



Poohsticks and Sandpits Ashdown Forest, Hartfield, Pooh sites

Distance 17km (10½ miles) or 2 walks of 10km & 10½km (6 & 6½ miles)
easy walking with one moderate ascent

Region: East Sussex

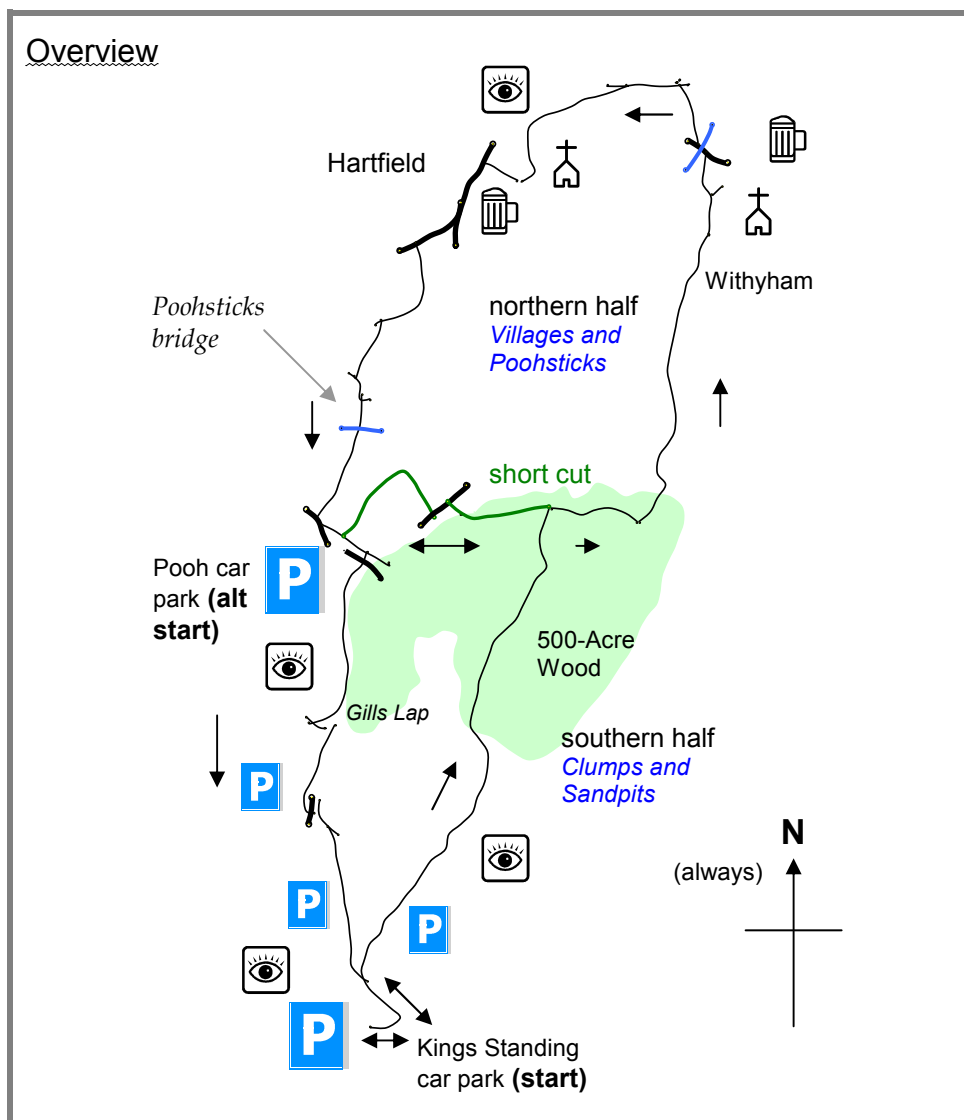
Author: Stivaletti *comments please to feedback@fancyfreewalks.org*

Refreshments: Hartfield

Map: Explorer 135 (Ashdown Forest)

Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

Heath, villages, woodland, literary references



In Brief

This circular walk in East Sussex shows the best of the heathland and woodland of Ashdown Forest and of the small towns that surround it while visiting many of the magical sites mentioned in the *Winnie-the-Pooh* stories.



The walk can be divided into two shorter walks: **Villages and Poohsticks** (10½km / 6½ miles) is the twisty northern half. **Clumps and Sandpits** (10km / 6 miles) is the breezy southern half which takes in the wilder spaces and the other Pooh sites.



There are a few nettles in the northern half near Hartfield and some brambles a little later, making shorts inadvisable. The going underfoot is generally easy with good paths. Dogs are welcome, especially on the open heath of the southern half.

The full walk begins at the **Kings Standing** car park (grid-ref 473302) in the centre of Ashdown Forest. If you are doing the *northern* half, you should begin at the **Pooh** car park, which can also be used to start the full walk. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

If you are doing only the *northern* half, beginning at the **Pooh** car park, you need to start with **Pooh to the Hundred Acre Wood**, a short cut described at the end of this text. If you start the *full* walk there, begin at Leg 5 below.

