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## Epping Forest: Chingford to Epping A (long) Walk In The Woods

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Distance: 13 km=8 miles

easy walking

Region: Greater London, Essex

Date written: 18-sep-2015

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Refreshments: Chingford, Visitor's Centre, Epping

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

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*Woodland !!!*

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### In Brief

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If you don't absolutely love forest before you do this walk, you certainly will afterwards and you will want to make this a yearly event. But you will not get tired of the trees because they change constantly, giving you one woodland scene after another. Some of the best oak woods, beeches as fine as in the Chilterns, ancient birch woods and just about every common species will be found here. This linear walk leads you on excellent paths through woodland, stretching from just after Chingford Plain to the outskirts of Epping.

There are plenty of bars and cafés at the start in Chingford. At the end of the walk, you pass a good pub in Epping with the excellent *Hayward's Restaurant* adjoining (ring 01992- 577350 to enquire). Half way through the walk you can call at the Visitor's Centre and the *King's Oak* pub, but these are no great shakes.



There are no nettles on this walk so shorts can be worn. All the paths are wide with excellent surfacing and generally *dry*, so as well as boots, trainers or good walking shoes can be worn. Your dog can certainly come on this walk, the only obstacles being crossing a few roads and the towns at each end. (He is allowed on public transport too.)



This linear walk begins at **Chingford Station**, Chingford, Greater London, on the **London Overground** network (and within the *Freedom Zone*). You may also begin in the free **Chingford Plain car park**, nearest postcode **E4 7QJ**, grid ref TQ 393 950, which requires bus/tube transport back to the start (unless you "do the double"). It ends at **Epping Underground Station**, Essex. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



## The Walk

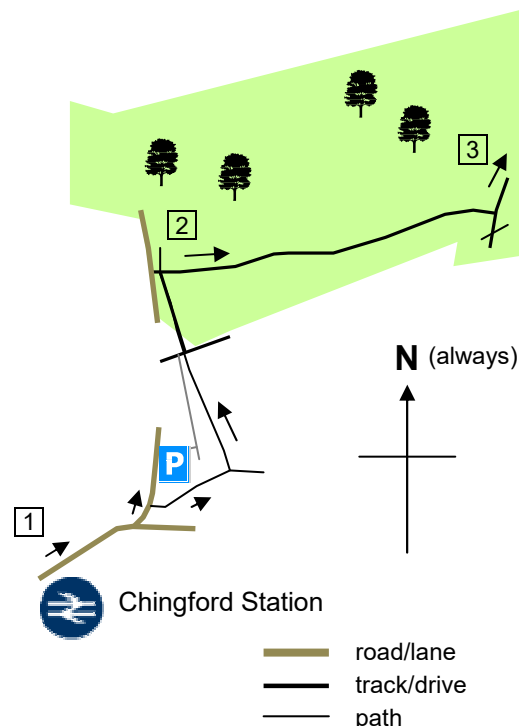
If you need to do any shopping, most of the amenities are on your **left**, a short but pleasant walk to Chingford Green and back, taking in some of the delights of this town: the church, *Carbis Cottage*, and the eccentric shops such as *Jojo's Deli Kitchen* and *Solution Repairs* with its ocean of buttons.

The name 'Chingford' may be derived from words meaning 'ford of the stump-dwellers', a reference to dwellings built on poles to keep them clear of the marsh, another suggestion is that 'ching' is a corruption of 'shingle'. There is a River Ching here but it was named after the town. King Henry VIII favoured Epping Forest as a hunting ground and had a lodge built so that he could view the hunt. This is known as Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge and is now a museum of the forest's history. (It can be reached by keeping straight on along the main road for 400m after the junction with Bury Road.) Famous sons of Chingford are David Beckham (who was brought up here), Teddy Sheringham, Alan Davies and Samantha Fox. The Kray twins were buried here.

