



Broxbourne Woods

Brickendon, Ermine Street, Wormley West End

Distance: 10 km=6 miles (+ 1.2 km=0.8 mile for north pub) easy walking
or two walks of 7 km=4½ miles (south)
and 6½ km=4 miles (north)

Region: Hertfordshire

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Refreshments: Brickendon, Wormley West End

Map: Explorer 174 (Epping Forest) *but the map in this guide should suffice*

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Nature reserves, long woodland trails, village, green meadows

In Brief

In Roman times, the dense woodlands of what is now East Hertfordshire offered a great challenge to road builders. With only the sun and stars as pointers, they carved a straight line from London to York, passing through this huge forested area, a route later called Ermine Street. These ancient woods are still standing today. This walk offers challenges of its own. Parts of this great wooded area are devoted to timber, parts are pristine and hold a great variety of trees and plants. For a change from the deep woods, this walk visits some of the nearby meadows and valleys.

Two places are available for refreshments, at the north and south limits of the route. For enquiries at the *Farmer's Boy*, ring 01992-511017. For the *Woodman and Olive*, it is *essential* to ring 01992-463719 because they occasionally close for a private function, even during the day on weekends.

This walk can be shortened by dividing it into two separate walks, the **Northern Walk** which optionally visits Brickendon, and the **Southern Walk** which takes you through Wormley West End. They both make use of the central section through an interesting area of isolated woodland.

