



Forest of Bere: Creech Woods, Place Wood

Distance: 11 km=7 miles

easy walking

Region: Hampshire

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Refreshments: picnic, many local inns after the walk

Map: Explorer 119 (Meon Valley) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Long woodland trails, easy field paths, quiet lanes, bluebells in season

In Brief

The Forest of Bere is a collective name for more than 40 sizeable forests, woods and copses north of Portsmouth, many with public access or foot-paths through them. They are spread over a wide area which in past centuries was unbroken forest. No one has yet devised a “Forest of Bere Trail” which would be super-marathon-length and separated by roads and settlements and farmland. This walk takes in two of the larger woods and a string of shady copses, making a satisfying and easy ramble. Creech Woods are an awesome forest of dark plantations and noble mixed woodland. Place Wood is a much lighter bluebell wood with a dizzying trail.

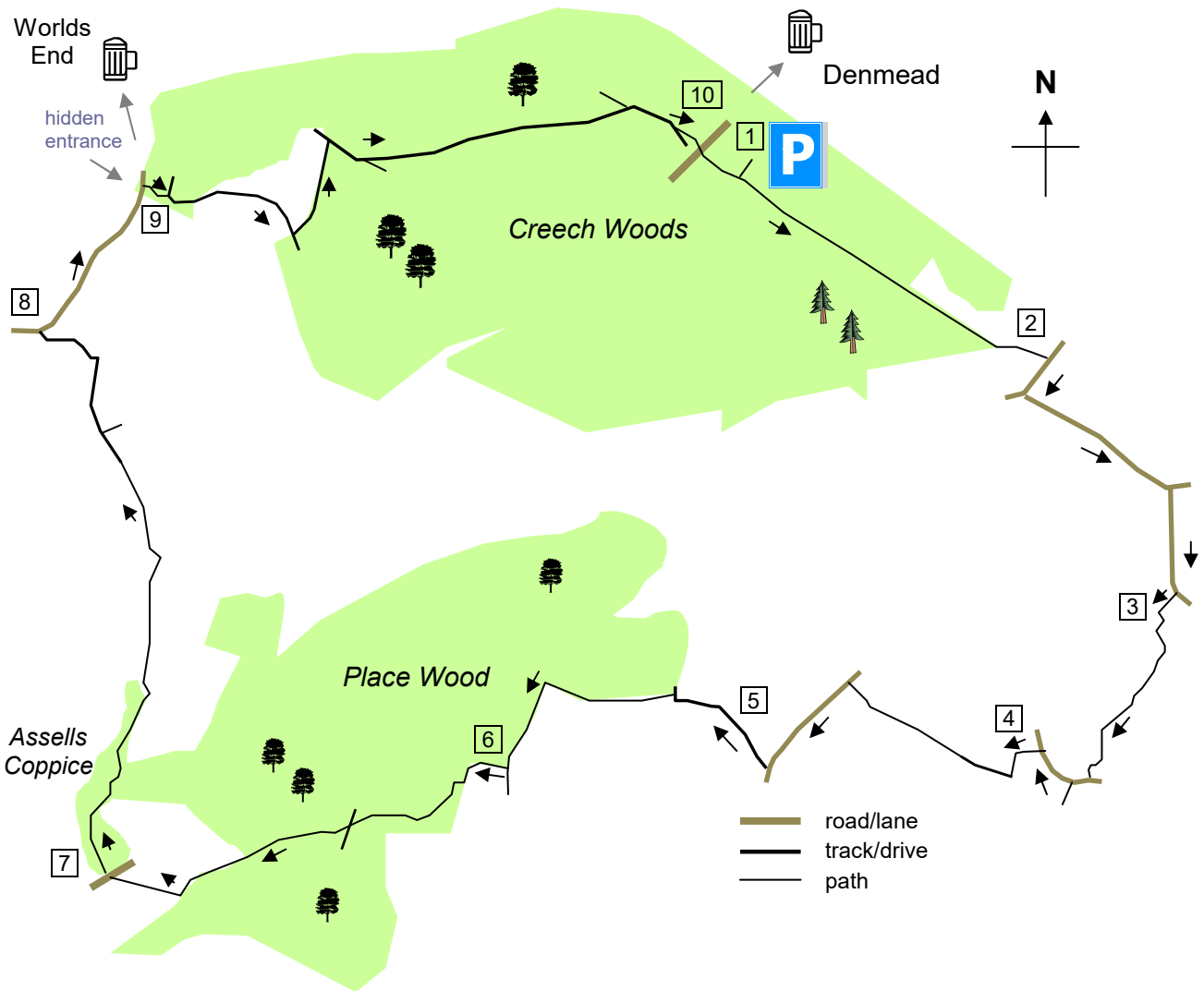
For refreshments, there are the *Harvest Home* pub, just off the roundabout at Denmead, and the *Chairmakers* in Worlds End, both within 1 km of the walk and reachable either after the walk or by a simple diversion using your map.



