



Brimpton and Hampshire Border Forests

Distance: 11½ km=7 miles

easy walking

Region: Berkshire, Hampshire

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Refreshments: Ashford Hill, Woolhampton after the walk

Map: Explorer 159 (Reading) **or** 158 (Newbury)
but the map in this guide should be sufficient

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

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Villages, green meadows, river, woodland, pubs, parkland

In Brief

This is a hugely varied walk through woodland, meadowland and parkland on the border of Berkshire and Hampshire. The countryside on this walk is almost completely unknown to walkers and really lives up to this site's motto. You will be astonished at the richness of the extensive woodland and charmed by the riverside meadows and wild flowers. This walk holds one or two genuine surprises.

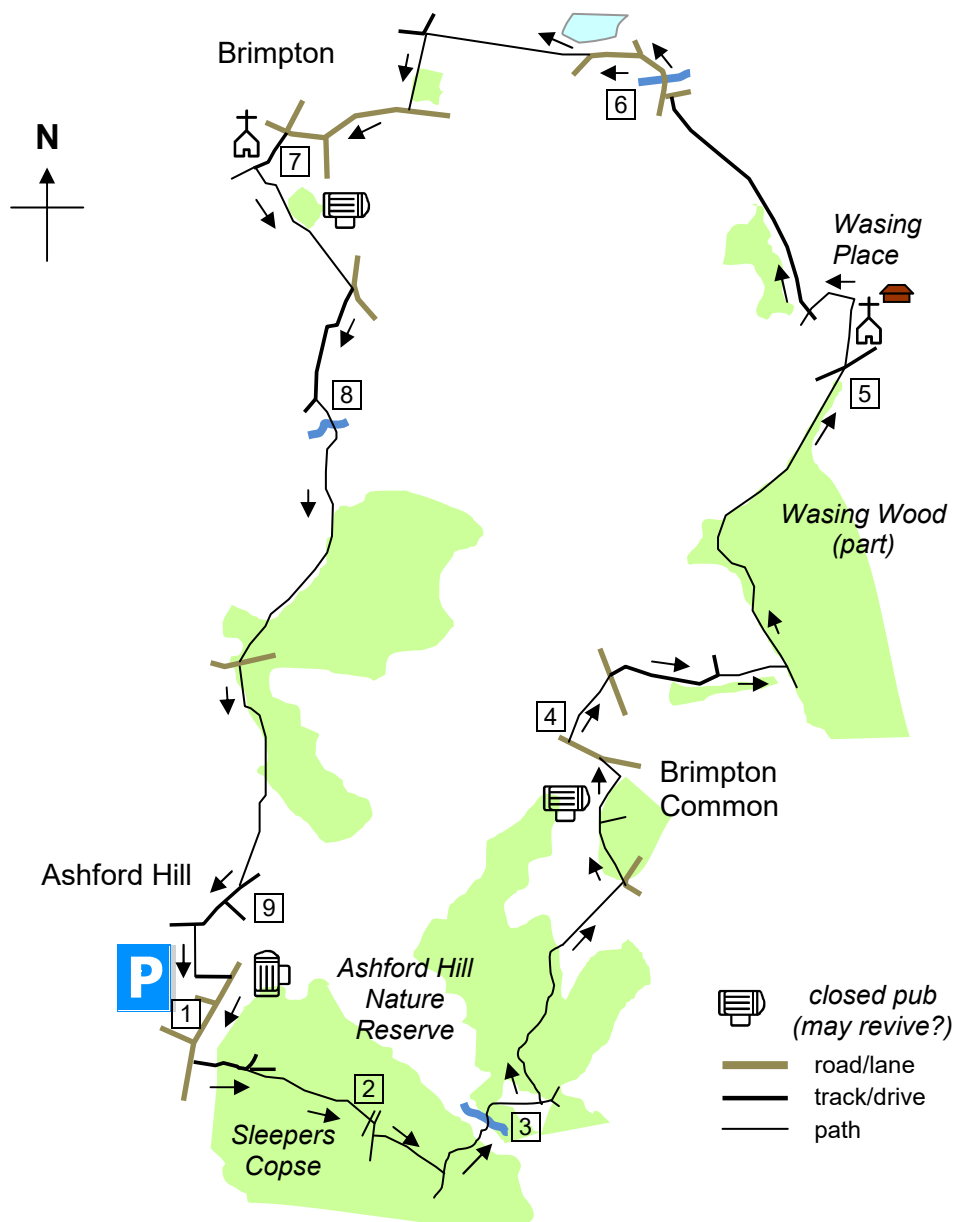
Pubs have been closing in this area and any feedback on restorations or *alternative places to eat/drink* will be welcome for these pages. The one pub *believed* to be open is for the *Ship Inn* in Ashford Hill (ring 0118-981-4504).



