

## **Welcome to Freshwater's Histree Trail**

*The Poets and Pines Histree Trail is 6.3km (3.9 miles) with an extra bit to Farringford of 1.3km (0.8 miles). The trail begins and ends at School Green in the centre of the town. The trail presents an easy walk, mostly maintaining hard surfaces. There are some stiles and gates to negotiate, with gentle inclines and descents. The trail may also be muddy and uneven underfoot on some of the public footpaths.*

### **Getting There**

*Bus: 7 or 11 to School Green. Car: There is a pay and display car park at School Green.*

**Follow the text and use the map to explore the Poets and Pines Histree Trail. Discover the historic Garibaldi Tree, follow a snaking sequence of Horse Chestnut trees, explore trees which may have inspired Tennyson's poems and visit a churchyard of veteran Yews.**

The Poets and Pines Histree Trail begins at School Green. The green was originally called School House Green in 1837 named after the 'village green' near to which town's the first school once stood. Here you are surrounded by the most spectacular collection of **Horse Chestnut (1)** trees on the Isle of Wight (top right). These trees were planted in 1902 to celebrate the coronation of Edward VII. There are around 32 trees spanning three roads.

From here head west to join the footpath once known as Brook and Tool Path keeping the **Horse Chestnuts** and the brook to your right.

Upon reaching Kings Bridge, cross the road to join footpath footpath F22 known as Spinfish Lane. You will shortly arrive at the only mature

**Aspen** grove on the Island **(2)**. The **Aspen**, known in IW dialect as 'Apse Pipple' or 'Snapsen' is a fairly uncommon tree. Even if there is only a hint of a breeze, listen out for the distinctive quivering sound of the leaves which is why its scientific name is *Populus tremula*.

Continue along Spinfish Lane, following Spinfish Brook. The lane forms one of the old rights of way which linked the five ancient settlements of Freshwater together. The lane emerges into the settlement of Middleton which translates as Middle Farm.

Head across the green and follow the road until reaching Bedbury Lane. Turn right here and walk a short distance along the road, taking care as there is no pavement. Once past the thatched cottage join footpath T7 - Briary Lane - to your right. This lane was originally constructed as the private carriageway between Farringford House, Island home of Alfred Lord Tennyson - the Victorian Poet Laureate, to Freshwater Court, home of Lady Emily Tennyson's family.

George Frederic Watts, the popular Victorian painter and sculptor, was a contemporary of Tennyson and lived at the Briary in the late 1860s. There is an interesting mix of tree species on either side of the lane. Continue to the top of Briary Lane and then down through the fields, passing Stonewind Farm to your left.

Stonewind Farm lies in a hollow and is built from stone reclaimed from a nearby windmill which burnt down in the 1840s. Continue through the field towards the copse and pause at the stile to view a mature **Hornbeam** tree to your left on the copse boundary **(3)**. You are entering Witches Copse, so called because of the dense shade cast by the mix of native and plantation trees. The spring which rises in the copse forms one of

the tributaries of the Western Yar and is the original 'fresh water' from which the town takes its name. Leave the copse by crossing the stile and head across the field towards Summers Lane.

Turn right onto Summers Lane, taking care as there is no pavement here. Turn left onto footpath T5. Here you rejoin Tennyson's carriageway towards Freshwater Court. Nearing the top of the hill, the site of the old windmill can be seen to your left at Windmill Cottage. Following the winding path which passes by a peculiar **Ash** tree **(4)** with a serpent like trunk to your left and through a prolific group of **Plum** trees until Freshwater Court comes into view ahead.

Freshwater Court was built in the 1850s to accommodate Tennyson's in-laws, Anne Weld and her family. The story goes that he had the house built to complete his marriage vow which stated that his in-laws could come and visit whenever they wished for as long as they wished. After realising he'd rather not have them at Farringford indefinitely, Freshwater Court was built nearby! The house is private, but many trees in the grounds date back to the original Victorian landscaping.

Of particular interest is a mature **Ginkgo** or **Maidenhair** tree visible near the perimeter fence **(5)**. This species was widespread in prehistoric times. A native of China, the **Ginkgo** was first introduced to the UK in the mid 1700s; this is one of the oldest specimens on the Island. In fact this is a very important tree for, if it is identified as a female and produces viable seeds, Kew Gardens will collect them for the Millennium Seed Bank.

Continue along this footpath until meeting footpath T13; turn right here. Mature **Oak** trees dominate the bank along length of this footpath **(6)**. They may have once formed a boundary or perhaps waymarked a main thoroughfare.

