



New Forest: Highland Water and Burley

Distance: 23 km=14½ miles or 19 km=12 miles moderate walking

Region: Hampshire

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Author: Botafuego

Last update: 28-aug-2025

Refreshments: Burley

Map: Outdoor Leisure 22 (New Forest)

*the sketch maps in this guide should be sufficient in normal circumstances
but a map (e.g. OS) is useful in case of path closures due to forestry work*

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

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Long woodland trails, nature walks, heath, village

In Brief

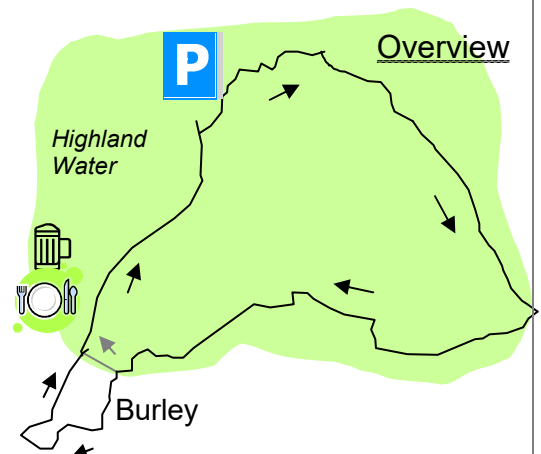
This is an enchanting walk through the New Forest in South West Hampshire with long woodland trails and rambles across the open heath. This walk is a tribute to the *Adventurous Walks* series and follows a similar route to one of them, with changes to allow for new “inclosures” (which are common in the New Forest). You will see parts of the forest that many visitors do not see. Indeed, even on the busiest weekend, you may find the car park empty and meet only the occasional cyclist for most of the way, so that your only companions will be the famous ponies, many birds, reptiles, and much more by way of wild life.

This walk takes you through the very attractive village of Burley. If you are eager to finish this demanding walk, there is a short cut, but omitting the village and an opportunity for refreshment. To enquire for lunch at the *Queen's Head*, ring 01425 403423.



There are no nettles throughout this walk, so bare legs are no problem. You need a moderate level of fitness because of at least one locked gate. The terrain is mostly firm with wide gravel tracks but there are one or two watery patches, so boots are recommended considering the length, and especially in winter time. Ground can be waterlogged in autumn and winter. Your dog, if fit, can come on this walk.

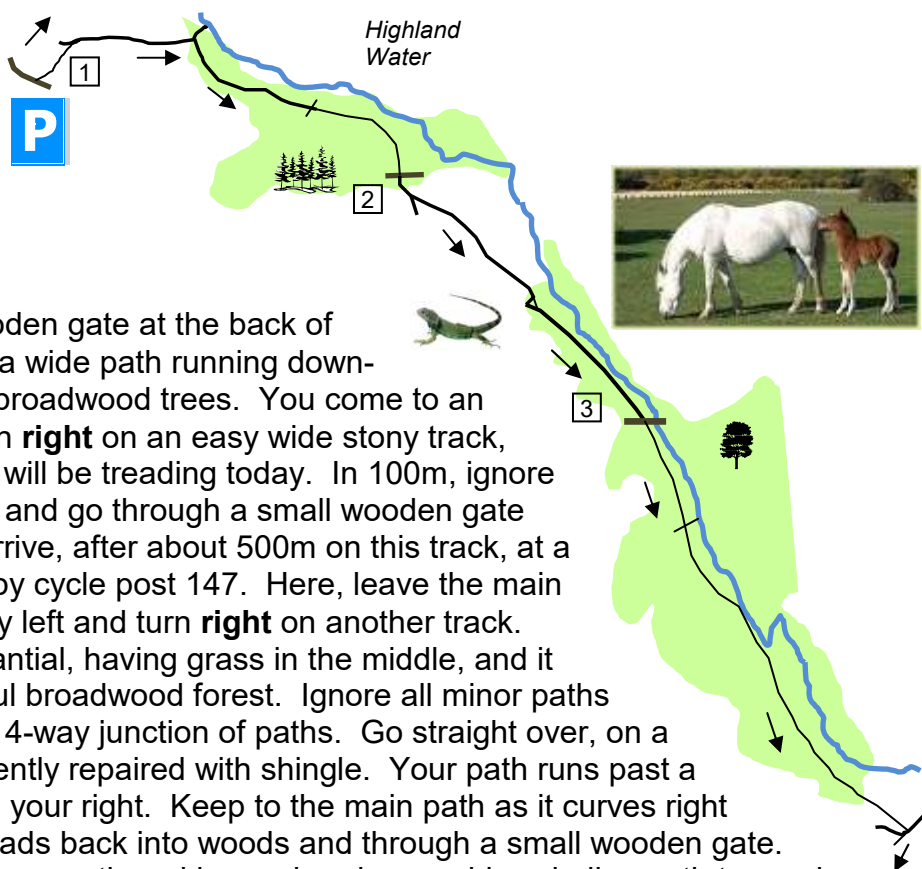
The walk begins at the **Highland Water** car park on the Bolderwood Ornamental Drive in the New Forest, near Lyndhurst, www.w3w.co/solid.smothered.turkey, nearest postcode **SO43 7GQ**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

