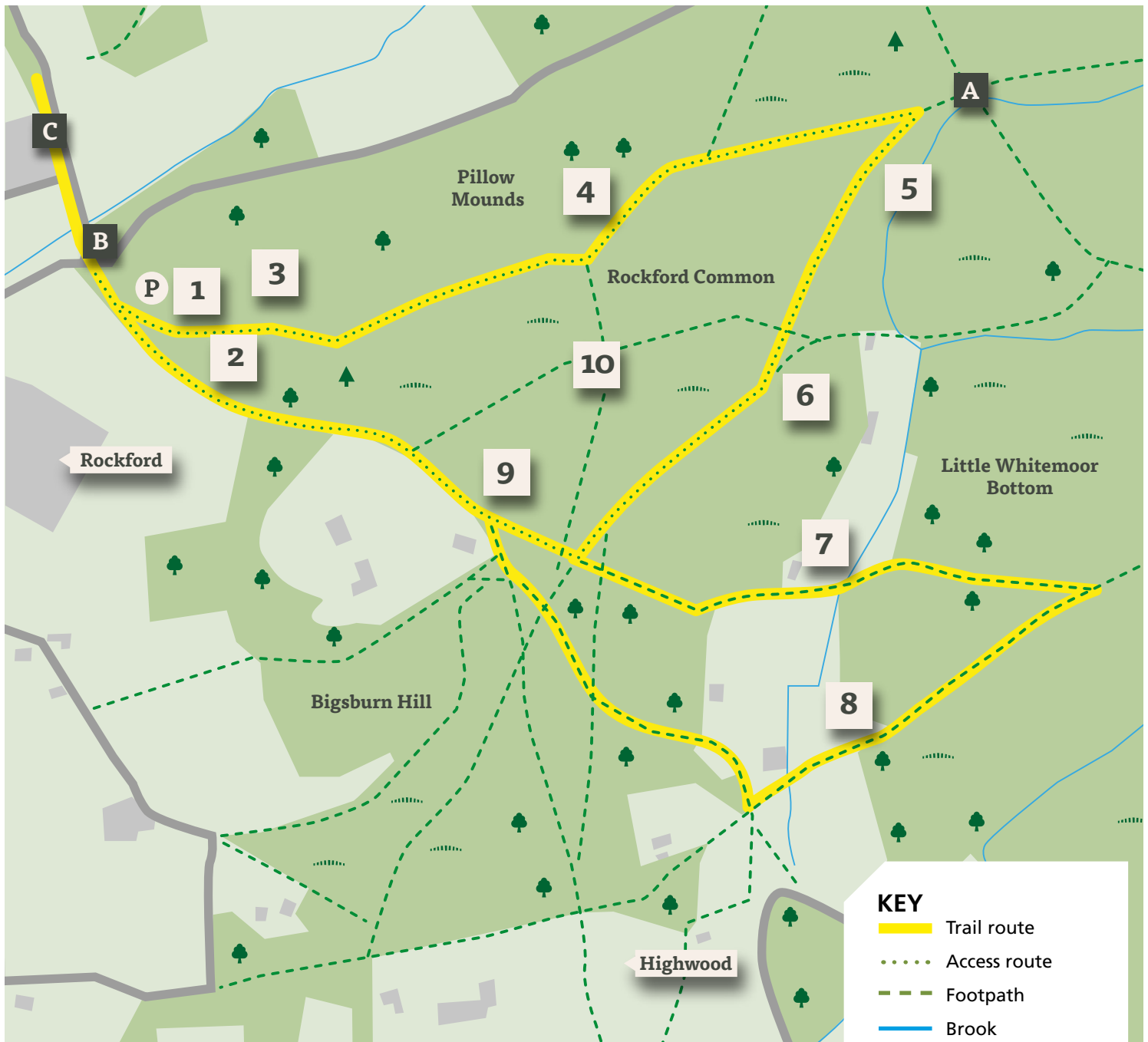




Rockford Common Trail

The Rockford Miles













1.7 – 2.5 miles / 45 minutes – 1.5 hours

Trail route summary

This trail has two routes, the main routes takes in a southern section (on unsurfaced rights of way with some gates and stiles), the other (shorter) route is via surfaced tracks. This route is more accessible for those with reduced mobility and/or making use of a 'Tramper' like mobility scooters.

