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## Aldershot and the Basingstoke Canal

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Distance: 10 km=6 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Hampshire

Date written: 26-mar-2018

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Refreshments: *The Foresters*

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Map: OS Explorer 145 (Guildford)

*The map in this guide should be sufficient but the OS map may be needed in case some paths are closed for military use, requiring a diversion.*

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

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*Pinewoods, canal, woodland stream, sandy paths, heath, views*

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### In Brief

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This is a walk of great variety, combining a woodland stream, a great sandy wilderness, a nature reserve, pine woods and oak woods. There are no standard footpaths or signposts or stiles on that section: you have to find your way using these very clear directions. The second half of this adventure is a long scenic walk along the towpath of the Basingstoke Canal through a spectacular landscape of dense broadleaves and exotic pines.

The first half of this walk is across Defence land but it is *not* part of a danger area. You will pass children, riders and dog-walkers. But there is free access *only on prescribed days* as listed on the Ministry of Defence website. There is a pointer from the *Guidelines* page on the FFW website to **MoD Access Times**. As a very rough guide, weekends are usually “open” days. *Don't be put off and do check that site – the experience is unforgettable!*

*Do not do this walk during the Farnborough Airshow (the third week of July of an even-numbered year, e.g. 17-24 July 2022) because some paths will be closed.*

