



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

Last update: 28-nov-2017

Refreshments: Mortimer West End, Silchester

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

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

Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

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.)



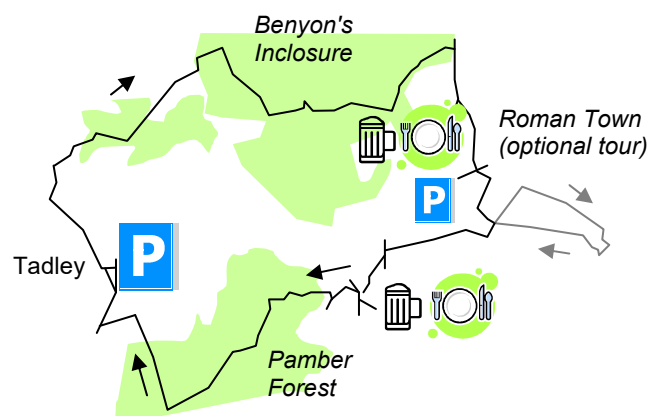
The paths in the two forests, Benyon's Inclosure and Pamber Forest, are winding, undulating, complex and rich in magnificent broadwoods. The notes here, as usual, are very detailed but you will need to stay alert to navigate the paths. For this reason, the walk will seem longer than its given distance.



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, *nearest* postcode **RG26 3DP**, not far from Basingstoke and the M3. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Overview



