



This walk is approximately 3.3 miles in length, parts of it over rough ground, starting and ending at the Abbott's Wood car park off Dockenfield Street. You will stop and admire magnificent examples of ten species of tree, have the opportunity to identify many more. On the way you will pass the Alice Holt Forest Centre, with refreshment and toilets if needed, and also walk a section of the Shipwrights' Way.

*You start the walk at the Abbott's Wood car park. Walk back almost as far as the road entrance but then turn right/south at a barrier. Follow the wide path that gently slopes downwards and weaves first left, then right. Past the second bend the slope steepens and, on the left, you find a group of trees that includes three that are not common in this wood – yew, field maple and ash. Let's consider all three:*

#### **1. Yew *Taxus baccata***

Yews are one of only three conifers native to Britain. They usually radiate out from churchyards. Individual trees can live for

thousands of years but they never grow particularly tall. Instead of a single trunk the base is a bundle of smaller ones.

There are two genders. The males grow small cones which shed clouds of pollen in early spring, and from early September the females bear small, cup-shaped berries called arils. The arils, like most parts of the yew, are not for mammalian consumption, but in November you will often see the trees seething with thrushes and crows building up their fat stores for the coming winter. At the same time they are helping to distribute the seeds of the next generation of yews.

#### **2. Field maple *Acer campestre***

The field maple is not an outstandingly majestic tree. It does not grow particularly tall; nor is it elegant like the beech or the birch, making a more rounded, compact shape than these. But it has been much loved, particularly for its wood. A harp made from maple was found in a Saxon barrow at Taplow in Buckinghamshire, and another, wrapped in a sealskin bag, was discovered among the treasures of the Sutton Hoo ship burial in Suffolk.

The UK's only native maple, it is found growing in woods, scrub and hedgerows, and on chalk lowland. It is widely planted in gardens and parks due to its compact habit, tolerance of pollution and rich autumn colours.

#### **3. Ash *Fraxinus excelsior***

When fully grown, ash trees can reach a height of 35m. They can live to a grand old age of 400 years – even longer if coppiced, the stems traditionally providing wood for firewood and charcoal. This specimen is still relatively young. Ash is the third most common tree in Britain, but it is under attack by a fungus called *chalara* whose spores have been blown all the way from China. It is estimated that only 20% of the population will survive.

The leaves can move in the direction of sunlight, and sometimes the whole crown of the tree may lean in the direction of the sun. Another characteristic of ash leaves is that they fall when they are still green.

Ash is dioecious, meaning that male and female flowers typically grow on different trees, although a single tree can also have male and female flowers on different branches. Once the female flowers have been pollinated by wind, they develop into conspicuous winged fruits, or 'keys', in late summer and autumn. They fall from the tree in winter and early spring, and are dispersed by birds and mammals.

*Continue on to meet another broad track crossing your path. To your left you will notice a white stone monument in the form of a Roman pot. This indicates that you have met a turn in the Shipwrights Way.*

**The Shipwrights Way** is a long-distance route linking villages and towns in east Hampshire through some beautiful countryside. Starting at Bentley Station across the South Downs to Portsmouth. The route is open to walkers and cyclists and, where possible, horse-riders and people with disabilities. The name reflects the journey of oak grown at Alice Holt to dockyards such as Portsmouth for medieval shipbuilding; the route finishes at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, home of the Mary Rose, HMS Victory and the International Boatbuilding Training College.

*At this intersection turn right and continue along this path to reach a stile, beyond which you cross an open meadow. On the other side is another stile and then shortly reach the main road. This is the A325 Borden to Farnham road which can be busy with fast moving traffic. Cross carefully to enter a wood and pick up the path that runs away to the right and northwest and gradually away from the road. You are now moving through relatively undisturbed woodland with some of the largest and oldest trees in the area. Here you find examples of:*

#### **4. English Oak *Quercus robur***

The ruling majesty of the woods, the wise old English oak holds a special place in our culture, history, and hearts. It supports more life than any other native tree species in the UK; even its fallen leaves support biodiversity. They are large, deciduous tree growing up to 40m tall. As common oaks mature they form a broad and spreading crown with sturdy branches beneath. Oaks even shorten with age in order to extend their lifespan.

Oaks produce one of the hardest and most durable timbers on the planet. However, it takes up to 150 years before an oak is ready for use in construction. It has been a prized hardwood timber for thousands of years and is still used for flooring, wine barrels and firewood.

#### **5. Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa***

With long, yellow catkins of mostly male flowers, and with female flowers at the base, both flowers are found on the same tree. After pollination by insects, female flowers develop into shiny, red-brown fruits wrapped in a green, spiky case. The trees begin to bear fruit when they are around 25 years old.

It should not be confused with the horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), which has similar-looking nuts, but the leaves are completely different, with sweet chestnut having single, long, serrated leaves and horse chestnut having hand-shaped leaves with deeply divided lobes or 'fingers'.

