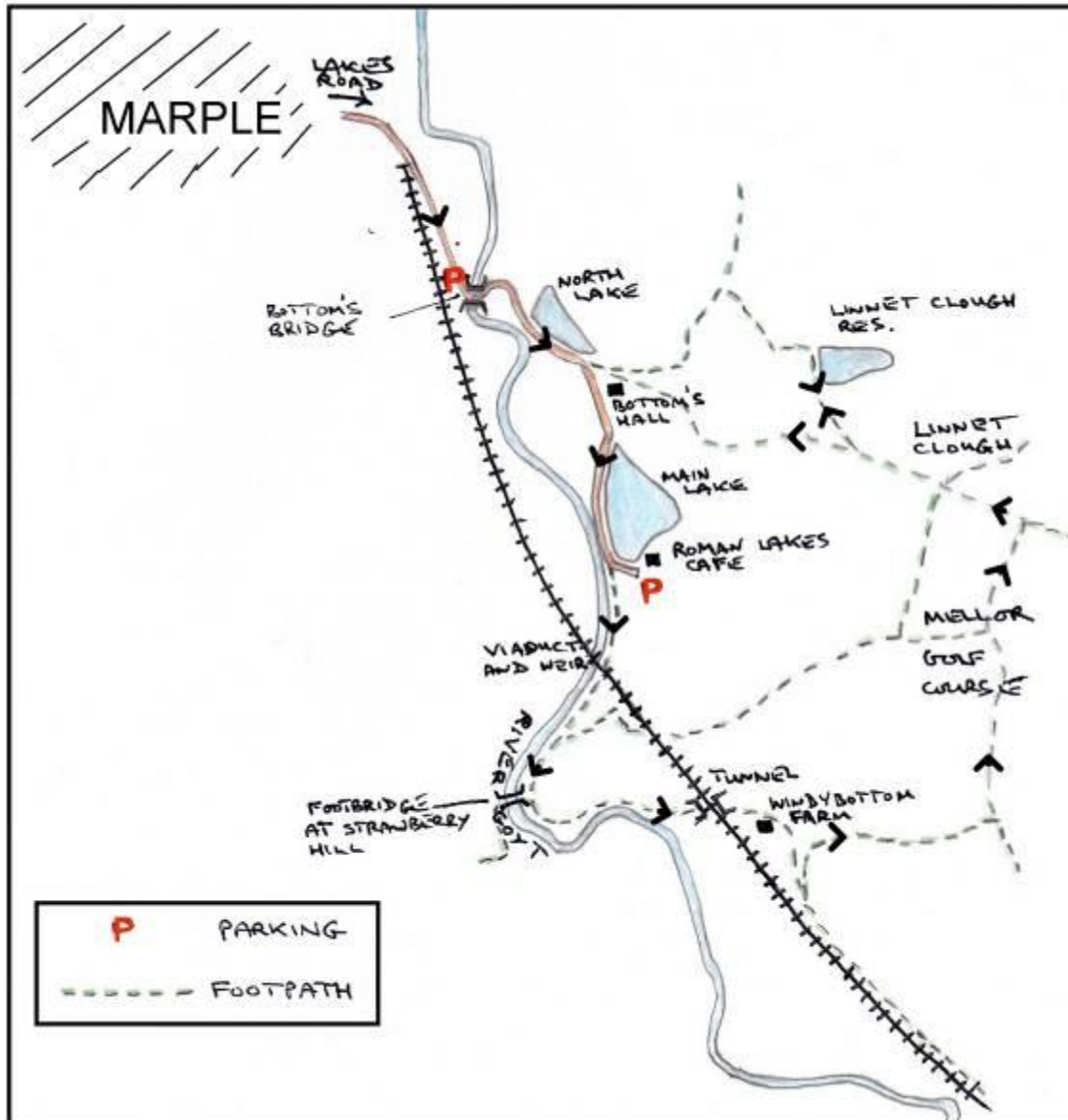


ROMAN LAKES and MELLOR GOLF COURSE

By John Rayner



Samuel Oldknow, a prominent 18th century cotton industrialist, built Mellor Mill and created the mill pools known today as Roman Lakes. It is a site rich in both industrial and natural history and the following extract, together with much more information, can be found at www.marple-uk.com

“The construction of Mellor Mill, which commenced in 1790, was a massive undertaking. In addition to the construction of the mill itself, an imposing and handsome brick structure six storeys high and 400 feet long, the River Goyt had to be diverted, a series of three millponds constructed and a complicated system of tunnels, channels and wheelpits built. The millponds still remain and are today known as "Roman Lakes", a name they were given in Victorian times when they became a huge tourist attraction. Of the mill, destroyed by fire in 1892 and the ruins later demolished, there is no trace above ground. The central wheelpit that housed the 22 feet diameter "Wellington Wheel", another added

in 1815 to house the "Waterloo Wheel" and their adjoining tunnels remain below ground, giving a faint and ghostly hint of the majestic structure long gone".

Directions: At the east end of Marple village drive further east down Oldknow Road and cross B6102 (Arkwright Road) onto Faywood Drive, which becomes Lakes Road. Drop down this rough road and park at Bottom's Bridge. Lakes Road continues to Roman Lakes car park but the road between, whilst driveable, is often badly pot-holed.

