

Along the river



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Tail 3: The Dipper

Dipper

Something you're much more likely to see on the banks of the River Derwent is a dipper: a short-tailed, plump bird with a low, whirring flight. When perched on a rock it bobs up and down and frequently cocks its tail. Its white throat and breast contrasts with its dark body plumage.

Amazingly, dippers walk into and under water in search of food. They feed mostly whilst underwater, picking food (insects and small fish) from the bottom of the river bed, using their wings to move around in fast flowing water.

1 Route description - start here!

Starting from the car park turn right, and go south into the village along the footpath on the right hand side of the road. Walk towards the archway and the Lord Crewe Arms Hotel. As you go through the arch you enter the village square formed by buildings that were part of Blanchland Abbey in the past.

⚠ When the river is high follow the path from the car park along the north side of the playing field and meadows to Baybridge.

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A natural bounty

Alongside the river you can see a fairly large shingle bank. Search amongst the shingle and you may find minerals such as galena and fluorspar which give clues to the mining heritage of the area. For more information on the geology of the area contact the AONB Partnership.



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2 Continue towards the bridge and, just before it, turn right into a side road, and then left through a small opening in a stone wall. Cross the little footbridge over the Shildon Burn. The path now follows the river to the Hamlet of Baybridge. The river sometimes floods. You can see and smell plenty of wild garlic in these woods in late spring.

Look out for the meadows on your right after the playing field. A visit in late August sees these fields being used to host the Blanchland and Hunstanworth Show.

3 When you reach the public road you are almost at the half-way point. Turn left and cross the bridge over the river. After a short distance turn left again into the woodland. Follow the woodland track, this time higher above the river, until you reach the road. In between the densely planted conifer plantations you can see a lovely birch wood with bushes dripping with bilberries in the late summer/early autumn. Look out for a picturesque waterfall near the end of this section.

At the road, turn left and retrace your steps through Blanchland to the car park.



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A mix of woodlands

The woodlands you pass through on this walk are varied. The conifers (including Scots pine, Douglas fir and larch) have been planted because the land is too steep to farm. As you pass into a darker area of the woodland, you'll see Sitka spruce is the dominant species here. These North American trees grow very well in Britain and planted close together they grow tall and straight. It is now an attractive part of the landscape and provides habitat for many woodland creatures, possibly even the rare red squirrel.

Other trees, including birch, rowan and alder grow freely and naturally. Some of the trees are very old and established. Younger trees, especially the rowan, show signs of browsing by roe deer and rabbits. Where this damage is severe the trees may die.



Grey wagtail

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