

BANSTEAD WOODS NATURE TRAIL



Easy Terrain

5 km
Circular
2 hours

070515



Access Notes

- 1. Most of the paths are firm and in good condition, however some sections can be muddy in the winter or after rainfall so stout shoes, boots or wellingtons are recommended.*
- 2. The route includes several slopes and there are kissing gates at the start and end of the walk. Dogs are welcome in the woodland, in fact it is a very popular dog walking spot, but please clear up after your dog and put the waste in the dog bins provided.*
- 3. The final stretch of 400m crosses a flower meadow where cattle are used for conservation grazing. The cattle seemed very relaxed in the company of dogs as we walked, but do take the usual care if you have a dog with you. (Alternatively, you can easily avoid this section by returning to the car park on the path through the woodland edge).*

A 3 mile (5km) circular walk discovering the hidden secrets and natural wonders of Banstead Woods, 250 acres of ancient woodland. Banstead Woods' recorded history stretches back for nearly a thousand years, to the time of the Domesday Book in 1086.

There are no toilets or places for refreshments along the actual route, however there are many benches along the way should you wish to bring a picnic. The area is covered by Ordnance Survey Map Explorer 146 Dorking, Box Hill and Reigate. This walk follows permissive footpaths which cross public and private land. Information is included for your interest, but please respect people's privacy, keep dogs under control and remember the Countryside Code.

Getting there

The walk starts and finishes from Holly Lane car park (which is free of charge and has a 1.9m height restriction barrier), near Chipstead in Surrey. The start of the trail can be reached by public transport. Chipstead railway station is around 500m from Holly Lane car park. For help with planning your journey by public transport please visit <http://journeys.travelsmartsurrey.info>.

Approximate post code **CR5 3NR**. Grid Ref TQ 273583.

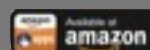
Walk Sections

Go 1 Start to First Post

From the car park, take the path which heads directly away from the road, going through a kissing gate and passing a large information board on the right. You will pass a fenced circular area on the left which contains benches and interpretation boards. It is worth spending some time in this area, learning about the local wildlife, woodland management and local history before you begin your walk.

Banstead Woods is 250 acres of ancient woodland and an amazing resource for wildlife and people. It is owned by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and is managed in partnership with the Downlands Countryside Management Project. Ancient woodland is defined as land that has been continually wooded since at least 1600. Before 1600, planting of woodland was

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uncommon, so land that was wooded in 1600 was likely to be natural. Some ancient woods may even link back to the original wildwood that covered the UK around 10,000 years ago.

The site, then known as Banstead Park Estate, was a deer park in the medieval period used to shelter the royal deer. Both King Edward I and II gave the park to their wives and hunted in the woods for deer. Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife, was the last queen to have the woods as a gift. She owned the woods until her death in 1536. In 1841 the land belonged to the Spencer family, when the name changed to Banstead Woods. Frances Baring, of the famous banking family, built a large house in the woods in the 1880s...more of that on the way round. In 1934 the woods were bought by Surrey County Council, but ownership later passed to Reigate and Banstead Borough Council.

Follow the path up the shallow woodland steps with the interpretation area on the left. You will pass a finger post on the left, with kissing gates each side. Keep straight ahead passing under the arch of a large yew tree. Immediately after this you will come to a choice of three paths ahead. If you look to the right you will see a waymarker post with yellow bands, a number one and a green-white-brown tree trunk waymark symbol with the words Banstead Woods Nature Trail. This is the first of the series of 17 posts that this nature trail follows. The numbered posts (like this one) denote particular points of interest, whilst posts with just the symbol and yellow bands mark the route directions

1 → 2 First Post to Orchard



Take the middle of three paths ahead, which passes immediately to the left of a strange looking old oak tree. This is a pedunculate oak (or English oak) and its odd appearance (with a bulging trunk) may be because it was damaged when it was young.

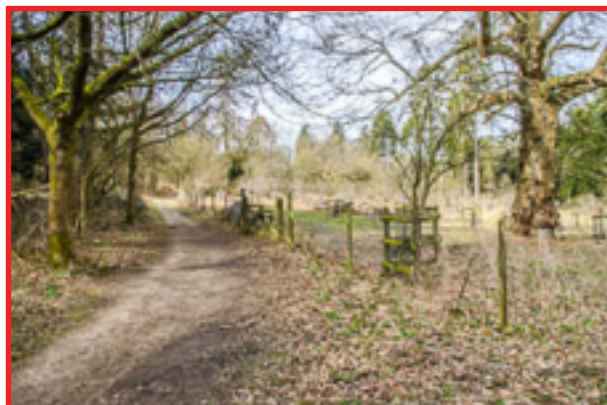
Follow the path steadily uphill. Towards the top of the slope you will see a path to the right, between a bench and Post 2. Turn right here. This is a good stretch to appreciate the methods of ancient woodland management, particularly coppiced hazel. Coppicing is an ancient, sustainable method of producing small diameter timber and is also beneficial to wildlife as it allows more light to reach the woodland floor promoting the growth of flowers and plants. Coppiced trees are distinctive in having an array of 'trunks' coming from the ground, rather than one single trunk as seen in a standard tree. By contrast, the most common modern method of timber production is larch plantation where a single species of tree, not native to the area, is planted in lines to produce a crop of trees. After harvesting they need to be replanted. Some wildlife does benefit from larch trees, such as siskins and redpolls in the winter months.

