

Hamsterley Forest

Access Guide

Viking Play Trail v1.0

Updated: May 2026



Forestry England





Welcome to Hamsterley Forest

Welcome to Hamsterley Forest. This guide has been created to help you plan your visit and provides detailed descriptions about and photographs of the Viking Play Trail. A separate guide is available of the general visitor facilities at Hamsterley Forest.

In addition to this guide, two further downloadable guides are available to support your planning from the [Hamsterley Know Before You Go webpage](#)

- **General Access Guide**
- **Viking Play Trail detailed Access Guide**

This access guide and any accompanying videos have been created with the input of people with lived experience of disability.

Gradients have been given in % throughout this document and are marked as less than or more than 10%.

Gentle gradient	Any gradient shallower than 1:12 or less than 10%
Steep gradient	Any gradient greater than 1:12 or more than 10%

If there is any information you can't find in this guide, or if you find some inaccuracies, please let us know so we can make changes by contacting:

Telephone: 01388 488312

Email: enquiries.hamsterley@forestryengland.uk

We hope you enjoy your visit!



Contents

Welcome to Hamsterley Forest.....	1
The Viking Play Trail - Key Information	4
Wheelchair and pushchair suitability	5
Sensory environment	6
Weather impact	6
Seating.....	6
! Water Safety	7
Play Zones - detailed access information	8
Odins Keep & Rans Home Harbour.....	8
Viking Warrior Zone.....	10
Wild Play	11
Freya's Lost Treasure.....	12
Lofn's Magic Treeway	14
Viking Ghost Ship.....	15
Gruffalo and Gruffalo's Child Sculptures	17
The River Beach	18

Loki's Forest Lookout.....	20
Thor's Workshop	23
Tyr's Woodland Fortress	25

The Viking Play Trail - Key Information

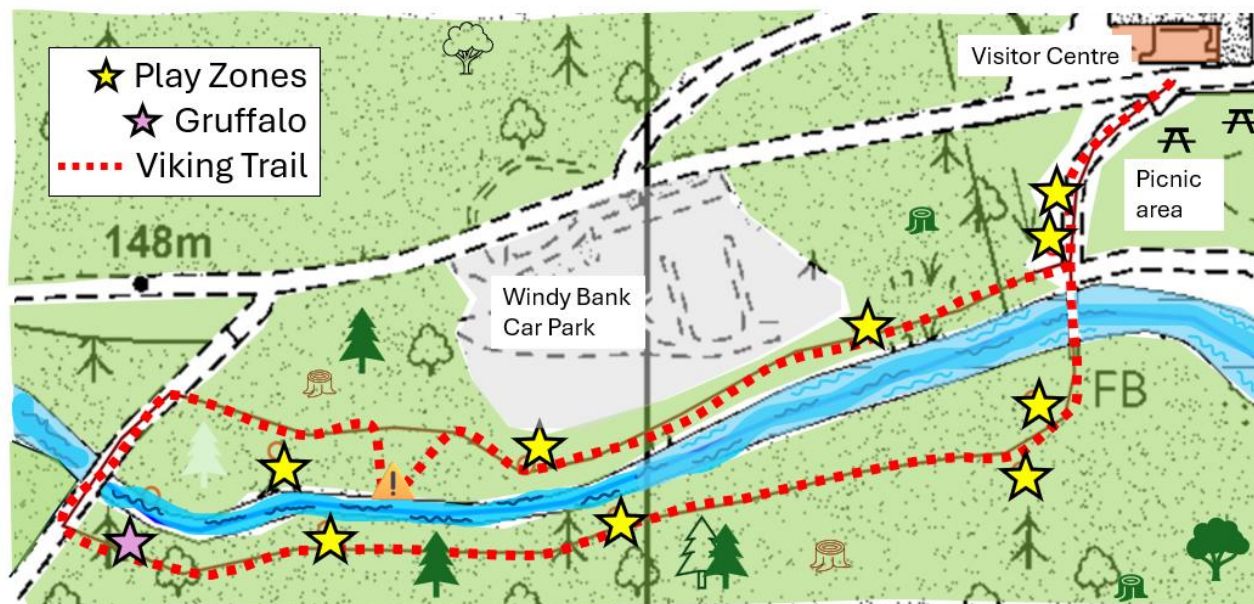
Situated close to the Visitor Centre, the Viking Play Trail is a short family trail featuring ten themed play zones inspired by Norse mythology in a loop along both sides of the scenic Bedburn Beck.

