

BARROW BRIDGE

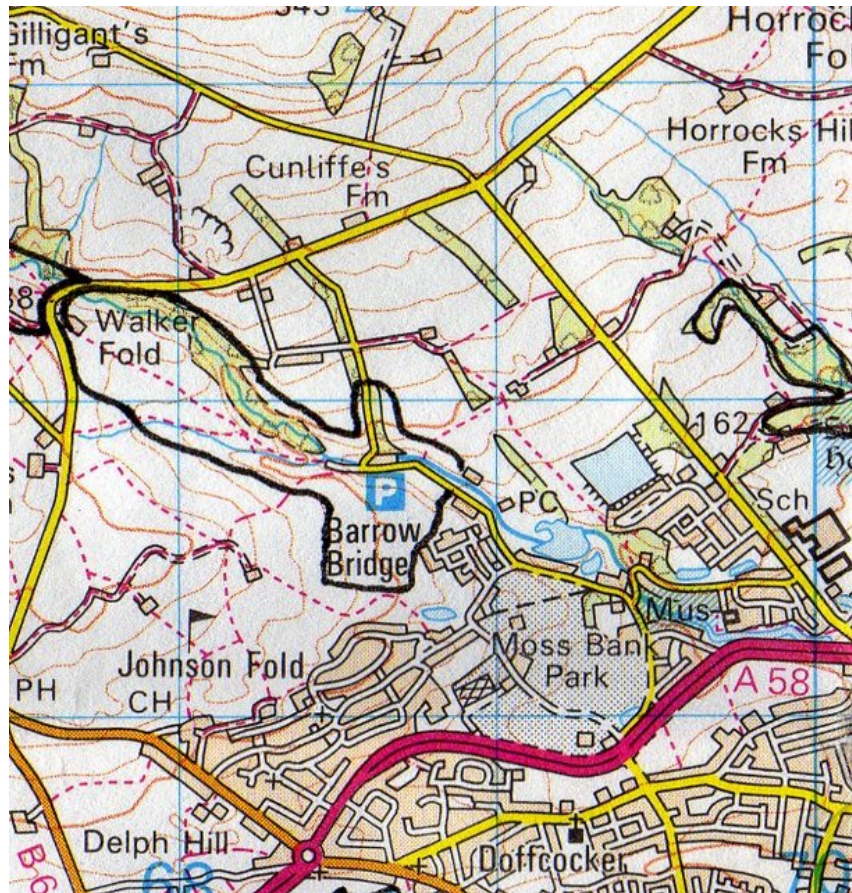
by Ian McKerchar



Barrow Bridge is a small, deeply sided and deciduous tree filled valley just to the north of Bolton. It has a small stream running through it, is well served with a large car park and is easily accessed off the A58, Moss Bank Way (Bolton Ring Road). It's close proximity to the Horwich Moors, Rumworth, Doffcocker and High Rid Reservoir ensures a full day's birding in the area.

As it is typically quiet during the winter period, the prime time to visit is early spring through to early autumn. Dipper breeds locally and they are usually found somewhere along the stream running through the valley and past the cottages. Likewise, Grey Wagtail are a colourful feature along the stony stream although as you'd expect, it is highly susceptible to flood after heavy rain when it can become a torrent. The cottages themselves often have Spotted Flycatchers in summer, utilising the television aerials for their typical hunting technique. The woods themselves can to be fair, often seem very quiet but all the common county woodland species are present and choosing a quiet time to visit (perhaps steering clear of sunny weekends and bank holidays) can provide an aural feast of bird song. Redstart and Pied Flycatcher no longer breed although the former would still appear to supply annual sightings (ranging from the wooded areas opposite the cottages and car park to the along the valley itself) but the latter does not with very few sightings in recent years. Frankly though, coverage by birders is extremely poor indeed and the true status of each of the latter species at this site must surely be under recorded such is its apparent suitability of habitat for them. Garden Warblers seem to have a very healthy population and Lesser Whitethroat can often be found (or at least heard) along the path heading north from the head of the 63 steps. Wood Warbler seems not to have been recorded but once again that seems rather surprising given the aptness of the habitat for them and Marsh Tit has bred successfully a few times but not for 25 years now!

