



Bagshot Heath and Swinley Forest

Distance: 13 km=8 miles

easy walking

Region: Berkshire, Surrey

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Refreshments: Forest Look Out, Bagshot

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.



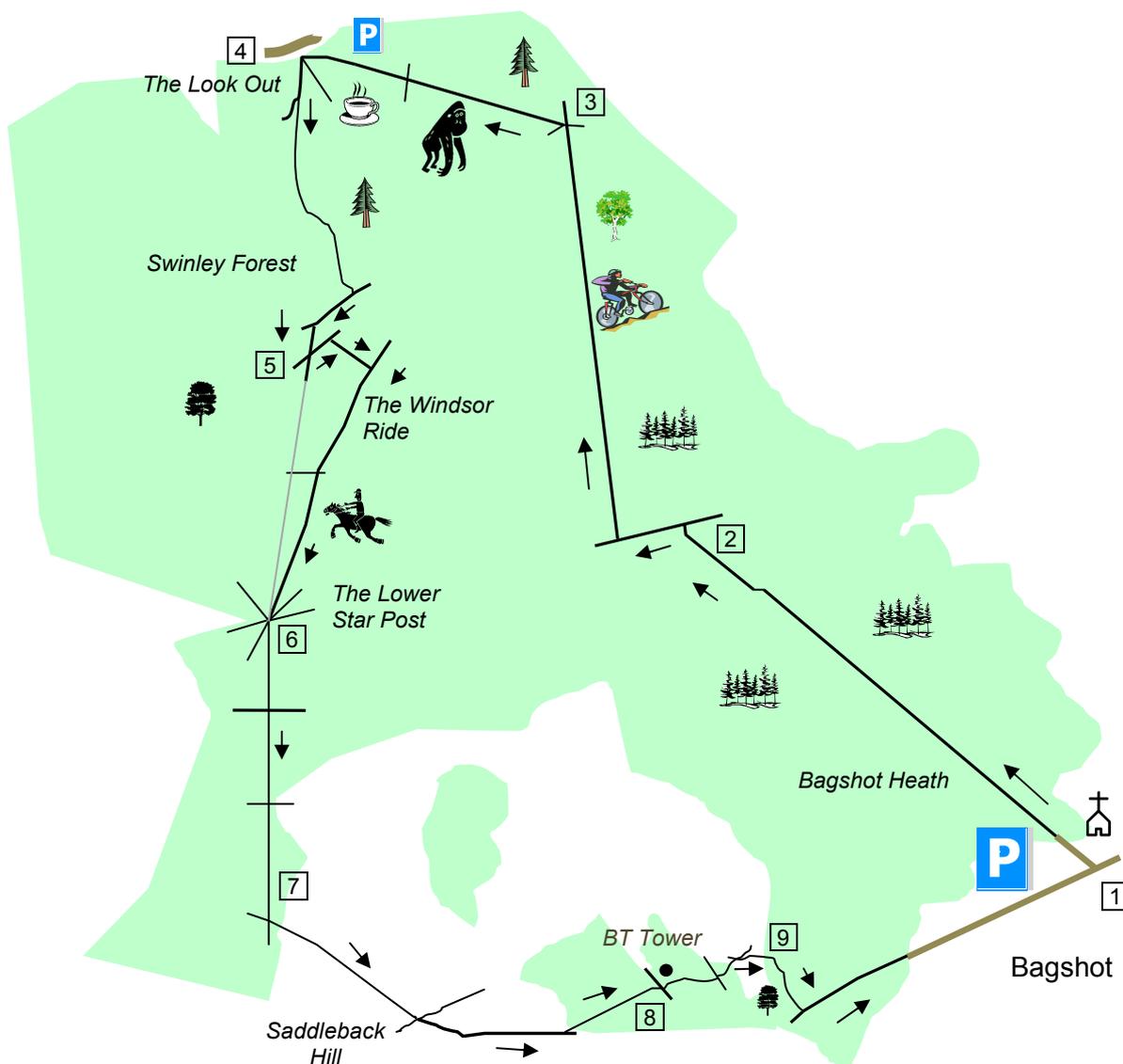
The walk begins in **Church Road, Bagshot, Surrey, postcode GU19 5EQ.**



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. 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 From near the church in Church Road, and on the same side, turn into the side road Vicarage Road and follow it until you pass a metal barrier entering Bagshot Heath. You are on a straight easy track 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 we manage to keep clear of them for most of the way.* The track goes over a stream with wooden railings, passes a bridgeway on the left and goes through an (open) gate. It next goes up a slope and over a crossing track with the metal fence on your right. If the conditions are dry, you can take a parallel more grassy

path on the left. Another rise and the remains of a gate take you into open area. Zig-zag left-right to join the sandy path ahead. Welcome to Berkshire and Swinley Forest! Ignore a track on the left. After another rise, you come to a 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 forking left. The track takes you up another slope where the trees change to broadleaf and another slope follows where the track becomes very wide. Soon a road is visible in the distance and you come to another fingerpost. Turn **left** here, 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, you go over a crossing path and between posts to find, on both sides, an obstacle course in the trees. This is the *Go Ape* course, a forest segway in which young and old swing on ropes between checkpoints, a health-and-safety nightmare, 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 and refreshment, continue past the Centre passing, on the left, the end of the fenced-off area and reaching a multiple junction with various metal gates all around, near the main road (part of the *Nine Mile Ride*). Avoid a path sharp left but take the next path on the **left** by a green (usually open) barrier. Where the main track curves right in 130m, keep straight ahead through a small wooden gate beside a larger one. *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 with a wooden gate ahead. Turn **right** on this crossing path. In 200m the path ends at a wooden gate. Go through the smaller gate and turn **left** 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 at the end of this leg. 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 that follows is an alternative route which has only one relatively short muddy stretch. It has been retained because of its charm.

