



Empshott

Distance: 9 km=5½ miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Hampshire

Date written: 31-may-2020

Author: Botafuego

Last update: 9-jul-2024

Refreshments: picnic, or afterwards in Selborne

Map: Explorer 133 (Petersfield) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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Medieval church, river valleys, woodland, views, high “hangers”

In Brief

This walk is a quiet stroll through the best of the Hampshire Hangers, featuring meandering woodland paths, wide open valleys and wild flower meadows . After sheep meadows and a broad green vale, you go up into the hills to find a hidden lake. A long wild expedition along a stream valley leads to the apex of the walk: a candidate for the best woodland ramble in Hampshire.

Spring 2024: This walk is badly affected by the closure of much of Noar Hill (Section [8](#)) due to fallen trees and forestry work, and the (consequential?) total blockage by brambles of the path in Adderhood Hanger (Section [7](#)).



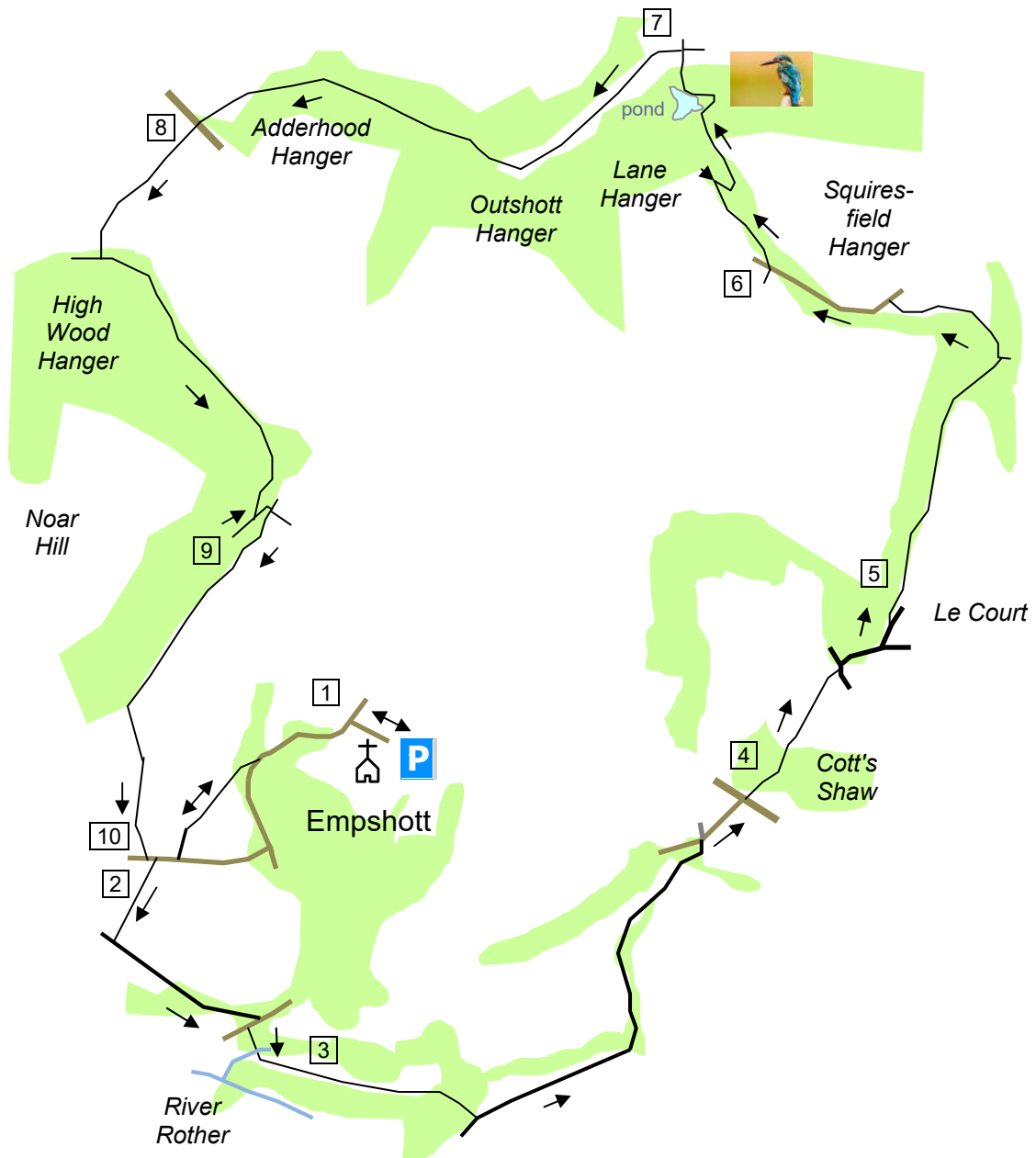
There is very little farmland on this walk, so very few nettles, but the good path through Adderwood Hanger has been carved through wild undergrowth, making shorts uncomfortable. Were it not for the 21 stiles, this walk could be classified as “easy”. The paths were dry underfoot when the walk was researched in a dry May but, generally speaking, it would be wise to consider wearing boots. With only two direct crossings of the main Selborne Road, this walk should be paradise for a dog, provided he is not too large and can manage the stiles, all but one of which have a gap, by accident or design.

