

The Outwoods



Walking to Nature



Loughborough

Route
1

Introduction

This walk makes use of the trails and routes around the **Outwoods**, a popular leisure area near Loughborough. Starting and ending here it takes you out of these woods and into the countryside beyond.

Uneven terrain and stiles will be encountered en route so stout, waterproof footwear is strongly recommended. The route involves two uphill climbs and some slippery rocks in wet weather. With a distance of **3¼ miles** it will take around **2 hours**.

It is not suitable for pushchairs/wheelchair users. Please don't pick plants and keep dogs on leads.

There are public toilets and free car parking at the Outwoods. There is also a disabled toilet and a water tap for dogs. This makes it an ideal place to return to friends and family who have not been able to participate in the journey and share a well earned picnic.

Explore the natural heritage of Leicestershire and the National Forest with **Walking to Nature**



Bridleway	Footpath	Restricted Byway
Urban Area	Stream	Byway Open To All Traffic



Contents

Getting to the Outwoods 6

The walk 9



Getting to the Outwoods by foot

Especially convenient for those living in Shelthorpe and Outwoods ward of Loughborough, is the path from Moat Road (allow about 30 minutes)

Begin at Moat Road car park. Stand so that Moat Road and the vehicular access to the car park are behind you and the play equipment is to your right. Cross the grass in front and turn right to join the clearly defined bridleway bordered by hedgerow. This path leads directly to the **Outwoods** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The bridleway is not generally suitable for normal wheelchairs and pushchairs.

As the walk begins, your view of the surrounding countryside is initially shielded by hedgerows on either side of the path. School holidays were once adjusted to allow children to participate in the picking of hedgerow blackberries and in haymaking activities.

The hedgerow and verge support a diverse population of small mammals, birds and insects.





Last updated December 2014

The decline of woodland means that they are an essential habitat for those creatures that traditionally lived in woodland.

Butterflies, such as the **Gatekeeper** and **Meadow Brown** flutter along the hedgerow feeding on bramble and consequently pollinating the blackberry plants.

As you emerge into open countryside, the division of the fields to your left has changed little since land was parcelled up in the 18th and 19th Centuries.

As you continue along the bridleway, look out for **swifts** congregating in the sky above the fields. The screech of these birds is a sign that spring/summer has arrived and groups of these high flyers can be seen swooping around the sky from mid May until late August. These birds live most of their lives on the wing, spending the British winter in Africa and have been known to live for up to 22 years.

At a **yellow arrow waymarker**, the route forks off to the left. Follow this through the field, instead of keeping the field boundary to your right. Walk past **Pocket Gate Cottage** on your right, with the brook on your left. Walk through the driveway and turn right to join the tarmac lane. At the crossroads, carefully turn right onto Woodhouse Lane and walk along the verge to enter the **Outwoods** at the gate on your right. You will see an interpretation panel to your right. Follow the path to your left, with the boundary wall on your left, until you reach the car park. From here, follow the main walk.



Getting to the Outwoods by bus or car

No bus services run from Loughborough to the Outwoods, but a bus can be caught to Woodhouse Eaves. Take the 154* from Baxter Gate in Loughborough or Haymarket Bus Station in Leicester. Get off the bus in Woodhouse Eaves at the stop by the Old Bulls Head. Follow Brook Road, which is opposite the Old Bulls Head. This becomes a footpath leading to the Outwoods and will take around 20 minutes.

If you must use the car, head south west out of Loughborough on the Nanpantan Road, then turn left onto Woodhouse Lane. The car park is on the left and the site is signposted for the Outwoods. The car park is free and the gateway will fit a small minibus bus or people carrier but not a coach.

* Centrebus 154 operates hourly, Monday-Friday daytime.
On Saturdays, Woodhouse Eaves is served by Kinchbus 123 (hourly) from Loughborough and Leicester.

Plan your journey at
www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk





Points 1 & 2

1 From the car park take the gravel path to the right hand side of the toilet block into the woods. This winding path takes you into the woodland passing oaks and birch and alder in the wetter areas. Take the first footpath on your left. Follow this over the beginnings of a stream, until you meet another footpath and turn left for 100m until you reach the wood's western the boundary wall. This brings you out onto Woodhouse Lane by a sign for Jubilee Wood.

A The Outwoods is mentioned in documents from the 14th Century, but is likely to have existed well before the Norman invasion, almost 1000 years ago and is mentioned in Domesday Book of 1086 AD.

