

Historic Needwood

By the mid-thirteenth century, Needwood Forest was mostly under the control of the Ferrers family of Tutbury Castle, who used it as a private hunting preserve. Henry de Ferrers was a close confidant of King William and his loyalty had been rewarded with the gift of extensive estates. However, the Ferrers family later forfeited their control over Needwood to the Crown and the forest subsequently passed to the Duchy of Lancaster.

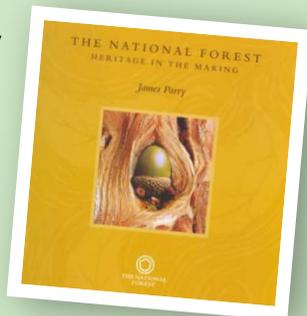
Although the forest was initially created as a royal playground for the hunting of deer, Needwood was particularly celebrated for the quality of its grazing, and this was one of its most lucrative commodities during the Middle Ages. Large numbers of cattle grazed in the forest, as well as horses, sheep and geese. Needwood was also well known for the many pigs that were allowed to forage there in the autumn for acorns and crab apples.

Inevitably for such an evocative and isolated place, the leafy glades of Needwood soon came to be associated with Robin Hood. In particular, he is alleged to have married Maid Marian beneath an ancient yew tree in the churchyard at Doveridge, on the north-western edge of the forest. Interestingly, a thirteenth-century survey contains a reference to a family called 'Hode', who lived on the edge of Needwood Forest near Loxley, between Uttoxeter and Abbots Bromley. Robin Hood was, of course, also known as Robin of Locksley...

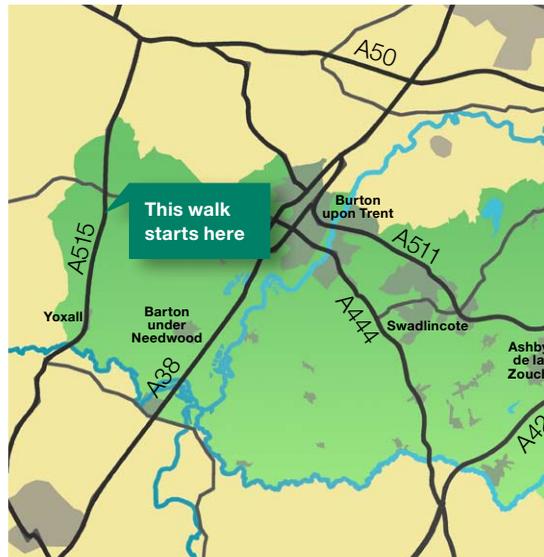
In the time of Robin Hood, the Needwood area would have been rich in wildlife, including populations of wolf and wild boar. Wolves were almost certainly exterminated by about 1300, and boar probably disappeared soon thereafter. While the return of wolves to Needwood is unlikely, the creation of The National Forest has encouraged the return of many other species. So see how many you can spot on your walk.

More information on the history of The National Forest can be found in **The National Forest - Heritage in the Making** by James Parry.

Available from:
www.nationalforest.org



This leaflet can be used in conjunction with OS Explorer 245 (The National Forest) and Landranger number 128 (Derby and Burton upon Trent).



