

# Staffordshire Tolkien Trail



Three circular walks in the  
footsteps  
of  
J.R.R. Tolkien

# J.R.R. Tolkien in Staffordshire

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, the world famous author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, spent an important period of his early life in Staffordshire, in particular during the Great War when posted to the Army training camps on Cannock Chase. In 1914 Lord Lichfield had given permission for two large training and transit camps to be constructed on Cannock Chase. The camps at Rugeley and Brocton were able to accommodate around 40,000 men and it is estimated that around half a million soldiers passed through the camps during the war. Cannock Chase became a new town of serried ranks of huts, occupied by officers and men of the British Army for the duration; there were also shops, a hospital, a power station and water tower serving plumbing for the camps and a cross Chase railway, known as the Tackeroo. In addition training grounds, practice trenches, drill squares and rifle and grenade ranges were constructed to prepare soldiers for the front line in France and beyond.

The Great War years were a formative period in the development of Tolkien's work on the mythology, languages, history and geography of what would become Middle-earth (his Legendarium) and references in some of his writings relate to Staffordshire - Great Haywood, Shugborough Hall, Gypsy Green near Penkridge and Cannock Chase – as well as to other places further afield such as Warwick, the Holderness Peninsula, Oxford and Cheltenham. Influences can be traced in his creative work, in particular his contemporary poetry and also *The Book of Lost Tales*, which was a forerunner to *The Silmarillion*.

From the spring of 1916 Tolkien stayed in Great Haywood with his wife, Edith. Great Haywood, with its confluence of the Rivers Sow and Trent at Essex Bridge, became Tavrobel where the Rivers Guir and Afros of Middle-earth met, near the 'House of a Hundred Chimneys' which is believed to refer to Shugborough Hall. The delightful little Essex Bridge became *The Grey Bridge of Tavrobel* in a ballad written during his stay.

Tolkien served as an officer in the Lancashire Fusiliers and was posted to France in June 1916 and served at The Battle of the Somme, returning to Great Haywood later that year to recuperate from trench fever. Here he began work on what would become *The Book of Lost Tales*, in particular *The Cottage of Lost Play* and *The Fall of Gondolin*. After his extended period of convalescent leave in Great Haywood, Tolkien was posted away on 27th February 1917 to a hospital in Harrogate, Yorkshire. Edith would follow him and the couple would not return to Staffordshire for more than a year.

In 1918 Tolkien was posted back to Cannock Chase and with his wife, and new-born son John, moved briefly to Penkridge. They rented a cottage at Gypsy Green on the Teddesley Park Estate, which later featured as *Fladweth Amrod*, or Nomad's Green, in his writings for *The Book of Lost Tales*. He regularly cycled or walked from the camp at Brocton down to the cottage at Gypsy Green to see Edith and his baby son. He made several notable illustrations during his brief time there, one of the cottage that still stands and another, '*High Life at Gypsy Green*' detailing life at the cottage and in camp, before being sent to hospital in Hull following an unpleasant attack of gastritis in late June. Edith, exhausted by so many moves and her recent pregnancy, remained at Gypsy Green until the war ended when she joined him in Oxford where he had found employment working on the Oxford English Dictionary.

A more detailed version of this article is available at [www.staffordshiregreatwar.com](http://www.staffordshiregreatwar.com)

# The Staffordshire Tolkien Trail

The Staffordshire Tolkien Trail is a series of three linked walks that cover over 30 miles of the Staffordshire Countryside on and around Cannock Chase. The walks focus on Staffordshire's J.R.R. Tolkien connection, but also offer lots of other local history interest, great Staffordshire views and are a fantastic way to stay healthy and enjoy Staffordshire's cultural and rural environment.

Some of the key locations visited in the following walks are:

- Great Haywood
- Essex Bridge
- Shugborough Hall
- Brocton Coppice
- The Sherbrook Valley
- Oldacre Valley and M-Lines Officers' Huts
- Chase Road Corner and P-Lines Officers' Huts
- Rifle Ranges
- Marquis Drive Visitor Centre and Great War Hut
- Commonwealth War Cemetery and German War Cemetery
- Gypsy Green, Teddesley Hay

Although three walk routes are suggested here, as well as a detailed view of Great Haywood, the walks are flexible—you are free to walk in stages or drive to locations of interest. Look out for led walks or walk with friends.

Please take your litter home with you and follow the Countryside Code.

The walks include some moderately busy and quiet roads, sometimes with no footpath, so please take care for traffic, especially when crossing busy A roads. There are some minor to moderately steep inclines on the route. Much of the route is well trodden and there are a great many stiles. Please take care when crossing fields occupied by livestock.

Not all of the archaeological remains referred to can be easily located.

