



Bagshot Heath and Swinley Forest

Distance: 13 km=8 miles

easy walking

Region: Berkshire, Surrey

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Refreshments: Forest Look Out, Bagshot

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Map: Explorer 160 (Bracknell) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Woodland walks, heath, views, adventure centre

In Brief

This walk takes you through one of the most popular large areas of wild open space and woodland that lies between Bracknell, Bagshot and Camberley on the Berkshire-Surrey border. Midway through the walk is the Discovery Centre, known as the *Look Out*, which attracts adventurous families, their children and dogs. One thing is certain: you will not be without company on this walk, in stark contrast to the solitary nature of many of the walks in this series.



The paths chosen for this walk are generally dry, with only a limited area which has been marked by forestry vehicles where we find a route that avoids the mud. There are no stiles and this walk is perfect for your dog.



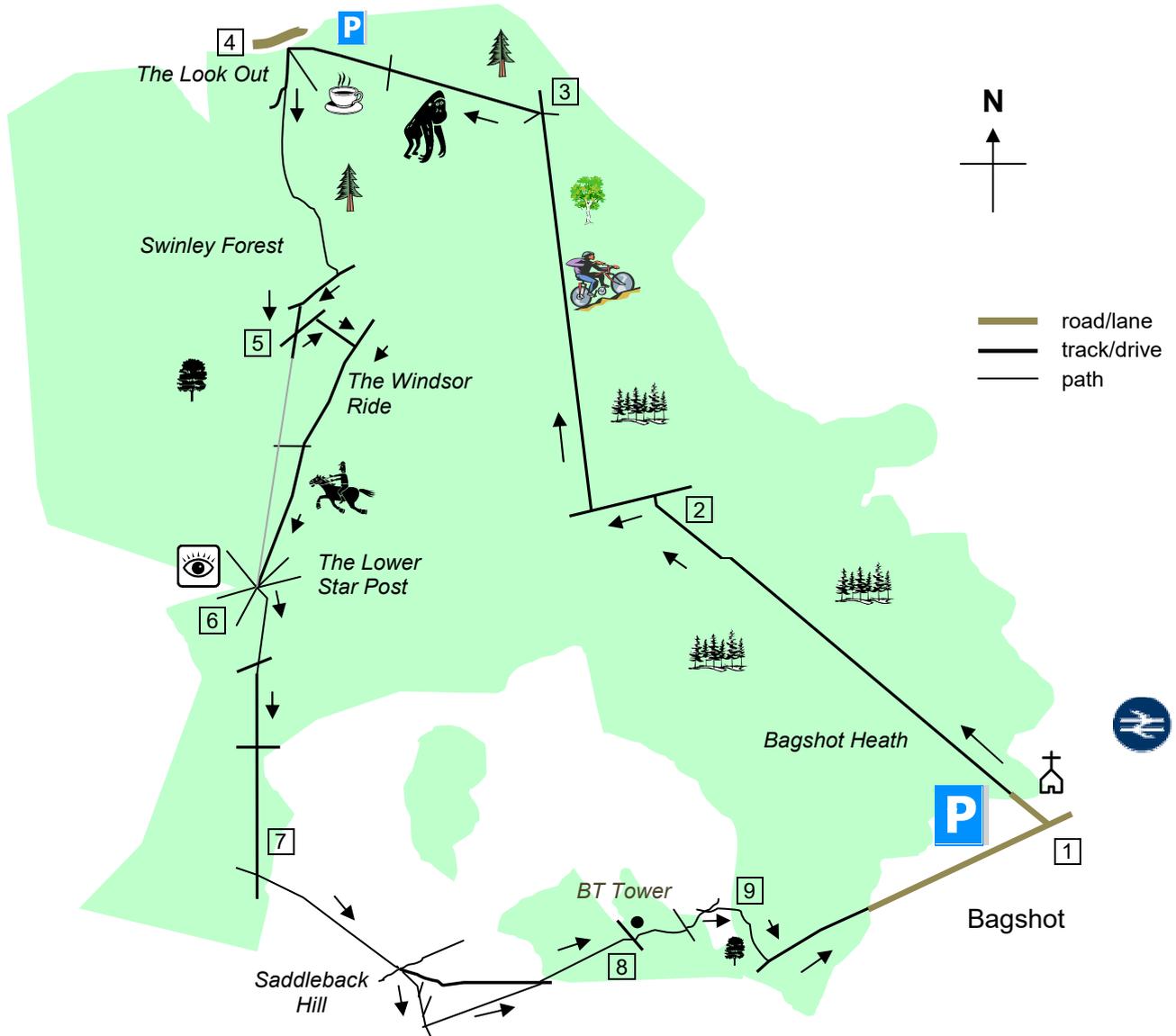
The walk begins in **Church Road, Bagshot, Surrey, postcode GU19 5EQ**. Park on the roadside just before or just past the church. It's best *not* to park at the Discovery Centre because of the fee, the limit on your stay and the vast number of cars. You can also come by **train** to Bagshot station.



