



Aldershot: Caesar's Camp, Levada, Long Valley

Distance: 12½ km=8 miles or two walks of 8 km=5 miles
and 5½ km=3½ miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Hampshire, Surrey

Date written: 12-mar-2012

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Refreshments: *Foresters, Royal Arms*

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Map: 145 (Guildford) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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High heath, water channel, inland beach, moors, views, wilderness

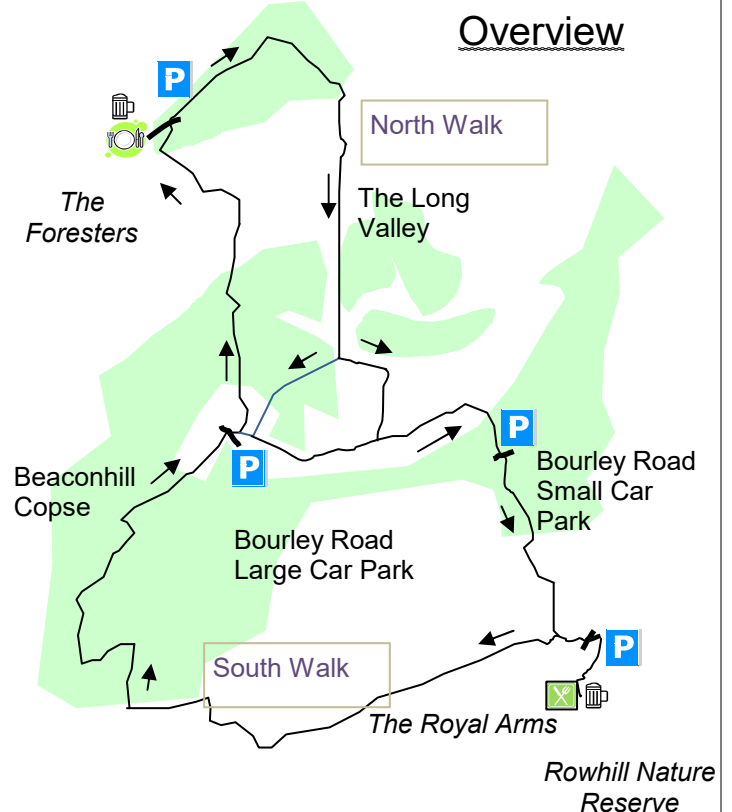
In Brief

This is a remarkable walk which includes some wild features not normally seen on a country walk: a long level woodland section along a water channel and a vast sandy space like an inland "beach". This is MoD land but it is *not* part of a danger area and there is free access. You may see soldiers and their vehicles on exercise but you will also meet families, children and dogs aplenty. For refreshment, there is a pub at each extreme end of the walk.

The walk can be split into two parts or done as a single trek. The **South Walk** (8 km=5 miles) takes you over Beaconhill Copse and the level section and back to Rowhill Nature Reserve. The **North Walk** (5½ km=3½ miles) goes north to the *Foresters* for refreshment and back via the great sandy tracks of the Long Valley. The **Full Walk** (12½ km=8 miles) starts in Rowhill and includes all these features.



Any kind of attire is fine but boots are recommended because of the terrain. Except near the main roads, your dog can run quite free. There are *no stiles*.



