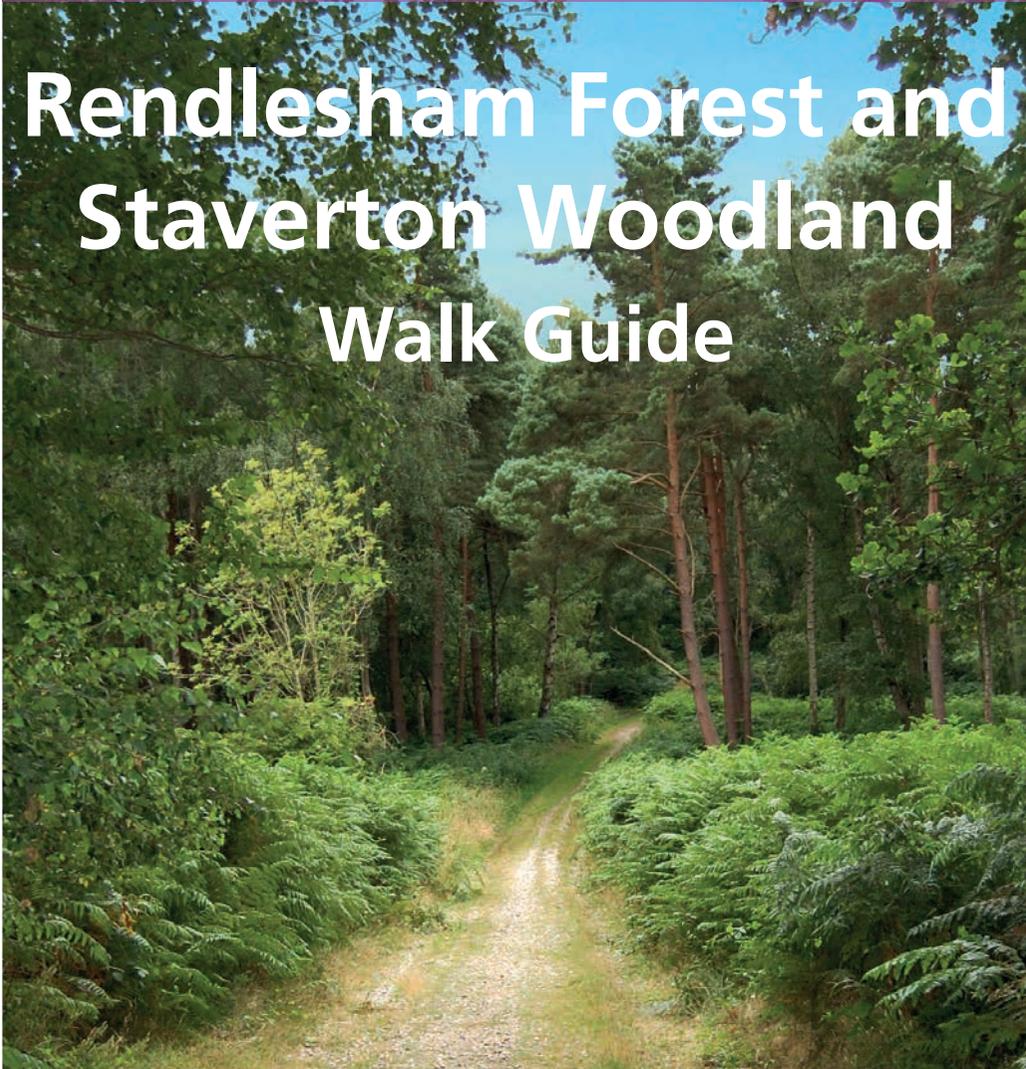


# Outstanding Landscapes

## Rendlesham Forest and Staverton Woodland Walk Guide



Explore the diversity of forest plantation and one of Suffolk's few ancient woodlands.



