



Blean and Thornden Woods

Distance: 8 km=5 miles

easy walking

Region: Kent

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Refreshments: picnic

Map: Explorer 150 (Canterbury) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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Long woodland trails, nature reserve

In Brief

The Blean woodlands form a vast area covering 11½ square miles in northeast Kent, far from the big towns, where the forest seems to go on forever. They comprise Thornden Wood, East and West Blean Woods, Clowes Wood and some smaller woods such as the Woodland Trust's new Victory Wood. A circular 25-mile walk known as the Big Blean was opened in 2012. This walk in this guide is much more modest but it shows you some of the best parts. The West Blean Woods are popular with visitors but few people visit the Blean Woods National Nature Reserve. This walk takes you on a magical journey on a long and probably lonely woodland trek to approach the Nature Reserve from a side few people see.

This walk can be combined with the Clowes Wood walk to make a full day's excursion.

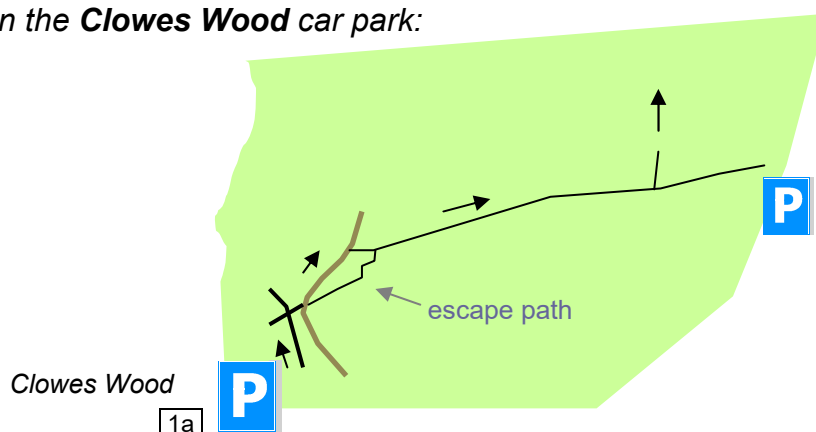
The woods are not agricultural land so there are no nettles. The woodland paths are beautifully clear but, when they emerge into the light, you may find a few brambles, but not enough to rule out shorts. Boots were not needed when this walk was researched in summer but, since it uses a lot of narrow woodland paths, you may be glad to be wearing boots in other seasons. This walk is perfect for your dog but he needs to be on a tight lead in the short section through the Nature Reserve.



The walk begins at **Clowes Wood**, nearest postcode **CT5 3ER**, or at **West Blean and Thornden Wood**, postcode **CT6 7NZ**, north of **Canterbury**, Kent. Both car parks are easily accessed from the M2 and A299 trunk roads, less than 1½ hours from London. The Clowes Wood car park is a little further from the walk but it is larger and easier to reach. The Clowes Wood car park is connected to the Blean and Thornden Wood car park by a short attractive woodland path. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

