



Title: Layer de la Haye

Distance: 7 miles

Time taken: 3 hours

Location: 2½ miles south west of Colchester town centre

OS Explorer Map: 184

Grid Ref.: TL 967 229

Parking: Gosbecks Archaeological Park, off the B1022, CO2 0HR

Bus: Frequent 75 bus service from Colchester town centre

Train: No train service

Refreshment: Layer de la Haye: Donkey & Buskins 01206 734 774

Colchester Shrub End: Leather Bottle, 01206 766018

PEAR Rating: 

## Walk Description

This is an wonderfully varied walk, packed with scenic and aural diversity. The flat high grasslands at the start are wide open and full of the sweet song of larks. Later, passing close to Colchester zoo, there are gently rolling fields and if the wind is in the right direction, the sound of trumpeting elephants, screeching monkeys and funky gibbons. The ruined church is quiet and still, the river gurgles and splashes along. Some areas of woodland are enriched by the sound of birdsong and squirrels rustling through the leaves; others are uncannily still with just an eerie creaking noise to fill your ears. Take care in Chest Wood, it's easy to get lost (although the photos will help guide you through) and as a result the walk has a lower Ease rating than the terrain and footing would warrant.

To make the walk a little shorter you can continue ahead at point G and re-join the route at point L, with the large barn on your right and Hill Farm house ahead. This reduces the length by about ¾ mile.

## Directions

**A.** Exit the car park (P) to the right of the information board, heading south. After 280 yards you will see a hedge on the right and a pair of trees on the left: go up a slight rise and turn right to pass behind the hedge (1).

**B.** Walk around the meadow along a track, with the hedge on your right and the lark song in your ears, for 500 yards. Although the track continues ahead, the official footpath turns right here. Follow the hedge (keeping the bushes on your right) before looping round to the left and back up to rejoin the track (2).

**C.** Once you are back on the track, turn right and walk southwards for a further 500 yards, with a wooded area ('Oliver's Thicks') on your right, to a T-junction. You will see a strange structure consisting of 4 vertical posts and a crosspiece to your left. Turn right to walk downhill along a sunken lane (3).

**D.** After a few yards the lane begins to go uphill. Near the crest of the hill there is a footpath junction: you can see the ruins of a church ahead of you, and to the left, the roofs of the animal enclosures of Colchester zoo. If the wind is in the right direction, you can hear the animals! Turn hard left, to dogleg back along a cart track across the fields towards the woods (4).

**E.** As you approach the woods, go over a footbridge then fork left along a bridleway into the trees (5). 100 yards later, bear right along the main path.

**F.** Continue for another 175 yards then follow the path around a sharp left turn then downhill. A few yards before the bottom of the hill look for an easy-to-miss exit through the hedge on your right before the next footbridge (6).

**G.** *If you wish to take the shorter route, don't turn right here, instead continue ahead crossing the footbridge and walking along the bridleway to Hill Farm. Re-join these instructions at point L with the large barn on your right and the farmhouse and boat ahead.*

**H.** Go through the hedge and continue ahead heading south west across a meadow with the woods on your left. This area gets very boggy from time to time, so don't walk too close to the bottom. But in early summer, when the buttercups are out, it's beautiful.

**I.** As you approach the trees and a small brook at the far end of the meadow, the path swings round to the right and goes into a thicket. The entrance is hard to see until you are close, but you do not need to cross the brook. (7).

**J.** Follow the path as it meanders up the slope to a wide grassy sward and after the stile turn left to walk south over the grass (8). Continue for about 320 yards, passing a cottage (Keepers Cottage) and then walking along a stony track to the roadside. Turn left along Birch Road towards a gatekeepers' cottage (9).

**K.** Walk along Birch Road past the cottage. Hidden in the trees on your right is the beautiful but derelict St Mary's Church. It is on private land, but there is a path to it from the access road to Birch Hall.

**L.** Continue along Birch Road past the reservoir, then turn left immediately along a meandering private road (10). After a third of a mile you will reach Hill Farm.

