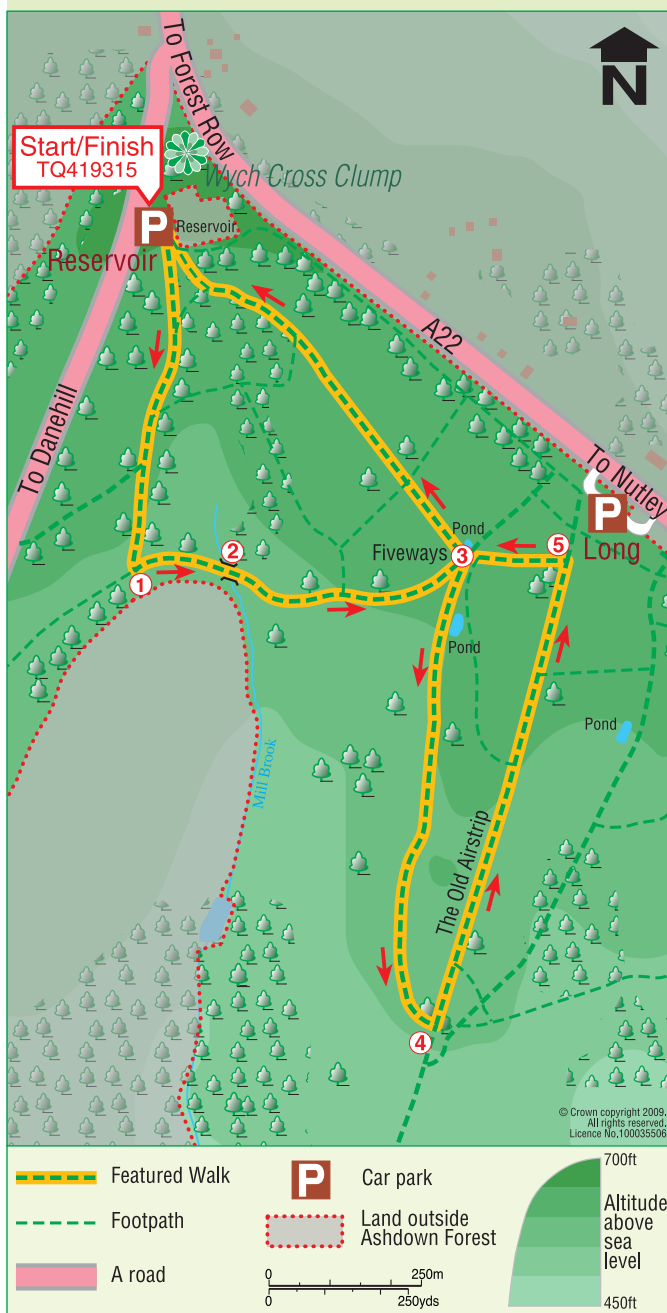


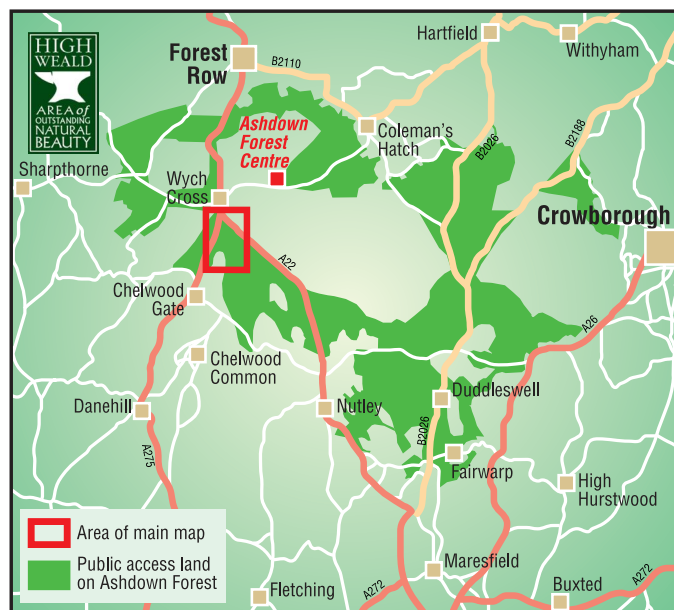
Leaflet 3 in this series describes a walk from Long car park that explores nearby Chelwood Vachery.