Leave the footpath. Cross to join Clayton Road. Then cross Queens Road to view the magnificent **Cedar of Lebanon (7)**. This tree, which is thought to be around 150 years old, displays characteristic dense, horizontal branches. Look out of the large cones which sit on top of the branches. From the **Cedar**, head back towards Kings Bridge and continue straight up Queens Road, following the majestic **Horse Chestnut** trees once again, until you reach West Wight Middle School.

*At this point in the trail there is the option to extend the route. This will take you to Farringford House which is open to the public for refreshments. If you prefer to walk the shorter route please proceed to the \*.*

Continue along Queens Road and you will soon arrive at Pound Green. If you wish to see the village pound, take a short detour to your right to view the circular stone construction. The village pound is where straying livestock were kept until their owner paid a fee to have them released. Several village pounds remain on the Island of which the Freshwater Pound is an excellent example.

Cross back over Queens Road, and then cross over Camp Road to join footpath F41 which takes you through Granny's Meade. Recently, local residents planted several young **Oak**, **Walnut** and **Rowan** trees alongside the footpath. Pass through the gate onto Bedbury Lane and cross to your left to join the drive to Farringford House. Please note, access to

Farringford has been granted by kind permission of the owners. Please keep to designated paths and do take afternoon tea.

Built in 1806, Farringford House was the Island home of the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson (1806-1892) for over 40 years and the house became the focus of a literary and artistic circle. Something of a celebrity of his time, Tennyson entertained many famous and fashionable Victorians including Charles Darwin and Lewis Carroll.

**(8)** Make your way up the drive and the first tree to visit is the Garibaldi Tree II. The newer tree was planted in 1996 by the Tennyson Society and is a **Wellingtonia** or **Giant Sequoia** - the same species as the original tree. The first Garibaldi tree also known as 'Tree of Liberty' was planted in 1864 by Guiseppe Garibaldi the Italian Revolutionary. Great crowds gathered to witness the event, apparently much to the displeasure of Queen Victoria who did not approve of the Italian. Unfortunately, the tree succumbed to disease - the top photo shows the dead tree, before it was cut down in 1959. The trunk remains with an informative plaque. The replacement tree is flourishing and a new plaque accompanies it.

By the terrace stands an impressive **Cedar of Lebanon** tree, certainly present in Tennyson's time **(9)**. It perhaps formed the inspiration behind the line from Tennyson's description of his life at Farringford in a poem to his friend Reverend Maurice in January 1854

*"...And only hear the magpie gossip  
Garrulous under a roof of pine..."*

Tucked away around the back of the house next to the conservatory is a wonderful, glossy

**Magnolia**. It is thought that the American poet, Henry Longfellow presented this as a cutting to Tennyson in 1868 during a visit to Farringford. The **Magnolia** is thriving in its south facing position. Catch it at its best in full bloom in early summer (right).

Leave Farringford House via the drive and retrace your steps though Granny's Meade, across Camp Road and back down Queens Road until you reach the school. Here, turn right to join footpath F39.

\* In the playing field to your right stand two towering **Monterey Pine** trees **(10)**, the remains of a line of trees originally planted as a windbreak from the prevailing south-westerlies, probably at the time the school was opened 1906.

A little further along lies a remnant of an old hedgerow - a squat **Ash** tree with a hole right through it **(11)**. Its unusual shape arose as it was regularly cut back or coppiced over many years, forming a large rotund trunk burr.

Follow the footpath around to the right and onto Camp Road. Turn left here and continue down Camp Road, until the turning to footpath F21. This footpath takes you onto Stroud recreation ground. Along the boundary fence to your left is a large **Eucalyptus** tree. Although this is not an old tree, it is one of the best to be seen on the Island, displaying stunning, colour variation in its naturally peeling bark.

Retrace your steps back to the tarmac path and then cut straight across the rec towards Stroud Road. Turn left onto Stroud Road and head towards the mini-roundabout. The Hooke memorial is across the road. Robert Hooke, born in Freshwater in 1635 was a remarkable natural

philosopher. His achievements include coining the term 'cell' to describe the basic unit of life and the invention of microscopy. He was also chief surveyor to the City of London after the Great Fire.