Total Trail length: 0.75 km

Trail Surface: Main path - compacted stone forest track. Play zones - varied surfaces including natural earth with exposed roots and raised enclosures filled with tree bark. See detailed description for each play zone.

Typical width: Main Path 2.5-3m wide, varied widths for access to each play zone.

Trail Gradient: Less than 10% gradient throughout the trail on the main path-



some play stations include short and steep climbs, but many are accessible on flat ground.



The Play Trail is signposted with Green signs with White writing



Viking Play Trail path connecting all play zones - 2m wide compacted stone



Surface around play stations can have roots and uneven ground



Surface around play stations can have roots and uneven ground

Wheelchair and pushchair suitability

The main trail is generally suitable for robust wheelchairs and all-terrain pushchairs. Some play areas sit on uneven and steep ground, bark or natural forest floor, or narrow pinch points which may limit access in some cases. See the individual play zone descriptions for further information.



Sensory environment

The forest offers a mix of natural sounds, children playing, and occasional dogs. The trail can become **busy during school holidays and weekends**, particularly **between 10am and 3pm**, which may affect visitors who prefer quieter environments.

Weather impact

The main trail is approximately 2 - 2.5 metres wide (even when crossing bridges) and is constructed from compacted stone, providing a firm and stable surface that does not typically become slippery in wet weather.

Several of the play spaces, designed to encourage natural exploration, are situated on forest floor surfaces without additional fall surfacing. These areas are more sensitive to changing weather conditions and may become muddy and slippery during or after rainfall. Visitors are advised to take extra care when moving through these natural play zones, particularly in wet or wintery conditions.

Important: Many of the play features are made from natural wood which does become slippery when wet; care should be taken to assess this before use.

Seating

A variety of formal seating is provided throughout the play area. This includes standard benches without backrests, benches with backrests, and picnic benches. Seating options are positioned close to each piece of play equipment to support rest, supervision, and ease of access.



Bench with backrest



Perch bench



Picnic bench

! Water Safety

⚠ The Viking Play Trail runs alongside Bedburn Beck. During periods of heavy rainfall, the beck can become deep and fast-flowing. Visitors are advised to take particular care, and young children should always be supervised.

At the halfway point of the trail (near the second bridge), there is a small, pebbled beach that provides closer access to the water. In summer months and during extended dry periods, this area may offer a suitable spot for paddling or resting beside the beck. However, any entry into the water must be carefully assessed by accompanying adults to ensure it is safe to do so.

Visitors are encouraged to remain aware of changing weather conditions and water levels throughout their visit



Play Zones - detailed access information

Odins Keep & Rans Home Harbour

This play zone on the trail is the closest to the to the Visitor Centre and includes carved Viking-themed structures, balance beams, small climbing features, a play hut, a play jetty, a basket swing, a 950mm wide slide, and a wobbly raft. The highest platform reaches approximately 1000 mm.



Odins Keep



Rans Home Harbour

Approach

- **Access:** The main stone trail (2500 mm compacted roadstone) runs directly alongside the play structures, with no raised lips or elevated surfacing to negotiate. Stepping off the main path leads onto a wood-chip surface, which may present challenges for some mobility aids, wheelchairs, or prams.
- **Surface:** Compacted stone transitioning to wood chip and natural bark/forest floor.
- **Gradient:** Predominantly gentle, with one short section at approximately 1:14 (7%) downhill when approaching from the main Visitor Centre.



Accessibility notes

- The wood-chip surface may be difficult for some mobility aids, wheelchairs, or prams to traverse.
- An overflow car park (called Windy Bank Car Park) is located adjacent to this play zone.
- Several traditional picnic benches are positioned near the play equipment. The approach surface is a grassy field, which may become soft or muddy during or after periods of heavy rainfall.



