



Aldershot: Caesar's Camp, Levada, High Road

Distance: 8 km=5 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Hampshire, Surrey

Date written: 12-mar-2012

Author: Botafuego

Last update: 14-oct-2023

Refreshments: *Royal Arms*

Map: OS Explorer 145 (Guildford)

The maps in this guide should be sufficient but the OS map may be needed in case some paths are closed for forestry work, requiring a diversion.

Problems, changes? *We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org*

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High heath, water channel, moors, views, sandy wilderness

In Brief

This remarkable walk, together with its "sister" Canal walk, is unique on this site (possibly in any book or site) because it includes some wild features not normally seen on a country walk: a vast nature reserve, great views across a wilderness of sandy hills, a long level secret section along a water channel similar to the "levadas" of Madeira, and treks through pinewoods and leaf woods. There are no standard footpaths or signposts or stiles: you have to find your way using these very clear directions.

This is Defence land but it is *not* part of a danger area. There is *permanent* free access to the principal sections of this walk and free access on *prescribed days* to the short section north of the Bourley Road. Since the first version appeared, that area was first fenced off and then re-opened with a MoD website telling you which days it is open to the public. There is a pointer from the *Guidelines* page on the FFW website to *MoD Access Times*. As a very rough guide, weekends are usually "open" days. *Don't be put off and do check that site – the experience is unforgettable!* (For this walk, if you come on a "closed" day you have a not-too-unpleasant 1-mile walk parallel to the noisy main road.)

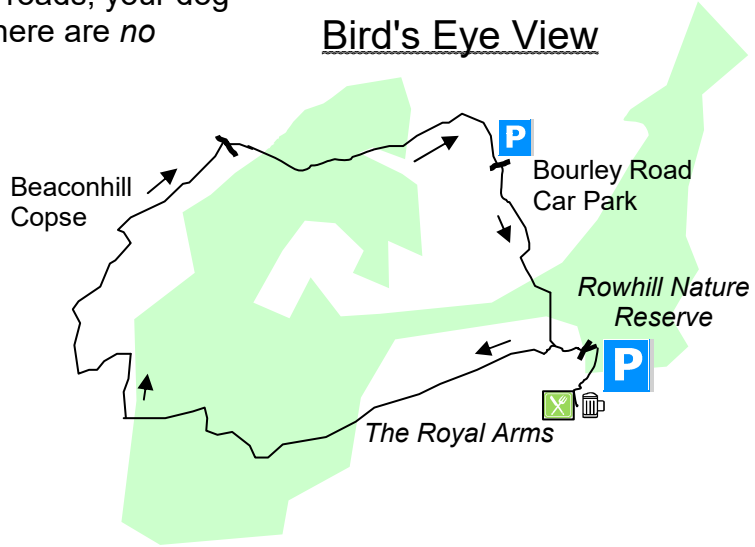
For refreshments, there is an excellent pub, the *Royal Arms*, near the start/end of this walk.

The walk begins at the **Rowhill Nature Reserve** car park on the outskirts of Aldershot, **postcode GU11 3BD**, www.w3w.co/solo.blast.ahead. There is also the improvised Bourley Road car park but it is not recommended as it is often congested. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



Any kind of attire is fine but boots are recommended because of the terrain. Except near the main roads, your dog can run quite free. There are *no stiles*.