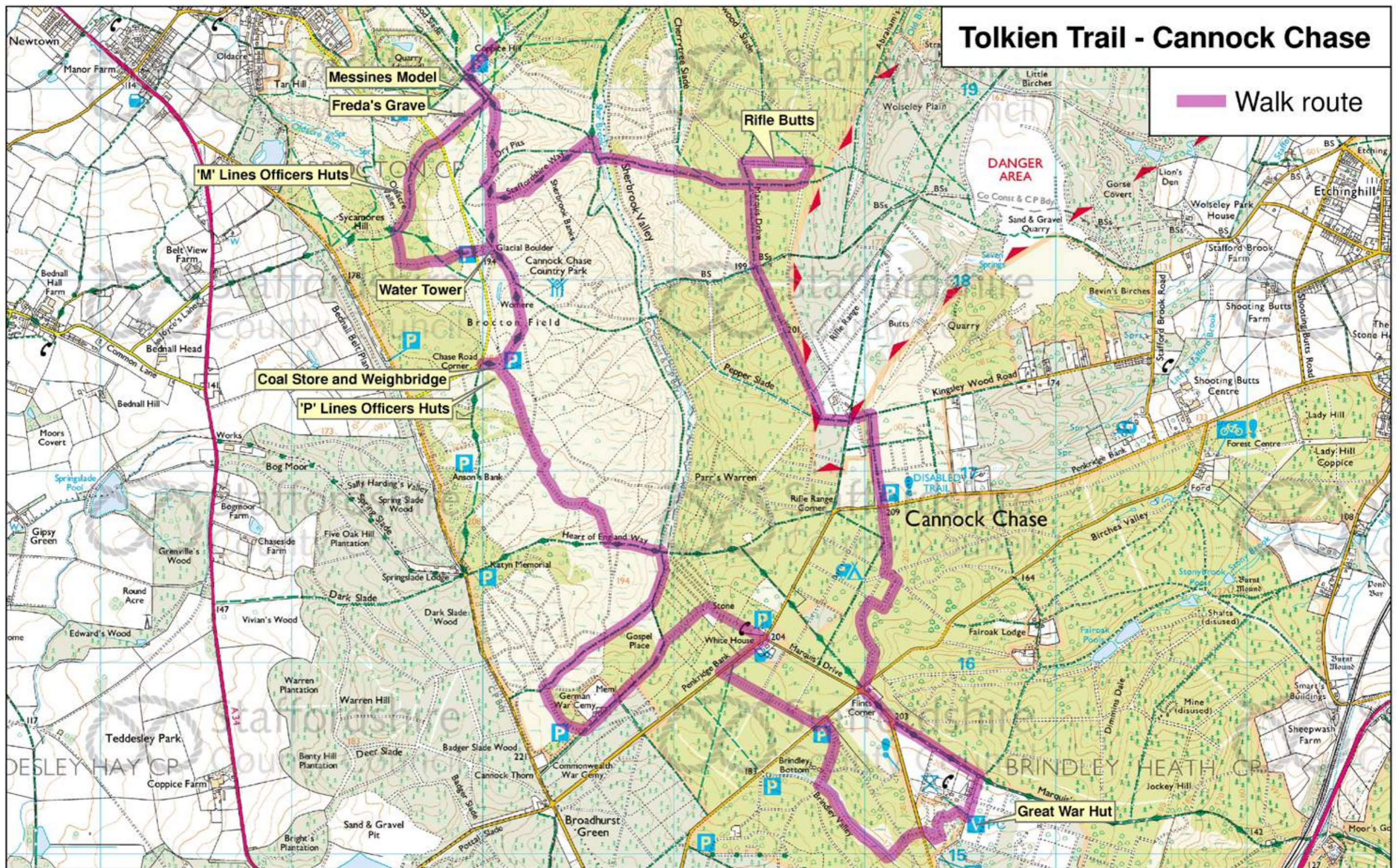
Contact number for County Ranger Service—01543 876741 or 01543 871773

Cannock Chase is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. For further information please visit [www.staffordshire.gov.uk](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk) (search for Countryside) or visit the AONB website at [www.cannock-chase.co.uk](http://www.cannock-chase.co.uk)



# Tolkien Trail - Cannock Chase

 Walk route



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## Tolkien Trail Cannock Chase Walk

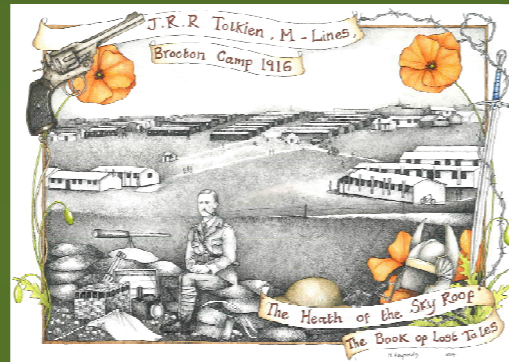
A circular walk departing from Coppice Hill Car Park, Brocton, exploring the remains of Brocton Camp, Oldacre Valley and the Glacial Boulder. The walk then descends into the Sherbrook and moves on to the Rifle Ranges, then following paths across the remains of Rugeley Camp to the Marquis Drive Visitor Centre. From here the route passes through Brindley Valley and visits the War Cemeteries via The White House before returning to Coppice Hill via Chase Road Corner.



