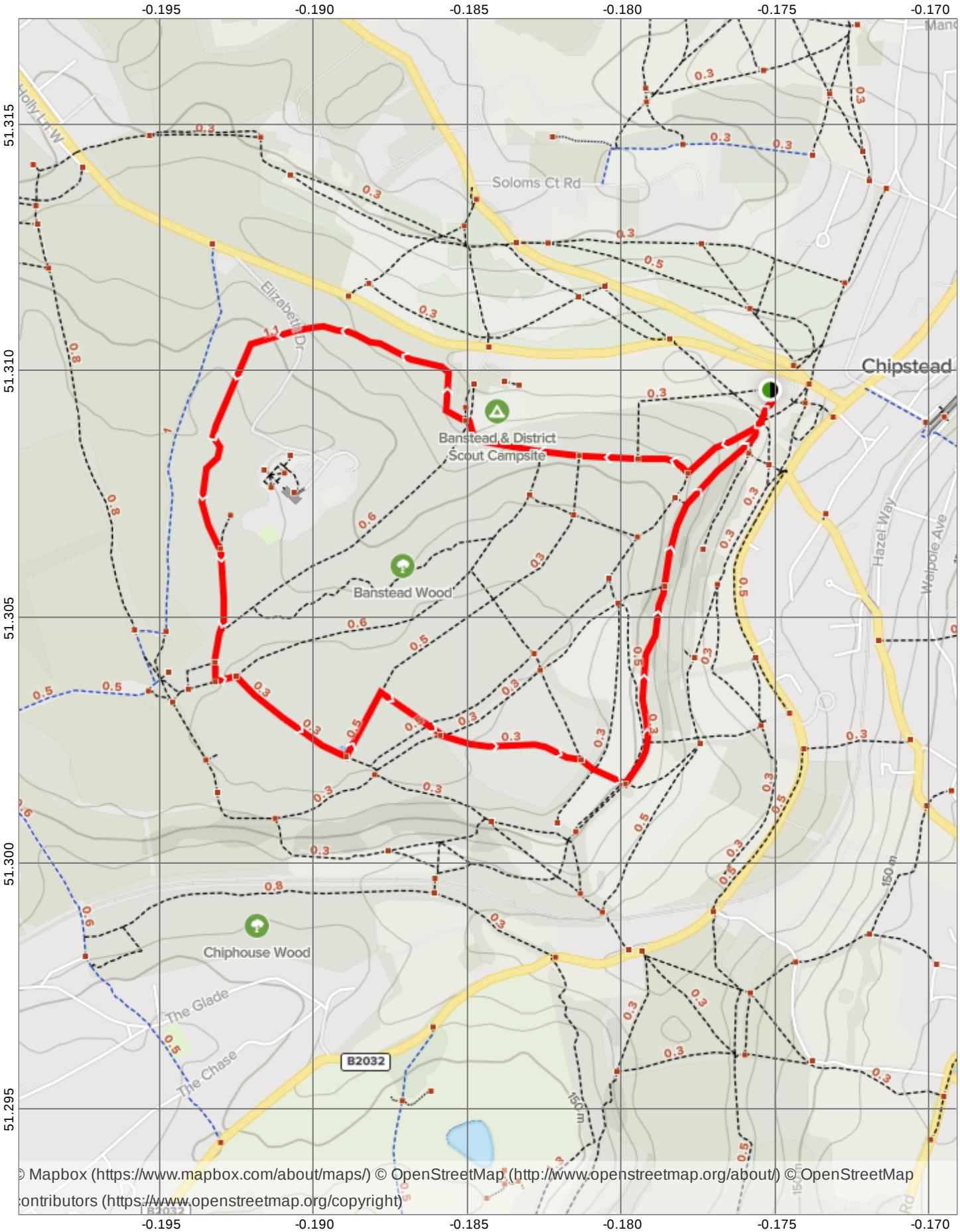
AllTrails

Banstead Woods & Chipstead Bottom



0.1°W

2/28/21

200 0 200 400 M 600

0.1 0 0.1 0.2 0.3 MI 0.4

Scale 1:11288 Datum WGS84

205 m

99 m

0 km 1.0 km 2.0 km 3.0 km 4

surreywalks

Banstead Woods & Chipstead Bottom - 4.4km

Source: All Trails

Start to First Post

From the car park, take the path which heads directly away from the road, going through a kissing gate and passing a large information board on the right. Banstead Woods is 250 acres of ancient woodland and an amazing resource for wildlife and people. It is owned by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and is managed in partnership with the Downlands Countryside Management Project. The site, previously known as Banstead Park Estate, was a deer park in the medieval period used to shelter the royal deer. Both King Edward I and II gave the park to their wives and hunted in the woods for deer. Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife, was the last queen to have the woods as a gift. She owned the woods until her death in 1536. In 1934 the woods were bought by Surrey County Council, but ownership later passed to Reigate and Banstead Borough Council. Follow the path up the shallow woodland steps with the interpretation area on the left. You will pass a finger post on the left, with kissing gates each side. Keep straight ahead passing under the arch of a large yew tree. Immediately after this you will come to a choice of three paths ahead. If you look to the right you will see a waymarker post with yellow bands, a number one and a green-white-brown tree trunk waymark symbol with the words Banstead Woods Nature Trail. This is the first of the series of posts that this nature trail follows. The numbered posts (like this one) denote particular points of interest, whilst posts with just the symbol and yellow bands mark the route directions.