There are plenty of wild flowers along the route but thankfully very few nettles, so shorts should be ok. The 7 stiles are fairly short and robust and passable by your dog. The walk was done in light trainers in the very dry summer of 2022 but in winter or damp conditions the paths in the two smaller woods will probably necessitate boots.



The walk begins at the large main car park in the central east side of Creech Woods, near **Denmead**, Hampshire, “what-three-words” location www.w3w.co/nosedive.animal.bristle. Postcode **PO7 6UB** will get you within a few yards of the car park, from where you only need to drive into the forest and turn left on a tarmac driveway. The car park **closes at dusk**, typically **4.30** in winter, so if you might be running very late, park on the patch a little further along the road, or on one of the road sides. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



- 1** The walk begins in the car park in the middle of Creech Woods. Walk the length of the car park, passing a notice board on your left, to the far end. Here, take a wide path which leads out in only 10m to a T-junction with a marker post and a large faded “walking trail” arrow. Turn **left** here on a long straight path through magnificent mixed woodland of pines, chestnut, birch, oaks and beech. In 150m you come over a crossing path. In 350m there is another crossing path: keep straight on, thus leaving the “walking trail” which points left. The wood thins out and, in another 300m, you reach a metal barrier [Jun 2024: broken]. Go through a swing-gate [Jun 2024: blocked by a fallen bush: use the horse trail] on the left of the barrier and follow a path that runs parallel to a horse trail on your right. You come through another swing-gate and out to a road.
- 2** Turn **right** on the road to reach a junction in 120m. Turn **left** on a leafy residential road of large houses, nicely situated close to the links of Furzeley Golf Club. *(The club serves the vast community of Waterlooville and offers a quite reasonable “pay-and-play” deal, including a rather condescending “Twilight” fee which applies to the elderly and not, as you might imagine, playing in semi-darkness.)* In 500m turn **right** at a 3-way road junction, signposted *Purbrook*. In 300m, where the road bends left, go **right** over a stile into Closewood Farm which is now mainly dairy and was once a piggery. *Note that you are on part of the Wayfarer’s Walk, a 70-mile long-distance Hampshire walk from Inkpen to Emsworth.*


- 3 Before a barn, go **left** over a stile and **right**. Go over another stile next to a metal gate and keep **left** alongside a crop field. Turn **right** in the corner, as directed. In the next corner, opposite two metal gates, turn **left** and follow the edge of a green meadow. The path leads you over a long bridge-with-rails and a stile where it continues beside the next meadow. Turn **left** in the corner, over a stile and long bridge-with-rails across a stream, a tributary of the River Wallington. A patch of woodland leads out to a tarmacked Sheepwash Lane. Turn **right** on the lane, ignoring a footpath on your left, going over the stream again, passing some cottages and farm buildings. As soon as you are in the open again, go **left** through a metal kissing-gate into a meadow.
- 4 Follow a path along the left-hand edge of the meadow and, in 50m, turn **left** around the edge. Go through a wide gap into the next meadow and immediately turn **right** to walk on a wide surfaced path beside a hedge on your right. Where the wide path turns right into a meadow, keep straight ahead on a narrow wire-fenced grassy path. The path finally leads you over a stile and into a large meadow. Take a faint path straight ahead across the centre. At the far side, pick up a wide track leading past buildings and out to a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on this straight quiet lane. In 300m or so, just after the lane bends a fraction left, go **right** on a signed footpath, a driveway for Belney Farm.

You are entering Southwick Estate and the biggest farm of its kind in Britain. But instead of milk or meat or wheat, as in the past, this farm's product is Solar Energy. Hailed by Friends of the Earth of a great step forward, this farm produces 48 megawatts. The great expanse of solar panels is visible from the hills but here closer to the ground they are hardly visible and the green beauty of nature is unspoilt.

