



11 Mereworth

Autumn



The Palladian-style St Lawrence's Church at Mereworth.

Starting in the village of Mereworth, near the classic Palladian-style church with its eye-catching steeple and remarkable neo-classical interior, this route takes you past a cobnut plantation and fields where strawberries and other soft fruit are grown. You pass a large pond with ducks then a section through woodland that displays a lovely palette of leaf colours in the autumn sunshine. The woods are filled with birds, the large nests of wood ants and many toadstools. There are also fine views on the walk and you pass an attractive 17th century mansion.

Distance 4 miles.



Terrain A walk with some gradual slopes. Some paths can be muddy.



Map OS Explorer 148 Maidstone & the Medway Towns.



Starting point The lay-by near the church in Mereworth (GR 660537, ME18 5LY).



How to get there Mereworth is 6 miles west of Maidstone, at the junction of the A26 with the A228. Buses (Arriva) from Maidstone, Tonbridge and Kings Hill run through the village.



Refreshments The Moody Mare gastropub is on the B2016 about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile north-west of Mereworth ☎ 01622 813038, and the Swan is in West Peckham, 1 mile west ☎ 01622 812271. There is also a good selection of pubs and cafés in West Malling, 2 miles north.

The Walk

1 At the end of the lay-by nearest the church look for a footpath sign on the verge and cross the road to go on a tarmac track alongside **Torrington House**, walking between houses then ahead on a path to the left of a cottage. Behind the hedge on the right of the path is a plantation of cobnuts. After 200 yards, where the path divides, keep right on a path between a hedge on the left and fence on the right, to reach a stile and go ahead on a drive until you reach a lane. Keep straight on along the lane, which soon bends left, and keep left where it forks, passing a large house and with good views to the left later. Continue straight on where **New Pound Lane** goes off to the right and past a thatched barn to reach a main road.

2 Cross the busy road with great care and go along a track at a footpath fingerpost. Soon pass a metal gate (signed No Bridleway) and go ahead on the left side of a field. Lots of strawberries are grown here, many on a table-top system under plastic tunnels. Keep right at a fork in the track and continue straight on to go past a metal gate to a lane.

3 Turn left along the lane for 100 yards then turn right, immediately after a large pond, to go on a track alongside the pond. Continue ahead to the right of a stone cottage then left of a line of conifer trees and through a gate in a metal barrier. Keep straight on along a path on the left side of a valley. Where



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the path reaches trees don't enter the wood but veer right alongside the trees, soon bending left to walk through an open area that gradually narrows, with trees on both sides. The path enters the wood, going gradually uphill between tall conifer trees then on a track between hazel bushes. After ½ mile you reach a crossroads of tracks near a group of oak trees (no markers). Go left here on a track that climbs gradually uphill between low banks. Look out for the large nests of wood ants, made of pine needles and other debris. Keep straight on where a track comes in from the left and continue ahead for ½ mile on a track between trees that are coppiced (cut down to ground level) every few years. You may also see fly agaric toadstools, crimson with white spots – attractive but poisonous.

4 On reaching a lane by a metal barrier turn left along the lane. Keep straight on where **Peckham Hurst Road** comes in from the right then, just past the drive to The Hurst, take the right fork in the lane. At a T-junction with another lane turn right for 30 yards then go left at a wooden fingerpost onto a track through trees. Keep straight ahead to the right of a fenced area with a telephone mast disguised as a tree. There are fine views to the right as you go downhill and the mansion of Mereworth Castle, with its distinctive dome, can be seen in the distance. Go straight ahead at a cross-track to keep left of a house and later over another cross-track and ahead on a wide track between wire fences. There are good views of the back of **Yotes Court**, a 17th-century mansion, on the right. At a T-junction with another track turn right, on a drive past houses. Immediately after Yotes Cottage, with its unusual arched windows, turn left on



Autumn colours in the woods.

a track between a hedge and trees and past barns. Later the track bends right between trees and reaches a lane. Turn left for a few yards to the main road and cross via the refuge on the left then go ahead alongside the road through Mereworth village, past the school and on to the lay-by.

What to look out for –

Wood Ants' Nests

Wood ants make spectacular nests, up to 5ft high, using pine needles, twigs and leaf stalks. The actual nest, containing the queen ants and the larvae, is underground, while the mound of debris protects it from the elements. The wood ant is one of the largest in Britain, up to 3/8 inch long, and is able to squirt formic acid as a defence mechanism. You can see trails of ants on foraging missions from the nest to find new nesting material and capture caterpillars and other insects for food.