First Post to Orchard

Take the middle of three paths ahead, which passes immediately to the left of a strange looking old oak tree. This is a pedunculate oak (or English oak) and its odd appearance (with a bulging trunk) may be because it was damaged when it was young. Follow the path steadily uphill. Towards the top of the slope you will see a path to the right, between a bench and Post 2. Turn right here. This is a good stretch to appreciate the methods of ancient woodland management, particularly coppiced hazel. Coppicing is an ancient, sustainable method of producing small diameter timber and is also beneficial to wildlife as it allows more light to reach the woodland floor promoting the growth of flowers and plants. Coppiced trees are distinctive in having an array of trunks coming from the ground, rather than one single trunk as seen in a standard tree. Keep ahead and further along you will come to Post 3. The multi-stemmed trees seen here are old hornbeam coppice stools. Hornbeam is the hardest British timber, which was used for early machinery parts such as mill cogs and was also widely cut for firewood. Keep directly ahead on the path which now leads you steadily downhill and swings right to reach a crossroads at Post 4. The magnificent standard tree here is also a hornbeam, around 300 years old. Other tree species visible at this junction include a large sessile oak (a close relative of the English oak), a Corsican pine and, to your right, an avenue of old pollarded lime trees. Keep ahead, passing between the two yellow posts then ignore the access track immediately on the right. Keep ahead, uphill, for just 40m to reach the next crossroads with a yellow post. Turn right here and the path leads you downhill to reach Post 5.

Orchard to Elizabeth Drive

Directly ahead is the fenced old orchard that has now been restored by protecting the old trees and planting additional young apple and pear trees. The fruit trees are all traditional varieties that are an important part of our heritage. The old trees themselves provide lots of texture for insects, including ladybirds that spend the winter under the loose bark. Follow the path as it swings left passing the orchard on the right. A little further along you will pass Post 6. Look to the left here and you will see a line of trees running perpendicular to the path. This is a planted line of horse chestnut trees that are around 100 years old. To the right is a native cherry tree, noticeable in spring with its magnificent display of flowers. Further along you will pass Post 7. The few beech trees left here are all that remain after many were destroyed in the Great Storm in 1987. All the young birch and ash trees in the area have grown up since then. Continue up the hill. NOTE: You are now coming up to the access road within the woodland so take particular care with children and dogs. Go through the staggered barrier and you will reach a zebra crossing over the access drive, Elizabeth Drive. The private drive provides access to the large house that was built in the centre of the woodland in 1880s. This became the Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Sick Children and is now private apartments.

Elizabeth Drive to Owl Nest Box

Cross the drive with care and go through the staggered barrier ahead to continue on the woodland path, winding steadily uphill.

The bare ground beneath the large beech trees is caused because the beech canopy casts dense shade. Much of the thickly grown evergreen scrub in this area is holly, which is shade tolerant. It is of great value to birds and invertebrates that feed on the fruit and disperse the seed. Continue on this path which leads you past Post 8 and on to Post 9. Invasive rhododendron was cleared from this area. The land is now starting to recover and native plants and trees are starting to grow again, including carpets of bluebells in the spring. Continue winding along the path to reach Post 10. To the right of this you will see a large scots pine, one of only three native conifer species found in Britain. There is an owl nest box on the south side of the tree.

Owl Nest Box to Pond

Keep ahead on the winding woodland path and you will come to a T-junction at Post 11. Bear right here. There is an ash tree to the left of the path. Ash is commonly found on chalk soils, so this tree indicates that there is an outcrop of chalk here. You will come to another staggered T-junction. Bear right and then follow the path as it swings left to reach a major crossroads with a bench. Keep straight ahead, passing Post 12 on the left. This marks a rowan tree. Rowan, a small native tree with attractive red berries, is an important winter food for birds. This is a good spot to look out for flocks of finches in the winter, particularly redpoll. Keep ahead and, after just a few metres, the path leads you past Post 13 (also on the left). The massive sweet chestnut coppice stool here is probably around 300 years old; although its large size is due to fast growth rather than old age.

Sweet chestnut is not a native species; it was introduced by the Romans more than 2,000 years ago. The tree had two main uses, firstly as a food source and secondly for timber. It is thought the tree was brought here as the nuts were a good source of energy and could be ground into flour. Continue on to reach Post 14 where you will find a fenced pond on the left, with some strategically placed benches, ideal for bird watching or your picnic. It is thought that this pond was created in medieval times for the benefit of animals that were hunted in the woodland. The pond is the last of seven ponds that were historically found in the area. Ponds like this are important for frogs, toads, newts, and dragonflies and are a vital source of water for badgers and deer. The pond was restored in 2011.

Pond to Viewpoint

Turn left, passing the pond on the left. The path winds ahead to reach a junction with a waymarker post. Turn sharp right here onto the smaller path, heading south once again. At the crossroads with a track, keep straight ahead on the narrow path. After just a few paces you will emerge to a T-junction with another track. Turn left along this for just a few metres and you will come to a fork at the edge of a more open grass section. Take the right-hand branch and follow the obvious grass track between sections of young trees and scrub. These fields were once part of the woodland but were cleared to grow food during World War I. They were still used to grow corn up until the 1980s. Now the area has been replanted with trees so that it can return to woodland. This is one of the best places to see summer migrant birds including willow warbler, linnet, garden warbler, blackcap and whitethroat. The path will lead you to Post 15.

After just a few paces to the right, you'll reach a bench and viewpoint across the valley (another great place to pause and enjoy the views or your picnic).

Viewpoint to Finish

After you've taken in the stunning views, continue in a straight line, heading downhill through the field to reach a wooden gate. Immediately before the gate, turn left, joining a path with Banstead Woods or your left and stunning views over Chipstead on your right. This stretch of path is known as Yew Walk, as you will pass under many Yew trees as you finish the route. Once on this path, stay on it as it starts to slowly head downhill, and you'll soon emerge near the information board where this walk began. Head down the steps and you'll be back at the car park.

Enjoyed this walk? Check out more like it at SurreyWalks.co.uk