

Greys Court Estate Stile-free Walk

Greys Court is a picturesque 16th-century mansion with tranquil gardens owned by the National Trust. This walk takes you around the Greys Court Estate, through classic Chilterns scenery of beech woodlands and open countryside with lovely views.

Distance: 3km or approximately 1¾ miles (allow 45 minutes to an hour)

Start: Greys Court car park is open all year. The mansion (April to October, check on the website www.nationaltrust.org.uk/greys-court or call 01491 628529). There is informal parking on Rocky Lane as indicated on the map.

Access Information: Mainly level or gently undulating but there are a couple of steep downhill sections, one of them in Pissen Wood with 11 steps and a handrail.

Keep dogs on leads in the parkland
Please remember to close all gates

Route:

1 Starting by Visitor Reception, walk diagonally across the car park.

2 Go through the gate at the top of the car park, and pass the picnic area. Walk down the field boundary. The ditch on your left marks the course of the old road to Henley.

3 Go through the gate inscribed 'Johnnie's Gate'. This is one of the gates on Sir Felix's Gentle Path, a special path around the Estate with gates dedicated to family members, designed by Lady Brunner. The field beyond at one time hosted the Henley-on-Thames Show. Follow the fence line, then go through a gate on your left and turn right. Go through a gate and continue along the edge of the farmyard.

4 Cross the lane leading to the Estate cottages, go through a gate and bear left across the field to the edge of woodland. You may hear a skylark, spot a woodpecker or see unusual butterflies along the woodland edge

5 Enter the beech woodlands via gate, turn left and follow the path along the edge of the wood. The beech woods are carpeted with bluebells in the spring. You will see old clay and flint pits from which material was dug to make the mansion. This part of the estate is known as Brickfield.

6 You will reach a steep hill at the end of the beech woodland. Turn left through a gate on a permissive path and follow it downhill. As you descend you will see dense softwood plantation with wood stacks providing habitat for birds, small mammals and snakes.

7 At the bottom of the hill turn to your left into Pissen Wood which is classified as a semi-ancient woodland, this means it has probably always been woodland. There has been a history of coppicing, which is a method of cutting wood from trees on a seven year rotation, in this area. Within this time the trees re-sprout and establish new limbs ideal for firewood. As you walk through you will see current and ancient coppiced trees. This is to allow the younger and weaker trees to establish by removing the dead and over-reaching trees.

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8 Just before you reach the gate out onto Rocky Lane, take the path off to the left to avoid the road. This path is ablaze with foxgloves and bluebells in spring and early summer.

9 You have now returned to the drive of the house and by following it to the left you can return to the car park.