There are some nettles along the paths so shorts are *not* advisable. Most of the route is dry. However, even in summer, boots are recommended because of some short but obstinate areas of mud. This walk would be fine with your dog.

The walk begins in the **recreation ground car park** in **Ashford Hill**, Hampshire, on the B3051, www.w3w.co/following.hippy.cars. The car park is unsigned and is at the end of the **southern** end of Chapel Lane. Note that Chapel Lane is on three sides of a square. If you come from the north (Reading or Newbury), you must skip the "first" Chapel Lane and turn **right** into the "second" Chapel Lane, 100m later. You will see the *Headroom* horizontal bar straight ahead. The postcode of the house opposite Chapel Lane is **RG19 8BD**. It is possible to park in Brimpton but there are few spaces, unless the pub allows you to park as a returning patron. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 From the car park in Ashford Hill, go back to the road and turn **right** using the footway. In 300m, immediately before *Butlers Garden Machinery*, turn **left** on a tarmac and concrete track signed as a footpath. In 200m the track forks, with the left fork turning away left. Ignore both forks and keep straight ahead on a narrow path on the right-hand side of the tracks. You glimpse some large sheds on your left before the path leads you through a large wooden gate (or over a stile) into woodland. Cross straight over a forestry track and follow the main path through Sleepers Copse.
- 2 After 300m or so on a fairly straight path through this woodland, you reach a junction of paths. Keep ahead a short distance to avoid some rutted forestry paths on both sides to reach a T-junction and a post with yellow arrows with a sign *Footpath Walkers Only*. Turn **right** and, in just 20m, at a yellow arrow, turn **left** on another path with a second sign *Footpath Walkers Only* on your right. Go straight on along this narrow path, avoiding debris and side paths created by forestry work. In 150m or so, your path dives down into trees quite steeply and rises up again equally steeply. After 120m in a fine oak wood you reach a post with blue arrows at a T-junction. Turn **left** here on a much wider well-made path. After a bendy 200m you

reach a bridge with a gate on your left. *A noticeboard here tells you about the Ashford Hill Nature Reserve, noted for its chain of water meadows and abundant flora.* Go straight on over the large bridge and keep **left** in a small meadow. Follow the path through a band of trees and out into a large grassy open space.

- 3 Take a diagonal path across the centre almost to the opposite corner. There are two narrow paths in the far corner but your path is a much wider track sharp **left** downhill just before you reach the corner. Your track fords a small stream and rises through woodland. Keep following it through mature woodland for a total of 600m, avoiding all side branches. Finally the path discharges you into a large green meadow. Take the second path on your **left**, heading across the centre of the field towards the buildings in the distance. At the other side, go through a band of trees to reach a tarmac lane at a bend. Keep left but immediately turn ***left** on a signposted woodland path. [*Some walkers avoided the muddy pits here by staying on the lane, taking the next left, keeping left at a junction, turning right at a T-junction to re-join the walk.*] Your path runs above a series of pits, probably old workings, followed by a gorse heath. 200m from the lane, the path elbows right. Leave the wider path here by keeping **left** on a narrower path, through more gorse, following some low-tension power lines. In 150m, avoiding too many scratches, you come to a T-junction. Turn **left** to join the main road in 100m in the village of Brimpton Common, on the Berkshire border. Another 100m on the left takes you to the pretty thatched *La Capanna* Inn/Restaurant. **2023 sadly closed and for sale: description kept in hope of a revival.**

La Capanna (previously the "Pineapple" inn) re-opened in 2019 as a wonderful fusion. Externally and, as far as the bar interior, it is a typical charming old thatched English country village pub. And you certainly can settle for a pint of 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. Mind your head on the beams!