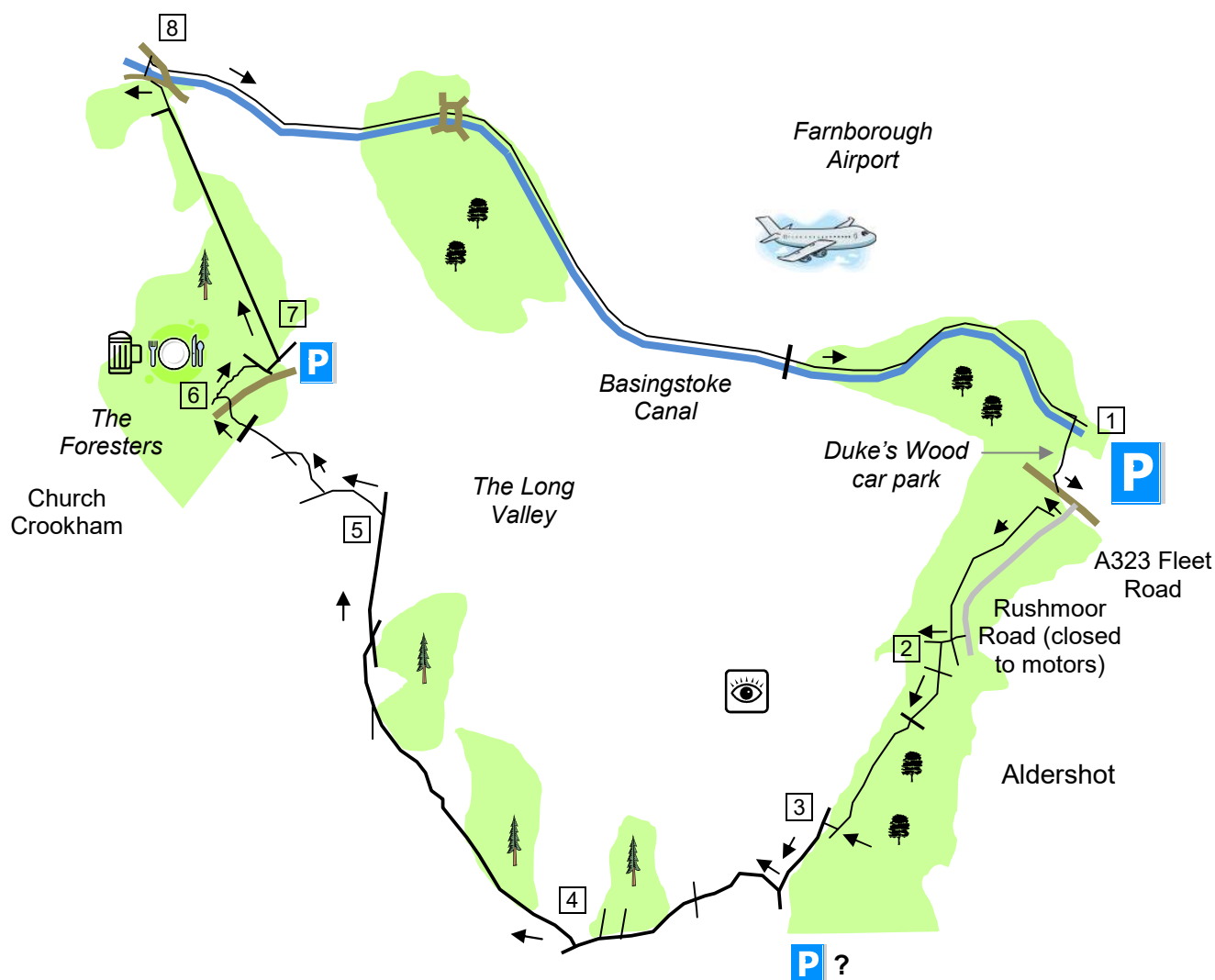


There are no nettles and no undergrowth on this walk, making shorts perfectly wearable. In dry weather, many walkers wear trainers on these easy paths. With no stiles and only two road crossings, this walk is ideal for your dog.



The walk begins at the **Duke's Wood** car park, [www.w3w.co/army.shut.nuns](http://www.w3w.co/army.shut.nuns), in Aldershot, off the A323 Fleet Road, near Puckridge Barracks. It is well publicised in brochures as part of *Wellesley Woodlands*. The nearest postcode is **GU11 2HF** but your satnav will probably direct you north, instead of south, of the canal. If arriving on the A325, follow signs for Fleet near the Potters International Hotel (postcode **GU11 2ET**). The car park is on the right, just after an open space. Another possible starting point is the car park 150m from the *Foresters* (*not* the pub's own car parks!), postcode **GU52 9EP**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

## The Walk



- 1 From the Duke's Wood car park, go out to the road, turn **left** and, in 50m, turn **right** on Rushmoor Road which is closed to motor traffic. Enter through a pedestrian gate on the left of the large metal gates. **Provided you checked the MoD website**, this gate, and all subsequent gates, will be open. Turn immediately **right** through a gate into the forest and walk through the forest for 500m, ensuring that you stay on the winding path that runs parallel with the fence 30m to your left. When you see a pair of closed metal gates to your left, turn **right** down a slope to arrive at a junction of paths. At the bottom, go straight ahead for another 25m to cross a narrow stream (the Claycart Stream) and turn **left** on a narrow path which runs beside the stream on your left.
- 2 **The path may be muddy at first but it quickly improves.** In nearly 100m your path goes over a crossing path. In another 200m your path reaches a crossing track. Go straight over, still following the Claycart Stream but this time with it on your right. *If you hear a din of engines nearby on your left, this is from the Aldershot Raceway where hotrods compete in the Caravan Destruction Derby and other delights.* As you continue through this beautiful oakwood, the stream on your right sinks into a deep cleft. Finally, 400m from the last crossing, you meet a narrow path on your right where the stream runs over a concrete channel and, in winter at least, cascades down.

- 3 Turn **right** here over the channel, to come out in 50m onto the open sandy moor. Turn **left** on a wide surfaced track. In 250m, you reach a major 3-way junction. Turn sharp **right** on a wide path which curves left uphill. Keep going for 650m on this undulating path to pass a large pinewood on the right of your path with a track running through it. Continue past the pinewood, out into the open again, downhill for another 80m. Here the wide path forks. Take the **right** fork, a wide sandy path which branches off diagonally.
- 4 Your course is now fairly straight for 1½ km. In 150m your path runs beside a pinewood on your right and enters a spectacular area of pinewoods, followed by broadleaf woods. It winds left and right and, after 500m in the dark woods it comes up into an open space where a path joins you from the left. The path descends gradually, re-enters woodland and arrives at a metal barrier with a warning notice about the Test Track ahead which is used to test military hardware (not today, of course). Shortly after the notice, you arrive at an oblique 4-way crossing where the sandy test track cuts across the path at an angle. Fork **left\*** here onto the sandy test track and go 400m to find a junction on your left with a large metal gate and a kissing-gate beside it. (\*The official guidance is to take the **right** fork, go 300m and fork **left** over a bypassable makeshift stile just before an animal grid onto a very narrow path, and in 150m cross the sandy test track to a kissing-gate.) Turn **left** through the kissing-gate.
- 5 In 100m, your wide path bends left and passes a little pond\* on the right. 40m after the pond, turn **right** on a very narrow path through gorse bushes. (\*The pond is **dry** in summer and you therefore need to measure a distance of exactly 200m: the turning is 100m after the bend and is through a very narrow opening in the gorse. Should you miss the path, turn right at the next opportunity; your destination is the dense bank of tall conifers on the near horizon.) Keep following this undulating and winding path with a hillock on your left, avoiding side turnings, heading towards the pinewoods and the possible sound of traffic on the main road. Your path curves left to meet a crossing path. Here turn **right** on a narrow path, thus **leaving** your previous path which continues upwards over the heath with the hillock on the left. Your new path keeps you in the same direction as before, down a small dip. Note that it is very narrow. (This area has been cleared of gorse bushes and you may still see the remaining stumps). The path goes past some pines and takes you through a swing-gate (sometimes awash in winter: please help by dropping a brick or a log!). Cross straight over a wide grassy strip onto a very narrow path into the trees opposite. Keep to this winding path, through hollies, leading up to a car park of the *Foresters* pub / restaurant. Cross straight over into the small car park on the left of the pub which during the 2020 situation was used for *al fresco* dining.



