



Nature Trail

Allestree Park

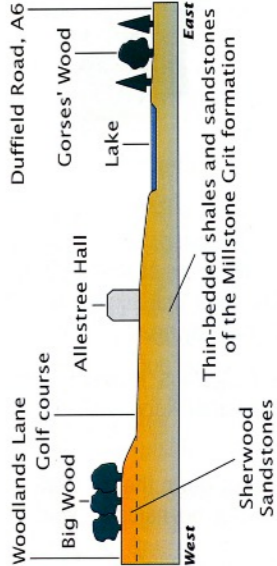
Introduction

Allestree Park is the wildest and most scenic of Derby's parks. Located on the far northern edge of the city, it extends over 129 hectares (319 acres) and was once a private estate. In May 2002, Derby City Council declared much of it a Local Nature Reserve because of its high wildlife interest.

The hilly landscapes of Allestree Park are a prelude to the Peak District which begins a few miles to the north. Late Georgian Allestree Hall in the centre of the Park is a listed building (Grade II*) because of its historical importance and architectural merit.

Geology

Most of the Park is formed from easily eroded, thin-bedded shales and sandstones. These technically belong to the Millstone Grit formation, but they are unlike the thick-bedded sandstones of the true Millstone Grit of the Peak District. They were originally deposited in the Carboniferous Period, 300 million years ago, by mighty rivers. These rivers, flowing south from a vast northern continent, carried huge amounts of sediments into a huge river mouth - a delta - which then covered much of Britain. Today, these formations are topped by a moist, fairly fertile soil, in which a variety of trees and plants thrive.



Cross-section of Allestree Park from East to West

Big Wood, lying on the western and highest part of the Park, is underlain by the Sherwood Sandstones. These were formed by flash floods which washed sands and pebbles into rapidly evaporating lakes in a harsh, hot desert. This happened when Britain was part of a huge rugged continent in the Triassic Period, about 250 million years ago. In the old sand pits in the wood, some of these soft sandstones are exposed. They contain bands

of water-worn pebbles, some carried from as far as northern France. They give rise to a poor, thin, sandy and very dry acidic soil which encourages Birch trees to grow in cover of Bracken.

There is a separate Friends of Allestree Park Nature Trail for Big Wood.


History

Allestree Park dates from the end of the 18th Century when the present Hall was built. By the 1930s, after a succession of owners, including the Evans family who founded Derby Abbey Mills, a developer who had hoped to build 2,000 houses and a golf course bought the Park and Hall. The golf course and some houses on the edge of the Park were in place when the Second World War started. The Army then requisitioned the Park and Hall. After the War, ownership passed to Derby Corporation which became Derby City Council. The Council's Park's Department continues to run the Park for the people of Derby. In 2005, The Friends of Allestree Park, a voluntary group, was set up to work with the Council in promoting wildlife conservation and helping to develop the Park as an educational resource.

The Nature Trail


The trail follows an easy, reasonably flat, route around the lower part of the Park, including the lake shore. The trail is just over two kilometres, or 1½ miles, long. It should take you about 2 hours to complete. The trail can be muddy, so wear suitable footwear. The points of interest in this leaflet relate to numbered posts, with a bell symbol, along the trail.

If you wish, you can extend the trail to the Hall and the gardens, including the ornamental pool with its fine bronze turtles which were once located in the River Gardens in the centre of Derby. The pond is also good for a variety of aquatic life, including water-boatmen, the early stages of dragonflies, frogs and their tadpoles.




Rose-day Willow-herb & Elephant Hawk Moth caterpillar

Now make your way back along the woodland edge and back to the car park to complete the trail.



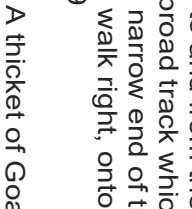
Broad-bodied Chaser & Southern Hawker

The tall plant with pink flowers, in mid summer, is Rosebay Willow-herb. You may be lucky to see the dark coloured caterpillar of Elephant Hawk Moth on this plant. It has frightening-looking eye markings, but is completely harmless.




Canada Goose

A thicket of Goat Willow grows on soil dredged from the lake in 1989. Open areas have an array of meadow flowers such as Lesser Knapweed which attracts a host of insects in mid-summer, including the exquisite Small Copper Butterfly (on the front cover). In early summer there is Ragged Robin (also on the front cover), a flower with deeply-cut pink petals.



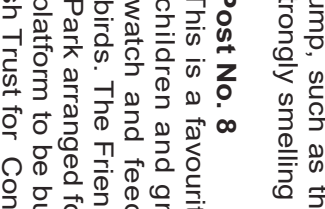
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Stink-horn

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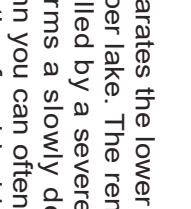
Stink-horn

This is a favourite place for children and grown-ups to watch and feed the water birds. The Friends of Allestree Park arranged for the wooden platform to be built by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers - to make this activity safer and to minimise the trampling which was leading to erosion of the shore.



