

Carsington Water Circular

A simple but rewarding walk on a waymarked path around Carsington Water, the last major British reservoir to be constructed in the twentieth century. The land around the reservoir has been planted with nature in mind, so thoughts of the dense pine forests which surround other reservoirs can be cast aside. This is a wonderful place!

Walk Facts:

Start	Carsington Water visitor centre (SK 241 516). Signposted from Wirksworth and the A517 Ashbourne-Belper road at the Ashbourne end of the village of Hulland Ward
Terrain	Good paths, tracks and roads.
Length	Nine miles
Time	Three to four hours
Food/Drink	Shops and cafe at visitor centre. Seasonal cafe in Carsington village. Pub in Carsington
Toilets	Visitor centre and Millfields car park
Note	Carsington Water was opened in 1992 and is only shown on maps from the 1994 edition onwards

Route

This is the easiest of walks to locate, as it's well waymarked throughout its length. There are cycle and pedestrian routes which sometimes share the same path and sometimes diverge. You can, of course, pick and choose which way you go. The information boards give the length as 7 to 8 miles but I believe it's more like 9 miles if you follow the pedestrian route all the way round, as this one sticks closer to the meandering edge of the water.

You'll be walking anti-clockwise around the reservoir. Walk through the car park which is to the right of the visitor centre, picking up the path which runs along the top of the dam, between the road and the reservoir.

The dam at Carsington isn't a huge high wall, as is the case with the reservoirs in the Derwent Valley further north. This reservoir is wide and relatively shallow and the water is contained by a wide earth embankment with a clay core (for water tightness) and faced with blocks of stone on the reservoir side.

The opening of the reservoir was delayed for several years after the initial dam partially collapsed during construction work. Happily, the present structure doesn't suffer from that sort of instability!

Walk all the way over the dam, admiring the views in both directions along the way. The windowed structure which rises from the water towards the far end of the dam is the point at which water enters and exits from the reservoir.

Carsington is not on a river and isn't fed to any great extent by natural rainwater. Instead, it's connected by an underground aqueduct to the river Derwent at Ambergate, several miles away and hundreds of feet lower. When the river level is high, water is pumped from the river into the reservoir. When the river level falls in times of low rainfall, the water is allowed to flow back from the reservoir to top up the river. This maintains the river level sufficiently to allow water to be extracted from it further downstream, to feed Derby and its surrounding area. Additionally, water can be piped from Carsington to maintain the level of another small reservoir, near Clay Cross in the east of Derbyshire.

If you're using the older 'Outdoor Leisure' map, you walk off it for a little way as you near the end of the dam but happily the route is obvious, taking you into and through another car park at Millfields. The current Explorer map has been extended a little to take in Millfields.

You could, of course, park at Millfields instead of the visitor centre: the car park has a coin-operated barrier.

Having left the civil engineering behind, you can concentrate on the countryside. The reservoir has been open for a relatively short time but has attracted a wide range of water birds. Swans, mallards, tufted ducks, coots, moorhens and Canada geese were in evidence when I visited in early May and as a bonus, there were swallows swooping low over the water in search of insects.

This part of the reservoir surround has been planted with native trees and some of the grass areas are managed as wildflower meadows. These are cut infrequently, to allow the plants time to set seed. The many young trees provide cover for numerous birds and the area was alive with birdsong when I visited.

Eventually you enter a patch of cool, shady woodland, climbing away from the reservoir for a little while. In spring the woodland is a mass of bluebells, the air heavy with their scent.

After descending to be close to the water again and walking through Hall Wood, you come to a main road at grid reference 264 533. Cross the road carefully (the traffic is fast but maybe not as fast as the many warning notices suggest!) and take a short track to join a minor road in the village of Hopton. Turn left and follow the quiet (but not traffic-free) road through Hopton and into the adjoining village of Carsington, from which the reservoir takes its name.

There's a pub in Carsington (the Miners Arms) which is open lunchtimes and evenings but, unusually these days, is closed between these times.

Take an acute left turn into a lane just after the pub, or walk through the car park if you visit, and then turn right after a short distance (look for the waymark) to follow a track for a little way until you get back to the main road. Cross the road again to pick up the path around the reservoir, soon walking through another car park.

After this, the path follows the many indentations of the reservoir shoreline back to the visitor centre. It's further than it looks on the map, as the path twists and turns a lot. There's a bird hide down a short path at one point, providing a last chance to study the bird life which the water has attracted.

The visitor centre contains shops, restaurants, play areas and a display about the mechanics of collecting and distributing the water which we all take so much for granted when we turn on the tap. A curious feature in the courtyard is the Kugel Stone, a one-tonne granite sphere which floats on jets of water and can be turned with finger pressure!

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