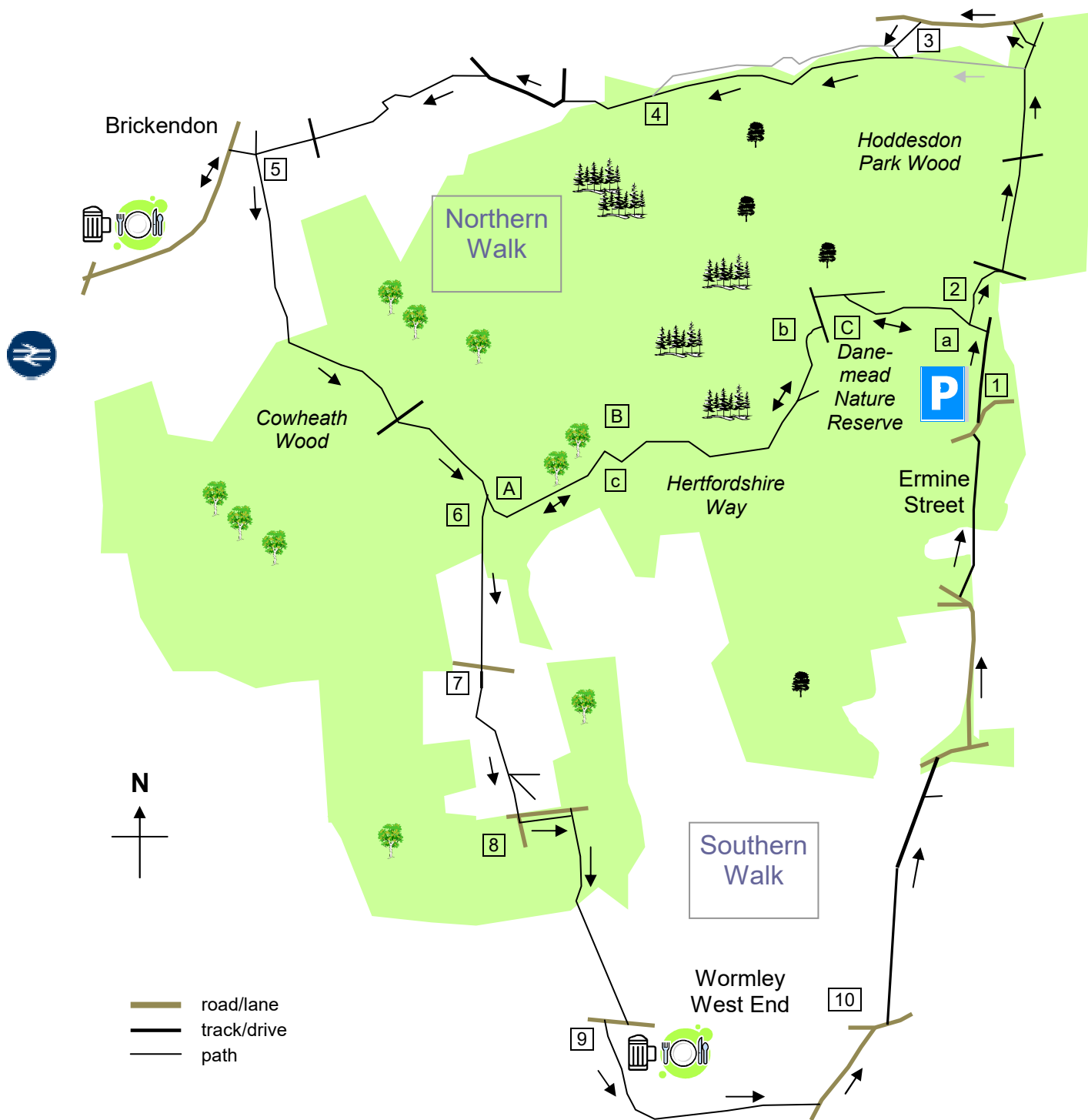


There **are** some nettles on this walk, making shorts inadvisable. Boots are optional in dry weather but recommended if there is any sign of rain. The walk would be fine for your dog, with only one (raisable) stile.



The walk begins at Bayford Station (see end) or the **Martin's Green** car park in Cock Lane, at the corner of Danemead Wood, near **Hoddesdon**, Herts. The nearest postcode is **EN11 8GG**. The car park is on a Z-bend in the lane. The name board says *Ermine Street (Martin's Green) Welcome*. Don't confuse this little car park with the Danemead camp site next door which is often crowded with cars. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 The footpath sign just before the entrance to the car park says *Public Restricted Byway 24, Goose Green ¾*. Your route goes up the Roman road Ermine Street but misses Goose Green. (If you have an old map, note that the *Huntsman* pub in that village is *no more*.)

Ermine Street was a Roman road running from London to Lincoln and York. It was named much later after an English tribe known as the Earningas. (Oddly, no one knows what the Romans called it.) Its straight north-south route has formed parts of numerous modern-day trunk roads, tracks and city streets.

From the dusty parking area, follow the main track into the woods. In 50m or so, you pass a metal barrier. In about another 200m you will see a sign for the *Danemead Nature Reserve*. Turn **left** here, on a narrow path which bypasses two metal gates and takes you through a wooden swing-gate into the nature reserve. There is a bench seat on your left and a notice board tells you details of this important site.

Danemead covers about 14 acres (5.6 ha) and is an important scientific site, protecting several rare plant species. It is known for its hornbeams (trees with those pointed slightly waxy leaves and catkins).

Decision point. You immediately have a choice. For the **Southern Walk** (7 km=4½ miles), skip to near the end of this guide and do the section called **Hertfordshire Way (West)**. For the **full walk** or the **Northern Walk** (which brings you here from the other direction), continue as below.

2 Turn immediately **right** after the notice board on a narrow path along the right-hand edge of the nature reserve. Your path takes you over a flat bridge and out through a wooden swing-gate past another notice board. Bear **right** over a bridge across the Spital Brook and turn immediately sharp **left** over another bridge. You are now at a meeting of wide tracks. Ignore a major track on your left and a muddy track on your right and cross straight over to a wooden swing-gate which bears a sign for *Hoddesdon Park Wood*. The path rises gently through this wonderful woodland. After 300m or so, you meet a wide crossing track: continue straight over. In another 200m you pass a post and a side junction on your right. Note that the post has *red and mauve* bands. (Just before the post, if you look to your **left**, you will see a path up a bank, which leads directly along the edge of the wood for 250m to the *Woodland Route* described in the next section, avoiding the stretch along the lane.) After a 3-plank bridge you pass another red-mauve post. Look **left** now for a small wooden gate. Go through this gate and turn **right** on a path leading up to a metal barrier. Fork **left** just before the barrier to meet a massive tree trunk and a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane. *It is a relief to be out in the open – but this respite is short-lived.*

3 In 250m, go **left** at a footpath sign through a small metal kissing-gate. In 100m or so, you are at the edge of woodland. *Two routes are available: the official route is perfect for lovers of the assorted delights of chickens, gates, green pastures and absolutely beautiful pedigree cattle. The woodland route is used by everyone else.*

Official Route. Go **right** through an avoidable wooden gate and take a path alongside the pastures on your right. You pass free-range chickens on your right. At the corner of the farm, your path goes sharp **right** through a small wooden gate. It goes **right** again in the next corner and **left** through a wooden swing-gate into a small meadow. At the other side, go through a metal kissing-gate and along the left-hand side of a pasture. A kissing-gate leads you along the left-hand edge of another pasture. In the far corner, go through a kissing-gate and keep straight ahead through woods along a boardwalk.

