

Hampstead Norreys: Woodland and Wartime

*An easy 2-mile walk (3.3km) taking about 1.5 hours, ideal for a short stroll with local refreshments. This walk starts and finishes at Hampstead Norreys Village Hall car park SU526762 **spotty.showcases.building**. It includes one steep hill. Paths may be muddy and uneven, especially after rain. Pub and community cafe in Hampstead Norreys. OS Explorer Map 158.*

From the Village Hall turn right down the track before turning left to walk through the church grounds.

1. The **Church of St Mary** is thought to date from Saxon times and is mentioned in the Domesday Book when Hampstead Norreys was held by Theodoric the Goldsmith and could offer 8 ploughs, small meadows and woodland.

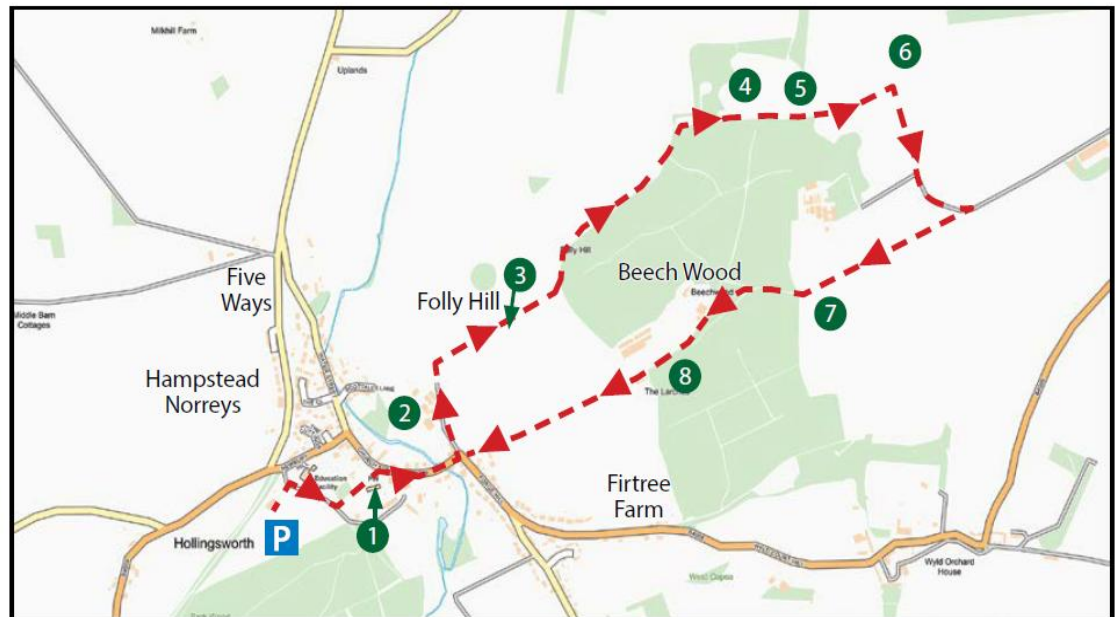
Turn right at the main road and walk past the **White Hart pub**.

2. The **River Pang** is an ecologically important chalk stream whose source is near Compton/East Ilsley. It is a 'bourne' (a seasonal stream) as its upper reaches may dry out as the water table falls. This now regularly happens to the section in the village during summer and autumn.



Just past the pub take the track to the left for 400 metres before taking the footpath to your right directly up Folly Hill.

3. From **Folly Hill** there are good views overlooking Hampstead Norreys. The name Hampstead means 'farm place' and there has been a settlement of some kind here for at least two thousand years and probably for much longer. 'Norreys' was added when it was bought by the Norreys family of Bray in 1450.



Once you reach **Beech Wood** follow the track around the wood on the edge of the field until you come across a permissive path through the wood itself.

4. An example of a **coppice**, **Beech Wood** was worked by man in the past as a source of stakes, firewood and timber. Look out for other signs of human impact in the form of boundary ditches, chalk pits and old brickworks.



On leaving the wood continue straight towards the beacon in the fields of **Haw Farm**.

5. As you leave the wood you enter the plateau where the **Hampstead Norris Airfield** (as it was originally called) was located. Numerous WW2 remains can be seen

throughout the walk including pillboxes, munitions stores, airfield buildings and of course parts of the runway and taxiways. The airfield was operational from 1940 to 1945 housing an Operational Training Unit, flying Wellington bombers, as well as other training, transport, glider and ferry units.

6. The farmed plateau has an ongoing aviation role as an active airfield and also houses a **radio beacon** which marks one of the airline corridors for Heathrow.

At the beacon take the track to the right. Where the track bends towards the farm there is a footpath sharp right which may be difficult to see. Look out for the footpath marker on the ground. Head towards the wood noting the old airfield Technical Block to the north.

7. On entering the wood, you will see an **air raid shelter** on your right. This was particularly needed when the airfield was subjected to a bombing raid on the 12th May 1941. 10 high explosive bombs and 100

incendiary devices landed on the airfield.



Continue through the wood.

8. This section of **Beech Wood** contains a variety of ecosystems including a rich moss understorey below fir trees.



On leaving the wood, join the track to the footpath crossroads and take the path straight down towards the village. Before returning to your car, take the opportunity of a relaxing break in the pub or community café.

Chris Sayer