



New Forest  
World War 2  
Airfields  
[nfww2airfields.info](http://nfww2airfields.info)

# Planning Your Visit to the New Forest

by Steve Williams

## Background

This document is to provide potential visitors to the New Forest with information to help you plan a visit, especially if you are intending to research your family heritage and walk in the footsteps of your brave relatives who served at one of the New Forest WW2 Airfields.

It is not a detailed tourist guide, many of them already exist, but rather it aims to provide practical advice from those who live in and know the area and what it has to offer.

It tries to help you answer some of the questions that I am frequently asked:

- When should I visit the New Forest?
- How can I get to the New Forest?
- Where should I stay in the New Forest?
- Do I need a car to visit the airfields?
- How long do I need to stay in the New Forest?
- How easy is it to combine a visit to the New Forest and Normandy?
- Where can I get more information?

## When to visit the New Forest

The New Forest is technically open all year, but it is fully open from Easter to the end of October. The natural beauty of the Forest comes into its own from the fresh new life of Spring, through the warm (usually) days of Summer to the glorious colour of Autumn.

However, you will not be the only ones thinking about visiting this very popular area. The Summer school holiday period from mid July to the end of August can be very busy and prices are at a premium. When would I visit the New Forest? *“Weekends are very popular for short breaks, so if I could choose when to visit it would be during May, June or September”.*

## A unique way of life

Covering over 70,000 acres, the New Forest is one of the largest areas of unenclosed pasture land, heathland and forest in Southern England. It was proclaimed a royal forest by William the Conqueror and it is featured in the Domesday Book.

It is the home of the New Forest Commoners, whose ancient rights of common pasture are still recognised and exercised today. They are enforced by official verderers and agisters.

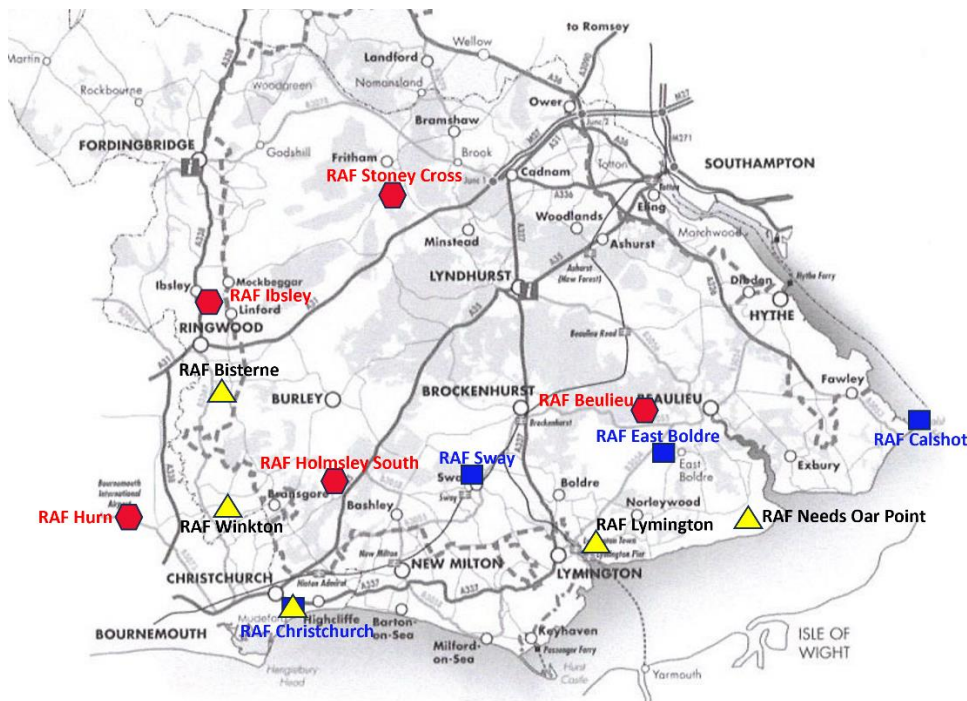
This means that as you drive through the forest, you are very likely to be sharing the road with ponies, cattle, goats or pigs, not to mention deer and wild boar. The animals have right of way!! The New Forest remains a habitat for many rare birds and mammals.

In the 18th century, the New Forest became a source of timber for the Royal Navy, Bucklers Hard was an important shipyard that was responsible for the construction of a number of famous ships.