In 1830, Brimpton Common was the scene of a pitched battle during the so-called "Swing Riots". Mobs from Aldermaston and Wasing, marched through the area and gathered here to protest about the introduction of farm machinery. The Constables and Magistrates read them the Riot Act but they refused to disperse and it was left to a certain Reverend Cove to face them alone.

- 4 After a possible break, cross the road into Berkshire and take a signposted footpath* directly opposite. [*Some walkers avoided the mud by climbing a metal gate (following the many footprints) on a parallel path, over another gate to the road.*] Go over a stile and on a path between fences and meadows. You come out, by an unneeded stile, to a road. Cross straight over onto a tarmac drive, soon a dusty track which bends right. *Note the bank of semi-wild flowers on your right tended by the terrace of houses.* You come to a 4-way signpost where the main driveway bends left. Keep straight ahead here on a slightly narrower track, passing two more houses and reaching a imposing forest under tall beeches at a T-junction. Turn **left** here on a good woodland path. In 80m you pass a house. Here the *official* path goes left to an old signpost, right alongside a meadow for 300m and abruptly right back to re-join the path. **However, this path is hopelessly overgrown and later becomes quite impassable. It is not clear why the path diverts in this way when the forest**

path is mainly a right-of-way. This walk therefore suggests staying on the good original path. In 400m, the woodland path bends right and the deep valley on your right reveals a wonderful stand of tall mixed conifers in Wasing Wood. In another 350m the wood thins out to a narrow strip and, in another 250m, suddenly you are out of the wood and into the open parkland of Wasing Place, with its house, cedars and church.

If you browse antique bookshops you may come across those wonderful colourful 18th-century maps showing ornate compasses, galleons and sea monsters. The publisher was Mount & Page and John Mount (1725-1786), son of the co-founder, used his fortune to purchase Wasing Place. The estate was originally owned by the Knights Hospitallers (see the "Alresford" walk in this series). John Mount saw the present house finished in 1775 and the family grew in influence, providing soldiers, bishops and MPs for Newbury. The house suffered a severe fire in 1945 and was rebuilt, clipped of its former wings. The estate is still owned by the Mounts. The little church dates from the 1400s, rebuilt in the 1760s. It still has some stained glass dating from the 1600s, definitely worth seeing.

The hamlet of Wasing was an active agricultural community. It is now a hotel offering guests a stay in the "Granary" (where they are protected from rats), the "Dovecote", or the "Pump House". Food is by the Galloping Gourmet. The hotel makes most of its income from weddings. It also plays host to the annual Glade Festival, an electronic dance music fest, a spin-off from Glastonbury.

5 Cross over a track beside a cattle grid and go through a swing-gate heading for the church. Go through a wooden swing-gate to reach a tarmac drive in 150m. Your route is **left** on the drive but first you will want to cross straight over to the west side of the church which is a *must visit*. Now retrace your steps to the drive and turn **right** on it (that is **left** if you did not visit the church) and follow the drive out of the location, straight over a junction in 150m, on a tarmac driveway marked Exit, going through a metal swing-gate to avoid the cattle grid. Follow this driveway across the parkland, gaining a view of the slender spire of Brimpton church on your left as soon as the wood finishes. Just before the gatehouse, the driveway goes over another grid (with a wooden gate) and finally leads you through a small wooden gate to the left of the big white gate, onto a roadway. Turn **left** and immediately **right** over the old Shalford Bridge across the River Enborne.

6 At a 3-way junction keep **left** as for *Brimpton*. As the road bends left, go **right** through a small wooden gate leading to Shalford Lakes. *These favourite angler's ponds are large and quite picturesque, worthy of a sneak look.* Turn immediately **left** on a wide grassy path which runs beside a very fruitful bank of brambles. After 150m, your path continues beside a large meadow. *The building in the distance is Moat Farm which has a 13th-century moat and a priest hole; its Chapel dates from the 1300s.* In another 350m, as you approach a shingle track, go **left** at a marker post. This footpath runs under oaks and past gardens and comes out on a road just outside Brimpton. Turn **right** on the road, ignoring a footpath on the left (*or, you can turn left here, entering Brimpton via a small housing estate*), soon reaching the centre of the village.

