Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

West Marden and Stansted Forest

Distance: 13½ km=8½ miles easy walking
with optional 2½ km=1½ miles extension to Rowlands Castle

Region: West Sussex Date written: 30-may-2016

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Refreshments: West Marden, Walderton

Map: Explorer 120 (Chichester) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Woodland, hills, views, green meadows, easy country tracks, historic house

In Brief

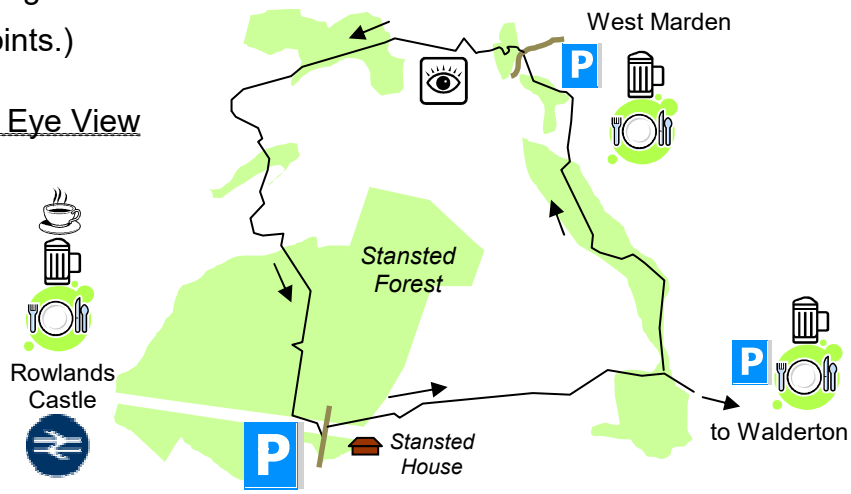
A wonderful easy day out with some adventure, many views, every kind of terrain (*except* main roads and ploughed fields!), wild flowers in summer, an exciting forest, awesome parkland, one or two perfect country pubs* and an option to extend the walk to a nearby large village (see below) having rail connections and generous facilities. (* If you need to book at the *Victoria Inn*, ring 02392-631-330, NB: closed Monday, except Bank Holiday.)

This walk can be extended by 2½ km=1½ miles with a visit to the village of Rowlands Castle with its three pubs, teahouse, shop and **Railway Station**. For this, you need a **copy** of the **other walk** *Stansted Forest and Rowlands Castle*.

There are just a few nettles on the narrower paths, enough to make shorts inadvisable. Underfoot, there are good surfaced paths or country trails, or woodland, making good shoes or trainers fine in summer, although boots are always recommended, especially in other seasons. Your dog can certainly come on this adventure, but you need a lead for the forest which is a conservation area with nesting birds.

(See next page for starting points.)

