keep their maintenance vehicles and other objects out of site so not to spoil the aesthetics of the park.

Just a little further ahead, to your right, you will spot a large round stone drinking water fountain, this will give you a taste of the water collected within the park.

To your left you will have a view of the front of the house, the ruins are open to the public and although the hours change depending on the time of year, it doesn't take much imagination to see how vast and grand it once was.

To your right you will see a foot bridge; this is the only access point for the public to go to the right of the river Lin and allows you to get closer to the Deer sanctuary although there are still some restrictions. There is also an exit at the end of the foot path on the right which will lead you in to the village of Anstey.

*(Bradgate House was one of the earliest unfortified mansions to be built in England and one of the finest brick houses of its period. It was the birthplace and early home of Lady Jane Grey who was queen for 9 days during the turbulent times following Henry VIII death.*

*By 1600 the house consisted of two main storeys with attics and was about 200 feet in length from east to west, there were two wings joined by a Great Hall and parlour on the north side.*

*The west wing was occupied by the great kitchen, bakery and servants quarters. The east wing contained the chapel and the family living quarters.*

*In 1719 the house had no residents and by 1790 it began to fall in to decay, the park trust now looks after the ruins.*

*There is only one whole room left within the ruins and that is the chapel which has a memorial tomb to Sir Henry Grey (created First Lord Grey of Groby in 1603) and his wife Anne Windsor).*

As you continue walking down the main path you may be able to see some peacocks that live in and around the house ruins, and on the right the deer sanctuary looks more like a meadow. As the ground is flatter you will be able to see more of the deer, they are often here in large numbers.

We are now just past our one mile point and you will be approaching the public toilets, and visitor centre which is free of charge, and old barn tea room where you may wish to stop for a break. There are plenty of outdoor picnic tables which give you a lovely view of Cropston reservoir which is where the river Lin leads to. There are some viewing holes cut out of the stone wall for the keen bird watchers and photographers.



We are now going to walk back on ourselves slightly, if you stand facing the staff house with your back to the visitor centre, turn left to walk to the second footpath to your right heading away from the main path we have walked down. There is a plaque in front of an Oak tree which will guide you.

This part of the walk has a slight incline to your left you will be able to see inside the ruins including some of the small lakes and trees. During the summer evenings the grounds of the ruins are used as an outdoor theatre.

Ahead in the distance is probably one of Leicestershire's best known landmarks, used in a lot of publicity about Leicestershire, and that can be seen from miles away due to its high positioning (690 ft. above sea level!) Old John.

*(The tower would have been used by Lord Stamford and his guests to watch their horses gallop across the racecourse that was laid out at the bottom of the hill or for him to view fox hunting on his grounds. The tower consists of two circular rooms one on top of the other with a spiral staircase connecting them, there are slate fire places and a few windows. The arch was added a few years later, locals call the building 'old johns beer mug'. Who exactly is old john? Well legend has it that an open air fire was started on the hill to celebrate the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday of the earl of Stamford's grandson, a ground keeper called john was killed by the fire and so the tower was named after him).*

Should you visit, on the top of the hill you will find a compass which points out different landmarks that can be seen around the county.

On the hill to the left of Old John is another landmark a tall stone pillar containing two bronze tablets The Yeoman War Memorial which stands on an area of consecrated "Holy Ground" and commemorates the men of the Leicestershire Yeomanry who died in the Boer War and the two World Wars. Each year a Memorial Service is held on the hill on the Sunday morning nearest to the Battle of Frezenberg in France (13th May 1915), in which the Yeomanry suffered huge losses.



Go through the gap in the wall ahead of you, and immediately turn left to walk alongside the wall. It will be on your left hand side. The path is not very well defined, and will like many of the paths in the park, will be slippery if you are doing the walk after it has rained. Ahead, to the right of you will be the Bowling Green Wood which is surrounded by a stone wall and is out of bounds for the public mainly used as a nature reserve.

Looking left now you will see the rear of the ruins of Bradgate House continue to walk ahead past the first



exit along the side of the woods but stick to the stone wall you have been walking along.

Head towards the bracken and follow the footpath slightly to the left you will come to a very small spring stream, there is no bridge so you will need to walk through it or it is small enough to jump over most of the time! After crossing the stream, carry on straight ahead.



You will soon see an opening in the stone wall on your left, walk through it. After a few paces, turn right onto a path through the bracken, which runs parallel to the wall, which will now be on your right. Follow this footpath up the side of the hill running parallel to the main footpath in the valley below, where we walked

earlier.

We are now about 2 miles into our walk.



You are now at the top of the ledge you were looking up at, at the beginning of the walk. You will have a great view of the park and the deer sanctuary. To your right just over the wall is a bridal path which can be used by the public to ride their horses.

Turn left at the fork in the path to keep towards the edge of the cliff face.

Down the side of the ledge you'll see the waterfall we passed earlier. Ahead of you on the foot path will be a fallen tree, keep to the right of it.

Ahead you will see another well-established footpath on the right; we will now be following this all the way to the parks exit, keeping the stone wall on your right.

Follow the footpath through the bracken, there will be a steep decline ahead.

As you come towards the bottom of the hill you will join a bridal path which you turn left onto, and will take you back to the main entrance. Walk through the gate and you will be back in the main car park where we started.

Before you return to your car, it is worth walking to the main road and visiting All Saints Church.

All Saints Church is a beautiful historic church which dates back to the 16th century; its stained glass windows pay tribute to the life and death, rise and fall of Lady Jane Gray.

There are many headstones, some so old that you can no longer read the engravings due to the weathering, this was the last resting place of many local people until 1960 when a cemetery was opened just a mile away on Groby Road. The church still hold services and takes pride in its appearance. You will often see a floral wreath around the door, of various and colour dependant on the season. Sadly the church doesn't seem to be open very often, but there are some interesting gargoyles around the window to the right of the entrance which are worth a look.

Also at the park entrance, you will see a bright blue Leicestershire Constabulary police box. The box is not much larger than a phone box and is still used today, as there are so few police boxes' left this is now a listed building. Behind the police box are a set of toilets, and a little bit further, the shop and café.

The walk is just under 2.5 miles.