KEY

-  Trail route
-  Access route
-  Footpath
-  Brook
-  Roads
-  Woodland
-  Buildings
-  1 Stop spots
-  A Points of interest
-  P Parking



Trail Stats:

	Access	Circular
Trail length	1.7 miles (2.7km)	2.5 miles (4km)
Time to walk trail	45 minutes	1.5 hour
Starting point of trail	National Trust Car Park, Rockford Common.	
Car parking	National Trust Car Park, Rockford Common Grid reference – SU164083.	
Terrain (hilliness)	Mostly flat with a couple of steeper sections.	Mostly flat with several steeper sections.
Surface type/s	Well-made gravel tracks	Well-made gravel tracks and more minor grass and gravel tracks.
Stiles / gates information	One barrier passable by buggies/ wheelchairs.	Some stiles, gates.
Notes	Do check yourself for ticks on your return to the car.	
Accessibility	It is possible to follow a shorter Access route on well-made gravel tracks (although some Stop Spots require a short walk of the tracks). The extended circular route continues further south on more minor grass and gravel tracks where there are some gradients and has stiles and gates.	

Trail route summary

The trail starts at the National Trust car park. Rockford Common is an area of 15 acres consisting of open heathland and woodland. It is grazed by livestock belonging to local commoners. Commoners are those people who occupy land or property in the New Forest which has attached rights; in this case the right to turn out ponies, cattle, mules and donkeys. These can often be seen grazing out on the common.

This area is rich in wildlife and has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Unlike much of the other New Forest moorland, in the past

Rockford Common belonged to estates; originally Moyles Court and then Somerley. The family of Lord Normanton of Somerley bought both estates in 1825. The National Trust bought about 1500 acres of common land at Ibsley and Rockford in 1999 and a further 32 acres in 2007.

The northern section of this trail can be journeyed as a circular route, following well-made gravel tracks with good accessibility but some steep sections. However, it is possible to extend the trail to include the southerly section which is on more minor grass or gravel tracks with some stiles/gates.

Before returning to the car park after completing the circuit, you may wish to walk down to the Moyles Court Oak (POI.b) and across the road to look at Moyles Court School (POI.c).

Over the centuries the common has been used for various purposes, as will be described at the ten Stopping Spots. Most of these have had an impact on the environment and often result in the landscape we see today.

Countryside Code:

Please keep to established paths and keep dogs under close control or on a lead if necessary, especially during ground nesting bird season March-July.

For more information: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/897289/countryside-code-leaflet.pdf

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1. Sand pit (East of car park)

This enormous sand pit used to supply sand by the cart load. Sand was being extracted from this pit in the 1950s by Bert Shutler. Richard Deacon (a local Commoner) remembers watching the Ruston Bucyrus front shovel excavator at work in his childhood.

There is a Scheduled Ancient Monument above the sand pit. Ongoing erosion of the sand is putting this monument at risk, so we ask that you don't access the sand pit as to not hasten this erosion.



Top: Disused Sand Quarry at Rockford Common.

© NFNPA

Right: Ruston Bucyrus front shovel excavator.



2. Pillow mound and bee garden



Pillow Mound, once covered in bracken.

© NFNPA

About 100 metres south of the car park is the site of a pillow mound (visible) and a bee garden. Both of these are low earthen features and can be rather tricky to spot, particularly if the vegetation has grown over them.

Pillow mounds were used for keeping rabbits during the Medieval period, the aim being to produce a manageable rabbit warren. Rabbit was a rare commodity during these times, prized for their fur and meat. These mounds were long, low, earthworks, flat-topped and built in groups. Clusters of pillow mounds

are spread over the south and west facing slopes all around the Common.

Bee gardens are areas enclosed by a low earthen bank, with entrance way and rectangular or round if looked at from above. These would have had a low fence on the back and gate to prevent livestock getting in and disturbing the straw bee skeps, an early form of beehive, looking a bit like a witch's hat but made of straw. They were located all across the Common and wider New Forest, to harvest honey from the heather.

3. Viewpoint

The trail heads northeast, following routes first shown on Isaac Taylor's map of Hampshire, dated 1759. Just north of the trail are several viewpoints located on the bank:

This is the site of a Bronze Age (2100 to 750BC) bowl barrow. The New Forest is known to have been particularly important for lowland Bronze Age occupation and a considerable amount of archaeological evidence has survived in this area because of the limited amount of agricultural activity and development.

Round barrows, in their various forms, mark the location of a burial. Their primary construction and use dates between the Neolithic period

(4000 to 2100BC) and the Bronze Age. There are different forms of barrow but bowl barrows, simply put, are earthen mounds which covered a single burial. Later in the Bronze Age and into the Iron Age (750BC to AD43) it was common

practice to place additional burials in and around these barrows. These later burials were in the form of large upturned pottery urns containing cremated remains.

View from over Sand Quarry toward Avon. © NFNPA



Looking back over the car park, there are views south west to Somerley House and across the lakes.

