

Bluebells near Bradfield

4.5 miles/7k of tracks and paths around Rushall Manor Farm and Stanford Dingley. Park at the Black Barn, Rushall Manor Farm off Back Lane SU584 723 ///telephone.brink.crate OS Explorer 159. Refreshments at Stanford Dingley.

1. The 18th century Black Barn at Rushall Manor Farm, and its associated buildings, forms the base for The John Simonds Trust, set up in 1986, which welcomes over 12,000 children a year to a variety of learning experiences in the Pang valley.

From the Black Barn walk north, following the farm track to the left of buildings, up through the bluebell woods to Miram's Copse. Where the path divides, take the second, northeasterly path which crosses various wide rides before reaching Scratchface Lane.

2. These traditionally managed woods and copses have huge value for all wildlife. They are full of bluebells in spring and mainly consist of hazel coppice with oak standards. The wide rides support a variety of wildflowers alive with butterflies and other insects, including the nationally rare Drab Looper moth. Scratchface Lane is no longer as narrow and little-used as its name implies, so cross with care.

Cross over through the gate and take the footpath across the field and into the copse, bearing left, until it joins a gravel track (turn right).



3. Greathouse Wood is a species rich secondary ancient woodland. Its name derives from the 'great' Bradfield House which stood to the south and

was destroyed in the 1840's. Only some cottages remain.

At the reservoir sign, take the grassy path to the right which runs southeast down to Owl Pit Copse. At the junction of crossing paths turn left to follow the field edge towards the modern buildings of Rushall Farm.

A shorter route, taking the path ahead, continues through bluebell woods, crossing the lane to follow the farm track back to the Black Barn.

4. The Owl Pit Geological site is part of a quarry started in 1830 which provided chalk used to 'sweeten' the acid soils of the surrounding fields. A display board gives an explanation of the features of this local reserve.

After visiting the geological site, return to the footpath, cross the lane and take the path diagonally left to cross the fields, emerging on Back Lane. Cross over to walk down Mariner's Lane, crossing Folly Bridge over the Pang. Turn right after the bend to follow the river upstream. Continue to Stanford Dingley.

5. Folly Bridge was rebuilt in 1947 after floods swept away the original hump-backed bridge.

6. The confluence of the River Pang with the spring water flowing from the pools upstream constitutes about 50% of the river's water. Here the Upper Pang becomes the Lower Pang and the doubling of the river width is easily viewed from the path.

7. The Blue Pool is formed from artesian springs forced through the porous

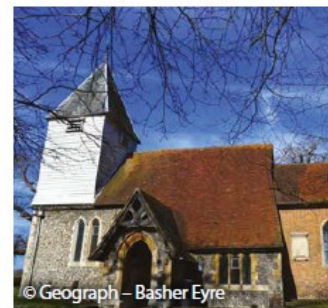


chalk between layers of impermeable clay. The blue colour is almost certainly derived from the fine particles of a blue-green mineral called glauconite which reflects the light. The water maintains a constant temperature of about 7-9°C all year.

On reaching the village, turn right along the roadside, walking with care past the Bull pub to the church.



8. Stanford Dingley is an ancient settlement. Stanford means 'stony ford' – usually a Saxon name; Dingley is the family name of a 15th century owner of the manor. The village is listed in the Domesday Survey of 1086. Today, the village is full of 17th and 18th century houses and has two pubs.



9. The Church of St Denys, with relics of its Saxon origin within the interior walls, is Grade 1 listed. Today's church still holds a Norman font and fragments of medieval wall paintings.

After the church, turn right onto a footpath skirting the northern edge of the churchyard. Cross the fields through 3 hedgerows to a well-defined track. Turn left and then right to follow the path beside the hedgerow to the south of the road. Where the path emerges onto the lane, cross over to follow the route back across the field to the Black Barn.

Margery Slatter