Approach gradient



Approach surface/path



Picnic area nearby



Viking Warrior Zone

This play zone is just across the Silver Bridge and features a sequence of balance beams, stepping posts, monkey bars, a small horizontal climbing net, and a range of low-level agility elements. The area is set beneath mature conifer canopy and is located immediately adjacent to the river.



Stepping posts



Hanging bridge



Monkey Bars

Approach

- **Access:** The main stone trail (2.5m-3m wide compacted roadstone) runs directly alongside the Viking Warrior Trail. Moving off the main path leads onto a natural forest-floor surface. Although generally flat, there are occasional tree roots to negotiate.
- **Surface:** The play trail surface is predominantly flat but includes intermittent tree roots. During periods of heavy rainfall, the forest-floor surface can become muddy and slippery underfoot. The main path, approximately 10 m away, remains firm underfoot in all conditions.
- **Gradient:** The trail is mostly level with gentle natural undulations.

Accessibility Notes

- Most equipment within this zone requires balance, stepping, or coordinated movement.



- Ground-level exploration is possible throughout the area.
- Approximately 1 - 1.5 m of space is available alongside the trail for carers to provide support; however, this area includes intermittent natural tree roots and may become slippery in wet conditions.
- Two simple resting benches are located adjacent to the play equipment for supervision and breaks. These benches do not include back supports.

Wild Play

A natural woodland play area designed to encourage free, imaginative exploration of the forest environment. The space features an assortment of logs, stumps, branches, and loose natural materials that children can use to build dens, create structures, and engage in imaginative role-play. The setting is intentionally unstructured, allowing people to interact freely with the landscape.



Hideouts in the Wild Play area



Wild Play area directly accessible from the main path, with backless perch bench



Ground is generally wide, open and flat - some areas between trees have loose material



Approach

- **Access:** The Wild Play Trail sits directly next to the Viking Warrior Trail, with the main stone path (2.5m - 3m compacted roadstone) running alongside the area. Step free, level access from the main path leads onto a natural forest-floor surface between widely spaced trees.
- **Surface:** Predominantly natural forest floor with mixed organic material, including tree roots and scattered woodland debris such as logs, sticks, brash, occasional stumps, rocks. Conditions may become soft or uneven during or after periods of heavy rainfall.
- **Gradient:** Mostly level with gentle natural undulations.

Accessibility Notes

- In periods of **dry weather** the natural forest-floor surface is generally suitable for wheelchairs, prams, or standard mobility aids.
- In **wet weather** more rugged, off-road equipment may be able to access parts of the area but could become stuck as silt muddy ground can develop.
- Some **uneven ground** conditions should be expected in parts of the play area due to roots, and **some trees are close together**, however much of the play area is amongst **widely spaced trees**.
- **Two simple perch benches** are positioned next to the play area for supervision and breaks. These benches do not include back supports.

Freya's Lost Treasure

Freya's Lost Treasure is a short, exploratory natural trail leading approximately 30 metres uphill through natural woodland to a themed Viking treasure chest. The route begins with a small wooden bridge, and the path is not clearly defined, requiring some searching and exploration of the area adjacent to the main path.



Freya's lost treasure- hidden up a slope amongst the trees



Small bridge from main path to the play area



Steep and rooty uneven ground throughout this play area

Approach

- **Access:** Freya's Lost Treasure is located just off the main stone path and is identified by a small narrow bridge (50cm wide). After crossing the bridge, the route transitions immediately onto a steep, natural forest-floor surface. The treasure chest is situated approximately 30m up a steep hill from this point.
- **Surface:** The terrain is entirely natural and includes steep sections with tree roots, logs, sticks, brash, occasional stumps, rocks, and uneven ground. Surfaces may become soft & slippery during or following periods of heavy rainfall.
- **Gradient:** The route features natural uneven floor throughout. The area leading to the treasure involves a noticeable uphill climb on unmodified terrain.