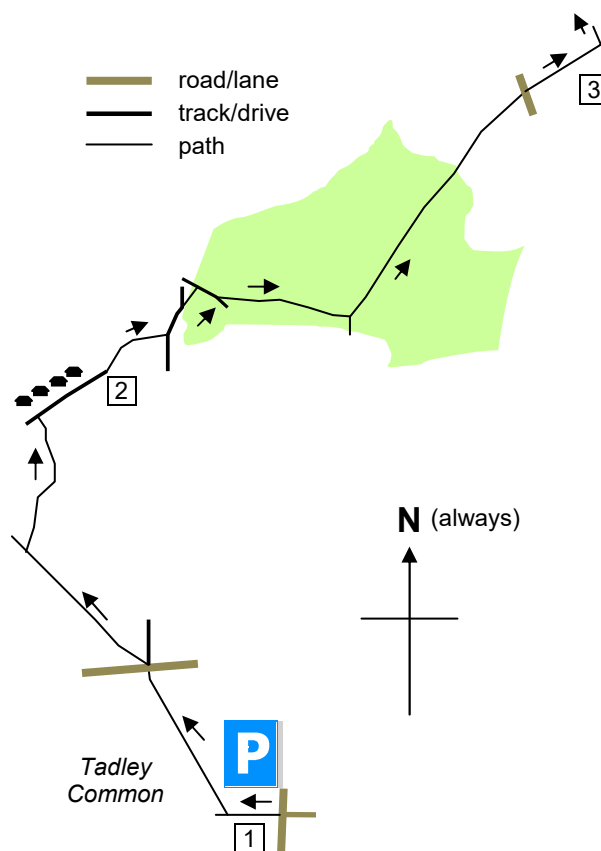
The Walk

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

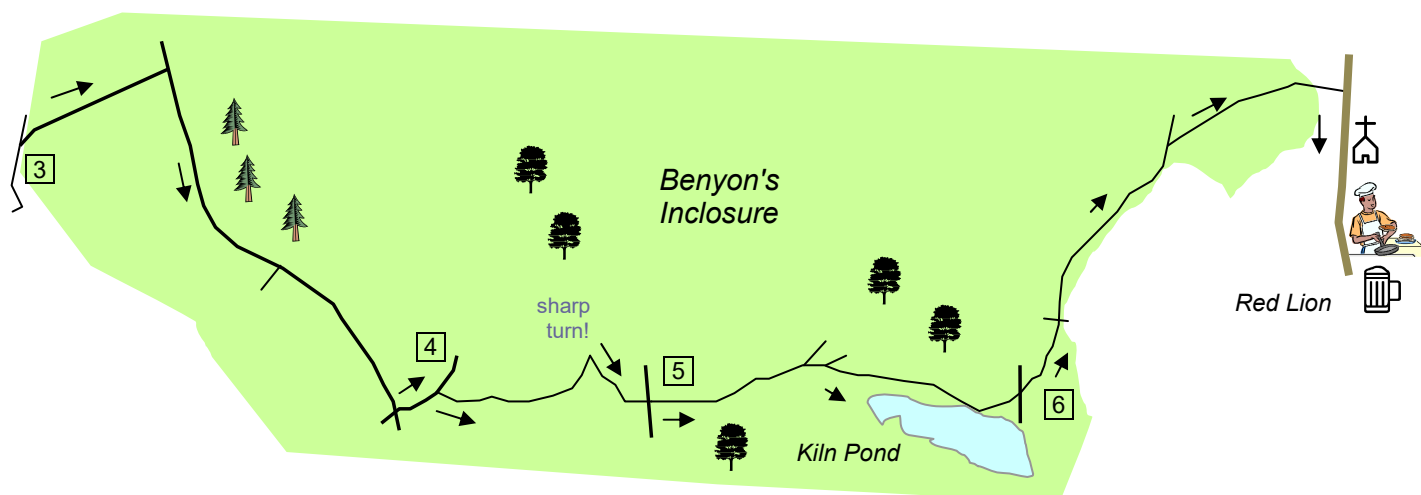
1 Starting in the Tadley Common car park, go straight ahead through a metal gate onto the heath. Go forward on the main path for 80m until you see a wide grassy path diagonally right. Fork **right** on this straight path across the Common for nearly 300m. On the other side, go through a small metal gate 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. In 150m, you reach a wide crossing path. Turn **right** here but immediately fork **left** on a narrow path. This narrow winding path is usually clearly marked as a mown strip. In case the route is not completely clear, you should aim for a line of immaculate chalet homes on the other side of the heath. Your path passes a pond on your right as it approaches the chalets. Turn **right** on a grassy path running parallel to the line of chalets with the pond still on your right.

2 As you come to the last chalet and the end of the fence on your left, follow the narrow path into the woods. In 30m turn **left** and you will soon join a wider path, which leads to a signposted junction with a wide byway. Turn **left** on the 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 cottages, keep ahead on a narrower path. At a marker post in the woods, keep straight ahead as indicated. In another 100m or so through the woods, you reach a 3-way fingerpost. Turn **left**. The path goes under wires and over a bridge. 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. After only 50m, just as the track curves left uphill, **leave** the track by turning **right** on a narrow unsigned but very clear path.



