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## Stansted Forest and Rowlands Castle

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Distance: 9½ km=6 miles

easy walking

Region: West Sussex, Hampshire

Date written: 23-may-2016

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Last update: 4-jun-2020

Refreshments: Rowlands Castle

Map: Explorer 120 (Chichester) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*Woodland, historic house, grass meadows, views, village, pubs*

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### In Brief

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The great Stansted Forest has been carefully cultivated for centuries by woodlanders, harvesting the sweet chestnut trees for fencing and charcoal. Now it is “a perfect example of modern woodland management” with a great number of bird and plant species, protected thanks to a careful division of the forest into public and conservation areas. This walk makes use of the many footpaths that criss-cross the forest, some less-known. You will experience sudden views in various directions as the paths come out into the open air. As a refreshment break, all the facilities of that charming Hampshire village Rowlands Castle await your pleasure.



There are one or two very short stretches with nettles. Outside the winter months, the paths are dry, making sensible walking shoes or trainers wearable. Your dog will also enjoy this walk but a (long) lead is needed because the woods are protected and are full of nesting birds.



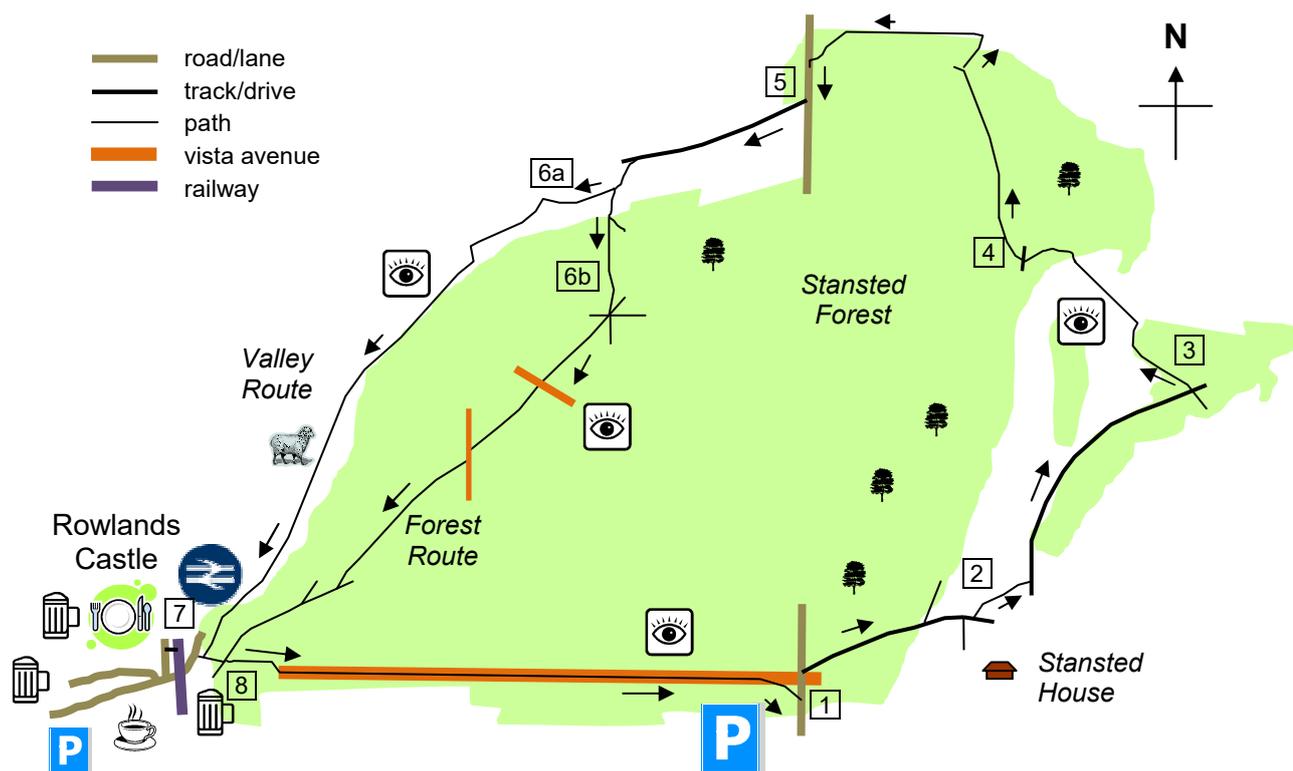
The walk begins in the **Stansted Forest Main Avenue** car park, postcode **PO9 6DU**, near the Middle Lodge, within sight of Stansted Park. *Note that this car park **closes at 5pm** even in summer, possibly earlier in winter.* If there's a risk that you won't be back in time, park elsewhere, such as on the roadside or in Rowlands Castle (postcode **PO9 6AB**) round the Green. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**). You can also arrive by train at **Rowlands Castle railway station**.



If you are beginning the walk in Rowlands Castle **railway station**, go down the approach road and turn **left** at a T-junction, leading quickly into the village by the Green.