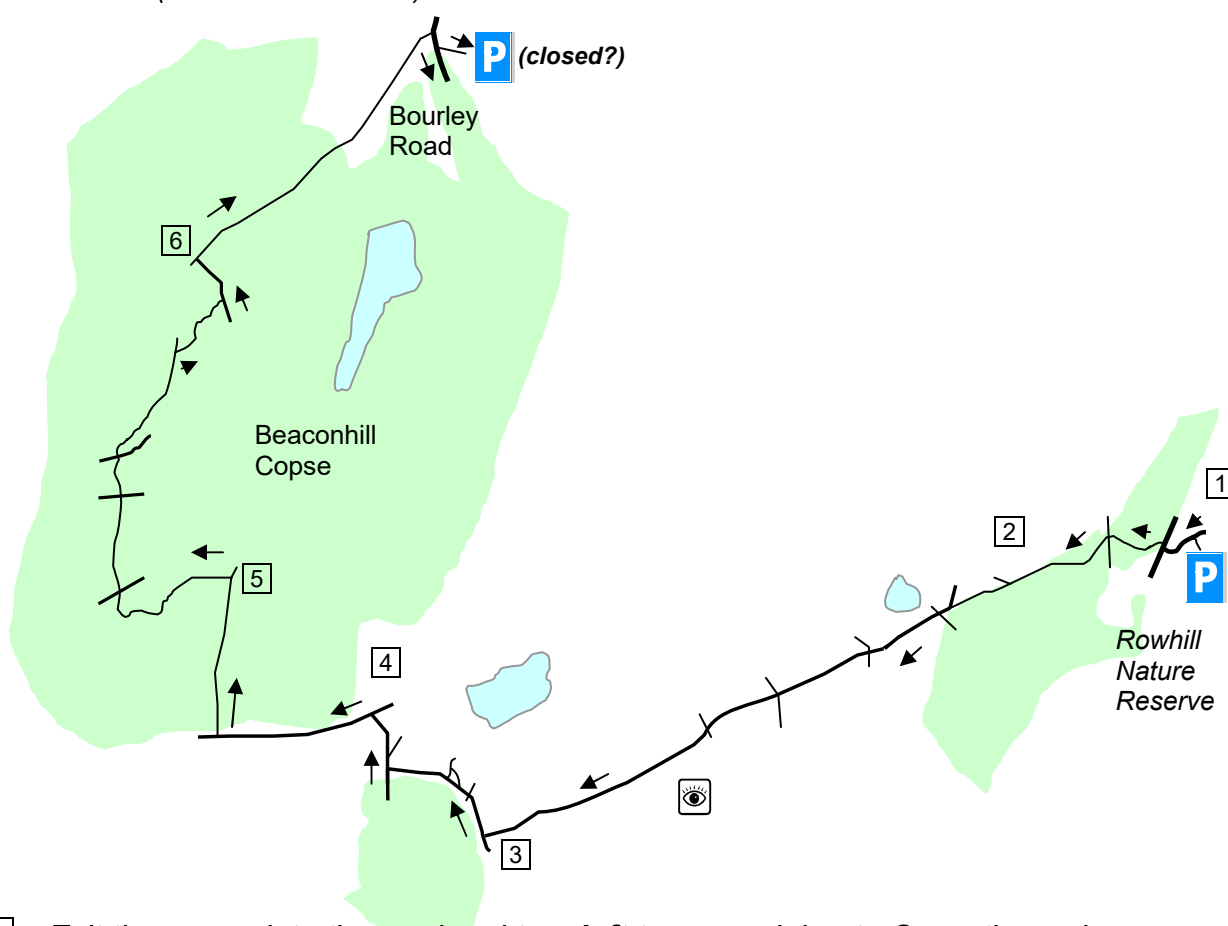
The **full walk** and the **south walk** begin at the **Rowhill Nature Reserve** car park on the outskirts of Aldershot, **postcode GU11 3BD**. The large car park on the Bourley Road was (controversially) **closed** in 2016-2017 so the best start for the **north walk** is the car park on the Aldershot Road, 150m east of the *Foresters* pub, Church Crookham, postcode **GU52 9EP**. You could also start at the *smaller* Bourley Road car park, with a small diversion. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Decision point. The text below describes the **Full Walk**. If you are doing the **South Walk**, you should do only **Legs 1 and 4**. If you are doing the **North Walk**, you should skip over Leg 1 and do **Legs 2 and 3**.

Leg 1: Caesar's Camp and the Levada 5 km=3 miles

Rowhill Nature Reserve covers 22 ha and was once a private timber and brick-works, as you may see. It was made a local nature reserve in 1985 and, thanks to local volunteers, is returning to its original state with deciduous woodland, working coppice and, in the spring, bluebells. The "Royal Arms" pub is on the other side of the Reserve and is a useful watering hole for the end of the walk (see foot of this text).