The Coppice Hill Car Park is accessed from Brocton Village to the North or Chase Road Corner to the South. (Please do not leave any valuables in your car)

Directions:

- From Coppice Hill Car Park walk to Heart of England Way and follow signs to site of Freda's Grave. (A short detour can be taken to site of Messines Model)
- Follow footpath SW, crossing road, and down into Oldacre Valley. The remains of the M-Lines Officers' huts can be located near the valley bottom close to a storm channel
- Walk along the Oldacre Valley and climb out to reach the Glacial Boulder (Water Tower site) and Tackeroo earthworks. Turn left onto the Heart of England Way, then right down the Staffordshire Way into the Sherbrook Valley
- Cross the Sherbrook and climb uphill and follow the path to the Rifle Butts on Marquis Drive. After exploring these head South down Marquis Drive, turning right to cross the remains of Rugeley Camp once you have reached Kingsley Wood Road
- Follow the footpath, crossing Penkrige Bank and walking through the Tackeroo camp site (more remains of Rugeley Camp to be seen here) and on to Flint's Corner. Follow Marquis Drive to the Cannock Chase Visitor Centre and Great War Hut. Refreshments and toilets available here (Please note: The Great War Hut operates limited opening hours)
- From the Visitor Centre follow the footpath, across Marquis Drive, into Brindley Valley. Walk up the valley to Brindley Bottom, turning right and walking up to Flint's Field Car Park. Cross the road and walk through the plantation until you reach Penkrige Bank. Cross the road and carefully walk along the verge to The White House and explore the remains. Walk on to the Bremen 25 Stone, turn left and cross the Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Walk up to the German War Cemetery and then on to the Commonwealth War Cemetery. Double back from here and turn left until a small car park is reached Turn right and walk down to Gospel Place and join the Heart of England Way Follow for a short way then turn right and walk to Chase Road Corner where you can explore the remains of the P-Lines Officers' Huts and the coal store and weighbridge
- Re-join the Heart of England Way and walk back to Coppice Hill Car Park, passing the Womere, Glacial Boulder and Tackeroo earthworks



## Tolkien Trail Great Haywood Walk

A circular walk departing from Coppice Hill Car Park, Brocton, exploring the route taken by J.R.R. Tolkien from Brocton Camp down to the delightful village of Great Haywood. This walk passes through Brocton Coppice and into the Sherbrook Valley, following the Staffordshire Way, past The Punch Bowl and across the Shugborough Estate, entering Great Haywood, as Tolkien did, across Essex Bridge. It is suggested that the detailed map and guide, written by local historian David Robbie, on the following page is consulted for exploration of the village and then the route to Little Haywood, along the canal towpath, should be followed and Great Haywood re-entered from the SE. The route can then be traced back to Coppice Hill with a short diversion up the Sherbrook.



Directions:

