



Bramshill and Hazeley Heath

Distance: 9½ km=6 miles

easy walking

Region: Hampshire

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Last update:

Refreshments: picnic or pubs in Eversley after the walk

Map: Explorer 159 (Reading) and 144 (Basingstoke)

but the maps in this guide should be sufficient

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

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Woodland, extensive heath, streams, long trails, quiet lane

In Brief

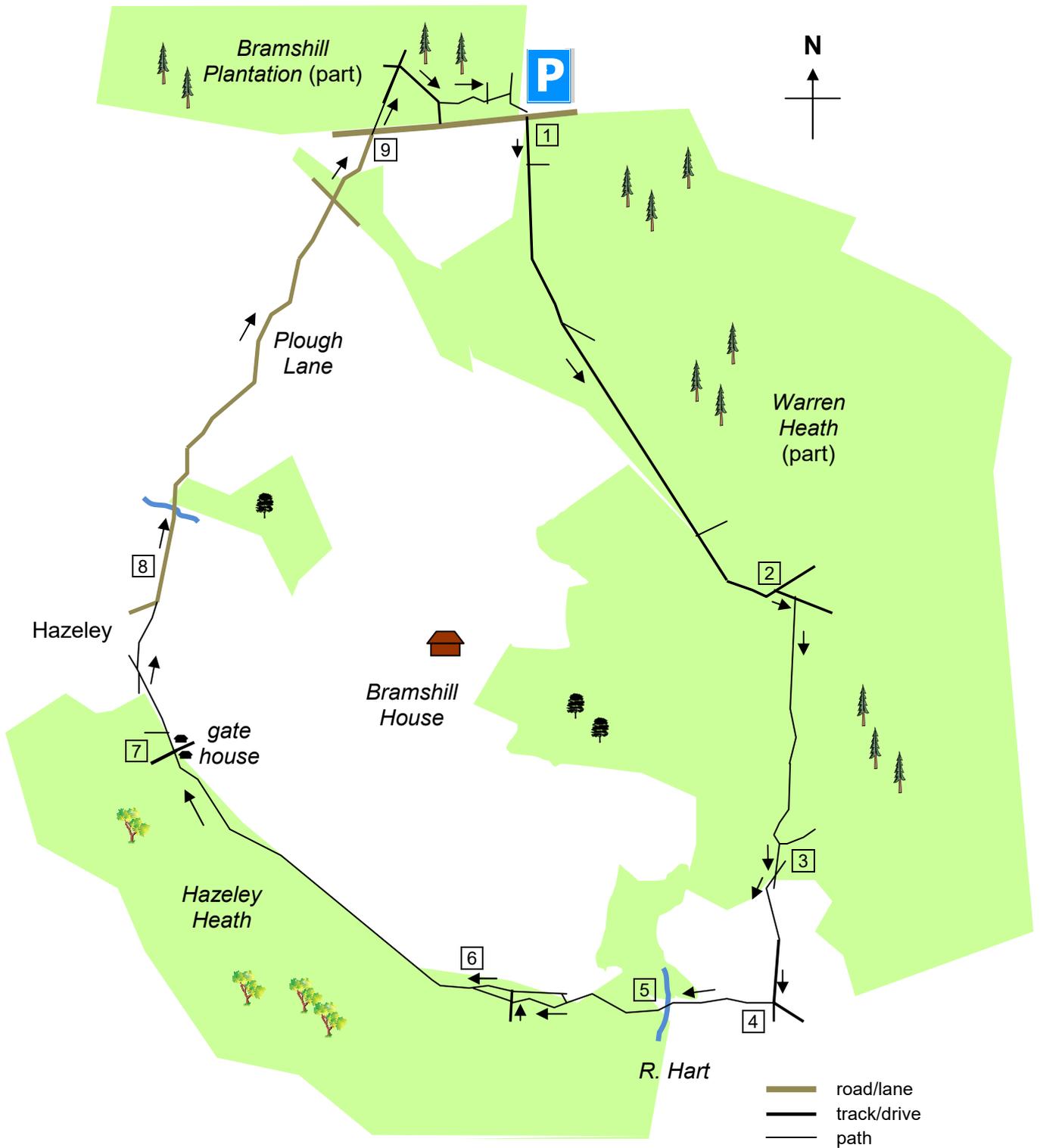
This is a journey of discovery. Hampshire which is often regarded as a land of cosy cottages and gentle meadows actually contains vast heaths extending over distances where you can be forever lost, rarely meeting another soul. This walk gives you variety, mixing those wild spaces with smaller gems and delights. Because of the extensive heath with tall pines, and the (fairly) dry terrain, this walk will be excellent in all seasons, including winter.