For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Bagshot's Anglo-Saxon name comes either from the word for "badger" or simply from a person's name. But excavations have found evidence of Roman and pre-Roman occupation. There were late Bronze-Age settlements in the area, and later iron smelting took place. Several Roman roads meet in the forest you are about to explore. Bagshot Park, in the eastern corner of the Heath is the home of the Earl and Countess of Wessex (aka Prince Edward and Sophie Rhys-Jones).



Leg 1: Bagshot Church to Look Out 5 km=3 miles

- 1 Facing St. Anne's church, turn **left** on Church Road and then first **right** into Vicarage Road. Stay on this road until, after a short dirt drive, you pass a metal barrier entering Bagshot Heath. You will be walking dead straight on an easy track for nearly 2 km and you may see some preparations on the right for a new mountain bike route. *You will encounter a host of mountain bikers in this, one of the top favourite areas, and there is a bike hire centre in the big car park; but you will manage to keep clear of them for most of the way.* The track goes over a stream with wooden railings, passing a waymarked bridleway on your left. It next goes up a slope and over a crossing track. Keep straight ahead, now with pinewoods on each side, soon arriving into an open area. Welcome to Berkshire and Swinley Forest! Press on to arrive eventually at an oblique T-junction with a straight sandy path. *As a diversion here, by turning **right**, you would come to Rapley Lake which has a marked nature trail.*

The huge (by English standards) Swinley Forest is 1100 hectares in size, i.e. 11 sq km, and belongs to the Crown (like Windsor Castle). Hence the crown emblems you will see atop all the signposts in the forest. The various towns that surround it all hold a bit of it under their own names, so you have Bagshot

Heath, Crowthorne Woods and Bracknell Forest. The Look Out Discovery Centre is run by Bracknell Forest Borough Council and is a huge draw for families with its hands-on science centre and a vast network of narrow-track mountain bike trails.

- 2 Turn **left** at the T-junction. You pass a path on the left and one sharp right to arrive at a major junction with a decorative signpost bearing the Swinley Forest crest. Turn **right** here in the direction of *Old Bracknell Road*. Keep to this wide popular sandy track for some distance. You will probably be sharing the route with a lot of mountain bikers. As the track rises, avoid a track at a left fork. The track passes a sign on your left to *The Look Out* and takes you up another slope where the trees change to broadleaf. A further slope follows where the track becomes very wide. Soon a road is visible in the distance and you come to another crested signpost by a wire fence. Turn **left** here on a crossing track, in the direction of *The Look Out*, avoiding a sharp left for *Pudding Hill*.
- 3 This wide path runs through an especially attractive part of the woods with a mixture of birch and more ornate conifers. It goes over a stream with railings. Finally, after about 700m in total, you go over a crossing path and between posts to find, on both sides, an obstacle course in the trees. This is a *Go Ape* course and in which young and old swing on ropes between checkpoints, protected by a safety line. Go past the shop and through a small wooden gate into the huge parking area of the *Look Out Discovery Centre*. The toilets, coffee bar, shop and bike hire are all on your left.



