



Bramshill and the Blackwater River

Distance: 9 km=5½ miles

easy walking

Region: Hampshire, Berkshire

Date written: 28-aug-2022

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Last update 27-nov-2022

Refreshments: picnic or pubs in Eversley after the walk

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

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

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Long woodland trails, secret paths, heath, ponds, streams, quiet lanes

In Brief

Hampshire is often regarded as a land of cosy cottages and gentle meadows. But it has wild spaces too, much nearer to London than the New Forest. This walk is a journey of discovery, taking you around the great forest of the Bramshill Plantation. The central part of the walk follows part of the shy Blackwater River.

This walk can be combined with its sister walk, Bramshill and Hazeley Heath, to make a wonderful 12-mile walk.

It's best not to do this walk after a bout of heavy rain because the lanes near the Blackwater River (sections [5](#) and [6](#)) may be flooded.

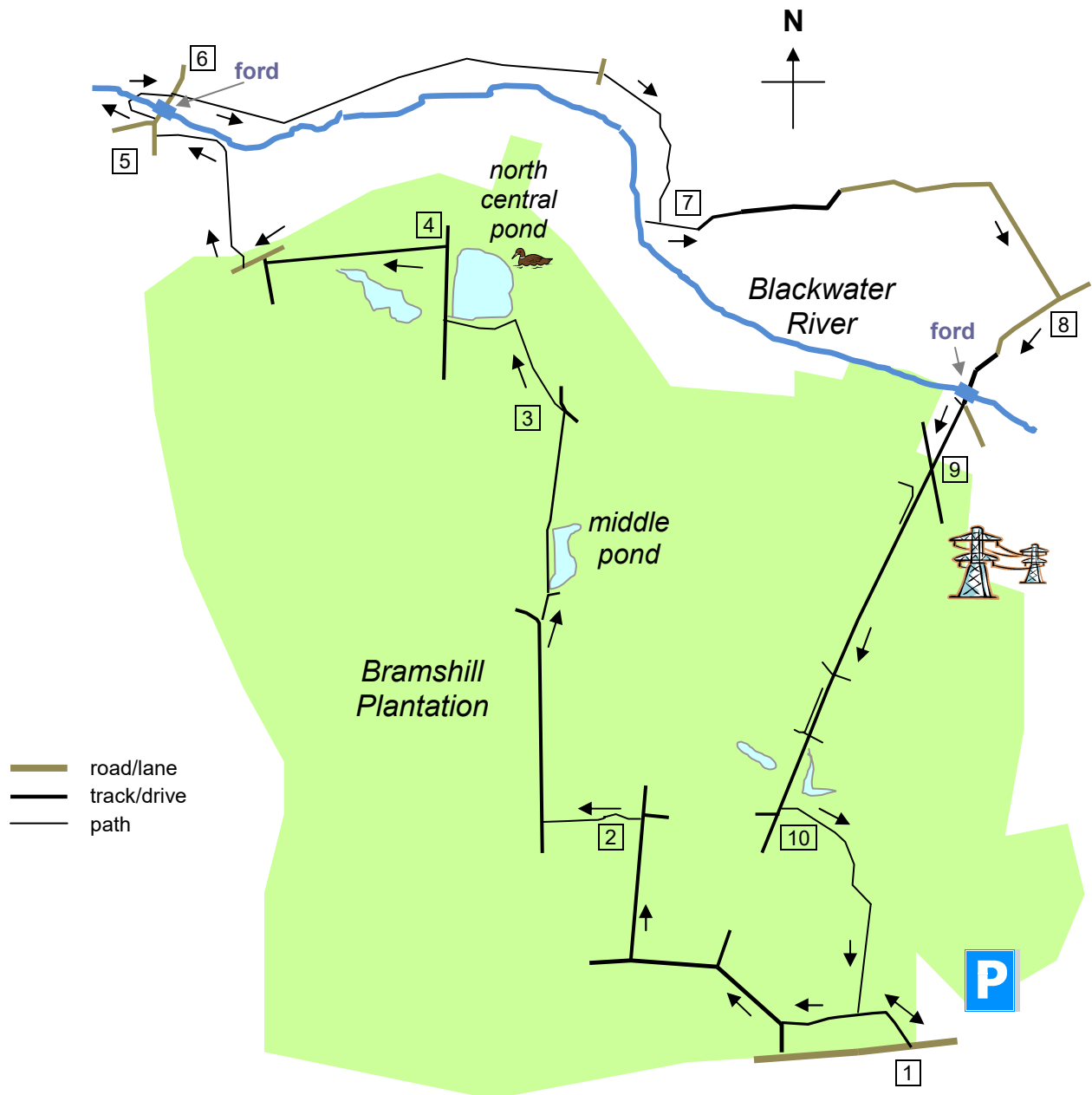


All the paths in the Plantation are clear of undergrowth. The short stretch of farm land beside the river has very few nettles and scratchy undergrowth. So shorts should be fine on this walk. In summer, the terrain was dry woodland with wide paths and tarmac. In other seasons there could be some wet along the trails, making boots advisable. With only **one stile** and no main roads, this walk should be ideal for your dog too.

The walk begins at the **Bramshill Road** car park, west of Eversley, Hampshire, accessible via the M3 at Hook, or the M4 at Reading. The car park is 1 km (¾ mile) east of the village of Bramshill, on the main Bramshill Road. It is easily located, being situated directly beneath several HT power lines. There is no exact postcode because the car park is not near any buildings, but if you approach from the east, you would pass close to **RG27 OPS**. The exact location is www.w3w.co/prepares.firework.strongly. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

In case the car park is temporarily closed, there are spaces just there on the dirt strip verge, also a little further along the road and also on the left in Plough Lane.

Map of The Walk



The Bramshill Plantation covers 1,664 acres (over 670 hectares). It is a mixture of commercial conifer plantations, natural mixed woodland and meadows, and nature reserves. It contains a large number of ponds, some hidden in the woods. The whole area is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The woods sustain a population of rare birds such as woodlarks, nightjars and Dartford warblers, and rare plants. The ponds and mires sustain dragonflies and damselflies.

The Walk

