



Silchester

Forest trails and a Roman town

Distance: 11 km=7 miles easy walking
plus 2 km=1¼ miles for an optional tour of the Roman town

Region: Hampshire, Berkshire

Date written: 4-jun-2015

Author: Botafuego

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Refreshments: Mortimer West End, Silchester

Last update: 18-aug-2021

Map: Explorer 159 (Reading) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Heath, woodland, forest trails, Roman town, historic church and village

In Brief

This walk takes you along two remarkable forests trails, beginning and ending on the luminous heath of Tadley Common. The central point is a visit to the site of an ancient Roman town followed by a break at the village inn which is open all day. For a possible earlier lunch break, there is a traditional pub with a difference: a genuine Italian restaurant offering home-made food from Turin. (To reserve at the *Red Lion*, ring 0118-970-0169. For the *Calleva Arms*, ring 0118-970-0305.)

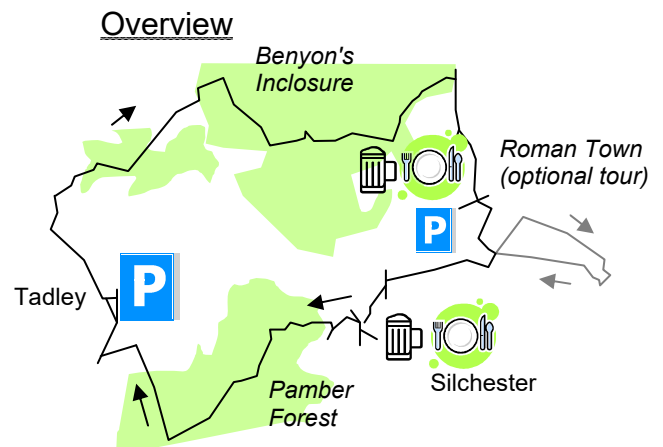


The paths in the two forests, Benyon's Inclosure and Pamber Forest, are winding, undulating, complex and rich in magnificent broadwoods. The notes here, as usual, are very detailed but you will need to stay alert to navigate the paths. For this reason, the walk will seem longer than its given distance.



The paths are fairly clear of nettles and brambles but you will encounter one or two patches, so shorts are wearable but inadvisable. The paths were clear of mud when the walk was researched in June but after a wet spell you will find boots an advantage. With few stiles, few main roads and no livestock, this walk should be fine for your dog too.

The walk begins at the **Tadley Common** car park, **Pamber Heath**, Hants, *approximate* postcode **RG26 3TG**, not far from Basingstoke and the M3. ("No vehicles" on the rules board refers to the heath, not the car park!) For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