## The Geography of the New Forest



## The New Forest World War 2 Airfields



The New Forest World War 2 airfields are:

- Stoney Cross
- Ibsley
- Beaulieu
- Holmsley South
- Hurn
- Winkton ALG
- Bisterne ALG
- Needs Oar Point ALG
- Lymington ALG
- Christchurch / ALG
- Calshot Seaplane base
- Sway ELG

More details of how to find these airfields and what is there today can be found in my Guide to the New Forest World War 2 Airfields, available on my website

<https://nfww2airfields.info>

In addition to the World War 2 airfields, the New Forest contains many other very interesting remains from World War 2 and D Day. These include:

- Lepe Country Park and D-Day memorial
- Ashley Walk bombing range
- The Signals Research and Development Establishment at Christchurch
- RAF Sopley “Starburst” GCI radar station, later Southern Radar
- Telecommunications Research Establishment - Purbeck Radar with links to Sopley
- East Boldre, a World War 1 Royal Flying Corps airfield
- Exbury House – HMS Mastodon
- The SOE training establishment at Beaulieu

## The main Towns and Village

The New Forest is surrounded by interesting towns and villages that provide a range of services that you might require during your stay. Anchoring the Southwestern corner of the Forest is Christchurch, a picturesque, historic harbour town where the river Stour meets the river Avon, and its neighbour, the village of Highcliffe on Sea. Christchurch and Highcliffe have a wide range of accommodation options, good restaurants and excellent transport links and the nearest town to several of the airfields including Christchurch itself.



The historic market towns of Ringwood and Fordingbridge mark the Western edge of the Forest and are the main points where you can cross the river Avon.

On the southern edge of the Forest, you will find Christchurch, Highcliffe on Sea, New Milton and Lymington, which is the ferry port for the Isle of White. These towns have a wide range of shops and services, and Lymington is a bustling market town with a busy harbour. Christchurch, New Milton and Lymington are served by the railway.

You will find Lyndhurst in the heart of the Forest, sometimes referred to as the capital of the New Forest, and a little to the South, is Brockenhurst. Locals like to call them Villages, but both are very busy in the main visitor season and traffic congestion can be a challenge. Brokenhurst has a railway station and is a good place to hire a cycle if you might enjoy riding through the Forest.

Hythe is the main town on the Eastern edge of the Forest. There is a convenient ferry service from Hythe’s Victorian pier, with its pier train, to Southampton’s Town Quay. Southampton is the city for you if you crave the attractions of an historic port city, with the

West Quay shopping centre and countless places to dine from fast food to top quality restaurants. Take a stroll around the 13<sup>th</sup> century Old Town Walls and admire the architecture of the great names from the shipping industry.

## **Getting to the New Forest**

Most visitors, especially those from overseas, will probably arrive in the UK by an airline that arrives at either London Heathrow or London Gatwick airport. Some of the most popular ways of getting from the airport are set out below, but you should consider what you want to do and therefore how you will need to travel once you get to the New Forest. (See below). There are also flights to both Southampton and Bournemouth airports from UK and European cities.

Unless you plan to visit London before coming to the New Forest, London Heathrow will be the most convenient airport to arrive at. It is close to the M3 motorway which brings you to the New Forest via the M27 and A31 if you are hiring a car and driving. The M27 which becomes the A31 is the major road across the New Forest from East to West. Junction two off the M27 gives you access to the Eastern part of the Forest via the A326. Junction one, where the motorway becomes the A31 gives you access to the venture of the Forest via the A337 to and the A35. For the Western side of the Forest, and for Bournemouth, use the A338, just to the West of Ringwood.

If you do not fancy driving, it is possible to book a car to pick you up at the airport. This is best and less costly if arranged in advance using a company from the New Forest rather than a taxi from the airport.

Alternatively, you can use the convenient RailAir coach service to either Woking or Reading railway stations, there are trains to the New Forest from both these stations, but not all trains serve all stations in the New Forest. The main stations in the New Forest are at Ashurst, Brockenhurst (with connections to Lymington and ferries to the Isle of White), New Milton, Christchurch and Bournemouth. Trains to the New Forest are operated by Southwestern Railway and Cross Country Trains.

National Express coach services are also a public transport option from London, London airports and Oxford to Southampton, Ringwood and Bournemouth.

[www.nationalexpress.com](http://www.nationalexpress.com)



## Getting around the New Forest

The Railway cuts through the New Forest from Southampton in the North-East to Christchurch and Bournemouth in the South-West, with main stations at Ashurst, Brockenhurst, Sway, New Milton and Christchurch. [www.southwesternrailway.com](http://www.southwesternrailway.com)

The main Towns and villages are well served by a bus network, and, during the main visitor season, there are three New Forest explorer routes. These are hop on and off services that link the main towns and villages to some of the key visitor attractions and provide a very picturesque way of seeing the Forest without driving. [www.morebus.co.uk/about-NFT](http://www.morebus.co.uk/about-NFT)



Cycling is very popular in the New Forest, but to really experience some of the little gems of the Forest, you will need your own transport.

Your own transport is advisable if you plan to visit any of the New Forest World War 2 Airfields as for the most part, they are not served by public transport. My Guide to the New Forest World War 2 Airfields provides directions to the airfields and a number of the other important military sites.

