



## A Forest Heritage Walk

Distance: 4.7 miles (7.6 kilometres)

Start: Giddings Wood car park, Dorsington Road, near Long Marston

Grid reference: SP 13943 48637

<https://what3words.com/fame.ocean.crop>

This walk passes through some of the first woodlands to be created in what was to become the Heart of England Forest, as well as sites associated with the life of our founder, Felix Dennis - publisher, poet and philanthropist. He wanted to bring back our lost native woodlands, but he also wanted the public to enjoy his creations. Not a surprise, really: his name is Latin for "happy". This five-mile circuit takes him at his word, leading us along some of the unofficial permissive paths that were established around his Dorsington home. It also visits sites associated with Felix's life - in fact, you'll meet him in the woods.

This largely flat walk should be easy in fine weather, but some paths become churned up after rain: they're squelchy when wet, and lumpy when dry. There's a small amount of road walking, mostly within Dorsington village - care is needed.

### Directions:

From Giddings Wood car park, turn right on the road, then through the second gate into Eddie's Wood. Take the path going diagonally right. It curves left, then right through an area of new planting (tree dedications), right again over a bridge, immediately left and over another bridge.

Follow the path right as the woodland narrows, then cross a short bit of field to go through a wooden gate opposite (ignoring the footpath on the left); continue to the far left corner of the field (aim for a telegraph pole) and through to the road.

Turn left, and soon right through a small wooden gate (white waymarker) and along the track. 160 metres before the track, turn left onto a wide grassy path (white waymarker) that turns left and then sharp right downhill.

Pass the brick barn and continue diagonally left on a slight downhill grassy track. At fork, keep right and through gate on public footpath enclosed between. The path turns right through wooden gate, still enclosed. Through gate; ignore public footpath uphill ahead but go through gateway to left; follow left hedge round to a gap; ignore footpath sign and turn right along right-hand edge of a wide grassy area with newly planted trees. At the end of the narrow field, through a gap. Pass right of the Jocelyn's Rest sign to go diagonally across the plantation.

You'll shortly walk through a wide circle of planting: this is the letter O of the word OZ, which Felix had incorporated into the tree planting to commemorate his involvement in the 1960s

underground magazine of the same name. It became the subject of a celebrated legal case and was the start of his career in publishing.

At a T junction, ignore the narrow path left to another sign, and turn 90 degrees right uphill towards a bench. Just before gate 94 turn left on a narrow enclosed path; follow round to the right (slightly muddy) on to an enclosed path.

At the sign for Ralph's Wood (the first woodland to be planted in the Forest back in 1996), keep left (straight ahead), ignoring paths to the right. At the T junction, turn left on a wide track and immediately right on an enclosed bridleway. [If the bridleway is very muddy, take the second turning instead, signed Heart of England Way, and follow the wide grassy path, bearing right up the hill and then left at the top corner; then through a small wooden gate opposite a bench and through a gap to the Dorsington Wood sign]. The bridleway turns right then left at a hollow tree ("Beth's favourite"); at the next bench, turn right through a gap to the Dorsington Wood sign.

Turn diagonally right on the wide path (orange waymarker), curving left to reach the statue of Felix Dennis, founder of the Heart of England Forest. Continue past memorials to his friends, gradually turning left and through a gap to a fenced path (orange waymarker). Turn right, cross a footbridge. The path turns left but you are welcome to go through the gate opposite to look at Felix's arboretum - returning through the same gate and continuing on the path to the road.

At the road (care) turn right into the village, keeping right at the green. The church is listed Grade II\*; the red K6 telephone box is also a listed building, as an example of iconic British design.

Continue south (church on left). Opposite The Moat House, turn right down a tarmac drive (Heart of England Way marker in left verge) for a few yards to the entrance to Felix's "party house", with two statues over the gate posts that - let's say - celebrate his love of human nature.

Return to the road and continue south to reach Felix's home at The Old Manor, a jumble of thatched gables that was originally five cottages.

Immediately opposite, go through a kissing gate (white waymark) and follow the mown path through the fields, heading slightly right through more gates and over a footbridge. When the path forks, take the right fork, soon heading towards a gap in a stone wall by a barn. Through the gap to a small clearing by a second barn; turn right on a straight path and soon afterwards left (orange waymark) into the young woodland. At a path junction, ignore the waymarker and turn right on the bare-earth path that winds through trees, back to the car park.