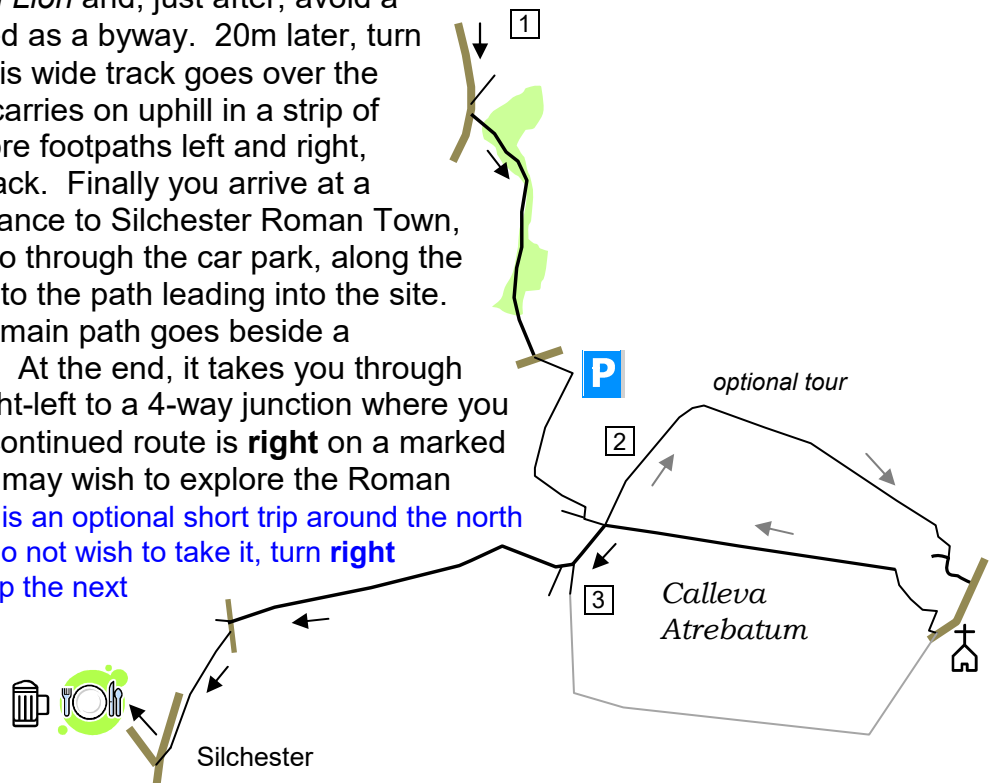
- 4 This well-defined woodland path, one of the local secrets of Benyon's Inclosure, winds its way along the valley. After 250m, the path curves left and you reach a marshy patch of tree roots. **Care! the next move is easily missed.** The main path goes **sharp right** here over the marshy tree roots, almost reversing your direction. **Don't take the path that seems to continue uphill ahead!** Your path is nice and clear and 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 two paths that branch off left and continue down through holly bushes. The path leads you down to the edge of the big Kiln Pond. Keep to the narrow rooty 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 curves **left** [2016: care! the main path seems to turn right: but your **correct** path (left) may be obscured by some fallen bushes]. It goes over an area with evidence of forestry work. It approaches the edge of a large meadow visible on your right. [2016: the path is now clearer after the debris remaining after by forestry was removed. Follow a course wheeling left so you are walking parallel to the meadow not far 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 crosses 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 wonderful fusion. Externally and, as far as the bar interior, it 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 restaurant crosses a cultural barrier and here you benefit from the cookery arts of owner Franco and head chef Marco who hale from Turin. Pasta is homemade but the menu is far from the highstreet’s idea of Italian food. Try the veal cheek braised in nebbiolo wine and, maybe to start, marinated fillet of venison, wild mushrooms and raspberries. The pub is closed all day Monday and Tuesday lunchtime, apart from Bank Holiday, and closes after 2.30 or 4 pm on Sunday when there is a different menu.

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, and into the path leading into the site. Entrance is free. The main path goes beside a meadow on your right. At the end, it takes you through a gate and zigzags right-left to a 4-way junction where you have a choice. Your continued route is **right** on a marked bridleway 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 bridleway and skip the next section.



The Atrebates were Celts and Calleva is a Celtic 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.** 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.

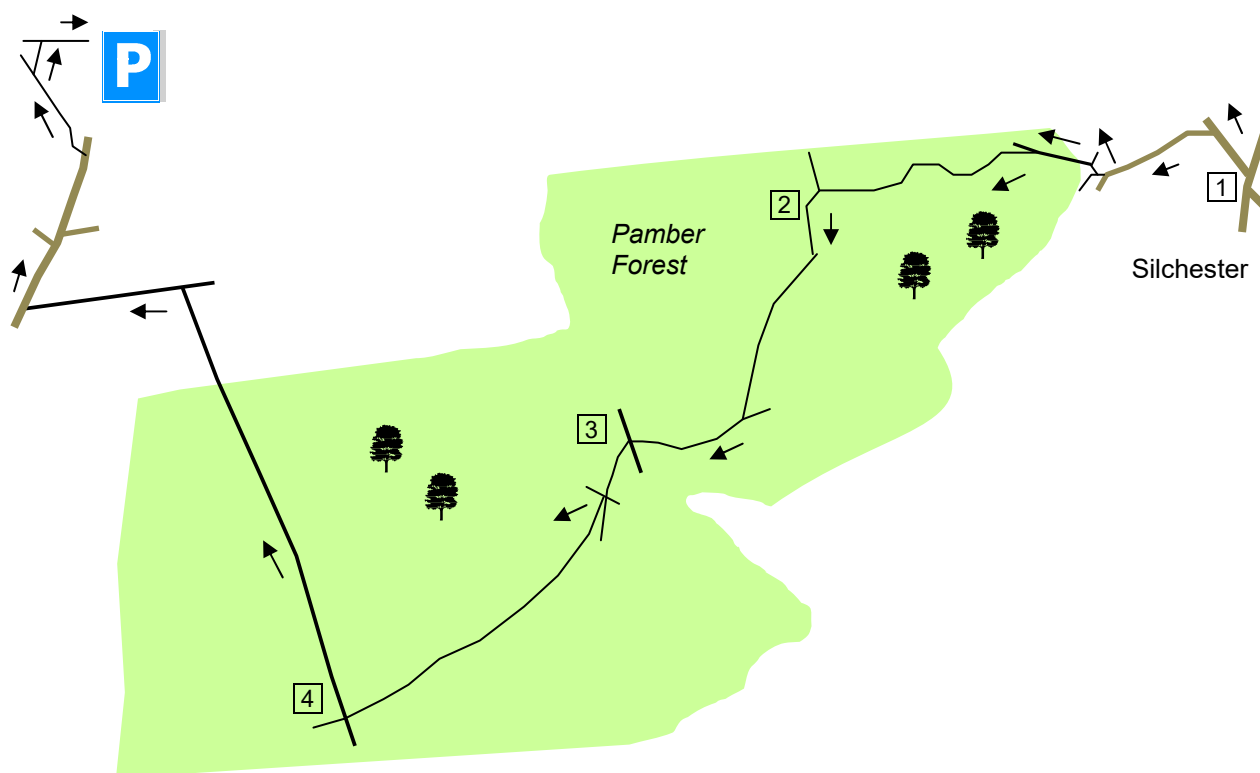
Silchester church was built around 1167 when the Bluet family held Silchester Manor. In 1316 only daughters were born, so the Bluet line ended. The stone effigy of one daughter, Eleanor, is inside a recess. The lovable medieval appearance of this church comes surprisingly from the Victorians who so often 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** now on a bridleway.

