



Empshott

Distance: 9 km=5½ miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Hampshire

Date written: 31-may-2020

Author: Botafuego

Last update: 20-sep-2021

Refreshments: picnic, or afterwards in Selborne

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

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

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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.



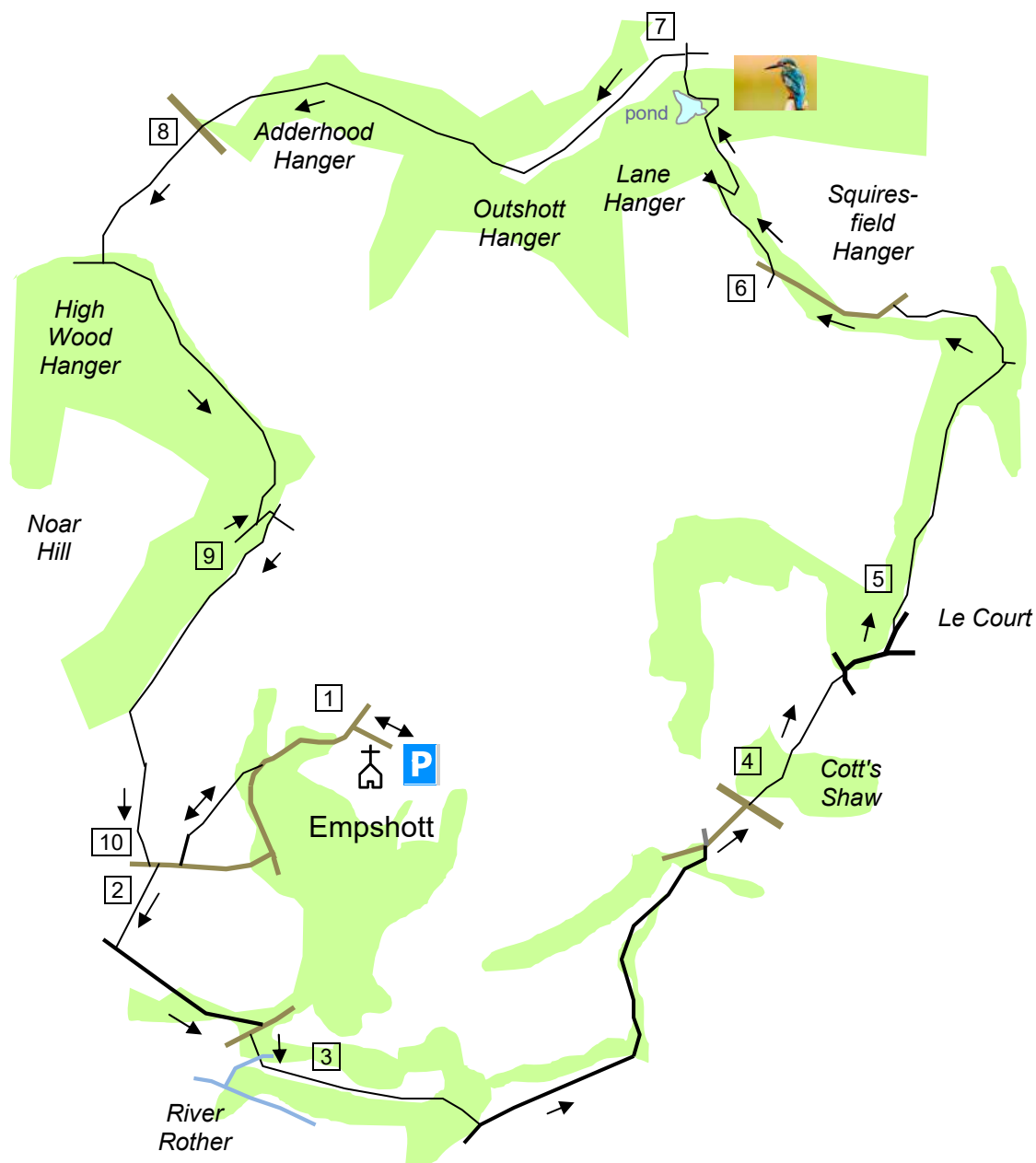
There is very little farmland on this walk, so very few nettles, but the good path through Adderwood Hanger has been carved through wild undergrowth, making shorts uncomfortable. Were it not for the 21 stiles, this walk could be classified as “easy”. The paths were dry underfoot when the walk was researched 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 most have 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. At a wide left bend, **leave** the road by forking **right**, just after a field gate on your right, at a fingerpost [Aug 2021: missing, don't miss this turn!] onto a footpath. [Winter 2020-21: the path is getting badly eroded: please tread very carefully; you may see a telecomms cable: please avoid it!] 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.

* The house owner asks you kindly to keep to the *far side* of the drive and not to peer in, to keep any dog on a lead, and generally to pass by discreetly. (Now and on the way back).


Turn **right**, shortly meeting footpaths on both sides of the road.

2 Ignore the more prominent sign pointing right (your return route) and turn **left** over a stile into a field. Go straight across the field on an unclear path, heading for a stile visible in the hedge on the far side. The stile leads down to a wide sheltered byway. Turn **left** on the byway and follow it all the way down to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane and, in only 40m, turn **left** on a signed footpath beside a garden hedge. [Jun-Aug 2021: the early warning "closure" sign does not apply to walkers.] 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, occupied by a small flock of pedigree sheep. The next stile is right on the edge, the third stile is rather thin (but the gate may be open), and the fourth (rather high) stile takes you into woodland, 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 [Jun 2021: the brick bridge, marked "closed" has no obvious damage and there is no sign of repairs in progress: the notice must apply only to motors and riders as walkers crossed without difficulty]. Continue uphill on a wide sunken 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. 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 a stile [care! wobbly] 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 seems to permit 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.

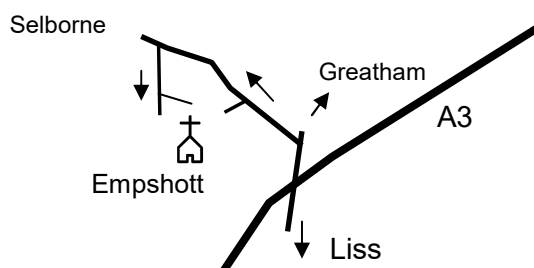
- 5  Continue along the tarmac drive and, at a fork, take the **left** fork uphill. In 50m, fork **left** on a woodland path beside a yellow arrow. This path runs beside a wire fence on your right with terrific views [\[Aug 2021: you need to go under a fallen tree\]](#). Soon it enters a woodland of very tall beeches and 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, go through a large metal gate [\[care! heavy and liable to fall\]](#) and follow a wide track 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 on the other side of the road. 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. At a kissing-gate, your route turns **left** downhill and gradually descends to meet the end of a field. A stile leads you down into deep woodland of Lane Hanger, via a flight of newly-repaired steps. [\[Sep 2021: the bridges have been restored and moved 30m downstream: awaiting minor adjustments to the instructions.\]](#) A pair of bridges take you to a pond hidden in the woods, where it is worthwhile pausing to enjoy the solitude and sometimes glimpse a kingfisher. The path wheels left along the side of an open area and passes the pond again. After a marshy patch, you 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 wide grassy path. You can see your route curving left ahead along the valley. After an easy open-land-scaped 400m in view of Outshott Hanger, your path curves right, goes over the remains of a wire fence (where a stile once stood) and enters woodland. 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 has been nicely cleared. 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. 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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