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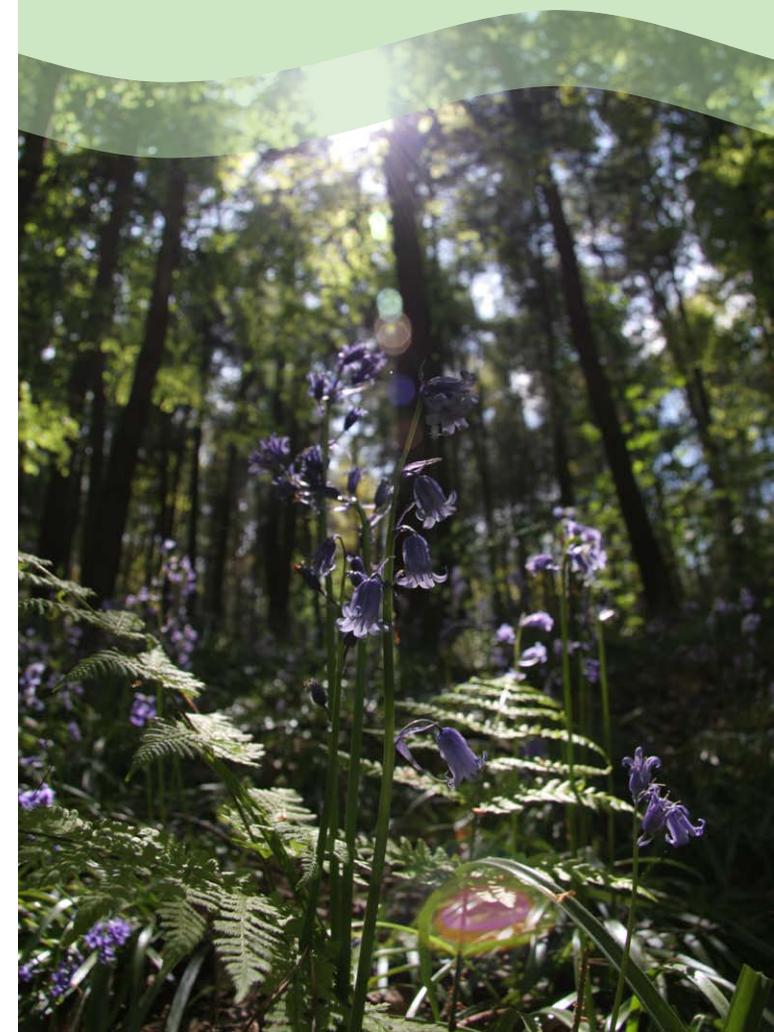
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Needwood circular