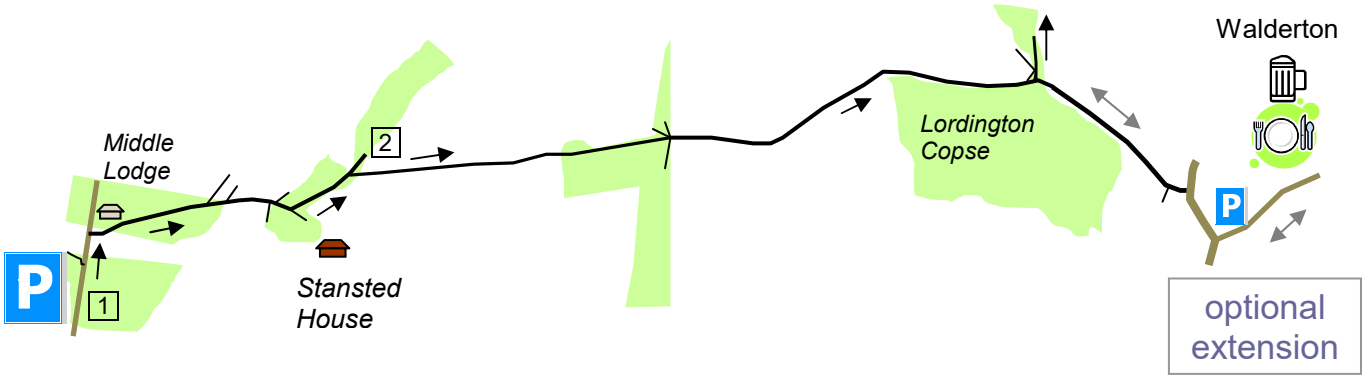
Bird's Eye View



The walk begins in the **Stansted Forest Main Avenue** car park, near the Middle Lodge, w3w:putter.drags.surfed, within sight of Stansted Park. *Note that this car park **closes at 5pm** even in summer, possibly earlier in winter.* If there's a risk that you won't be back in time, park on the roadside (such as near the entrance beyond the line of stumps). The nearest postcode is **PO9 6DU** but if you navigate by this you will go through Stansted Park which *also* has free car parks, w3w:disclose.soak.stolen, **(closing at 6pm)**, adding a little to the distance. Other good starting points are (1) in West Marden (postcode **PO18 9EN**) where there is plenty of roadside parking (2) in Walderton, with a slight extension to the walk, where there is a car park just outside the village near the main road (postcode **PO18 9EA**) (3) in Rowlands Castle, round the Green (postcode **PO9 6AB**), using the extension described above and in the text. Another possibility is by the roadside in Forestside where there is a dirt strip (postcode **PO9 6EQ**). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

If you are starting this walk in **Rowlands Castle**, begin with section 8 of the other walk *"Stansted Forest and Rowlands Castle"*.



Leg 1: Stansted Park to Watergate Hanger 3¼ km=2 miles

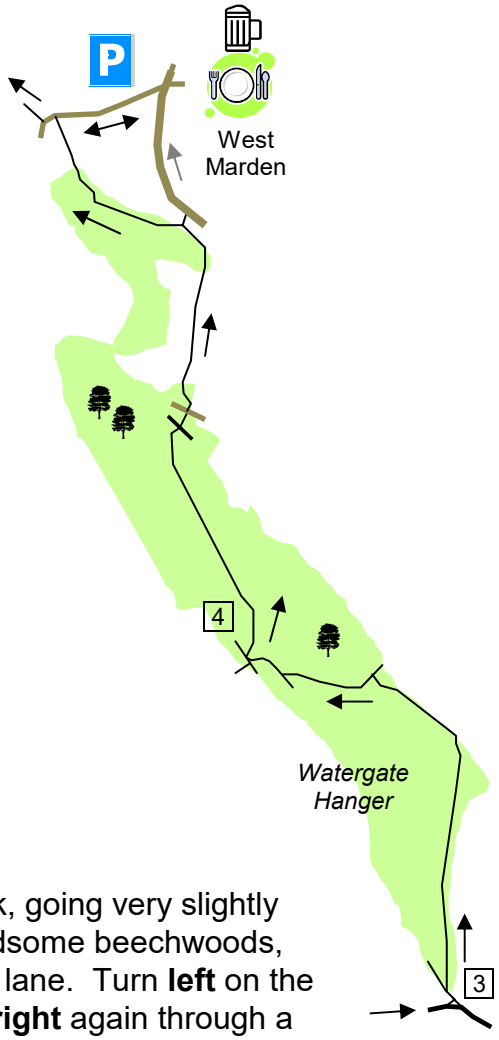
1 From the Main Avenue car park, go out to the road and turn **left** towards the porticoed gatehouse known as the Middle Lodge with a view across to Stansted House on your right. Turn **right** just before the lodge and follow the tarmac drive under the tall beeches of Stansted Park. In 300m, as you come out into the open, avoid footpaths on your left. Just before more trees, ignore a footpath on your right and avoid a permissive path on your left, staying always on the tarmac. Just before the gates onto a private drive to the house, fork **left**, as directed by a fingerpost. You are on a magnificent drive in parkland, crowned by tall ash trees. In 200m, just before a house and a flint wall, fork **right** on a wide gravel track.

