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Earl's Hill and Pontesford Hill

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Free Earl's Hill Nature Reserve car park (SJ 409057),
Ordnance Survey map	OS 241 - Shrewsbury
Distance	4.5 miles
Date of Walk	26 April 2017
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: Earls Hill and Pontesford Hill protrude from the Shropshire plains south west of Shrewsbury and mark the start of the Shropshire Hills from the north. Their profile has been likened by some to the shape of a sleeping dragon but never having seen a dragon, I cannot vouch for this! What I can say is that they became the Shropshire Wildlife Trust's first nature reserve in the 1960s.

The hills were formed millions of years ago by lava which burst through the Earth's crust, though neither was a volcano itself.

On the top of Earl's Hill, are the remains of an Iron Age hill fort, constructed about 600BC and you can still see the remains of the ditches. The occupants would have had a great defensive position because from the summit, there is the most fantastic 360° view. It is recommended you take binoculars. You can pick out the Stiperstones, Long Mynd and The Wreakin clearly, to name but a few. To the south east there are some dramatic cliffs which would have aided defence but for that reason, do not wander carelessly off the summit.

Other than the summit, the remainder of the walk is mainly a pretty woodland meander. I was lucky enough to do this walk in the spring when fresh green leaves were forming on the trees. Wild garlic and bluebells were in profusion and there was a selection of blossom on various trees and shrubs

The first section from the car park is very steep. I have graded it as amber rather than red but if I had an orange, it would get it!

One thing you will see on the way round is a very confusing plethora of direction arrows on various posts. Some have so many, one wonders if there is some sort of supremacy rivalry going on.

The walk starts from the Pontesford Hill and Earl's Hill Nature Reserve free car park. To get there, turn south-east off the A488 between Pontesford and Pontesbury, where signposted.

Please note much of this walk is through woods and therefore GPS receivers may not be reliable.

Start: From the rear of the car park (SJ 409057), turn right up the steps through the woods. The path climbs then levels slightly to a broad track. Turn left and almost

immediately right up some more steps through the trees. A marker post advises that you are heading for the summit.

Go through a kissing gate, at the edge of the trees and head up Earl's Hill on the most obvious, prominent path. Views behind you immediately start to open up.

As you near the summit, the white trig. point comes into view. As you reach it (SJ 409049), the route continues straight ahead down the broad ridge but do take time to admire the fantastic views in all directions.

As you start to come off the summit (direction 210° magnetic), you can pick out, relatively easily, the ditches which will have formed part of the Iron Age fort. On the horizon to the south-west, you can just make out the irregular shapes of the Stiperstones (binoculars will help!).

Follow the ridge down ending through a short section of trees and joining another footpath at a 'T' junction in Oaks Wood. Turn left along this path, to follow a blue bridleway arrow.

Continue along this path until you reach a marker post (SJ 410046) where you turn right, once more to follow a blue bridleway arrow. Note there is a second post a few yards further on but you need to turn at the first post.

Follow the path as it drops down to meet a hedge. Keep to its left. As you walk along by the hedge, look out for a metal kissing gate into the woods at the bottom of the field, to your left.

Through this gate, cross a bridge over Habberley Brook and follow the path through the woods.

At SJ 410041, join a broad forest track and turn left. You need to follow the main track, not a lower level less used track.

Follow this track for a mile, taking in a sharp left bend at SJ 417046 and later, a right bend. A few yards further on, fork off left by a post bearing blue arrows, on to a narrower bridleway.

At a stream (SJ 415051), cross by a footbridge, then, after climbing a short bank, turn right to stay on the main track until you reach a farm. Just beyond this are two brick built cottages on the left (SJ 418055). The onward route is between them, marked with a public footpath fingerpost and yellow arrows.

The path passes the farm, through several gates, then enters woods. Stay on the main path, ignoring one off to the right.

The path approaches the edge of the woods and joins another path. Turn left then immediately right.

At SJ 414062, go through a walkers' gate on the right hand edge of the trees, into a field and turn left to follow the left hand field boundary. This diversion is to avoid what

would otherwise be a steep bank in the trees. At SJ 413063, go through another walker's gate into the trees again and turn right.

Go on, through a kissing gate and follow the left hand field boundary. At the end of the field, go through another kissing gate and follow the footpath to the road. Turn left and at the junction with the A488, turn left and follow the road through Pontesford back to the car park road and the start.