If your starting point is Rowlands Castle, go through the big railway arch, keep left past the *Castle Inn* for 150m to where the road bends left and turn **right** through a metal barrier; begin the walk at section 8.

## The Walk



- 1 From the Main Avenue car park, go out to the road and turn **left** towards the porticoed gatehouse known as the Middle Lodge with a view across to Stansted House on your right. Turn **right** just before the lodge and follow the tarmac drive into the beechwoods of Stansted Park. In 300m, as you come out into the open, avoid several paths on the left and stay on the tarmac drive as it curves right between two pastures, with more views of the house. On your right (not on your route) is footpath leading to the visitor's centre and facilities.
- 2 Immediately after the footpath on your right, as the meadow on your left ends, turn **left** on a narrow grassy path. (There is a small notice here indicating a *permissive path*.) After more than 200m through trees and bushes, the path ends at a tarmac drive. Turn **left** on this drive. Follow the drive with woodland on your right and sheep meadows on your left. After 400m, stay on the tarmac, avoiding paths that branch off to your left, onwards towards woodland. In another 400m, you pass on your right a pair of small wooden gates leading into the grounds of another historic house *Lumley Seat*. (*Richard Lumley also built the main house, Stansted Park.*) Immediately after the end of the fence of the property, you meet a 4-way fingerpost where a footpath crosses.
- 3 Turn sharp **left** at the fingerpost on a narrow grassy path through the woods. The path runs beside the sheep meadow on your left. *On a clear day, Portsmouth is visible, including the Spinnaker Tower.* The path curves right and reaches the corner of a fence. Turn **left** here at a fingerpost, down through a small kissing-gate and diagonally up again across the next pasture. At the other side, go through a small kissing-gate into woods. *This beautiful stretch of woodland is part of the Stansted Wood Conservation Area which protects much of the surrounding woodland.* The path curves left and runs straight. After 200m, you reach a crossing bridleway by a fingerpost.

Cross straight over the bridleway and bear **right** with the path, going past a wooden barrier.

- 4 You will be walking for about 750m through this marvellous part of the wood known as Batty's Park, usually amidst loud chirruping of various birds. In 300m, your path goes over a forester's track. 20m after this track, a marker post directs you to fork **left** (*don't miss!*). In another 300m, immediately after a minor path on your right, you meet a crossing path with a (not very obvious) marker post on your right with a black-on-yellow arrow. Turn **right** here, as directed. [\(The path straight ahead - over a crossing path, all the way to a T-junction and left - is also possible but the official footpath, though slightly longer, is drier and more pleasant.\)](#) In 100m, keep straight on at a marker post, until you reach a corner with an open green meadow on the other side of a hedge. Turn **left** here, staying next to the woods. In 200m or so, ignore a kissing-gate and stay on the path which curves left and runs straight to reach, in 150m, a metal kissing-gate leading out to a tarmac lane, Broad Walk.
- 5 Turn **left** on the lane, passing on your right Christ Church Forestside, which is usually open and worth seeing. After two more houses (*"Old School House" and "The Old Orchard", previously "Hookers", possibly named after Farmer Hooker, a Victorian grave digger whose sepia photo is in the entrance porch of Christ Church*), turn **right** on a solid track marked as a footpath. Your path runs past stables and paddocks, then a fir plantation on your left, with views across the valley. After a total of 600m on this path, just before a wooden gate into the garden of the house ahead, fork **left** on a grassy path. The path goes down through undergrowth to a marker post directly opposite the house. [Here you have a choice of routes to Rowlands Castle. The Valley Route keeps the views and takes you through long flowery meadows with a lot of sheep and the occasional heifer. The Forest Route is through more of the vast dark woods of Stansted Forest.](#)
- 6a The **Valley Route**. Keep straight on at the marker post, continuing through more undergrowth. Your path takes you through a kissing-gate between flowery meadows, shortly with woodland on your left. After 250m, avoid a path on your right and turn **left** through a kissing-gate. **(a)** This pleasant winding path through woodland ends at a pair of kissing-gates where the path zigzags left-right at the end of a long pasture. You are now on a wide grassy fringe beside a crop field, with the first houses along the Finchdean Road visible ahead. After 400m or so, in the far corner, your route takes you through a kissing-gate to a fork. Avoid the wider rising left fork and take a narrower **right** fork beside a metal fence, through another metal kissing-gate and onwards into a widening long green pasture. After 350m, a redundant kissing-gate leads into another long sheep meadow. After 500m, in the far corner, a short fenced path lead through a wooden swing-gate into woods. Veer immediately **right** and follow this woodland path over a stony ditch, over a bridge with handrail. Turn **right** to go through a metal barrier to the road in Rowlands Castle.
- 6b The **Forest Route**. Turn **left** at the marker post, through a kissing-gate across the short side of a beautiful long pasture belonging to Drews Farm and through another kissing-gate into the woods. **(b)** Immediately take the **right** fork, passing a very wizened large yew on your left. In nearly 100m, your path goes over a crossing path. In another 100m or so, in a lighter area, avoid a path on your right. In another 100m, you reach a junction of six paths. Take the **second** path on the **right**, following a marker post with

