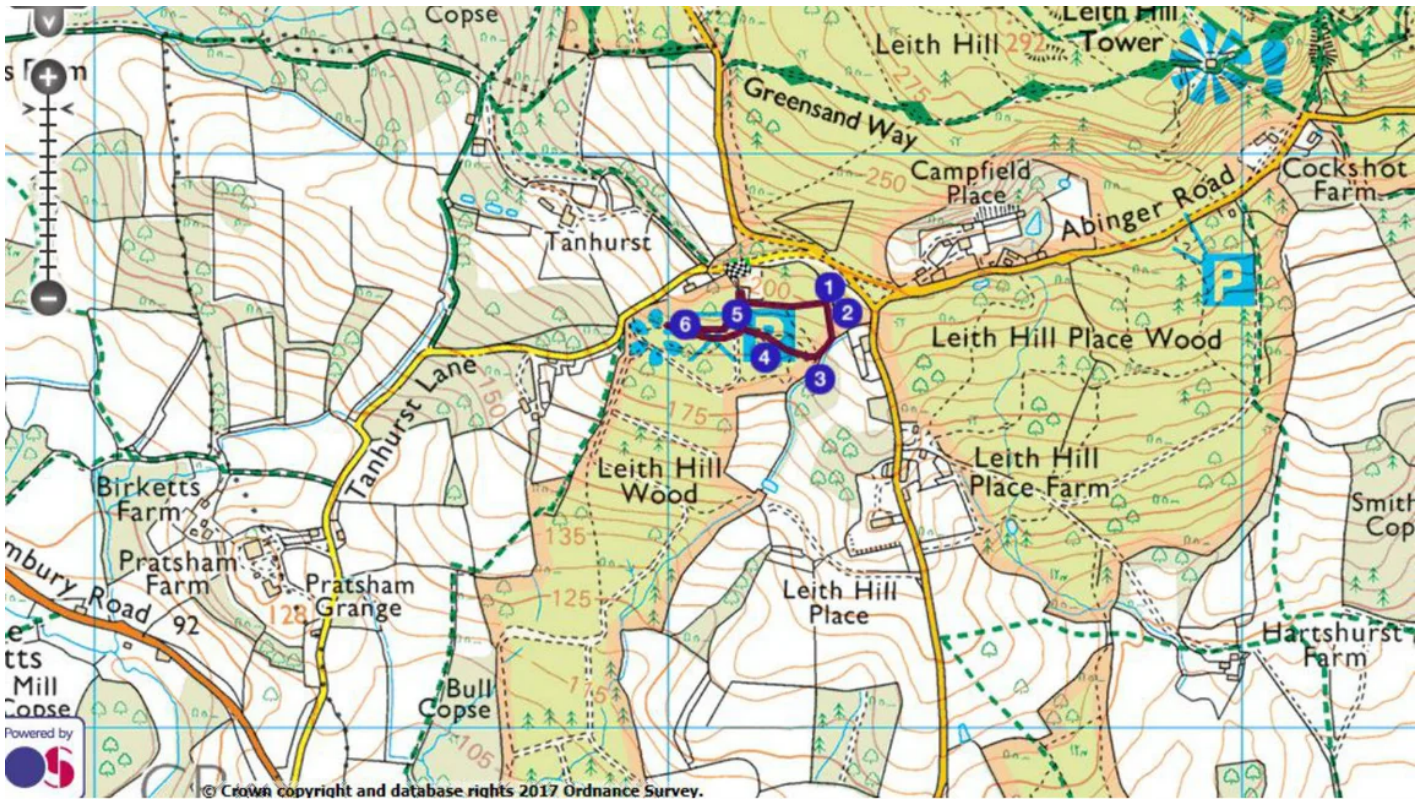


SURREY

Leith Hill Rhododendron Wood Walk

This is a gentle walk through Rhododendron Wood, which was created in the late 1800s by Caroline Wedgwood – of the illustrious pottery family – who lived at nearby Leith Hill Place. A keen botanist, Caroline was also the eldest sister of Charles Darwin, who would visit Leith Hill and walk in the woods. In 1944 the Rhododendron Wood was bequeathed to the National Trust by Caroline Wedgwood's grandson, the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams. On 16 October 1987 the wood suffered severe damage during the Great Storm, losing many of its mature trees and shrubs. Much of what you can see today is a result of initial clearance and extensive restoration work.



Information

Address: Rhododendron Wood Car Park, Surrey, RH5 6LU

OS map: Landranger 187; Explorer 146

Activity: Walking

Easy: A short, gentle route over flat ground. For further details, please see Terrain section.

Dog friendly

Full trail: Miles: 0.5 (km: 0.8)

Access: Easy

Duration: 30 mins

Total steps: 6

Start point: Rhododendron Wood car park, grid ref: TQ131427

1. Please note that this trail isn't waymarked. Start your walk from the Rhododendron Wood car park. Walk east to the far end of the car park towards the picnic benches. Follow the signposts to Leith Hill Place.
2. As you reach the end of this path at a 'T' junction, turn right. Look ahead and up to see one of the wood's *Wellingtonia* trees. Otherwise known as the giant redwood (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), this tree is over 150 years old and its planting is believed to have been commissioned by Caroline Wedgwood. Its location suggests that it formed a feature along the main driveway to Leith Hill Place. Following the path downhill, look to your left to see a magnificent coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*). This species of tree holds the record for being amongst the tallest in the world. As with the *Wellingtonia* that you have just seen, it is likely that this planting was commissioned by Caroline Wedgwood along the driveway to Leith Hill Place.
3. As you approach a right-hand bend opposite a bench, before taking the steps, briefly stop at the gate ahead and cast your eye through the gap in the trees. Just beyond the boundary gate of the Rhododendron Wood and into the parkland surrounding Leith Hill Place is a bit of a record-breaker. This tulip tree (named for its tulip-shaped flowers) has been dated to 250 years old and is one of the oldest known specimens in the country. It pre-dates the Rhododendron Wood and would undoubtedly have been admired by Charles Darwin when he visited Leith Hill Place. Return to the bench and continue down the steps, staying within the Rhododendron Wood.
4. Reach a crossroads marked by another redwood and turn right. This pathway is lined with two distinct types of rhododendrons; rhododendron winsome and rhododendron macabeaenum. Winsome produces red flower buds in the winter months and many

cerise blooms each June. Macabeanum has large leaves and flowers pale yellow blooms. The left hand side of this pathway is lined with azaleas.

5. Continue straight over the next crossroads. Proceed along the main path and bear right. The dominant plant along this stretch of the walk is rhododendron arboreum. This is a founding plant of the rhododendron wood and its vast size and spread suggests that it was planted by Caroline Wedgwood when the wood was begun. This rhododendron is native to the Himalayas, China and Thailand but thrives in our climate.
6. Another distinctive rhododendron along this stretch of the pathway is rhododendron macabeanum. Native to India, this plant has boasts silvery new leaves, with a woolly underside. Red buds appear and large pale blooms follow soon afterwards. Take a sharp right turn at the bench and bear left uphill to return to the car park.

End point: Rhododendron Wood car park, grid ref: TQ131427