There is very little farm land along this route, with practically no nettles or scratchy undergrowth, so shorts should be fine. In summer, the terrain was dry heath, wide paths and tarmac. In other seasons there could be some wet along the woodland trails, making boots advisable. With **no stiles** and only one road to cross – the one at the start and finish – this walk should be ideal for your dog too.

The walk begins at the **Bramshill Road** car park, west of Eversley, Hampshire, accessible via the M3 at Hook, or the M4 at Reading. The car park is 1 km (¾ mile) east of the village of Bramshill, on the main Bramshill Road. It is easily located, being situated directly beneath several HT power lines. There is no exact postcode because the car park is not near any buildings, but if you approach from the east, you would pass close to **RG27 0PS**. The exact location is www.w3w.co/prepares.firework.strongly. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Map of The Walk



The Walk

The car park is situated on the edge of the Bramshill Plantation. This huge area of deep forest and ponds with a network of narrow paths and wide trails attracts numerous visitors for recreational walking, cycling and riding. This walk takes you in the other direction to Warren Heath and Hazeley Heath, giving you a taste of the Bramshill Plantation at the end of the walk and tempting you to explore it another time. (There are a number of published walks available, but the whole area seems to have free access, so it is rewarding to plan your own unique routes.)

- 1 From the Bramshill road car park, cross the main road and take a signed footpath opposite the entrance, going past a metal barrier onto a concrete driveway. Shortly, the path takes you past another barrier and changes to gravel. In a further 200m, ignore a path on your left and keep ahead on a slightly narrower path. *You will be following this path across Warren Heath for nearly 2km, partly on a public bridleway and partly on rider's paths. On your left is a vast area of woodland, stretching much further eastwards.* The tall power lines which you follow for the first part of this walk act as guides. Stay close to the fence on your right at all times. *Beyond the fence are the grounds of Bramshill Park and House, now the National Police College, a much-haunted place as soon to be revealed in the notes.* In late summer, patches of purple heather and blackberries line the path. Soon the power lines are on your left. More than 1½ km from where you set off, you will notice that the landscape has opened out with a wide track on your left. Ignore this junction and keep straight ahead. The power lines switch to the right again. Your path, now very wide, elbows left. You come to a fork with a choice of two wide straight paths ahead.
- 2 Take the **right** fork, staying close to the wire fence. But, in only 70m, turn **right** at a junction, on another straight wide path, still with the fence on your right. Your path descends through an area of tall pines and bracken known as Birch Bottom. Stay on the main path at all times, as you pass a horse jump and other distractions. The path descends further into a lush valley and rises out of it. Avoid narrower paths on the left and keep to the main path as it curves right past an area of rhododendrons. Finally, after almost 1km on this path, you come to a 3-way junction where the main path curves away sharply left. This is where you **leave** the main path.
- 3 Take the somewhat narrower path straight ahead at the 3-way junction, staying close to the wire fence. As you begin to descend, after only 80m, you meet a diagonal crossing path. Turn **right** here on a relatively narrow path which is enclosed between fences. *You have joined part of the Three Castles Path which runs between Windsor Castle and Winchester.* The path runs beneath power lines, elbows left, and leads through a small stud farm. Slip through a large kissing-gate and keep straight ahead, following power lines. You pass a business park and the path changes to a tarmac lane. In 80m, you reach a junction where the lane elbows left, with a track and a ford straight ahead, and a metal kissing-gate on the right.
- 4 Turn **right** through the kissing-gate and a small wooden gate into a small horse pasture. Walk to the end and go **left** through a small metal gate, then **right** through another small metal gate, over a bridge-with-rails and through a metal kissing-gate. Keep ahead on a narrow path next to a wire fence on your right. A large metal kissing-gate leads out suddenly into a wild open meadow. Your path crosses the centre of the meadow and leads



up and over a long bridge across the River Hart (which runs through Bramshill Park and which you will meet again). **But just before the bridge on your right is a grassy platform with willows and more views of the river, a possible picnic spot.** After the Hart bridge your path continues through a glowing space of birch and pink heather at the start of Hazeley Heath.

