

2018 WALK 12

Bencroft and Wormley Woods and Thunderfield Grove, west of the proposed Brookfield Garden Village, Broxbourne Borough

Throughout 2018, our walk each month will feature the corresponding site in our "Countryside Under Threat" calendar. Our aim is to highlight these sites and raise their profile in aid of local campaigns to prevent their inappropriate development.



Our December walk of just under 4½ miles runs through well-wooded countryside in Broxbourne Borough to the west of the A10 and south of Hertford. To the east the proposed Brookfield Garden Village would cut through the heart of an area of quiet countryside in the Green Belt. The proposal for 1,500 houses, retail and leisure uses, a school, employment space and a new local centre would put pressure on the wildlife of the nearby wooded habitats, many of

which are of national and international significance, including Wormley Wood (see photo above), part of Hertfordshire's only National Nature Reserve (NNR).

The route described starts and finishes in Bencroft Wood West car park. It runs east and south to visit Thunderfield Grove, a quiet area of ancient hornbeam woodland partly planted with conifers which is owned by the Woodland Trust. From the eastern end of the Grove it is possible to look over the area which would be occupied by the proposed Brookfield development. Then the walk heads west to pass through Wormley Wood, also Woodland Trust-owned. This large area of oak and hornbeam woodland is of European as well as national importance as a wildlife habitat. The route is relatively flat with a few short ascents and descents. Lying on the thick clay which dominates this part of the county, the route may be muddy underfoot especially after rain. In Wormley Wood there are raised boardwalks across the wettest places, and in all the woods there are footbridges over the numerous stream crossings. There are no stiles except at the far side of Thunderfield Grove, on the optional detour which adds a mile to the route if taken in full.

Less than 20 miles from central London, Wormley Wood is a very peaceful place, and walking here gives a sense of remoteness which is rare in this part of the country. Visit in spring to enjoy drifts of bluebells, in summer in search of butterflies, and in autumn to savour spectacular tree colours. In winter the rides and glades are sheltered from the wind and with no leaves the tree-dwelling birds might be easier to spot.

Parking The walk starts and finishes at point A on the map, in the Hertfordshire County Council-owned Bencroft Wood West car park, located on White Stubbs Lane and approximately 4 miles due south of Hertford. Satnav or a phone navigation app will be useful to reach here.



To begin the walk, head south from Bencroft Wood West car park at the far right-hand side corner, passing the sign (see photo left) and keeping left to follow the path signposted to the East car park. The path runs downhill to cross a stream on a footbridge (see photo right).



Close to a large oak tree on the left of the path (see photo left), turn right onto the public footpath signposted on the waymark post (see photo right).





Follow the path southwards through the wood (see photo left). When you reach the edge of the wood, go through the kissing gate next to the bench (see photo right), then follow the path across the field keeping the hedge on the left.



At the far side of the field the path goes through a small thicket of vegetation, then passes a garden to the right, before emerging onto a road (see photo left). Turn left, walk along the road and turn right onto public footpath 18 signposted 'Beaumont Manor ½' (see photo right).



Follow the path down into a small valley, cross the footbridge over a brook, then go through the gate and uphill on the left-hand side of a field (see photo left). At the top of the field go through a wooden gate. Turn right and follow the path (see photo right).



In a short distance the path turns left to run uphill alongside a wood, with a fence to the left (see photo right). Keep going straight between fences alongside a field to reach the road, then turn left. Follow the road for just over 200 yards.



At the public footpath sign on the right of the road pass a low wire barrier and go along the short track with two metal field gates on either side (see photo left). Just beyond the gates turn left (east) onto the overgrown path which leads to a gate into Thunderfield Grove (see photo right).



Thunderfield Grove covers just under 61 acres (25 hectares) and is owned by the Woodland Trust. The western end is dominated by mature hornbeam coppice, which once would have been cut regularly for fuel and other uses. For centuries London was a major market for fuel wood from Hertfordshire and hornbeam was the species of choice. Elsewhere in the wood the coppice has been replaced with planted conifers.





The route shown on the map takes you down the public footpath which closely follows the western end of the wood from the gate you have just gone through (see photo left). This brings you to a footbridge crossing Turnford Brook at the southern end of the wood (see photo right).



Visitors are welcome to explore all parts of the wood. If you wish to look over some of the countryside which is proposed to be developed as part of Brookfield Garden Village, stand with your right shoulder closest to the footbridge to orientate yourself, then walk between the two hornbeam trees in the photo (right) and keep to the path ahead.



The path continues through the trees (see photo right), although is not always distinct. Keep roughly parallel with the brook running along the southern edge of the wood. There are simple wooden bridges crossing the streams which run down through the wood. In half a mile you reach the road - Park Lane Paradise - which runs along the eastern end of the wood. The Brookfield Garden Village site is on the far side of this road. You can go over the simple stile and cross the road, but take great care as the traffic along this stretch is often going very fast.



Retrace your steps back to the footbridge on the public footpath at the western end of Thunderfield Grove, cross over the brook and go through the kissing gate (see photo left), then go uphill with the line of trees to your left (see photo right).



At the far end of the field go through the kissing gate (see photo left) and turn right to walk along the overgrown track. A little further along the route passes beside old hornbeam trees (see photo right).



The track turns left and slightly uphill, running at first between trees and hedgebanks, then with a close-boarded fence to the right, then on a concrete drive. Keep left of large metal gates onto an overgrown section, then onto a gravel drive by more large metal gates to a farm. Keep left here and stay on the track to reach the road (Appleby Street), with houses opposite.