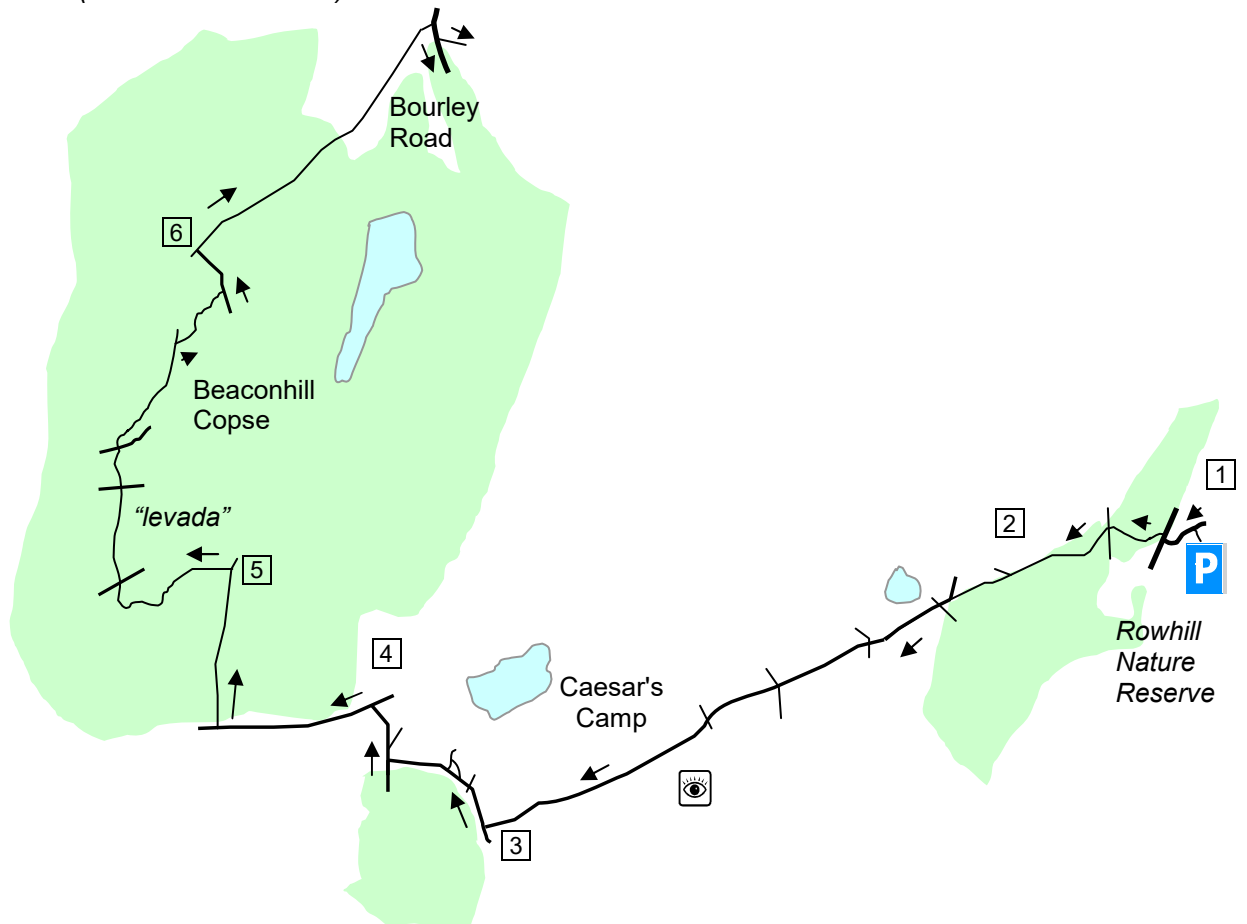
Bird's Eye View




The Walk

Leg 1: Caesar's Camp and the Levada 5 km=3 miles

Rowhill Nature Reserve covers 22 ha and was once a private timber and brick-works, as you may see. It was made a local nature reserve in 1985 and, thanks to local volunteers, is returning to its original state with deciduous woodland, working coppice and, in the spring, bluebells. The "Royal Arms" pub is on the other side of the Reserve and is a useful watering hole for the end of the walk (see foot of this text).