- 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 through a small wooden gate and ahead on a dusty track. Follow the track under trees for 350m to reach a tarmac lane. 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.)

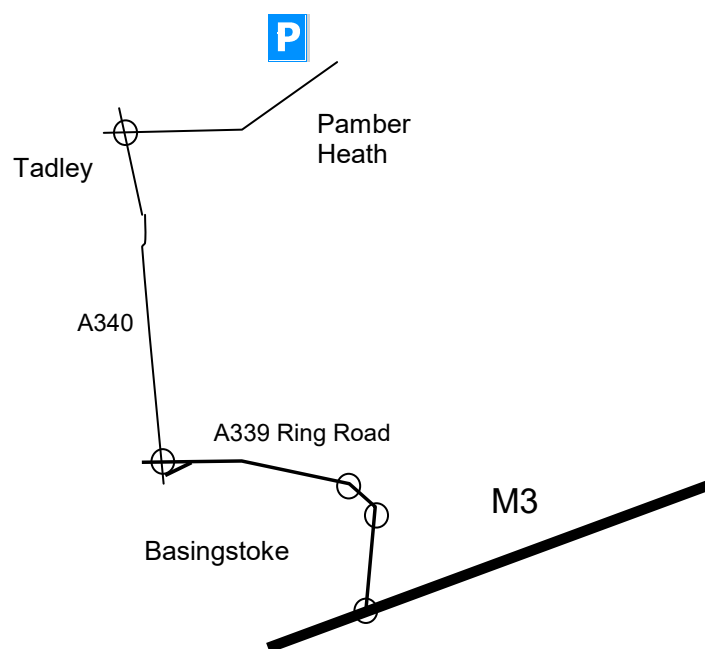
Leg 3: Silchester to Tadley Common 3½ km=2½ miles



- 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, open heath on your left. The track comes to an end ahead at a white garage by a back garden. 20m before the garage, fork **left** on a narrow grassy path. This lovely path goes through silver birch, then gorse. It is joined by a path from your left and goes downhill. Once out in the open, at a fork, take *either* path: they quickly re-join. Follow the path gently downhill, sideways across the open space, then into the dense woodland. There's an attractive long bridge and a boardwalk on your right which goes over the stream, but regretfully this 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 a path that goes off to your left. You now have 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**, going over another boardwalk. [\(Disregard a parallel path running on your right on the other side of a bank: it is not an alternative!\)](#) 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 the wire fence on your right ends at a corner. Keep straight ahead here, avoiding a path on your right and 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 more 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 junction and, in 100m, opposite the village hall, cross the road and go **left** through a small metal gate onto Tadley Common. Follow this beautiful grassy path across the gorse heath. In 150m, fork **right** on another, slightly narrower path (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.

fancy more free walks? www.fancyfreewalks.org