2 You are on an easy wide track between open fields. Soon another house, the *Lumley Seat* can be seen on your left. After 600m, your track enters trees and, in another 300m, you reach a junction of paths. Go straight ahead past a large metal gate, thus leaving Stansted Park. The track becomes semi-tarmac as you walk under more tall ash trees. After 700m, the woods of Lordington Copse are on your right. As you emerge from the

woods and your track begins to descend with views ahead, as the track veers to the right, leave it by taking either of the **left**-hand turns.

However, if you began the walk in **Walderton**, or would like a pleasant break at the *Barley Mow*, keep ahead and do the **Walderton Extension East**, near the end of this text.

Leg 2: Watergate Hanger to West Marden 3¾ km=2½ miles



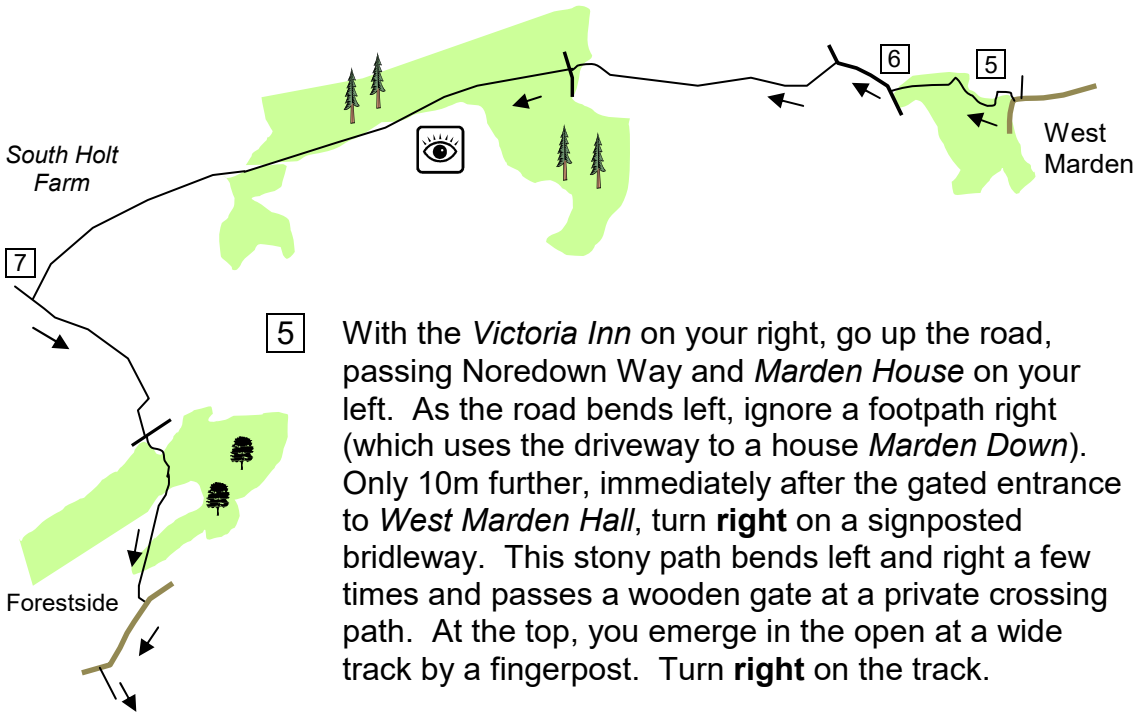
3 Almost immediately, you come to a 3-way fingerpost with a choice of paths ahead. Take the **right** fork, a pleasant level path down into the centre of the woods of Watergate Hanger. (The left fork is also usable, dry and level, but it is stony and runs beside a ploughed field.) You have woods on your left and occasional views right across the valley. After 500m, ignore a permissive path on your right. Soon you are walking quite close to the road, with a house on the other side. Your path suddenly narrows and runs beside a fence behind a house. Immediately after the house, you reach a T-junction. Turn **left** uphill. The path winds upwards past a marker post, fairly steeply, then getting easier in thick woodland. At the top, after 250m, you meet a track with a metal barrier on your left. Turn **right** on the track. Stay on the main track to come out to a multiple junction with a 4-way fingerpost and an open field and a shed (belonging to a farm house) visible on your left. (It is here that the "left fork" option mentioned above joins.)