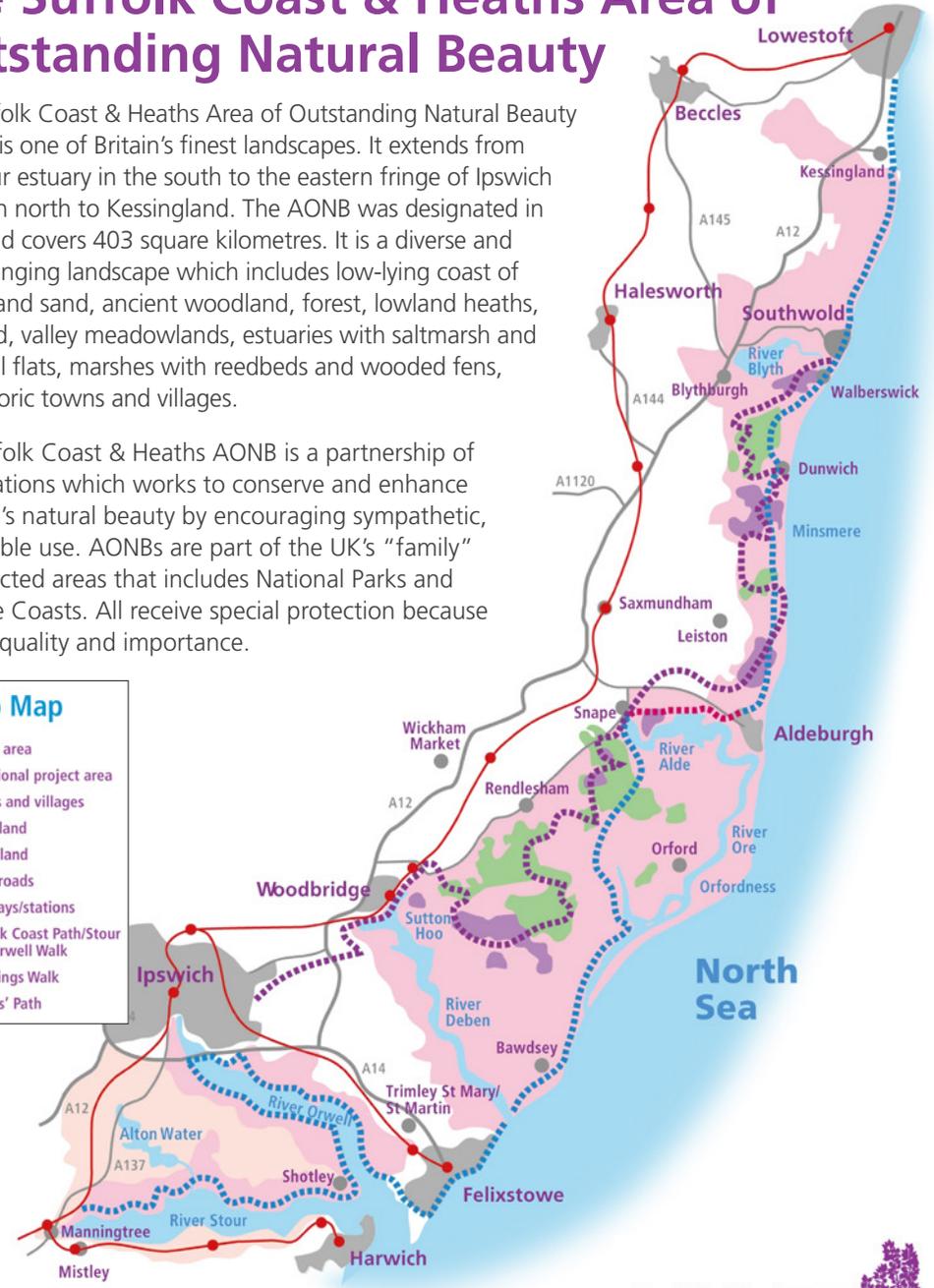
# The Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of Britain's finest landscapes. It extends from the Stour estuary in the south to the eastern fringe of Ipswich and then north to Kessingland. The AONB was designated in 1970 and covers 403 square kilometres. It is a diverse and ever changing landscape which includes low-lying coast of shingle and sand, ancient woodland, forest, lowland heaths, farmland, valley meadowlands, estuaries with saltmarsh and intertidal flats, marshes with reedbeds and wooded fens, and historic towns and villages.

The Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB is a partnership of organisations which works to conserve and enhance the area's natural beauty by encouraging sympathetic, sustainable use. AONBs are part of the UK's "family" of protected areas that includes National Parks and Heritage Coasts. All receive special protection because of their quality and importance.