The New Forest was created by William the Conqueror as a hunting forest by razing several villages, although it was hardly prime land as the soil was poor and suitable only for woodland and grazing. It is well-known that his son William II "Rufus" was killed by an arrow whilst hunting but it is not so generally known that his son Richard was killed several years before in a similar way. Special Forest Laws were enacted to give the local people grazing rights but with dire consequences for touching the King's deer. The Forest covers 566 sq km=219 sq miles, of which about a third is broadleaf woodland, a third heath and grassland (including wetlands) and the rest settlements or enclosures. These latter became common as a source of timber for the Navy. In 2005, the New Forest became the twelfth national park in England and Wales (four years before the South Downs). Rare species of wildlife thrive in the Forest because these vast areas of lowland heath and marsh are hardly found elsewhere.

Leg 1: Highland Water to Poundhill 6 km=4 miles



1 Go through a small wooden gate at the back of the car park and follow a wide path running downhill between pines and broadwood trees. You come to an oblique T-junction. Turn **right** on an easy wide stony track, typical of the paths you will be treading today. In 100m, ignore an oblique crossing path and go through a small wooden gate beside a large one to arrive, after about 500m on this track, at a major junction marked by cycle post 147. Here, leave the main track which curves away left and turn **right** on another track. This track is less substantial, having grass in the middle, and it passes through beautiful broadwood forest. Ignore all minor paths off to reach, in 750m, a 4-way junction of paths. Go straight over, on a slightly lesser path, recently repaired with shingle. Your path runs past a fence and plantation on your right. Keep to the main path as it curves right beside the fence and leads back into woods and through a small wooden gate. Continue uphill on a grassy path and keep ahead on a wide, winding path to reach a lane. This is the same Bolderwood Ornamental Drive that you probably took to reach the car park. About 100m on the left, as a quick diversion, is the Portuguese Fireplace which you may have seen on your way to the car park. This is all that remains of a camp set up by soldiers from that country during WWI.

2 Cross the road and go through a small wooden gate beside a large one into the Holidays Hill Inclosure.

The name sounds like a modern-day resort but Holidays Hill was enclosed in 1696. Inclosures were necessary for trees to thrive amidst the deer, and trees were vital for shipbuilding. (The old maps, by the way, always spell them that way.) The Adventurous Walks book states that enclosing began in the 1400s. Before then kings, such as William II who took a fatal arrow through the lung, could ride freely

