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## Alice Holt Forest

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Distance: 11 km=7 miles

easy walking

Region: Hampshire, Surrey

Date written: 11-feb-2013

Author: Botafuego

Last update: 15-jun-2017

Refreshments: Alice Holt Centre, Rowledge, Holt Pound

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

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

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*Long dry woodland trails*

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### In Brief

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This wonderful woodland walk has one remarkable feature: it is entirely *firm underfoot!* The fresh green of the trees make it a perfect walk in all seasons, even when the climate is not too clement. The route is within the boundaries of Hampshire but we have placed Surrey alongside it in the *Region* heading because the Alice Holt Forest and all the places around are always described as *near Farnham, Surrey*. Indeed, the “pub” at Rowledge is in Surrey.



There are no nettles, **no stiles** and **no mud** (well *hardly* any!) so any sensible shoes and clothing will be fine. Your dog too will thrive.



The walk begins at the small unmarked Gravel Hill Road car park on the edge of Alice Holt Forest. The nearest postcode is GU10 4LJ but for navigation purposes, you need to set **GU10 5JD** which will take you past Bentley Mill (super B&B!) on the Gravel Hill Road. The Alice Holt Centre (postcode **GU10 4LS**) seems like another *possible* start but it has become prohibitively expensive to park there all day. You can also get to the walk by train (see end). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



*Alice Holt is such an ancient forest that no one is completely certain how it got its name. Most likely, it came from Ælfsige anglo-saxon bishop of Winchester and “holt” meaning simply “a wood”. The Forestry Commission took it over in 1924 and established a Research Centre which advises on forest management, nursery, soils etc. anywhere in the country and does extensive research here. They also re-established an Arboretum (close by, though not on this walk), with the help of an army of volunteers. The forest is mainly planted with conifers but these are being gradually culled in the broadwood sections to encourage native trees.*

## The Walk



### Leg 1: Gravel Hill to the Alice Holt Centre 4 km=2½ miles

- 1** From the car park, go ahead past a metal barrier and follow the wide stony path. After 200m, ignore paths left and right. (The right-hand path leads to a picnic area and a circular path. The left-hand path leads to the Alice Holt Research Centre.) After another 400m, go straight over a tarmac path. (On the left is a conservation pond. The path on the right leads to Bentley Station - see the walk *Bentley and Isington Mill* in this series.) The path curves left with great views to your right over Hampshire (summer foliage permitting). Just after, avoid side tracks left and right. The path descends between cypress trees, then ascends again and runs level amongst pines,

becoming more grassy. After another level section, a total of 2 km from the car park, your path runs next to a tree plantation on your left.

- 2 Avoid the path that forks left here (**careful!** some walkers miss this landmark! it may be obscured by undergrowth) but, 20m further, turn **right** on a path. [Mar 2017: this path was temporarily closed for forestry work, making the next coloured section the best option; however, people were still using the “closed” path.] If you are adventurous, and want to stay **dry**, you can **instead** continue on the main path for 120m and find a *very narrow but clear path*, almost hidden, on the right – beware of an *extremely* narrow one just before it – and follow it through dense conifers, wheeling left a bit at the end through some tall pines [over a fallen tree 2013]. This takes you to the Y-junction mentioned below. After nearly 300m on this straight path, at a junction, turn sharp **left** to arrive in about 200m at a **Y-junction**. Take the **right** fork on a path that takes you through a wooden barrier. Keep straight ahead with houses and gardens on your right and, after 130m, turn **right** on a quiet residential road. In about 250m, just after *St Huberts* (with its little turret and wind vane) turn **left** on a narrow footpath. This takes you past a filling station (with a small shop) to the main A325 road.

