

The people's forest

A self-guided walk around Epping Forest in Essex



Explore an area of tranquil woodlands and grassy plains
Look out for wildlife that thrives in different habitats
Discover a long history of public access to the forest
Find out how the landscape is managed today

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**the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks**





This booklet is to be used alongside the audio commentary for this walk

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Cover image: Old pollarded beech tree in Epping Forest, Jynto, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

The people's forest

Explore Epping Forest on the edge of London

Many Londoners looking for some fresh air and a good walk head to the great Royal Parks but the capital's largest open space is actually Epping Forest.

Stretching for 12 miles, this swathe of woodland and grassland is well-loved and well-used by those living on its doorstep. But the forest has a very long history.



This walk explores how the forest has been used and managed during different periods: from peasant villagers cutting wood to monarchs hunting deer and from Victorian picnics to wartime defences. There are stories of legal and illegal activities, of politics and protest, of conflict and consensus.



Epping Forest is also a very important site in ecological terms with one of the largest number of ancient pollarded trees in Europe, as well as an abundance of wild flowers and fungi which contributed to its SSSI designation.

Today the challenge is to find a balance between protecting wildlife habitats, conserving historic features and allowing public access.

Path on Chingford Plain (top) and Connaught Water (bottom) © Jenny Lunn

Practical information

| | |
|--|--|
| Location | Epping Forest, London Borough of Waltham Forest and Southwest Essex |
| Start and finish | Bury Road car park, Chingford Plain, Chingford, E4 7AZ |
| Getting there | <p>Car – Chingford is easily accessible from the A406 (North Circular) and M25 (Junction 26); there is a free car park on Bury Road. It is located just after the Chingford Golf Course club house and its car park.</p> <p>Train – The nearest railway station is Chingford (500 metres) which is served by trains from London Liverpool Street.</p> <p>Bus – The nearest bus station is Chingford (450 metres) which is served by local buses from northeast London and Essex.</p> <p>Underground – The nearest London Underground stations are Buckhurst Hill (2 ½ miles) and Loughton (2 ½ miles) on the Central Line from where you can catch a local bus to Chingford.</p> <p>Bicycle – National Cycle Route 1 passes up the Lee Valley about 1 ½ miles to the west</p> |
| Directions from rail and bus station to start | Exit the station forecourt or bus station onto Station Road and turn right. After about 100 metres take the second turning on the left which is Bury Road. After about 30 metres (just before the Chingford Golf Course club house) turn right onto the dirt path onto Chingford Plain. After about 100 metres take the narrow path on the left which leads to Bury Road car park. Stop by the information board. |
| Walk distance | 3 ¾ miles |
| Level | Gentle – An easy walk around the forest with no major hills and easy terrain underfoot. |
| Terrain | Forest tracks (dirt), grassy paths, tarmac lane, surfaced footpaths. |
| Conditions | Some of the forest tracks and footpaths can get very muddy after wet weather and during the winter months so walking boots or wellies are recommended. |
| Best time to visit | The forest has different characteristics depending on the time of year but there is always something to see. |
| Note on navigation | The walk route uses major tracks and paths but there are very few signposts in the forest so follow the map and directions carefully. The forest is well-known to locals so ask the way if you feel lost. |

Suitable for

Families – The forest is a safe environment for children to enjoy (see below for family-friendly activities).

Pushchairs – The entire route could be used by rugged pushchairs when ground conditions are dry.

Dogs – The forest is well used by local dogs but they should be kept under strict control in areas where there are cattle and deer; some of the paths are shared with horses and cyclists.

Refreshments

Butler's Retreat (Stop 15) serves drinks, hot and cold lunches, cakes and ice creams. Open 7 days a week. www.worldslarder.co.uk

The Royal Forest (adjacent to Stop 16) is a Brewers Fayre pub serving hot and cold food. Open 7 days a week. www.brewersfayre.co.uk/pub-restaurant/Greater-London/Royal-Forest-Enfield.html

There are picnic tables by the car park at Connaught Water (between Stop 12 and 13).