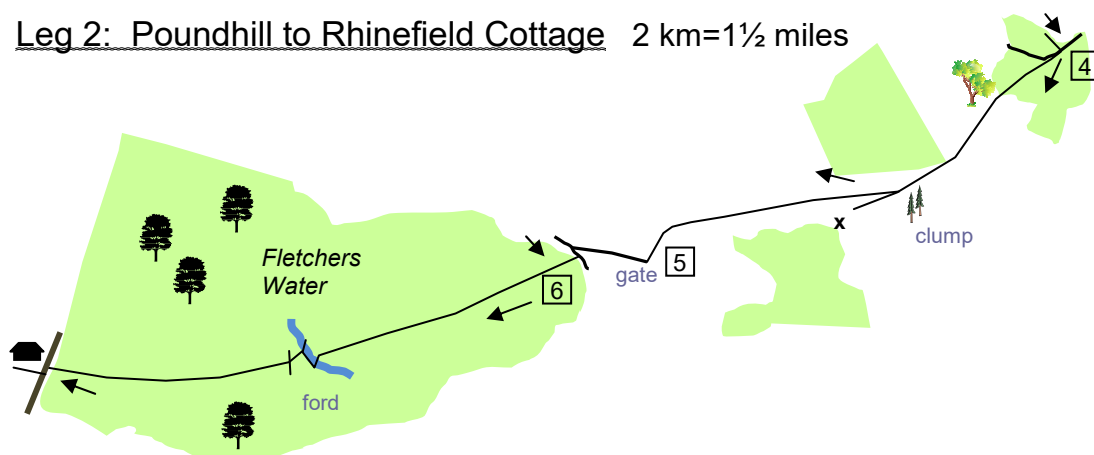
over the forest. Three acts of Parliament in history led to more and more areas being enclosed. The Forestry Commission now owns most of them.

In 100m, by a lily pond with its giant wooden frog, fork **left**. You are now walking through an amazing area of tall pines, like skyward arrows. You arrive in 700m at the Reptile Centre. *This is a free mini-zoo with snakes, lizards and frogs in open air netted pens, rather difficult to see. There is also a small exhibition, occasional live demos and a toilet.* Go straight across the reptile centre, keeping your original direction, go out through a small wooden gate near a pony grid and keep ahead on the gravel entrance driveway, passing a white cottage. Stay on the drive all the way – about 700m – to a main road, the A35 Lyndhurst-Christchurch road.

WC

- 3 Cross straight over the road, over a stile, and into a wild part of the forest. Keep straight ahead on a narrow winding path. On your right, you can see open heath, whilst on the left you will see the Highland Water (HW), probably for the first time. *This is a precious stream that rises in the north of the Forest and comes out into the Solent as the Lymington River. You have been following it unseen from the start of the walk.* The HW comes close to the path and you can walk beside it for short sections. In over 500m, you reach a bridge on your left. This is not on the route but it is a pleasant place to take a break by the waterside, possibly in the company of New Forest ponies, wagtails and reptiles. The path touches the meandering stream several times. *An ox bow indicates that the stream has been stronger in the past or in some seasons.* Keep following the bankside, keeping, if you like, to the narrower winding path in preference to the straighter grassy path on the right. Suddenly the HW loops back by some fallen trees. Ignore a minor path here on the left and keep ahead. You are on a narrow dirt path running beside a very wide grassy strip. In around 500m you will see a ditch on your right which is in fact another stream, a tributary of the HW; soon you cross it via a wooden bridge [2025: damaged but still passable, with care!]. After the bridge, keep **left** beside the stream. Soon you pass a locked gate and a field on your left and you go over another small stream. Keep ahead with a fence and a ditch on your left, passing a lookout. Finally you reach a wide crossing track much used by cyclists and trekkers by a concrete bridge on your left.