4 Turn sharp **right** at the junction on a wide stony track, going very slightly downhill. After 800m on the main track through handsome beechwoods, you cross over a private drive. Continue to a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane and in just 5m turn **right** and then immediately **right** again through a kissing-gate. Follow the narrow path uphill through shrubs into a gorgeous sloping meadow. Your path runs along a line of beeches, beneath the steeply sloping hillside on your left. It then leads you downhill and past the remains of a small metal gate. A short section leads you to a 2-arm fingerpost and a stile on your right. Turn **left** along the edge of a field. In 100m you reach a 3-way fingerpost. Your route is **left** here over a stile. (However, if you would prefer to avoid four more stiles (one a challenge for a dog) and the cutest little group of Highland cattle, turn **right** instead across the field, **left** on the road, ignoring a footpath on the left (which is too overgrown), and **left** at a road junction into the village.) Your path goes up into beechwoods again and takes you over a stile into a mown grassy meadow. Keep to the left to go over another stile into a small pasture with some lovable Highland cattle. Keep straight on to another kissing-gate leading to a road. Your route is left on the road for 30m, but first you will want to go **right** into the village where you will find the *Victoria Inn*.

West Marden is one of four Marden hamlets, the only one without a surviving church. (North Marden is visited on the Harting Down walk in this series. East Marden and Up Marden are on the Kingley Vale walk.) Unlike the others, it

does have a pub. The Victoria Inn is a picturesque country pub with a colourful garden, drawing custom from well beyond the village, including the Chichester theatre-goers. The restaurant allows for smaller appetites, either as bar bites, or smaller dishes such as Toby's "naked burger". Four local real ales include typically Midhurst-based Ballards, Hammerpot (see the "Burpham" walk) and Langham of Lodsworth. The pub is closed on Mondays (open Bank Holidays).

Leg 3: West Marden to Forestside 4 km=2½ miles



5 With the *Victoria Inn* on your right, go up the road, passing Noredown Way and *Marden House* on your left. As the road bends left, ignore a footpath right (which uses the driveway to a house *Marden Down*). Only 10m further, immediately after the gated entrance to *West Marden Hall*, turn **right** on a signposted bridleway. This stony path bends left and right a few times and passes a wooden gate at a private crossing path. At the top, you emerge in the open at a wide track by a fingerpost. Turn **right** on the track.

6 In 150m, at a fingerpost just before the farm buildings of Horsley Farm, take the **left** fork, thus leaving the bridleway. Your path runs over a farm track, on a rather narrow course with some undergrowth, leading through a kissing-gate, into a large crop field. Follow the path along the grassy right-hand edge, with countless wild flowers on show. At the far end, keep straight ahead into Markwells Wood. In 50m, your path crosses a forestry path, a fraction left, and continues on a green woodland trail. In 250m, you come out into another field with great views ahead towards Portsmouth. Keep to the right-hand side of the field, on a path through shrubs and under trees. In 300m, at a marker-post, you cross a forestry track, and your path begins to rise, entering deeper into the wood. Soon you have a field on your right and your path runs in the open between two fields, heading for a tall oak (which has a companion ash when you reach it). You join a shingle farm track and soon arrive at South Holt Farm.

7 Just before a flint-walled cottage, turn **left** on a signposted rough track which quickly becomes a wide grassy path. The path bends right, through a kissing-gate, left around a small pasture, passing two cottages, one being a perfect thatched, timber-and-flint specimen. Go straight over a "public way" and, at a 4-way fingerpost, go uphill into woods on a wide footpath. At the top, your path leads through a wooden swing-gate (or through a large open metal gate). Cross a delightful small meadow diagonally and, at the other side, go through a wooden swing-gate. A narrow path beside gardens takes you **left** on a shingle drive and out to a road in the scattered residential settlement of Forestside. Turn **right** on the road. In 150m, on your left is a dirt strip, of possible use as a parking space.