**Key to Map**

- AONB area
- Additional project area
- Towns and villages
- Woodland
- Heathland
- Main roads
- Railways/stations
- Suffolk Coast Path/Stour and Orwell Walk
- Sandlings Walk
- Sailors' Path



# Rendlesham Forest and Staverton Woodland Highlights

This Outstanding Landscape and its wildlife is part of a network of habitats that are considered rare and significant, and are the reason for the **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)** designation. Within the AONB are many site-specific conservation designations, helping this remain an Outstanding Landscape, for now and future generations. Rendlesham Forest and Staverton has three of these designations:

**Special Protection Area (SPA)** – strictly protected sites classified for rare and vulnerable birds.

**Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)** – represent the country's best wildlife and geological sites, supporting plants and animals that are rarely found elsewhere. All SSSIs are legally protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

**Special Area of Conservation (SAC)** – strictly protected sites designated under the European Habitats Directive, to protect listed habitats types and species.

You can help to protect these habitats and their wildlife by remaining on Public Rights of Way and clearly signed permissive paths and by not allowing you or any dogs to cause disturbance at any time of the year. Please follow the countryside code and any information signs displayed.

**1 Rendlesham Forest.** Established during the First World War when Britain had increasing demand for timber it is now managed by the Forestry Commission. The first trees were planted in 1919 and a lot of the timber was used as pit props as industry was heavily dependent on coal. Rendlesham Forest covers an area over 1400 hectares, most of which was planted on the Sandlings Heathland. It is a designated site because of the presence of the rare birds, Woodlark and Nightjar.

In 1980 the Forest was the site of a supposed UFO event. US military personnel spotted strange lights above the Forest. In a violent storm in 1987 much of the forest was devastated and large areas were cleared and replanted. Timber is still harvested from the Forest but it is managed as a special place for nature and recreation. Much of the replanting is with mixed conifers and broadleaved trees which increases visual and ecological diversity.

**2 Butley Priory.** An Augustinian Priory founded in 1171, it covered an area of twenty acres enclosed by a stone wall. All that remains is a beautifully restored 14th century gatehouse and an arch which once led out of the south transept of the church. In 1538, Butley Priory, with all its lands and properties, was surrendered to Henry VIII but even before this it was a regular hunting ground for the nobility and became a royal hunting lodge before being granted in 1540 to Thomas, Duke of Norfolk.



**3 The Butley Clumps.** While walking along the wide grass verge, look out for stands of trees on either side of the road. This arrangement of 5 trees is known as quincunx. The Marquis of Donegal was in residence at the former gatehouse to Butley Priory and in 1790, to enhance the approach to it, he had planted groups of four Beeches

at the corners of a square, with a Pine in the centre. After the 1987 storm some of the damaged trees were replaced.

**4 Staverton Thicks.** This is one of the three wooded areas that forms what remains of the medieval Staverton Park. This was once an area of 150ha, mostly occupied by woodland and some heathland and used for grazing livestock, mostly sheep. These woodlands are designated sites due to their uniqueness and the rarity of the trees, lichens and birds found here.



# Rendlesham Forest and Staverton Woodland walk



Some of the Oak trees are well over 400 years old. The majority of them are old pollards from the 18th century, trees that have had their upper branches pruned to encourage new growth. The cut timber was used for wattle sticks in house building and also firewood. The Thicks is densely populated with Holly trees, some are said to be the tallest in Britain and are over 150 years old. Some of these have seeded and grown in the hollow trunks of the now declining Oaks. Large specimens of Birch can be seen as well as younger Rowan trees.

**5 Staverton Park and the lakes.** The majestic ancient pollard Oaks of the Park, which has no public access, can be viewed from the footpath. This area has recently been fenced and is grazed by cattle as well as deer. The lakes on your left are part of the farm irrigation system and provide a valuable habitat to many plants, insects, birds and mammals. They are a great place to see dragonflies in the summer. There is a small area of wet woodland on the right.