- 1** Exit the car park to the road and turn **left** to a roundabout. Cross the main road, turn **right** on it for only 10m and turn **left** past an MoD sign on a foot-path. Go through a modern swing-gate past a sign for Caesar's Camp. In 30m, the path veers **right** away from the fence, ascends and reaches a wooded crossing path in a slight dip. Cross this path, a fraction right, to a rising path opposite that runs between banks. *In fact, any path will do. The idea is to come out into the open moor.* At the top, turn **left** on a wide path

with a silver birch wood on your left and extensive open views of the moors on your right.

- 2 You will be following this main track for 1½ km, the first ½ km next to the wood, the rest out in the open. Very soon, your track bends right and left but you have the option of continuing straight ahead through trees on a path that soon veers right to meet the main track again. 100m later, you see a pond on your right and the path forks. Here, you have a choice of either of two level paths as they join up again. *The left-hand path is easier but the right-hand path takes you a little closer to the pond for a photo opportunity.* At a junction of paths, keep straight ahead on the same wide level sandy path, avoiding all rising paths, left or right, stepping for a while into Surrey. Your path runs through an area of scattered birches with low hills on each side. You cross another track as the path begins to rise gently in an area known as Long Bottom. Finally you come to a T-junction with, on the left, a small metal gate and houses visible in the distance.
- 3 Turn **right** at the T-junction, still on a wide path. The main path veers slightly left at a junction, then left again in 70m by a *Danger Drop* sign. On your right is a steep drop. *You are in part of Caesar's Camp, a hill fort with great views all around.* In 100m, your path comes to a wide crossing track with views ahead. Turn **right** on the track and keep **left**, avoiding a track that forks off right. In 60m, turn **left** at a T-junction on a hard-surfaced track.
- 4 Continue along this wide track, going past a conifer plantation on your right, with gorse and wild heathland, heading for a tall thin metal tower to the left in the distance. 400m after joining this track, you see on your right a metal gate and deer grid. Turn **right** here, going through a small metal gate onto a wide track going downhill into a birch wood, back into Hampshire. [\[Any path on this walk may be closed for forestry work and this one was taped off in winter 2015; many people simply ignored the notice.\]](#) Continue on this path for about 300m, where you come to the corner of a green metal fence on your right. Immediately turn **left** here on a narrow level path that runs beside an old water channel on your left. You have reached the start of a "levada".
- 5 [The next km or so is the closest you'll get in SE England to those famous levadas of Madeira that channel water from high in the mountains to the populous areas, with level paths running beside them that are such a pleasure to walk.](#) The path bends sharp right and then winds right around a valley. Always keep to the **level** path, avoiding any ascending or descending paths where various rivulets descend to join or cross the channel, sometimes with small bridges. The path crosses a wide track and takes you through a dusky area of tall pines. The pines change to birches with a more open area on your right. The path crosses a wide stony track near a stone bridge and bears right to run high above the track. You meet more scots pines and, looking down on your right, you see the track now deep in the valley. 230m after crossing the track, your path crosses a very steep stony path. Just 15m after this, your path forks. Here, leave the level path, which continues onwards for some distance, by taking the **right** fork downhill. This narrow path descends gently for some 150m. When you reach the bottom, turn **left** on a wide semi-tarmac track.
- 6 In 100m, at a T-junction with a steep slope ahead, turn **right** on another wide track. You pass a large pond on your right, unromantically called *Reservoir No. 1*. As you near a grassy meadow visible ahead, cross a track and go through a small metal gate next to a deer grid. In 20m, veer **right** to

the edge of the grass and walk the whole length of the meadow, either using the track round the right perimeter or diagonally across it, aiming for a metal barrier. Go through a small metal gate, cross the main Bourley Road, a fraction to the right, and enter the large parking area.

Decision point. If you began the walk here, the walk is finished. Otherwise, you have a choice. For the **Full Walk**, continue with Leg 2 below. If you are doing only the **South Walk**, skip to the end of this text, do the **Bourley Traverse** and continue with Leg 4.