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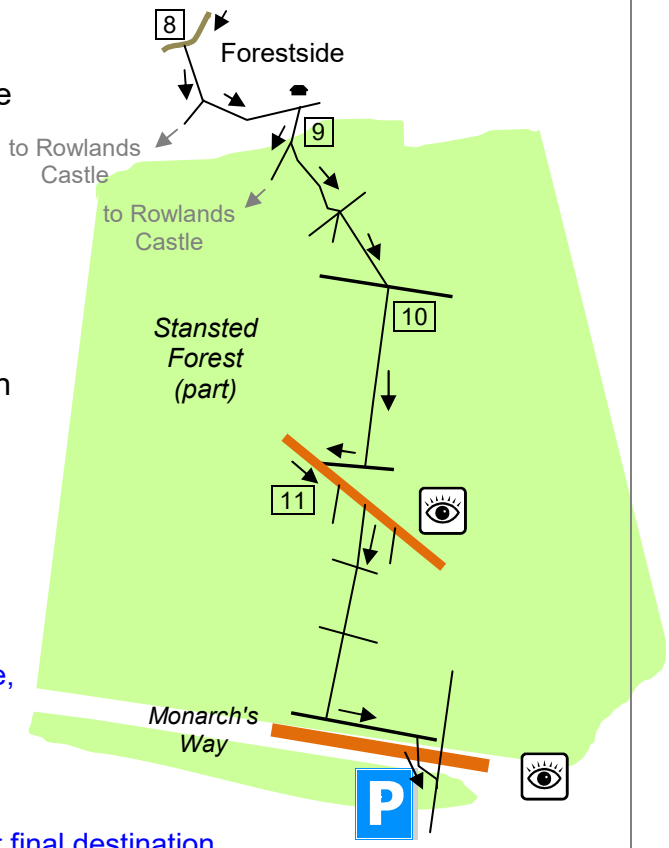
Leg 4: Forestside to Stansted Park 2½ km=1½ miles

If you would like to extend the walk by 2½ km=1½ miles with a visit to the village of Rowlands Castle with its three pubs, teahouse and shop, you can switch to the other walk *"Stansted Forest and Rowlands Castle"* from the points marked **(a)** for the *Valley Route* or **(b)** for the *Forest Route*. The "switch" points are identified below.



8 Immediately after the dirt strip, turn **left** by a small signpost on a narrow path down across the centre of a crop field. At the bottom, continue through a modern kissing-gate. (For Rowlands Castle, continue ahead for 30m to go through another kissing-gate and switch to point **(a)** in the other walk.) Continue straight ahead across the quiet cattle pasture avoiding the turns both right and left. In 100m you reach a fingerpost just before the line of trees on your right. Go through the kissing-gate onto a path running through shrubbery, beside a meadow on your right, through more woodland, to a 3-arm fingerpost opposite a house on your left.

9 Ancient Stansted Forest is laid out in chessboard style with some wide vista paths cutting it at an angle, like New York's Broadway. Much of it is restricted as a conservation area; the rest has free access, forestry work permitting. This route follows popular trails used by local people but you may need to concentrate more than hitherto to avoid missing your final destination. Turn **right** at the 3-arm fingerpost, through a kissing-gate into a long pasture. Cross straight over to a kissing-gate at the other side, leading you into the famous labyrinth of Stansted Forest. (For Rowlands Castle, switch to point **(b)** in the other walk.) Immediately take the **left** fork, passing a very wizened large yew on your right. Your path goes up through an old coppice and, in 70m, goes over a crossing path. In another 150m, you will see a pit on your right under a large yew where the path curves round left-right and immediately comes to a 5-way crossing by a 4-arm fingerpost. Avoid a path sharp left and take the **second left** as directed by the yellow arrow on a marker post - not the path that continues straight on across the open space. Your path runs straight as a die for 200m where you meet a wide forestry track crossing at an angle.

10 Cross straight over the wide track, a fraction right, onto a narrow footpath opposite, thus leaving the official footpath (which veers left here joining the wide track). You immediately pass two magnificent large yews. Your straight narrow path soon runs in a more open area with small chestnut saplings on your left. After a total of 450m you reach a final T-junction with a wide forester's path. Turn **right** on this path. In just 70m, the path curves left and you find yourself in a wide vista avenue. There are several of these clear avenues across the forest, established by Richard Lumley, the builder of Stansted Park. Turn **left** in the avenue, soon with a sight of Stansted House in the distance.

