

Access Opportunities on the Defence Estate

Friday Woods Essex



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE



A circular woodland walk, using public rights of way and permissive paths, providing the opportunity to explore an area of high nature conservation interest, on the doorstep of a built up urban area.

Distance: 4 miles (6.4km)

Duration: 2½ hours

Grade: ▲

OS map sheet(s)

OS Landranger Sheet 168 (1:50,000)

OS Explorer Sheet 184 (1:25,000)

Starting Grid Reference: GR 986 209

Site description / history

Colchester is a large garrison town. The Training Areas to the south of the town include both live firing ranges and areas used for tactical training, not involving live firing. Friday Woods is part of this Dry Training Area, and is a popular area for local walkers.

Friday Woods, part of the Roman River Site of Special Scientific Interest, is an ancient woodland, modified in places by plantations of conifers and sweet chestnut. The woodland has spread out over the last century, with secondary woodland and scrub interspersed with open grassland and heathland. You may see clearance work being undertaken to restrict the spread of scrub and safeguard and restore the most valuable open habitats. In the valley bottom, wetland habitats predominate.

This intricate mosaic of habitats supports a variety of both characteristic and special plants and animals. The area is famous for the almost one thousand types of butterflies and moths that have been recorded here, including numerous rare species.

Walk description

The route follows a permissive path and is waymarked. The route may be very wet, even under water in places, after heavy rain.

From the car park **A** (GR 986 209), follow the path northward (to the left) towards a gate by Bounstead Road **B** (GR 987 213). Turn right, away from the road and follow a gravel track into the woods. Continue along this for about 600m until the path turns sharply left, **C** (GR 993 208) through the woodland. Continue along this narrow path until you reach the corner of the woodland. Follow the path out of the wood, turn right and walk along the edge of the wood to meet the track at the corner of the barracks **D** (GR 995 214).

Follow the metalled road along the western edge of the barracks, through a gate, until you see another metalled track off to the right. Follow this track until you reach a gate on the right and a waymarker **E** (GR 998 215). Pass through the gate and continue along this track until you see a stile off to the right and a waymarker. Cross the stile and continue, firstly in a southeasterly direction. The path then bears to the south across an open, semi-wooded area to **F** (GR 999 211). At (F) turn left and follow the path, passing through a gate and cross over a track (Cherry Tree Lane - GR 001 212) and continue in the same direction, following the waymarkers to weave through the woodland.

Continue along the path, with the stream on your left, proceeding to Ball Farm (on your left) at **G** (GR 009 205). At **G** cross over a stile on your left, and turn right on to a metalled road. Continue along this road until you come to Rock Farm on your right **H** (GR 001 204). Take the path to the left of the farm buildings and continue to walk parallel to the river. Pass through a gate and continue down the hill, crossing over a gated footbridge **I** (GR 997 202).

Turn right off the footbridge and continue to follow the waymarkers, along the side of the stream. At the waymarker turn right and cross back over the river via another footbridge **J** (GR 994 203).



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This brings you back into the woodland area. Continue to follow the waymarkers along the northern bank of the river for about 500m and then turn right **K** (GR 989 204), to follow the track through the woodland back to the car park **A** (GR 986 209).

It may however be possible that you will meet military personnel/vehicles engaging in training activities. The land is used for tactical training only, using blank ammunition and pyrotechnics, so be prepared for sudden noises!

Points of interest

- Breeding skylarks and meadow pipits in the dry grassland near the carpark.
- Whitethroats, bullfinches and nightingales in the dense woody growth in summer, and flocks of redwings and fieldfares in the winter.
- Bluebells covering the woodland floor in a swathe of shimmering cover during the spring.
- Around Roman River, an array of dragonflies and damselflies, including the iridescent banded and beautiful demoiselles.
- Many varieties of fungi in every conceivable colour can be seen, especially in the autumn.

Safety

- Stick to the paths
- Keep dogs under control
- Don't touch any unfamiliar objects
- Remember you may be sharing the site with training soldiers undergoing training

How to get there

For information on local public transport contact Traveline on 0870 608 2608 (local call rate) www.traveline.org.uk

Local facilities

There are car parking facilities at the start of the walk, on the road out of Colchester towards Malting Green.

Restrictions / access times

Access to the walk is available at all times as Friday Woods is outside the live firing area, within the Dry Training Area.

Useful contact details

For further information on access to this Training Area call 01842 855235.