Hazeley Heath is a precious survival from a vast area of lowland heath that once covered much of the UK. This tranquil nature reserve is home to some rare wildlife, including nightjars, tree pipits, woodlarks and silver-studded blue butterflies.

5 Always keep to the main path. Soon you are joined from the left by another path and you come over a long boardwalk. The path twists to the left and enters woodland, going over a 2-plank bridge. Very soon, looking to your right, you will see a house with brown wooden cladding. Strictly speaking, the footpath turns right here and left alongside more houses, past a large metal gate, but everyone seems to keep **straight on** along the woodland path. This path climbs gently over tree roots and suddenly ends at a gravel drive that serves this hamlet. Your easiest route now is **right** on the drive, down to the delectable (grade-II listed, from the early 1600s) *Purdie's Farmhouse*, and **left** on the drive leading to a footpath into the woods. This said, it is possible to cross straight over the drive onto a continuation of the path, which looks very overgrown but soon improves; this path runs over a course of birch logs and comes down to meet the wide footpath, where you can turn **left**.

6 You will be walking this wide woodland path, with the heath on your left and pastures on your right, for nearly 2km, all the way to the outskirts of Hazeley. After 400m, keep straight on past the entrance to *Wedgewood Farm*. Next, after a further 300m, is the large *Crabtree Lodge*. Avoid a footpath on your left here, keeping straight on through an arch in the hedge and across the grass. *Check your watch against the clock turret.* On your left is a lily pond but, alas, the bench is private. Continue on the woodland path, with more pastures on your right. Soon a bridleway joins. For the next 750m, the heath is clearer, until your path enters a short winding section of woodland and comes out opposite the massive double gatehouse of Bramshill Park.

Bramshill House is sited in the ancient manor of "Bromshyll". It was built in the early 1600s by 11th Baron Edward la Zouche, famous for living in Hackney, voting against the execution of Mary Queen of Scots and inviting on a stag hunt the Archbishop of Canterbury who accidentally sent a man to Heaven. The house was nearly bought by the Duke of Wellington who chose the nearby Stratford Saye instead. The last private owner, before it became a Police College, was Ronald Nall-Cain, 2nd Baron Brocket, a Nazi sympathiser. The house is a Jacobean glory, built in Renaissance style, with many Italian features such as covered galleries, or "loggias". The interior has a long gallery and other state rooms, with tapestries and furniture of the period.



Bramshill is possibly the most haunted house in England, with at least 14 "ghosts" (maybe inspiring the BBC comedy series): a Grey Lady, her beheaded husband, a Green Man (a gardener?) who drowned in the lake or threw himself off a cliff, a child who cries and tries to hold visitors' hands, a lady dressed as Queen Anne, a knight in armour, a lady in 17th-century dress, a nun, a young man dressed in tennis clothes who fell from a train, a small boy who fell from a roof. The house could also be the location of the "White Lady" – a bride who hid in a wooden chest and was discovered 50 years later; King Michael I of

Romania who was exiled here saw the White Lady pass through his bedroom every night and asked to be moved.

Bramshill Park is a landscaped garden of more than 100 ha, including a large lake. The house and grounds have occasional open days – check the internet.