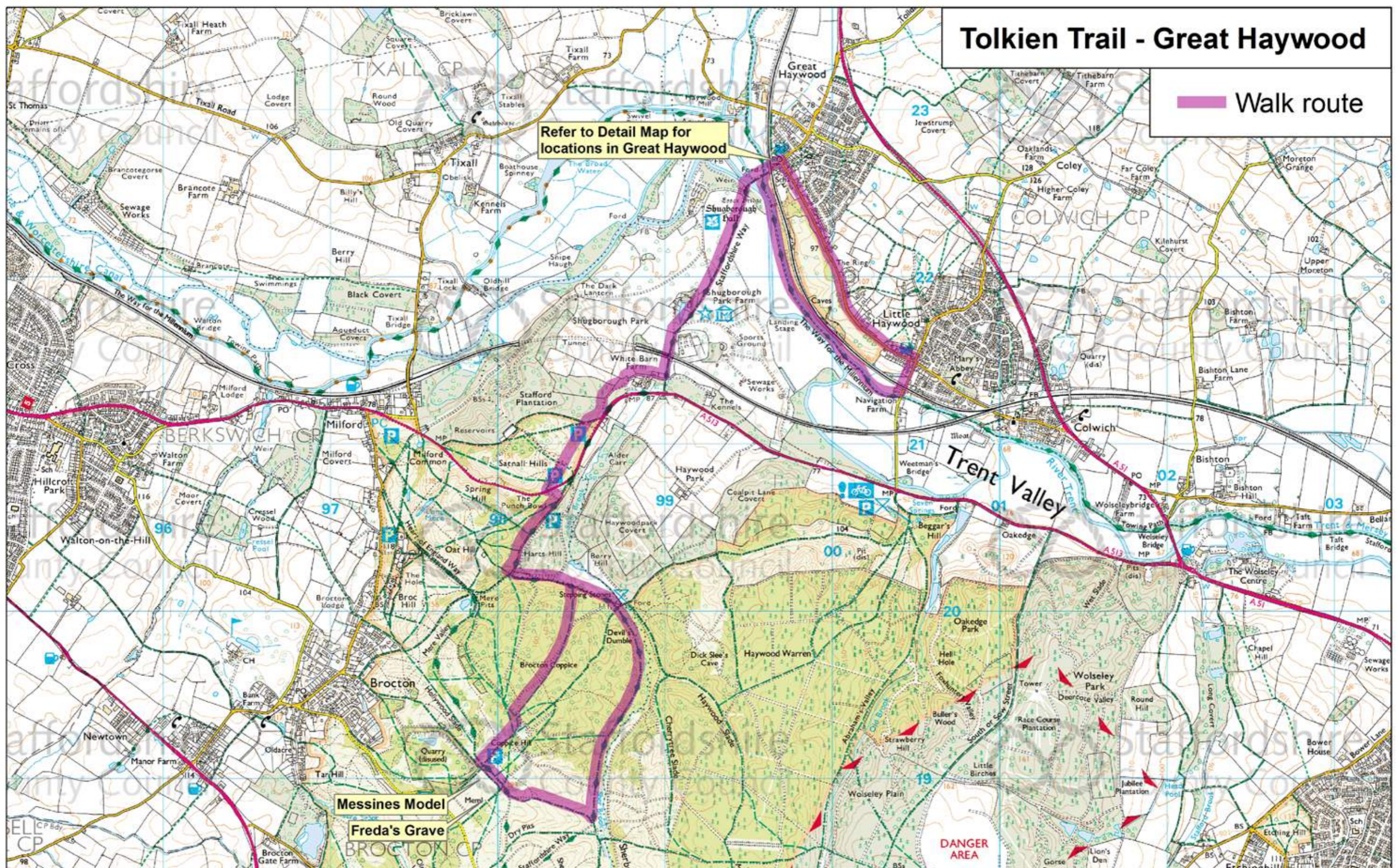
- From Coppice Hill Car Park walk NE to the edge of Brocton Coppice, turn left then soon after right and walk gently down hill through the ancient woodland until you emerge in the Sherbrook Valley
- Follow the footpath around Harts Hill to The Punch Bowl Car Park on the A513. Cross the A513, taking great care on this busy stretch of road, and after walking through the Satnall Hills Car Park follow the path through woodland parallel to the road for about a mile. You will eventually emerge on a quiet road, passing White Barn Farm before re-joining the Staffs Way
- Follow the Staffordshire Way down across the Shugborough Estate enjoying views as you walk. Look out for a great pine tree near the farm, could this be Tolkien's *Great Pine of Tavrobel*?
- Continue along the Staffordshire Way, passing Shugborough Hall itself, Tolkien's *House of a Hundred Chimneys*, arriving at Essex Bridge (*The Grey Bridge of Tavrobel*) at the confluence of the Sow and Trent Rivers. Here refer to the following page—Tolkien's Great Haywood
- Upon completing Tolkien's Great Haywood tour retrace your steps across Essex Bridge and follow the Staffordshire Way back to the Sherbrook
- Continue along the Sherbrook Valley, passing the stepping stones and enjoying the scenery and babbling brook
- Eventually turn right, walking uphill until you join the route of the Tackeroo which you can follow back to the Coppice Hill Car Park



# Tolkien Trail - Great Haywood

Walk route

Refer to Detail Map for locations in Great Haywood



Messines Model  
Freda's Grave

DANGER AREA

0 0.5 1 Kilometres



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## Tolkien's Great Haywood 1916—1917

