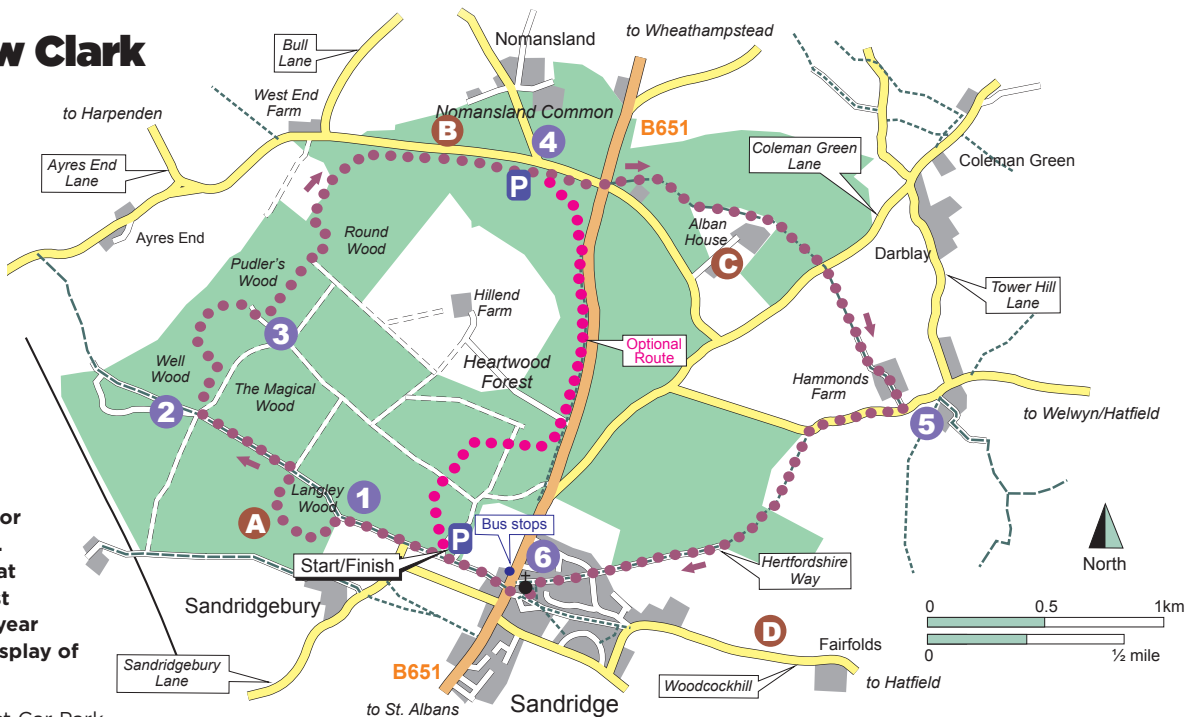


Heartwood Forest walk

With **Andrew Clark**

Although this wood is on the edge of the Chilterns, it's well worth making the effort to explore what's now the largest continuous new native forest in England. There's a network of waymarked trails that leaves the visitor spoilt for choice on where to walk. We've chosen a route that features some of the best scenery throughout the year and has a magnificent display of bluebells in spring.



START: Heartwood Forest Car Park, Wheathampstead Road, Sandridge. Nearest postcode AL4 9DG. Grid ref: TL 172110. Alternative start from the car park in Ferrers Lane at Waypoint 4

DISTANCE: 5.6 miles/9km, with a shorter 4 mile/6.5km option

TERRAIN: Easy stile-free walking on good paths passing through numerous gates. A couple of uphill sections with total ascent of 300ft/90m, or 260ft/80m on the shorter option

MAP: OS Explorer 182

REFRESHMENTS: None on route, pubs and cafés in Sandridge
LOCAL TRANSPORT: Bus service 304 runs between St Albans and Hitchin and stops by St Leonard's Church.

Route

Leave through a gate at the back of the car park onto a bridleway. Turn right along it for 500m and turn left up a set of steps into Langley Wood.