**6 Woodbridge Airfield.** In 1943 during World War II the base was constructed for emergency landings of damaged aircraft. Over one million trees needed to be felled and cleared away before construction could begin. Visibility of the runway needed to be improved and this was achieved by the installation of a 'Fog Investigation and Dispersal Operation' (FIDO). This comprised of petrol filled pipelines along the runway. The petrol was ejected through small holes then ignited by burners along its length. The heat burned the fog away from the runway. During the Cold War the base was used by United States Air Force for fighter bombers. The base is now called Rock Barracks and is home to 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment and is used as a training base for the Army Air Corps regiments based at Wattisham Airfield.

**Front Cover)** Path through Rendlesham Forest;  
**A)** Walking along a ride in Rendlesham;  
**B)** Sunlight through the trees in Staverton Thicks;  
**C)** Beech trees form part of the Clumps at Butley;  
**D)** Ponds at Staverton.

**Start:** Rendlesham Forest main pay and display car park. Off the B1084 Woodbridge/Orford Road. TM354484 Postcode: IP12 3NF

**Walking distances and times:** 7.7miles/12.5km. Allow 3hrs to enjoy this walk.

**Terrain:** Mostly flat. Route follows Public Rights of Way footpaths and also permissive paths. Includes a 0.5 mile (800m) stretch along a busy road with no verge and approx. 1.5miles (2.4km) along a Quiet Lane and a road with wide grass verge.

**Caution:** Routes can be muddy in places. Please adhere to any Forestry Commission notices about felling operations and follow diversions.

**Starting from the main car park.** From the information point in the main car park turn left along the car park entrance track. On reaching the main Forest entrance road cross over and continue straight ahead towards the Forest camp site. When the road bears right to the camp site, carry straight on join the Sandlings Walk (SW). **This is a long distance path from Ipswich to Southwold which celebrates what remains of the once extensive Sandlings Heath. Much is now fragmented and lost to plantation, housing and intensive farming, but landowners and conservationists are working hard to restore and**

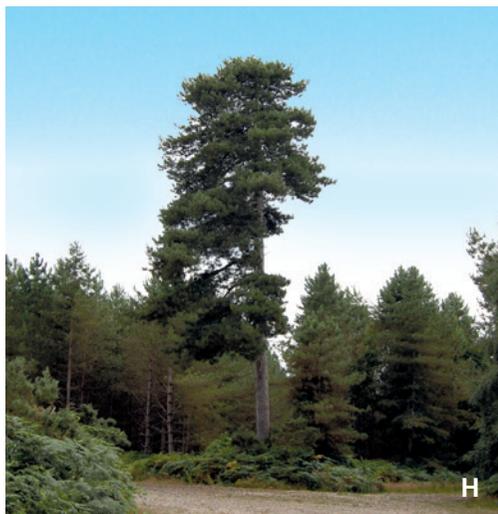


maintain what remains of this rare and special habitat. The SW route is marked by silver plaques with the logo of a Nightjar which is a rare ground nesting heathland bird that hunts for moths and insects at dusk and dawn and the male makes a very distinct churring noise.

At a crossroads of paths continue straight ahead leaving the SW which goes to the left. Remain on this Bridleway until you reach a metalled road where you turn left.

On your right across the fields you will see Oak Wood and in the distance Water Wood. These private woodlands host many bluebells and wild daffodils in the spring. Buzzards are often seen soaring over the trees. Between the woods, buildings of Abbey Farm can be seen where Butley Priory once stood.

