

Burnham Beeches walk

With **Paul Weller**

A walk for the family round the scenic Burnham Beeches National Nature Reserve, which is particularly colourful in spring and autumn, but well worth a visit at any time of year. The walk can be shortened to suit younger or perhaps older family members. The shortcuts are evident from the illustrated map. This walk was devised with help from Burnham Beeches Information Centre.

START: East Burnham Common car park, off Bedford Drive. Grid ref SU 955 851. Nearest postcode SL2 3LB. The car park is £2 at weekends and bank holidays, with donations requested at other times

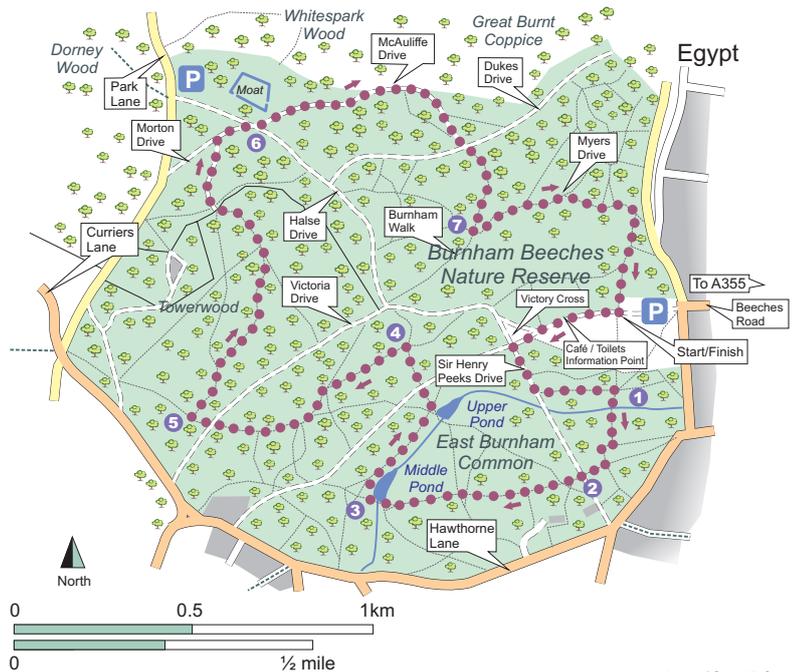
DISTANCE: 3.5 miles with 210ft of ascent

TERRAIN: Generally fairly dry paths, tracks and drives. A few moderate hills but no stiles

MAPS: OS Explorer 172 and Chiltern Society 24

REFRESHMENTS & FACILITIES: The Beeches Café, information point and public toilets are open all year between 10am and 5pm subject to seasonal variations

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: If travelling by train, bus connections are available from Beaconsfield and Slough. (Numbers 74, X74 and 583 to Farnham Common). Alight near Kingsway opposite a car showroom. From here, walk north past the shops and turn left into Beeches Road. Cross over the road into Lord Mayors Drive.



Map: Glyn Kuhn

Route

Starting from the car park, turn left and walk past the café, toilets and information point. Continue for a further 75m, ignoring the driveway forking right, to meet a crossroads and information board. Turn left down Sir Henry Peek's Drive for c140m to a cattle grid. Turn left just before it onto a wide path. Continue along this path for c180m, keeping a fence on the right.

1. On reaching a junction of paths, turn right through the gate and onto a wooden boardwalk through a wetland area. Continue straight ahead on the main boardwalk until it ends at a crossing path. Cross it to reach a T-junction. Turn right for c80m to meet a tarmac drive.
2. Cross the drive and continue along a wide grassy area and then a gravel path for c350m, ignoring all other paths to right and left. At a large oak tree and seat, go over a crossing path and head slightly downhill to another boardwalk. Pass a very old tree trunk on the left. The path slopes downhill through a sharp right-hand bend to reach Middle Pond.
3. At Middle Pond continue past a seat on the left to reach a crossing path. Bear right round the edge of the pond and past another seat on the left. Follow the gravel path for c275m to Upper Pond. Turn left past the information board and seat and, at a junction of paths, bear left to join a well-defined track. Continue up a slope, go over a crossing path and after c45m head straight over a tarmac drive. After a few metres go over a crossing path and round to the right between two old trees. Pass through a gate in a fence and continue to a path junction.
4. Turn left at this junction along a wide track. Ignore paths coming in from

left and right and go straight over a crossing path. Continue along the track for c500m to meet a fence on the left. Where the fence and track bends sharply to the left, bear right and follow a steep downhill path to meet a wide crossing path in the valley, Victoria Drive. Cross it and head uphill for c55m.

5. Turn right on a fairly indistinct path that passes over a ditch. Follow the path for c750m. It soon meanders uphill to reach level ground. Ignore other paths to left and right and stick to this main path to reach an old gatepost on the right. The path bears right and after 30m passes a green sign for Dimsdale Drive. Stay on it to the next tarmac drive, Morton Drive. Turn right and, after c90m, pass metal bollards and a sign for Morton Drive to meet up with a junction of drives.
6. At this junction turn left down McAuliffe Drive. Immediately on the left is Hartley Court Moat and its information board, which is worth a visit. Continue down the tarmac drive for c750m to meet another tarmac drive, Dukes Drive. Go straight ahead and follow a wide downhill path. Pass a seat on the right and cross a small stream. After a further c90m meet a junction of five paths.
7. Turn first left down the path, then uphill to reach a seat on the left, where the ground levels out. Stay on the main track through this stretch of the walk for c450m, ignoring all paths left and right, to a crossing path within 90m of a green barrier and public road. Turn right downhill, over a bridge and stream, then head uphill to return to the original car park and start point.

Points of Interest

Burnham Beeches National Nature Reserve & Site of Special Scientific Interest is one of a number of open spaces, parks and gardens in and around London owned and managed by the City of London. It covers 540 acres. Originally for sale as 'land suitable for the erection of superior residences', the Beeches was bought by the City of London Corporation in 1880 to protect it as a public open space and wildlife reserve. There has probably been woodland on the site since the retreat of the last Ice Age, but today's landscape was created by people and the area has been inhabited since as early as the Iron Age.

Wood Banks and associated ditches can be seen on the walk. These were constructed in medieval times to separate woodland areas under different

ownership, and helped prevent animals from straying from the pastures into the woods.

Hartley Court Moat is a Scheduled Ancient Monument dating from sometime between the 12th and 14th centuries. A farmstead would have been built inside it. The outer ditch and bank round the moat might have been topped by a wooden fence. The people living in the farm would have cultivated the land between the moat and the outer ditch and bank.

The Information Point at Burnham Beeches has a number of interesting leaflets about the history of Burnham Beeches and walks in the area - it's well worth a visit.