

Warning: For the first time in 2022 a notice was published on a gate on Piggford Moor (unidentified origin), stating that from the gate onwards (blue dots on the map), the moor would remain closed during the whole month of May. That snag is that anyone following at least one officially published route guide known to me, could have completed more than 80% of their journey only to be turned back. This represents inconsiderate behaviour as due notice is demanded at all potential main access points around Piggford Moor; common decency and common sense.

Well marked designated on-street parking is provided at the large red dot (SK11 0NS – SJ 959 711 – Elev: 292m). This is close to the main off-street car park serving Trentabank Reservoir and the Rangers' Office where there is a pay and display car park plus useful facilities and information boards. I only visit off-peak in Wildboardclough and never have a problem parking considerably.

I invariably follow Route 2 route clockwise. Take the second gate giving access to the forest. That is the entrance with two pedestrian gates either side of the vehicular gate. This route (only) delivers the first of five ponds (blue numbered dots) known to include several Odonata species.

The initial route is a wide limestone-chatter road for agricultural vehicles. The first pond (SJ 961 704 – Elev:344m) is well established and teeming with life. Unaffected by the 2018 drought which decimated some ponds.

Shortly after the first pond you reach a wider area with a fence and gate on your left. The area behind that fence next to the gate is usually teeming with Butterflies in season. A sun trap.

You will soon reach a stretch of drystone walling on your left (SJ 965 705 – Elev: 404m), keep an eye open for Common Lizards which I confirm I photographed in August 2020.

The second small pond is on your left (SJ 967 703 – Elev: 385m). This is a relatively new pond yet to become established. Adjacent vegetation on the footpath a surprising magnet for varied butterflies. Continue to T junction on the track and bear right.

After 200 metres take the right track signposted for Shutlingsloe up to the nearby kissing gate (SJ 975 700 – Elev: 448m). Once through the gate keep an eye open for Common Lizards which I confirm I photographed in August 2020 on fencing timbers (a favourite spot). Shortly after I also snapped a Green Hairstreak Butterfly in that area on the right.

You are now walking on large stone slabs (erosion-control measures) through to the summit of Shutlingsloe (Piggford Moor). You will see another kissing gate ahead of you before the path to the summit. If you are feeling fit you can make a temporary detour to the summit of Shutlingsloe (SJ 976 695 – Elev: 507m). Then back track and resume as below.

About 50 metres before the kissing gate, on your right, take the grassed track which contains heavy duty plastic green erosion-control mesh. This mesh will be hard to discern in snow conditions. Unless already very familiar with the whole route it is strongly recommended this route is not followed in snow or dense mist conditions. Easy to stray off course in mist.

After the mesh, the track is essentially a narrow but well-defined goat trail, parallel to the wall. Mesh gives way to stones. That whole area a quagmire. Stay parallel to the wall about 2 to 3 metres away. You pass a gate in the wall and continue parallel to the wall until the steps to Shutlingsloe are close by (on the other side of the wall). The track then curves slowly right to meet a path down from Shutlingsloe summit. Wooden posts (way markers) will be seen. Boggy areas included. You are now walking a curving route gently downhill. Wall / fencing on your left.

Two gates will be noted in the distance. Take the right hand gate with the green sign attached. Dog restrictions signposted – dogs not permitted). Continue on the path following the way markers which include a post referring to the Hanging Gate (Inn), now re-opened.

You will meet a boardwalk at SJ 972 691 – Elev: 404m. The boardwalk is home to Black Darter Dragonflies and on your right is where Pond Number three existed, surrounded by a barbed wire fence (SJ 972 691 – Elev: 400m). Once a firm favourite. Pond number three vanished overnight in the winter of 2018/2019.

Once home to Darter and Hawker Dragonflies, land slip led to the complete destruction of Pond Number three, down what is known on the OS map as Sheep Clough Gutter. Previously unseen water courses and ponds clearly existed under the tall reeds and eventually collapsed downhill. The vegetation in some of the new small residual ponds seen confirms they have actually been in existence for longer than a few months.

Pond life from Pond Number three will have washed into other minor pools. That land slip could prove to be useful and will need to be explored further in the future. Some barbed wire fencing remains standing there as a memorial.

Resuming on the well worn path, you will meet with a tall wooden ladder-stile over a drystone wall. From the stile walk the gentle slope downhill through the bracken until you meet a rounded hump (panoramic views) then descend the steep slope (looking right) to a very narrow wooden gate in the wall next to the road. Turn right on the road. You have now exited Piggford Moor. Common Lizard spotted April 2021.

Passing Heron Crag on your left, take the kissing gate on your right and follow the path. From this point on there is the potential for Dragonflies. Have seen the Chimney-Sweeper Moth. Continue on the public footpath to meet up with the ancient pond number four (SJ 961 694 – Elev: 351m) at Oakenclough House. That pond is on private land but the more productive marginal vegetation is firmly on the public footpath. I have seen Black Darter Dragonflies up to 100m each side of this pond on walls and grass.

A lot of ground work has been undertaken on this route (Cheshire Wildlife Trust) before you reach the pond. That includes some stream damming work to slow progress and generate small flood plains for wildlife, including ground nesting birds. Trees including Rowan are being planted.

Re-join the road, bear right and immediately take the public footpath on your left, through the small gate and up the grassy hill. You can look back over Oakenclough. Continue up and over passing the very substantial and productive pond number five on your left (SJ 959 696 – Elev: 373m). This delightful pond now known to include many Odonata species. Superb spot which includes the Emerald Damselfly in season.

Continue straight on the path to the drystone wall, turn right through the gateway and immediately left over the stile after 10 metres. This straight track takes you directly to (Meg Lane) and the Hanging Gate Inn. The track is like Chester Zoo in season and heaving with insects. Maybe more.

Turn right at Meg Lane and follow the very narrow road back to the start. Plenty of marginal vegetation all along that route.

Route (GPS) = 10.4km (add 1km if including an invigorating trip to Shutlingsloe summit)

Updated: 29.04.2022