It has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to its rare rock outcrops, its woodland plants and its wildlife. Some of these are explained in the interpretation panel as you enter the woods. It is also noted as a prime habitat for breeding birds, for example the tree pipit. This bird is at risk due to a lack of suitably managed woodland.



2 Turn right, keep to the right hand verge and face the oncoming traffic. Walk downhill along the road past the new plantations on your right.

B This road was once a main route from Woodhouse to the Priory at Nanpantan and marked the eastern boundary of the medieval hunting park of Loughborough. The Outwoods is so called because it was not within the hunting park boundary.

C The bluebells in Outwoods and Jubilee Wood begin to grow in January and when they flower in April/May, the ground is transformed into a vibrant blanket of blue.

Bluebells are associated with ancient woodlands. Even if the trees have been removed, the presence of bluebells shows the area had been ancient woodland in the past. Like most native woodland plants they start to grow before the leaves of the trees come out. Their rich colour and sweet smell is attractive to bumble bees and other pollinators.

Folklore has it that bluebells were rung to herald the arrival of fairies, and trouble.

An Iron-age coin (2,000 years old approximately) has been found near the Outwoods.





Points 3, 4 & 5

3 Farther down Woodhouse Lane, there are large metal gates to provide access to the new planted Jubilee Wood on your right. Traditional woodland species of oak, ash and hazel have been planted to create a new wood for the future. About 20 metres on there are two electricity poles on the other side of the road. Next to them is a gate and entrance to a permissive path courtesy of the Paget Estate. Cross the road carefully. Go through the wooden gate by the sign for Nanpantan Hall Farm and along the path towards a wooden ladder and a gate and a drystone wall. Cross the wall and go into a small woodland on **Buck Hill Knoll**. **D** Behind you to the right are the remains of an old quarry, which has been recolonised by woodland. The ground is spongy under foot in wet weather. Follow the trodden path through the bracken and by the drystone wall until you reach the next ladder, and you can see the path ahead to the next clump of trees.

This area of Leicestershire is called Charnwood Forest because of its historic woods and its use as a royal hunting area. It is known for its stone walls, which

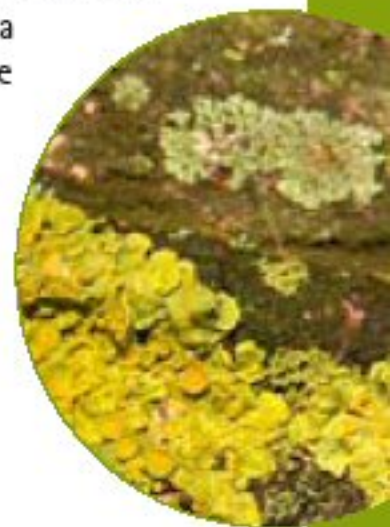
are unusual in lowland England, which comes from the availability of suitable hard stone on or near the surface. The hard stone is the remains of long extinct volcanoes which would have been active nearly 700million years ago.

