



Woolmer Forest and Weavers Down

Distance: 9½ km=6 miles

easy walking *

Region: Hampshire

Date written: 27-apr-2020

Author: Botafuego

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Refreshments: Griggs Green

Map: Explorer 133 (Petersfield). *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Isolated village, moorland, heath, views

In Brief

This is a walk through two landscapes which will leave you breathless – not with effort (the going is easy) but with amazement at the stark and wondrous landscape of these two open forests. At the high plateau in Woolmer Forest, for miles in each direction, you can see no signs of human habitation. The walk starts at one extraordinary isolated village and calls in at a small settlement with a legendary pub (to enquire at the *Deers Hut*, ring 01428-724406).

Woolmer Forest encompasses a huge area which is a nature reserve but still officially Defence land. Starting in June 2020, the MoD have resumed military use but there is website so you can be fairly sure the area is open to the public. See our webpage: [MoD Access Times](#) and ring 01420-483405 beforehand as they make sudden changes, especially on a Bank Holiday. If the area is open, a small pedestrian / rider's gate is your way into the Forest, leading to some remarkable and little-known landscapes of pine forest and heath. But if a red flag is flying, you have to take the easy boundary path which is fine but noisy due to the A3 road.

* At the time of writing the pedestrian / rider's gate leading *out* of the Forest (point 5 on the mini-map) was padlocked, but it was a doddle to go over (or under) the gate. The sign on the other side of the gate clearly implies access is allowed “unless a red flag is flying”, so the reason is probably that the padlock is rusted in and no one has taken the trouble to open it, much to the chagrin of horse riders.

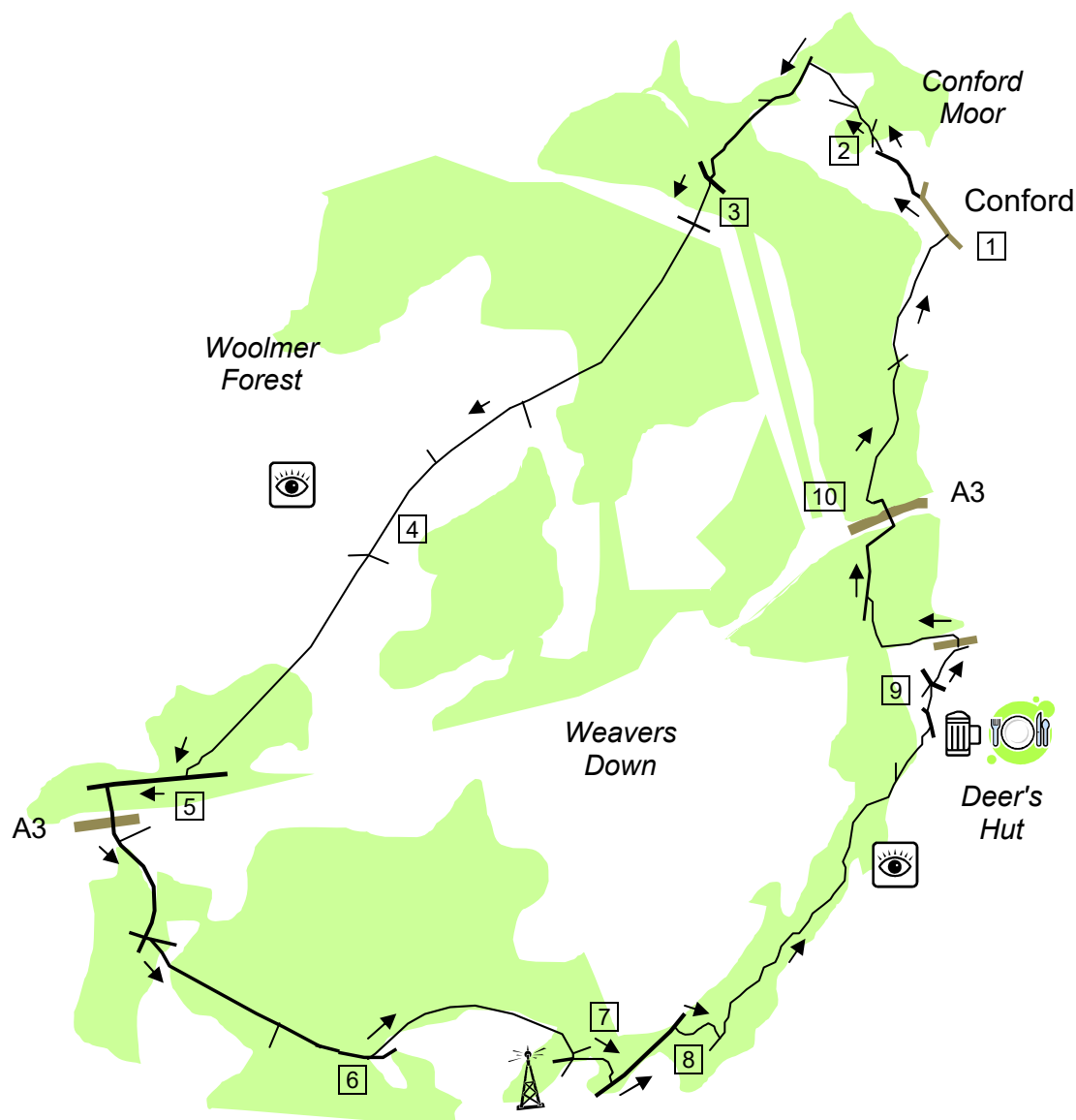


The paths on this walk are generally wide and sandy, if a little stony, with no undergrowth to speak of. Because of the springs that rise near the village, there are some muddy spots, mainly caked in summer. The author saw no dogs but there seems to be no good reason.