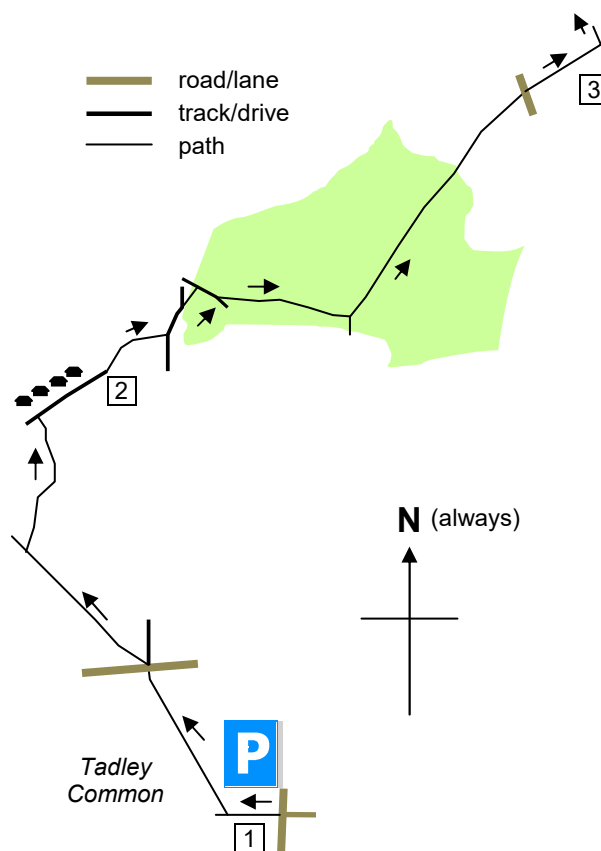
The Walk

Leg 1: Tadley Common to Mortimer West End 5 km=3 miles

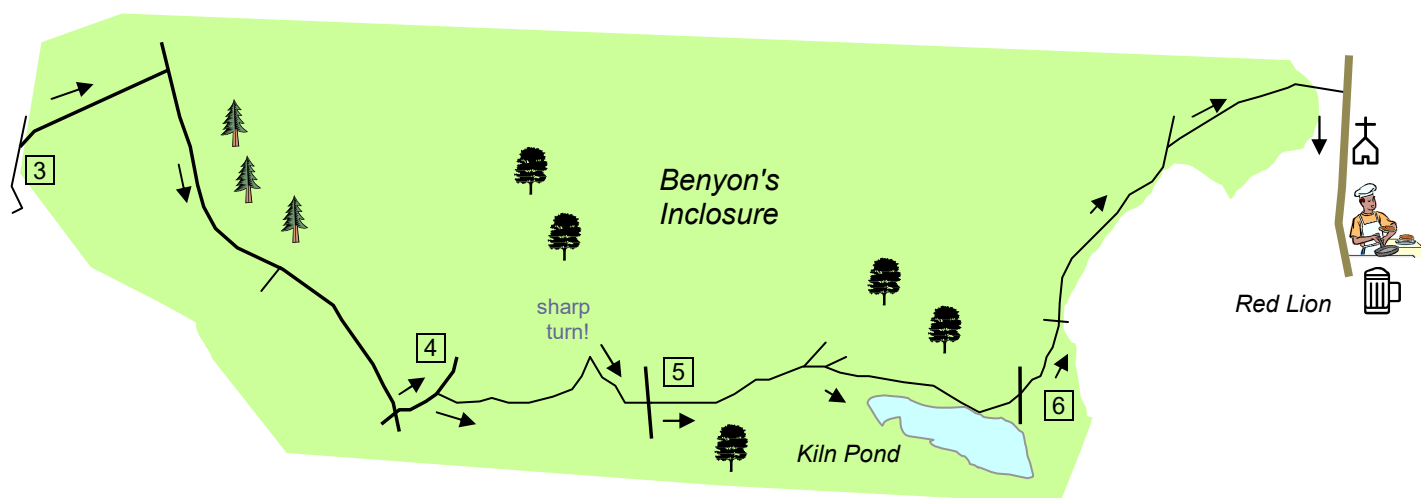
1 Starting in the Tadley Common car park, go straight ahead through a metal gate onto the heath. Go forward on the main path for 80m until you see a wide grassy path diagonally right. Fork **right** on this straight path across the Common for nearly 300m. On the other side, go through a small metal gate to the main Silchester Road. Cross the road (into Berkshire) to a lane opposite but immediately fork **left** over a small stile. (This route avoids the Stacey Industrial Park. Apart from one more industrial unit in 1 km, there are no more like this.) Keep straight on across the narrow end of a large car park (which may be closed and empty) and follow a narrow path ahead that runs beside a large pond on your right. After the pond, cross a cinder track and take a narrow path opposite, as marked by a yellow arrow. In 150m, you reach a wide crossing path. Turn **right** on this mown grass path. It bends left with a bank on your right and winds its way, heading for a line of chalets, soon passing a long pond on your right. Turn **right** on a grassy path running parallel to a road of very stylish chalets (all priced around £300K!) with the pond still on your right.

2 As you pass the end of the fence and the tarmac road on your left, fork **right** on a narrow winding path into the wood, as directed by a yellow arrow. In 50m, turn squarely **left**. This path joins a wider path and reaches a signposted junction [Aug 2021: signpost grounded] with a byway. Turn **left** on the wide byway. In 50m, fork **right** on a narrower path. Your path goes down a couple of shallow steps to meet a semi-tarmac drive. Turn **right** on the drive and, at the entrance to *Keepers Cottage*, keep ahead on a narrower path. In 150m, at a marker post in the woods, avoid a junction on your left, as indicated. In another 100m or so through the woods, you reach a 3-way fingerpost. Turn **left**. The path crosses under wires and goes over a bridge. It rises gently through a forest of silver birch. After passing some paddocks on your right, you join a clinker path. Follow it out to a road, cross the road and take a narrow path opposite, passing between industrial buildings. Your path turns left, follows some metal fencing and zigzags into the great woodland of Benyon's Inclosure (and back into Hampshire).