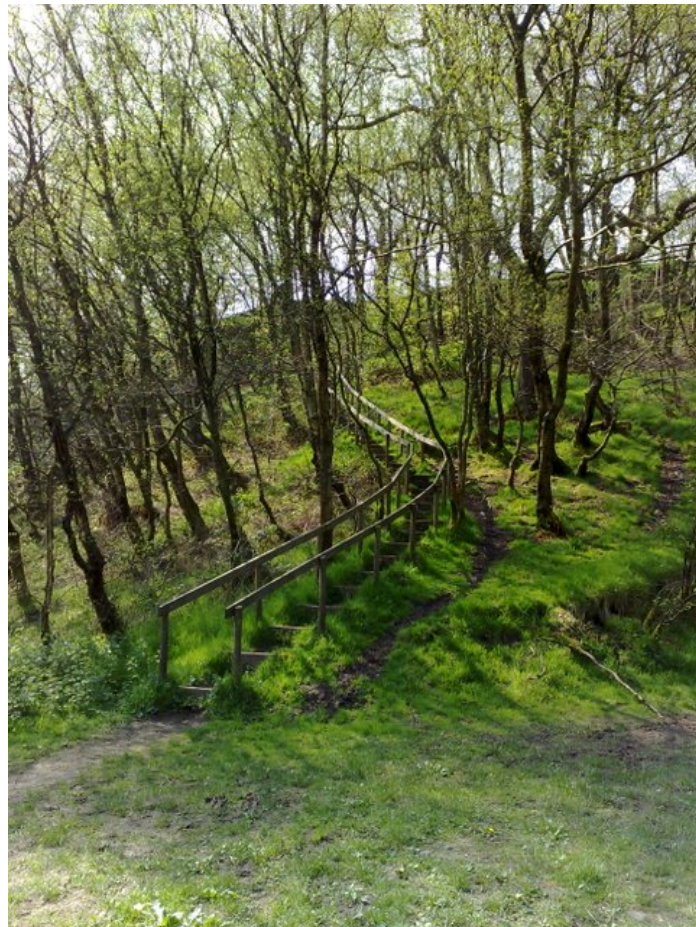
For access, turn off the A58 onto Moss Lane, which then becomes Barrow Bridge Road. At the top of the road just before the small row of stone cottages on the right there is ample parking in the car park on the left. From there walk up past the cottages (checking the stream in front of them for Dipper and Grey Wagtail) and continue past the barrier, following the stream north. From here there are paths leading you up the 63 steps or continuing along the valley floor and exploring them all is to be recommended. Personally, I following the stream as far as I can go, crossing it from one bank to the other (via strategically placed rocks in the stream), then double back to the set of winding wooden steps. Climbing these and then head south to go back down the 63 steps.



Above: The row of cottages in between the car park and wood. The stream in front of them often holds Dipper and Spotted Flycatchers utilise the television aerials and chimney pots in summer.



Above: The 63 steps (my son counted them twice in the same day just to make sure!) which leads you to the top path and the path off to the left which leads you along the stream and eventually to either the steps through the wood (see below) or up to the head of the valley were footing became difficult and potentially dangerous. The 63 steps were in fact built for the miners who used to climb the steps daily to reach the coalmines and the quarries on the moors some two hundred years ago.



Above: This set of steps takes you up through the wood and on to the top path which brings you at eye level with much of the canopy.



Above: In parts, the valley bottom is wider and partially grassed. It can be popular in summer and during good weather with the public but I've never found that has detracted from any of my visits.



Above: It's steep sides are well wooded with a good proportion of Oak and Beech.



Above: If the stream is in flood the noise generated by it can obscure much of the bird song. Perhaps this is why I never hear the Wood Warblers which must at least pass through the place every so often?



Above: It truly is a beautiful location and the path running along the stream crosses it at a couple of locations. Wellies, good balance or wet feet are called for.



Above: The top path above the wood. From here a footpath runs north to Walker Fold and Burnt Edge (approximately a mile away) and the Horwich moors beyond. Well worth the effort and the makings of a superb day out.

Ian McKerchar, December 2009

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