- M.** Go around a large barn on your left, then turn right. Walk along Leas Lane with the farmhouse (and boat) on your left (11).
- N.** 400 yards after the boat, you will come to a T-junction with a metal post indicating you are on a cycle route. Bear left at this junction and head northwards beside Chest Wood (12). Stay on the track (at this point, the woods are private) as it descends through the woods for just over a third of a mile.
- O.** At the bottom of the hill is Roman River. Look for the entrance into the Roman River Valley Nature Reserve on your right, and follow the (somewhat overgrown in summer) path roughly eastwards through the trees (13).
- P.** After about 170 yards cross a 2-planker, pass through a small clearing, then look out for a large footbridge on your left and a bench to the right of the path. At this point, turn right and with your back to the footbridge, walk up the hillside to the right of the bench, along a muddy track (14).
- Q.** 80 yards later bear left alongside a barbed wire fence on your right, then bear right to follow the fence line up the slope. Where the terrain flattens out, look out for a path off to the left past a distinctive twin-trunked tree, towards some pine trees (15).
- R.** Walk east south east through the pine tree avenue, for 125 yards. Where the pine trees stop and you regain broadleaf cover, there is a wide track going up to the right and down to the left. Ignore this. Instead, proceed ahead east-south-east on level ground. We took a route passing between two holly trees (16).
- S.** After 50 yards or so, you should reach a steep slope. Go down towards a path alongside a stream. Turn right along the path and a few yards later, cross the stream on a narrow footbridge and turn right (17). This takes you into Charity Woods, so called because of an ancient bequest: forty faggots of firewood were supplied from these woods annually to each of five widows in St. Mary Magdalene's almshouses in Colchester. Each faggot was worth about fourpence.
- T.** Follow the path up a slope for 150 yards, to a gate with a 'Wildside Walk' logo attached. Bear right onto an unmade road with houses and hedges on either side, and walk along the rough track for 60 yards to a Y-junction. The house at the corner on your right is called 'Woodview'. Turn left to walk along the metalled road (New Cut) (18) to meet the High Road at a T-junction.
- U.** Turn left and walk down the High Road for a quarter of a mile to the Donkey and Buskins. Continue ahead for a further 250 yards to cross the road bridge over Roman River, then look for an entrance back into the Nature Reserve, 70 yards later on the left (19).
- V.** Go into the reserve and walk ahead for about 30 yards then turn left over a boardwalk. Follow the path around to the right, with the river on your left (20). This path meanders through the woods for about a third of a mile, then through a meadow. Access is only permitted along the riverbank, not out into the field.

**W.** 300 yards after leaving the woods you will see a footbridge on your left - the same footbridge as in point P above. Do not cross it, instead bear right to walk north west along a grassy track beside the trees (21).

**X.** 100 yards later pass through a wooden gate into an avenue heading north (22), then through another wooden gate 200 yards later. Continue ahead, passing a hexagonal black barn on your left.

**Y.** When you reach a stile with a surfeit of waymarkers attached (23), climb over and turn right along the gravel track (Oliver's Lane). Go past a black weather-boarded house, and keep going until you pass a wide field entrance on the left. 100 yards later turn left along a bridleway, with a hedge on your right (24).

**Z.** Follow the bridleway round to the right and then walk northwards for about half a mile (25) back towards Gosbecks Park from where you can choose any route you wish back to the parking. You will pass the site of a Roman theatre on your right, and may cross the site of the temple on the way to the car park (26).

### [ROUTE DIRECTIONS at www.essexwalks.com](http://www.essexwalks.com)

The ROUTE MAP and ROUTE PHOTOS **also** need to be downloaded and saved on your computer for printing.



The Route Map PDF can be downloaded from this page: [Description & Map](#)



The Route Photos PDF can be downloaded from this page: [Photos](#)

This route description is not meant to be used in isolation, it is one piece of a three part guide to the walk. The other two pieces are the route map, and the numbered photographs. The walks work best when the description, map and the photos PDF are printed off and used in conjunction with each other.

The numbers in brackets in the description refer to specific points along the route, marked with numbered symbols and these in turn are matched to illustrative photographs which show you the lie of the land.



These symbols are shown at strategic points along the route, overlaid on a 1:50K Ordnance Survey map: [Online OS Map at www.essexwalks.com](#).