- 5 Follow the driveway as it elbows left and bends right towards the farm house. After a barn, turn **left** on a concrete path, over a stile. Immediately keep **right**, next to trees, passing more solar panels on your left. At the far corner, keep straight on, down into woodland. Turn immediately **left** on a wide path which runs just inside the wood. When you notice a wooden gate on your right, your path zigzags to join a wider path. After a total of 250m in the wood, you emerge next to an open field where the wood turns right and you still have solar panels to your left, and usually a red arrow. *(Don't miss this turning! If you reach a house, you have gone too far and need to backtrack.)* Your route is immediately **right** here. This path may seem unmarked until you notice some yellow arrows on a post just inside the corner.
- 6 Follow the right-hand edge of the wild field. *The tall structure in the distance in "battleship grey" on Portsdown Hill is a replica of a modern destroyer, used for training.* Your path runs beside the brooding darkness of Place Wood, turns **left** in the corner and in 50m bends **right** to enter the wood. The route through this bluebell wood is twisty but perfectly clear on the ground, keeping you glancing down at your feet. There are yellow markers at first but they don't last. After a trapeze of about 300m, your path meets a wide private crossing path. Keep ahead on a path which is now a bit wider and straighter. In about 350m you pass beneath a high canopy of ash trees and you emerge into a lighter area. Continue dead straight on a narrow path through bracken, shrubs and chestnut, soon back in deep forest. Your path ends suddenly at a brick wall, one of the boundaries of Southwick House.

Southwick was once the site of an Augustinian Priory, dissolved at the time of Henry VIII. The ruin is owned by English Heritage and can be visited. Southwick House was built in 1800 to replace an older house and castle.

Turn **right** beside the wall and follow a path along the left-hand side of a field of wild grass, through a patch of woodland and out to a main road.

-  **7** Cross straight over the road, through a metal swing-gate (or the small wooden gate) with a yellow arrow. Your path runs through a long grassy area of wild flowers. finally bending **right** and through a wooden barrier into woods. This is Assells Coppice, a small wood not usually listed in the Forest of Bere, but the great oaks and dense foliage make it seem larger. Hollies and a flat bridge lead to a twisty left-right course. *In late spring, this is a great place for bluebells.* Soon there is a steep slope on your left, just as fields appear on both sides, while you pass under tall beeches. The wood ends at a hump (*care! slippery*) leading straight ahead into a field of wispy grass. Your route crosses the field diagonally and runs along the left-hand edge. At the far end, keep **left** over a tarmacked flat bridge, through an (open) wooden gate, leading into another long meadow. Walk the length of this meadow. *The big house ahead to the right is Lovelocks Farm.* A "Southwick Estate" gate leads onto a semi-tarmac drive. Follow the drive, passing the entrance to Beckford Green Farm. Finally, you emerge onto the tarmac of Beckford Lane.

- 8** Turn **right** on this quiet lane. In 200m or so, ignore a signed footpath on your left. You pass a farm house and converted stables on your left. **Ignore** a modern kissing-gate on your right at this point and stay on the lane. You now need to measure exactly 40m along the lane. That is about 50 paces. The crucial turn is **after** the first electricity pole (which may be overshadowed by an oak tree) and 20m **before** the second electricity pole. Look **right** here for a narrow unmarked path into the woods. Take this path, passing the remains of a wooden fence. You are back in Creech Woods!

- 9** The path immediately becomes quite respectable and winds for 100m to meet a major horse path at a 3-way junction. Avoid the left turn and keep straight ahead, joining the horse path. You enter an open area surrounded by spruce plantations and other tracts of cultivated forestry. The path curves right and finally, after 400m on this horse path, you approach more dense forest ahead and reach a prominent 3-way junction. Turn sharp **left** at this junction. The path runs for 300m with the dense forest close by on your right and finally ends at a T-junction with a very wide track. Turn **right** on this track, possibly meeting more walkers and strolling families for the first time. In nearly 100m, avoid a narrow right fork and bear **left** to stay on the main track. You now have an easy trek through the forest for 700m, where the track meets a grassy path from the left and curves right. In a further 200m, just before the track bends right again, you will glimpse a metal barrier ahead and see (or hear) the main road.

- 10** Fork **left** here onto a narrow path into the tree canopy. (*Don't worry if you miss this turn.*) Keep **right** through the trees, heading for the road. Exit through a small wooden gate here. Cross the road directly over to a narrow path, going through a small wooden gate. Follow this narrow woodland path until, in less than 100m, you see the car park on your left. Fork **left** through the trees, back to the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Denmead is near Waterlooville and Portsmouth and 3 miles from the A3 trunk road. If arriving from the north, come off the A3(M) at exit 3. Turn right for Waterlooville. Follow the road over two more roundabouts and, at the third roundabout, turn **right** for *Denmead*. In 1½ miles, turn **left** on Forest Road, signposted *Southwick*. In 1 mile turn **left** at a small roundabout, as for *Furzeley Corner*. (The *Harvest Home* pub is on the right* here.) The entrance to the car park is 450 yds on the left, a wide tarmac driveway. (* Your satnav may direct you via Southwick Road and past the *Harvest Home* pub, in which case your route is *straight over* the small roundabout.)

By bus: ring the *Harvest Home* pub (see above) on 023-92255086 and ask them which bus (and train?) serves the bus stop just outside the pub (feedback please).

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