

Trail	: HAMPTR0027
Activity	: Walk
Type	: Tea Shop
Terrain	: Towpaths and Cycle Tracks
Author	: Jean Patefield
Distance	: 4.5 miles / 7.2 kms
Ascent	: 614 feet / 187 metres
Location	: SU733198 / GU31 5SH



Holt Down Plantation
© David Kemp



Pond at QECP Visitor Centre
© Chris Wimbush



Buriton Pond and Church
© Martyn Pattison

Trail Summary

Short and energetic, this highly recommended walk is ideal on a sunny day in spring when all around the signs of the countryside coming to life will blow away any winter cobwebs. Equally, it is outstanding in autumn when the changing vegetation makes a fiery backdrop to the landscape. Whatever the season, be sure to choose a clear day to appreciate the views, which are such an outstanding feature of this lovely route.

Trail Details

1. Leave the car park by the broad track at the far end and follow it uphill. As you climb, extensive views to the north-east open up behind you, well worth pausing to enjoy!

Queen Elizabeth Country Park covers 1,400 acres of the western end of the South Downs. It is part of the East Hampshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and after this walk I am sure you will agree with that designation! It covers three hills: War Down and Hold Down are wooded and visited on this route. Butser Hill is covered with chalk grassland and there are magnificent views across to it shortly. The park is managed jointly by Hampshire County Council and Forest Enterprise.

2. Soon after the track levels out, turn sharp right, almost back on yourself, on another wide track. When this track forks after 180 yards, bear left, continuing uphill. After a pronounced left-hand bend, continue ahead, passing a wide path

on the left, and ignore all paths and tracks to both left and right until you approach a parking area.

Left alone, without any human interference, these hills would be covered by forest with many yews. This environment is so suitable for yews that they are sometimes called the Hampshire weed. Yew is a long lived conifer that can survive for hundreds and even thousands of years and grow to immense size. The tree has never been popular with farmers because all parts of the plant are poisonous. On the other hand, the wood is very strong and was used for making the famous long bows of England. Due to these conflicting demands, yews are mainly found in churchyards. The woodland on this walk is quite modern. The beech and conifer woodlands on War Down and Holt Down were planted in the 1930s to help meet the country's timber needs. They are still managed commercially so this is a working landscape as well as being very beautiful. However, yews, juniper (easily recognised by its distinctive gin smell) and other species can be found among the beech and remnants of dark green yew woodland can be seen on Butser Hill across the valley.

Butser Hill is the highest point of the South Downs and well worth visiting for its outstanding views. It is less wooded and the open chalk downland, with its wealth of wild flowers, is maintained by a flock of sheep. Without their grazing, nipping off the growing point of all tree seeds that germinate, the hill would soon be invaded by scrub and would eventually become covered with forest again. There are signs of ancient human activity on Butser Hill – Iron Age field boundaries on the lower slopes and defensive works on the summit.

3. Immediately before the parking area, opposite a display area with boards explaining the management of the forest, turn right across an open area with children's play equipment to meet a cross path at the far side. Turn left. At a cross path turn right downhill and follow this path across a track and on down to the visitor centre.

As you descend, the sylvan tranquillity is increasingly disturbed by the noise of the traffic on the A3 below. The A3 is in a deep cutting here which at least allows a glimpse of the underlying chalk. It is this geology that is the fundamental cause of this outstanding landscape. The chalk was laid down at the bottom of the sea millions of years ago and later pushed up into folds by the same earth movements that built the Alps.

4. Leave the teashop along a path signed 'Hangers Way' and 'Staunton Way' with the pond on your right.

These two long distance paths both start at Queen Elizabeth Country Park. Staunton Way runs 12 miles south to Langstone Harbour while Hangers Way goes north for 21 miles to Alton.