Brimpton goes back at least to the Bronze Age because the round "Borson Barrows" are a feature of the village at its southern boundary. But the name is Saxon, although the first part of the name might come from the Welsh word "Bryn" meaning "hill". King Edmund, grandson of Alfred the Great, granted the parish (actually eight "hides" - enough for eight families) to his high-born retainer Ordulf, but Ordulf had to pay 90 pure gold coins, giving you some idea of the value of the village. Brimpton Manor came into the possession of Richard Duke of York, father of the ill-fated

Richard III. But there was a second manor on the east side: Shalford Manor was held by the aforementioned armed monks, the Knights Hospitallers.

- 7 After a possible break, continue along the road, passing the thatched *Old Post Office*, to reach a junction opposite the church. Turn **left** along a gravel track to the Church of St Peter which is usually open from 10am and worth a visit. With the church on your right, follow a path out into a field where there are two waymarkers. Take the path on the **left**, bending round the left-hand side of the field. *In the distance, you can see the Hannington church spire and TV mast (see the "Watership Down" walk in this series).* After the next corner, the path continues between two fields. At the bottom, go straight on to go round a large metal gate close to the road. *(If the gate is padlocked, instead stay in the field, going round to the right to find a gap in the hedge on your left.)* Without touching the road, go immediately **right** on a track. The track zigzags right-left through a hedge and continues along the left-hand side of the next field. In another 250m, ignore a footpath and footbridge on your left. But, just 20m after, turn **left** down a bank and **right** over a bridge *(warning! balsam)*.
- 8 Resume your walk along the left-hand side of a field with the River Enborne on your left. *On your right is a fallow segment of the field which is dense with red clover and other wild flowers.* After 300m, just before a tall oak in the field, your path veers **left** and runs through a large willow grove. You enter a small field. Keep to the right-hand side and, in 30m, keep **right** to go under overhanging trees. Where the landscape opens out again into a larger hay meadow, take a path across the centre, heading for a fingerpost and bridge. Cross this long bridge over the River Enborne into Hampshire and dark woods, with a tributary stream on your right. You come out to a tarmac lane with a stone bridge on your right. Cross straight over on a wide path which becomes narrow after a metal gate, running beside a horse pasture. A stile and 1-plank bridge leads into a pasture full of tall grasses and wild flowers. *(There was no bull, by the way.)* Follow the path *(don't miss!)* to the far side and keep **right** along a wooden plank, thus avoiding a gap into a field on your left. In the far corner of this meadow, your path swerves **right** to take you over a stile and onto a path across green pastures between two wire fences.
- 9 At the end, go through a wooden gate and turn **right** on a track, through a wooden gate to the right of a large metal gate and over a wide bridge into the village of Ashford Hill. At a 3-way fingerpost, keep straight on along a gravel track. Just after the track elbows right, turn **left** through the **first** gap in the hedge on a grassy hedged path. *(Note: this is not the path indicated by the fingerpost, which goes through the second gap and will lead you astray.)* Continue past a metal kissing-gate and a tarmac path to the recreation parking area where the walk began.



The eccentric *Ship Inn* is **left** on the road, 250m from where Chapel Lane comes out.



For end-of-walk refreshments, nearby Woolhampton (which you may have come through) has one of the best canalside pubs in the county. The Rowbarge (postcode RG7 5SH) is fantastically popular, with food all day, six real ales and oodles of parking space on the meadow. It is situated at the meet of Enborne River and the Kennet Canal. There is a canalside walk and a lock; you can watch the swingbridge open and close as the barges come through.

Getting there

By car: Ashford Hill is on the B3051 road. It is accessible from the the M3 via Basingstoke or from the M4.

From the M3: come off at *Basingstoke*. Follow the A339 as far as Kingsclere, without leaving the A339. At a major crossing, turn **right** onto the B3051 in direction *Aldermaston, Tadley*.

From the M4: come off at *Reading West, Theale*. Follow the A4 into Woolhampton. Turn **left** opposite the *Angel Inn*, over the canal. Follow the road, avoiding turn-offs, to a T-junction in 2½ miles. Turn **left** and, in 100m, fork **right**. In ¼ mile, veer **right** to join the B3051 road.

By bus/train: bus 102, 104, 105 from Newbury . Check the timetables.

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