Epping Forest has stood, in one form or another, for over 3000 years. It was once the home of deer, wild boar, bears and beavers. The forest saw the building of several earth works during the Iron Age. Ambresbury Banks is passed on this walk; Loughton Camp is another. In medieval and Tudor times, hunting was a major activity. Forest Law was introduced to protect the King's right to hunt game. Officials called 'verderers' were appointed to protect the forest (as in the New Forest also) and they exist to this day.

If you are beginning the walk in the Chingford Plain Car Park, exit it on the main path, past a noticeboard, turn **left** at a sign for the **Holly Trail**, follow the path, along the left-hand edge of the common, for 150m, to the woodland and skip to section [2](#).

- 1** Beginning at Chingford Station, turn **right** on the main road. Opposite the station, the *Station House Pub* is closed but there are several good ethnic restaurants here. Continue to the junction with Bury Road. Here you will see the large black Corporation of London sign board for Epping Forest. (The *beware cattle* sign is for motorists and quite superfluous as you will not meet any on this walk.) Turn **left** on Bury Road for only 40m and then turn **right** on a path across the grass, between posts, just before the *Hollytrail Café*. This path is signed *London Circular*. Where the good path comes to an end in 200m, at a junction of paths, turn **left** between two short wooden fences. Follow this grassy path, avoiding all paths forking off right, with the car park and then a wood-chip store on your left, all the way to the woodland, a distance of 250m.



- 2** Join a wide gravel path into the woodland, passing an info tablet for the *Holly Trail*. Follow this wide woodland path for just over 250m. It gradually comes closer to the Bury Road and reaches a 4-way junction with a 1-bar barrier and the Jubilee Retreat across the road on your left. Turn **right** here on a wide pink-sand ride through wonderful woodland. This stretch runs for nearly 1 km. You may pass riders, as this is a favourite horse path. Some other woodland paths join your path, but only minor ones. Finally

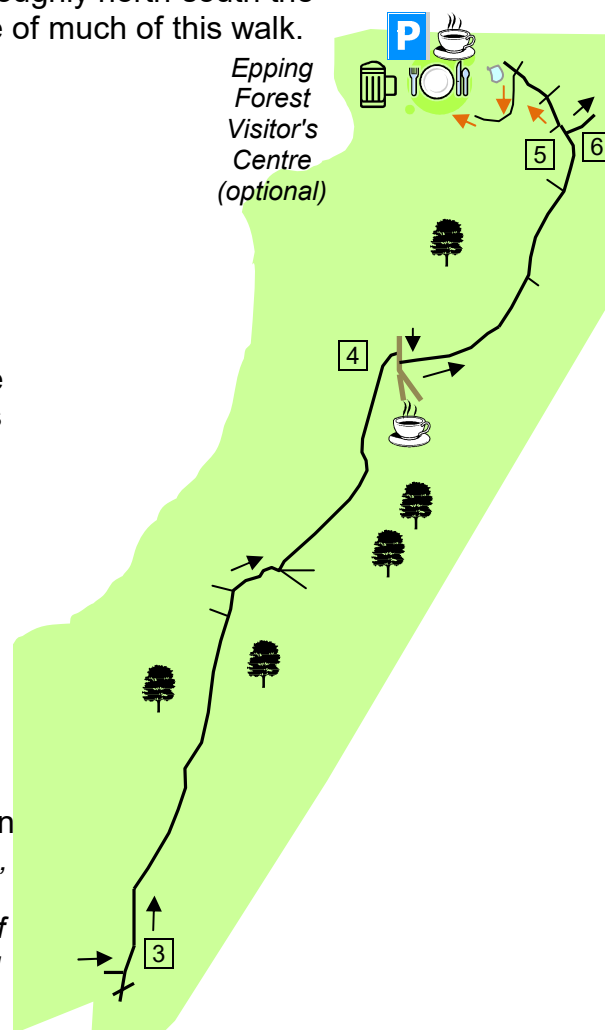
you meet the first really wide crossing path. (As a guide, this is the first *sandy* crossing path in contrast to the grass.) Turn **left** on this wide path. This is the **Green Ride**, a major artery running roughly north-south the length of the forest which will form the backbone of much of this walk.