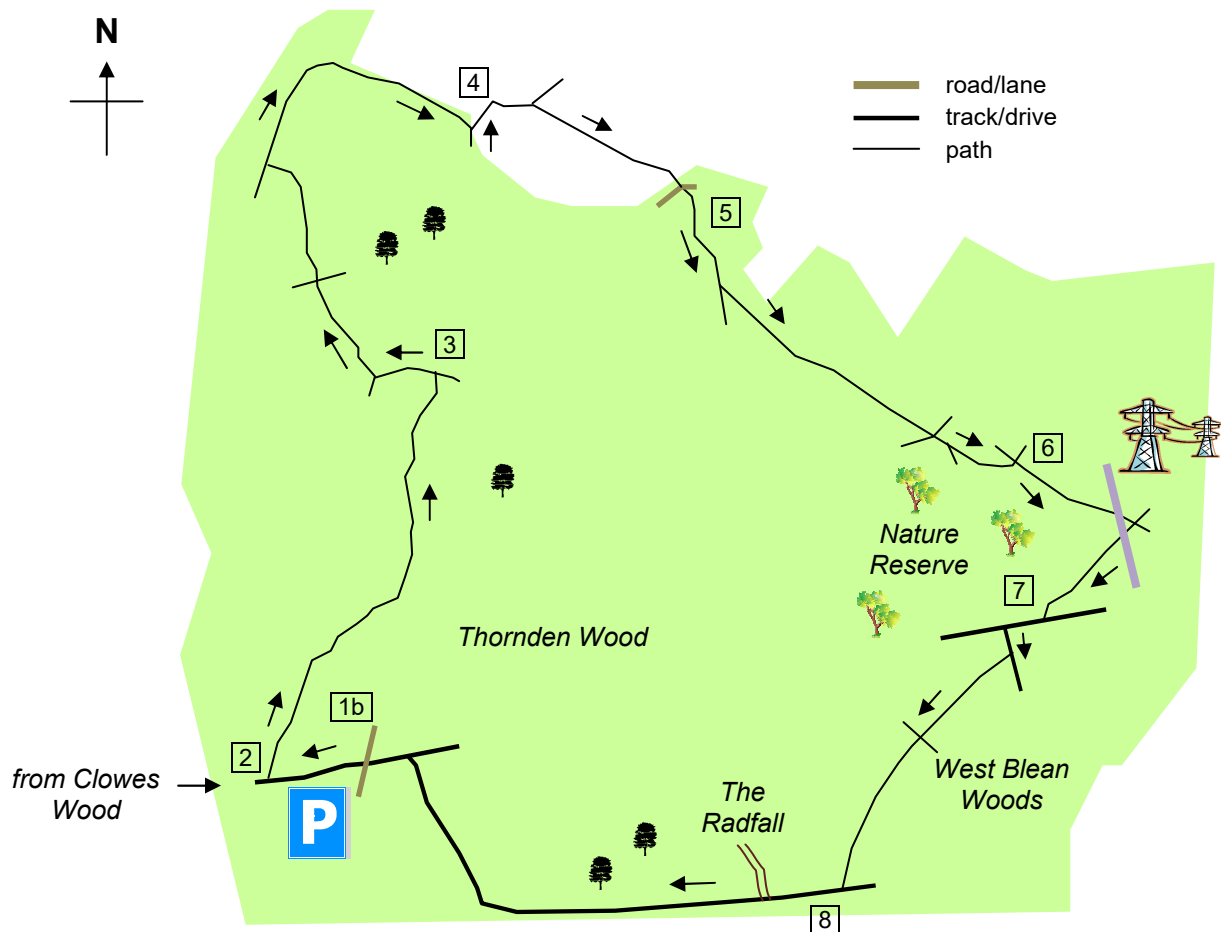
If starting in the **Clowes Wood** car park:



- 1a** With the road on your right, walk to the far side of the car park where there is a notice board and width restrictors. Follow this footpath for about 50m to a major junction of tracks. Turn **right** through a metal barrier out to the road. (The “orthodox” route now is **left** on the road for 100m and **right** on a path through the woods; but the road is often busy and the route given here is much more interesting.) Cross the main road carefully, go **left** for only 10m and **right** up an earth bank. The path immediately curves left parallel to the road and shortly veers off right through dense woodland. After 150m on this extremely twisty path, you reach a T-junction with a permissive path. Turn **right** here. Follow this fairly straight stony permissive path through beautiful woodland for 450m. The path leads to the other car park (West Blean and Thornden Wood), but your route turns left exactly 100m **before** the car park. As soon as you see the metal barrier of the other car park, look to your left for a path into the woods. This path is narrow and easy to overlook, but it is quite definite and it is the only decent path leading off. Turn **left** on this path.

If starting in the **West Blean and Thornden Wood** car park:

- 1b** **See map overleaf.** Go to the back of the **west** car park. (This is the *long* car park with the narrow access; the car park on the **east** side which leads into West Blean woods is normally reserved for blue badge holders or families with children.) Go through a metal barrier onto a wide path into the woods and walk exactly 100m. (That's 110 yards or 1½ minute's walking). Look to your right for a path into the woods. This path is narrow and easy to overlook, but it is quite definite and it is the only decent path leading off. Turn **right** on this path.
- 2** Your path immediately goes over a little (dry) stream bed covered in twigs. It becomes a good sandy path. You will be walking on this path for 1 km and you need to concentrate so as to keep to the main path without accidentally straying. The path is extremely twisty, turning this way and that. The vegetation changes from scrub to young beech and oak to open areas of bracken which may become dense in places. You will never be more than 150m from the road on your right and it should be audible. After 250m you pass a bench seat. After another 650m you come through a more open area and reach a T-junction 100m later. Turn **left** here on another path.