3 **See map overleaf.** In 20m, fork **right**, passing a marker post, on a wide path that goes into the centre of the pinewood. (The official footpath runs a little to the left of this forestry path but it is blocked and overgrown.) In 100m, ignore a path on your right. In another 100m, at a T-junction, turn **right** on another wide forestry path. You will be following this path for over ½ km. The pines end and the trees change to broadwood, the path becoming a little muddier. Finally you come down to a very obvious crossing path under



large oak trees. (As a guide, you can see a bridge over the West End Brook about 30m ahead.) Turn **left** here on a wide track (rutted in 2019). After only 50m, just as the track curves left uphill, **leave** the track by turning **right** on a narrow unsigned but very clear path.



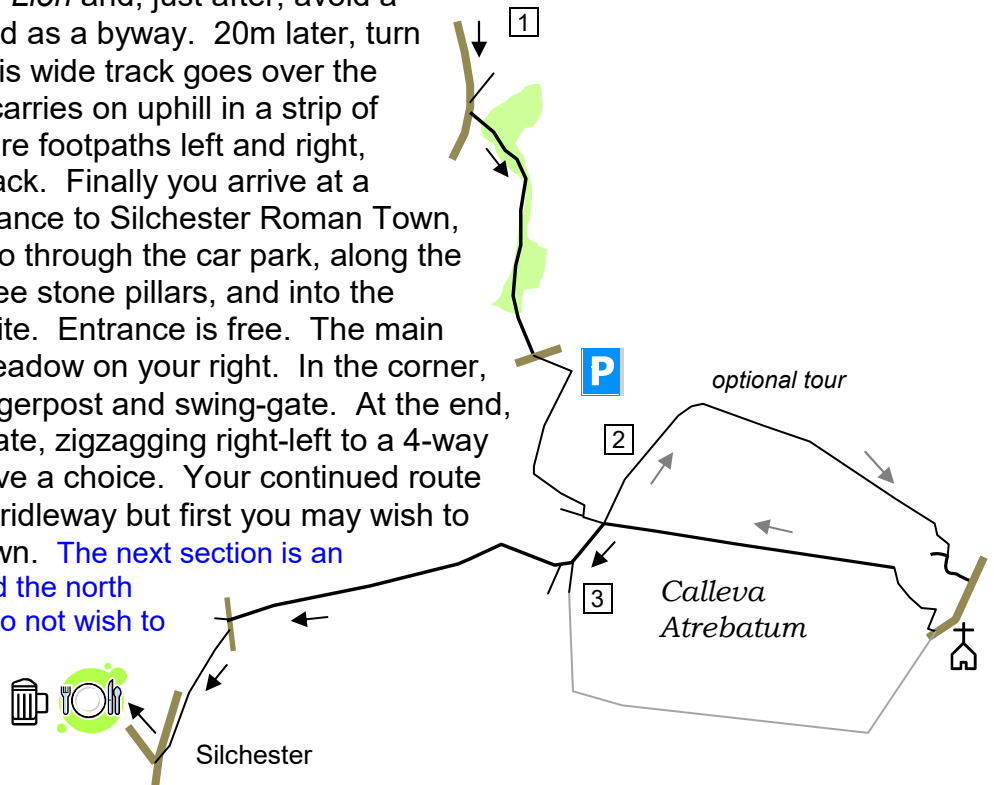
- 4 This well-defined woodland path, one of the local secrets of Benyon's Inclosure, winds its way along the valley. In 100m, the path goes over a stream bed where some sticks have been placed to keep you dry. After a further 150m, the path curves left and you reach another marshy patch where sticks have been placed among the tree roots. **Care! the next move is easily missed.** The main path goes **sharp right** here over the tree roots, almost reversing your direction. **Don't take the path that seems to continue uphill ahead!** This clear path leads you, in only 100m or so, to a junction of wide forestry tracks. Go straight over to join a track ahead.
- 5 You are on a wide woodland path through an oak wood. In 250m, avoid a path on your left that goes uphill. In only a further 15m you reach a fork, take the less-defined path to the **right** through holly bushes. **Care! this path is easily missed.** This twisty path leads you over tree roots down to the edge of the big Kiln Pond. Keep to the narrow knobbly path that runs along the left-hand edge of the pond. Sometimes the path seems to take you right to the water's edge and you may have to tip-toe past the occasional angler. After 200m, the path veers left and comes up to a wide track.
- 6 Cross straight over the track to a narrow path uphill. The path goes up-down-up over a bank and bends **left**. You can glimpse the edge of a large meadow on your right. You come to a crossing farm track. Go straight over on what is now a lovely very clear path with the big meadow still on your right. You pass a signboard identifying the *Englefield Estate Ufton Woods Benyons Enclosure*. Your path now winds deep down into the wood and goes over a bridge across a stream. Immediately after the bridge, you come to a marker post. Turn **right** here. The path rises gradually through handsome woodland, finally passing a house on your right and out, by a metal barrier, to a road. Turn **right** on the road in the outskirts of Mortimer West End, passing St Saviour's Church and then the *Red Lion* pub / restaurant.