Leg 2: Poundhill to Rhinefield Cottage 2 km=1½ miles



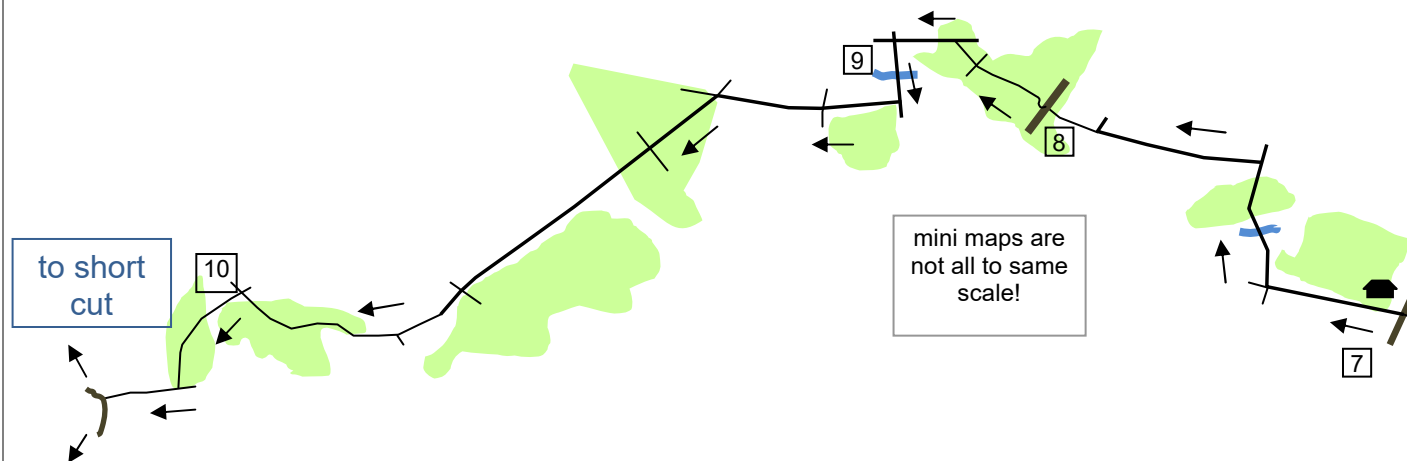
- 4 Turn **right** on the wide track but **leave** it after only 15m, where it curves off right, by keeping straight ahead on a grassy path. Your path runs between birches and heads out over the open Poundhill Heath. Aim to pass just to the left of the jutting corner of a plantation about 300m distant. After this point, continue ahead for 100m or so to go between a solitary clump of pines that

straddle your path in the centre of the heath. Here, leave the main path which heads for the side of the trees on your left and instead take a **right** fork, a lesser path, which runs along the central open wide strip of the heath. Follow this path through low scattered thorn bushes and heather. In about 200m, ignore a gate and stile visible over to your right on the edge of a plantation. Keep going, veering a little to the left, heading for a fence ahead and a double wooden gate. This heath is a favourite location for New Forest ponies.

New Forest ponies are a recognised breed, one of the dozen or so “mountain and moorland” breeds, known for their good nature and “rideability”. The ponies you see in the Forest are not wild. They are all privately owned but are free to roam, as far as the fences and grids allow.

- 5 Go through the smaller gate and follow a wide rough path for 150m to a T-junction with a wide track. Turn sharp **left** on the track, but for only 10m. Now turn sharp **right** on a narrow grassy path leading into the dense woodland.
- 6 This little-known path will take you to the road at Rhinefield Cottage and will test your navigation a little, although the route is basically straight ahead for 1 km. [2023: there were several fallen trees across this section, mostly easy to walk around; but sometimes it can be hard to find the main path again, so you need to be very careful if you're forced off the track to rejoin it as soon as possible.] About half way along this path, you meet Fletchers Water, a shallow stream. Veer **left** to cross the stream bed where the black rocks (or a fallen tree - careful!) make the crossing easy [Nov 2020: stream in full spate: stay on this side!]. Go up a bank and turn **right** parallel to the stream. In 30m, your path veers left away from Fletchers Water, setting you back on your original direction. In 40m, zigzag straight over a crossing path. Continue dead straight, give or take a few twists, until you reach the Rhinefield Road opposite a large redbrick cottage of that name.

Leg 3: Rhinefield Cottage to Burley Grange 5½ km=3½ miles



- 7 Cross straight over the road and take a wide track on the left of the cottage, going past a 1-bar barrier. After 450m this easy track reaches a crossroads of broad tracks; turn **right** here. (This is one place where you have to divert from the original Adventurous Walk.) The track crosses the Black Water by a concrete bridge [Jul 2021: bridge replaced by ford which may be deep: cross with care!]. In under 200m from the bridge, after a slight incline, turn **left** at the first crossing track that you come to, onto a gravel and grass path. In 500m, as you become aware of the main road ahead, ignore a junction on the right and continue on a more grassy path. The path takes you through a

