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The Manifold Valley is one of my specialties as I know it very well and regularly visit the area on my Ecton Experience Guided Walk. The picturesque landscape of reef knoll hills and deep wooded valley is packed with geological features and archaeological sites and yet remains unspoilt and relatively unchanged despite being popular with visitors who make the most of the Manifold Way, which runs through the heart of this tucked away rural community.

This particular walk took Alfie and me on a scenic route of less than three miles along a section of trail and through fields and pasture dotted with cattle and sheep as well as including a short climb up the side of Ecton Hill for a hilltop 'fix'.

I parked in the pay and display area to the side of the Manifold Valley Visitor Centre and we set off down the Manifold Way which was formerly the line of the Leek and Manifold Light Railway. The 2' 6" narrow gauge line with its little primrose painted carriages was designed and laid in the early 1900s, mainly to transport milk and farm produce from the upland district west of Hartington. It also provided a passenger service for nearby villagers as well as tourists. The track followed the Manifold and Hamps valleys on its southward journey to Waterhouses but closed in 1934 due to non-profitability as by then road transport had improved. Ironically, one of the labourers working on the original construction said, "It's a grand bit of line but



they wanna mak a go on it, for it starts from nowhere and finishes up at same place!"

On reaching a road after almost a mile, Alfie and I walked to the junction near the early 20th-century black and white road sign and then headed up the steep drive to the fabulous copper topped folly known as The Hillocks. Although ancient in appearance, this was in fact built in 1933 by Arthur Radcliffe, the Tory MP for Leek, as a replacement to a single storey thatched cottage. The copper spire was reputedly taken from a demolished chapel.

Located in buildings to the side is the Centre for Ecton Hill Field Study Association where my Ecton Experience walk turns into an overground/underground adventure! Hidden from

The Teapot Trail - Hulme End

This is not intended as a walk guide

view is the entrance to Salts Level where specialist guides take us right into Ecton Hill on a flat route without the need for

now resemble a cow shed but was in fact the engine house which contained an early Boulton and Watt steam engine. The whole

the car park is to turn right but I know from experience how boggy that section of path can be, even during summer months, and we



ladders or any scrambling to see Ecton Deep Shaft. This runs almost vertically from a gaping exit on the top of the hill to a depth of more than 1,300 feet, almost a thousand of which are below river level and now permanently flooded and inaccessible.

Emerging from the mine my guests are treated to a lunch of home-made soup, bread and cakes before they either return to their cars at Hulme End or join me for an optional 5-mile walk around the Manifold Valley. The next Ecton Experience Walk is on Saturday September 11th and costs £15 for adults, £10 children (6-16) including the tour and lunch. For further information or to book

places please telephone 01629 814108.

Ecton Hill is a honeycomb and labyrinth of mines, shafts and adits. It is known that mining took place here in Bronze Age times as proven by the discovery of an antler pick and other primitive tools. There is also evidence of Roman workings; however the

heyday of Ecton Copper Mine was at the end of the 18th century.

This whole area was once a thriving industrial site with mines, mills and machinery. The first established workings into Ecton Hill, which rises to a height of 1212 feet, were in the mid 17th century but the introduction of gunpowder led to an increase in the mine's activity. By 1764 the mineral rights belonged to the Duke of Devonshire and the 5th Duke is said to have built the Crescent at Buxton on its profits. Between 1776 and 1817 nearly fifty-four thousand tons of copper ore worth £677,112 were produced, with a profit of £244,734.

Alfie and I began the long climb up the hill on a zig-zag course to reach the little stone building on a rise near the top which may

area around Ecton Mine is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and Ecton Mine itself is an underground SSSI.

As we climbed I listened to a buzzard as it soared above the trees, its distinctive cry reverberating around the valley below.

After passing through a little gate to the right of the engine house, Alfie and I wandered down a rough track which would take us to the Back of Ecton. The rich pasture hereabouts provides grazing for a variety of sheep and cattle. Some of the cows are very hefty girls with extremely large and rotund rumps of exuberant and ample proportions, similar to Beryl Cook ladies! They could be Belgian Blue, Charolais or even a mixture - I'm no expert on cattle, but they were certainly big and chunky! Over the wall I saw what must be the nursery field where three overgrown calves were all suckling from one cow in very noisy slurps.

Being aware of the dangers of walking through cows and calves with a dog, Alfie and I were lucky that the track was thankfully clear as we headed down to meet a narrow lane on a corner at the top of a steep section of the road. From here we headed down to a lovely pond where a heron perched majestically on a nearby branch and ducks swam between the man-made reed islands. This little nature reserve with its quaint old building was originally constructed as a reservoir which fed the ore washing beds at Ecton Mine, a little stream of water being drawn from here along a purpose built gully of carved out gritstone channelling which ran for more than a mile.

After passing former miners' cottages and traditional smallholdings, we arrived at a junction by the side of a picture postcard cottage where we turned right and followed the road around to Westside Mill with its immaculately manicured gardens. Here we crossed over the River Manifold by means of a newly replaced wooden footbridge. The most direct route back to

therefore turned to the left and headed across the field to a stile onto the trail.

Before heading for home I had yet to try out my pot of tea, and for this walk I was to visit the Hulme End Tea Junction which has just celebrated its first anniversary. Located on the site of the old engine shed, using two of the original roof arches in its construction, The Tea Junction stands adjacent to the Visitor Centre, which was the original ticket office and waiting room for the railway.

The airy tearoom contains descriptive information boards depicting local scenes throughout the seasons as well as a Nature checkpoint and educational area. In one corner was a comfortable armchair with a selection of magazines and newspapers together with a large screen showing the 'Magic of the Peak District' DVD. I could quite happily have made myself comfortable for the duration, however my tummy was gurgling and taste buds tingling for a treat and I headed to the counter to survey the 'Snack on the Track Menu'.

It was a difficult decision but I opted for the home-made lasagne from the Specials Menu and a pot of tea. It was amusing and novel to observe that all the cups, saucers, teapots, jugs and sugar bowls are miss-matched from an eclectic assortment of rather appropriate Staffordshire pottery and bone china. Each table was covered with a hand embroidered cloth and as I sat down to enjoy my meal I found myself transported back in time to memories of having afternoon tea as a child with a favourite aunt.

The lasagne was extremely tasty, but when I heard comments of "umm!" and "absolutely delicious!" coming from the next table, I wondered if the home-made pea soup with chunks of granary bread might have been even better.

With tea costing only £1.20 per person a pot and sandwiches starting at £2.95, this is one of the most reasonably priced tearooms that I have come

across. Open 10am until 5pm every day apart from Monday until the end of September and then weekends 10am until 4pm during October and November, I'm sure Alfie

and I will be back for some more Manifold Magic!
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