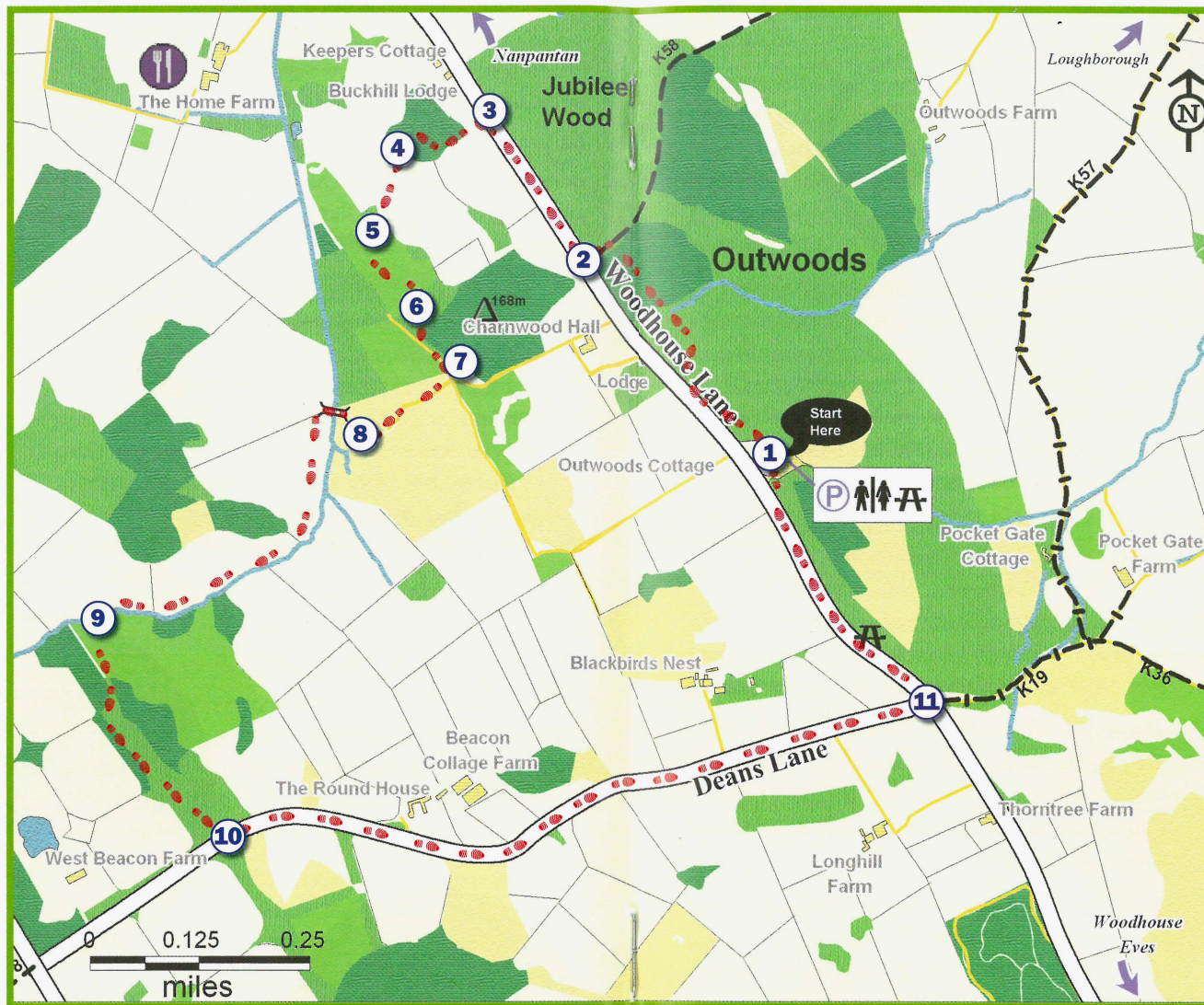
4 Climb down over the ladder and onto a track in open grassland. Walk straight ahead with the fence on your right hand side. This grassland has been improved to make it more productive from a farming point of view; it now has few native plants growing in it.

5 At the next drystone wall go through it into **Buck Hill wildlife site**. Follow the path past a large beech tree on the right and a rotten tree with holes made by woodpeckers. Smooth barked silver birches are down the hill to the left. It is rocky and slippery under foot in wet weather. Follow the steep stony path up a short hill, through the tussocks of grass covering the rocky outcrops.

E The lichen growing on stone walls and the rocky outcrops, can add a splash of colour to a winter day. It is no surprise that they are used for pigments.

Superstition has it that picking bracken at the summer solstice would render the person invisible.





●●●● Route

--- Footpath

—|—|—| Bridleway

— Tracks

--- restricted Byway

== Roads

■ Rough Grassland

■ Deciduous Trees

■ Coniferous Trees

■ Scrub land

■ Buildings

■ Water



Points 6 & 7

6 You are now at the top of a ridge which is part of Buck Hill, an excellent place to stop, relax and admire the surrounding views over Loughborough to the east, and Charnwood to the west. Listen out for grasshoppers. The rocks here were originally volcanic ash, like the ash which came down the sides of the Montserrat volcanoes in 1993. Over time they have been changed into rock.

i The plants here include tormentil, heath bedstraw, rowan, early hair-grass and sheeps sorrel, which all thrive on the acid soil. Tormentil, with its yellow flowers, may derive its name from its ability to relieve pain and torment. Its astringency was used for tanning in the past. The leaves can be brewed into a tea and the roots eaten.

A New Stone-Age quern or hand mill was found down in the valley near this point, showing the long occupation of this area – at least 8,000 years. The richer soils at the bottom of the hill have red campion and other woodland plants growing in them.

After resting, continue round the side of the hill and through the bracken. Follow the path under the canopy of the next woodland, past oaks and the occasional Scots pine and then larch, England's only deciduous conifer.



Descend the path through the woodland, following the waymarkers.

G The needles that continuously drop from the conifer trees create a springy carpet under foot. There are more impressive rock outcrops here and because the wood is open more woodland flowers can be found here than in most conifer woods, for example broom, gorse, bluebells and tormentil.