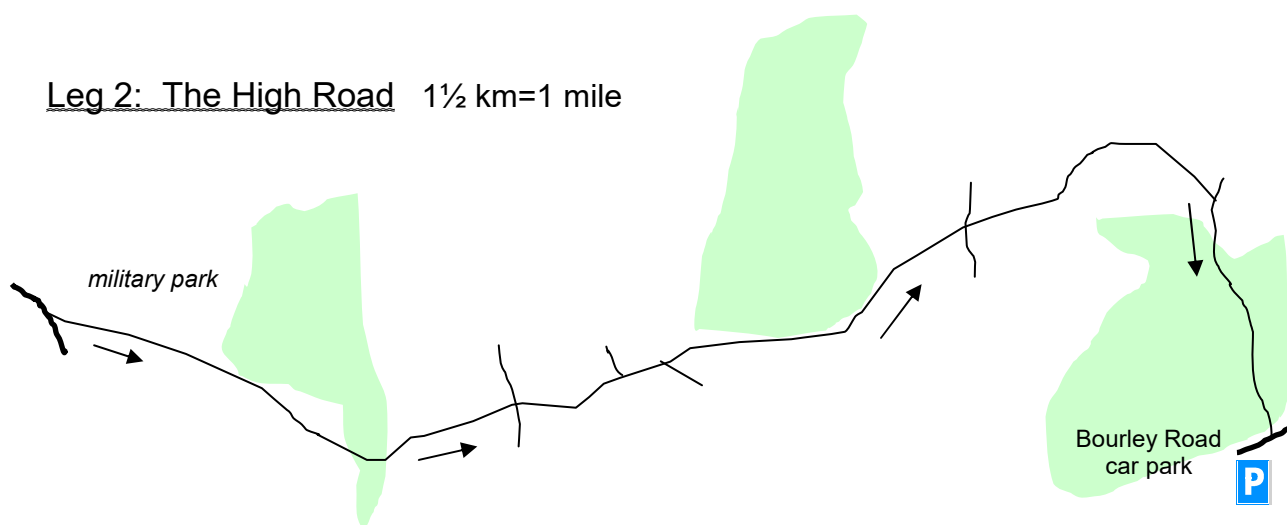


- 1 Exit the car park to the road and turn **left** to a roundabout. Cross the main road, turn **right** on it for only 10m and turn **left** past an MoD sign on a foot-path. Go through a large kissing-gate past a sign for Caesar's Camp. In 30m, the path veers **right** away from the fence, ascends and reaches a wooded crossing path in a slight dip. Cross this path, a fraction right, to a rising path opposite that runs between banks. *In fact, any path will do. The idea is to come out into the open moor.* At the top, turn **left** on a wide path known as *Long Bottom*, with a silver birch wood on your left and extensive open views of the moors on your right.
- 2 *You will be following this main track for 1½ km, the first ½ km next to the wood, the rest out in the open.* Very soon, your track bends right and left but you have the option of continuing straight ahead through trees on a path that soon veers right to meet the main track again. 100m later, you see a pond on your right and you reach a 5-way junction where your path ahead forks. *[It is possible to make a round tour from here of Caesar's Camp (see below) by diverting off to the right here. The way is steep but quite manageable and the views from the top are fantastic. Re-join the route at the start of Section 4.]* Here, you have a choice of either of two level paths as they join up again. *The left-hand path is easier but the right-hand path takes you a little closer to the pond for a photo opportunity.* At a junction of paths, keep straight ahead on the same wide level sandy path, avoiding all rising paths, left or right, stepping for a while into Surrey. Your path runs through an area of scattered birches with low hills on each side. You cross another track as the path begins to rise gently in an area known as Long Bottom. Finally you come to a T-junction with, on the left, a small metal gate and houses visible in the distance.
- 3 Turn **right** at the T-junction, still on a wide path. In nearly 100m, keep **left** at a junction, then keep **left** again in 70m by a *Danger Drop* sign. On your right is a steep drop. *You are in part of Caesar's Camp, a hill fort with great views all around.* In 100m, your path comes to a wide crossing track with views ahead. Turn **right** on the track and keep **left**, avoiding a track that forks off right. In 60m, turn **left** at a T-junction on a hard-surfaced track.
-  4 Continue along this wide track, going past a conifer plantation on your right, with gorse and wild heathland. 400m after joining this track, you see on your right a metal gate and an animal grid. Turn **right** here, going through a small metal gate onto a wide track going downhill into a birch wood, back into Hampshire. Continue on this path for about 300m, where you come to the nearest corner of a green metal fence on your right followed immediately by a bridge. Directly after the bridge, turn **left** on a very narrow knobbly level path that runs beside an old water channel on your left. You have reached the start of the secret "*levada*".
- 5 *The next km or so is the closest you'll get in SE England to those famous levadas of Madeira that channel water from high in the mountains to the populous areas, with level paths running beside them that are such a pleasure to walk.* The path soon gets wider and easier and bends sharp right, winding right around a valley. Always keep to the **level** path, avoiding any ascending or descending paths where various rivulets descend to join or cross the channel, sometimes with small bridges. Just after another sharp bend, the path crosses a wide track diagonally and takes you through a dusky area of tall pines. The pines change to birches with a more open area on your right. The path crosses a wide stony track near a stone bridge and bears right to run high above the track. You meet more scots pines and, looking to down