There are also lots of cafes and restaurants in Chingford.

Toilets

- Butler's Retreat (Stop 15) – with baby changing facilities
- The View visitor centre (adjacent to Stop 16) – with baby changing facilities
- The Royal Forest (adjacent to Stop 16) – with baby changing facilities

Family friendly activities

Shorter walk option - For little legs that cannot manage the whole distance, try the waymarked 2 ½ mile 'Holly Trail' which starts from Bury Road car park; it follows the main walk route from Stops 1 to 7 and then loops back to Chingford Plain. Download map from <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/about-us/Documents/the-holly-trail-walk-epping-forest.pdf>

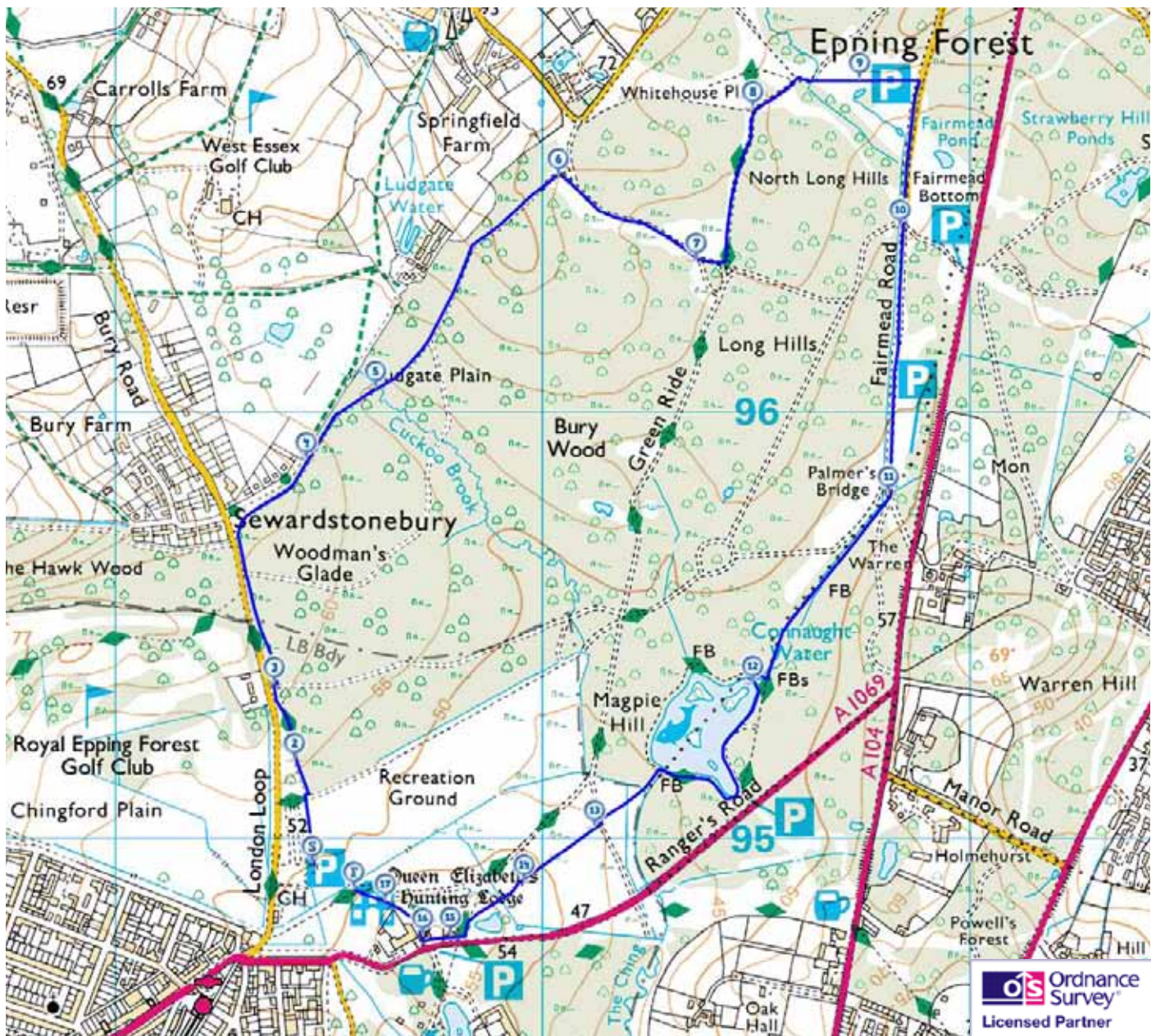
Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge (Stop 16) - This spectacular medieval building has child-friendly displays about life in Tudor times and the opportunity to dress-up in costume. Open 7 days a week. Admission free.