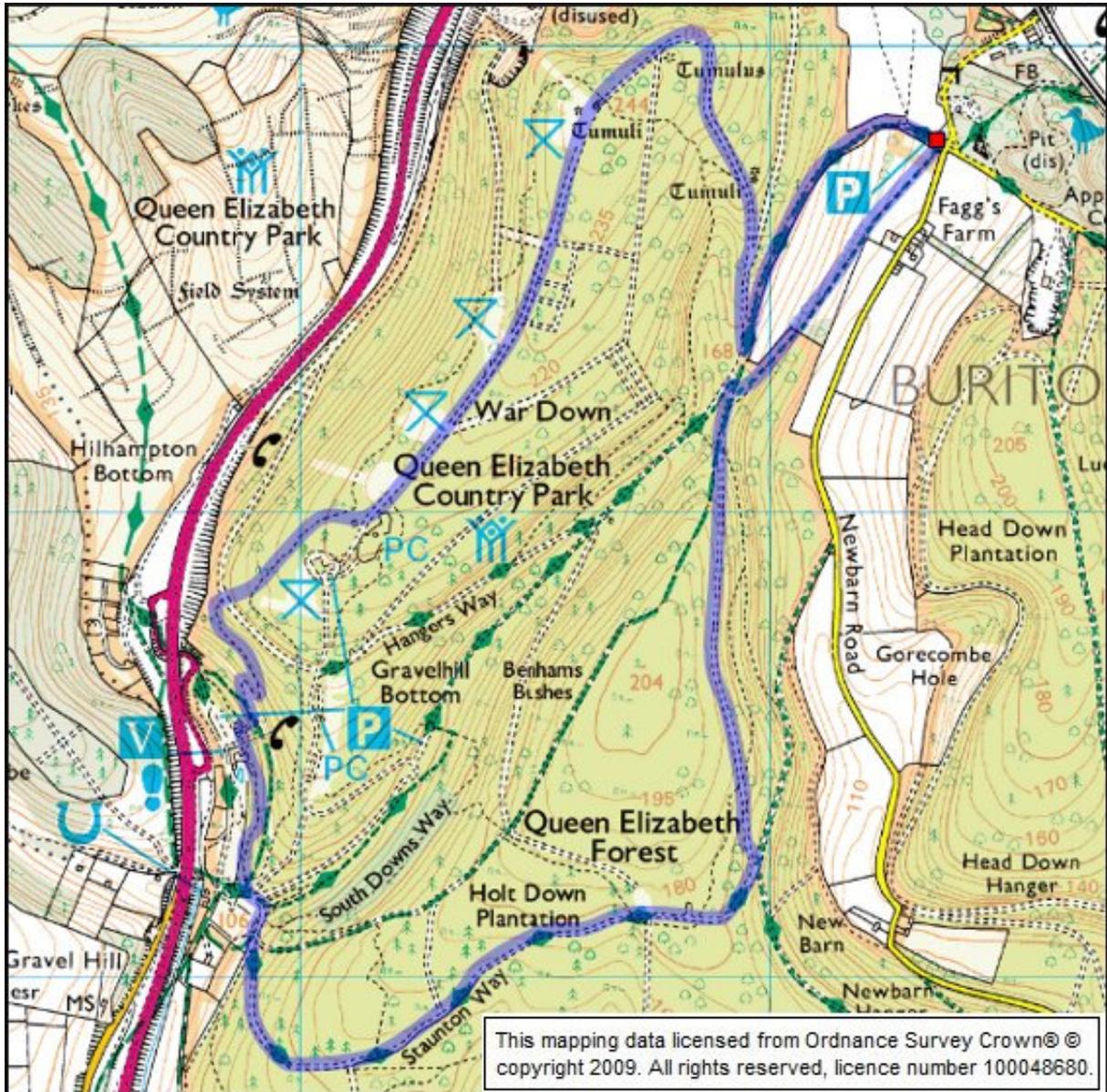
Queen Elizabeth Country Park

5. Cross a surfaced drive to a track signed 'Staunton Way'. Follow this uphill, bearing left at a fork. Bear left again at the top of the hill. Continue on the main track, passing a fenced pond on the left. Soon after this the track starts to descend.
6. At an obvious cross track turn left, uphill again, soon passing a Hangers Way sign on the left.
7. After about 1/2 mile, turn right on a clear path, signed 'Hangers Way', and follow this out of the woods and across fields, back to the start. (Note: if using the alternative start continue ahead for about 200 yards instead of turning right at point 7, to pick up the route at point 2, forking left.)