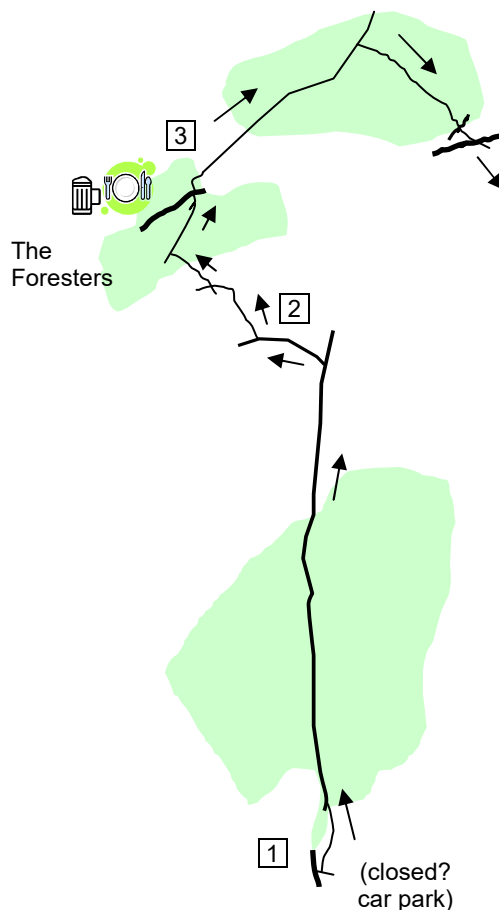
Leg 2: Foresters and Forest 3 km=2 miles

1 Beginning from near the entrance to the large (closed?) Bourley Road car park, with your back to the main road, turn **left** on a wide path that goes through a metal barrier by an MoD sign. (It is even pleasanter to go along the left-hand side of the grassy open space 10m to the right and veer left at the end to join the path *but (2017) be careful to keep generally left as some walkers wander too far to the right here.*) About 700m from the car park, where your woodland path is joined by a wider gravel track coming down from the right, keep left. Ahead is warning sign about high-speed military vehicles. 150m further, you pass a metal barrier. *This location is also an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), known as a preserve of rare species.* Keep ahead on a very wide sandy track, avoiding one forking off right. In 300m, your path goes through a metal swing-gate next to a deer grid. 30m metres further, turn **left** through a metal gate.

2 In 100m, your wide path bends left and passes a little pond on the right (which may be dry). 40m after the pond, turn **right** on a clear path through the gorse bushes. Keep following this undulating and winding path with a hillock on your left, avoiding side turnings, heading towards the pinewoods and the possible sound of traffic on the main road. Your path curves left to meet a crossing path. Here, **leave** your previous path which continues upwards over the heath by turning **right** on a narrow path. (This area has been cleared of gorse bushes and you may still see the remaining stumps). The path goes past some pines and takes you through a swing-gate (sometimes awash: some walkers climb the fence). Turn **right** here on a wide grassy strip. (If you encounter a muddy patch soon, you will find a path through the bushes on the left to avoid it.) You reach the main road. Your course is straight over into a car park. However, first you will wish to turn left on the road for only 60m to find *The Foresters*, a pub/restaurant. (You can also reach the pub using a path at the back of the car park.)



“The Foresters” at Church Crookham is as much a restaurant as a pub and the food may be a bit pricey. Nevertheless, there are several well-kept ales on tap and the food is imaginative with ostrich steak and tempura courgette flowers thrown into the gastronomic mix. There is a sizeable garden and patio to enhance the outdoor atmosphere. The pub has a car park but there is another (public?) one on the other side of the road.