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Leg 2: Look Out to Lower Star Post 2½ km=1¾ miles

- 4 After a brief rest for refreshment, continue straight on past the Centre, through the car park, passing several signs for “mountain bike trails” and “cycle routes”. Simply keep the fenced enclosure on your left. You reach the end of the enclosure, pass through a large metal gate and come to a multiple junction with various metal gates all around, near the main road (part of the *Nine Mile Ride*). Avoid the first path sharp on your left (with the green barrier gate) and take the **second** path on the **left** between posts with a white stripe. Where the main track curves right in 130m, keep straight ahead. *This section is for walkers only, but the bikers unfortunately take little notice.* This is the *Forest Walk*, known for its planted evergreens and rhododendrons. The path rises quite steeply and you pass a trig point on the right. Your course wheels left and right with hollow ground on your left. Finally, 1 km from the Centre, you reach a wide crossing path. Turn **right** on this crossing path, with a new conifer plantation on your left. In 200m the path ends at a junction between two ponds. Turn **left** here on a wide path. In 120m you come to a diagonal crossing path.

You can now continue straight ahead for 1 km to reach the Lower Star Post, skipping section 5. In the winter of 2013 when this walk was planned, that path was muddy and heavily churned up by forestry operations *but it has now been repaired* (Dec 2013) and is in good condition. The text in section 5 below was an alternative mud-free route but it has been made “standard” because it is more interesting and varied and is not on any of the bike trails.

- 5 Turn **sharp left** at the junction and in 100m turn **right** on a wide grass path. In 180m you reach a junction with a major path. Turn **right** here. This is the *Windsor Ride*, a favourite long route across the Forest. Follow the Windsor Ride for 1 km, going straight over a crossing path about half way along (which is, by the way, a Roman road). Finally you reach a junction with various paths fanning out, under wires, with another of those crested signposts. This is the Lower Star Post, a 10-prong junction.

Leg 3: Lower Star Post to Bagshot Church 5½ km=3¼ miles

- 6 Ignore the straight path directly ahead and instead take a grassy narrower path to its **left**, immediately to the **left** of a 1-metre high cylindrical concrete block. At the end of this pleasant path, go through a large metal kissing-gate. Keep straight ahead, passing a pond on your left and crossing over a track eventually arriving, after 500m, at an open high promontory where it is worth pausing to admire the views ahead to Olddean Common. Go straight ahead fairly steeply downhill. *On your left is a sparse open area which has nicely regenerated after the fire of 2011.* Also visible is the pointy BT Relay Tower which you will pass on your route. Ignore all minor paths off until, just over 500m from the high promontory, on a downward course in the middle of a pinewood, you reach a wide diagonally crossing path by a white *Ministry of Defence* notice fixed to a tree. Turn **left** here.
- 7 In 250m, this path crosses a green metal bridge, leading you gradually up, back into Surrey and, after 650m, to the top of the ridge by Saddleback Hill. You meet a very wide track which runs along the top of the ridge. Cross over the track, a fraction right, up a short sandy slope to a multiple junction directly under power lines. On your left is the very wide track under the power lines (which this walk now avoids as they are not very decorative). On the other side of the track is a steep path leading up to the top of the nearby pine-topped hill and fitter walkers will want to climb it for the view. But your route is a **descending** path between banks immediately to the **left** of the steep path (to the **right** of the wide track). Your path curves right and descends into a valley with scattered groups of pines ahead. When you reach the bottom, there are several paths leading off. Ignore a path sharp left which leads up towards the power lines, but take the **next** path on the **left**, gently uphill. (As a guide, this is just *before* a marshy patch and there is a solitary pine on the left of the path.) Your path runs gradually up, over a crossing path and onwards in the direction of another pine-topped hill which it skirts to the left. At the top, another path joins from the right and you arrive under the power lines again. Cross straight over diagonally on a path heading for the BT Relay Tower. At a crossing path, continue ahead. After 400m, you reach a track in front of the Tower.
- 8 Cross the track beside a large metal gate and and turn **right** through a smaller metal gate. Immediately turn **left** towards the tower and take a partly hidden narrow path that runs beside the green fence on your left that forms the perimeter. At the first corner, continue ahead over a crossing path and follow this forest path for 130m. *Remember, each 10m is about 15 paces and 100m is 1½ minute's moderate walking.* You come through the remains of a metal gate in a wire fence and go over another crossing path onto a wide open area of heath with occasional tall pines. Keep ahead across the heath on a path that threads its way through the pines. In 100m you are out of the pines and you come over a narrow crossing path and,