a yellow arrow. This is the official footpath through the forest and, judging by the good surface, a historic byway. You go over several crossing paths, especially, after 300m, a wide straight avenue with Stansted Park visible to your left. Another 300m takes you to a fine lime avenue crossing your path. Here you need to be careful to avoid a wide track directly opposite. The correct path is the only one with a markerpost just on its left. The path is now dirt or hardcore and the vegetation has changed to tall mixed woodland. In 600m, you meet a semi-tarmac forest track coming from the left. Veer **right** on this track, joining another track coming from the right after 100m. In 300m, at a fingerposted junction under a tall beech with an info tablet, turn **right**. This path leads through an awkward metal barrier to the road in Rowlands Castle. Turn **left** on the road, reaching on your right the *Castle Inn* (Fullers), recommended as a quiet unpretentious pub.



This following section is a short optional refreshment excursion into the village (and into Hampshire). If you prefer to skip the village, simply retrace your steps, back along the road to the metal barrier.

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Continue under the railway bridge into the village where, alongside the Green, you have a small supermarket which is always open, the *Café on the Green* (recommended), the *Robin Hood Inn* (H&W) and *The Fountain*.



*The name "Rowlands Castle" is a corruption of a much older name. The "castle", on the other side of the flint wall, is now just an earthwork and a few stones, after half a century of pilfering and the building of the railway. At its heyday in 1150 it passed to King Henry II (by "escheat" - i.e. takeover by the overlord when the owner dies without issue). He used it as a perfect base for hunting and, as a result it survived demolition and decay for a couple of centuries. (The first Plantagenet kings felt insecure in a Norman land and, after the "troubles" with King Stephen, ordered the demolition of all castles "improperly erected".)*

*By the 1700s, Rowlands Castle was known for smuggling and poaching and the locality was home to gypsies, hence the names Gypsies Plain and Gypsies Clump. In 1686 a mansion was built in nearby Stansted Park by Richard Lumley. He also laid out the many straight avenues you see on this walk. The house was destroyed by fire in 1900 and was rebuilt to the same design.*

*Rowlands Castle village is blessed with **three** pubs (**four** if you include the "Staunton Arms" which is further along the Redhill Road). The "Robin Hood Inn" is probably the foodiest of them (it serves food from 12-6 on Sundays). The "Fountain", a cultish local, was once run by the former Van Morrison guitarist Herbie Armstrong and they still have live music evenings.*

After your refreshment break, retrace your steps, back through the railway arch, past the *Castle Inn* for 150m to the metal barrier on your right.

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Go **right** through the awkward metal barrier onto a wide footpath. In 100m, at a junction under a tall beech with a fingerpost, go straight ahead. The stony uphill path leads out to an ultra-wide green corridor known as Monarch's Way or The Avenue with Stansted House visible in the distance. After 750m, you pass a fingerpost on your left where the Sussex Border Path turns off to the right (not on your route), passing a war shrine. Continue ahead on the Monarch's Way for another km, almost to the road, marked by the classical profile of the Middle Lodge. Here your main path forks **right**, over a wooden bridge, into the car park where the walk began.

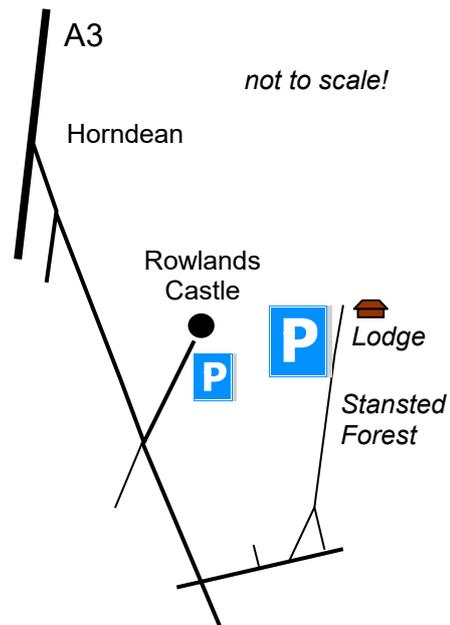
## Getting there

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By car: Rowlands Castle is accessed from the A3 trunk road. If coming from the north, Rowlands Castle is signed left, just before the A3 becomes a motorway. Follow the signs through Horndean, past the historic Gales brewery, and immediately fork **left** at the mini-roundabout. Go 2½ miles to a double mini-roundabout.

For Rowland Castle, turn **sharp left**.

For the Stansted Forest Main Avenue car park, fork left past a *Harvesters*. In 1⅓ miles, turn **left** as for *Chichester, Funtington, Stansted House*. In 1 mile, **ignore** a left turn for *Rowlands Castle*. In another ¼ mile, **fork left** and at the next junction **keep left**. You are on Broad Walk. The car park is just under 1 mile on your left, just before the neo-classical Lodge comes into view.



By train: regular trains to Rowlands Castle Station on the London-Portsmouth line, including Sundays.

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