

# What is a labyrinth?

It is hoped to install a labyrinth at Rushcliffe Country Park. Although the finished work will lie flat to the ground it is a major undertaking to create a 22m wide permanent installation with paths wide enough and robust enough to provide wheelchair access and heavy use. A 15m mock up was installed for a Festival in July 2009 and numerous people signed to support the initiative.



This leaflet gives some background to Labyrinths and their uses. For more information contact:



Friends of Rushcliffe  
Country Park  
Mere Way  
Ruddington  
Nottingham  
NG11 6JS

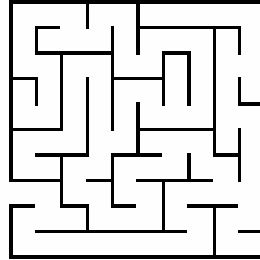
Email: [countrypark@rushcliffe.gov.uk](mailto:countrypark@rushcliffe.gov.uk)

Web: [www.friends-of-rcp.co.uk](http://www.friends-of-rcp.co.uk)

Registered Charity Number: 1079665

# A labyrinth is amazing ... but it's not a maze

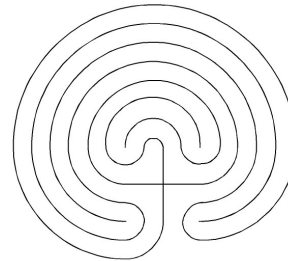
You think you know what a labyrinth is? It's just like a maze, right? Wrong!



A maze is a puzzle where you try to go from the entrance to the centre and back again, but there are lots of different paths and you must beware, because most paths are false and bring you to a dead end. Finding the right

path is frustrating, challenging and very absorbing. You don't have time to think about anything except finding your way.

A labyrinth is a journey where you travel from the entrance (mouth) to the centre (goal) and back again, but it has only one path. It twists, it turns, but always it takes you towards the goal and when you turn around to retrace your steps it brings you safely back again. There is no puzzle to solve, but it gives you time to think.



People say that the shape of a labyrinth and the way that you walk helps you think in a different way, using the creative side of your brain.

Walking a maze needs logic and perseverance but a labyrinth can open your mind.

# A labyrinth is fun ... but looks a bit flat

When you first look at the labyrinth, what do you see? It's just a flattish piece of ground, until you look more closely. On the ground is an amazing pattern, but what do you do with it?

Maybe you just want to run straight to the goal. That's great; see how fast you can get there.



If you want to see what it feels like to follow the pattern with all its twists and turns then you really need to walk the path, or maybe you want to run and see how quickly you get to the goal that way. Beware; it's going to take a lot longer than going in a straight line.

Can you count the number of turns the path takes before you get to the middle?

Some people like to sing a song as they walk round the path. The challenge is to keep in rhythm with your footsteps and to make sure your song ends exactly when you get to the goal. How hard is that?

You can do anything with a labyrinth. How many games can you invent?

Anyone can enter the labyrinth. There are no walls and it's flat so everyone can use it safely. Just be careful and respect people who want to use it differently to you – whether they want to be quiet or noisy.

## A labyrinth is historic ... prehistoric

People have been making labyrinths for thousands of years, before the first history books were written, before people even knew that there was something called history. You can find ancient labyrinths all over the world, in Britain, in Italy, in Greece, in Egypt, in India and even in America. The oldest designs are known as classical labyrinths and can be found carved in rocks and on old coins.



Some of the best known labyrinths (yes, labyrinths can be famous too) were built at the same time as the great Medieval Cathedrals in Europe. One of the most famous is at Chartres in France. You can still walk eleven

circuits to the centre and then eleven back again just as people did over eight hundred years ago. It is beautiful and ancient, but if you don't look down at the floor you might never even see this wonder.

They say that people who were too poor to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem would travel the same distance by walking the labyrinth every day, praying all the time. I wonder how many days and prayers that would take?

There are some very old labyrinths in England, and there is one near here at the village of Wing in Rutland. It was built about the same time and to the same design as the one at Chartres Cathedral.

Labyrinths have been important to people for a very long time.

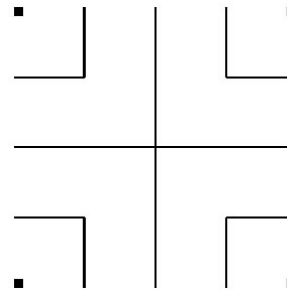
## A labyrinth is interesting ... very interesting

Look at the labyrinth.

If you walk in a straight line from the entrance to the goal, how far is it? How much further do you think it is if you walk all the way around the circuit – it may be much longer than you think? Why not try counting your steps and see just how much further it is?

Look at the shape. What does it remind you of? Can you find a cross? Maybe that was why so many Christian cathedrals were keen to adopt a labyrinth.

How do you draw a labyrinth? After all somebody had to. You can work it out on a piece of paper, if you find the secret. Here is a clue.



How do you draw it on the ground? Somebody did with the help of a rope and some pegs. He made some careful measurements and tied some knots and was able to draw the shape. Can you figure out how?

Labyrinths make you think about history, they make you think about numbers and shapes and design. They make you think about how your brain works and give you ideas for games and fun. They give you a place to think about anything you want.

Labyrinths are just plain interesting.

## A labyrinth is a place ... for a good think

People have always used the labyrinth as a place to think and meditate and pray. Perhaps the shape and the movement really do open up your mind and make you more creative. Or maybe it just gives you a focus without having to think too much about what you are doing.



You can use the labyrinth to help you when you want to celebrate, or when you need to think through a problem, or when you feel tired and depressed and need a boost. There is no "right way" or "wrong way" to use the labyrinth – you use it in the way that works for you.

Many people find it works best to think of a journey in three stages.

On the journey towards the goal you think about why you are there. As you walk, you put your problems into perspective and become quiet. There is plenty of time – it's a long walk.

At the goal, you think about yourself, about the real **you** that people don't see. You have time to work out how **you** want to deal with what is on your mind.

On the journey back you can decide what you are going to do differently when you are back in the real world.

You don't need to be religious to make the trip, but it can be a spiritual experience.