10m further, a wider **oblique** crossing path. Veer **right** on this oblique crossing path. This path leads you, in under 100m, between wooden railings, over a small cattle grid.

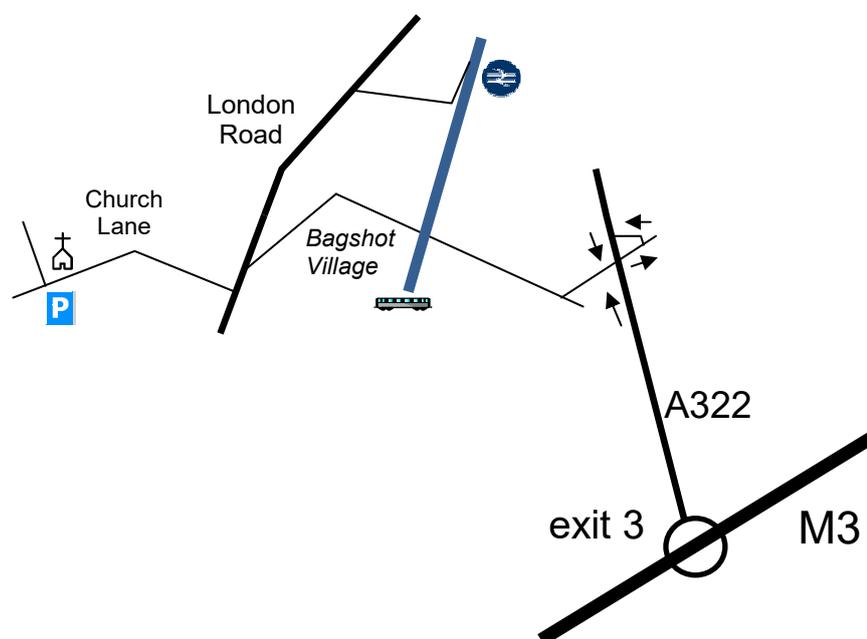
- 9 Stay on the path which winds its way through broadleaf woodland. In 60m, take the **left** fork, staying close to some steeply sloping woods on your left. (You can instead take the right fork as they meet up again in 100m; the left fork is drier.) After 200m or so, you reach a junction with a wide bridleway. Turn **left** on the bridleway, and follow it steeply downhill on a long straight course, ignoring all paths off. After some houses, continue ahead on an unmade drive, soon passing the entrance to *Pennyhill Park*, a noted spa and golf hotel with Michelin-starred Matt Worswick's *Latymer* restaurant. After a metal gate, the drive becomes tarmac and you are now on Church Road, soon arriving at St Anne's church where the walk began.



For final refreshments, Bagshot village centre is only 300m from the church. A Harvester establishment is on the left in the main road, with the Fighting Cocks opposite. Passing the latter, you are in the village with several good places of refreshment.

Getting there

By car: Bagshot is reached from **exit 3** of the **M3** motorway, signposted *Woking, Bracknell, Lightwater*. From the roundabout, follow signs to Bagshot on the A322. Turn **left** in ½ km (500 yards) at a sign for *Bagshot*. Follow the road **right** at a roundabout, under a railway bridge and straight through the village. On reaching the main road, turn **left** and immediately **right** into Church Road. *On returning, there is no right turn into the A322, so you have to go straight over it and turn immediately left and left again.*



By train: Bagshot station is only ½ mile from the start of Church Road. See drawing above. Follow Station Road to the main road and turn left.

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