The View (adjacent to Stop 16) - The visitor centre has child-friendly interactive displays telling the story of Epping Forest, particularly focused on the ecology and prehistoric sites. Open 7 days a week. Admission free.

Tourist information

The View visitor centre (adjacent to Stop 16)
Visitor information specifically about Epping Forest and a small gift shop.
See above for details

Route map



Stopping points

- | | | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|
| Start | Bury Road car park, Chingford Plain | 10. | Fairmead Road |
| 2. | Bury Wood, near Bury Road | 11. | Palmer's Bridge |
| 3. | Bury Wood, opposite Jubilee Retreat | 12. | Connaught Water |
| 4. | Bury Wood, end of Hornbeam Ave | 13. | Chingford Plain, eastern side |
| 5. | Bury Wood, crossing of Cuckoo Brook | 14. | Chingford Plain, eastern side |
| 6. | Western end of Almshouse Plain | 15. | Butler's Retreat |
| 7. | Eastern end of Almshouse Plain | 16. | Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge |
| 8. | Green Ride by Whitehouse Plain | 17. | Top of Dannet's Hill |
| 9. | Fairmead Bottom | Finish | Bottom of Dannet's Hill |

Directions

Listen to each track then read the directions in the boxes below to get to the next stop

1. Welcome to Epping Forest

Bury Road car park, Chingford Plain

Directions 1

With your back to the car park, face towards the open grassland of Chingford Plain. Turn left along the path which is signposted 'The Holly Trail' with the Plain on your right and Bury Road on your left. Where the path meets the trees go straight on into a section of the forest known as Bury Wood. Stop after a short distance once you are surrounded by trees.

2. Seeing the wood from the trees

Bury Wood, near Bury Road

Directions 2

Follow the path through Bury Wood. At the first major junction of paths, there is a gate on the left leading out onto Bury Road. Across the road is a complex of buildings called Jubilee Retreat. Look above it at what appears to be a large conifer tree. This is actually a mobile phone mast disguised as a tree!

3. Pasture, Pannage and Wood

Bury Wood, opposite Jubilee Retreat

Directions 3

Continue along the path through Bury Wood with Bury Road on your left. Ignore any minor paths to the left or right. After about 350 metres, you will see a road sign indicating the village of Sewardstonebury. Here the path bears right away from the Bury Road. To the left of the path are the houses of Hornbeam Avenue. After the last of the houses on the left you can see a golf course. Stop here and look at the area of trees on the right.

4. Lopping

Bury Wood, level with end of Hornbeam Avenue

Directions 4

Continue along the path. After about 250 metres the path reaches its lowest point and crosses a small stream called Cuckoo Brook. Stop here and look at the area of trees to the right of the path.

5. Death brings life

Bury Wood, crossing of Cuckoo Brook

Directions 5

Continue along the path. At the first major junction of paths continue straight on, climbing very steadily up a hill and down the other side. At the bottom of the hill is a clearing to the right which is the beginning of Almshouse Plain, named after some almshouses for the poor that were located nearby in the early-nineteenth century. Stop at the junction of paths.

6. Flowers and fungi

Western end of Almshouse Plain

Directions 6

At the junction, turn right with the clearing of Almshouse Plain on your right. Stop after about 400 metres where the path forks.