The walk begins beside the Church of the Holy Rood in the small village of **Empshott**, near Liss, Hampshire, www.w3w.co/washed.pelt.rucksack. The nearest postcode is **GU33 6HT**, but *do not follow your satnav to the end* because it will take you into a private drive – ignore the last turn and continue along the lane to the church. There is a strip for parking beside the lane*. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk


The village's name has evolved from "Himbesetc" in 1170 and means "patch of land (Hott) frequented by swarms of bees" but you will be quite safe. Less than ten inhabitants were registered in 1428, making Empshott one of the smallest villages in England. The number had risen to 171 in 1931 and is probably still about the same. There are no shops or pubs, unfortunately, making this rather spread-out village one of the quietest, so you really can hear the bees -- and the rippling of the little river. In fact it is the mighty River Rother in its infancy. Empshott can boast one famous son, the cricketer superstar John Small, the greatest batsman of the 1700s who helped formulate the rules of the game in Hambledon (see the "River Meon" walk in this series). Bill Bryson, the author, also lives nearby.

Empshott church of the Holy Rood was built in the 1200s in the reign of Henry III but newer features have been added over time, especially the stained glass bell tower the likes of which you will not see elsewhere. The dedication is not particularly rare: the Holy Rood is a relic of the True Cross. Bill Bryson declared it his "favourite church of all".