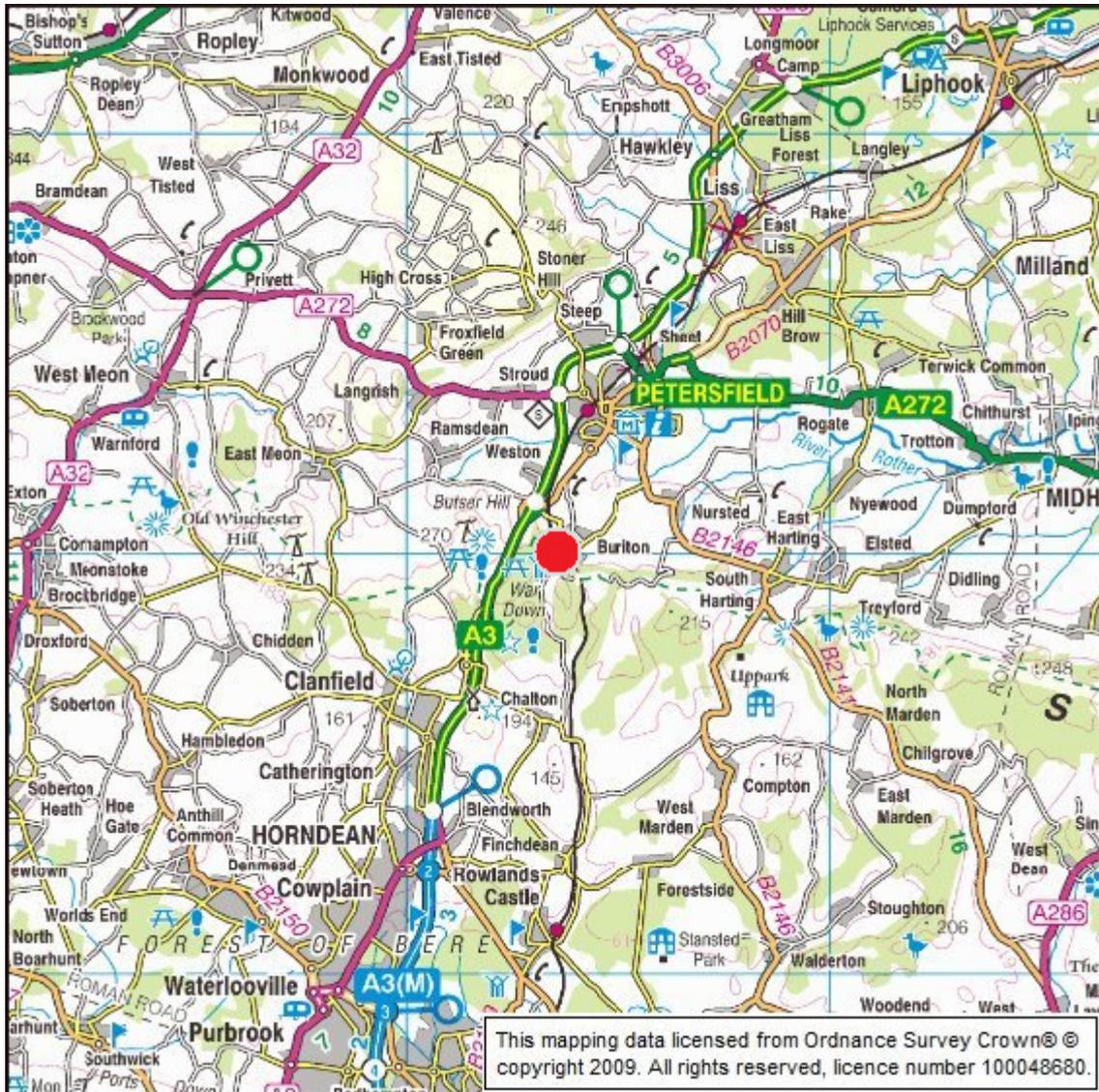
Coach House Cafe

The attractive modern visitor centre houses the Coach House Cafe as well as a shop and displays about the country park. The teashop has an extensive patio with picnic tables overlooking a pond. It serves a good selection of delicious cakes and biscuits and for lunch there is soup with an interesting range of sandwiches and baguettes, pasties and burgers. Open between 10 am and 5.30 pm every day from Easter to the end of October and from 10 am until dusk at weekends in the winter. There is no alternative source of refreshment on this walk.

Trail Map



Trail Location



Location Details

The starting point for this trail is the Halls Hill car park in Buriton. From the A3 south of Petersfield take a minor road, signed 'Buriton' coming from the north and 'Petersfield' from the south. Follow this to Buriton then take a lane on the right, signed 'Chalton 4 Finchdean 6', to Halls Hill car park on the right. An alternative starting point, if you wish to visit the teasshop at the beginning or end of your walk, is to start at the visitor centre (signed from the A3) where there is ample parking. The teasshop is in the visitor centre. You will then start the walk at point 4.