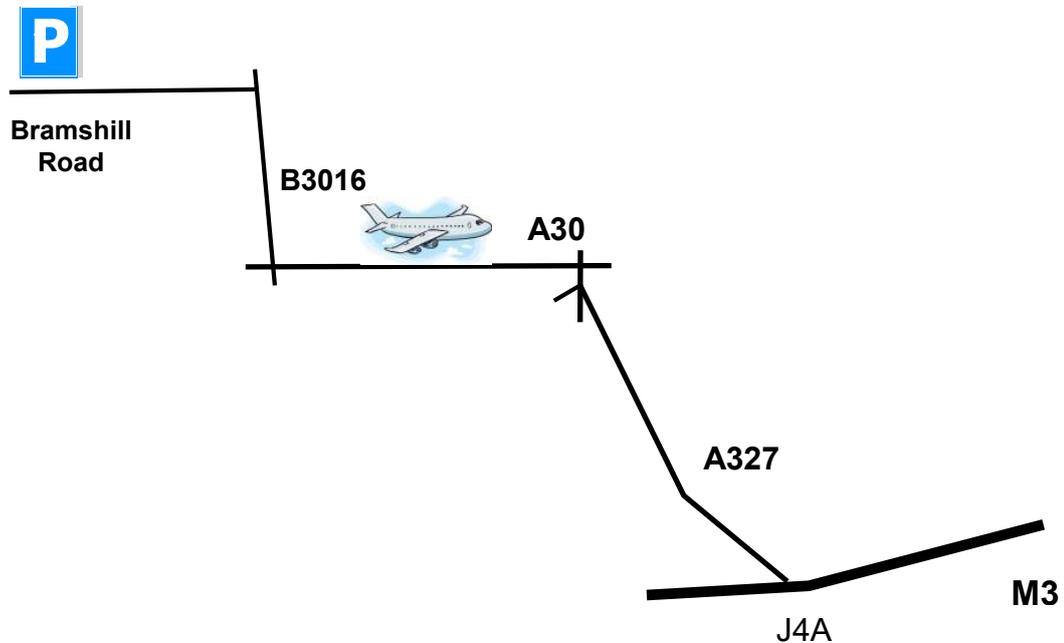
- 7 Continue straight over, ignoring the driveway on your left. In 50m, ignore a footpath on your left and keep straight ahead as usual, staying on the wide horse path. After 250m or so, you finally pass a blue waymarker, just before a path joins from your left. In another 15m you reach a marker post with blue and yellow arrows. Fork **right** here, eschewing the left-hand option which leads to some of the houses of Hazeley (although it also leads to a convenient bench seat). After 250m of dark woodland you reach a tarmac lane, Plough Lane, at a bend. Keep straight ahead along this very quiet narrow lane encountering only very little traffic from the two farms along the way. You will be walking to the end of the lane, a total of 2km, with a chance to pick blackberries in late summer.
- 8 In 300m you pass *Lea Farm*, which incorporates a day care centre. You cross the River Hart again and a welcome sign for Bramshill. In a further km you pass *Moor Place Farm* (dating from the 1400s, once the manor house of *Great Bramshill Manor*). 400m later, you come to a cross roads. Continue straight on. In a further 250m the lane ends at the main Bramshill Road.
- 9 This next section gives you a too-brief taster of the vast Bramshill Plantation (see the note at the start). Carefully cross the main road and take a narrow path into the woods, meeting a junction of wider paths. Take a wide sandy path straight ahead. In 200m you meet a wide tarmac crossing path. Turn **right** on this path. In 200m the tarmac bends right. Leave the tarmac here by keeping ahead, slightly to the left, on a wide sandy track. Continue for 250m, avoiding a tempting side path, to reach a T-junction. Turn **right** here, quickly reaching the Bramshill Road car park where the walk began.



Pubs in Bramshill and Hazeley are long gone. But for end-of-walk refreshments, there are several good pubs in Eversley, such as the *Chequers* (RG27 0NS) and *Golden Pot* (RG27 0NB).

Getting there

By car: Bramshill can be accessed from the M3 motorway. Come off at Junction 4A. Go north on the A327 in the direction *Yateley, Reading* for 2 miles. Turn right at a roundabout as for *Reading, Yateley*. Turn **left** soon on the A30, going past Blackbushe Airport; after 2 miles, turn **right** on the B3016 as for *Reading, Eversley*. In 2 miles turn **left** as for *Bramshill*. The car park is in just over 1 mile, on the right, just as you pass beneath overhead power lines.



From the M4, Bramshill can be reached via the A327 near Reading.

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