- 1 Starting from the back of the Bramshill road car park, take a wide sandy path leading into the woods, just to the left of the power lines. In about 50m, turn **left** with the main path. Ignore a path on the right shortly after and continue with a plantation of young spruce on your right. In nearly 200m you reach a tarmac drive. Turn **right** here. (To your left you can see the road and perhaps a few parked cars.) In 200m, ignore paths off and stay on the tarmac drive as it elbows left. *If you have a dog, please don't let him wander, as this is a notable place for wildlife, including the elusive nightjar.* In a further 200m you reach a junction where the tarmac changes to sand ahead. Turn **right** here on a wide concrete track deeper into the forest.
- 2 Your next turning is after 330m along this track, on the **left**. As a guide, look for the *first major turning* on your right. Your path is on the **left** a fraction **before** this wider turning. Yours is an unmarked woodland path, much narrower than the track you were on. Follow this path, surrounded by dense conifers on each side, for 250m where it ends at a sandy track. Turn **right** on this wide straight track and follow it for nearly 500m. Here the main track bends away to the left. **Leave** the track at this point by continuing straight ahead along a minor sandy track. Ignore a junction on the right, keeping straight ahead on the track which has become more grassy and surrounded by dense shrubs and trees on each side. On your right is one of the many natural ponds that are found in the Bramshill Plantation (we'll call it the *Middle Pond*, since the ponds don't seem to have names). It is obscured at first until you get a clear view through a break in the trees. A smaller pond on your left is hidden by reeds. After nearly 500m, this minor track ends at T-junction with another path.
- 3 Turn **left** at the T-junction but immediately **leave** the wide path as it bends away to the right. Instead, continue straight ahead on a very narrow woodland path leading beneath some tall pines. The path runs through dense forest for nearly 250m with a ditch on your left. Finally you emerge with a classic view of one of the largest ponds on the Bramshill Plantation (we'll call it the *North Central Pond*). *If you are lucky on the day, you may see a pair of swans.* Turn **left**, avoiding a narrow path on the right which is only useful for a photo-opp. The path runs alongside the pond on your right, giving wide views. It ends after 150m or so at a wide gravel drive.
- 4 Turn **right** on the drive. After 150m, some short sections of fencing mark a wide crossing path. Turn **left** here on a wide sandy path in an open landscape. In 400m, at a T-junction, turn **right**, immediately reaching the tarmac of Well House Lane. Turn **left** on the lane for only 50m, then **right** on a footpath marked with a fingerpost and a yellow arrow. Your path leads round the side of a large metal gate, passes under power lines and runs along the right-hand side of a wild field and then curves left towards the far corner. You pass a yellow arrow on a marker post and emerge, via a 3-step stile, onto a tarmac lane, Ford Lane.
- 5 Turn **right** briefly on the tarmac lane. Almost at once, turn **right** on a rough track leading to the wide *Farley Hill Ford* which crosses the flowing Blackwater River.