Sitting as it does next to the River Goyt this is an area of varied habitats and thus is rich in bird life. It is greatly under-watched.

A circular route of about three miles is described passing North and Main Lakes, Windybottom Farm, Mellor Golf Course, Linnet Clough and (as a detour) Linnet Clough Reservoir. But the area is interlaced with many footpaths and alternative walks could easily be devised. As would be expected an early morning visit pays dividends. Later in the day, and especially at weekends, you may be sharing with dog walkers, joggers, hikers, mountain bike and trail bike riders but you will have to get up early to beat the fishermen.



Parking at Bottom's Bridge



Tunnels under Bottoms Bridge

Dippers and Cormorants are quite often found on the river and the expected suite of common birds nest in the surrounding woods. The occasional Woodcock may be flushed in winter and Roe Deer may startle the visitor when bursting from cover.

Continue walking along Lakes Road passing North Lake on the LHS. North Lake is pleasant-looking water but, being right next to the road, rarely holds many waterfowl. A Goldeneye in 2009 was an exception as they are rare around here.



Lakes Road



North Lake

At the end of North Lake turn right passing Bottom's Hall to reach Main Lake. There are often Grey Wagtails in the stream nearby and the horse field on the right has hosted Merlin in the past.



Right turn down Lakes Road to Main Lake



Main Lake

Main Lake has a large Coot flock in winter and is occasionally visited by a variety of waterfowl, although always in small numbers. These include Little Grebe, Wigeon, Gadwall, Pochard, Red-crested Pochard (of unknown origin), Tufted Duck and Goldeneye making this one of the prime water bodies in Stockport Borough. More likely are the residents; including a large flock of Canada Geese, Mallards and exotics, including Peacock, Guineafowl and feral geese including a Barnacle, which took up residence in 2011. Breeding birds here include Mute Swan, Mallard, Coot, Moorhen and Great Crested Grebe. The surrounding alders provide food for Siskins and Redpolls in winter and rarely, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. More local rarities must also drop in here as the Goyt valley makes a superb fly-way. A Redshank in early 2011 would fall into this category.

A relic from the past is the old turnstile, which indicates the popularity of these lakes as Victorian pleasure grounds in their heyday. The cafeteria can be seen in the background of the photograph below. It is here that further parking can be found if your visit is a short one.



Victorian turnstiles with cafeteria in background

The River Goyt rejoins the road here where Kingfisher, Dipper and Goosander are often seen. Conifers hold breeding Goldcrest and Coal Tits.



River Goyt

Ahead is the magnificent viaduct under which Roe Deer sometimes shelter and Sea Trout can occasionally be seen jumping the weir as they travel upstream to spawn, a sure

indicator of the cleanliness of the water. Continue for 300 metres through riverside woodland ignoring the first footpath sign on the left and pause at the pretty packhorse bridge at Strawberry Hill.



Viaduct over the Goyt



'Roman Bridge' at Strawberry Hill

Do not cross the bridge but continue along the farm track until the railway tunnel is reached. The horse paddocks either side of the track is a good spot for Green

Woodpecker and winter thrushes. Pass through the tunnel, looking out for warblers in summer and pass Windybottom Farm.



Tunnel at Windybottom Farm

After approximately 200 metres turn sharp left up a steep track and approach Mellor Golf Course (straight on here to Strines could form an alternative linear route for those on public transport). Woodcock or Green Woodpeckers are sometimes accidentally flushed from this path up to the golf course. At the wooden stile turn left and walk along the edge of the fairways. The large winter Lesser Redpoll flock that is often found around here may one day contain a Mealy Redpoll - we can hope. Once the gravel path is reached the route across the golf course is fairly obvious but if in doubt aim for the greenkeeper's equipment building which is to the left of the clubhouse. The path now joins the road to Linnet Clough camp site. Turn left and continue down a tarmac road which quickly deteriorates into an ancient stony track sign-posted 'Bridleway to Marple and Marple Bridge'. It is easy to imagine Oldknow's workers trudging down for a hard day in the mill. The woods here are alive with bird song on an early spring morning.



Footpath across Mellor Golf Course (turn left at the wooden stile)



The footpath passes the equipment building (left) with the clubhouse on the right



Road passing Linnet Clough camp site



Bridleway to Bottom's Hall

If time allows a detour could be made to Linnet Clough Reservoir. Before the raised stone path by the side of the bridleway (see photograph above) look out for a footpath sign on the right hand side which leads across pasture with scattered Hawthorns. One day a shrike may be found here but this scrub and the trees around the reservoir hold many breeding warblers. Look out for Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers, Garden Warblers, Whitethroats and Lesser Whitethroats. The water itself, although secluded, is often less productive but from this spot there is a good overview of the surrounding hills. Raptors often seen from here include Sparrowhawk, Kestrel and Buzzard.



Linnet Clough Reservoir and panorama



Linnet Clough Reservoir

Return to the bridleway and continue downhill passing Prescott Old Hall Farm and Bottom's Hall, where many pairs of Swallows breed, and continue straight on along Lakes Road to complete the circuit.

John Rayner, August 2011