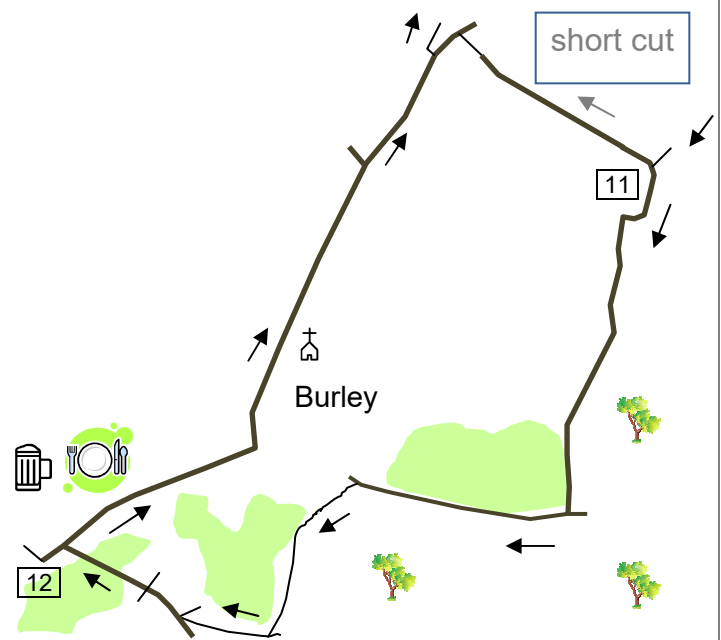
small wooden gate (Jul 2023: no longer padlocked, as it was in last years) and across a muddy patch to the main road, the A35 again.

- 8 Cross the road carefully to a narrow path opposite, zigzagging right-left to a small stile. Cross the stile (recently repaired but a challenge for a dog). In 10m go through a gate in a fence [Jul 2023: still padlocked, but the fence beside it is now readily climbable now that the wire has been removed] and continue ahead along a very wide green strip, which may be muddy in sections, ignoring a junction on the right after 200m or so. The path ends at an oblique T-junction. Veer **left**, now on a good wide track. In nearly 200m, you come to a major crossing track.
- 9 Turn **left** on the crossing track, crossing the Black Water again by a bridge. As the track begins to ascend, 180m from the last turn, turn **right** on a crossing track at a cycling marker post (no.118). In 250m, ignore a grassy crossing path to reach, in another 300m, an oblique junction of four paths. Veer **left** here, avoiding a green path ahead, keeping to the main track. From this point, you will be following the track for 1.8 km. You negotiate two grassy crossing paths, a small wooden gate next to a large one, several minor paths leading off and a major crossing track. Your path curves slightly right and goes over another crossing path. At this point, on your left you will see a plantation as the path curves right again. It now snakes through a really fine section of woodland with tall oaks and pines. This pleasant wide green path straightens out and, after 100m of a more open stretch, leads to a crossing path.
- 10 Turn **left** on the crossing path through birches. You have another narrow dense forest walk, sometimes twisty, muddy in one or two places, but always clear, lasting 400m. You pass straight through a lovely glade sheltered by tall oaks. Near the end of this beautiful wood you need to veer **right** as you penetrate some rather thick rhododendrons. You come out through a small wooden gate suddenly onto the open heath. Turn **right** beside the fence and keep the same direction across the heath, heading for a thick line of trees about 200m distant. When you approach them, go just to the right of the trees and exit via a wooden barrier to a lane, Mill Lane.

Decision point. The next section takes you into the village of Burley for a change of scenery, window-shopping and refreshments. If you do not want to visit the village, do the following. Turn **right** on Mill Lane passing the very fine *Burley Grange*. At the end of Mill Lane, turn **left** on a major road, Lyndhurst Road, and in under 100m, turn sharp **right** into a small parking area, with a sign for *Wood's Corner*. Your route is **right again** through a small wooden gate next to a gate and fence. Now skip Leg 4 and resume the walk at Leg 5 section [13](#).

Leg 4: Burley Circuit 4 km=2½ miles

- 11 Turn **left** on the lane. Mill Lane bends right and left, passing isolated houses, some available for holiday let. It then runs across more open heath, through some woods and past more houses to a T-junction. Turn **right** on the well-named Beechwood Lane, passing properties under a canopy of mature trees. At a fork, keep left on a rougher lane with a sign for Church Lane. In 20m, fork **left** again on a dirt lane, going past a giant wooden owl [Jul 2023-2025: still flown]. At the end of the track continue straight ahead through woodland quickly reaching a fork. Turn **right** onto a track, Cott Lane. The lane passes the Burley golf club and its car park, across more heath and reaches a road junction. Bear **right** on the main road, quickly leading to the centre of the village and the *Queen's Head* pub. *The Queen's Head is a reliable pub, one of a chain run by Greene King. The building goes back to 1685 when it was a blacksmiths.*