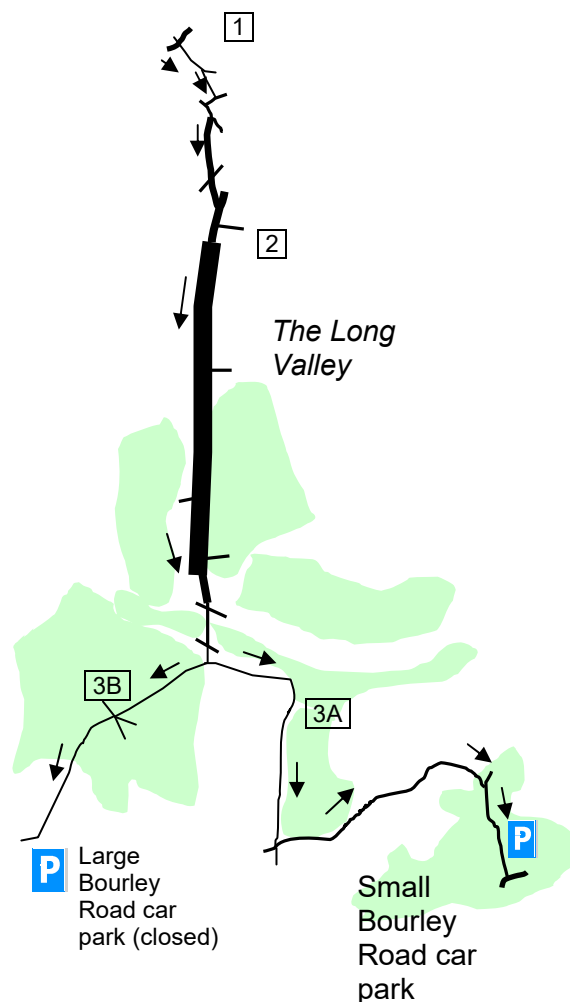


- 3 Cross straight over the main road to the car park opposite. (If you visited *The Foresters* you need to retrace your steps first.) Turn **right** through the car park, avoiding a barrier straight ahead, and go through a metal kissing-gate by a barrier and deer grid. Immediately ignore a path on your left and continue ahead on a straight gravel path which shortly runs over another deer grid. Follow this woodland path for some distance, avoiding several minor crossing paths. Nearly 500m (½ km) from that second deer grid, look out for a quite definite junction on your right. This appears after a gentle rise, just before your current path curves left uphill, and is easily identified from the small triangular patch of grass. Turn **right** here going over some small untidy concrete blocks and, 20m later, avoiding a minor path that forks off on the right. In 300m, your path nears a road and crosses a wide track. Stay on the narrow path ahead to reach the road. Cross the road carefully, going past an MoD sign.

Leg 3: The Long Valley 2½ km=1½ miles or 3 km=2 miles

- 1 Go over a bridge with rails. In 50m, as the path nears a hillock, fork **right**, avoiding a rising path on the left. In 80m, at a T-junction, turn **right**, going past an MoD notice about the Test Track. Immediately, at a T-junction, turn **left** on a track but immediately leave the track that runs left uphill by forking **right** on a very marshy path (which may be dry in some seasons). Keep ahead with a fence running close by on your right. On meeting a very wide crossing track, go straight over and veer **right** onto an **extremely wide sandy track**.

- 2 This track is 30m wide and is like a long gash in the landscape. It is used to test army vehicles but you are unlikely to encounter these on an average day. *Looking down, you get the unavoidable impression that you are walking on a sandy beach. This is no surprise because, 40 million years ago, this area lay beneath the sea. Nutrients are easily leached from sandy soils so they are very unfertile - hence the large areas of heathland in this region.* The fence on your left eventually ends and you pass a large open space on your left. Keep dead straight ahead, going over another track and going through a gap in the pines to meet a wide crossing track. Go straight over between concrete pillars onto a much narrower path and step over a ditch and bank.



Decision point. If you are doing only the **North Walk**, you need now to return to the large (closed?) Bourley Road car park. In this case, ignore the next section and do section 3B. Otherwise, continue with section 3A, which takes you to the very small Bourley Road car park before leading you onwards.

3A Onwards to the small Bourley Road car park. Turn immediately **left** on a wide path, passing over two single-log barriers, heading for trees in the distance. Over on your left is a fence whilst on your right is a large open area of gorse. On reaching the trees, turn **right** on a path that runs beside the line of trees. (You can also take a parallel path that runs just inside the wood.) Your path joins the path that runs in the wood and, after about 350m total, the wood comes to an end at a major junction at a high point. Turn **left** here on a wide track. The track runs level and later descends. Stay on the main track for about 600m, ignoring all paths off until you reach a 3-way junction. Turn **right** here on a wide track, avoiding a lesser path that forks off right into woodland, and in 250m reach the small Bourley Road car park.

