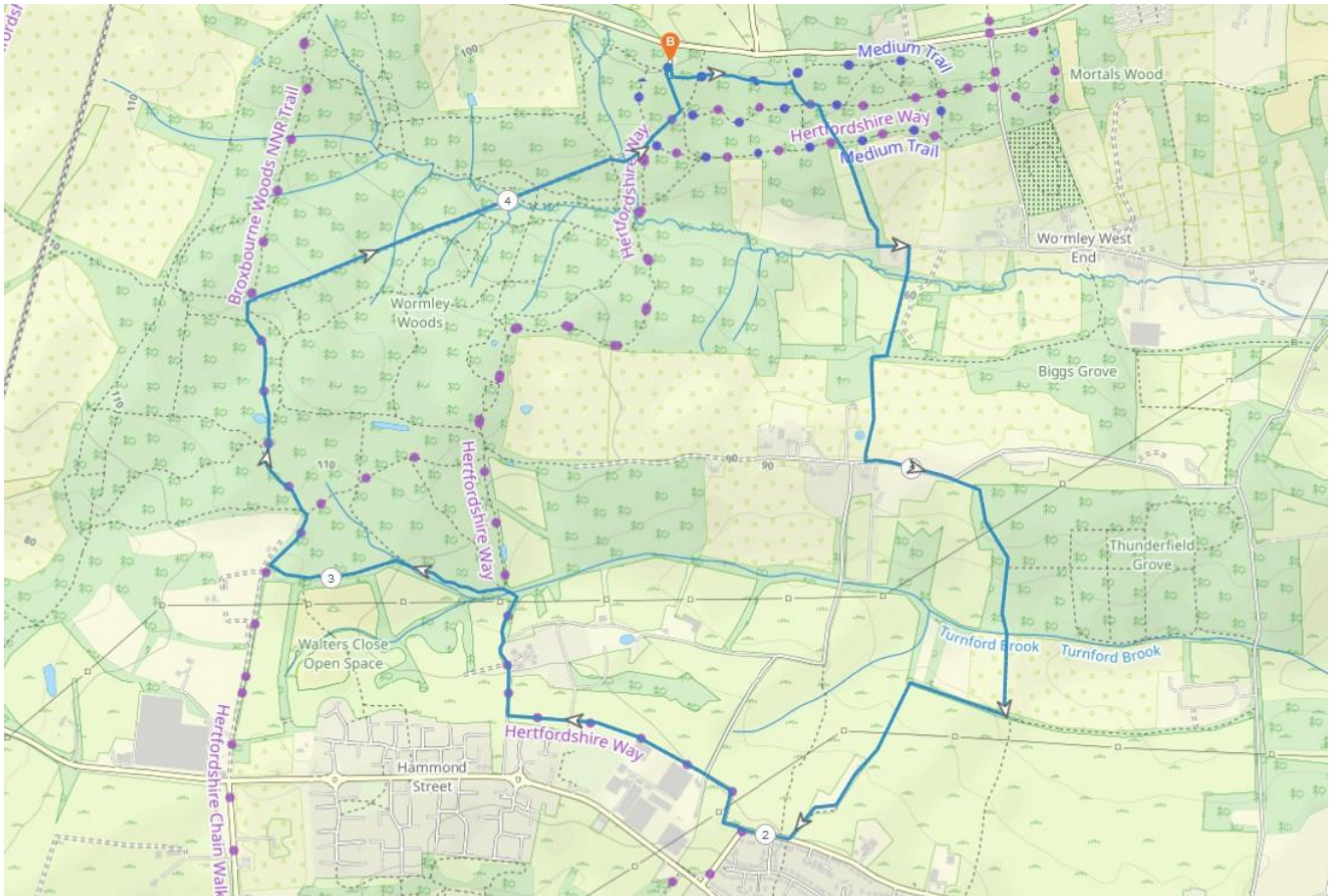




The countryside charity
Hertfordshire

Bencroft and Wormley Woods



This circular walk of just under 4½ miles runs through well-wooded countryside in Broxbourne Borough to the west of the A10 and south of Hertford. Much of the wooded habitats are of national and international significance, including Bencroft and Wormley Woods, part of Hertfordshire's only National Nature Reserve (NNR).