Burley's history goes back at least to the Bronze Age when the people built impressive earthen burial chambers, clearly visible now as tumuli or low mounds. The village's name comes from "burgh" or "borough" and the common word "ley" meaning a clearing. Burley Manor was established soon after the Norman Conquest. Roger de Burley began as lord in 1212 followed by other "de Burleys". It was rebuilt in the mid 1800s and you can now stay in it, because it is a hotel. Other impressive buildings are Burley Lodge, dating back to 1490, and Burley Grange situated near where you entered the outskirts.

The village also houses a legend: the Burley Dragon, which used to live on Burley Beacon. According to old stories, the dragon would regularly fly down and demand a pail of milk in exchange for sparing the villagers' sheep. The villagers, at the point of desperation, recruited a knight to slay the dragon. Cleverly, he coated himself in layers of birdlime and ground glass to deflect the dragon's fiery breath. After a fierce combat the knight triumphed.

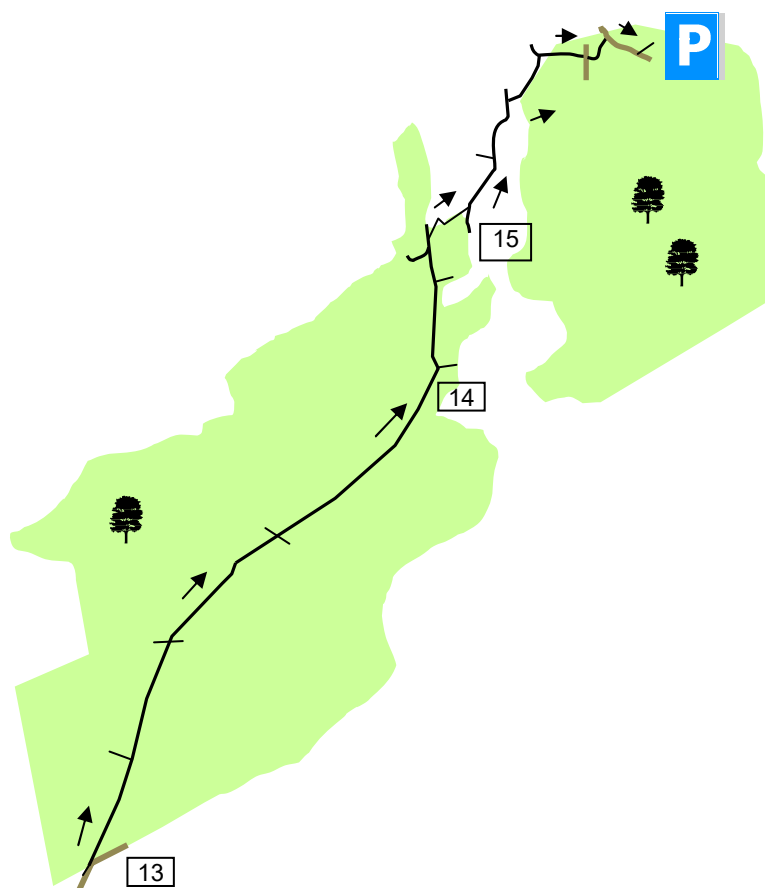
- 12 After possible refreshment, with your back to the *Queen's Head*, turn **left**, avoiding the main road that curves uphill, keeping to the Chapel Lane that runs beside the pub's car park. On your right, you pass a lane leading to the church of St John the Baptist, worth a look but not on the route. There follows a delightful thatch and a left bend. Stay on Chapel Lane for another 700m, keep ahead at a road junction and go another 300m where you see a small parking area and a sign for Wood's Corner on your left. Leave the road here by forking **left** (effectively straight ahead) past the sign and going through a small wooden gate in line with a large gate and fence.

Leg 5: Woods Corner to Highland Water 5½ km=3½ miles

13 You will be following this excellent path, more or less straight ahead, for nearly 4 km. Avoid many tempting turnings off near the start. Eventually the track goes between plantations of scots pines and, 1.7 km=1 mile from the start of this path, you reach a crossing track which is tarmac. Continue over, passing several diagonal crossing paths. *(One of these is a left turn given in the original Adventurous Walk which this guide avoids because of closures and restrictions due to wildlife.)* Your track rises and enters an area of pines, where soon there is a bench on the left in a place known as Woolfield Hill. Ignore a path on the left and a track curving right and stay on the main track.