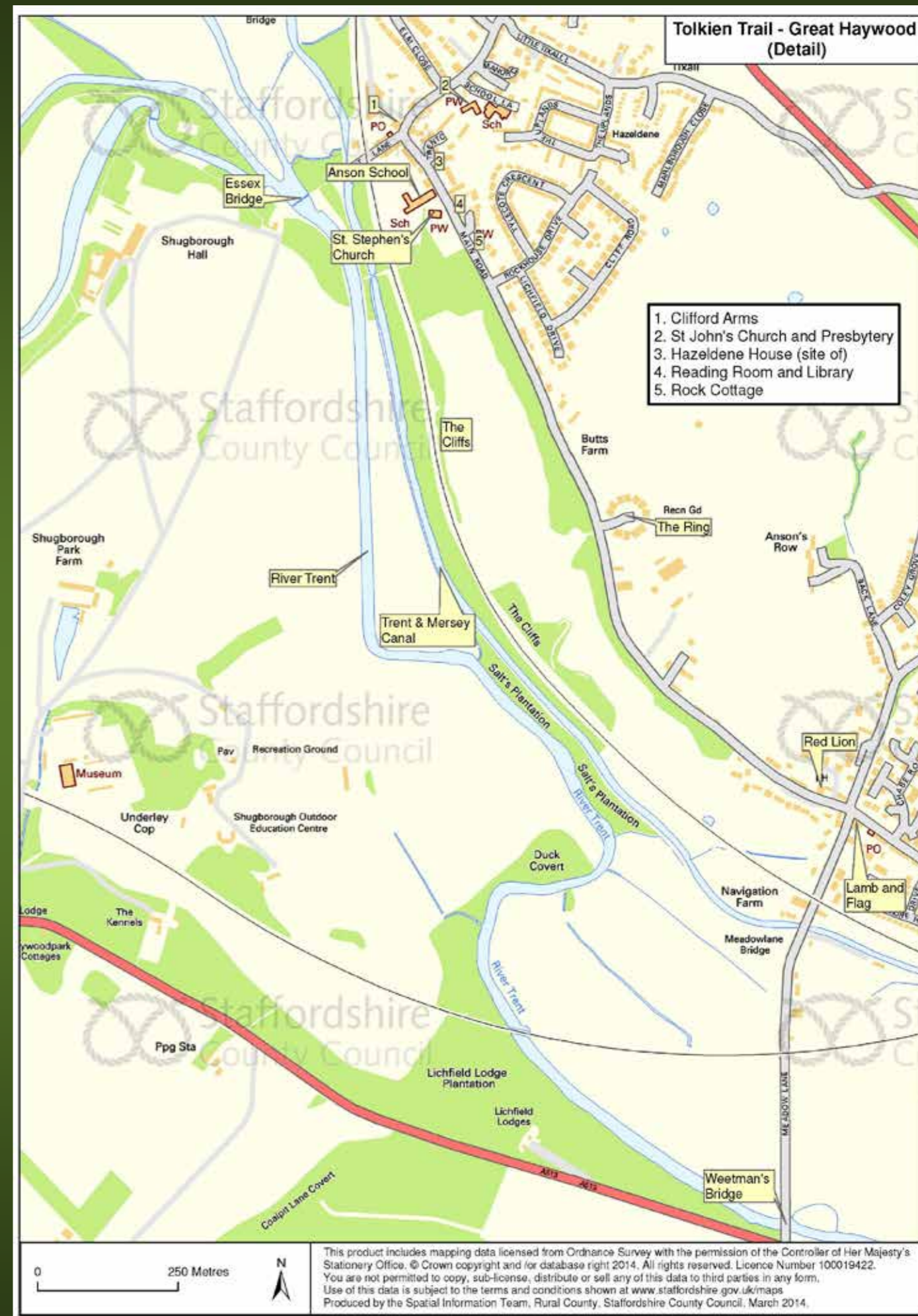
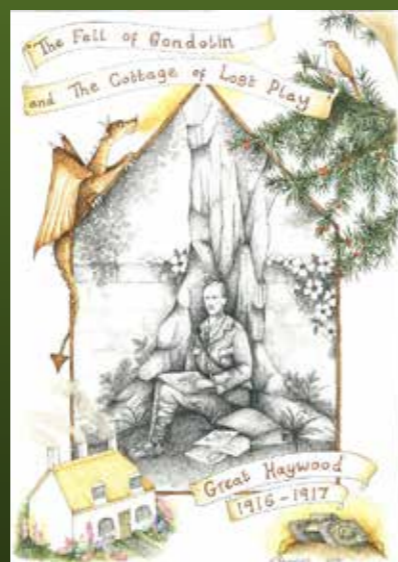
Between November 1915 and June 1916 J.R.R. Tolkien was stationed at Rugeley and Brocton Military Camps on Cannock Chase. After his marriage to Edith Bratt in March 1916, the couple came to Great Haywood to look for accommodation for Edith. It was quite common for officers to find lodgings for their wives near their camps and the Tolkiens probably chose Great Haywood because it was quite close to Brocton Camp and also had a Catholic church, St. John the Baptist.

On their first visit they probably stayed at the **Clifford Arms** while they looked for lodgings. They met the local parish priest, Father Augustin Emery, who offered temporary accommodation at **St. John's Presbytery** to Edith and her cousin Jennie Grove, who was to accompany her during her stay. Father Emery was to become a personal friend ('Uncle Gus') of the Tolkiens and they were to enjoy several musical evenings together at the Presbytery. Edith was a fine pianist while Emery played the violin.




