

## Pondhead circular walk

This is a 3.25 mile easy circular walk from the New Forest Heritage Centre. It is accessible to strollers and wheelchairs.

Starting at the New Forest Heritage Centre, walk out of the car park and turn right onto the high street. Pass by all the shops and when you reach the bus stop you will see a right-hand turn onto the Beaulieu Road. Go through the gate and turn left into Boltons Bench carpark. Walk all the way up the tarmac road passing the war memorial on your left and a yew tree covered mound on your right.



*Legend says the mound was created by a slayed dragon defeated by Sir Maurice and his hounds. After defeating the dragon, he wandered aimlessly until he found himself at the mound. He laid down to die with his foe and as he dropped his bow made of yew it grew into a tree. You will find out more about the Bisterne dragon on your walk.*



Continue past the chapel on your left and through the carpark onto the open grassland and follow the track for a short way. You will no doubt see New Forest ponies here and the odd rabbit darting into a warren. This path offers far far-fetching views across the heathland but you will soon see a track going off to the right and down to the Beaulieu road. Take this track down hill and cross over the road. As you cross you will see a sign to Ridge house. You may feel like you are walking into someone's drive, but it will quickly become obvious there is a gate into Pondhead inclosure.

*Pondhead is a haven for wildlife. It is an ungrazed inclosure so offers plenty of wildflowers including rare species. This little pocket of the New Forest is a hazel coppice and is run by a group of passionate volunteers.*

Ignore the first left hand turn and you will soon come across a way marker sign for the circular trail. From here you can follow the signs to enjoy the history and wildlife of Pondhead. The way markers also have an audio to help you get the best of your walk via a QR code.



*As you turn left at the third sign, look out for a small opening in the trees on your right where some stumps have been invitingly placed to take a seat. If you look at the large, ancient beech tree within this opening you will find some wartime tree graffiti. (what3words megawatt.sifts.floating)*



Continue your walk and enjoy the wild wood where in spring this is a carpet of English bluebells. Foxes and badgers thrive in these woods and an array of butterflies including rare species can be spotted here on a warm summer's day.

*If you have the time, just meander through pondhead and you will notice hidden wood carvings and amazing bird life in this well managed inclosure.*

As you turn left past way marker 6 onto the stoney track you could easily miss the information board tucked into the hedge on your right. This gives you a history of charcoaling in the New Forest. Wander through the gap in the hedge by the board and you will see the charcoal retorts used today by volunteers to make BBQ charcoal from the wood right here in the inclosure. You may find one of the volunteers there.



*Stop by and say hello, they are all very friendly and love to have a chat about what they are doing and the wildlife and history of Pondhead.*

Continue along the stoney track lined with wildflower verges. This is a great space to spot butterflies, beetles and dragonflies on this sun-drenched path. When you reach the end turn right and head back out of the gate, across the road and retrace your steps to Boltons bench and Lyndhurst high street for a well-deserved cuppa and cake at the Heritage centre.

*The top of Lyndhurst high street is home of Forestry England at Kings house and the ancient verderers court where court is still held weekly to protect the crownland and grazing stock. You will also find St Michaels and all Angels church were lies the grave of Alice Liddell who was the "real Alice" in Alice in wonderland. Lewis Carroll was a family friend and she became the inspiration behind the character.*