on your right, you see the track now deep in the valley. 230m after crossing the track, your path crosses a very steep stony path. Just 15m after this, your path forks. Here, leave the level path (which continues onwards for some distance) by taking the **right** fork downhill. [2023: care! some walkers forked right too early: there may be another descending path which you need to avoid.] This narrow path descends gently for some 150m. When you reach the bottom, turn **left** on a wide hard-surfaced track.

- 6 In 100m, at a T-junction with a steep slope ahead, turn **right** on another wide track. You pass a large pond on your right (hidden in summer), unromantically called *Reservoir No. 1*. As you near a grassy meadow visible ahead, cross a track and go through a small metal gate next to an animal grid. In 20m, turn **right** to the edge of the grass, go **left**, and walk the whole length of the meadow, either using the track round the right perimeter or diagonally across it, aiming for a metal barrier. Go through a small metal gate, cross the busy Bourley Road, a fraction to the right, and go through a walkers's / rider's metal gate beside the barrier, entering a large parking space used for military vehicles.

Did you check the MoD website? If you came on a "closed" day, you have to turn **right** on the road for 400m (¼ mile) as far as a metal kissing gate on the right, and follow a woodland path which runs parallel to the road (1 mile total or 20 minutes). [2023: walker reports no kissing-gate but another gate after 100m where you can squeeze through and continue on a forest track.] Re-join at the Bourley Road car park in Leg 3.



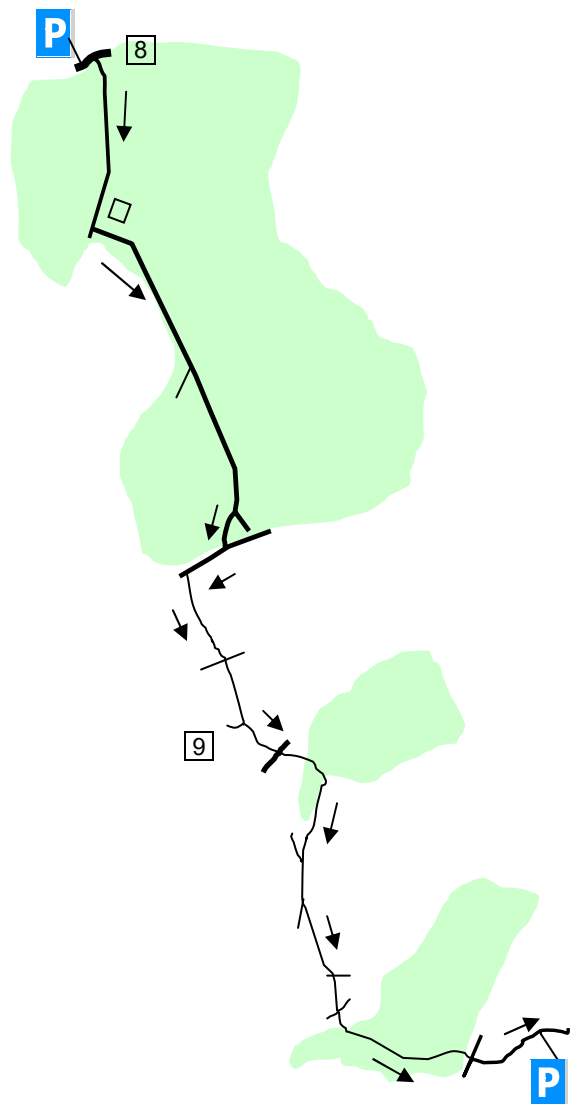
This is an easy-to-follow stretch where in principle you stay constantly on the main curvy path. It ends, once again, at the Bourley Road after giving you great views along the way.

