

Shropshire Hills Conservation Fund final project report

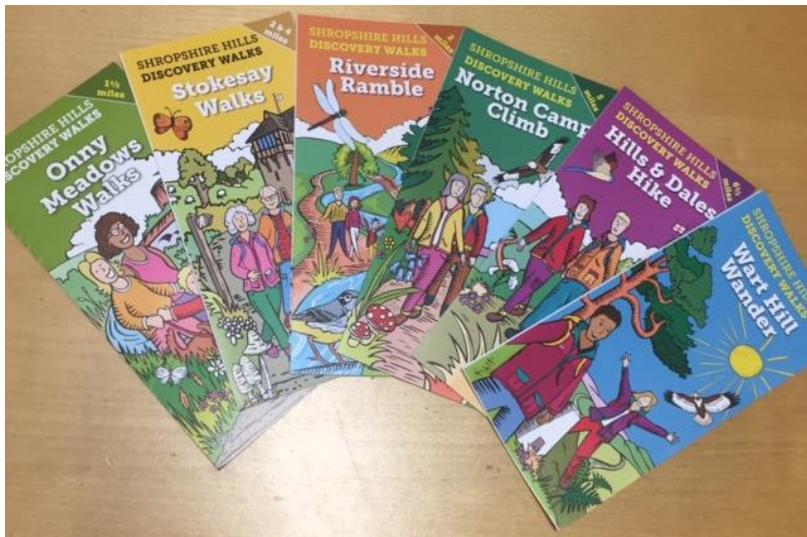
Grow Cook Learn - Shropshire Hills Discovery Walks

October 2017

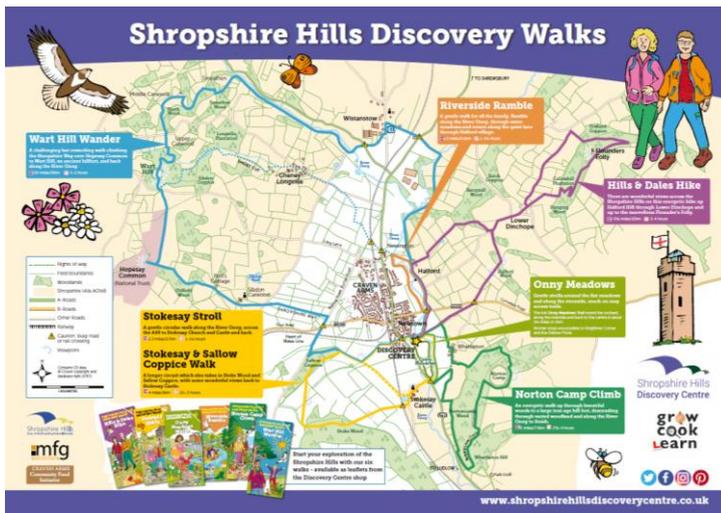
The six new walks leaflets have been launched and are proving very popular with visitors to the Discovery Centre. Three existing walks were refreshed; the Wart Hill Wander, Hills and Dales Hike and Riverside Ramble and three new walks developed; the Norton Camp Climb, Stokesay Walks (2 options) and Onny Meadows walks.

Match funding was secured from MFG Solicitors (£900) and the Craven Arms Local Food Initiative (£560). The walks were firstly walked by a volunteer to check current conditions and changes on the existing walks. The direction text was written or amended and interpretive material researched and written with input from GCL staff, volunteers and Nigel McDonald at the AONB (special condition 1.). The walks were all tested by volunteers – local walkers and GCL staff and the direction wording amended to make sure it is easy to follow. GCL also liaised with the Council's rights of way team to get some additional kissing gates installed and ensure several repairs and improvements were carried out before the walks were printed – e.g. the steps climbing up to Flounders Folly.

GCL worked with designer Mike Ashton to design colourful and attractive leaflets which will catch visitors' eye and encourage them to do the walks. The leaflets are designed to be sold either individually or in a pack of all six. An insert for the packs of six was also designed and plastic wallets sourced for the packs. The Onny Meadows walk incorporates a new map illustration from local artist Katy Alston.



The wall map is an attractive design and illustrates the routes of all the walks. It is mounted in a prominent position in the Discovery Centre. The leaflets and wall map feature the AONB logo, as did all the publicity around the launch of the walks (special condition 2). The AONB area is also shaded and labelled in the key on the maps in the leaflet and wall map.



Volumes of the leaflets printed varied according to how popular we predict each walk will be. We printed 2,000 of the longer walks and 3 or 4,000 copies of the shorter walks.

The interpretation included focuses on the local landscape, wildlife, heritage and food connections in the locations which the walks pass through. They therefore help meet the AONB's purposes by not only encouraging people – (locals and visitors) to explore more of the local landscape but also give interesting snippets of relevant information.

The leaflets were launched with a small event at the Discovery Centre on 4 September 2017 to which a wide range of people had been invited, followed by an inaugural walk on the Riverside Ramble (see photos). We weren't able to secure a 'professional' walk leader for this as originally envisaged but GCL Chair Charles Edwards and Education Officer Stephanie Bellows jointly led the walk instead. Good local media coverage featured the walks.





A briefing on the walks has been carried out for all staff and visitor welcome volunteers so that they are familiar with the routes and which may be of interest to which types of visitor. GCL have liaised with Shropshire Council to make sure the new routes are featured on the Shropshire's Great Outdoors website.

The walks have also been promoted via social media – Facebook, Instagram and twitter, with photos from the walks. Local volunteers are being encouraged to walk the routes from time to time and report back any problems on the ground.

The project was significantly delayed (2-3 months) when additional match funding had to be sourced due to the reduced grant offer from the Conservation Fund. This took additional staff and volunteer time and meant the walks could not be completed before the main summer season as originally planned.

GCL plan to host a session with other visitor information centres locally over the winter to familiarise staff and volunteers at all with the walks information in each area. This will be another opportunity to promote the Discovery Walks and potentially to put the packs on sale at more venues.

The walks leaflets will remain in stock for a number of years – until they are out of print. A similar review and refresh process is then likely to keep them in use indefinitely.