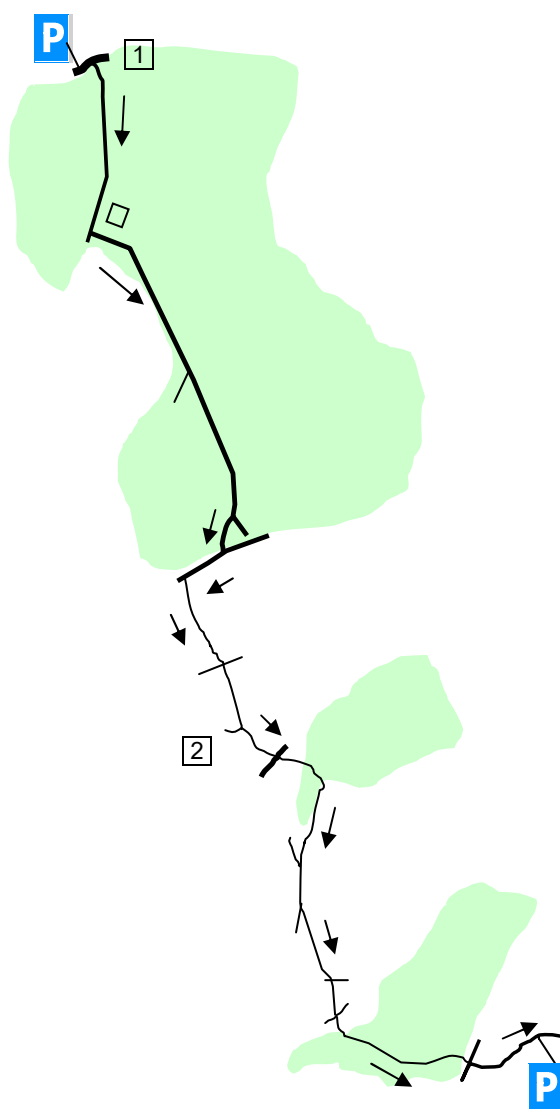
Now skip forward to continue with Leg 4.

3B Return to the large (closed?) Bourley Road car park. Immediately turn **right** on a path through a wood avoiding all side paths. On the other side of the wood, you reach a 5-way junction. Take the **second** path on the **right**, approximately straight ahead. The path bends left and reaches a large grassy space. On the other side is the car park where the walk began.

Leg 4: Copse and Sandhills 1½ km=1 mile

1 *This is a very complex section and you need to concentrate more than usual to arrive successfully at the end point.* With the small car park on your right, cross the main road, going through a 1-bar metal gate beside an MoD yellow warning notice and a modern swing-gate beside a deer grid. The path goes past a large brick shed. Immediately after the shed, turn **left** uphill on a wide path. Stay on this tarmac path, avoiding, in 150m, a wide track on the right with views of Bourley Hill. 100m further, at the top of a rise, ignore a path on the left and, in 20m at a T-junction, turn **right** on a track. In only 30m, before the track begins to ascend and opposite another path on the right, turn **left** on a very narrow path between some small oaks. In 100m, the path crosses a rutted track. It then crosses a ditch and, 50m later, it finally joins a wide path coming from the right.

2 In 40m, your path reaches a junction with a wide hard-surfaced track with a series of steep banks ahead. Turn **left** on the track for only 20m, then sharp **right**, keeping to the left of an oak tree, and go up a short but fairly steep slope ahead. (There are even steeper slopes to its right, which are best avoided.) At the top of the slope, turn **right** on the main path which is joined in 70m by a path coming from the right. In 40m, you have a clear fork ahead. Take the **left** option. At the top of a slope, you come to a junction with a line of bricks across