The “Red Lion” is a typical charming old English country village pub. And you certainly can settle for a pint of (Badger) ale or any other thirst quencher. But the food here is taken seriously. The menu changes daily and there are also “specials” chalked up on the board. If you have no time to savour the squid or stroganoff, there are also educated sandwiches. Best of all, food is served all day every day from 12 noon.

Leg 2: Mortimer West End to Silchester 2½ km=1½ miles

- 1 Continue past the *Red Lion* and, just after, avoid a track sharp left, marked as a byway. 20m later, turn **left** on a dirt track. This wide track goes over the West End Brook and carries on uphill in a strip of trees. As you go, ignore footpaths left and right, staying on the main track. Finally you arrive at a road opposite the entrance to Silchester Roman Town, *Calleva Atrebatum*. Go through the car park, along the right-hand side, by three stone pillars, and into the path leading into the site. Entrance is free. The main path goes beside a meadow on your right. In the corner, turn **left**, ignoring a fingerpost and swing-gate. At the end, you come through a gate, zigzagging right-left to a 4-way junction where you have a choice. Your continued route is **right** on a marked brideway but first you may wish to explore the Roman town. **The next section is an optional short trip around the north side of the town: if you do not wish to take it, turn right on the brideway and skip the next section.**



The Atrebatas were Celts and Calleva is a Celtish name. The Romans took over the town, reinforced it, built an amphitheatre and streets of houses. The town became important nationally, even internationally. Then, unlike Bath, Chichester, London etc, the town was abandoned. (The modern Silchester is a village a mile away.) No one is sure why. Excavations by the University of Reading has shown French and Irish immigrants living there, so perhaps the town was purged by the Anglosaxons after the Romans left. Many fine Roman artefacts have been found and a complete reconstruction of the town has been made, down to the public baths, forum, rich and poor housing.

- 2 **Optional section (2 km=1¼ miles).** Turn **left** at the 4-way junction on a path marked as the *Silchester Trail*. This high path goes up along the ancient walls. Soon you pass the North Gate with an information tablet and illustration of how this part of the town may have looked. Continue round, finally wheeling **right** and down through a swing-gate. Turn **left** on a track leading to a road. Turn **right** on the road to reach the 12th-century St Mary's church in 120m. Turn **right** and go round to the right past the church, situated just inside the east wall, with its ancient yew trees.

