

Out and about in Leigh Woods



This month we discover the leafy joys of Leigh Woods on the North Somerset and Bristol border.

Why go there?

Just on the outskirts of North Somerset, Leigh Woods offers wonderful views of the Avon Gorge, woodland sculptures and rare trees. The rare wild service tree can be found here as well as the Bristol whitebeam, found only in the Avon Gorge. Leigh Woods is largely a broad-leaved ancient woodland with some areas of conifers. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Site of Nature Conservation Interest and a National Nature Reserve.

There is a timber framed barn, recently constructed from local wood, not far from the Forestry Commission car park. The barn was built five years ago by volunteers using techniques unchanged since medieval times.

Leigh Woods, one of many woodlands in the Forest Of Avon, is not only a great place to explore, it's also very easy to get to.

Leigh Woods offers a wide choice of walks suitable for all ages and abilities.

Alternatively, why not try cycling along one of the popular, traffic free, waymarked paths.

Whether you want to walk, cycle or just relax and admire the landscape, many of the stone paths through the wood provide easy access for all, even with a pushchair or wheelchair.

One of the walks, called the Purple Trail, is an all-ability path with marker posts numbered one to 21 so you can easily find your way around. There is a choice of surfaced routes on the Purple Trail. The outer circuit is 1.5 miles long but, if you prefer, there is a shorter route of about one mile.

Wooden benches provide resting points at various locations along the trail and additional disabled facilities are also available.

A brief history

Leigh Woods was once part of the two great estates of Ashton Court and Leigh Court and the Parish Wall marks the old estate boundary.



Ashton Court

Over its long history different styles of management in Leigh Woods have produced diverse woodland which is now a valuable wildlife habitat.



The wood to the north is ancient woodland, indicated by rare species such as wild-service tree, and was traditionally managed as coppice. Species like hazel and lime were cut just above the ground and new shoots allowed to grow again. The wood south of the parish wall was originally pasture grazed by cattle and sheep until about 1840.

● The walk

Network of hard surfaced paths which are suitable for wheelchairs and prams. Some slopes and muddy patches in wet weather. Picnic area with benches.

● Distance

Wide choice of various length walks available.

● Parking

Ample parking close to woods.

The 440-acre wood is owned and managed by the Forestry Commission and The National Trust



long before this time (some of the arrow heads are displayed at the Ashton Court Visitor Centre).

How to find Leigh Woods

From junction 19 of the M5 Take the A369 Portishead to Bristol Road. Just after you've

Pollarded trees which were cut three to four metres above the ground level can still be found to this day.

Stokeleigh Iron Age Fort, which can be seen from the all-ability trail, was built in about 300BC and Neolithic arrow heads found there tell archaeologists that people were hunting in this area

passed through Abbots Leigh you'll see a signpost for Leigh Woods on your left hand side.

If you are cycling, remember some of the paths through Leigh Woods link with the River Avon Trail and Sustrans Route 41, but the path down to the river is steep.

Safety tips

- Check the weather conditions before you leave
- Let someone know where you're going and when you're expected back
- Wear sensible shoes – walking boots, trainers etc
- Take any litter home with you
- Keep dogs under close control
- Always consider other people



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KEY:

- Purple Trail
- All-ability path (surfaced)
- Other surfaced paths
- Red Trail (unsurfaced)
- Minor unsurfaced paths
- Waymarker posts
- Picnic tables
- Bench seating areas
- Steep slope 1/12 or greater
- Slope less than 1/12
- Avon Gorge viewpoint
- Sculptures