*You may notice a brown post and a new narrow winding yellow cycle path leading off on your left. Even when it **is** ready, cyclists will have priority, or exclusive use. But it is a **dry** route to the junction with the [Windsor Ride](#) described below.*

- 5 Turn **sharp left** at the junction and in 100m turn **right** on a wide path. *This path may be rutted but it is quite short (180m).* When you reach a junction with a major, and fairly dry, path. Turn **right**. 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 fingerposts. This is the Lower Star Post.

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

- 6 Avoid the wide path straight ahead but take a grassy narrower path to its **left**, just to the left of a large stone. [2015: walkers report absence of large stone: just look for that narrow grassy path, at about 10° left of your original direction.] At the end of this pleasant path, go through a large metal kissing-gate. [2015: Surrey Water have temporarily closed the gate by inserting a red plastic fence over it but you can climb over the 3-bar fence beside it.] Go straight over a sandy crossing path, where there is a pond on your left, now on a wider path. You pass side paths on your right and left and reach, after 500m, 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 rather sparse open area which has nicely regenerated after the fire of 2011.* Also visible is the BT Relay Tower, your next destination. Ignore all minor paths off until, just over 500m from the high promontory, on a downward course, you reach a wide diagonal crossing path. Turn **left** here.
- 7 [2015: There is some fairly extensive work going on in this area; you may need to bypass it carefully so as not to stray!] This path leads you gradually up, back into Surrey and, after 650m, to the top of Saddleback Hill. Go straight over the path that runs along the tops, cross an open space and take a very wide sandy path that runs ahead uphill under the electricity wires. The path dips slightly and then takes you on a gentle climb for 500m. You reach the crest of the hill, just before a pylon. Fork **left** here, away from the wires, through fir trees, heading for the BT Relay Tower. At a crossing path, continue ahead. After 400m, you reach a track just beside the tower.
- 8 Cross the track and turn **right** through a metal kissing-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. You go over another crossing path into 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 reach an oblique crossing path. *Remember, each 10m is about 15 paces and 100m is 1½ minute's moderate walking.* Fork **right** here on a narrow path. This leads, in under 100m, past a small disused gate (which could disappear or be reinstated in the future if the area becomes fenced again).

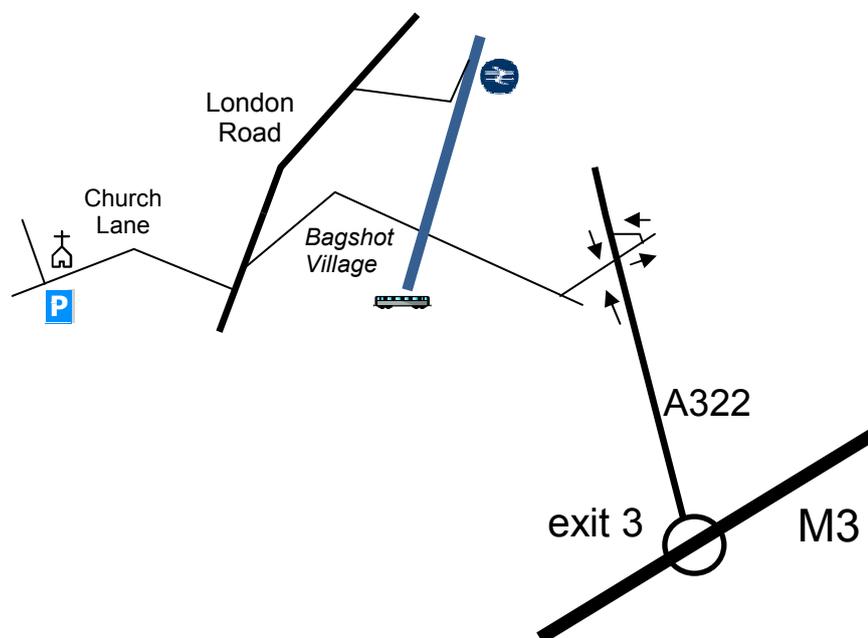
- 9 Stay on the path which winds its way through broadleaf woodland. It is fairly level all the way, but with deeply sloping woods on your left. After 200m or so, you reach a junction with a wide bridleway that is level on the right but downward sloping on the left. Turn **left** on the bridleway, and follow it downhill on a long straight course. After some houses, continue ahead on an unmade drive, soon passing the entrance to *Pennyhill Park*, a noted spa and golf hotel with the two-Michelin-star *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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