Keep ahead and further along you will come to Post 3. The multi-stemmed trees seen here are old hornbeam coppice stools. Hornbeam is the hardest British timber, which was used for early machinery parts such as mill cogs and was also widely cut for firewood.

Keep directly ahead on the path which now leads you steadily downhill and swings right to reach a crossroads at Post 4. The magnificent standard tree here is also a hornbeam, around 300 years old. Other tree species visible at this junction include a large sessile oak (a close relative of the English oak), a Corsican pine and, to your right, an avenue of old pollarded lime trees.

Keep ahead, passing between the two yellow posts then ignore the access track immediately on the right. Keep ahead, uphill, for just 40m to reach the next crossroads with a yellow post. Turn right here and the path leads you downhill to reach Post 5.

2 → 3 Orchard to Elizabeth Drive



Directly ahead is the fenced old orchard that has now been restored by protecting the old trees and planting additional young apple and pear trees. The fruit trees are all traditional varieties that are an important part of our heritage. The old trees themselves provide lots of texture for insects, including ladybirds that spend the winter under the loose bark.

Follow the path as it swings left passing the orchard on the right. A little further along you will pass Post 6. Look to the left here and you will see a line of trees running perpendicular to the path. This is a planted line of horse chestnut trees that are around 100 years old. To the right is a native cherry tree, noticeable in spring with its magnificent display of flowers.

Further along you will pass Post 7. The few beech trees left here are all that remain after many were destroyed in the Great Storm in 1987. All the young birch and ash trees in the area have grown up since then.

Continue up the hill. NOTE: You are now coming up to the access road within the woodland so take particular care with children and dogs. Go through the staggered barrier and you will reach a zebra crossing over the access drive, Elizabeth Drive. The private drive provides access to the large house that was built in the centre of the woodland in 1880s. This became the Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Sick Children and is now private apartments.

3 → 4 Elizabeth Drive to Owl Nest Box



Cross the drive with care and go through the staggered barrier ahead to continue on the woodland path, winding steadily uphill. The bare ground beneath the large beech trees is caused because the beech canopy casts dense shade. Much of the thickly grown evergreen scrub in this area is holly, which is shade tolerant. It is of great value to birds and invertebrates that feed on the fruit and disperse the seed.

Continue on this path which leads you past Post 8 and on to Post 9. Invasive rhododendron was cleared from this area. The land is now starting to recover and native plants and trees are starting to grow again, including carpets of bluebells in the spring.

Continue winding along the path to reach Post 10. To the right of this you will see a large scots pine, one of only three native conifer species found in Britain. There is an owl nest box on the south side of the tree.

4 → 5 Owl Nest Box to Pond



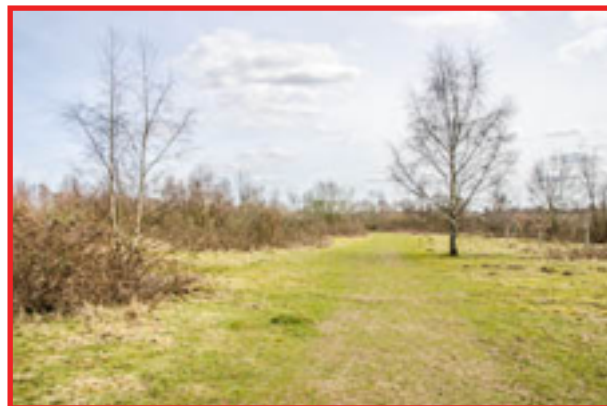
Keep ahead on the winding woodland path and you will come to a T-junction at Post 11. Bear right here. There is an ash tree to the left of the path. Ash is commonly found on chalk soils, so this tree indicates that there is an outcrop of chalk here.

You will come to another staggered T-junction. Bear right and then follow the path as it swings left to reach a major crossroads with a bench. Keep straight ahead, passing Post 12 on the left. This marks a rowan tree. Rowan, a small native tree with attractive red berries, is an important winter food for birds. This is a good spot to look out for flocks of finches in the winter, particularly redpoll.