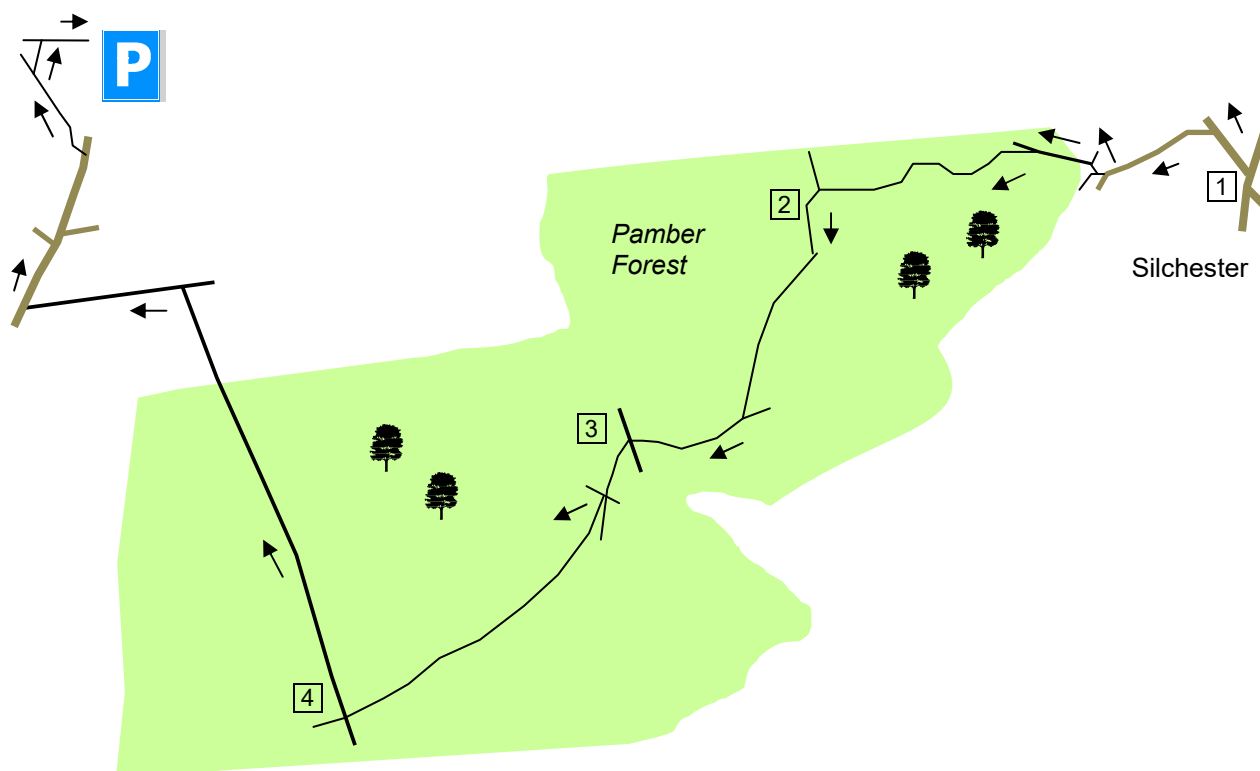
Silchester church was built around 1167 when the Bluet family held Silchester Manor. In 1316 only daughters were born, so the Bluet line ended. The stone effigy of one daughter, Eleanor, is inside a recess. The lovable medieval appearance of this church comes surprisingly from the Victorians who so often completely rebuilt churches. It was another more romantic school which prevailed in this case, restoring the church as it would have been in the 1400s. Most interesting inside this treasure house are the modern "corona" over the font, the elaborate screen and the east window.

After visiting the church, continue past the church on your left and go through a swing-gate in the back wall. Follow the path across a small pasture, usually grazed by alpacas, through another swing-gate and **left** on a wide path which leads back to the 4-way junction. Turn **left** on a wide path marked on a post as *Church (via South Gate)*.

- 3 You quickly reach a junction with several swing-gates. **The leftmost gate will take you on an extra excursion to the southern wall of the Roman town, if you have a reserve of energy.** Keep **right** at this junction going through a wooden gate onto a wide dirt path, marked as the *Silchester Trail*. (Also the *Brenda Parker Way*, a 78-mile (125-km) long-distance path running from Aldershot to Andover.) As you go, ignore a swing-gate and footpath on your right. At the end of the path, continue past a large metal gate and ahead on a dusty track. Follow the track under trees for 350m to reach a tarmac lane. Avoiding a track straight over, turn **left** on the lane but, in only 10m, fork **right** on a narrow woodland path. This path leads out, in 200m, to the green at Silchester beside the war memorial. Keep straight on to reach the centre of the village, crossing the main road to the *Calleva Arms*.

The Calleva Arms is famous for its comic signboards as if you needed inducement to come to such a perfectly situated inn-on-the-green. For more privacy there's a nice garden and a dining conservatory. Food seems to be very well regarded. Beer is Fullers plus two guests. Best of all, the Calleva is open all day! (Food all afternoon at weekends, other days, at "meal times" till 2.30.)