9 mile medium walk

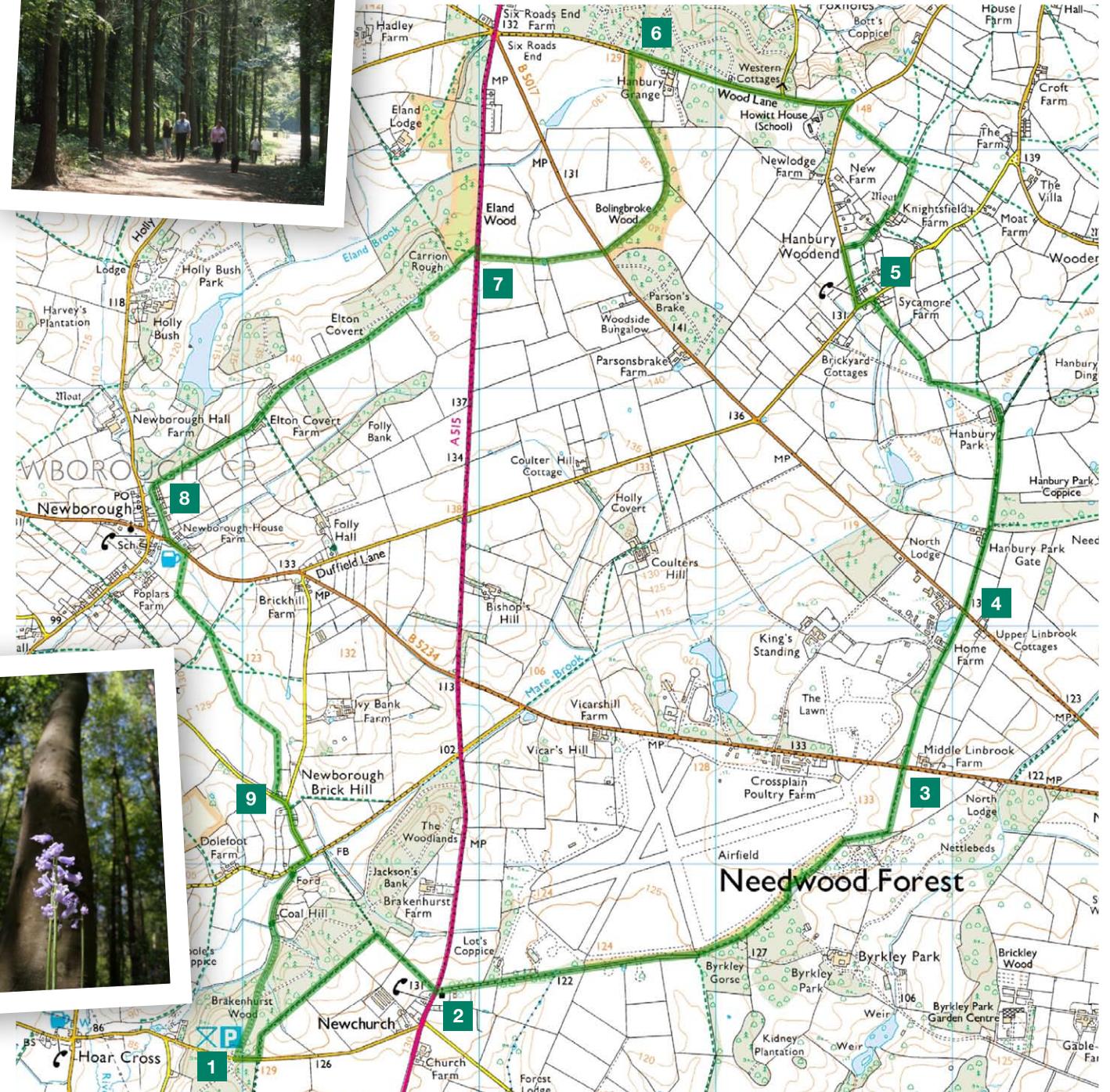


Needwood circular

Needwood has a strong rural and historic character, with Ancient woodland, old parklands, rich farmland and estate forestry blended together. Small hamlets and villages are almost hidden in the landscape.

On this walk you will visit three sites which the Duchy of Lancaster has opened up to the public through the National Forest Tender Scheme, and pass another, privately owned wood planted with grant aid from the National Forest Company.

- 1 From the car park, turn left up the road for 80m until you arrive at a stile on your left. Cross the stile and you are on the Kissing Gate Walk. Follow the footpath that runs along the edge of the wood as far as a T-junction at the entrance to Jackson's Bank. With metal gates on your left, turn right and follow the footpath along the hedge that meets the road. *(Please keep dogs on a lead here please as hens frequently run loose).*
- 2 The A515 is a busy road, so please cross with care. Go through the hand gate to the left of the former church into Crossplain Wood and follow the path for just over a mile through a narrow belt of trees and then mature woodland skirting the airfield. At the end of the woodland, go straight on following the edge of the field with the fence on your right. Pass through a gap in the hedge into a second field and then turn left to follow the hedge as far as the B5234.
- 3 Cross the road with care and pass through a metal gate. Follow the bridleway past some paddocks and Home Farm to reach the B5017.
- 4 Cross the road and go straight on along the drive that passes Hanbury Park Gate Farm and leads to Hanbury Park Farm. *(Dogs on a lead along this section please).* Go straight on through the farm yard, then fork left through two metal hand gates in quick succession and walk diagonally across the field to a third hand gate. Walk diagonally across the next field to cross a stile and then turn right to follow the hedge. Cross another stile and bear left to follow the path around the field as far as a ditch stile. Go straight on through Sycamore Farm to the road.



Points of interest along the walk:

1 The 35ha woodland at **Jackson's Bank** is part of the Duchy of Lancaster's Needwood Estate. Defined as replanted ancient woodland, it still retains some of its semi-natural flora, such as bluebell, wood anemone, wild garlic, early purple orchid, herb Paris and wood spurge. The crop is even aged as the woodland was replanted after the Second World War, when a large amount of timber was extracted to provide props for trenches. Tree species include commercially planted Scots pine, hybrid black poplar, oak and cherry. Hazel, holly and hawthorn shrubs form the understorey.