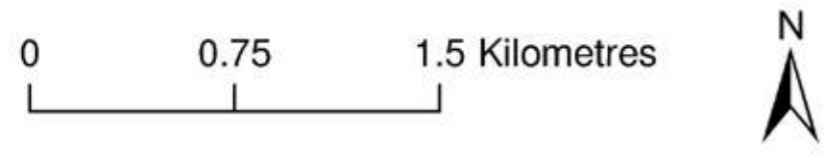
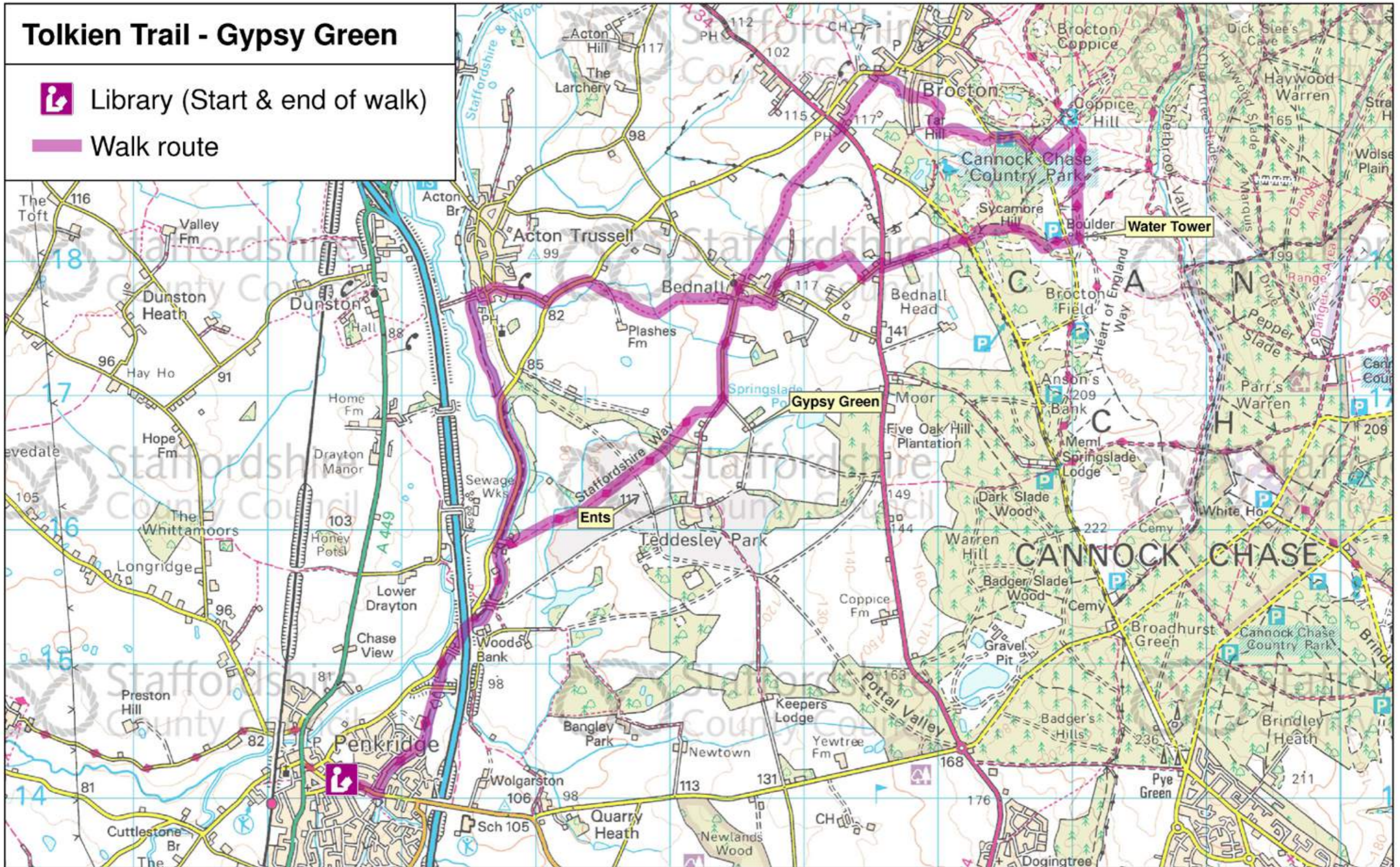
From the Presbytery, Edith and Jennie moved to some furnished rooms at the home of a Mr. and Mrs. Kendrick, at **Hazeldene House**, where they were visited on the weekend of 27th-28th May by Ronald's close friend from schooldays, Geoffrey Bache Smith, who described it as a 'splendid two days'. While Ronald was away in France Edith rented a cottage in which she and Ronald could live together on his return. This was most probably what is now called **Rock Cottage**, close to the village Reading Room and Library. After Ronald's return from France, the couple were reunited on 9th December 1916 and lived together in the cottage for almost three months while Ronald recovered from his experiences in the trenches and a serious bout of trench fever.