Woodland Route. At the wooden gate, keep **left** into the woodland and immediately turn sharp **right** on a path which runs just inside the wood. You can see a chicken farm and pastures through the trees on your right. Your path veers left away from farm buildings and approaches the corner of a chicken run. Here it turns right over a ditch and continues, still just inside the wood, with cattle pastures visible on your right. The footpath joins you

from the right at a kissing-gate. Keep straight ahead through woods along a boardwalk.

- 4 The boardwalk goes over a damp area of reed grass and comes out into a hay field. Follow the left-hand edge to come out through a new hedge to a tarmac lane at a bend. Keep **left** along the lane past the small industrial unit of Monks Green. Just before the last new grey/green building, with a house on your left, fork **left** at a marker post on a dirt track. When you reach a hay field, pass through a gap in the wooden fence and veer **left** along the edge. At the other side, keep straight ahead on a wide grassy strip beside a new fence on your right. As the path curves left, look to your **left** for a hidden wooden swing-gate. Go **left** through this gate, over a flat bridge, and turn **right** on a grassy path. You come out into a field of grass: keep straight ahead across the centre, heading for a large house. Cross straight over a shingle drive. (*To the left, the drive leads to the Celtic Harmony Camp, an education charity which enables young people to experience the "stone age" at first hand.*) On reaching the far side of the field, go through a small wooden swing-gate to a 4-way signpost in the precincts of that house, in the outskirts of Brickendon. (*Bourne Orchard was originally built around 1600.*)

There is an excellent pub here in Brickendon and the village is worth seeing. It requires a there-and-back trip of 600m each way. Do as follows. Cross straight over, across the grass, to a main road and turn **left** on it. You pass a colourful cattery and what must be a unique chapel, the *Holy Cross*, built in 1932 in Tudor style with a fine wooden beamed interior. The *Farmer's Boy* pub is on the right by the green. Retrace your steps to the big house and the 4-way signpost.

Brickendon ("the hill of Bricca's people") has always been highly prized. King Henry II "gave" the manor to the monks of Waltham and granted it freedom from tax, known as the "Liberty of Brickendon". But the monks had rivals: none other than the Benedictine monks of Westminster Abbey, who went as far as forging Saxon papers to lay claim to it. It turns out their main focus of attention was a house called "Maidenhead" where certain "ladies of the night" needed spiritual comfort. Within the parish there have been several great houses: one is Brickendonbury and its estate, with a long history. Another is Brickendon Grange, long-time host of every kind of sport. Brickendon is one of the most haunted places in Hertfordshire (see "Haunted Hertfordshire, A Ghostly Gazetteer" by Ruth Stratton and Nicholas Connell).



The "Farmer's Boy" pub is open all day and has food daily, with a very attractive garden in the back. Beers are fairly standard, plus one guest. Walkers report a friendly reception. The house next door, the "Five Horseshoes", was once a rival beer house.

- 5 At the 4-way fingerpost, turn **left** (that is, **right** if coming from the village) across the shingle in front of the house with its smart porch. Follow a wide grassy path, through a kissing-gate and bushes, leading into a rough meadow. Keep to the right-hand side, alongside a bramble hedge, peppered with trees of every size. A stile (note: the bar is liftable) leads into woods. A short path takes you into a meadow of wild grass, still following the right-hand edge. A rider's gate leads into Cowheath Wood. At a marker post, your path immediately veers left on a course through the centre of the wood. Your path is fairly evident and easy to follow: if it splits, it re-joins. In nearly 250m, the old coppice gives way to pines as you pass a marker post. In another 150m, you meet a wide crossing forestry track. Go straight over, skipping over a muddy track, by a commemorative bench. The path goes through bracken, passing another marker post, leading into

an attractive birch forest. In 200m, you meet another marker post, this time offering a choice.

Decision point. If you are doing the shorter **Northern Walk** (6½ km=4 miles), skip to near the end of this guide and do the section called **Hertfordshire Way (East)**. For the **full walk**, continue as here ...

Fork **right** at the marker post.

