



## Recommended Leaf Peeping Walk for Autumn

### No. 2 - Nagshead RSPB Nature Reserve

by Paul Rutter, Chief Leaf Peeper and Tree Specialist

**Distance:** Approx. 1.5 miles

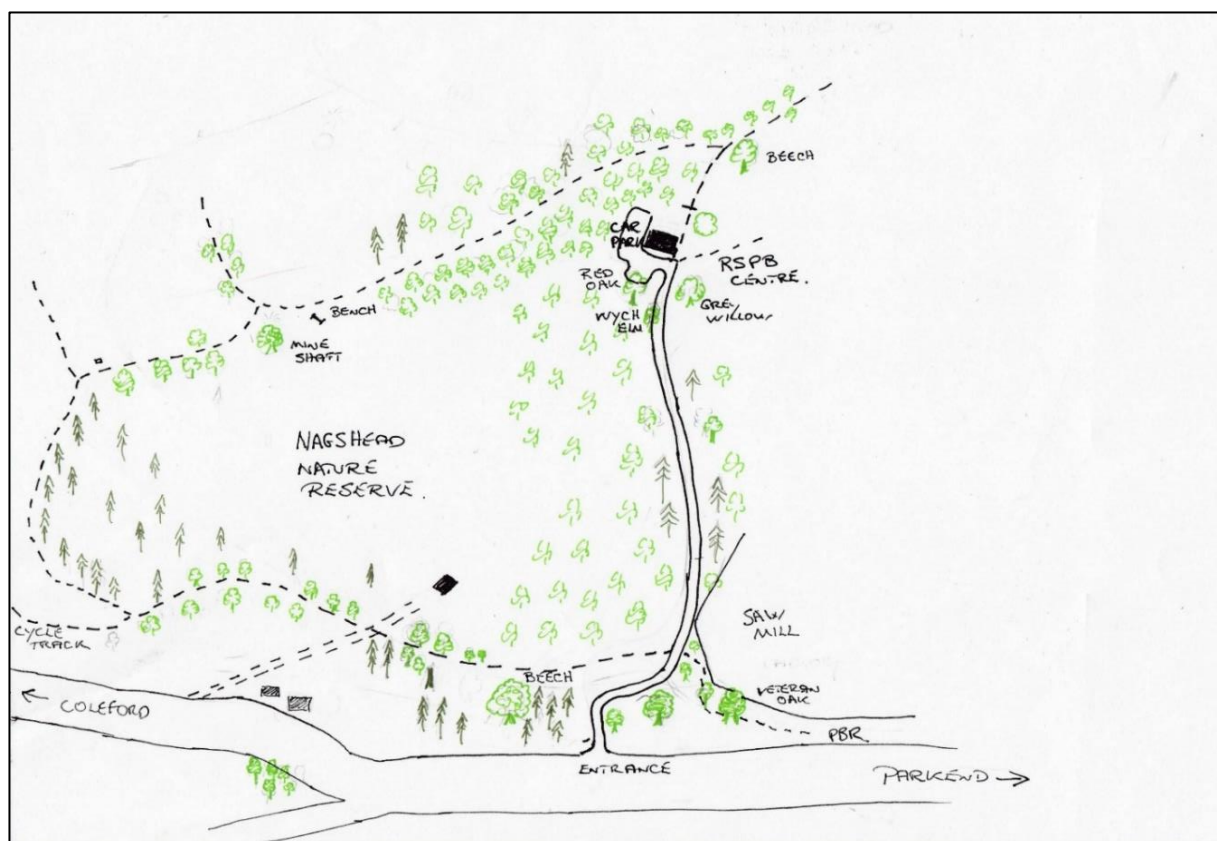
**Parking:** Nagshead Car Park (N.B. Gates close at dusk)

#### Walk Summary:

This circular walk begins in the car park of Nagshead Nature Reserve. Distinctive red oaks, a large willow, a sycamore and a wych elm encircle the car park, providing a festival of colour before the walk even begins.

