



Alice Holt Forest

Distance: 11 km=7 miles

easy walking

Region: Hampshire, Surrey

Date written: 11-feb-2013

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Date revised: 6-aug-2018

Refreshments:

Alice Holt Centre, Rowledge, Holt Pound

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

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Long dry woodland trails

In Brief



This wonderful woodland walk has one remarkable feature: at the time of writing (on a wet sleety February day) it was 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*. In fact, most of Rowledge is in Surrey.



There is only one short patch of nettles (on the path after Rowledge), **no stiles** and **no mud** (well *hardly* any!) so any sensible shoes and clothing will be fine, except in a very wet season when boots are recommended. Because of the extensive woodland, this walk is also excellent if you want to escape very hot sun. 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.) Soon the path curves left with great views to your right over Hampshire (summer foliage permitting). Just after, avoid side paths left and right and ignore a yellow arrow. 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, the pristine forest ends and your path passes a tree plantation on your left with a grassy path forking left beside it.

- 2 Go just 20m further along the track and, turn **right** at a wide junction on a much narrower grassy (and rather stony) path. (As a guide, this is the first clear right turn for a good 2 km.) After nearly 300m on this straight path, at a junction, just before a cleared area with new saplings, turn sharp **left** to arrive in about 200m at a 3-way junction. Veer **right** here 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 the road junction in the village of Bucks Horn Oak. Fork **left** next to a new house on a side road signed to *Dockenfield* and *Alice Holt Forest*. In 100m, turn **left** on a byway. (In case this byway is muddy, you could go another 150m and turn left at the entrance for cars.) The path enters woods and in another 250m you reach the main driveway of the Centre, with the car park on your left. Turn **right** and veer left to find all the facilities: the café, toilets and cycle hire centre. *The new eco-friendly Visitor Centre and Café (no great shakes) have now been completed.*



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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 *This section takes you in a loop round the best part of the forest, always finding dry paths.* Opposite the café and cycle hire there is a square roofed shelter and picnic area with open sides. Take a path past the shelter on your left, going downhill on a path marked as the *Willows Green Trail (reverse route)*. This nice wide path curves right and 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 (the colour is bleaching to pink!)*, 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 In about 100m, avoid a left fork at a marker post, thus leaving the *red route*. This excellent wide path snakes its way downhill for another ½ km. In a dip, you pass regardless a junction sharp left and, 50m later, you reach a crossing path. Turn **right** on this crossing path (*don’t miss this turn!*). (2018: you may notice that you have joined the new *Family Cycle Trail*, with **blue markers**: you will be following it for nearly 2 km.) In 250m your path wheels

left and in 150m it goes over a crossing path. The next crossing, in nearly 250m, is a byway (rather muddy in winter). In 100m your path curves right as it meets a grassy path on the left and goes over a stream. In 200m, stay on the main path as it bends **sharp left** and then veers **right**, avoiding all the lesser, muddy side paths.

- 6 On your left soon is *George's Lonely Oak*, named after a long-serving forester. Nearly ½ km after that sharp left turn, you 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, still on the [Family Cycle Trail](#), 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 (and the [Family Cycle Trail](#)), which bends away left, by taking another wide path, almost straight ahead, through trees. 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 Take the first **left** onto School Road. You pass on your right, a bowling club, a recreation ground and a small 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* and immediately before some new housing, turn **right** on a hidden footpath. (This path is easy to miss as signpost is not visible till you turn.)
- 9 This path (which was *almost* dry at the time of writing) soon takes you over a bridge across 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 come out beside a large metal gate to 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.

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Pass the pub wall on your left and go through a wooden gate into a meadow by a 4-way fingerpost giving you a choice of two paths cutting across the grass. Take the **left**-hand fork, aiming for a metal kissing-gate (which may be hard to see at first) at the **right** end of a wooden boundary fence. (In winter you can also see a house there.) 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 wide 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, you have a wide choice including the celebrated *Anchor Inn* at Lower Froyle (postcode GU34 4NA) and the *Hen and Chicken* pub, on the A31 (postcode GU34 4JH).

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

At the 5-way junction, turn **left** with the very wide main path. The path soon wheels sharply round to the left, almost doubling back in its direction. About 500m after the 5-way junction, just after a stout wooden bench, turn **right** by purple and blue waymarkers onto 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 takes you through a wooden barrier, zigzagging left-right onto a path between hedges, out to Fullers Road on the outskirts of Rowledge, opposite some new housing. Turn **right** on the road and, in 70m, turn **left** onto a hidden footpath. (This path is immediately after the new houses, just before a driveway into a more mature house. The signpost is not visible until you enter.) Now continue the walk from section [9](#).

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Getting there

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.