11 Your next manoeuvre is *right* and *left* along the "chessboard" to meet Monarch's Way (the extremely wide clear avenue) and the car park. This guide has chosen the most attractive paths but if you miss the next turn, there are others to choose from. After 60m, there is a clear right fork into the trees. **Ignore** this path and stay in the open avenue. The well-worn central path immediately kinks a little left-right. 50m after the "kink", fork **right** on a much narrower path into the trees. This very straight path goes through more ancient chestnuts and, in 150m, over a crossing path. The path goes down a shallow dip and up again. There are two more crossing paths at 150m and 100m intervals. Finally, after another 120m, you reach a definite T-junction with a very wide forestry track, with Monarch's Way just beyond. Turn **left** on the forestry track. In 250m or so, about 50m before some big wooden gates visible ahead, turn **right** on a wide path leading to Monarch's Way. (If you did *not* begin the walk in the Main Avenue car park, turn **left** along the avenue to go through a little metal gate and cross the road direct to the Middle Lodge.) Cross straight over the Monarch's Way and veer **left** over a small wooden bridge, back to the car park where the walk began.

Walderton Extension East 1 km=0.6 miles

Use this section if you are ending the walk at Walderton, or visiting it for a break. See the mini-map for Leg 1.

Continue along the dark sunken tarmac lane. After a house on your right, the lane is lighter and dustier. Ignore a footpath on your right as the lane bends left. Turn **right** on a slip road, joining the main road. In 150m, turn **left** on a road signposted *Stoughton*. Immediately on your left is a parking area. The village, with a memorial garden and the *Barley Mow* pub on your left, are another 300m away. *The Barley Mow is open all day Saturday and until 6 pm on Sunday with food all afternoon.*

Walderton Extension West 1 km=0.6 miles

Use this section if you are beginning the walk at Walderton, or returning after a break there. See the mini-map for Leg 1.

With the *Barley Mow* (or the out-of-village car park) on your right, go down the road to a T-junction. Turn right **and**, in 150m, fork **left** on a slip road and keep left on a lane, ignoring a footpath on your left. Follow the lane past a house on your left, continuing up a dark sunken lane to near the top and, at a fingerpost, fork **right** on a footpath.

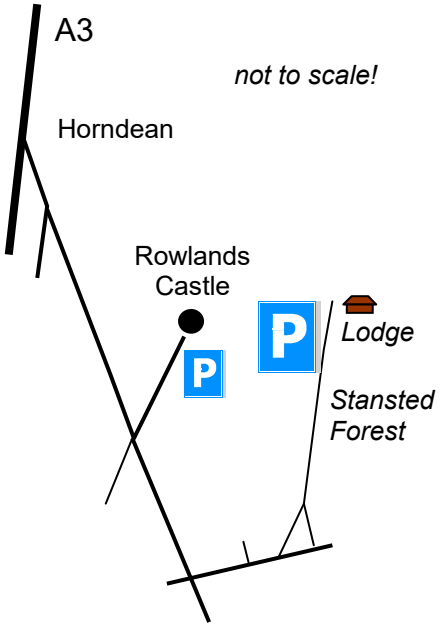
Now join the main walk at the start of Leg 2.

Getting there

By car: Stansted Forest is accessed from the A3 trunk road. If coming from the north, follow a sign for *Rowands Castle* on your left, just before the A3 becomes a motorway. Follow the signs through Horndean, past the historic Gales brewery, and immediately fork **left** at the mini-roundabout. Go 2½ miles to a double mini-roundabout. (You can reach Rowland Castle here by turning sharp left.) Fork left past a *Harvesters*. In 1⅓ miles, turn **left** as for *Chichester, Funtington,Stansted House*. In 1 mile, **ignore** a left turn for *Rowlands Castle*. In another ¼ mile, **fork left** and at the next junction **keep left**. You are on Broad Walk. The car park is just under 1 mile on your left, just before the neo-classical Lodge comes into view.

By bus: bus 121 to Walderton (on the B2146). Check the timetables.

By train: regular trains to Rowlands Castle Station on the London-Portsmouth line, including Sundays.



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