The looping walk passes large beech trees, silver birches and sweet chestnuts en-route, as well as large veteran oaks that change to a russet brown during autumn as the acorns fall. Along the way, coniferous plantations with dark evergreens contrast against the brown gnarly oaks, copper beech trees and yellow hornbeams as they light up in autumn.

#### Route of Walk:





The car park is surrounded by interesting trees, including red oaks with distinctive large leaves that turn a rich red in autumn as well as a sycamore, a large grey willow and a young wych elm.

A blackboard on the wall of the reserve office building will often have a list of wildlife recently seen, so it's well worth checking that out before you start your walk.

### **Walk Directions:**

Begin the walk by taking the main track north from the car park, through the gate. A variety of big sycamore and beech trees can be seen along the edge of the path, amongst the oak trees that are the most common tree here.

At the first junction by a large beech tree take a left turn and follow the track that begins to go up hill passing silver birches, a bird cherry, sweet chestnuts and some large Scots pine. The trees that grow alongside the larger oak trees are currently being thinned to increase the space and light for the oaks to grow. Halfway up the slope you will come to a bench; a great place to sit and enjoy the woodland colours.



Continue for another 100 yards and you come to a junction, here the main track continues uphill, while your route is to turn left downhill along a grassy forest ride.

There is a wire fence to your left around an old mine shaft, so take care along here. You will see a very old oak tree on the far side of the enclosure, often described as a veteran tree because of its many features that support other wildlife. In autumn its leaves turn a golden russet and its acorns begin to fall.

Continue down this path, following the route to avoid wet ground. As you continue under conifers for another 50 yards, just after a 'No Cycling' sign, the path bears left downhill. Keep following the track, with a low bank on your right, until it opens out. Here, there is some gorse and bracken that makes the route of the path a little indistinct, but keep going and after a few yards its path is wide and clear again and continues gently downhill.

This section of woodland is a coniferous plantation which is a much darker woodland and remains green much of the year. You will pass a large Scots pine, Douglas firs, Norway spruce and Western hemlock with a drooping top branch.



Looking to your right you will begin to see gnarly oak trees that have sprouted very interestingly shaped branches as they have grown in a tight space, adjacent to a disused railway track, before becoming the cycle track that you see today.

As the ground levels out, the forest track approaches the cycle path, here you join the track and continue along the cycle route, watching out for cyclists as you go.



Look out for the light brown bark of a Sawara cypress on the left with feathery needles, it is set back in the woods and has distinctive cinnamon coloured bark.

Trees on the edge of the forest have a more natural shape, including some fine oaks, beeches and hornbeams.

There are also some horse chestnuts with palmate (fingered leaves) that turn yellow and display a crop of conkers during the autumn before falling to the ground.

The track here is raised above the nearby road and gives good views of the birch trees across the valley.

Continue along the cycle track where you will pass two small hornbeam trees, named for their very hard timber with serrated beech-like leaves, first turning to yellow and then to brown.



Notice that the hawthorn trees here are not often seen this tall because they are usually cut down in the hedgerows. But the tall dead beech stump is a valuable habitat in the woodland for many insects and fungi.

A little further on after passing a copper beech, look out for a narrow path leading off the cycle track down to your right. Take a quick detour to see one of the largest beech trees in the forest. There are also some very tall conifers in this part of the woodland.

At the track intersection you come to a large boulder on the track and a sign saying Parkend.

If you take a short detour along the pathway on the opposite side of this track following the edge of the factory fence, you will come across two notable oaks, one is a large ancient veteran oak and the other is a younger oak, planted in memory of Mr A. Smith who was a local rambler. The old veteran oak is probably the oldest tree you have seen today.

Trace your steps back to the forest track and walk up the slope, passing the sign to Nagshead in 400 metres. Here, pass larch trees planted amongst older oaks. The branches are all covered in lichen, a very important feature in a healthy woodland.

As you approach the car park you will spot an old grey willow tree with yellow leaves, whilst on the left is a young wych elm that is trying to resist the widespread Dutch elm disease to repopulate our woodlands again.