- 1 The little 13th-century church at Empshott is the perfect example of the quiet English churchyard and definitely worth visiting before you begin the walk (although it was locked in May 2020 for good reasons *but has re-opened*). With the church on your left, walk along the lane to a T-junction by the entrance to *The Grange*. Turn **left**, signed *Empshott Green, Hawkley*, and follow the road downhill under tall ash trees. In 200m, at a wide left bend, **leave** the road by forking **right**, just beside a field gate on your right, [2024: the sign is missing and this narrow path is very easy to miss because of tall nettles; if you miss it, stay on the lane, keeping **right** at a junction] onto a footpath. This narrow path runs through thick vegetation high above the road and comes over a stile into a meadow. Walk along the **right**-hand side of the meadow, go over a stile next to a house*, and turn **left** on a shingle drive, coming out to a road. Turn **right**, shortly meeting footpaths on both sides of the road.
- 2 Ignore the prominent sign pointing right (your return route) and fork **left** across the grass and over a stile [Jul 2024: care! broken] into a field. Go straight across the field on an unclear path, heading for a robust stile visible in the hedge on the far side, under the tall trunk of a dead tree. The stile leads down to a wide sheltered byway. Turn **left** on the byway and follow it for 350m down to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane and, in only 40m, turn **left** on a narrow signed footpath beside a garden hedge. The path leads across a long bridge over the infant River Rother in a delightful spot with a private garden on your right and a tree garden on your left.
- 3 Your path goes over a stile and turns immediately left, going over a stile beside a large metal gate into the first of several sloping meadows, sometimes occupied by a small flock of pedigree sheep. After an open gate, you are walking under a fringe of beeches. An avoidable stile and a small wooden gate lead into a second meadow: keep right in the corner to go over a stile, along a winding woodland path, thick with wild garlic in spring. You emerge, via a wooden swing-gate and a stile into a long meadow with a wide vista that makes a telling contrast to the dark woodland. Turn **left** in the long meadow on a main grass path which is also a bridleway. At the far end, go through a large metal gate and over a stream. Continue uphill on a sunken stony track. After 350m the atmosphere turns lighter as you pass a field gate. In another 150m you reach tarmac Church Lane. Turn **right** to reach the main road.
- 4 Cross straight over the road to a narrow signed footpath opposite, just to the right of a private drive. Your path runs beside a house on your right and winds through the woodland of Cott's Shaw, ending in an untidy felled area (a future new plantation). It ends at a new bridge-with-rail and stile into a meadow of waving grass. Continue straight ahead, in the direction of the exotic trees at the top. Here, go over by a redundant stile to a tarmac drive opposite the modern *Red House*. Cross over a tarmac drive to a driveway, a fraction **left**, marked *North House, Halifax House*. A short distance on your right is the entrance to the little Memorial Garden and Rose Garden of *Le Court*, which permits visitors to enter and relax. For you are on the site of the first Cheshire home.

Leonard Cheshire returned from WW2 and bought this Victorian mansion from his aunt in 1946 as a self-help community for war veterans. But the project ran into debt and Cheshire planned to sell the house. Then, out of the blue, he had a call from the matron of the Petersfield Hospital who needed a place for a terminally-ill patient who had been one of the veterans. Many others followed and so "Cheshire" homes for the disabled began. The old house was pulled down and replaced and many other Cheshire homes were founded, in the UK and abroad.

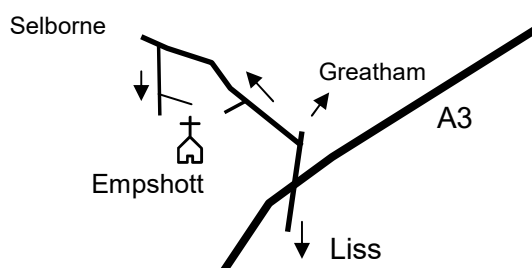
- 5  Continue along the tarmac drive and, at a fork, take the **left** fork uphill. In 50m, fork **left** on a woodland path beside a yellow arrow. This path runs beside a wire fence on your right with terrific views [\[Aug 2021: you need to go under a fallen tree\]](#). Soon it enters a woodland of very tall beeches, followed by varied shrubbery. The path is very overgrown but quite walkable. In 500m or so you arrive at a 3-way junction of paths. Keep **left**, passing some yellow arrows on a redundant stile. Your path runs along the top of a sloping meadow. [The golfball-shaped dome visible on your right belongs to RAF Oakhanger](#). At the other side, follow a wide sunken woodland path down to a road, Bradshott Lane. Turn **left** on this road, passing Squiresfield Hanger with its unusual oasts (this was once hop-growing country).
- 6 After 250m on this quiet road, as you emerge from the shade of trees, fork **right** on a footpath, as directed by a new wooden fingerpost. The path passes a bypassable metal kissing-gate and runs beside a field on your left. After 200m, it doubles back **right** into the woods. (This turn is easy to miss: it is 10m before the field edge bends left; look for a tall wooden post.) At a kissing-gate, your route turns **left** downhill and gradually descends. Try to keep about 10m from the field on your right, entering the field only for the last 10m before arriving at the end of a field. The remains of a stile lead you down into deep woodland of Lane Hanger, via a flight of newly-repaired steps. The path bends right and left over a bridge. It wheels left along the side of an open area and passes a pond on your left where it is worthwhile pausing to enjoy the solitude and sometimes glimpse a kingfisher. After a marshy patch, you pass a redundant metal gate and emerge into a long valley.
- 7 In only 30m, you meet a wider crossing path. (As a check, there is a field fence and some old rusty gates straight ahead, and a stile – which you do not need – diagonally left.) Turn **left** on this path through the grass. You may need to turn **left** away from the stile and shortly **right** on a very unclear grassy path. You can see your route curving left ahead along the valley. After an easy open-landscaped 400m in view of Outshott Hanger, your path runs through dense bracken, bends **right** (NB, don't miss), goes over the remains of a wire fence (where a stile once stood) and enters woodland. [\[2024: the brambles ahead had become impenetrable: walkers were forced to climb steeply up into the trees, turn left and scramble down after 100m or so to rejoin the path.\]](#) You now have a walk for about 700m through the wild landscape of Adderhood Hanger where in summer the bracken can be head-high. The path runs a little higher than the valley floor on your left where a stream meanders. The path keeps the same general direction but it winds a lot through head-high bracken and horsetails, keeping you on your guard. It is evidently well-used since it had been nicely cleared [\[before 2024\]](#). Soon there are groves of trees on both sides and your path dips to cross the stream over a bridge-with-rail in dense woods. Finally, after more deep woodland, following a winterbourne (stream dry in summer) on your left, you come out into a field of bracken and reach the Selbourne Road via a metal barrier.
- 8 Cross the road carefully to a similar barrier opposite. Now take a signed footpath straight ahead, running in a thin band of woodland between two fields. (The way in looks dark and forbidding, but this is correct!) The path gradually widens and the scent of wild garlic is overwhelming in springtime. You seem to pass through a tunnel of overhanging coppiced beeches. Finally you come up to a T-junction with a 3-way fingerpost. Turn **left** on an excellent level path under tall beeches. [\[Spring 2024: a wide diversion was in](#)