The Blackwater River, sometimes called the Long River, runs for 32 km=20 miles, rising near Aldershot and meeting the Whitewater, and hence the River Loddon, near Swallowfield, Berks. It forms the border of Hants and Berks for much of its length. The Blackwater Valley Path can be walked from near

*Badshot Lea all the way to Swallowfield and follows it fairly closely, apart from a few diversions. The book *Explore the Blackwater Valley* which can be ordered from <http://www.blackwater-valley.org.uk/> describes the walk and the wildlife as well as several circular walks.*

Your route is *straight ahead across the ford (only joking)*. Immediately turn **left** through a large modern kissing gate onto a wide path which runs on the edge of a wild meadow with the river on your right. In only 50m or so, turn **right** over a barred bridge across the river, giving you a chance to peer down at the rushing waters. *For this stretch beside the river, you will be in Berkshire.* After the bridge turn **right**, doubling back on the other side of the river. This path leads through a wooden swing-gate to the other end of the ford. Cross the tarmac lane here, through a tiny car park and keep ahead on a signposted footpath through a (usually open?) wooden gate beside a crop field on your left. You are on part of the *Blackwater Valley Path*, also the *Wokingham Way*. (See also the walk in this series "*Sandhurst to Horseshoe Lake and Blackwater*".)

- 6 The Blackwater River is close by on your right, appearing occasionally at a gap in the trees or an angler's perch. Your path goes over a wooden bridge into another field and continues as before. A wooden bridge-with-rail leads into a third field. Finally, a large metal kissing gate leads into a larger crop field. This time, your route diverges a little from the river side and goes straight across the field in the direction of a distant pylon. You emerge through a large metal kissing gate onto a tarmac lane next to Jouldings Farm. *Note the unusual sculpted figures on the gate posts.* Cross straight over, across a wooden bridge, onto a footpath which runs between ranch fences of this stud farm. In the next meadow, turn **right** to navigate a wooden gate, a plank bridge and a kissing gate, taking you into a horse pasture. Keep to the right to go through a pair of kissing gates. Your path runs along the right-hand side of a meadow, then across the centre to a modern kissing gate and a T-junction.
- 7 Turn **left** here on a path between hedges. The path takes you shortly through a wooden swing-gate. Keep **left** now on a dirt track which reveals patches of tarmac. It becomes the fully tarmac with big farms on each side, including the timbered *Bulloways*. Follow this very quiet bendy lane, ignoring a footpath on the left just after the over-modestly named *Lea Cottage*. Finally, after exactly 1 km on this lane (Forges Lane as its name is revealed at the end), you meet a T-junction with another lane.
- 8 Turn **right** on this lane, New Mill Road which, for reasons to be seen, is even quieter. The lane ends at a large house, the *New Mill*, in times past a restaurant and wedding venue. Here you meet the Blackwater again at a wide ford. Once again, your route is *straight ahead across the ford (joking again)*. Slip to the right and cross by the long metal footbridge, enjoying the view of the rushing waters with the sluice on your left. *Welcome back to Hampshire!* Ignore a kissing-gate on your left and go straight ahead towards houses. Avoid a tarmac lane to your left and cross straight over on a shingle drive, passing two houses. After a heavy metal barrier, you enter open heath. Welcome back to the Bramshill Plantation!
- 9 Go straight ahead on the main path, avoiding little wooden bridges on your right. In 150m, at an oblique crossing path, go straight over. (The power lines take the left fork here and this walk avoids them completely.) Your path has a companion path running parallel on your right which should be disregarded. There are minor paths leading off: one after 600m and

another 150m later. After that, you pass close to ponds: one over on your right, hidden in the trees, and another close by on your left where you can just discern a murky long stream curving away into the trees. Your next turn is vital. It comes after the wire fence on your left ends. Your turn is a narrow path **left**, down and over a hump. (As a guide, if you miss this turn and go a little further along the main path, you meet a much wider junction on your right between two short wire fences, indicating that you have come just 10m too far.)