Accessibility notes

- Due to the steep and uneven natural terrain and the loose ground with uneven with roots which can become muddy or slippery, particularly in wet weather, this play station is **unlikely to be suitable for those using mobility aids, for wheelchairs, or prams.**



- Visitors with balance difficulties or visual impairments may require additional support or supervision to safely complete this activity.
- No seating or rest points are available at this section of the trail.

Lofn's Magic Treeway



This feature comprises a slightly elevated, 25m long walkway constructed from natural logs, with a wire support cable provided to aid balance while crossing a small stream. The design offers a playful, nature-based challenge within the woodland environment. Use of this walkway requires good balance, coordination, and confident movement and therefore likely not to be suitable for users who rely on mobility aids.

Approach

Access: This feature is accessed directly from, and runs parallel to, the main path (2.5m - 3m compacted roadstone). It consists of a series of low-level balance logs that begin immediately at the path edge.

Surface: The balance logs connect directly from the main path with **no dedicated fall surface**, relying solely on the natural forest floor. The central log spans a small stream. Due to the positioning of the logs and

surrounding terrain, it may be challenging for carers, supervisors, or parents to maintain close proximity and support throughout the activity.

Gradient: The logs follow a natural slope, descending approximately 2m in height to cross the stream before rising back to the original path level.

Accessibility notes

- Due to its natural, uneven construction, this feature is likely to be unsuitable for mobility aids.
- It is accessed directly from the main path, with an immediate transition onto unmodified woodland terrain.
- Users will need good balance and coordination to navigate the element safely.
- The layout may make it difficult for carers, supervisors, or parents to remain alongside users throughout the activity.

Viking Ghost Ship

The **Viking Ghost Ship** is a large wooden play structure designed for climbing, imaginative play, and elevated lookout points. The main deck sits approximately 1m above ground level and includes multiple access points, such as climbing holds, a small cargo net, a log step-up, three interconnected platforms, and crossing logs with supportive hand cables. There is clear space around the entire structure, allowing carers, supervisors, or parents to provide assistance where needed.



Viking ship themed climbing equipment



Set in a forest environment



Viking Ship Head

Approach

- This feature is accessed directly from the main path. There is a 20cm step up to a raised pit filled with wood-chip fall surface.
- The approach transitions from compacted stone to deeper wood-chip surfacing.
- On the far side of the equipment there is a steep descent towards the river.

Accessibility Notes

- The main deck can be accessed via steps, a cargo net, or climbing holds, all of which require confident mobility.



- A 10 - 20 cm raised edge surrounds the wood-chip pit, which will prevent wheelchairs, prams, and some mobility aids from entering the play area or accessing the platform.
- There is ample space around the structure for carers, supervisors, or parents to provide support.
- Seating is available with a non-backed bench adjacent to the feature and another non-acked and backed-bench in close proximity across the main path.



Raised pit step around play



Viking Ship Platform



Seating with backrest

Gruffalo and Gruffalo's Child Sculptures

The Gruffalo Sculptures are hand-carved wooden figures designed to provide an engaging focal point for visitors. They offer an ideal opportunity for photographs, imaginative play, and sensory interaction.



Gruffalo sculpture and surrounding surface



Picnic Bench opposite Gruffalo

Approach

- **Access:** The sculptures are located directly beside the main path and benefit from level, step-free access.
- **Surface:** The surrounding surface consists of compacted stone, providing a firm and stable base suitable for a wide range of users.
- **Gradient:** No gradient

Accessibility notes

- The area is likely accessible for wheelchair users, pushchairs, and most mobility aids.
- The sculpture's carved texture makes it highly tactile, offering opportunities for sensory engagement.

- Picnic bench seating is next to the Gruffalo sculpture.

The River Beach

Description

The River Beach is a natural pebbled area that becomes exposed during periods of hot weather or low rainfall. It offers opportunities for quiet exploration, sensory play, and engagement with the natural riverside environment.

⚠ There are no barriers around the water at the river beach - be sure to monitor young children closely



Panoramic view of River beach and approaching paths to left and right from main path (descent looks flatter in the photo than it may be in reality!)