Look out for the **Noon Column** near to the car park. Erected in 2006, the column includes a slot through which the sun shines at true noon each (sunny) day.



2 **Christ Church, Newchurch** was built in 1809 as a result of the Enclosures Act of 1801 bringing in a new population to the area. The king, George III, gave 10 acres for the site of the church, the parsonage and churchyard, and 150 acres for the support of the minister (known as Glebe land). The building was recently de-sanctified by the Bishop of Lichfield and is now privately owned although the graveyard can be visited.

Crossplain Wood was planted by the Duchy of Lancaster Estate in 1996. Covering 6ha, it is planted predominantly with oak and ash and includes two restored field ponds. The name is thought to come from "Cross Planes" referring to the adjoining airfield.

The **airfield** was a satellite airfield of RAF Lichfield during the Second World War (others were at Fradley and Church Broughton). It is now used as a private airfield.

3 **Byrkley Park** contains old parkland with some very old, veteran trees. Byrkley Lodge, now demolished, was one of the few dwellings in the ancient Needwood Forest, before the Enclosures Act in 1801. It was the country house of Michael Arthur Bass, son of Michael Thomas Bass, the founder of Bass Brewery. Michael Arthur Bass became the first Lord Burton in 1886. The name "byrkley" may come from a clearing "ley" in the birch "byrk" trees.

6 **Bolingbroke Wood** takes its name from Henry Bolingbroke, who, in the 14th Century, was heir to the Duchy of Lancaster. However, Henry was banished from England after incurring the displeasure of King Richard II. Following the death of his father, John O'Gaunt, in 1399, Henry returned to claim his inheritance and began a military campaign against the King. Richard II was in Ireland with many of his supporters and, as a result, Henry was able to gain enough power to have himself declared king and have Richard arrested. Henry IV was crowned on 13 October 1399 and reigned until 1413.



7 Covering 10ha, **Eland Wood** was planted in 2000 and you are free to explore the woodland via the new permissive and definitive paths.

8 **Newborough** has a village feature which was carved from a yew tree blown over in the great storm of 1987. Look out for the 'Staffordshire knot' carved into the base.



5 Turn left on the road and, after about 50yds, turn right at the junction. After the two cottages to your right there is a footpath, follow this to a T-junction of paths and then turn left. When you reach a farm track, turn right and through a metal gate into the farmyard. Take the next metal gate on your right and follow the footpath up the field to a fence ditch and stile.

Follow the field round to your left where you will see a signpost. Turn left over a gate by a water butt, over a ditch stile and onto the road. Turn right, then left along Wood Lane for a short distance until reaching a handgate into Bolingbroke Wood.

6 Go through the gate into the plantation and follow the footpath straight ahead along its edge. Turn left, staying on the edge of the woodland until you reach a hand gate onto a gravelled track.

Keep ahead until you reach the B5017. Cross over the road, through a gate and along the field to a narrow overgrown gap in the hedge by a reed bed into the next field and onto the A515. Cross the road with extreme care and you are on the edge of Eland Wood.

7 Enter the wood and follow the footpath which forks to the left. After 200yds, cross a stile into a field and follow the footpath past Elton Covert Farm and on to Newborough.

8 Walk down Elton Close and on to Chapel Close. Bear left onto the main road and, after 50yds, cross over a stile on your right to join the public footpath. Cross the field and follow the path of the left. After 200yds, there is a crossing of paths. Carry straight on over the hill and down to the corner of the field and onto the lane.



9 Turn left and follow the lane to the T-junction (ignore Brickhill Lane). Turn right and, after 100yds, turn left over a bridge onto a farm track. Follow this past the farm back into Jackson's Bank. Take the right hand track and follow this back to the car park.