From the Hooke Memorial, go to Afton Road, passing by the End of the Line café, once Freshwater Railway station. The last train journey on this line to Newport was in 1953. Join footpath F67 just beyond the café. This path follows the old railway line to Yarmouth, passing alongside the Western Yar River and Afton Marsh. At one time, the area west of the Yar was an Island. The marsh and surrounding area regularly flood and it is only ongoing preventative management which keeps the sea at bay.

This track leads to the causeway, passing through reed beds to your left and wet **Willow** and **Alder** carr or wet woodland to your right. The marshes are a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and provide a valuable habitat for wildlife such as water voles, and breeding birds such as reed and sedge warblers.

Join the causeway and head to your left. This was once the only crossing point over the Western Yar. Great views down the estuary can be enjoyed from here as well as sightings of many wading and sea birds, particularly at low tide. Once you have crossed the causeway, you will see a World War II pill box on the left side of the road. There were many of these look-out posts at strategic locations on the Island.

Just beyond the cottage on your right, you will see a looming lump along the boundary wall which appears to be a mound of rock. Take a closer look for this is the remains of a mighty **Elm** tree (**12**). The size of the stump perhaps

gives us some idea of how colossal this tree may have been. When alive, it would have had an even larger girth; both the bark and sapwood have rotted away leaving the heartwood. Note the way that the stone wall seems to disappear into the trunk.

Continue uphill towards the church, taking care as the road is narrow and has no pavement. All Saints Church will come into view to your right. The church dates back to the 13th century and was among the first to be established on the Island. The churchyard could be described as a mini-arboretum as it contains up to 80 species of tree and shrubs within its five acre plot. It is carefully managed for conservation; the grass is kept long in places to enable the wildflowers to grow. The churchyard also is the resting place of some eminent people and has some the Island's oldest legible headstone inscriptions.

**(13)** As you enter the churchyard, immediately to your right stands an ancient **Yew**. This **Yew** is multi-stemmed and has been coppiced or regularly cut back in the past. **Yews** are incredibly difficult trees to date, and this being a coppice makes it even trickier. However it is thought that this champion Yew tree could possibly be the oldest tree the Island.

To your left, in contrast in age and size stands the All Saints Church Millennium **Yew**, planted as a cutting taken from the Hayling **Yew** which is thought to be over 2000 years old. This tree was planted in the year 2000 by the junior church and the mothers' union. Let's hope that it survives to become as impressive as its neighbour, although it may take several hundred years!

Other trees of interest include a second ancient **Yew** which lies on the eastern boundary of the

churchyard. It is common to find Victorian dignitaries of a parish buried beneath a **Yew's** shady canopy, but we can see that Lady Emily Tennyson was piped to the prime spot.

Traditions associated with the **Yew** pre-date this churchyard by many centuries. The **Yew** was believed to repel evil spirits and protect the dead. The tree has qualities of longevity and regeneration as drooping branches of old **Yew** trees can root and form new trunks where they touch the ground. It is also believed that the wood from the **Yew** was superior; it was used to make medieval longbows and provided protection when required.

Also, you can find the Mountbatten Tree, an unusual **Dawyck Beech**. Lord Mountbatten was Governor and Lord Lieutenant of the Isle of Wight and this tree was planted to commemorate Mountbatten's death on 27th August 1979.

Finally, the Silver Jubilee **Oak**. This is a young Common Oak tree planted in 1977 by Commodore Ian Brodie, church warden (1968-1992), to celebrate the Queen's Silver Jubilee.

Leave the churchyard via the lynch gate, passing the Red Lion pub to your right. Towards the end of Church Place, cross the road to join footpath F66. This becomes footpath F17 also known as Longhalves. It is not known where the name derives from, but is certainly an old right of way which would have formed one of the links between the original five ancient settlements.

Near the start of Longhalves stands an old coppiced **Field Maple**, the final tree on the Poets and Pines Histree Trail (**14**). This small but characterful tree would have been a waymarker, indicating the direction of the old

byway. This tree has several stems, some of which have fused together to form interesting, intertwining shapes.

Continue along Longhalves, passing the raised bank to your right with many mature Ash trees. Take the next left into footpath F18 which runs alongside All Saints Primary School. This path will bring you back onto School Green. To return to the start of the trail cross the road here.

*Thank you for walking the Poets and Pines Histree Trail. There are seven other Histree Trails in the series for you to enjoy.*

# Poets & Pines Histree Trail

3.9 miles / 6.2 km



- Main route
- Route on roads/paths
- Route on tracks
- Footpaths
- Brideways
- Start
- Public house
- Tea rooms
- Parking
- Toilets
- Bus stops