Post No. 7

A stone dam separates the lower lake from the much smaller upper lake. The remains of a large Common Oak, felled by a severe storm in November 2005, forms a slowly decaying wildlife habitat. In autumn you can often see an array of interesting fungi inside the hollow stump, such as the weird and strongly smelling stink-horn.



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Ornamental Capital on Allestree Hall

While in the Park, Please:

- *Put your litter in the bins or take it home with you.
- *Keep dogs on a lead around the lake shore to prevent them chasing or alarming the water-birds.
- *Clean up after your dog with a poop scoop.
- *Note that there is no fishing on the Upper Lake

Please contact Derby Direct on 01332 291111 about anything you are concerned about.

Getting to Allestree Park

The trail starts at the main car park, reached from off the A6 - Duffield Road - DE22 2ET, For bus services 'phone the Busline - 01332 292200

Begin the trail by unfolding and turning over the leaflet.

Allestree Park Nature Trail

Start the trail by walking out of the car park towards the drive. Once out of the car park, turn sharp left along the edge of the woodland. Along the route look for numbered posts with a bell symbol.

Post No. 1

Hawthorn flowers and berries

The thorny shrubs along here are Common Hawthorn. In May, they have masses of white scented flowers. By autumn these have developed into dark red berries, known as 'haws'. A few fairly young Common or English Oaks grow along the woodland edge. In summer, its wavy edged leaves are unmistakable. Oaks often bear different kinds of growths, called galls, caused by different kinds of tiny wasps which lay their eggs inside the tissues of the tree. The Marble Gall and Oak Apple Gall can be found on the ends of the twigs, while the grotesque Knopper Gall grows on the acorns.

Marble Gall (top) Oak Apple (bottom) and Knopper Gall (left)

The woodland is fringed by vegetation dominated by creeping thistle and nettles, vital habitat for butterflies. The thistle flowers often have an array of different butterflies

feeding on their nectar, while nettles are fed upon by the caterpillars of several of our finest butterflies. Continue for about 100 metres keeping to the woodland edge. On your right is an area of grassland which the Parks Dept are now only mowing infrequently to produce a wild flower meadow. On your left is a 'butterfly bank', made of rubble and soil and planted with low-growing plants, where butterflies can bask in the sunshine and feed, a joint

Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock & Gatekeeper Butterflies

project by Butterfly Conservation and the Friends of Allestree Park. Beyond this, go left into the wood at the marker to reach a well-surfaced path, a project instigated by the Friends in 2011.

Post No. 2

The tall shattered stump is all that remains of a large 200 year-old Beech Tree. The spore-producing bodies of the Beech Bracket Fungus can be seen on the trunk. This contributed to its death around the year 2000, aided by storms which broke off its huge limbs. More light now reaches the woodland floor at this point, encouraging the growth of bramble and wild flowers, including Red Campion with its pink flowers. Carry on along the path which goes through the long wood (formerly an arboretum) to the lake.

Post No. 3

Here you'll find a Holly bush, with a rather gnarled Horse Chestnut nearby. From the opening at the woodland edge at a gate, you have an excellent view eastwards over the Derwent Valley. The wooded hill on the skyline, to the right with the aerial on the top is Drum Hill, made of millstone grit. In front of you is a wildflower meadow, ablaze with buttercups in early and mid summer. Now continue along the woodland path until you reach the lake.

Post No. 4

The lake, consisting of a larger lower one and a much smaller upper one, was constructed in 1825 for the Evans family (founders of Darley Abbey Mills), the most famous owners of Allestree Hall. On your right, you'll see the old bridge-like boathouse, now festooned with ivy, which was built at the same time.

The very tall trees behind the boathouse, with the peculiar diamond-shaped pattern on their bark and with leaves covered in whitish down, are Grey Poplars. They are fairly uncommon hybrids between the introduced White Poplar and the native Aspen.



Yellow Iris



Great Hairy Willow-herb

Post No. 6

Here is a dense shrubbery of blackthorn. In early spring small white flowers clothe its bare spiny branches. By late summer these have become blue fruits known as sloes.



Blackthorn flowers and fruits

A gap in the bushes gives you a fine view over the lake to Big Wood on the skyline. The lower lake is regularly fished by anglers, who catch a range of species, including Pike, Carp and Bream. You may see Coots and Moorhens from here. Both are black in colour - the larger Coot with a white forehead, the Moorhen with a brilliant red forehead and bill. Both are quite aggressive, chasing off rivals with a great deal of splashing and noise.



Coot



Moorhen



Nature Trail Route

Position of numbered posts 1-11 shown



Beech Bracket Fungus



Red Campion



Reed Beetles
Photo by Steve Plant



Branched Bur-Reed



Grey Poplar

Here is the outflow of the lake, the water disappearing down a large drain and emerging as a stream in the woodland behind you. At the lake edge look for the nettle-like Gipsywort with its small white flowers, also Nodding Bur Marigold and Branched Bur-Reed. Look closely and you may see the beautifully metallic Reed Beetle (*Donacia*), which has a larva that feeds on this plant under the water.