The walk begins in the village of **Conford**, near **Liphook, Hampshire**.
postcode **GU30 7QJ**, www.w3w.co/coach.exists.summit. Park considerably off-road. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Conford has an extraordinary history. It was settled by a small group of early “squatters” after the wars with Napoleon (the early 1800s). As they were deep in the woods, they managed to live here undetected and undisturbed. They had their own bakery, grocer and school, now all gone. Mary Tyfield’s books “Conford from Domesday to Victoria” and “Conford from Victoria to the Millennium” are a social history of the hamlet. (Tel: 01428-751258/751433 for more details.) Conford Moor, where most of the houses are, is owned by the National Trust.



- 1 Walk along the road in the village, away from the Village Hall, with houses on your right and the green with its red post box on your left, until the road curves right uphill. Leave the road here by forking **left** at a fingerpost on a gravel drive, going past more houses. In 150m or so, after the large wooden gates of *The Ferns*, fork **right** at a fingerpost on a narrower path up a slope. At the top you meet a 3-way fingerpost. Fork **left** here on a signed footpath.
- 2 The path lead through the woods of Conford Moor. Shortly you come out of the woods with various scattered trees and paths branching off. Keep dead straight ahead, staying on the level. (The descending left fork is also good but it goes through a boggy patch.) Just before houses, you reach a T-

junction in trees. Keep left and veer **left** on this wider bridleway. The path winds downhill and veers right in denser woodland. Avoid a right branch shortly, staying on the main path. A damp section through hollies leads to a wide bridge over the Holly Water. The sign indicates that you are entering an MoD area, although the public here are perfectly safe. Keep ahead on a wide path under tall spindly trees. The path zigzags under HT lines and reaches a very wide gravel track.

This is the perimeter path that encircles the Woolmer Forest, course of the old railway. You will see a lot of cyclists and even some walkers on this popular route. Indeed, you can turn **left** on the path and follow it as far as the Longmoor bridge in case the route described below happens to be barred.

Woolmer Forest is a 1300-ha SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and a Wealden Heaths Special Area of Conservation. It forms a high plateau and the various valley streams that drain it, trickle down to the River Wey in the south and to the River Rother in the north. Rare varieties of heather abound due to the acidic soil. Woolmer Forest is the only site in Britain that supports all six native reptiles (lizards and snakes) and all six native amphibians (newts etc.). The name comes from "Wulfamere" or "wolf's pool" and, spelt as "Wolmer", it appears frequently in Gilbert White's "Natural History" (see the "Selborne" walks in this series).

- 3 Cross straight over the track to a small rider's (and walker's) metal gate. The notice says you cannot enter if warning lights or flags are displayed. *This is very unlikely.* Your route is straight ahead up a stony path and under the pines of Keeper's Hill and Polecat Hill. Your path crosses a wide open strip under power lines and continues ahead in a splendid green corridor under pines. You come over a lively stream, through an unneeded metal gate and out into the open space of Long Down. This gently rising path takes you up to a high plateau with views in all directions and with many tempting paths leading off, well used by horse riders.



- 4 You come over a major crossing path with a rider's gate on the right. Keep straight on, shortly going through another rider's gate (not needed due to the large open gates). *There are loos on your left, available to "Site Events" (mainly U3A) – it's not certain if they are a permanent facility.* Your path continues straight ahead beside pine and birch forests, gently down and up. You reach a sandy and gorsy area and arrive at a large metal gate with a rider's / pedestrian gate on its right.

As the intro explains, this small gate is probably padlocked, with the tantalising popular wide perimeter path on the other side. Either gate can be climbed without too much difficulty. (Some people even lift their bikes over.) Another way is to lie on your back and slide under the small gate. As the sign implies, *entry is permitted*, barring any (very unlikely) military activity. For an easier climb, you can shift 150m or so along the fence to the right where there is a large gate without the wire mesh on the back, giving you more toe room.

- 5 Turn **right** on the wide perimeter path, probably joining other walkers and cyclists for the first time. In 200m or so, turn **left** on a wide concrete track which leads over a bridge across the A3 trunk road.

In 2020 military exercises resumed on Weavers Down and you may need to watch out for closures (hopefully not affecting this route). The MoD allows you freedom to roam. You may see friendly troops very occasionally but their exercises are always "dry" and this is not a danger area.

