

Outlaws and Oaks



Distance	8 miles (13 km)
Duration	4.5 hours
Stiles	0
Route summary	Longer walk on woodland tracks. No hills or stiles to climb but some paths may be muddy at times.
Start point	Sherwood Forest Art and Craft Centre, which is next to the Visitors Centre and is also well signed with brown signs.
Public Transport	Bus services run direct to Sherwood Forest Country Park from Nottingham, Mansfield and Worksop. For details call Traveline on 0871 200 22 33 or visit www.traveline.org.uk .
Parking	Parking is available at the Sherwood Forest Art and Craft Centre. Parking charges may apply at peak times.
Dogs	Please keep dogs under close control at all times.

Directions

This longer walk takes you deep into the heart of Sherwood Forest, with its ancient oaks and birch woodland. Legend tells us that Sherwood once gave sanctuary to outlaws; today though, it is a haven not for bandits but for birds, bats and beetles. Escape for a while into its magic.

1. From the car park at the Art and Craft Centre take the centre path leading straight ahead towards the Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre, until you reach a junction of paths. Take the signed bridleway to the left, ignoring the signed path to the Visitors Centre, and go through the gate. Follow this bridleway to pass through a gate, across a track, and through a second gate. Crossing two more tracks, continue ahead to meet a metal gate by the Dukeries Training Ground. Pass through the gate and continue ahead. Follow the fenced bridleway ahead for 1km before reaching a metal gate.

We always imagine ancient Sherwood to be a dense tract of virgin forest. However, by the Middle Ages it comprised not just oak and birch woodland, but open areas of sandy heath, 'wood pasture' and settlements. The term 'forest' was a legal one denoting an area where the king's Forest Laws held sway.

2. Turn left here along a wide track and follow it for approx. 1km
(Optional shorter route – at the next junction of tracks turn left – following NCN route 6 and follow this for 2km until reaching Centre Tree. Continue for a further 0.5km before turning left onto the bridleway at point 5).

Follow this across a junction of tracks and into woodland (signed to Warsop.)

At the time of William the Conqueror, Sherwood Forest covered a third of Nottinghamshire. As a royal hunting preserve, its heaths and thickets provided an ideal venue for the aristocratic sports of hunting and falconry. Tradition states that Robin Hood poached the king's deer in the royal hunting forest and that travellers through the forest provided rich pickings for the outlaw and his gang. After the fall of Charles I, royal power declined and huge swathes of the former forest passed into the hands of private

landowners. By Queen Victoria's reign much of north Nottinghamshire was owned by aristocratic landlords; their estates known collectively as the Dukeries.

3. Turn left at the next junction of tracks onto the signed public footpath. Follow this woodland path for 1km and at the next major junction turn right following the waymarked footpath and follow this for a further 1km. At the next junction of tracks continue straight ahead, ignoring the wide track as it sweeps to the right.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this unique area is its natural history. Pollen records show that there has been an unbroken cover of woodland here since the end of the last ice age, 10,000 years ago. Today the area is recognised as a 'Site of Special Scientific Interest' by Natural England. Many of the ancient oaks are now in a state of slow decay, and yet it is this very decay which supports a rich ecosystem. 1500 species of beetle can be found here as well as 200 types of spider. You may also be lucky enough to see Redstarts, Nightjars and Long Eared Owls.