- 7 Turn **right** after the gate and keep to the **left** edge of the military vehicle park, furthest from the road, where you will join a wide shingle path. Continue ahead on this path as it zigzags uphill over a grassy area and goes through a band of trees into gorse. Here, avoid a minor track on the right. At the top, go straight over a track. Your path goes down a shallow dip, where a track joins from the left, then up again. *Without the summer foliage, you can see Farnborough Airport ahead and you may see planes taking off, especially if an air show is in progress. (See the sister walk "Aldershot and the Basingstoke Canal".)* The spire of the Royal Garrison Church in Aldershot can also be seen. Avoid a track here forking right. You soon pass another junction and a pine wood on your left. The track runs level and later descends. Stay on the main track for a good 400m, ignoring all paths off until you reach a major 3-way junction. Turn **right** here on a wide track, soon to reach a metal barrier. Go through a walker's / rider's gate on the left of the barrier and cross the road to the small improvised Bourley Road car park.

Leg 3: Sandhills and Copse 1½ km=1 mile

This is a very complex section and you need to concentrate more than usual to arrive successfully at the end point.

- 8 Take the wide track 10m to the **left** of the entrance to the car park. Go past a metal barrier beside an MoD yellow warning notice and through a modern swing-gate beside an animal grid. The path goes past a large brick shed. Immediately after the shed, turn **left** uphill on a wide metalled path. Stay on this path, avoiding, in 150m, a wide track on the right. From this point you have great views of Bourley Hill. 100m further, at the top of a rise, ignore a path on the left and, in 20m at a T-junction, turn **right** on a track. In only 30m, before the track begins to ascend and opposite the corner of a wire fence on your right, turn **left** on a very narrow path between some small oaks. The path runs through dense gorse and, in 100m, crosses a rutted track. It then crosses a ditch and, 50m later, it finally joins a wide path coming from the right.
- 9 In 40m, your path reaches a junction with a wide hard-surfaced track with a series of steep banks ahead. Turn **left** on the track for only 20m, then sharp **right**, keeping to the left of an oak tree, and go up a short but fairly steep slope ahead. (There are even steeper slopes to its right, which are best avoided.) At the top of the slope, turn **right** on the main path and, after 70m, keep **left** where another path joins from the right. Continue ahead for another 40m until you reach a clear fork. Take the **left** option. At the top of a slope, you come to a junction with a line of bricks across your path. Turn sharp **left** on a wide track and, in 20m, opposite a large concrete structure, turn



sharp **right** on a path downhill. If you began the walk at the Rowhill Nature Reserve, you will recognise this path from the outward journey. In 60m, branch **left** steeply downhill through hollies. On reaching a fence, veer **left** to a noticeboard and swing-gate, the main road and the Rowhill Nature Reserve where the walk began.



For refreshments, the *Royal Arms* pub/restaurant is only a short distance away through the Nature Reserve, in Surrey. With your back to the road go to the left-hand side of the car park (near a house) and take a wide ascending path to the right of the Field Centre. At a tall oak, keep right and keep ever onwards, gently uphill. Follow the path through the hollies until you reach a lane, Rowhills. Turn **right** on the lane and **left** on the main road quickly reaching the pub. The *Royal Arms* is open all day at weekends and has a pleasant patio.

Getting there

By car: If coming from the north on the A3, take the A31 (Hog's Back), *ignore* the first left filter for *Aldershot* and continue to the large roundabout just east of Farnham. Follow signs for *Odiham, Badshot Lea, Farnborough*. Follow the A325, straight on at each roundabout or junction, until after 1½ miles you pass the *Royal Arms*. Continue to the next small roundabout. Turn **right** on Cranmore Lane: the car park for the *Rowhill Nature Reserve* is on the right.

If coming from the M3, come off at exit 4, take the A325, always following signs for *Farnborough*, through the town and past the airport on your right. 2 miles after the airport, continue ahead over a large roundabout. Look for a 30 mph sign ½ mile later and a brown tourist sign for *Rowhill Nature Reserve* and turn sharp **left** at the next small roundabout.

By bus/train: Bus no. 4 from Aldershot station stops on Cranmore Lane near the Nature Reserve. Check the timetable.

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