Information

A Board of Conservators manages Ashdown Forest as a quiet, natural place for you to enjoy and as a refuge for wildlife. At 2500 hectares (10 square miles), Ashdown Forest is the largest open access space in the South East. Nearly two thirds of it is heathland, one of the rarest habitats in Britain. On account of this, the Forest is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and an EU Special Area for Conservation and Special Protection Area.

This leaflet is produced as part of the Conservators' contribution to the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme. This is a £3.3 million programme of activity, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, to enrich the area's natural and cultural heritage and to enable people to enjoy and care for the area.



Text by Per-Rambulations
www.per-rambulations.co.uk
and the Conservators

If you would like further information about the work of the Conservators and the Friends of Ashdown Forest, visit the Forest Centre at Wych Cross. Telephone 01342 823583 or visit www.ashdownforest.org



Cartography, photography and graphics by Mapping Ideas Ltd. www.mappingideas.co.uk

Old Airstrip

A fairly (and unusually) level walk that explores the largest heathland block on the west side of the Forest

The area was heavily used in World War Two – leaving a legacy of an airstrip and some valuable wildlife habitat!



Exploring Ashdown Forest on foot

Old Airstrip

2.5 miles/4km

The walk starts from Reservoir car park at an altitude of 656 feet (200m). Just to the north of the car park is a group of Scots pines, called Wych Cross Clump. This is one of a number of clumps on high ground planted in 1825 – at a time when trees were a rarity in the Forest!

Facing the reservoir, turn right through a pole barrier onto a ride. Remain on this ride for about 600m as it heads straight across heathland, almost parallel with the A275 road (to the right).

At 1500 hectares, heathland is the most extensive habitat on the Forest as well as being its most important: the Forest is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and is also a designated EU Special Protection Area and Special Area for Conservation. As such it forms part of the European Natura 2000 Network.



Characterised by plants such as heathers, gorse and purple moor-grass, heathland may look 'natural' but it was in fact created over centuries by a combination of grazing, tree clearance and fire. To stop it turning gradually into woodland, the Conservators apply a number of management methods such as clearing scrub and trees, mowing bracken and, increasingly, introducing their own flock of Hebridean sheep. You may see indications of all these activities as you walk round.

Ahead lies a tree line and a fence around a field. Turn left on the ride ①, cross a stream by a small bridge ② and ascend gently over heathland to reach a junction of rides ③ (Fiveways).

The heath here has breeding populations of characteristic birds such as Dartford warbler, nightjar, stonechat and tree pipit. The redpoll ('poll' refers to head), a rare breeder in Sussex (although it is a common winter visitor), also occurs here. Linnet, meadow pipit, reed bunting, skylark and yellowhammer add to an exceptionally rich list of birds.



Redpoll
(© Daniel Trim)

Scots pine is abundant in this whole area. Not strictly a native tree to southern Britain, having retreated northward after the last Ice Age, it is nonetheless a widely accepted part of the landscape. Whenever crossbills are on the Forest, looking for pine seeds to eat, this is one of the best places to find them.

Turn right and remain on this ride for about 800m, passing a pond (sometimes dried up) on the left on the way. The South Downs are in the distance.



Golden-ringed dragonfly
(Source - Wikipedia)

The acid ponds and streams of heathlands can be rich in wildlife such as the golden-ringed dragonfly. In Sussex it is confined largely to Wealden Greensand (in the west) and the High Weald, most prominently on the Forest. It flies from mid June to early September.

At the next junction of rides ④ turn left on to the Airstrip and follow it for about 800m towards Long car park and the A22.

The Airstrip was built by the Canadian Army as an Emergency Landing Ground in World War Two. It was put to the test on 6 September 1943 when a United States Army Air Forces Flying Fortress B-17 landed here, having run out of fuel. It later managed to take off. Two others landed nearby the same day, one at Pippingford Park three



Flying Fortress B-17
(© R. M. Lindsay)

minutes later at 1253 and another behind what is now the Ashdown Park Hotel at 1255. All three were returning from a raid on Stuttgart.



Bog asphodel

The extensive military activity has had a long-term beneficial impact for some wildlife! Many of the wet areas in the heaths here were created by bull-dozers in the War and are home now to several characteristic plants such as round-leaved sundew and bog asphodel. In July the latter's yellow flowers are easy to spot on the Forest – but are very scarce elsewhere in Sussex.

About 100m before the car park, turn left onto a ride ⑤. After about 150m the ride reaches Fiveways; take the second ride on the right (with a small pond on the right) and follow it to Reservoir car park.