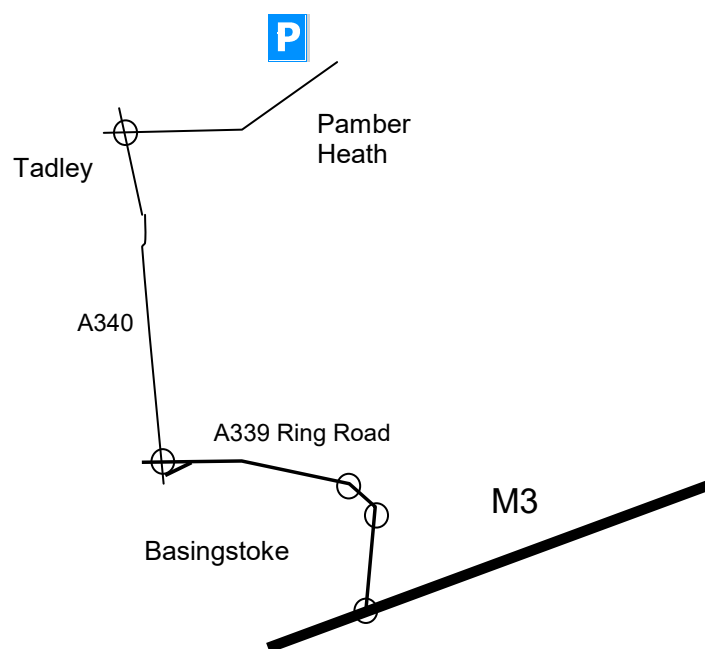
Leg 3: Silchester to Tadley Common 3½ km=2½ miles



- 1 After your rest, follow a side road, Pamber Road, passing the pub on your left and, almost immediately, turn **left** on a residential road, Dukes Ride. Continue for 150m to where the road curves left and here fork **right** on a fingerposted footpath into the woods. [The paths across Pamber Forest are complex because of the irregular terrain. For this final stretch you will need to stay alert so as not to stray from the route.](#) Immediately fork **right** at the corner of a wire fence and, in 25m, go **left** through a small wooden gate next to a cattle grid. Follow this beautiful wide track across the Common, with open heath on your left for about 150m. The track comes to an end at a white garage by a back garden. 25m **before** the garage, fork **left** on a narrow grassy path. This lovely path goes through silver birch, then gorse. In 150m, it is joined by a path from your left and starts to go down into a valley. You are now walking in the open through bracken and gorse as you cross the valley. Finally you enter dense woodland. There's an attractive long bridge and a boardwalk on your right which goes over the stream, but your route carries straight on regardless, staying in the wood.
- 2 Within 100m, your path finally crosses the marsh by a boardwalk. Immediately after the boardwalk, ignore paths that goes off to your left and right. Take the **centre** path, which sets you on a fairly straight course ahead through the birch and scrawny oaks for about 300m, although you need to keep an eye on the main path ahead. Your path comes to an oblique T-junction before a bank. Turn **right**, shortly going over another boardwalk. You are now on a very clear and easy path. Soon you meet a crossing bridleway. Go straight over through a swing-gate by a sign for Pamber Forest with a square information stand.
- 3 Follow the footpath through the woods, going over a bridge across the Bishopswood Stream. In about 100m you reach a crossing path with a small cattle-proof gate on your left. Turn **right** here, following the *Brenda Parker Way* arrow, but keep **left**, avoiding a narrower path on your right. You pass a bench seat. After 350m from the junction through Beggars Bridge Copse you reach a junction on your right. Keep straight ahead here, going past a post with a horseshoe symbol. Continue another 150m to reach the head of a T-junction of very wide sandy shingle paths. Turn **right** here on the main artery through Pamber Forest where you may pass ramblers for the first time since the last village.
- 4 Your wide path goes over a stream and rises gently to take you out of the forest through a barrier. Continue across an open space to a T-junction by bungalows. Turn **left** on a track, leading in 250m down to a road. Turn **right** on the road using the footway. Go over a minor road, Burney Bit, and, in 100m, opposite the village hall, cross the road and go **left** through a small metal gate onto Tadley Common. Turn **right** and follow this beautiful grassy path across the gorse heath. In 150m, fork **right** on another, much narrower path through prickly gorse (this is the first decent turning). At a T-junction turn **right**, immediately going through a metal gate to the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Pamber Heath is 5 miles north of Basingstoke, Hants. Coming from the London area, the easiest way is via the M3. Come off at Basingstoke, follow the Ring Road, the A339, and take the A340 signed *Aldermaston*. (You can also follow the “oak leaf” National Trust signs for *The Vyne* till you’re out of town.) Follow the A340 for about 8 km=5 miles to Tadley. After about 1 km= $\frac{2}{3}$ mile through the town, at a roundabout, turn **right** as for *Silchester, Pamber Heath*. Follow the road for just over 1 km= $\frac{3}{4}$ mile where there is woodland on your left. The car park is on your left, opposite Church Road.



The walk is also easily reachable from the M4 at Reading West.

By bus/train: bus 44 from Basingstoke and Vitality 3 from Reading both serve Pamber Heath and Silchester, not necessarily daily. Check the timetables.

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