Edith and Ronald did their best to put the war and the cold winter out of their minds and to make the most of their short time together here. During the day, wrapped up against the cold, they went on long walks in the village and along the Trent and the canals, and close to Shugborough Hall. In the evenings they made log fires in their cottage, where Edith played the piano while Ronald read poetry, sketched and wrote. It was in this cottage that Ronald was able for the first time since he left university to concentrate his mind on writing the mythological stories that were, in time, to evolve into **The Lord of the Rings**. His most important writings here were **The Fall of Gondolin**, which was very much influenced by his experiences on the Somme battlefield, and **The Cottage of Lost Play**, the foundational story for all his later writings. Both stories were later published as parts of his **Book of Lost Tales**. The Tolkiens finally left Great Haywood on 27th February 1917, when a still poorly Ronald was transferred to a hospital in Harrogate, Yorkshire. They would not return to Staffordshire until 1918.



# Tolkien Trail - Gypsy Green

-  Library (Start & end of walk)
-  Walk route



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## Tolkien Trail Gypsy Green/ Brocton Camp Walk

A circular walk departing from Penkridge Library follows the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal and the Staffordshire Way to Gypsy Green, on to Bednall and then to Brocton via footpaths. From Brocton the walk heads up on to Cannock Chase and the site of Brocton Camp. The walk then heads back down to Bednall and on to Acton Trussell following footpaths, returning to Penkridge via the canal towpath.

Penkridge Library is situated at Bell Brook; there is lots of free parking at the nearby Haling Dene Centre



### Directions:

- From Penkridge Library walk up Cannock Road, pass The Haling Dene Centre and turn left down onto the canal towpath at The Boat public house
- Follow the towpath to Parkgate Lock. From here follow the Staffordshire Way over Teddesley Park, enjoying fine views of Staffordshire and Shropshire, until reaching Gypsy Green where Tolkien's cottage of 1918 can be seen
- Follow Cock Lane into Bednall passing the school and C19th Church
- Cross Common Lane and follow the well signposted footpath to Brocton, emerging on the A34. Cross carefully here and continue to follow the footpath, taking a right turn in front of a playing area after the stables. Follow this footpath up onto Tar Hill, briefly crossing Oldacre Lane on route
- Follow the main footpath around Tar Hill, eventually crossing Chase Road. Proceed towards Coppice Hill car park, but turn right to view the site of the Messines Model, then down a green path, following signs for Freda's Grave. A little further on, amidst the ruins of Brocton Camp is Freda's Grave, a monument to the mascot of the New Zealand Rifles, a harlequin Great Dane who died in 1918
- Follow the Heart of England Way and Staffordshire Way South to the Glacial Boulder, site of the water tower which served the camp during the War
- From here follow The Staffordshire Way down Sycamore Hill, crossing Camp Road and the busy A34 back to Bednall
- At the end of Richfield Lane, cross Common Road and walk up Smithy Lane to a footpath. Follow this footpath, crossing Cock Lane, across fields to Teddesley Road
- After a brief walk down this quite busy road turn right down Meadow Lane and walk into Acton Trussell. Bear left onto Barnfield Road, cross Penkridge Road into Moathouse Close, pass The Moat House and look to the left for a footpath which crosses the canal
- Follow the towpath all the way back to Penkridge Library where you can explore the J.R.R. Tolkien Collection