Approach

- **Access:** The beach is reached via a smooth descent from the main path which may be more than 10% gradient in places. Due to the steepness and irregular terrain, this route may not be suitable for wheelchairs, prams, or mobility aids.
- **Surface:** The approach consists of natural forest floor, with occasional roots, stones, and uneven ground. This transitions into a pebbled riverbed surface, which may shift underfoot and vary depending on water levels and recent weather conditions.
- **Gradient:** There are multiple options for descending from the main path to the river beach - one is particularly short and steep (more than 10%) whilst others are longer and shallower in gradient (less than 10%).

Accessibility Notes

- Due to the steep and uneven descent, the area may be unsuitable for wheelchairs, prams and most mobility aids.
- Natural seating only is available, such as raised earth or exposed stones when river levels are low. No formal benches in the area.
- The space provides sensory play opportunities using natural materials such as pebbles, water, and driftwood.



River Beach approach path from top



River Beach and surrounding compacted dirt approach paths



River Beach approach path from bottom



River Beach

Loki's Forest Lookout

Description

Loki's Forest Lookout is an elevated viewing and play structure designed to accommodate a wide range of users. A dedicated access ramp enables wheelchair users and those with mobility aids to reach the main platform, which provides views over the main path and towards the river. The ramp is fitted with raised edges and continuous handrails to ensure safe use and prevent mobility aids from leaving the surface.

From the main platform, users can access several additional play elements, including a 950 mm-wide slide with an overhead safety rail to prevent accidental use, a tunnel, and a small climbing structure. These play components are set within a raised pit containing a wood-chip fall surface, while the ramp itself remains outside this contained area.



Step up to elevated pit and wide slide



Climbing features



Tunnel

Approach

- **Access:** The feature is located directly off the main path, with a flat and straightforward approach leading to the ramped entrance of the lookout platform. Access to the tunnel and climbing elements requires stepping into a 300 mm raised pit designed to contain the wood-chip fall surface.
- **Surface:** The surrounding area consists of natural forest floor, which includes occasional undulations and exposed tree roots that may affect stability underfoot.
- **Gradient:** No gradient

Accessibility Notes

- The lookout platform offers easy, step-free access directly from the main path, and is suitable for wheelchair users and most mobility aids.
- Two picnic benches are located in close proximity, providing convenient seating for rest or supervision.



- Windy Bank Car Park is situated less than 50 m away, accessible via a short 2,000 mm-wide bridge, allowing this feature to be reached without completing the full trail. (See the Forest Drive section for car park locations.)
- The slide, tunnel, and climbing elements are positioned within a 200 mm-deep wood-chip pit, which may limit access for some users.
- Tunnel Width: 1m wide
- Slide Width: 97cm
- Ramp Width: 1.2m



Main ramp and approach



Climbing platform



Ramp to platform



Nearby Picnic Benches



Bridge to carpark & carpark

Thor's Workshop

A themed area with interactive tools for digging, pouring and lifting gravel; carved elements, wooden features and a climbing platform.



Climbing frame



Access from the Windy Bank
Park Car Park



Access from river trail side

Approach

- Level access from main trail. Access from Windy Bank Car Park is 79cm wide. Access from Riverside trail is not less than 100cm wide.

Accessibility notes

- Many ground-level features that are available without climbing to the platform. Some interactive elements may require reach or grip strength. Area around the feature is covered in deep woodchip so may be difficult to access for wheelchairs or mobility aids.

Tyr's Woodland Fortress

This play zone has a fort-style structure, with climbing ramps, walls and ladders, a rope bridge and lookout points.



Fortress Climbing frame



Fortress Climbing frame



Access to climbing area from riverside trail

Approach

- Situated immediately next to the Windy Bank overflow car park there is a slight incline to get to the climbing equipment depending on direction of travel.
- Surface: bark and natural earth.

Accessibility notes

- Elevated sections require climbing or steps.
- Climbing equipment is surrounded by deep bark which may not be suitable for wheelchairs and mobility aids.



End of Guide

If there is any information you can't find in this guide, or if you find some inaccuracies, please let us know so we can make changes by contacting:

Telephone: 01388 488312

Email: enquiries.hamsterley@forestryengland.uk

We hope you enjoy your visit!