The construction of RAF Ibsley during WW2 had an enormous impact on this area. The airfield, which operated from 1941 to 1946, was located to the north west of the Common, where you can now see the lakes. The Common was used for military manoeuvres, with slit trenches and gun emplacements. There is oral history about going to the village school at Rockford (later taken over by the Alice Lisle pub) and the fighter planes roaring overhead at take-off and some limping home. The site of the old



airfield is now a series of gravel pits and landscaped lakes and only the control tower and a short section of runway remain. Slightly further east along the bank a second viewpoint provides views north west.

View north west with Moyles Court school nestled in the trees

© NFNPA

4. Mineral extraction (site of)

Mineral extraction has made one of the most dramatic changes to this landscape. From 1908 to 1964 there had been one small gravel pit of about three acres. The battle to prevent further extraction lasted from 1964 to 1966 but was eventually lost and up to six meters' depth of gravel was stripped from most of the western end of the

Common. Looking south east you will get an impression of the extent of the mineral

From the same point, looking in a northerly direction it is possible to see a clump of trees which are part of plantings made in the 1840s to create vistas from Somerley House.



View across an extracted landscape.

© NFNPA

5. Pillow mounds – Big Whitemore Bottom

Big Whitemore Bottom. Here are more examples of pillow mounds, used for keeping rabbits during the Medieval period.

A. Route north for the Huff Duff walk & more Pillow mounds

This first section of the trail is also part of the National Trust's "Walk to the Huff Duff" walk. This takes you up onto Ibsley Common to the site of the 'MOST SECRET' WWII Directional Finding Station, later a High Frequency Directional Finding or 'HF-DF' Station. You can follow this link for details of that walk: nationaltrust.org.uk/new-forest-northern-commons/trails/walk-to-the-huff-duff



Reconstruction of the Ibsley Huff-Duff.

© NFNPA

6. Notable heathland

Looking north west, the wildlife across the lowland heathland of Rockford is a stunning mix of flora and fauna, constantly changing through the seasons. The beautiful purple of the heather is best viewed in late August, and throughout the summer the common is home to

rare ground nesting birds, such as woodlark, nightjar, Dartford warbler and lapwing. Rare

silver studded blue butterflies can be seen flying low over the heather in

July and adders are a common sight, basking under gorse bushes in the morning sunshine.

Dartford warblers rely on the well managed gorse stands throughout the year, for breeding in the spring and shelter during the winter. Hen harriers and merlin can be seen hunting across the plateaux in winter, as well as peregrine falcons and migrant great grey shrikes.



Dartford Warbler, Nightjar Nesting, Silver studded blue butterfly.
© National Trust

7. Pigs at Cherry Oaks (southern end)

You will pass a cottage called Silver Birches Apiary. This may perhaps be a reference to the bee gardens mentioned at [SS1], apiary being noun for a collection of beehives.

Silver birch, a native tree, supports well over 300 insect species; a fact that makes these trees a favoured foraging place for woodpeckers which often make nesting holes in the trunk. Birch seeds also provide winter food for siskins, greenfinches

and redpolls. In addition, the little catkins in spring, are an early source of pollen.

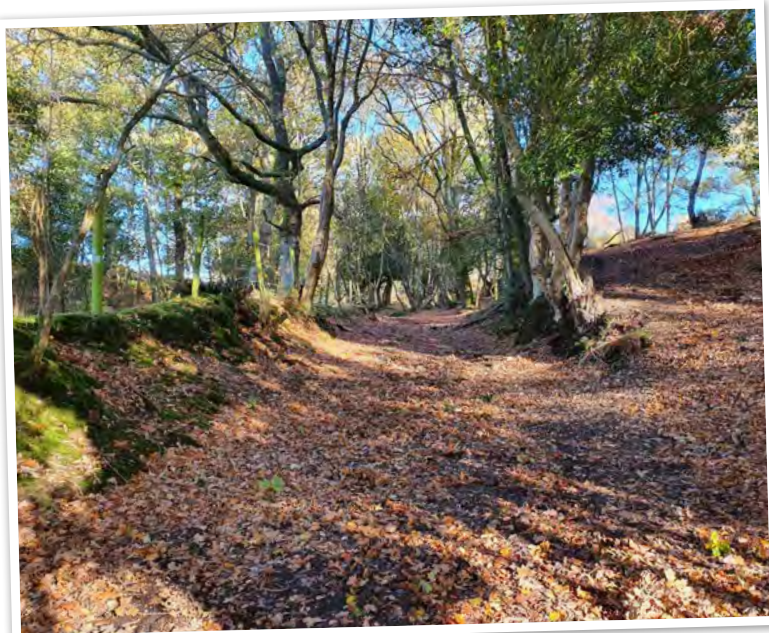
In the fields here you can often find Gloucester Old Spot pigs. The New Forest is one of the few places in the UK where pannage is still carried out. This practice, also known as 'Common of Mast', probably goes back to the time of William the Conqueror, who established the New Forest, as a Royal hunting

ground, around 1079AD. Every autumn domestic pigs are allowed out on the forest to eat acorns and other nuts. This is because in large numbers acorns are poisonous to the New Forest ponies and cattle.