7. Watership Down

Eastern end of Almshouse Plain

Directions 7

At the fork in the path, go left. At the next junction turn left along a major track which is known as the Green Ride. Follow this path for about 350 metres until you see a grassy path off to the left into a clearing known as Whitehouse Plain. This is indicated by a white pole.

8. Going for a ride

Green Ride by turning into Whitehouse Plain

Directions 8

Continue along the main track (Green Ride) which soon bears round to the right (with more grassy paths off to the left) and then to the left. At the left bend turn right off the main track. Go past the wooden post and onto an open area known as Fairmead Bottom. Follow the wide grassy path and stop part way across.

9. Oh deer!

Fairmead Bottom

Directions 9

Continue on the grassy path across Fairmead Bottom until you reach a car park. Go through the car park and onto the lane, which is called Fairmead Road. Turn right onto the road. Stop after about 300 metres where a track goes into the forest on the right and across the plain on the left.

10. Highways and byways

Fairmead Road

Directions 10

Continue along Fairmead Road which is very straight. If you prefer there is a grassy path running parallel to the left. After about 600 metres the lane ends and paths radiate in different directions. At this junction there is a bridge over a small stream; you can see some brickwork of the bridge either side of the path.

11. The Commoners and the Corporation

Palmer's Bridge

Directions 11

Cross Palmer's Bridge and immediately afterwards fork right on a path. This path runs in a very straight line and is known as Red Path (because it was originally made with crushed red brick rubble). After about 500 metres Red Path meets a bend in another path, turn right then immediately left onto the wooden boardwalk over a pond called Connaught Water.

12. Pits and ponds

Connaught Water

Directions 12

Follow the boardwalk to the other end and then continue along the path ahead with the water on your right. At the car park continue following the lakeside path. About 200 metres after the car park you will see a metal drainage grill where a stream, the Ching Brook, flows out from the lake. Turn left on the path away from the lake with the stream on your left. When you reach a major junction of paths go straight ahead on the grassy path signposted 'To Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge'. Stop after about 50 metres where the grass path goes over a series of ridges.

13. Ploughing the Plain

Chingford Plain, eastern side

Directions 13

Continue along the wide grassy path which leads gently uphill. Stop where the path forks near the top of the hill.

14. Cattle at work

Chingford Plain, eastern side

Directions 14

Take the left fork and follow the path through trees towards a building. When you reach the building turn left to go round to the front which faces the road.

15. Time for tea

Butler's Retreat

Directions 15

Follow the surfaced path across the front of Butler's Retreat with the road on your left. Stop at the next building which has a distinctive red brick chimney.

16. Grandstand view

Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge

Directions 16

After going inside the Hunting Lodge, do go next door to The View visitor centre where there are displays about the ecology and history of Epping Forest, as well as a small gift shop. When you are ready, go through the gate that leads from the lawn of the Hunting Lodge out onto the hill overlooking Chingford Plain, known as Dannet's Hill. Bear left on the path which leads down across the grass towards some trees. You will see the bottom of the car park of the Royal Forest on the left. Go between two large oak trees and stop just beyond, looking down onto Chingford Plain.

17. Protection and promotion

Top of Dannet's Hill

Directions 17

Follow the path down Dannet's Hill. Stop at the bottom where there is a junction of paths.

18. The people's forest

Bottom of Dannet's Hill

Directions 18

To return to Bury Road car park – With your back to Dannet's Hill, go straight on between the wooden fences that mark a stream crossing then bear left on the path back to the car park (100 metres).

To return to Chingford railway station or bus station – With your back to Dannet's Hill, turn left and follow the path to the corner of Chingford Plain. Turn right along the main road and the transport connections are on the left side (400 metres).

Exploring other parts of Epping Forest

There is much to explore in Epping Forest. If you would like to visit another area of the forest we suggest getting hold of the official map which shows car parks, paths and trails, refreshments and other information.

Copies are available at the forest visitor centres or it can be downloaded from: www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/Documents/epping-forest-map.pdf.

The main visitor centre is at High Beech (IG10 4AE). It is open all year round on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays. Admission is free.

Credits

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Painting of pollarded trees in Epping Forest by Harry Barr (1948)
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