*The path crosses the wood on a northwest diagonal but when the other side is becoming visible, with a fence and some buildings, follow the path as it turns abruptly right and tracks northeast. You will notice the noise from the A325 getting steadily louder. Eventually you emerge at the side of Binsted Road. Across the road, and to the right is Back Lane, Bucks Horn Oak, and here you will come across three fine examples of popular urban trees:*

#### **6. Monkey puzzle** *Araucaria araucana*

Reaching up to 30m in height, monkey puzzle has a stout, almost cylindrical trunk with smooth bark that has a purplish-brown colour.

The leaves are green, spiky, stiff, leathery, glossy and triangular-shaped. They are thick and broad at the base, sharp at the edges and tips, and are arranged in a spiral around the trunk. They are dioecious, meaning male and female flowers grow on separate trees.

This species has been around for 200 million years, when dinosaurs still roamed the earth. Its spine-like needles acted as protection from ancient grazing animals.

In the present era it is native to central and southern Chile and western Argentina. It was first brought to the UK in 1795. It became very popular during the Victorian and Edwardian era and is now widely planted as an ornamental in parks and gardens.

#### **7. Indian Bean Tree** *Catalpa bignonioides*

The Indian Bean Tree does not come from India and does not grow beans! It originates from the Eastern United States and was introduced to Britain in 1726. The Indian in the name refers to the local native American (Red Indian) tribe near to where the tree was first recorded by a European botanist. His transcription of their name, Catawba, was incorrectly recorded as Catalpa and the tree is now also known as the Southern Catalpa.

It has large heart shaped velvety leaves, very large when the tree is young. The leaves are late to emerge not appearing until late June and will be killed off by the first frost without changing colour.

The tree comes into flower in the middle of July with white flowers that have yellow and purple flecks. The flowers are produced in large clusters and can be so numerous as to obscure the leaves of the tree altogether, thus ensuring its status as one of the most appealing summer trees.

The beans are the tree's bean-like pods, which are very slim and almost perfectly cylindrical and can grow up to 16 inches in length. These pods contain winged seeds and remain on the tree throughout the winter before splitting and releasing the seeds.

It is not particularly long lived though there is a specimen in a Reading Churchyard that is 150 years old.

#### **8. White willow** *Salix alba*

Huge, sweeping and romantic, the white willow is a typical weeping willow. It is the largest species of willow, with mature trees growing up to 25m. They often have an irregular, leaning crown. The bark is grey-brown and develops deep fissures with age, and twigs are slender, flexible and grey-brown.

The slender, oval leaves are paler than most other willows due to a felty covering of fine, silky white hairs on the underside. White willow is dioecious, meaning male and female flowers grow on separate trees. Catkins appear in early spring – male catkins are 4–5 cm long and female catkins 3–4 cm long. After pollination by insects, the female catkins lengthen and develop small capsules, each containing minute seeds encased in white down which aids dispersal by wind. Like other willow species white willow freely hybridise, making identification a challenge at times.

Like most willows, the white willow is usually found growing in wet ground such as river and stream sides, so what is this one doing here?

*Reaching the end of Back Lane you find a track. Turn left here and shortly you will find:*

#### **9. Lime** *Tilia europaea*

The common lime is a hybrid of two native species – *T. cordata* and *T. platyphyllos* – but now outnumbers both.

Both the male and female reproductive parts are contained within one flower. Flowers are white-yellow with five petals and hang in clusters of 2–5. Once pollinated by insects, the flowers develop into round-oval, slightly ribbed fruits, with a pointed tip.

Lime leaves are eaten by the caterpillars of many moth species, including the lime hawk, peppered, vapourer, triangle and scarce hook-tip moths. Lime flowers are considered a valuable source of food for honey bees.

*Continue along this track, with the Back Lane houses on your left and a tree nursery on your right, past a wooden barrier until you come to a junction with a stand of tall conifers ahead of you. Turn to the right along the back of the nursery. The next junction is where you next encounter the Shipwrights' Way. This time turn right to follow it down to the A325. Once again take care as you cross the road into Alice Holt. You are heading for the Forest Centre, but the path initially takes you in the opposite direction. Shortly though you meet the main track and make a sharp turn to the right.*

*Follow this main track, still signposted Shipwrights' Way and eventually you will reach the Forest Centre, passing first the Education Centre, then the inner car park, then the café and toilets. Across the green beyond the Centre and past a pond you move round the entrance car park to where there is a fork with signposts. The left fork is signed as 'Willows Green Trail'. You take the right fork signed as 'Easy Access Trail'*

*Proceed along here to the next junction, but just before you reach this, on the left, you notice two very different trees apparently growing from the same roots! 'SO2' is sprayed in pink on one trunk. One tree is a sweet chestnut. The other is a hornbeam:*

#### **10. Hornbeam** *Carpinus betulus*

Romans used hornbeam to make their chariots because of the strength of the wood. The timber is a pale, creamy white with a flecked grain. It is extremely hard; in fact it has the hardest wood of any tree in Europe.

Male and female catkins are found on the same tree. After pollination by wind, female catkins develop into papery, green winged fruits, known as samaras.

A hornbeam hedge will turn orange in autumn but keep its leaves all year round, providing shelter, roosting, nesting and foraging opportunities for birds and small mammals.

*At the junction turn right and shortly pass a wooden barrier. Beyond this you come to Dockenfield Street. Turn left and a short walk will bring you back to the entrance to Abbotts Wood car park.*