Distance: 4.4 miles / 7.1 km

Ascent: 462 feet / 141 metres

Duration: 2.5 hours

Difficulty: Easy; some paths may be indistinct at certain times of year

Start / Finish: Bencroft Wood West car park, White Stubbs Lane, approximately 2 miles west of Broxbourne and 4 miles south of Hertford (what3words: regime.casual.fees)

Refreshments: None on the route, bring a picnic

The route starts and ends in Bencroft Wood. 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. 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 undulating 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.

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 foliage. In winter the rides and glades are sheltered from the wind and with no leaves the tree-dwelling birds might be easier to spot.

The walk starts and finishes at the Bencroft Wood West car park on White Stubbs Lane, approximately 2 miles west of Broxbourne and 4 miles south of Hertford.



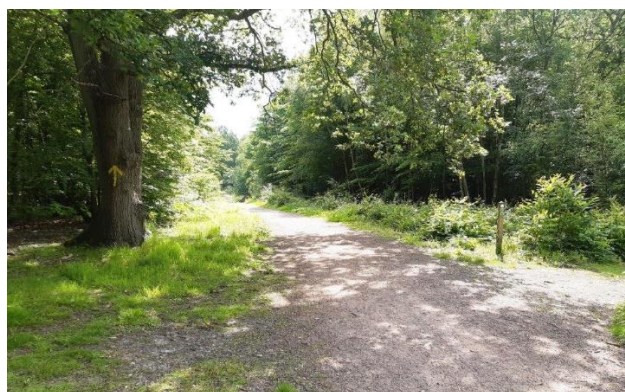
Start by taking the path at the southeast corner of the Bencroft Wood West car park to follow the gravel path signposted to the East car park.

The path runs downhill - ignore any side paths - to cross a stream on a footbridge.



Continue onwards and close to a large oak tree on the left of the path turn right onto the public footpath 17, signposted on the waymark post.

Follow the path southwards through the wood.



When you reach the edge of the wood, go through the kissing gate next to the bench, then follow the path across the field keeping the treeline/ hedge on your left.



At the far side of the field the path passes a garden to the right, before emerging onto a road. Turn left, walk along the road and turn right onto public footpath 18 signposted 'Beaumont Manor ½'.



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. At the top of the field go through a wooden gate. Turn right and follow the path .



In a short distance the path turns left (FP27) to run uphill alongside a wood, with a fence to the left. Keep going straight between fences alongside a field to reach the road, then turn left. Follow the road for just over 200 metres.



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. Just beyond the gates bear left onto the overgrown path which leads to a wooden gate into Thunderfield Grove.

Thunderfield Grove covers just under 61 acres (25 hectares). 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. Visitors are welcome to explore all parts of the wood.

Continue down the public footpath, which closely follows the western edge of the wood. This brings you to a footbridge crossing Turnford Brook at the southern end of the wood. Cross over the brook and go through the kissing gate, then go uphill with the line of trees to your left.

At the far end of the field go through the kissing gate and turn right to walk along the track (Restricted Byway 31).



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. Keep left here and stay on the track to reach the road (Appleby Street), with houses opposite. Turn right.

After approximately 100 metres turn right onto Bread and Cheese Lane, which bends right, then left.

Where the road turns right again, keep straight on along a public footpath which is the route of the Hertfordshire Way.

Follow the path, 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.



At the bottom of the hill - at a black five bar gate - turn left on to the (currently) unsigned footpath.

Continue downhill to enter Wormley Wood by a large hornbeam pollard.



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.

The path through the trees is not always distinct.

At the footbridge bear slightly left to keep going close to the edge of the woodland on the left.



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.

Eventually you reach a spiked metal and wooden fence. Turn right here 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 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, stay on the NNR Trail and public footpath.

Then at the fork take the path to the left, crossing a board walk.



A little further on you reach a broad ride running through the wood to the 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, 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.



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. Follow the path to the waymark post then turn left to return to the West car park.

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This route last walked by CPRE in June 2024.

If you have enjoyed this walk, please consider supporting CPRE Hertfordshire in our efforts to protect and promote the Hertfordshire countryside for everyone. For more information on our work, or to sign up for our newsletter, make a donation, or volunteer with us, please visit www.cpreherts.org.uk

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

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