- 3 Cross the road carefully and turn **right** to reach, at a junction, the site of the demolished *Halfway House* pub at Bucks Horn Oak. Fork **left** by this building on a side road signed to *Dockenfield*. In 100m, ignore a muddy byway on your left, continue a further 150m and turn **left** onto the tarmac drive which is the entrance to Alice Holt Forest. Avoid a left fork that only goes to the office and stay on the snaking drive, passing a car park on your right and forking **right** to the café, toilets and cycle hire centre. *The new eco-friendly Visitor Centre is still under construction after delays.*



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*The Alice Holt Forest Woodland Park is a big pull for families, vying with nearby Birdworld. You will see a range of forest walks, mostly unchallenging, and you can hire a bike or “go ape” in the trees. Best of all of course is the fine woodland location. A long-distance trail, the Shipwright’s Walk, runs through here on its way to Portsmouth.*

## Leg 2: Alice Holt Centre to Rowledge 4 km=2½ miles

- 4 *Instead of looking for the shortest way, this section takes you in a loop round the best part of the forest, but always finding dry paths.* [Mar 2017: The start of the *Willows Green Trail* used in this section was closed until late April; till then do as follows: Standing with the entrance to the cycle hire shop on your left, turn **right** along the drive until you reach a tarmac path on your left; follow this past the car park on the right and turn **left** at the *Willow Green Trail* marker post; soon you reach a fork: take the **left**-hand path, marked as *short route and visitor centre*; continue on this path until you reach a T junction, with a view of the bridge on your left; turn **right**, as for *The Long Route*; re-join the path at (\*).] From near the café, toilets and cycle hire, turn **right** downhill on a path marked as the *Willows Green Trail*. Your path goes over a bridge with railings. At a T-junction, turn **left** on the *Long Route*, soon reaching a T-junction with a wide sandy gravel track. Turn **right** here. (\*) In 200m you reach a crossing path with waymarkers, plus a stick man and a Gruffalo. (As a detour, to see two wooden owls, turn **right** for 75m, then retrace your steps.) Turn **left** on the *red route*, a grey gravel path, passing several stick huts or “dens” as your path veers right. After 200m on this path, at a T-junction, turn **left** on another wide path, with houses sometimes visible beyond. Keep ahead on this path for about 350m, avoiding a left fork half way along, until you reach

a major T-junction, indicated by a fork in the path. Keep **left** here and turn **left** as you join another path at the T-junction, still on the *red route*.

5 You will be following this path more-or-less straight for over 600m. In about 100m, avoid a left fork at a marker post, thus leaving the *red route*. Your excellent wide path snakes its way downhill. In a dip, you pass regardless a junction sharp left and, 50m later, reach a crossing path. Turn **right** on the crossing path (the path left would take you back to the Centre). You will be following this main, rather curvy, path for over 700m. Your path wheels left and goes over a crossing path. **Care! some walkers go wrong here.** Your next encounter is with that byway (rather muddy in winter) across your path. Your path curves right as it meets a grassy path on the left and goes over a stream. Stay on the main path as it bends **sharp left** and then **right** again, avoiding all the lesser, muddy side paths.

6 On your left soon is *George's Lonely Oak*, named after a long-serving forester. You soon reach another junction. Turn **left** here to avoid the muddy horse path ahead and quickly **right** again, staying on the wide dry path, passing some cypresses, a picnic table and a large wooden ball. This takes you, in another 100m or so, to a very wide path at an oblique T-junction. Turn **right** on this wide path to reach, in 150m, a 5-way junction.

[An alternative route in woodland, visiting the Lodge Pond but missing the village, is described at the end.](#)

7 Now leave the main route, which bends left, by taking another wide path, a fraction right, almost straight ahead. In about 200m, you reach the border of the forest indicated by a wooden gate and a small car park. A small community on the Surrey border, welcome to Rowledge! St James' church is on your left. Keep straight ahead on the lane to a junction in the village.

*Rowledge was once a rowdy and lawless place. It was originally called "Row-ditch" because of the scuffles that took place between local youths across the ditch that formed the Surrey/Hampshire border. The Victorians renamed it "Roughditch". The church authorities finally tamed the village by obtaining two acres of land from the Alice Holt Forest for a church, churchyard and vicarage (which you just passed). How things change! Recently it was runner-up in the Fullers Surrey Village of the Year Competition and its most violent pursuits are salsa dancing and badminton. The populace has grown from 50 dwellings and 250 inhabitants in 1841 to 600 and 1600 respectively today, partly due to the railway in Farnham and the rise of nearby Aldershot as an army town. The best-known building in this modest parish is probably Frensham Heights (originally Fir Grove House), built by the brewer Charles Charrington and now a private school. For a first-hand account of life in the village, seek out "The Way We Were - a Social History of the Village of Rowledge" by Flora Westlake.*