place due to fallen trees and forestry work. In 2024 the diversion was so impractical that walkers simply ignored the “closure” at their own risk, climbing over a gate at the end.] This is High Wood Hanger, one of the slopes that circle Noar Hill. (See the neighbouring walk “Selborne Common and Noar Hill”.) After about ½ km ash take over from the beeches. In a further 200m you descend to meet a similar path coming from the left, marked by a post with blue arrows.

- 9 Turn sharp **left** on this path, almost doubling back. It shortly reaches a large metal gate leading out into the open fields, next to a 4-way fingerpost. Go over a stile here [careful! wobbly] and immediately turn **right** over another stile. Your route is along the right-hand side of a pasture, on the edge of the woods. There may be some docile cattle in this very large pasture. After a stile on the far side, you are walking beside a large hay-field in a generous grass margin. In the corner, your path elbows left, away from the wood, with a horse pasture on your right, now (2021) beside a new fence which encloses the path. In the first corner, go over a new stile and veer a fraction **right** across a grassy meadow, heading for the rightmost house. Tucked in the corner is a rather tall stile which now, thankfully, has a dog flap. After the stile, a path leads between gardens, and hence out to the road in Empshott.
- 10 The final stage of this walk retraces the outward journey. Turn **left** on the road and, in only 70m, turn **left**, keeping to the left-hand side of an unsigned gravel drive past a house (dog on lead please!). Go **right** over a stile, along the **left**-hand side of a small meadow, over a stile and down through undergrowth to a road. Keep **left** on the road, the upward gradient drawing on the last of your reserves, and turn **right** at the next junction, back to the church where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: the easiest approach for those coming from the M25 or London area, is via the A3 as far as the Liss / Selborne roundabout. Follow signs for Selborne. You pass a welcome sign for Empshott, but the village is off the main road. It is best to ignore the first left turn signposted *Empshott Green*, because the lane is narrow and twisty. Instead, go another km (.6 mile) and take the *second* sharp **left** turn for *Empshott Green*. In 600 yds, turn **left** to the church. Park on the roadside verge, but on Sunday keep back some distance to allow for church-goers.



By bus/train: bus 38 between Petersfield and Alton runs along the Selborne Road and must stop somewhere. Check the timetables.

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