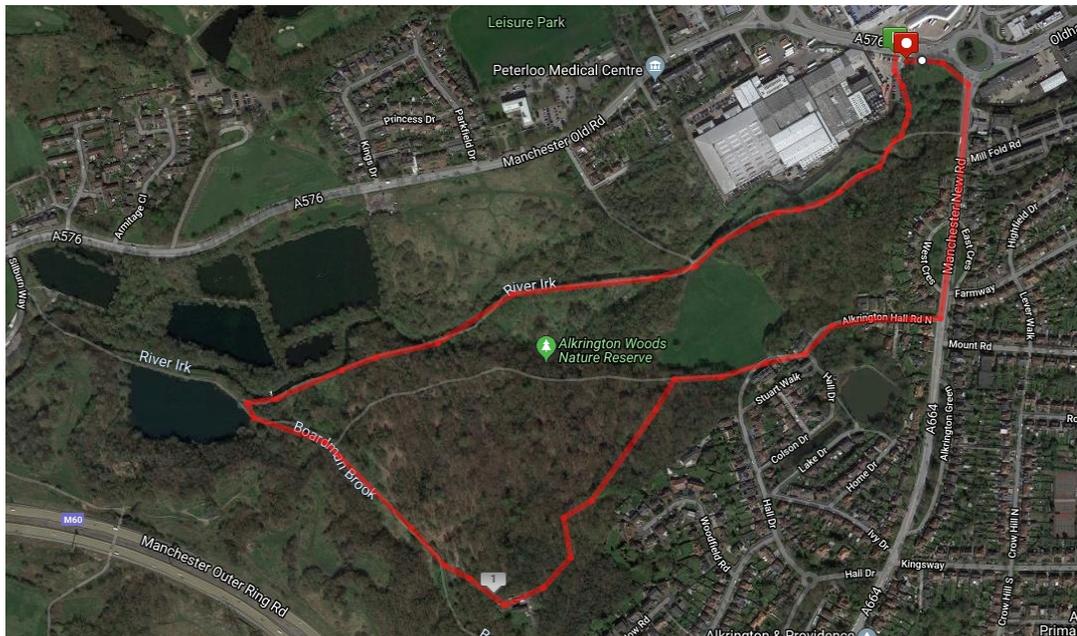


ALKRINGTON WOOD CIRCULAR (By Margaret White)

This route starts at The Gateway on Middleton Way, opposite Middleton Bus Station. It is a circular route of just under 3 km. and takes in several different areas of the woods. Please note that the paths have a variety of surfaces and may be muddy or slippery after wet weather. Also there are some steep gradients to encounter.



Having entered through The Gateway, follow the path past the bench and round to the right. Cross the wooden bridge over the river Irk and follow the river downstream. To your right is McBride's (on the site of the old Irdale Bleach Works) and on the left the land slopes steeply upwards.

The wooded area here is known as Kitchen Wood and there used to be greenhouses higher up the slope which supplied food to Alkrington Hall. In this area also was the Lever family crypt and ice house most of which is grown over and fenced off for safety reasons.

Continue along the river and as you approach Lever Bridge, a stone arched structure, the land opens up, allowing you to see the façade of Alkrington Hall at the top of the hill.

Take the path along the river, which here has been straightened and canalised, with five check weirs.

Over to the right, across the river Irk, is a series of lodges or reservoirs created over the last 170 years or so to supply the various dyeing and bleaching works which used to line the river bank. With the decline of the textile industry these became redundant. However, they have become an important habitat for wildfowl and are used by anglers.

The path meanders past some large trees then there is a short, steep section just after a large weir on the river. Turn left here and follow the stream, known as Boardman Brook. After about 300 metres there is a fork in the path. Take the left fork up the hill and past the former warden's cottage. The path now becomes a track through the oldest part of the woods.

Look out for linear mounds on the left and old craters. These are thought to be linked to soldier training, either by soldiers at the old drill hall which used to be at the bottom of Manchester New Road or soldiers billeted at nearby Heaton Park.

Follow this until the woods open up in front of the hall again. Before the track goes downhill, take the path to the right up to the hall. Pass in front of the hall to the left and between the terraced cottages on the left and the old dairy on the right. Keep following the track, past the houses and onto Manchester New Road. Turn left here down the hill and this will take you back to your starting point.

Diversions from this route will reveal many interesting features, including a dog memorial, parakeets and their nesting holes and various wildfowl. The changing seasons will also reveal nature at its best. Enjoy!