Walk facts

Distance: 1.7 miles / 2.8 km circular walk
Time: 1 hour (approx)
Start point: Friends car park
Beware: Some paths can be muddy any time of the year.
Highlights: Nutley Windmill
Common heathland plants
Woodland
Friends Clump

Gradient profile:

Toilets and Information:
Ashdown Forest Centre Tel: 01342 823583
www.ashdownforest.org

Refreshments and Accommodation:
Help support local businesses - pick up your copy of Ashdown Forest Area Visitor Map & Guide or visit www.ashdownforest.com

Caring for Ashdown Forest

A Board of Conservators manages Ashdown Forest as a quiet, natural place for you to enjoy and as a refuge for wildlife. A team of ten full-time staff carry out day-to-day management of the Forest. If you would like further information about the work of the Conservators, visit the Forest Centre at Wych Cross, Tel: 01342 823583 or visit www.ashdownforest.org

Getting to Ashdown Forest

Have you thought about using public transport for your journey to the Forest?

East Grinstead (6.3 miles / 10 km away)
Twice hourly trains from London Victoria
Take bus 54 from East Grinstead Station to Wych Cross. Time: 28 minutes.

Useful websites
www.transportdirect.info
www.traveller.org.uk

A walk amongst friends

Exploring Ashdown Forest on foot
A Forest of beauty

Ashdown Forest is a place of beauty. It is an area of open heathland on the highest sandy ridge-top in the Heart of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). People and their livestock have created heathlands here over many centuries. Ashdown Forest has the largest and best-preserved area of heathland in the South East. The word 'Forest' derives from its use as a royal hunting ground.

A Forest full of wildlife

Ashdown Forest is a place bursting with wildlife. Heather and gorse grow on the open heath. Listen for birds such as the nightjar, which sings its churring song at dusk in summer. The silver-studded blue butterfly is common here: its caterpillars eat gorse and heather. Oak, silver birch and beech, along with holly and hazel, grow in the wooded areas of the Forest. Look out for deer - mainly fallow - dawn and dusk.

A Forest steeped in history

Ashdown Forest is a place steeped in history. Look out for two stretches of Roman road and remains of the 38 km medieval 'pale' - a ditch and bank that surrounded the Forest. Can you spot the pillow mounds once used for rabbit farming in medieval times? The Forest is covered with hollows, where iron ore and sandstone were dug.

The Romans used waste slag from iron smelting, to build roads.

The daily grind

On this walk you will pass Nutley Windmill. It started life in Kirdown, Kent and moved several times before finally coming here. The mill is designed around a single large post, dating from the 15th Century. Mills of this type are known as post mills. Windmills were once a common sight throughout the High Weald. The terrible roads made it hard for farmers to move their corn long distances for milling and it was a relatively windy area.

It is rumoured that some millwrights deliberately built mills with design flaws, to give themselves more work in the future. The mill turned two large millstones, which ground the corn. The millstones were dug from quarries in the Peak District. The stones they used became known as Derbyshire Peaks. In the past, it was very hard to stop flour going mouldy, so grain was not ground into flour until needed, hence 'the daily grind'.

Standing high

Ashdown Forest is the best preserved royal hunting forest in the High Weald. Hunting deer became important in the Norman period. At this time, hunting was a very hands-on sport. Deer were pursued by hunters and hounds through the Forest and killed at dangerously close quarters. In the Tudor period, Henry VIII preferred to hunt in a safer way, especially in old age. As at Kings Standing near here, hides or 'standings' were built; these were hidden, raised wooden platforms from which deer were shot by longbow or crossbow as they were driven past.

Blooming marvellous!

Archaeologists discovered the remains of a Saxon bloomery furnace in the Millbrook valley in 1980. A bloomery was a small furnace made from clay and sand, for smelting iron. The one at Millbrook was producing iron in the early 9th century. Smelting iron in a bloomery took skill and experience. The workers heated a mixture of iron ore and charcoal and used hand bellows to create the high temperatures needed to produce iron.

The Saxons dug iron ore from the Forest. They used a bloomery to smelt iron that was made into nails and horseshoes.

The Normans hunted deer and wild boar on the Forest.

1. Fallow deer were introduced to the Forest in Norman times.
2. Can you spot nightjar's breeding in their surroundings?
3. Look out for the silver-studded blue butterfly in July and August.

Post mills like this were often built around a growing tree, which formed the central post of the mill.
A walk amongst Friends

See www.ashdownforest.org for Ashdown Forest Centre opening hours

Map scale

\[ \frac{1}{4} \text{ mile} \]

\[ \frac{1}{2} \text{ km} \]

Key to photos
(Arrow indicates the direction camera was pointing)

A) Ling is the commonest heather on the Forest. It flowers between July and September.
B) Look out for cross-leaved heath growing in the wetter areas of the heath. It flowers between June and October.
C) You will see bell heather growing on the drier parts of the Forest. It flowers between May and September.

Common and dwarf gorse grow all over the Forest. The first has its peak flowering in Spring, the second in August.
Photo guide and route description

1. Start by turning left next to the information panel at the back of the car park in front of the clump of trees.

2. Follow the wide ride downhill for 250 metres, then take a narrow path on the left signed 'Windmill'.

3. The path passes the Nutley windmill on your left and continues through the trees.

4. Turn right on a narrow path between the trees, where the path winds down to the main ride again, and then turn left.

5. Head straight downhill on the ride, ignoring the other rides on your right and left. The path now descends steeply downhill onto the open heath.

6. As you go downhill, keep the line of five holly trees on your right.

7. As you near the bottom of the hill, take the ride on your right, which runs along the edge of the woods.

8. Follow this ride into, and all the way through, the woods, until you emerge at the other end onto the open heath below the Friends Chump of trees.

9. Now turn left and walk along the valley bottom, until you reach another ride where you turn right, and continue steeply uphill back to the Friends car park.