

Lancashire Walks



Rufford

Continuing our theme of family walks for the festive season try this one starting near the West Lancashire village of Rufford. Mere Sands Wood is one of the finest nature reserves in the North West and attracts an impressive variety of birdlife. It was established in 1982 after sand extracting operations came to an end. These left a string of small lakes surrounded by woodland that had been planted in the mid 19th century. Owned and managed by the Wildlife Trust its trails are easy to follow and some are suitable for wheelchair users. This route extends a circuit around the reserve across the A59 to the Rufford Branch of the Leeds Liverpool Canal and returning by way of the village.

Start: Mere Sands Wood visitors centre, **(Pic 1)** off the A59 at Rufford, along Holmeswood Road.

Distance: 6 km or 4 miles 9 (though with several opportunities to reduce length of walk)

Time: 1½-2 hours, but more if diverted by bird watching.

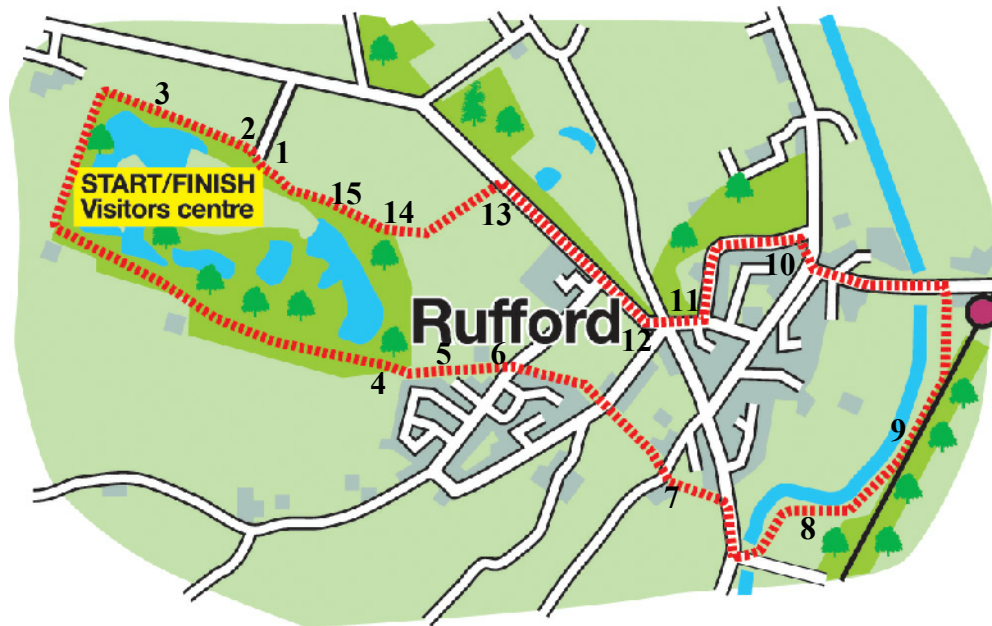
Terrain: Ridiculously easy. Care should be taken crossing A59.

Map: OS Explorer 285 Southport & Chorley

Directions: From visitors centre bear left through the car park and follow the trail **(Pic 2)** as it enters woods and quickly comes to Marshall Hide. There are seven hides in all placed at strategic points around the reserve looking out onto the water. **(Pic 3)** January is a particularly rewarding time to visit the reserve as it attracts many winter migratory birds. Geese and swans tend to prefer the more open waters of Martin Mere. Mere Sands attracts Gadwall, Teal, Wigeon, Pintail, Shoveler, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye and Goosander. This low lying area used to form the largest lake in England before it was drained. There has been some suggestion that it was the Lake of Arthurian legend – where Excalibur ended up. (Metal detectorists note this is only a legend so there is no need to disturb the wildlife!) From the hide keep on the path through the woods as it circles the reserve. The woods are a mixture of oak, beech, birch and pine providing quite a different habitat. Spotted Woodpecker, Jay, Wood Pigeon, Treecreeper and Sparrowhawk breed in the woodland. In all 170 species of birds have been seen on the reserve. All the more remarkable then that it is largely maintained by volunteers in their spare time.

On the far side of the reserve from the visitors centre the trail divides. Bear right taking the White Trail. This soon brings you along the edge of the woodland. After 400m keep ahead to take the second of two exits. **(Pic 4)** The footpath enters a field and soon passes the village cricket ground on the left. **(Pic 5)** Keep ahead on reaching the lane to walk on the right of a drainage channel (Rufford Boundary Sluice). **(Pic 6)** In fact follow the sluice all the way to Liverpool Road (A59) at first with water on your left, then right, after crossing a lane, and then on your left again after crossing another lane. **(Pic 7)**

Liverpool Road is busy most times of the year so care is needed crossing it. Turn right and then almost immediately left to cross a swing bridge over the canal. Bear left to reach the tow path. **(Pic 8)** You are now on the Rufford Branch of the Leeds-Liverpool Canal which leads down to Tarleton and the River Douglas. Follow the canal for 800m until you come to the large marina **(Pic 9)** and then the B5246 Station Road, Rufford. Turn left. Walk past the church and quickly reach the A59. Cross with care and then turn right. At Flash Lane turn left. **(Pic 10)** This winds its way round to the primary school past a fascinating variety of residences. At Holmeswood Road turn right. **(Pic 11)** Keep ahead at Cousins Lane **(Pic 12)** and then take the footpath on the left to cross to the reserve. **(Pic 13)** On reaching the wood turn right **(Pics 14 & 15)** for the car park and visitors centre.



Map by Chris Wyatt at The Blackpool Gazette

Pic 1



Pic 2



Pic 3



Pic 4



Pic 5



Pic 6



Pic 7



Pic 8



Pic 9



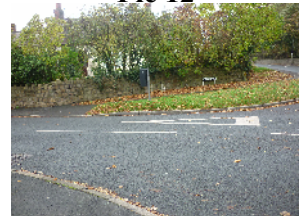
Pic 10



Pic 11



Pic 12



Pic 13



Pic 14



Pic 15