- 6 The path goes through a previously thinned-out area and over a 2-plank bridge into darker woodland. You come immediately to a wooden step-over barrier [May 2020: lying broken on the ground]. Follow a path between wire fences, followed by a bridge and a swing-gate leading up into a meadow. Keep straight ahead on a path up the centre, passing under an oak. At the top, go through a kissing-gate, followed by another (if the catch is jammed, use the large metal gate). A small pasture and a kissing-gate (probably not needed) take you onto a tarmac lane.
- 7 Cross straight over the lane on a concrete drive and through a small wooden gate. Immediately ignore a kissing-gate on your left and a path on your right and keep straight ahead, following a wire fence on your left. After the next kissing-gate, your path veers left across the meadow. You come through a line of trees into the next meadow. Ignore two paths on your left here and keep on dead centre across the meadow. You come through yet another swing-gate onto a path across a meadow with waving grass. A swing-gate, a band of trees and a 3-plank bridge lead onto a main road.
- 8 Cross straight over the main road onto a minor road, West End Road. But, in only 5m, at a small marker post, turn **left** on a narrow path into the woods, running parallel to the road on your left. This wood is known as Emanuel Pollards. After about 150m, at a T-junction, turn **right** into the woods, thus leaving the noise of the road. Go straight down, avoiding paths branching off to the right, to meet an unneeded kissing-gate on the other side. Now follow a fenced path down the side of a large horse pasture with good views ahead. A line of yews leads down to the road opposite the *Woodman and Olive* pub.



The “Woodman and Olive” belongs to the normally worthy McMullen of Hertford Brewery. The location is admirable, in the valley of Wormley West End with a fine large garden. This establishment is pervaded by a Greek subculture and people expecting a typical English pub will find the exact opposite. Casual walkers report a rather chilly reception and disappointing food and drink. Note that the pub sometimes closes for a private function, even during “normal opening hours” and walkers must therefore always check by ringing 01992-463719 before planning a visit. Further feedback will be welcome.

- 9 Turn **right** on the road for just 50m and go **left** at a signpost on a path which runs along the right-hand side of the pub's car park, through a (broken) gate in the fence, to the back of the garden. (If you visited the pub, simply keep **left** out of the entrance and go to the back of the garden.) Go through a small wooden gate over a bridge into woodland. Keep straight ahead through the wood, slightly uphill. After nearly 200m, a pair of arrows on a marker post point you to the **left**. As you reach the corner of a meadow with attractive views, **ignore** a stile in the corner and keep **left** beside a metal fence. [May 2020: This next section was difficult to navigate as there was a large fallen tree needing circumvention. The path was also blighted by many sawn-off branches that had been dumped in the way]. Continue on this woodland path, soon crossing a smashed up plank bridge, followed by a 2-

plank bridge, and under a pylon (where the bracken may be quite dense). You come through a small (broken) wooden gate onto a road. Turn **left** on the road to reach a T-junction with a major road in 250m.

- 10 Turn **right** on the major road and, in 20m, turn **left** on a woodland path. You are now on another section of Ermine Street, the Roman road, and you will be following it to the end of the walk. This fine sheltered path runs under oak and ash trees and comes to a tarmac drive, running beside a rather stylish, but deathly quiet, development of brown-board chalets of White Stubbs Farm. Ignore a footpath on your right and keep ahead through woods to a main road. Turn **right** on the road and, in 100m, turn **left** on quiet Cock Lane. In 400m, as the lane bends left past *Little Grove Lodge*, just after a junction with Pembridge Lane, turn **right** on a byway marked *Martin's Green* $\frac{1}{4}$. In 600m, your path goes between bollards and runs through more mixed woodland. You come out to a road. Turn **right** and immediately **left** into the Martin's Green car park where the walk began.

Hertfordshire Way (West)

Take this route if you are doing the shorter **Southern Walk**.

- a At the notice board in the Danemead Nature Reserve, keep straight on across the centre of the area, heading for trees. Go through a swing-gate beside a large wooden gate onto a winding rooty path. (These nice new gates are dog and backpack friendly.) You come through a another swing-gate and reach the start of a boardwalk, just as a path joins you from the right. After the boardwalk (designed to protect the flora as well as to keep you dry), go through a swing-gate by another notice board for *Danemead*. Turn **left** here on a wide straight path. In only 50m, you will see an old metal gate on your left and the remains of a wooden fence on your right. Turn **right** here on a narrow path uphill. *Don't miss this turn!*
- b Your path winds its way through larches [2017: and round a fallen tree]. Soon you can see on your left a rough meadow and a smallholding. Roughly 30m into the woods again, **avoid** a wide path forking right into pines and keep straight on. You shortly reach a swing-gate on your left. **Ignore** the swing-gate and keep ahead as your path wheels right. You are in a wood of spectacular tall straight pines. After passing several marker posts you come through another swing-gate. At a marker post, your path veers **right** over a bridge.
- c The path rises past another marker post. Only 20m later, another marker post forces a **left** turn on a narrow path into larches. Immediately the trees change to birch. The terrain is botanically very rich with marsh plants, shrubs and ferns, but the ground is bumpy so you have to watch your feet. You now have a fairly straight section, marked by several posts which have a nice clear white top. Looking left, you see a deep valley with oak woods as you continue along the wide strip of marshy plants. Some walkers miss the next white-topped marker post, because the tendency is to keep left whilst admiring the oak woods. If this is the case, you need to go to your **right** to find the marker post, then **left**, back on track. At the next marker post, your path suddenly turns **right**. In 80m, you meet another marker post at a 3-way junction. Turn sharp **left** here.