Keep ahead and, after just a few metres, the path leads you past Post 13 (also on the left). The massive sweet chestnut coppice stool here is probably around 300 years old; although its large size is due to fast growth rather than old age. Sweet chestnut is not a native species; it was introduced by the Romans more than 2,000 years ago. The tree had two main uses, firstly as a food source and secondly for timber. It is thought the tree was brought here as the nuts were a good source of energy and could be ground into flour.

Continue on to reach Post 14 where you will find a fenced pond on the left, with some strategically placed benches, ideal for bird watching or your picnic. It is thought that this pond was created in medieval times for the benefit of animals that were hunted in the woodland. The pond is the last of seven ponds that were historically found in the area. Ponds like this are important for frogs, toads, newts, and dragonflies and are a vital source of water for badgers and deer. The pond was restored in 2011.

5 → 6 Pond to Viewpoint



Turn left, passing the pond on the left. The path winds ahead to reach a junction with a waymarker post. Turn sharp right here onto the smaller path, heading south once again. At the crossroads with a track, keep straight ahead on the narrow path. After just a few paces you will emerge to a T-junction with another track. Turn left along this for just a few metres and you will come to a fork at the edge of a more open grass section.

Take the right-hand branch and follow the obvious grass track between sections of young trees and scrub. These fields were once part of the woodland but were cleared to grow food during World War I. They were still used to grow corn up until the 1980s. Now the area has been replanted with trees so that it can return to woodland. This is one of the best places to see summer migrant birds including willow warbler, linnets, garden warbler, blackcap and whitethroat.

The path will lead you to Post 15. Here the route continues to the left, but it is worth taking a small diversion for just a few paces to the right to reach a bench and viewpoint across the valley (another great place to pause and enjoy the views or your picnic).

6 → 7 Viewpoint to Flower Meadow



When you've finished admiring the views, retrace your steps back to the fork at Post 15. Ignore the left-hand branch (the path from which you emerged), instead take the right-hand branch to continue your journey.

At the crossroads, keep straight ahead to re-enter the ancient woodland. After just a few paces you will come to another crossroads with a large oak tree at its centre. Keep straight ahead here and then, at the next major crossroads turn right.

The path leads you past Post 16 on the right. The strange tree by this post is a stub oak coppice stool, half way between a coppice stool and a pollard, used to produce specialised timber for ship building.

Keep ahead at the next crossroads, with a bench on the right. Continue to the next crossroads where you will see Post 17. Go straight ahead and look across to the right. You will be able to see the ancient reverse ditch near to the pollarded beech tree. This ditch would originally have been one metre deep with a one metre bank on the left-hand side. Topped with dead wood, this would have made a deer-proof barrier to stop deer grazing young coppice beech shoots.

This is the last marker post on this nature trail. To get back to the car park follow the main path which bears left then right heading downhill. At the T-junction turn right and, after about 100m you will come to a junction with a path on the left (marked with a yellow banded post). Here you have two choices:

-If you wish to avoid the flower meadow, which is grazed by cattle for conservation, keep straight ahead to the end of the path, then turn left down the hill back to the car park.

-For the main route through the meadow, turn left here and continue to the gate at the bottom of the slope.



flowers such as pyramid orchid and marjoram.

The path leads you back to a kissing gate into the car park, where the walk began.

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7 → 8 Flower Meadow to End

Go through the gate and turn right. Follow the path through the flower-rich meadow.

Behind you is Park Farm. During World War II Canadian troops were based at Park Farm. They dug trenches and built tank tracks in the woodland using rubble from the London Blitz. German and Italian prisoners of war were also kept here.

Cattle are used in this meadow for conservation grazing to maintain the habitat and prevent the encroaching scrub. Both the woodland and this meadow are important habitats for wild flowers. The woodland is home to bluebells, wood anemones and celandines in the spring whilst the meadow is home to

Disclaimer

This walking route was walked and checked at the time of writing. We have taken care to make sure all our walks are safe for walkers of a reasonable level of experience and fitness. However, like all outdoor activities, walking carries a degree of risk and we accept no responsibility for any loss or damage to personal effects, personal accident, injury or public liability whilst following this walk. We cannot be held responsible for any inaccuracies that result from changes to the routes that occur over time. Please let us know of any changes to the routes so that we can correct the information.

Walking Safety

For your safety and comfort we recommend that you take the following with you on your walk: bottled water, snacks, a waterproof jacket, waterproof/sturdy boots, a woolly hat and fleece (in winter and cold weather), a fully-charged mobile phone, a whistle, a compass and an Ordnance Survey map of the area. Check the weather forecast before you leave, carry appropriate clothing and do not set out in fog or mist as these conditions can seriously affect your ability to navigate the route. Take particular care on cliff/mountain paths where steep drops can present a particular hazard. Some routes include sections along roads – take care to avoid any traffic at these points. Around farmland take care with children and dogs, particularly around machinery and livestock. If you are walking on the coast make sure you check the tide times before you set out.