*“The Foresters” at Church Crookham is as much a restaurant as a pub and the food may be a bit pricey. Nevertheless, there are several well-kept ales on tap and the food is imaginative with ostrich steak and tempura courgette flowers thrown into the gastronomic mix. There is a sizeable garden and patio to enhance the outdoor atmosphere.*

- 6 After a possible break for refreshment, go to the left-hand side of the small car park and turn **left** through a gap. A narrow path bends right and takes you through a kissing-gate. Turn immediately **right** and follow a wide path which runs alongside the pub’s garden. In 150m, you arrive at a T-junction.

- P** Turn **right**, going through a gate beside an animal grid, to arrive at the Aldershot Road car park (alternative start). Do not enter the car park.
- 7** (if you began the walk in this car park, avoid the main path leading into the woods over an animal grid and instead turn **right** on a wide straight path. Otherwise ...) Turn **left** just before the car park on a wide straight path. After 40m your path goes through a gate beside an animal grid. Immediately after the grid, turn **left** on a wide straight path. Follow this woodland path for most of a km to its end where you can hear a main road close by. Ignore the path where it bends left and instead keep ahead through a large kissing gate to arrive shortly at a side road (Valmead Road). Turn **left** on the road and quickly turn **right** between bollards over a canal bridge. After the bridge, turn sharp **right** to join the canal towpath, going under the road (mind your head!).
- 8** You will be following the canal on your right for a total of 3½ km, with the main roads far enough away to your right to allow you a long period of peaceful walking. In 1 km you pass under two carriages of a main road. The trees change to thin birch and the terrain opens out as you become aware of Farnborough Airfield close by on your left. The next bridge is the Eelmoor Bridge, a black girder bridge, which has a small car park. Continue along the towpath, now in quiet woodland once more. After 1 km, you see a second black girder bridge. Fork left to turn **right** over the bridge. *On your right is one of the gates into Duke's Wood: worth a look for its wooden sculpture, bridges and nature trails.* In a minute you are back at the car park where the walk began.

## Getting there

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By car:

**from the M3:** come off at exit 4 (*Farnborough etc.*). At the first roundabout, keep right as for *Farnborough etc.* At the big roundabout, keep straight on, still for *Farnborough A325*. In 200 yds, **avoid** a left filter but, after passing under a road bridge, filter **left** for *Farnborough A325*. At the next roundabout, turn **right**, go straight over the next roundabout and turn **left** at the next larger roundabout, always following *Farnborough A325*. Keep straight ahead for 3½ miles, passing the airport on your right, going over several junctions. Filter **left** for *Fleet A323* and turn **right** under the trunkway still for *Fleet*. In ½ mile, stay on the main road as it elbows right: the car park is ⅓ mile on the right, it is not marked.

**from the A31** (Guildford / Farnham): if coming from Guildford, take the Hog's Back (A31) road and ignore the first left filter for Aldershot, continuing to the large roundabout just east of Farnham. At the large roundabout, follow signs for *Odiham, Badshot Lea, Farnborough*. Follow this road (A325), straight on at each roundabout or junction, passing the *Royal Arms*, after 1½ miles. Continuing over a small roundabout and, ⅔ mile later, straight over a large roundabout. After ⅔ mile, at the corner of the *Potters International Hotel* (postcode **GU11 2ET**), turn **left** at a sign for *Fleet A323*. At the end, turn **left** on a major road and immediately stay on the road as it elbows right. The car park is ⅓ mile on the right: it is not marked.

By bus/train: bus 7 runs from Aldershot to Church Crookham; bus 10 runs from Fleet and Farnborough, including Saturday . Check the timetables.

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