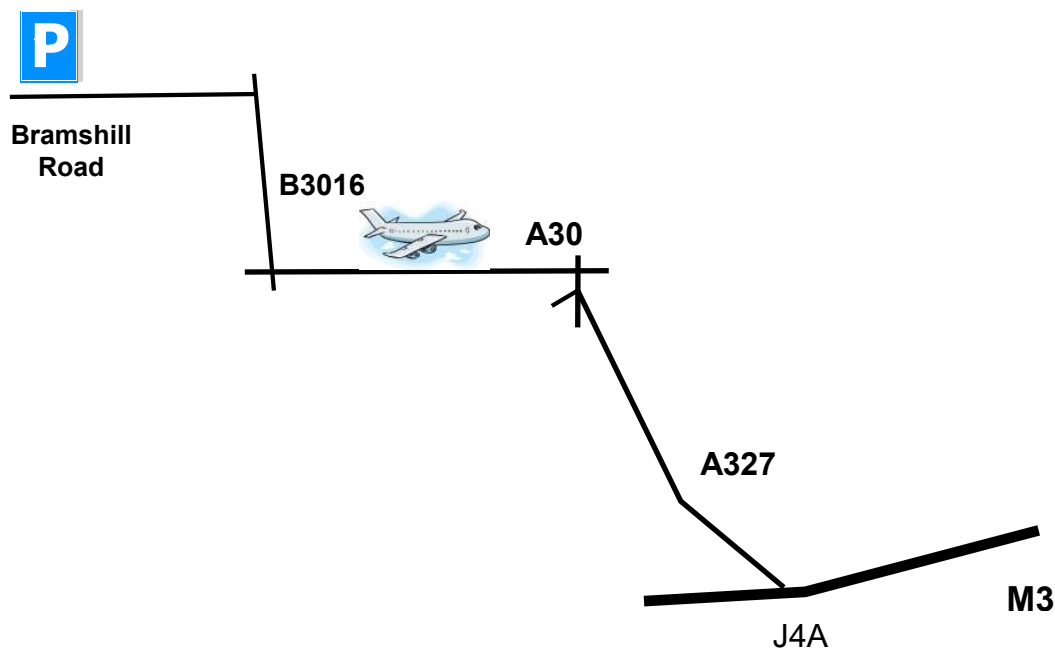
- 10 You are on a natural sandy path which runs beside the wire fence on your left. Hoof prints indicate that this is a popular route for local riders and you can see the contrast from the straight forestry paths. The space on your left is a protected area, concealing another pond. You come through tall pines and across a birch-fringed bracken heath. The path runs over roots, past hollies and larches, through glowing heather, finally curving right to run along the side of a plantation of young spruce. Continue all the way to a T-junction with a path familiar from your outward journey. Turn **left**, wheeling **right**, to come back to the Bramshill road car park where the walk began.



Pubs in Bramshill and Farley are long gone. But for end-of-walk refreshments, there are several good pubs in Eversley, such as the *Chequers* (RG27 0NS) and *Golden Pot* (RG27 0NB).

Getting there

By car: Bramshill can be accessed from the M3 motorway. Come off at Junction 4A. Go north on the A327 in the direction *Yateley, Reading* for 2 miles. Turn right at a roundabout as for *Reading, Yateley*. Turn **left** soon on the A30, going past Blackbushe Airport; after 2 miles, turn **right** on the B3016 as for *Reading, Eversley*. In 2 miles turn **left** as for *Bramshill*. The car park is in just over 1 mile, on the right, just as you pass beneath overhead power lines.



From the M4, Bramshill can be reached via the A327 near Reading.

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