- [3] In 150m you see a marker post with a yellow arrow just ahead. Turn **right** just before the post onto to a fine path through mixed mature woodland. In 350m your path goes straight over a crossing path. Your path now rises a little, curves left and in nearly 200m reaches a T-junction. Turn **right** on another woodland path. In 250m your path begins a definite gradual right bend and you will soon be aware of a green field on your left. About 250m after the bend, if you look to your left, you will notice a line of trees separating the first field from the next field. Only 20m after this, your path curves right and arrives at a T-junction where a narrow path comes from the left and leads back into the wood. Turn **sharp left** onto this path, leading you over a (shaky) stile into a large rough meadow.
- [4] Continue straight ahead, aiming for a visible marker post by a flat bridge 70m away. Cross the flat bridge and continue straight on. In 50m, you come over a shallow ditch. Veer **right** here. Your route is straight down the middle of this long meadow, roughly half way between its two wooded sides. The path is a little unclear at first but you can see it ahead in the distance. In 300m, your path ends by the remains of a fence and a large metal gate. Exit through a chain stile on the left out to a main road. Cross the road to a signed footpath opposite.
- [5] This narrow path quickly gets much wider and leads you through handsome woodland. About 250m from the road, you come to a clear fork in the path. Take the **left**-hand fork. [Aug 2018: you soon have to go round a fallen tree trunk.] Soon you will be walking alongside a long earth bank on your left. Wherever the path seems to split, keep left on the path **nearest** to the bank. Soon the path zigzags left-right over the bank. The bank is now

close on your right. 350m after the fork, your path goes down over a ditch and up again, still with the bank on your right. Soon your path runs along the top of the bank. 200m after the ditch, you meet a diagonal crossing path which runs uphill very clearly sharp on your right. **Ignore** the crossing path by keeping straight ahead on a level path. In 20m, avoid a right fork uphill and continue straight on, passing a wooden post. (There are several of these blank posts; they obviously once marked a nature trail.) A path meets you from the right and you pass two more posts. *Note the little arch made from saplings.* Your path veers left beside a wire fence and you reach a large wooden swing-gate at a crossing of paths.

- 6 Turn **right** through the swing-gate into the Blean Woods National Nature Reserve. You are on a grass path flanked with pink heather. Just by stopping and listening, you will notice unusual birdsong. You pass a rustic bench and cross beneath some wires, then power lines. In 20m, you come to a marker post indicating a 4-way crossing of footpaths. Turn sharp **right**, passing under the power lines and wires again. You see more delicate birch and heather for 250m until you reach another large wooden swing-gate. Go **left** through this swing-gate and follow a narrow path, coming out to a wide stony track. This is New Road, an artery which runs the whole length of the West Blean Wood.
- 7 You may now meet other walkers and families with children for the first time. Turn **right** on New Road to reach a bench seat and a major junction in 50m. *You could of course stay on this straight path all the way back to the car park, but this walk finds another rare path for an extra twist.* Turn **left** at the junction onto a wide track. In 30m, just before a large (open) wooden gate, turn **right** onto a narrow path. This path is obscure at first but it soon becomes a clear woodland path. The path runs over several shallow ditches and goes over a crossing path. The path twists and rises gently and meets a wide stony track. Turn **right** on the track.
- 8 You are now on the main popular trail. Soon you pass an illustrated sign board just as you cross the route of an ancient drover's path known as The Radfall, now mostly overgrown. A replica "milestone" shows the distances the cattle travelled. Continue straight on along the gravel track. You pass an adventure area, several benches and features. The track bends right and you finally come out past a large wooden gate to the New Road. Turn **left** (*note the wooden man carved on a gate post*) into the east car park. Cross the road to the west car park. If you began in the Clowes Wood car park, continue straight on through the west car park, past a metal barrier and onto a permissive path. Stay on this permissive path for around 500m to the main road. (*Because of a blind curve in the busy road, it is better to use the road this time.*) Turn **left** to the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: if coming from the west (Maidstone or London), the best route is as follows. Take the A2 / M2 (from East or North London) or the M25 / M26 / M20 / A249 / M2 (from South or West London). Where the M2 ends, keep in the same direction on the A299, signposted to *Margate, Ramsgate*. After Yorkletts, fork **left** at a sign for *Whitstable, Canterbury*. Follow this road, Thanet Way, over two roundabouts and, after another mile, at a third roundabout, turn **right** as for *Superstore, South Street*. Continue to a T-junction and turn **right** on a residential road. Follow this road, soon through open country, for nearly a mile. At a T-junction, turn **right**, going under the A299 trunk road, This is Radfall Road. Follow it for a mile, passing the *Dogs Trust Canterbury* on your right. The **Clowes Wood** car park is another ¼ mile on the right after a bend.

For the **West Blean and Thornden Wood** car park, continue another 500 yds and turn sharp **left** on Thornden Wood Road. The car park is ½ mile on the left.

You can also reach the car park (1) by continuing along Thanet Way for another 3 miles to the big Herne Bay roundabout and turning **right** on Greenhill Road; (2) from Canterbury, via St Stephen's Hill, near the University of Kent.

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