After approximately 100 yards turn right onto Bread and Cheese Lane (see photo left), which bears right by a pylon, then left. Where the road turns right again keep straight on along a public footpath which is the route of the Hertfordshire Way (see photo right).



Follow the path (see photo left) past glasshouses and a chimney to the left. Pass the drive to Tanfield Farm to the right and keep straight ahead along the drive, then turn right at the T-junction to go downhill, through a builder's yard, then past a metal fence and gate (see photo right).



Continue downhill to enter Wormley Wood by a large hornbeam pollard (see photo left). Like coppiced trees, pollards were cut on a regular basis to provide wood for fuel and other uses. Unlike coppice, which was cut at ground level, pollards were cut much higher up so that the young regrowth was out of reach of grazing animals. The lower part of the tree trunk was known as a bolling. Turn left to keep on the Herts Way briefly, as far as the Woodland Trust entrance. Where the Herts Way turns right to go uphill, turn left instead to follow the southern edge of the wood with a small stream on your left and beyond it a fence.



Wormley Wood was bought by the Woodland Trust in 1981. Covering just over 350 acres (142 hectares), the wood is dominated by tall trees of sessile oak (one of Britain's two native oak species) and hornbeam, the combination of species at its most northerly range here. Stands of more recently-planted conifers are gradually being restored to broadleaved woodland. Ancient woodland has occupied much of the site for hundreds of years, but there is also evidence of old fields here, perhaps dating back to the Bronze Age, as well as Saxon boundaries. Both were demarcated by still-surviving wood banks now topped by coppiced hornbeam stools and hornbeam pollards. A network of streams has eroded deep valleys in the underlying clay. Its many ponds are frequented by dragonflies. The tall trees provide ideal sites for all three native woodpecker species, hawfinches and nuthatches, as well as the rare white admiral and purple emperor butterflies.

You can walk anywhere in Wormley Wood, but be careful: it is easy to get lost in this large area if you are not familiar with its layout. You are advised to keep to the route described. The many ponds can also be hazardous, and are often surrounded by deep soft mud into which you can quickly sink. Stay on the higher ground around the ponds, and on boardwalks where provided, and keep a careful watch on children and dogs.

The path through the trees is not very distinct (see photo right). At the footbridge bear slightly left to keep going close to the edge of the woodland (on the left). Eventually you reach a spiked metal and wooden fence. Turn right here to head north on the public footpath. When you reach a fork, take the left-hand path to follow the *clockwise* Broxbourne Woods NNR Trail, which is marked by a roundel depicting a butterfly on a green arrow. This is also the public footpath (marked by a yellow arrow).



The waymarked Broxbourne Woods NNR Trail is a circular route of just under 11 miles (17.5 km) which can also be walked in shorter sections. Covering 590 acres (239 hectares), the National Nature Reserve includes Wormley Wood and also Hoddesdonpark Wood, owned by the Woodland Trust, together with Bencroft and Broxbourne Woods in County Council ownership. The NNR Trail visits all of these woods, together with adjoining areas.

You will pass through an area of woodland quite different from the rest of Wormley Wood and dominated by tall young trees of birch, aspen and other species. In autumn aspen leaves (see photo right) turn bright yellow. The species name for aspen - *Populus tremula* - describes the way the leaves appear to tremble in even a light breeze. This is because the leaf stems are flattened. When the Woodland Trust bought the wood this area had been clear-felled and was planted with young Lodgepole pines, which the Trust sold for Christmas trees, leaving broadleaved species to recolonise the area.



When you reach the bench (see photo left) stay on the NNR Trail and public footpath. Then at the fork take the path to the left, crossing a board walk (see photo right), bordered by pendulous sedge, a distinctive plant typical of these damp woods where the clay severely impedes drainage. It has

distinctive long brown flower heads.



Further on you pass banks topped in places by old hornbeams (see photo right). These may have marked distinct woodland areas, or Saxon boundaries or even Bronze Age fields.



A little further on you reach a broad ride running through the wood to the right (see photo right). Leave the NNR Trail and public footpath at this point and take the ride. This runs through mature woodland with many large tall oak and hornbeam trees. It dips down to cross several tributaries of the stream system, including Wormleybury Brook which you crossed further downstream earlier in the walk.



The streams are crossed by simple wooden bridges. Take care on these as they may be slippery in wet weather.





When you reach a very deeply-incised stream with a seat on the far bank (see photo left), turn right to pass by a post with a pink band near the top. This marks the route to steps and the bridge across this valley (see photo right).



Go uphill to the left of the seat, passing the Woodland Trust sign, then the Broxbourne Woods National Nature Reserve sign. You are now back in Bencroft Wood (see photo left). Follow the path to the waymark post (see photo right) then turn left to return to the West car park.



If you have enjoyed this walk, please consider supporting CPRE Hertfordshire in our efforts to protect and celebrate the Hertfordshire countryside for everyone to enjoy. Our website www.cpreherts.org.uk contains more information about our work and how you can donate and perhaps volunteer.

This route was last walked by CPRE in October 2018.

Note: all walkers do so at their own risk. Suitable footwear and clothing are recommended.

CPRE Hertfordshire is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered charity no. 1162419, address: 31a Church Street, Welwyn, AL6 9LW, tel: 01438 717587.

We are the county branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England.