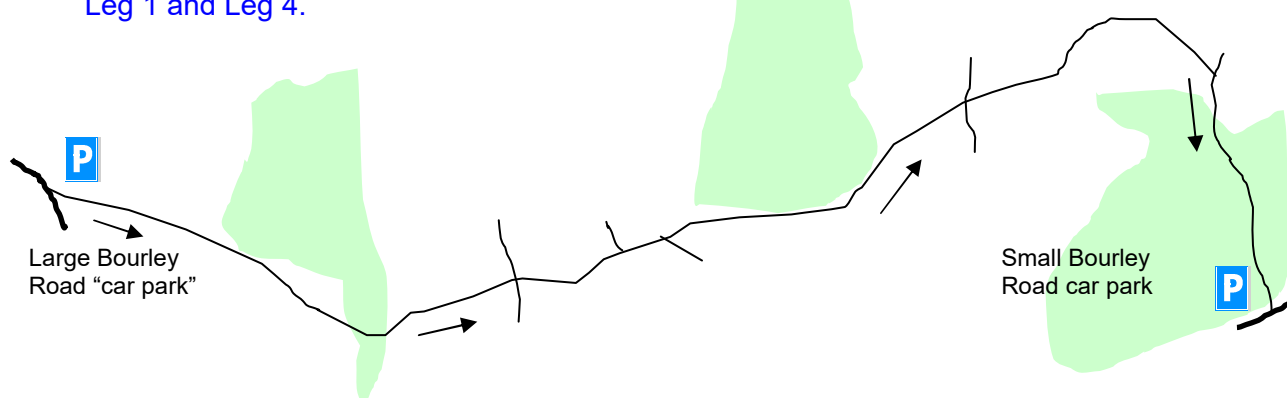
your path. Turn sharp **left** on a wide track and, in 20m, opposite a large concrete structure, turn sharp **right** on a path downhill. *If you began the walk at the Rowhill Nature Reserve, you will recognise this path from the outward journey.* In 60m, branch **left** steeply downhill through hollies. On reaching a fence, veer **left** to a noticeboard and swing-gate, the main road and the Rowhill Nature Reserve where the walk began.



For refreshments, the *Royal Arms* pub/restaurant is only a short distance away through the Nature Reserve, in Surrey. With your back to the road go to the left-hand side of the car park (near a house) and take a wide ascending path to the right of the Field Centre. At a tall oak, keep right and keep ever onwards, gently uphill. Follow the path through the hollies until you reach a lane, Rowhills. Turn **right** on the lane and **left** on the main road quickly reaching the pub. The *Royal Arms* is open all day at weekends and has a pleasant patio.

The Bourley Traverse 1½ km=1 mile

This path runs from the **large** Bourley Road car park to the **small** Bourley Road car park. Take this route if you are doing the **South Walk**, as a link between Leg 1 and Leg 4.



This is an easy-to-follow stretch where in principle you stay constantly on the main twisty path. Go to the back of the car park, furthest from the road, where you find a one-bar metal gate. Continue ahead on a wide shingle path. The main path zigzags uphill over a grassy area and goes through a band of trees into gorse. Here, avoid a minor track on the right. At the top, go straight over a track. Your path goes down a shallow dip, where a track joins from the left, then up again. *Ahead you can see Farnborough Airport and you may see planes taking off, especially if an air show is in progress. The spire of the Royal Garrison Church in Aldershot can also be seen.* Avoid a track here forking right. You soon pass another junction and a pine wood on your left. The track runs level and later descends. Stay on the main track for a good 400m, ignoring all paths off until you reach a major 3-way junction. Turn **right** here on a wide track, avoiding a lesser path that forks off right into woodland, soon to reach a metal barrier and the small Bourley Road car park.

Getting there

By car: If coming from the north on the A3, take the A31 (Hog's Back) and, just before Farnham, at the large roundabout, follow signs for *Odiham, Badshot Lea, Farnborough*. Soon you see signs for *Aldershot*. Follow the A325, straight on at each junction, until you pass the *Royal Arms*, and continue to the next small roundabout.

For the **Nature Reserve car park**, turn **right** on Cranmore Lane: the car park for the Rowhill Nature Reserve is on the right.

For the **Aldershot Road car park**, continue ahead on the main road for 2 km, going straight over a large roundabout; turn **left** on the A323 signposted *Fleet*; in 3 km, turn **left** signposted *Church Crookham*; the car park is 1 km on the right.

If coming from the M3, come off at exit 4, follow the Farnborough Road (A325) through the town and past the airport on your right

For the **Nature Reserve car park**, 3 km=2 miles after the airport, continue ahead over a large roundabout and turn sharp **left** at the next small roundabout.

For the **Aldershot Road car park**, 1½ km=1 mile after the airport, filter **left** as for A323 *Fleet*, keep following the A323 *Fleet*, and, after 2 miles=3 km, turn **left** signposted *Church Crookham*; the car park is 1 km on the right.

By bus/train: there is a bus stop on Cranmore Lane opposite the Nature Reserve; various buses run from Aldershot station to here.

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