

Leighton Hall — A guide to the woodland walk

The Leighton Hall estate lies in the heart of the Arnside and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The park and gardens of Leighton were originally laid out in 1763 by the then owner, George Towneley – and show some classic features of these types of landscapes (for example the ha-ha, the smooth, rolling park surrounding the house, the walled enclosure for the kitchen garden and the carriage rides and walks around the estate to admire the views). During your woodland walk you will see several different habitats – parkland, a pond, rockeries, woodland, pasture for farming and formal gardens. Each place is a blend of the natural environment and the influence of human beings over the ages. There are things to see all along the route, but there are marker posts labelled A to M at particular points of interest.

Post A – The Pond

This pond was built in the mid 18th century and has supplied water for the house in the past. It is now a good place to find assorted pond wildlife and plants.

On the left of the pond is the sun dial – is one of the oldest things in the house, dated 1647, and has the initials of George and Ann Middleton on it.

Post B – The Rhododendrons

This is a pleasant place to come in spring because of the flowering *rhododendrons* that grow here. They are rather unusual because they normally don't grow in Limestone areas like this.

Post C – The Rockery

This was created in Victorian times (about 130 years ago) when the Woodland Walk was made. The rockery gave Victorian ladies something to look at as they strolled along. It has several types of *fern* growing on it – as well as other woodland plants such as *wild garlic*.

Post D – The Corsican Pine

This very large tree is probably the oldest tree in the woodland walk (around 200 years old). The nearby wall marks a clear boundary between the woodland and the parkland. The parkland has sheep and cattle as well as red and roe deer in it.

Post E – The Rabbit Patch

This area is a nice sunny spot in the woods and if you are very quiet you may be able to spot some of the many rabbits that have burrows here. The very large tree here is a *balsam poplar* – you should look out for some small round holes on the trunk of this tree that have been pecked out by a woodpecker. There are some boards to lift and examine the creatures underneath here.

Post F – Limestone Rock

At this point the rock that is under the soil on the estate comes to the surface and sticks out. Many types of plant live on it. From this point onwards, if you are quiet, you should be able to see and here the birds that live in the woods.

Post G – The Statue

Leighton Hall was used as a rest home for soldiers, sailors and airmen who were wounded in the fighting during World War 2. One of the officers who stayed here carved this statue and gave it as a present to Mr. Reynold's mother. In spring this area is covered in wild flowers such as *bluebells* – in summer it is a mini-jungle of *ferns*.

Post H – Log Slices

Around here you will find some slices of tree trunks lying on the ground. They are here as homes to many different types of mini-beast. If you lift the log slices carefully at one end you should be able to find some. Please put the wood back carefully so you do not crush them! Just past here you will see the bird hide from where you can spot many woodland birds.

Post J – Birds and Squirrels.

Here, deeper in the woods, you will find many birds and squirrels living in the trees. You would have to stand still and quiet for a short time to spot them though.

Post L – The Old Charcoal Site

Just above here in a small hollow is the place where the estate made its own charcoal many years ago. The wood came from the trees here.

Post K – The Russia House

The family have nicknamed this domed structure as the Russia House – though it does not come from Russia, a film company left it behind, some years ago, when they were filming on the estate. The view from here is spectacular. You can see the estate farmland, Leighton Moss, Silverdale and Arnside and the Lake District fells in the background (the High Street range).

Post M – The Old Cross

This rather dark and gloomy area should remind you of a churchyard. The trees are all *yew* trees, which are traditionally grown in churchyards. The stone cross gives the story away. In the days when it was not possible to have Catholic Churches some landowners who came from Catholic families had private burial grounds. The owners here were Catholic and this is where the family members were buried. In the 19th century the then owner (Mr. Gillow) built the Catholic Church in Yealand and had the bodies removed and reburied in the churchyard there.

From here you can either, turn left across the grass and go through the door into the walled garden and caterpillar maze, or continue straight on and re-join the path you were on earlier to get back to the house.