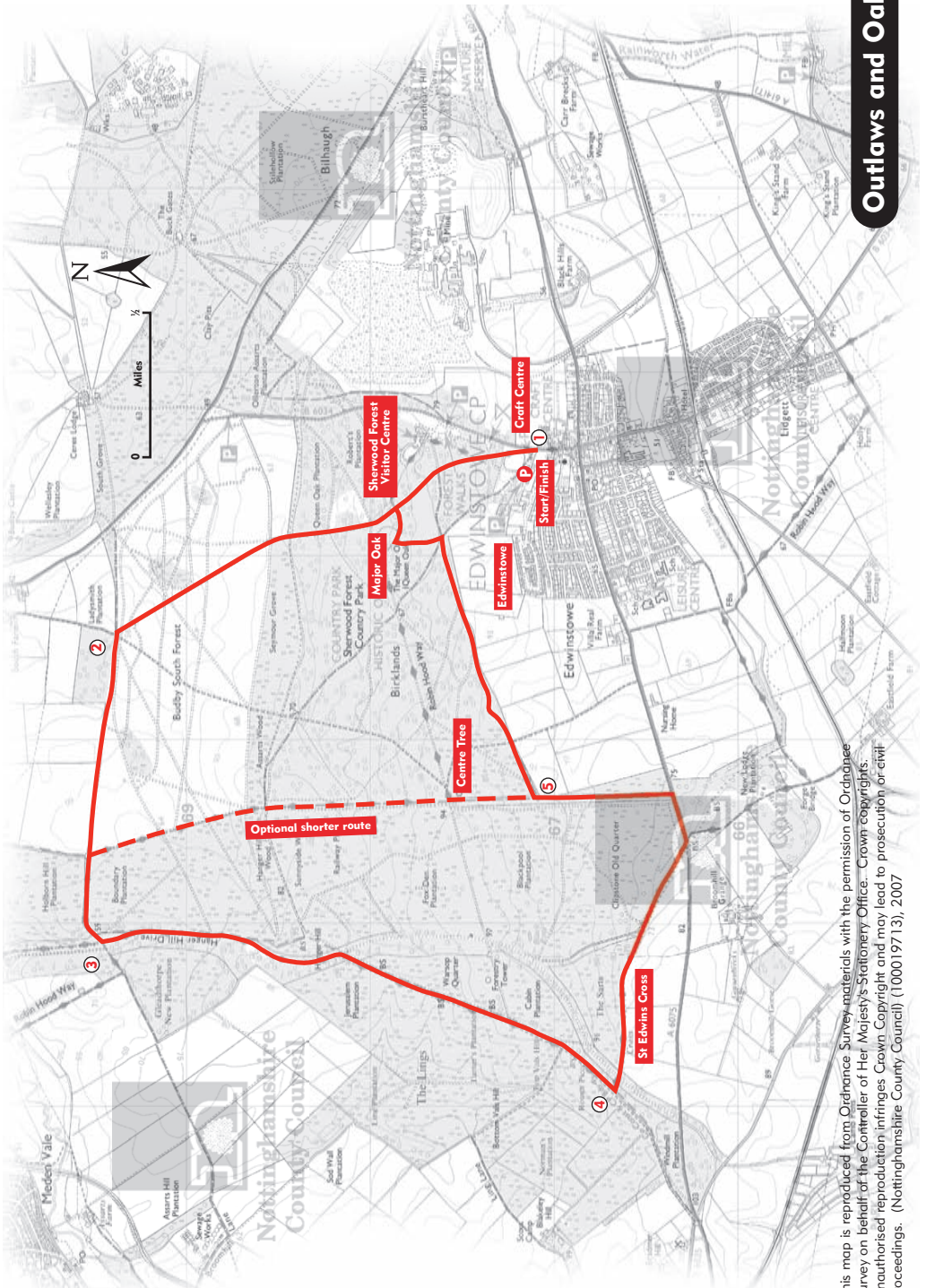
4. After ½ km turn left, signed for the Robin Hood Way, to cross a wide track and follow a path with fields to your right. At a junction of tracks follow the path to your right, again following the route of the Robin Hood Way. Follow this path around to the left as it meets the road and then follow the bridleway as it bears left away from the road. Note this is also the National Cycle Network Route 6.

Not long after you turn onto the Robin Hood Way you will see St. Edwin's Cross. This marks the origins of Edwinstowe in the 7th century. St Edwin was king of Northumbria, stretching from the River Trent to Edinburgh. He converted to Christianity and when he was killed in battle, his men gave him a secret Christian burial in this forest clearing and a chapel was built on the spot. He was canonised and the name Edwinstowe means 'Edwin's Burial Place'. During the reign of King John a hermit was paid to live here and pray but the chapel was banned under Henry VIII. The iron cross and tablet were erected by the Duke of Portland to mark the spot where it stood.

5. Walk along this wide tree lined avenue for approximately ¾km before turning right onto the signed bridleway. There is also a handy bench just here! Follow this bridleway for 1½km with fields to your right, until reaching a junction of signs within the Country Park. Turn left and follow the signs to reach the Major Oak; and from here follow the signs back to the Visitor Centre. When you are ready to leave, head towards the car park and follow the signed path back to the Art and Craft Centre.

Experts estimate that the Major Oak is 800 years old, but dating is difficult as there is a question as to whether it is a single tree or in fact three or four fused together. Whatever its age though, the statistics are staggering; its girth is 10 metres and the spread of branches is 28 metres. The Major Oak is not the only ancient tree in the forest; over 900 trees in the park are over 600 years old. There is an information office at the Visitors Centre where you can learn much more about this ancient forest; as well as a Robin Hood exhibition and video introduction to Sherwood. It is well worth spending some time here before returning to the start point.

This walk is taken from 'Exploring Sherwood Forest 2' a compilation of 5 walks exploring the Sherwood Forest area, priced £2.50. For ordering details please see the back page of this leaflet.



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