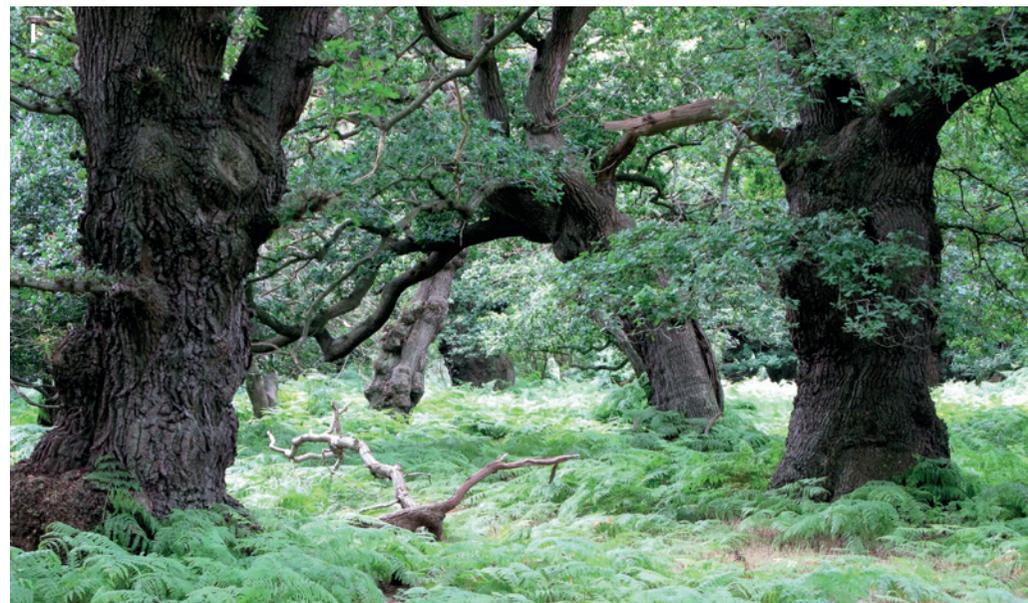
At the end of the lane turn left at the T-junction towards Melton. You can walk on the wide grass verge. At the next T-junction turn right onto the busy Woodbridge Road towards Orford. After passing a small



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cottage set back in the trees on your left enter the woodland, known as The Thicks, at the Footpath sign. Cross over the track that leads to the cottage and continue through the woodland remaining on the defined path.

On leaving the woodland follow the footpath, which heads north, and joins a sandy farm track to continue past Staverton Park on your left. After approx. 600m you



will pass a track on your left which leads to the **Shepherds Cottage, an 18th century thatched building hidden in the trees.** The lakes then become visible on your left.

As the farm track bears right turn left onto a bridleway to re-join the SW. (You remain on the SW until you reach the main entrance road into Rendlesham Forest in approx. 3 miles/4.8km). **On your right you will pass the fence line of former Royal Air Force (RAF) Bentwaters. Used by the RAF during the Second World War and by the United States Air Force (USAF) during the Cold War, from 1951 to 1993. Bentwaters Park is now a commercial enterprise park and offers unique locations for film and television.**

Continue straight along the gravel access track and bridleway which borders the northern boundary of Rendlesham Forest. Take a track on the left which is signed for the SW and head south into the Forest. The path descends through open woodland and wet areas and crosses a small stream.

Cross the busy Woodbridge Road and continue south. At a T-junction of tracks turn left, at the next T-junction turn left and then bear right. The grass track joins a wide gravel track which leads to the main Rendlesham Forest entrance road, on reaching the road leave the SW and turn right to walk past the end of Woodbridge Airfield and Folly House. Just past the free car park area turn right onto a concrete forest ride. **The term "ride" means a track wide enough to allow a gap in the tree canopy through which sunlight can reach the ground, its original use is based around deer hunting in forests.** Take the first ride on your left and continue straight ahead until you reach a T-junction. Turn left and head back towards the main forest car park and toilets.



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E) Pine trees grown for timber; F) Sandlings Walk logo; G) Dead wood a great habitat for insects and fungi; H) Tall Pine trees in Rendlesham Forest; I) Pollard Oaks.

# Visiting Rendlesham



## Ordnance Survey

Explorer Map No. 212 (Woodbridge and Saxmundham)



**Rendlesham Forest** is off the B1084 Woodbridge/Orford Road. Approximately 6 miles (9.6 km) from Woodbridge.



**Sat Nav:** Rendlesham Forest, Tangham.  
Postcode: IP12 3NF.



## Public transport information:

[www.suffolkonboard.com](http://www.suffolkonboard.com) or call **0345 606 6171**.  
Local bus from Woodbridge to Butley which is then 0.5 mile (800m) to Staverton Thicks.



**Connecting communities:** This is a local book in advance travel service which links to public transport **01728 635938**.



**Nearest train station** Woodbridge.



[www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk) Tel: **08457 484950**

## Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB

T: **01394 445225**

E: [schaonb@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:schaonb@suffolk.gov.uk)

W: [www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org](http://www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org)

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Disclaimer: Whilst the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of maps and information within this publication, they are provided as guidance only and we cannot accept any liability for their interpretation and use.

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All photos by Lynda and Robin Gilbert

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