- 3 In just over 250m, the path veers right and snakes its way through the woods. In another 500m, you pass an open area with a junction on your left at a marker post. 50m later, your path forks. Take the **left**-hand fork, the slightly narrower option, avoiding a wide track which curves away on your right. Your path immediately goes over a crossing path. Keep straight on, with thick woodland on your right and sparse oaks on your left. After another 350m, you pass a post on your left, by an open area where sloe berries grow rife in autumn. At a Gas Line tall white post, your path bends sharp right and left. Stay on the main wide sandy path at all times, avoiding several tempting paths that lead off across the grass. Your path goes gently uphill and, 350m after the double bend, it executes another left-right bend and winds through beautiful forest of oak and birch. In another 350m, it curves right to reach a road, Cross Roads, by a metal one-bar barrier. Turn **right** on the road. *As a short diversion, if you fancy a cuppa, in 100m there is a small parking area with a snack bar, much used by elderly bikers who spend much of the day sitting in circles exchanging anecdotes. You need to retrace your steps afterwards.*



- 4 In only 15m, turn **left** (that is, **right** if you are coming back from the snack bar) on a wide path leading off between short wooden fences. As you follow this path between more beautiful woodland, you will probably hear traffic on the main A104 Epping New Road. **Do not cross this main road!** The path comes quite close to it but curves left uphill, leaving the noise behind. 500m from the start of this path, ignore a small metal gate on your right soon which leads out to the road. Your path goes downhill and uphill again and after another 250m you go through a grove of remarkably-shaped beeches, full size but sprouting many branches from below. *These are the ancient pollarded beeches of Epping Forest and you will see many more during this walk. Some of these beeches are believed to be as much as 1000 years old. Pollarding stopped in 1878 when the Epping Forest Act was passed, giving the trees time to grow to a normal size but still bearing the shape formed by coppicing.* In another 250m (that's 1 km since you turned off the road into this path) you reach a major junction on your right with a post bearing a yellow arrow pointing ahead to the Visitor's Centre. This junction is **crucial**.

**Decision point.** Your route is **right** at the junction. But the Visitor's Centre and refreshments are only ½ km from here, giving you a 1 km there-and-back diversion. If you do *not* want a break, turn **right** at this junction (ignoring the arrow) and skip over the next (coloured) section.



- 5 Keep straight ahead at the junction, following the yellow arrow. In 60m, you go over a very minor crossing path. In another 120m, you meet a crossing path with signs meaning *no riding no cycling*. This is the *easy access path*, a circular wheelchair route. Keep straight on. In another 80m, you meet another crossing path with a *no riding no cycling* sign, just before a small pond on your left. Turn **left** here, passing the pond on your right. Follow this winding easy access path until it ends at a large signboard by some buildings. The Visitor's Centre is on your left. The *King's Oak* pub can be reached by going through (or round) two small car parks. The open area ahead has good views and a snack bar and is the only spot where you may see crowds. After your break, retrace your steps on the easy access route, turn **right** on the wide path by the pond, go 250m and turn **left** at the major junction previously mentioned.