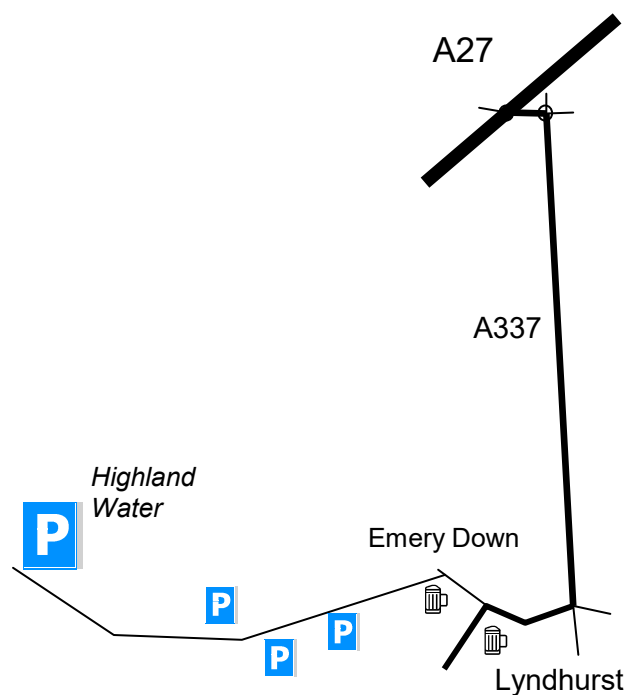
14 You pass more grassy crossing paths. The track goes over a stream, the Blackensford Brook, and curves left. After another 750m or so, you will see a wide track joining from the left. (As a guide, this is the first decent wide track on the left for a long time and it is marked by cycle post 108.) Ignore this track but, just 40m after it, fork **right** on a wide grassy path. In 40m, turn **right** again on a very narrow path down under trees to ford the Bratley Water stream. Veer **left** immediately after the ford on a rooty path which ascends and runs along the right-hand side of a wide open strip. Sometimes the path is unclear and you need to find your way through the fringe of trees to avoid the more marshy grass. In less than 200m, your path leads to a wide track in a place known as Smoky Hole. Veer **left** on the track.

15 You pass a junction with a seat and path on the left. After a possible rest, keep straight on. Some red markers indicate that you are on a Forestry Commission leisure route. After an uphill stretch, your path snakes downhill and you pass another bench. At a junction, turn **right**, still on the "red route", at a sign for a Conservation Area. Continue uphill, passing another bench, and onwards to a T-junction under a fine group of redwoods. Turn **right** at the T-junction, still going uphill. At the top, you meet a one-bar barrier and a tarmac lane, part of the Bolderwood Ornamental Drive. Cross directly over on a shingle track, going past *Bolderwood Cottage* on your right. Turn **left** just before the house and follow the track into woodland. Continue down, under more redwoods, through a large wooden gate, to a road. Turn **right**, quickly reaching the Highland Water car park where the walk began.



Getting there

By car: if coming from the London direction, take the M3 until, near Southampton, you see signs straight ahead for **M27 West**. Near the end of the motorway, veer off **left** at a sign for **A337 The New Forest, Lyndhurst**. At the roundabout, turn **left**, signposted *Cadnam Lyndhurst*. At the next roundabout, follow the A337, signposted *Lyndhurst*. In 3½ miles, you reach Lyndhurst. Follow the one-way system through the town and take the A35, signposted *Christchurch*. ½ mile out of town, at a bend by the *Swan Inn*, turn **right** signposted *Emery Down*. In under ½ mile, just past the *New Forest Inn*, turn **left**, signposted *Bolderwood*. Follow this beautiful woodland drive, passing the James Hill, Whitemoor and Millyford Bridge car parks and, on your left, the Portuguese Fireplace. The Highland Water car park is 3 miles from the *New Forest Inn*, on the **right**.



By bus/train: train to Lymington, bus 118 to Burley. Check the timetables.

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