### Leg 3: Rowledge to Gravel Hill 3 km=2 miles

8 Turn **left** on School Road, passing the *Cherry Tree* pub on your right, now an "Indian" restaurant, although it has retained the pub sign. Continue on the road, passing various houses, a recreation ground and a parking area. *Rowledge House, on the right shortly with the dragon-crested outhouse, was a hostel during World War II for Jewish child refugees who arrived on the Kindertransport.* At a T-junction, turn **left** on Fullers Road. Avoid a footpath immediately on the right, continue on the road for 250m and, just past *Fox Hollow* (**don't miss!** the house sign is askew and buried in the hedge), turn **right** on a footpath (*this turn is easy to overlook!*).

9 This path, which is *almost* dry, soon takes you over a gurgling stream, through woodland and out to a junction of farm tracks. Keep straight ahead and, after passing an entrance to a farm, keep ahead on a hard-core grassy track. Finally, you reach the main A325 road. Cross the road carefully and go through a swing gate directly opposite into the front yard of the *Forest Inn*, Holt Pound, a rudimentary family pub and a place for last-chance refreshment, but with a very limited range of ales.



10 Pass the pub on your left and go through a wooden gate into a meadow by a 4-way fingerpost. Fork **left** here across the grass, aiming for a metal swing-gate in front of a house visible in the trees ahead. (In summer foliage, head towards the top end of the left-hand fence until the gate comes into view.) Go through the gate, turn **right** in front of the house and go past a wooden barrier back into the forest, avoiding side paths. This long straight (and fairly dry) path makes for a pleasant final saunter back to your starting point. After pines, a more open section, and more pines and birch, you go over a crossing path with views on the right (summer foliage permitting). Finally, after a total of just over 1 km on this path, you go through a metal barrier to a lane. Turn **left** on the lane and in 20m fork **right**, back to the car park where the walk began.



For final refreshments, there is the *Bull Inn*, on the A31, where you turned off, a celebrated pub serving Ringwood and St Austells and a noted dinery.

### [Alternative Woodland Route via Lodge Pond](#) 1½ km=1 mile

At the 5-way junction, turn **left** with the main path. The path soon wheels sharply round to the left, avoiding a muddy horse track ahead, almost doubling back in its direction. About 500m after the junction, just by a raised plinth (site of a vanished wooden bench), turn **right** on a good side path. This path leads to the Lodge Pond, a well-known scenic spot and a good photo opportunity. However, your route is *not* round the pond. About 20m **before** the path that goes round the pond, turn **right** on a woodland path through a wooden barrier. This long straight path has a few muddy sections but always with a bypass through the trees. Finally it exits, via an enclosed section, out to Fullers Road on the outskirts of Rowledge. Turn **right** on the road and, in 70m, turn **left** at a fingerpost onto a footpath. Now continue the walk from section [9](#).

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## Getting there

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By car: You reach the car park from the A31 road (signposted *Winchester, Alton*), just 3 miles=5 km west of Farnham, Surrey. If coming from the east, go straight ahead at a roundabout, ignore several left turns until you cross the Hampshire border; just after you glimpse the *Bull Inn* on the right, take a **left** filter and turn **left**, in front of a clump of pines on narrow **Gravel Hill Road**. Follow this fabulously twisty road for just under a mile, entering the dense forest and going over a railway. The car park is  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile after the railway bridge, the first obvious right fork on a gravel, rather uneven, track. Park at the end, or tight along the edge if full.

If coming from the west (Alton, Winchester), **Gravel Hill Road** is on the **right**, at a signed crossroads after Bentley, just before the *Bull Inn*.



By bus/train:

Bentley station is only 600m from the walk: cross the line, take the wide signposted track going southeast, turn **right** at a crossing path on the walk.

Bus 18 from Farnham station to Rowledge. Or special bus service for *Bird World* (enquire locally), getting off at Forest Inn. Check the timetables.