7 You will come to a red and white estate 'dogs be kept on a lead' sign and after 15 metres go through a gap in the drystone wall to the right. Go out of the shady woodland along a path through bracken and beech trees. Another path joins from the left but continue forward past an iron gate and a yellow waymarker sign on your right. Walk along the path going down hill, passing shrubs, bracken, and blackberries in season until you come to more woodland near the bottom of the hill. To the left of the path are old corrugated iron pig shelters.

U By the pig shelters are trees with broad trunks. The circumference of a tree trunk has been chosen to indicate the oldest trees – if an oak or beech tree is over 3.77m round at chest height, or an ash or elm is over 3m round then it is classified as an ancient or veteran tree. Very old trees are now recognised as being very important both in themselves and for the insects and animals that live in and on them. Can you see any trees that big?

This area of woodland has a good mixture of traditional woodland plants growing in it, especially near the stream – wet woodlands like this are a declining habitat in the UK and are even more important to keep. Golden-saxifrage, broad-buckler fern and yellow loosestrife occur here.





Point 8

8 At the fork in the path, with the large sycamore tree, bear right, go through a gap in the wall and cross a wooden bridge over **Black Brook**. After the bridge, turn left and walk through the open pasture, keeping the babbling brook on your left and heading towards the next drystone wall. Cross it to go into a second field and follow the gently worn grassy hollow.

1 This brook is home to a number of insects, attracting **dragonflies**, amongst others. Unusually for insects, these majestic creatures can flap each set of wings independently. Fossils of dragonflies have shown that they are one of the largest insects to have existed, with a record wingspan of 75 centimetres. **Dragonfly larvae** live in streams and ponds, but as adults they can fly and feed miles away from water.

Black Brook is especially important as it contains freshwater lamprey, stone loach and native white clawed crayfish. The white clawed crayfish is the only native crayfish in Britain and is endangered due to its susceptibility to crayfish plague carried by an introduced

species, the American signal crayfish. The brook flows into The River Soar and Trent and water passing you today will take over 3 days to reach the North Sea.

1 As you stroll through the fields, look out for **buzzards** soaring on thermals over the woodland to the right. These magnificent birds of prey had been extinct in Leicestershire until the 1990s. They were once persecuted by gamekeepers and landowners but are now protected so that **buzzards** are one of our most commonly seen large predatory raptors.

Cross into the third field, following the sign for Deans Lane and The Beacons. Take care over the pile of rocks and keep walking with the fence to your left until you reach a spring bubbling out of the ground in an area where stones have been piled up. Notice that the course of the spring can be seen, even where the water is not visible, due to the lush water loving plants such as **watercress**.

1 The extra supply of water by this part of the brook has probably encouraged the very large willow to grow by it. **Willows**, oaks and birch support especially large numbers of insects and other invertebrates.





Point 9, 10 & 11

9 Just beyond the spring is a fence with a waymarker pointing left. Follow this and cross the brook by way of stepping stones.

L As you pass over the brook, you may be able to see **hard rush**, which has been used in basket making, thatching and weaving.

The nettles in the boggy area to your left have had a number of uses in the past, such as dyes, tea, beer and soup. Their sting has given rise to the phrase 'grasp the nettle' being employed when someone has an unpleasant task that must be done.

The coconut scented spiky gorse here can flower all year round and is a habitat in its own right. Some of its inhabitants are bees, long tailed tits and whinchats, in addition to insects including weevils living in its seed pods.

Follow the path up the gentle hill past the holly bushes and into the woodland.

U The field on the left has been rough grazing for over two hundred years. Archaeologists have found possible earthworks near here. The trees along this path include



old and new ones, and new plantations to the right can be seen through the trees.

10 At the top of the hill leave the woods at the gate in front of you and turn left onto Deans Lane. Almost immediately walk past a sign on a gate for Beacon Hill on the opposite side of the road. Stay on the road and walk straight on, passing **Felicity's Wood** to your left and **Martin's Wood** to your right, where some of the mature trees are over 200 years old.

N As you walk, look out for swallows flying low over the fields in summer. These birds can be distinguished from swifts by their forked tails. As you descend from the brow of the hill, enjoy the magnificent views of Loughborough in the distance.

11 At the crossroads at the end of Deans Lane, turn left and head towards the triangular sign saying 'No footway for 1 mile'. Take extra care crossing the road here, as the traffic travels fast. After 20m a gate leads back into the **Outwoods**. Follow the earth path nearest the wall on your left and go past picnic tables up a gentle rise. This path leads back to the car park and start point.