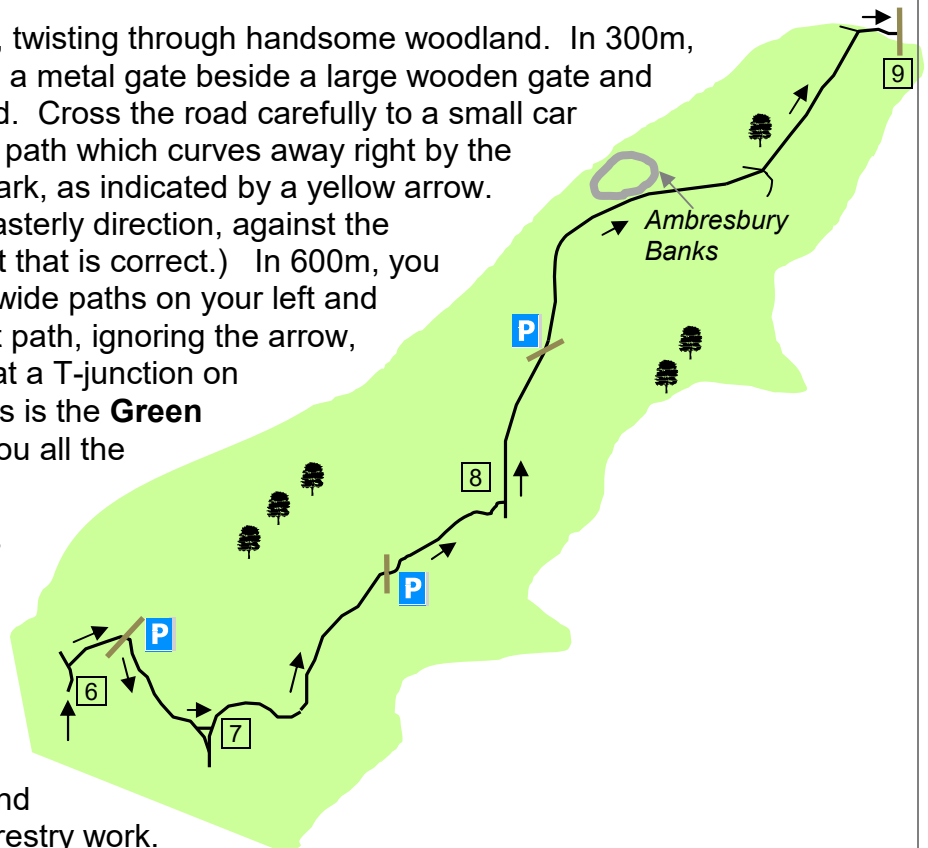


- 6 Follow this wide sandy path, twisting through handsome woodland. In 300m, your path takes you through a metal gate beside a large wooden gate and out to the main Epping Road. Cross the road carefully to a small car park opposite. Take a wide path which curves away right by the **right**-hand side of the car park, as indicated by a yellow arrow. (You are going in a south-easterly direction, against the general flow of this walk, but that is correct.) In 600m, you reach a major junction with wide paths on your left and ahead. Turn **left** on the first path, ignoring the arrow, and immediately **left** again at a T-junction on another very wide path. This is the **Green Ride** again and it will take you all the way to Epping.

- 7 This scenic ride soon bends right downhill under some magnificent beeches, with deep woods on your left, known as Bellringers Hollow. It dips down over a stream and up again. It is now running fairly straight and you may see evidence of forestry work.

After 1¼ km on this path you pass a 1-bar barrier and come out to the A121 road (Goldings Hill). Cross the road to a path opposite, beside a small car park on its left, into another part of the forest known as Broadstrod. Keep to the main path which quickly bends left by a white post, then right downhill. It takes you over a stream, uphill and, 650m after crossing the last road, arrives at a T-junction with a wide path known as the Ditches Ride. Turn **left** here.

- 8 You pass more of those bizarrely-shaped beeches. Your path is now wide and straight and the woodland simply matchless. This area is known as Jack's Hill. 700m from the T-junction, you come to a horizontal bar, a car park, a noticeboard and a road. Cross straight over the road into another small car park. Go past a vehicle barrier and straight ahead on a wide path. (There is also a narrow path parallel on your left, at least as far as the next junction.) 700m from the road, you will see on your left a sign board for Ambresbury Banks.



