

Normans and Navigators at Hamstead Marshall

An easy walk of 6.5km (4 miles). Two stretches of roadside walking. Park by Enborne Church SU435657. OS Map 158 might be useful. Refreshments at The Red House, Marsh Benham and surrounding villages.



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1. Enborne Church, with its Saxon/Norman origins, contains a 12th century font, a wall painting dating from 1316, and the Michael Bell of 1260, possibly the oldest church bell in England. Beautiful views across to Beacon Hill can be seen from the churchyard, in which many casualties from the 17th century Battle of Newbury are buried.

Cross the green diagonally to the right, turning right alongside the road for 500m, until you reach a footpath leaving to the left along a driveway.

2. The current woodland boundary of **Enborne Copse** is almost identical to that shown on Rocque's map of Berkshire in 1761, but most of it is now a conifer plantation and only the area designated as an SSSI retains its semi-natural broad leaved woodland.

On reaching the canal, cross over and turn left by the pillbox to follow the towpath past Benham Lock.

3. The **WW2 pillbox** is one of many constructed along the east-west waterways of the Kennet and Pang valleys to act as a second line of defence against a possible Nazi invasion.

4. Completed in 1810, the **Kennet and Avon Canal** took 16 years to construct. It runs 87 miles from Bristol to Reading and thence via the Thames to London. It was redundant by 1940 but reopened in 1990 after enormous local effort to restore the route.

Cross the weir by the footbridge at Benham Broad and continue to the road at Hamstead Lock, turning left to pass Hamstead Mill and the Craven Fisheries. Turn left into Hamstead Park and take the track to the right.



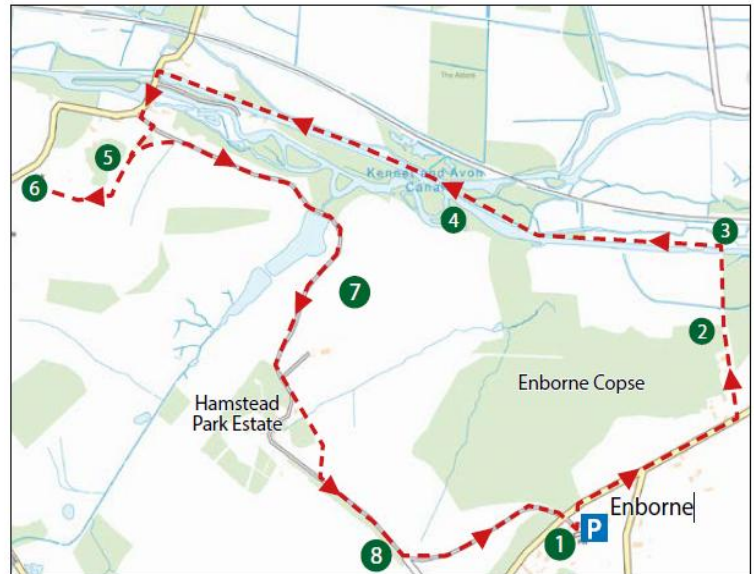
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5. Within Hamstead Park stand three, much eroded, **castle mottes**. Two of them are on the right as you approach the church. The suffix in the name 'Hamstead Marshall' recalls the celebrated Marshal family who held the manor in Norman times. These two mottes are almost certainly all that is left of their home.

Before reaching two isolated and enigmatic 16th century gateposts belonging to the



© Geograph – Stephen Richards



demolished, fire-ruined Hamstead mansion, detour to the church via a gate in the wall.

6. **Hamstead Church** is of Norman origin with later re-modelling. The brick tower was built in the 1620's. The pulpit, font, communion rail and box pews also date from this period. The churchyard contains an ancient yew and the mausoleum of the Craven family, owners of Hamstead Park.

Retrace your steps past the mottes to rejoin the main driveway, turning right through the park.

7. **The Park**, containing many fine trees, was enclosed by a pale, the remains of which can be seen in several places in the form of a ditch and bank. It was designed to keep deer in. Edward III stayed at Hamstead several times in the 1350's, on hunting expeditions, as the park had been stocked with deer a hundred years earlier. Standing near the old fishponds, which were stocked with royal bream as early as

1230, is a third unfinished motte possibly erected as a siege castle by King Stephen during the war with his cousin Matilda in the 1150's.

As the drive approaches the buildings of the present Hamstead Park and sweeps to the right, take the footpath straight on until an avenue of trees is reached.

8. Ahead, in the trees, is the **Memorial Stone** dedicated to the US forces 101st Airborne Regiment who were encamped here in the closing months of WW2.



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Turn left and follow the driveway as it curves to the road, emerging opposite the car park at Enborne Church and green.

Margery Slatter