## Staying in the New Forest

There are accommodation styles to suite most in the New Forest from award winning 5-star hotels to Bed and Breakfast, self-catering and camping. The information web sites listed at the end of this guide will provide you with access to the information that you are likely to require. One word of warning, accommodation during the peak season, July to mid-September, can be difficult to find, so book as early as you can to avoid disappointment and to get the best prices.

By way of an example, Christchurch and the village of Highcliffe on Sea offer a good selection of accommodation with a few of the different types listed below, as an example of what is available:

- One of the top 5 Star hotels in the country - The Chewton Glen
- A great boutique hotel – The Lord Bute
- 4-star hotels – The King’s Head or The Captain’s Club
- National 3-star chain hotels – there are three Premier Inn in Christchurch/Highcliffe
- A good choice of Bed and Breakfast
- Caravan and lodge rental – Hoburne

Lyndhurst, Brockenhurst and Ringwood are other towns with a selection of different hotels.

For more information on places to stay in the New Forest visit [www.thenewforest.co.uk](http://www.thenewforest.co.uk)

## Eating and Drinking in the New Forest

The New Forest has a wide range of different eating establishments from internationally renowned restaurants to the homely tea rooms and everything in between. All the towns and villages offer a good choice of dining options, but they can get busy during the main holiday season so if you have set your mind on one, it is always best to book a table either online or by telephone. Most villages will have at least one pub, some have more, many of which serve food. There are also some excellent restaurants, pubs and tea rooms scattered through the Forest.

You will need to be in one of the larger towns around the edge of the Forest to find national or international brands and fast food. Apart from some pubs and restaurants, most places are privately owned or part of a small local group.

For specific ideas of where to eat and drink in the New Forest visit [www.thenewforest.co.uk](http://www.thenewforest.co.uk)

## Something for everyone in the New Forest

Whilst the focus of this guide is on the twelve airfields and the role of the New Forest around D-Day, the New Forest has much more to offer, there is something for everyone.

Just to the south of the New Forest are some great beaches, the forest offers many different cycling, horse riding and walking routes. There are country parks, wildlife parks,

the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu and the wonderful Exbury Gardens to visit. Those interested in history should visit Bucklers Hard, where some of Nelson's fleet for the battle of Trefalgar were built, it remains largely untouched by the passage of time. More information at [www.bucklershard.co.uk](http://www.bucklershard.co.uk) If castles are your thing then be sure not to miss Hurst Castle, an artillery fortress built by Henry VIII and located on a spit in the Solent with fabulous views to the Isle of Wight. [www.hurstcastle.co.uk](http://www.hurstcastle.co.uk)

Many of the attractions are on one of the three New Forest Explorer bus routes.

The historic towns in and around the forest are well worth exploring and some of the small villages such as Burley and Beaulieu are also very attractive, however, they can be busy in the high season and at weekends. Bournemouth, the Isle of Purbeck and the Jurassic Coast, Salisbury and Southampton are all within easy reach of the New Forest.

There are many events taking place in the forest or the during the holiday season including the famous New Forest Show and a number of towns have regular markets.

For information on attractions and activities in the New Forest visit [www.thenewforest.co.uk](http://www.thenewforest.co.uk)

## **Moving on to Normandy, the D-Day landing beaches and beyond**

The proximity of the New Forest to Normandy is the reason it was so important during Operation Overlord and the D-Day invasion.

Today, there are a number of convenient ferry services from the South coast of England to Normandy, some are seasonal routes whereas others operate year-round.

The most convenient ferry port to the New Forest is Poole. A traditional ferry provides a daily service to Cherbourg from around April to October and a fast ferry operates to Cherbourg and St Malo via the Chanel Islands on specific days of the week during the Summer. Cherbourg is well located for visits to the invasion beaches and the Cotentin Peninsula.

Portsmouth, about an hour from the New Forest, is the major ferry port for the South of England. Ferries run from Portsmouth to Caen (Ouistreham) three times a day, to St Malo daily and to Cherbourg on certain days of the week.

Ouistreham is located on the end of Sword Beach and a couple of miles from Pegasus Bridge and Caen, right in the heart of the invasion coast.

Both Poole and Portsmouth were important ports and places of embarkment for many of the troops who landed on the Normandy beaches in 1944.

For more information on ferries to Normandy and Brittany visit [www.brittany-ferries.co.uk](http://www.brittany-ferries.co.uk)

## Useful sources of information

In this guide I have tried to provide you with enough information to give you an idea of what is possible if you wish to visit the New Forest and its twelve airfields. When you get down to detailed planning you will want to do your own research or use a travel professional. As with all places, a great deal of information is available on the internet, but please validate any reviews and recommendations.

You can access a lot of information about the New Forest and the World War 2 Airfields on my website <https://nfw2airfields.info>

Happy planning!!