1. Continue straight ahead on the laid out all-weather trail, fork right and stay on the main path as it circles the wood. Where the path meets a bench on the right, go straight on past a barrier to leave the wood onto a wide track. Turn left along it past the entrance to Magical Wood and, after 450m, turn right through a gate on a track signposted for the Wildlife Wander.
2. Turn immediately left past a barrier into a wood (Well Wood). Follow the edge of the wood for 230m to a wide crossing track and turn left out into a field.
3. Turn right, follow the edge of the wood along and then round to the right up to a crossing path. Turn left through the gate, continue ahead past the memorial stone and through the next gate at the far end. Turn left, follow the path round to the right and stay with it as it drops down to a wide track at the bottom. Turn right along it, go through a gate, down the steps and turn immediately right to leave the wood onto open grassland - Nomansland Common. Don't head for the road, instead, bear right and follow any of the paths across the common for nearly 1km to reach the Ferrers Lane car park. *The optional shorter route starts here.
4. Continue past the back of the car park to the junction of Ferrers Lane and the B651. Cross over and take the bridleway opposite, signposted to Coleman Green. Follow the path through the small wood, pass the Heartwood Forest noticeboard and stay ahead on the main track for nearly 1km to a lane - Coleman Green Lane. Cross straight over to the bridleway opposite, staying in the same direction

- along the edge of the first field and across the middle of the next. On the right are lovely views of the western section of the forest. Follow the wide track towards the farm buildings and turn right through the yard of Hammonds Farm to a lane.
5. Turn right along the lane for 400m to a footpath on the left at a right-hand bend. Turn left past the disused stile into a field and right along its edge. The route will now follow The Hertfordshire Way into Sandridge. The path continues along the edge of a wood, across an open field and through a gate to a road - Langley Grove. Cross it, go through the gate opposite and walk on for 200m to take a path on the left. Go past two sets of barriers into the grounds of St Leonard's Church. Bear right and leave by the lych gate at the front of the church. Walk down past The Queens Head pub and fork right to the main road.
 6. Cross over, go through the entrance to Pound Farm and keep straight ahead to the right of the big barn. Continue for a further 200m and turn right through a gate to return to the car park.

*Optional shorter route - continue past the back of the car park for 50m and bear diagonally right uphill on an unmarked path towards the road ahead. At the T-junction, turn right uphill for a few metres and fork left to continue to a main track. Turn right and continue along a surfaced section parallel to the road. Pass through two gates at the entrance to Hillend Farm and continue for a further 100m to a gate on the right. Follow the wide track uphill for 400m to a crossing path. A few metres ahead is a second path with a short marker post with a Dylan Francis poem. Turn left at the first path to reach a wide gravel path and turn left again to return to the car park.

Continued overleaf



Path from Pudler's Wood



Path from Round Wood to Nomansland Common



Woodland on The Hertfordshire Way



St Leonard's Church



The church and The Queen's Head



Bluebells

Points of Interest

In summer 2020 the Chiltern Society and the Chilterns Conservation Board produced a series of social distancing walks. This is a recent addition. The walks were developed by 18 volunteers, all experienced walk leaders who are passionate about the Chilterns and keen to share some of their favourite walks away from the crowds.

Heartwood Forest represents the Woodland Trust's most ambitious woodland creation project to date in England. Purchased in September 2008, it's already seen the planting of over 600,000 trees and the introduction of new wild flower meadows. The 345 hectare site also includes a number of ancient semi-natural woods that are carpeted with bluebells in spring.

A. Langley Wood: Heartwood Forest is made up of four ancient woods: Langley Wood, Pismire Spring, Well and Pudler's Wood, and Round Wood. Langley Wood is undoubtedly the jewel in the crown for its spectacular display of bluebells. To protect these very delicate plants, please stick to the all-weather surfaced track.

B. Nomansland Common is owned by the Althorp Estate and Wheathampstead Parish Council, and managed by St Albans City & District Council. During the 17th century it was notorious for

highwaymen, the most famous of whom was the Wicked Lady. She was revealed after her death as Lady Ferrers of Markyate, and the nearby pub is named after her. In the 19th century it was the site of prize boxing and horse racing. The Common is a haven for wildlife and the heathland is some of the best in south Hertfordshire. Notable species are dwarf gorse, heather, grasshoppers, butterflies and bees.

C. Nomansland Farmhouse is Grade II listed and dates from the early 18th century. The house is said to have been built as a hunting lodge.

D. Sandridge Wireless Station: The aerial on the horizon is on the site of a secret WWII Wireless Intercept Station. The intercepted messages were sent to Bletchley Park for decryption.

Sandridge & St Leonard's Church: Sandridge is one of the oldest villages in Herts, dating back to 796AD. It was once home to one of our greatest generals, John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, and his infamous wife, Sarah. St Leonard's Church has been a place of Christian worship for over 900 years. Parts of the church are thought to date from 946 and there are 12th century additions. The timber lych gate was erected in 1921 to commemorate those from the parish who fell in WWI.