## A Tolkien Wartime Chronology 1915—1918

- 19 July 1915—August—Basic Training in Bedford. Tolkien is assigned to 13th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers
- August—Posted to Whittington Heath Camp, Lichfield – is rewriting works such as *The Happy Mariners*, *Thoughts on Parade* (begun in Bedford)
- 12 Sept—Writes a poem—*A Song of Aryador* (*The Book of Lost Tales*)
- 14 Sept—Writes a poem—*Dark are the Clouds about the North*
- 25/26 September—The T.C.B.S 'Council of Lichfield' at The George Hotel. It would be the last time Tolkien, Smith, Wiseman and Gilson were all together
- November 1915—13th Battalion moves to Rugeley Camp, Cannock Chase
- 21—28 Nov—Writes a poem—*Kortirion among the Trees* (*The Book of Lost Tales*)
- 28 Nov—4 Dec—Writes a poem—*The Pool of the Dead Year* (*and the Passing of Autumn*)
- Dec 1915—13th Battalion moves to Brocton Camp—Tolkien billeted in P-Lines Officers' huts, near Chase Road Corner
- Dec 1915 (Brocton)—completed June 1916 (*Étaples*) Tolkien writes *Habbanan beneath the Stars*
- 1 Dec—Publication of *Goblin Feet* in *Oxford Poetry 1915*
- Dec—Jan—Feb 1916—Writes *Over Old Hills and Far Away*. Likely written over Christmas 1915/16 at Brocton Camp
- 3 Feb—By this time Tolkien is billeted at M-Lines Officers' huts, Oldacre Valley, Brocton Camp
- March 1916—Completes a poem in Quenya called *Narqelion*, which translates as 'Autumn', inspired by *Kortirion among the trees*
- 16 March—Degree ceremony in Oxford
- 22 March—Marriage in Church of St Mary the Immaculate, Warwick, followed by a week long honeymoon in Clevedon, Somerset. The couple visit Cheddar Gorge
- April 1916—Edith Tolkien and Jennie Grove take lodgings in Great Haywood Father Emery offers the couple a nuptial blessing at Sunday Mass
- 6 April—Still billeted at M-Lines, Brocton Camp
- Mid April—Mid May – Attends signalling school, Otley, Yorkshire
- 13 May—Tolkien qualified at signalling school
- 15 May—Returns to Brocton Camp
- 27/28 May—G.B. Smith visits the Tolkiens in Great Haywood—'a splendid two days'
- 2 June—Tolkien informed of posting to British Expeditionary Force in France
- 4 June—Farewell to Edith in Birmingham
- 6 June—Crosses English Channel to France, joins 11th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers
- 1 July—The Battle of the Somme commences (officially ends 13 November)
- 27 October—Tolkien contracts trench fever
- 9 December—mid Dec—Tolkien travels to Great Haywood to convalesce
- 25 Dec 1916—Writes poem *G.B.S* in memory of G.B. Smith who has died of wounds
- Dec 1916—27 Feb 1917—Great Haywood—Begins writing first prose version of his mythology, *The Book of Lost Tales – The Cottage of Lost Play* and *The Fall of Gondolin* and compiles a list of the races and beings who inhabit his Legendarium
- 27 Feb—Tolkien transferred to Furness Auxiliary Hospital, Harrogate, Yorkshire
- 1917—May 1918—Postings on the Holderness Peninsula—Writes *The Tale of Tinúviel*
- Spring (May) 1918—Posted to Rugeley Camp. Edith, John and Jennie Grove lodge at Gypsy Green (Gipsy Green) which becomes *Fladweth Amrod* (Nomad's Green) a place in *Tol Eressëa* visited by Eriol and mentioned in *The Book of Lost Tales*
- May-June 1918—Illustrations of Gipsy Green/ *High Life at Gipsy Green*
- June 1918—Transferred to Brocton Camp
- 29 June—Contracts gastritis—sent to hospital in Hull. Edith remains at Gypsy Green
- 11 November 1918—War ends



## Further Reading

Below are some key titles that contain information about J.R.R. Tolkien's life during the Great War years or about the military camps on Cannock Chase. All are available from Staffordshire Libraries:

Robert S. Blackham, **Tolkien and the Peril of War** (2011)

John Garth, **Tolkien and the Great War. The Threshold of Middle-Earth** (2003)

Wayne G. Hammond, and Christina Scull, **J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator** (1995)

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service, **World War I Camps on Cannock Chase – A Short Guide** (2012)

Christopher Tolkien (Ed.), **The Book of Lost Tales Part One** (1983)

Christopher Tolkien (Ed.), **The Book of Lost Tales Part Two** (1984)

C.J. and G.P. Whitehouse, **A Town for Four Winters: An original study of military camps on Cannock Chase during the Great War, 1914-19** (1983)

OS Explorer Map 244 Cannock Chase and Chasewater

### Suggested web sites:

Staffordshire Libraries—[www.staffordshire.gov.uk/libraries](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/libraries)

Staffordshire Past Track—[www.staffspasttrack.org.uk](http://www.staffspasttrack.org.uk)

Shugborough—[www.shugborough.org.uk](http://www.shugborough.org.uk)

Archives and Heritage—[www.staffordshire.gov.uk/archives](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/archives)

The Tolkien Society—[www.tolkiensociety.co.uk](http://www.tolkiensociety.co.uk)

Do you have a story to share about Staffordshire's Great War?—Let us know at [www.staffordshiregreatwar.com](http://www.staffordshiregreatwar.com)

Why not visit the Marquis Drive Visitor Centre to discover other Great War Walks on Cannock Chase

Staffordshire Libraries, through Penkridge Library, has celebrated the local connection with J.R.R. Tolkien over recent years with a variety of events, including talks from Tolkien scholars, educational activities for local school classes, family fun days and this Tolkien Trail, which has been created in conjunction with David Robbie, local historian from Great Haywood.

Visitors to Penkridge Library can browse a collection of Tolkien stock, including copies of his own published works and many other books relating to all aspects of Middle-earth from literary criticism and biography to The Lord of the Rings and Hobbit film trilogies, directed by Peter Jackson. Artwork and a fantastic community created mosaic are also on display at the library.

“Tolkien's connections to Staffordshire are well documented, and I am very pleased that you have taken it upon yourselves to join with the community of Tolkien fans around Britain, and the world, to celebrate and educate people in all matters Tolkien” - Sir Peter Jackson

Written by Scott Whitehouse. Material on Tolkien in Great Haywood was written by David Robbie.

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Image of Essex Bridge/Shugborough Hall from the collection of David Robbie and used with permission. Officers' Huts image from collection of Scott Whitehouse. Artwork by Hannah Reynolds. Other photographs by Scott Whitehouse.