*This great circular earthwork, 4½ ha=11 acres in size, surrounded by a ditch is all that is left of an Iron Age hill fort. At that time (about 700 BCE) the views*

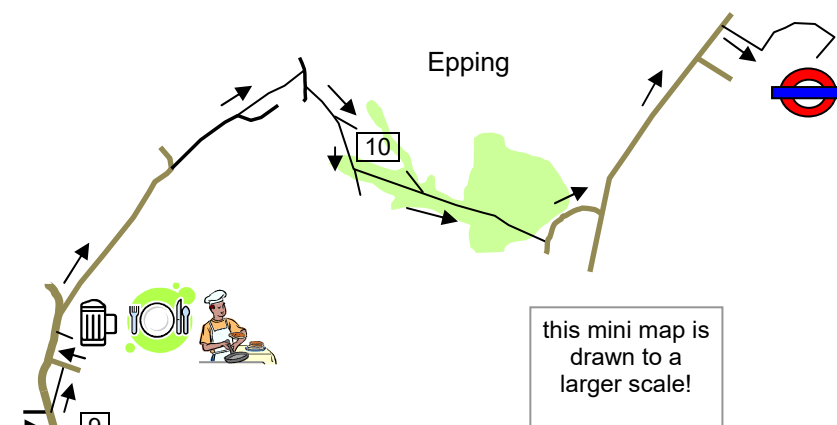
would have been clear of trees. According to (pure) legend, this is the place where Boudicca, Queen of the Iceni, made her last stand against the Romans in the year 61.

Continue on the main path. In another 700m or so, you reach a junction where a horse track joins you from the left and your path forks. Take the **left** fork, a narrower sandy path which goes downhill, avoiding the wide woodland path which curves away right. Your path runs straight through more beechwoods, with occasional holly, rowan and hornbeam. In 700m or so, at the top of a rise, you reach a junction where the main path curves right. This area is known as Bell Common. You will have heard the roar of traffic: this is the M25 which runs underground here, under the cricket pitch, playing fields and road. The tunnel was finished in 1984 using the "cut and cover" principle. Bear **right** with the main path, passing a barrier and sign board and coming out to a road, Theydon Road.

- 9 Cross the road, turn **left** and fork **right** on a tarmac path beside the green M25 air conditioning building. Follow the path straight to a road. Cross the road and turn **left** and **right**, back on the Theydon Road. Avoid a signposted bridleway on your right, immediately reaching the *Forest Gate Inn*. This is a pleasant final watering hole, a 17<sup>th</sup>-century country free house and hotel owned and run by the same family for 50 years. Ales are mainly Adnams. Walkers have found it "excellent & very welcoming". Next to the inn is the excellent *Hayward's Restaurant* which has an imaginative fixed-price menu.



Keep straight ahead on a side road beside the inn, passing houses and cottages. Where the tarmac bends left, keep ahead on a stony drive, marked as a cul-de-sac. Where the drive zigzags right-left past houses, leave it to proceed in the same direction across the grass. You meet a curving tarmac drive leading to a large house on your right. Turn sharp **right** on the drive but immediately fork **left** on a grassy path leading into an open space.



- 10 There is bench seat and two paths leading through the grassy space. Take the **right**-hand path, the slightly wider option which runs near the right-hand edge of the space. At the bottom, as you enter trees, bear **left** on a narrow woodland path. In 120m, at a junction by a post, keep straight ahead, staying on the woodland path. In 200m, it leads out to a residential road, Western Avenue. Turn **left** and follow the road as it bends right to meet another road, Centre Drive. Turn **left** and follow the road for 300m. 40m after passing Woodland Grove, go **right** on a narrow tarmac path between fences, marked with the Underground symbol. This path bends and curves its way to Epping Station, marking the end of this walk.





## Getting there

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By train: Chingford station is on the Lea Valley train network and is also a terminus of the **London Overground**. London Freedom Pass holders can travel there free. Connections are from **Liverpool Street** or via **Walthamstow Central** on the **Victoria Line** of the Underground. Returning is from **Epping Underground** station (Central Line) with various connections to rail, Overground, DLR or other Underground lines.

By car: the Chingford Plain car park is to the east of the town, at the southern end of an open space of Epping Forest. Coming along the A1069, passing Chingford station, turn **left** into Bury Road. Park in the **second** car park on the right. Do *not* park in the *first* car park which is used exclusively by the golf club and the Tee House Café. To return from Epping, take the Underground to Loughton and then the 597 bus to Chingford. (A taxi is also recommended!)

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