Immediately ignore a track on your left and follow this high-banked track as it curves right into trees. You arrive at a 5-point junction. Turn **left** through a small metal gate beside an animal grid and immediately take the **right** fork. You will be following this wide easy path for a total of $\frac{3}{4}$ km, avoiding all turn offs. After 450m you pass a junction on your right. In another 200m, the path flexes a little to the left and, shortly after, approaches a wide left-hand bend in an open area. **Leave** the main path just *before* the bend by turning **left** on a partly grassy wide path which runs parallel to the original path on your right.

- 6 Your path runs fairly straight under the shade of trees, making it pleasanter than the wide vehicle track on your right. Your course is between an open heath of birch and pines and, on the left, pine woods. Your path becomes sandy and you can see ahead to your right the 'phone tower on the hill, your next destination. Finally, where you meet a cleft in the ground, follow the main path as it curves **right** to the top of the hill next to the mast, with a junction of several wide tracks. If you cross over, passing the tower on your right, to the edge of the hill, you have some fine views, including of the Folly Pond (seen on the neighbouring walk "Weavers Down"). However, your route is the **second** path on your left, directly opposite the tower, a wide sandy steep rapidly descending path.

- 7 Your path bends right and comes down to a T-junction with a wide path beside a wire fence, one of the arterial paths that crisscross the heath. Turn **left** on this path, soon going through the smaller of two metal gates, passing an open sandy area of your right. Keep straight ahead, passing another large metal gate, next to a stone block to deter vehicles. In roughly another 200m, you meet a sandy driveway on your left. Immediately opposite the driveway, at a marker post, turn **right** on a narrow path into pines. *You may see other walkers blithely continuing on the wide track (and you may do the same to reach the Deers Hut a little sooner) but the path chosen here is one of the delights of this walk, giving you a memorable trip through the heather with great views all the way.*

- 8 This narrow path curves left and right through the heather and reaches a T-junction in front of a clump of pines. Turn **left** and follow a wide sandy path with great views on your right. Keep to the main undulating path through gorse and heather, avoiding all turnings off. After $\frac{3}{4}$ km you cross under wires. In another 120m, at a fork, take the **right** fork, shortly joining a path from the right. Finally you come down to a driveway by houses. Turn **left**, immediately reaching the *Deers Hut*.



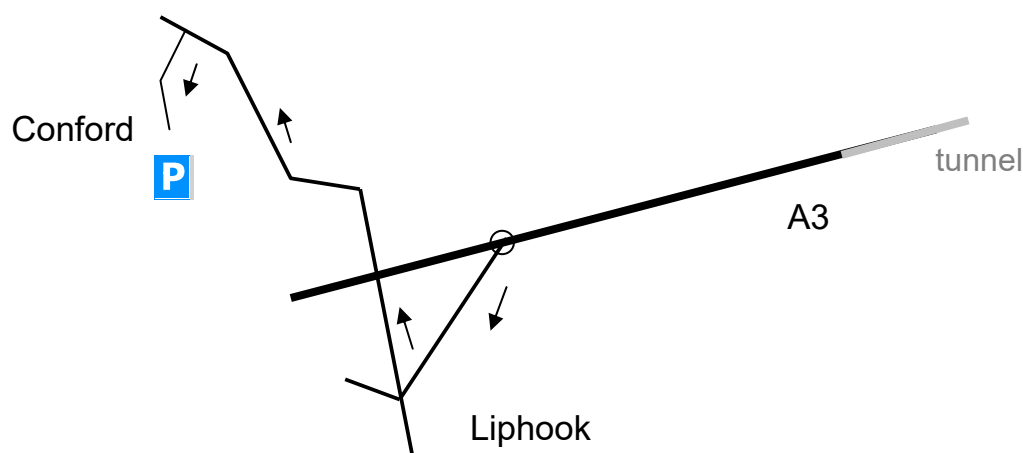
The Deers Hut was built as a Queen Anne Hunting Lodge in the late 1600s. Today, as well as providing good ales and food it is slap bang in the centre of a fine outdoor leisure area and is hugely popular.

- 9 After your break for refreshment, continue straight on in the same direction, crossing a patch of grass in front of the pub. Cross straight over a tarmac approach driveway and take a narrow gravel woodland path. In 120m, where you first glimpse a house ahead, turn **left** on a path leading to the road. Cross the road and turn sharp **left** on a signed bridleway. This path runs parallel to the road, then curves away and turns **right** under wires at a 2-way fingerpost, before it veers **right** away from them. You briefly meet power lines just as you reach a very wide crossing path. Turn **right** on this path which goes steeply up. Your path crosses the A3 by turning **right**, then **left** over a wide bridge and turning **left** at the other side.

- 10 Your path bends **right** and runs through a handsome stretch of beech-woods in an area called Holm Hills. You reach a surfaced drive with the first houses of Conford visible on your right. Cross straight over on a rather damp path which quickly improves. You pass the back gardens of houses on your right. A bridge leads over the Holly Water and you arrive shortly on the green in Conford village where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Conford is reached via **Liphook**, off the A3 trunk road. If coming through the Hindhead tunnel, go another 3 miles and turn left for *Liphook*. Once in the town, at the first mini-roundabout, take the **first** road sharp **right**, the B3004 Headley Road, signposted *Bordon*. After crossing the A3, stay on the main road for just over a mile and turn **left** at a sign for *Conford*.



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