Your walk now continues from section **6** of the main walk.

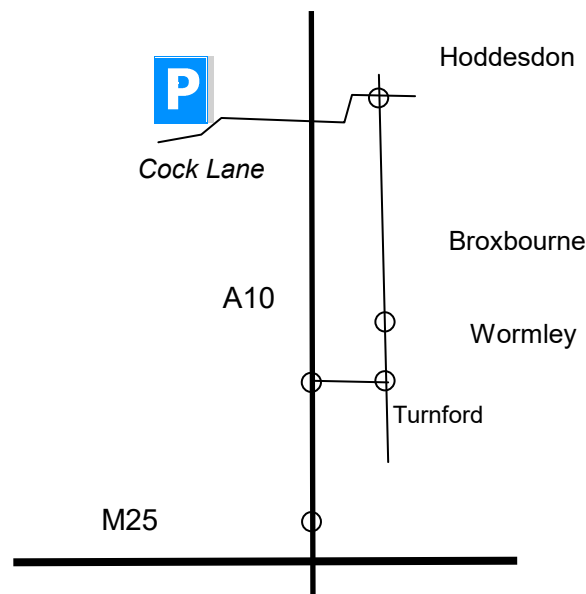
Hertfordshire Way (East)

Take this route if you are doing the shorter **Northern Walk**, omitting Wormley West End.

- A** At the marker post, keep straight ahead, ignoring the right fork. In 80m, at a marker post, your path suddenly turns **left**. You now have a fairly straight section, marked by several posts which have a nice clear white top. The terrain is botanically very rich with marsh plants, shrubs and ferns, but the ground is bumpy so you have to watch your feet. After more than 300m, finally you reach a marker post forcing a **right** turn. You descend to cross a bridge.
- B** Your path rises again, veering left, on a nice clear trail. You come through a swing-gate into an impressive pinewood. (*The **Private** notice only applies to motorbikes.*) At the next marker post, after little more than 50m, your path veers **right**. After a 300m woodland stroll, you meet another swing-gate (*which most people use without thinking – but this is FFW!*). **Ignore** the swing-gate and keep **left** on a narrow path. Soon there is a rough meadow and a smallholding on your right, before your path goes deep into the woods again [*2017: and round a fallen tree*]. After 400m on this section of the path, you come down to a T-junction with a much wider path.
- C** Turn **left** on the wide path for about 50m. At a notice board announcing *Danemead Nature Reserve*, turn **right** through a wooden swing-gate onto a boardwalk (designed to protect the flora as well as to keep you dry). Immediately after the end of the boardwalk, fork **right** over a tiny bridge on a narrow path. This winding rooty path takes you in 150m through a new wooden swing-gate. (*These nice new gates are dog and backpack friendly.*) You arrive at another swing-gate beside a large wooden gate. Keep straight on, going past a notice board which should be familiar from your outward journey. A wooden swing-gate and a narrow path beside metal fences leads to a wide track, Ermine Street. Turn **right** on the track, quickly leading to the Martin's Green car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: the Martin's Green car park is easily accessible from the A10 trunk road and hence from the M25. One way is to leave the A10 **eastwards** at the exit for *Broxbourne* into Turnford. At the next roundabout, turn **left** as for *Hoddesdon, Wormley*. In 1¼ miles at a roundabout, **ignore** a road left marked *Broxbourne Woods*. In a further 1¼ miles, where the road divides with a left filter before a mini-roundabout, turn **left** on Cock Lane as for *Sheredes School*. The road executes a left and right double bend. Later it goes over the A10 and into woods. The car park is on the right, at a kink in the road, ¾ mile after going over the A10.



By bus/train:

Brickendon is served by **Bayford Station** (half-hourly from Moorgate, including Sunday) which is only ½ mile away, with a good footway.

bus 308 runs from Hertford to Brickendon, Mon-Thu. Check the timetables.

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