Up to 600 pigs are currently released, but in the 19th century there were as many as 6,000. The pigs are usually owned by the commoners, who pay a token fee for each animal. The main breeds are Tamworth, Gloucester Old Spot, British Saddleback and Wessex Saddleback. The pigs must have rings through their noses to stop them rooting into the ground and damaging the forest. Pannage lasts for at least 60 days, from late September or whenever the acorns start to drop.



Gloucester old spot pig.
© NFNPA



View along (Footpath 704) sunken lane
© NFNPA

8. Hollow way

As you walk the most southerly section of the trail to the east of Mount Farm, the route becomes a well-worn hollow way, which may indicate that this is an ancient trackway. After centuries of use these types of old routes often became eroded or sunken in the middle, leading to sunken routes with high banks. This route is visible on Taylor's Hampshire map, dated 1759, but is likely to be much older. In 1786 a Turnpike was created from Cadnam to Ringwood and on to Longham, now the A31. Following this it is possible that this ancient route was used as a bypass to avoid the tollgate at Picket Post.

Thought impossible to see now, there is a large earthen banked enclosure here. It is probably a boundary line for a wooded area or stock enclosure but a late prehistoric date cannot be ruled out.

9. WWII Gun Site & Officers Accommodation

On the 1945 site plans for RAF Ibsley this location is marked as 'Gun Site' with Chatley Wood house and grounds as Officer Accommodation.

As part of the BBC's WW2 People's War project, Gwennie Matilda Howard gave her memories of the area. Gwennie recalls that during WWII there was a large gun near here at the top of Chatley Hill, seeing the bomber pilots who lived at the big house at Chatley Wood and that there were ack-ack guns on the Common itself and bombs were stored in the gravel pit nearby.

10. Bronze Age settlement and late Medieval encroachment

What is now a peaceful haven for nature was once a busy settlement, later illegal farmland. Prior to gravel extraction in the late 1960s remains of a Bronze Age settlement were seen during topsoil removal. Over 180 features were recorded including burials, pits, post holes, hearths and gullies. In more recent times, studies of historic aerial photography have revealed ridge and furrow cultivation and lines of pillow mounds, evidence of late and post Medieval encroachment, agricultural expansion illegally cutting into the forest boundaries.

B. Moyles Court Oak

Situated just north west of the car park and close to the water splash is a historic oak tree, the Moyles Court Oak. It is one of a number of named oaks around the New Forest, including the Knightwood Oak and the Eagle Oak. There has been much discussion about which is the oldest tree in the New Forest. The Moyles Court Oak is shown on an 1872 map as 'The King of the Forest', but the Knightwood Oak is probably favourite for the title. In 1860 the girth of the Moyles Court Oak was measured at 5.7m and by the late 1990s this had grown to 7m.



Moyles Court Oak
© NFNPA

C. Moyles Court

The site of Moyles Court has been occupied since the Middle Ages but the current red brick manor house dates from the 17th Century. From 1658 it became the manor house of the Lisle family (whose name is derived from the Isle of Wight). It is possibly most famous for events that happened in 1685 when Moyles Court was the home of Dame Alice Lisle, who by this time was over 70 years old. On 20 July two members of the rebel army fighting James II, John Hickee and Richard Nelthorpe, sought refuge here and Alice Lisle consented. They were arrested by the King's men the next day. It is quite possible that Alice Lisle thought they were just religious dissenters rather than traitors. A jury found her innocent of treason three times, but she was eventually sentenced to be burned at the stake by the notorious Judge Jeffreys (famous for the Bloody Assizes). James II eventually commuted her sentence to beheading and she was executed on 2 September in Winchester marketplace for 'Harbouring persons disaffected to the King'. Moyles Court was initially confiscated by the Crown but was

eventually restored to the Lisle family in 1688. Alice Lisle is buried in nearby Ellingham Church.

The property remained in the Lisle family until around 1820. By this time, it was dilapidated and unoccupied and it was sold to Lord Normanton of neighbouring Somerley. It continued as a country residence until it was vacated immediately before WWII.

Moyles Court was requisitioned by the RAF in 1940 and became the station headquarters of Ibsley Airfield. It was used as accommodation for officers.

The house was eventually derequisitioned in 1946 and since then Moyles Court has been an independent school.

Just to the west of Moyles Court along Highwood Lane is the Alice Lisle pub, where you can take post-trail refreshment. This building was originally Rockford village school and its current name reflects the local connection with Alice Lisle.

Moyles Court school.

© NFNPA



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