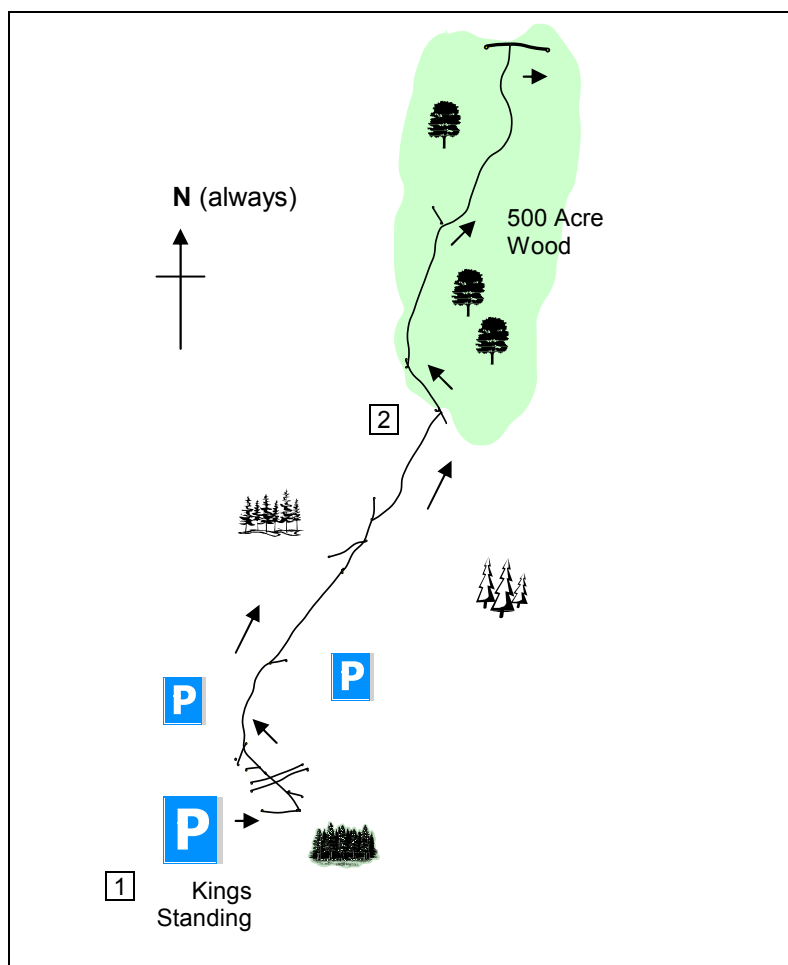
Leg 1: Kings Standing to the Hundred Acre Wood 4km (2½ miles)

You begin in the very centre of the forest. As you see, this is not woodland. The word 'forest' originally meant 'the woods outside' as opposed to the lands inside the lord's enclosure. The king would ride out and at this spot he would have stood waiting for the deer and other game to be driven past him. The clumps of scots pines were planted here and in other areas of the forest by Arabella Diana, Duchess of Dorset.

- 1 **See map overleaf.** Take the path from the back of the car park, with the Kings Standing clump on your right. In 50m, just before the bracken begins, at a crossing path, turn **left** on a narrow path. The path curves left and left again by a line of trees and comes to the B2026 road by the entrance to a riding centre. Cross the road to a track opposite. The track is joined by a track from the left and veers right. When you reach a clump of pines on the right, keep straight ahead, avoiding the right turn that goes to the Black Hill car park. Continue onwards, avoiding all turnings off and side paths until, after another 700m, you meet an even wider path joining from the left, part of the Wealdway. *The Wealdway is a long-distance footpath running from Gravesend on the Thames estuary to the sea near Eastbourne.* In a few paces, take the **right** fork, thus joining the Wealdway.
- 2 Eventually the path meets the treeline at a T-junction. Turn **left**. The path gradually descends into charming woodland and soon you are joined once again by the Wealdway and there are 'WW' symbols to guide you. Eventually the path goes through a small wooden gate into the Five Hundred Acre Wood. *The 'Hundred Acre Wood' referred to in the Pooh stories is*

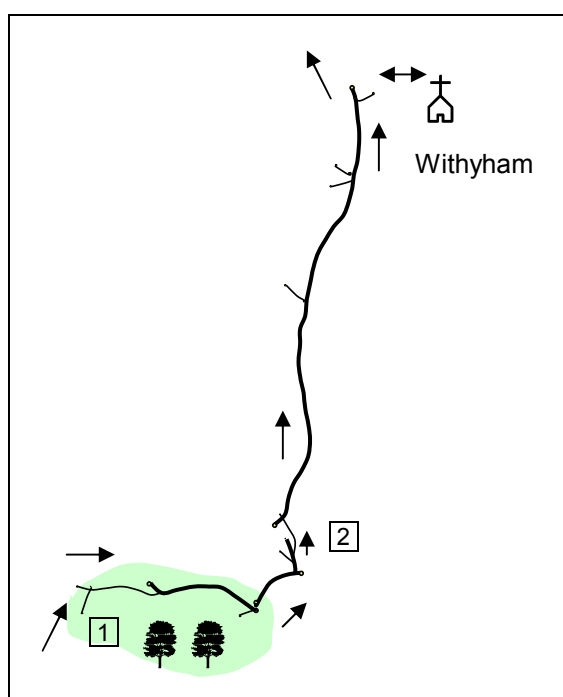
probably this one. Finally you reach a T-junction at the edge of a field. Turn **right**.

At this point, the *northern half* joins the walk.



Leg 2: Hundred Acre Wood to Withyham 3km (2 miles)

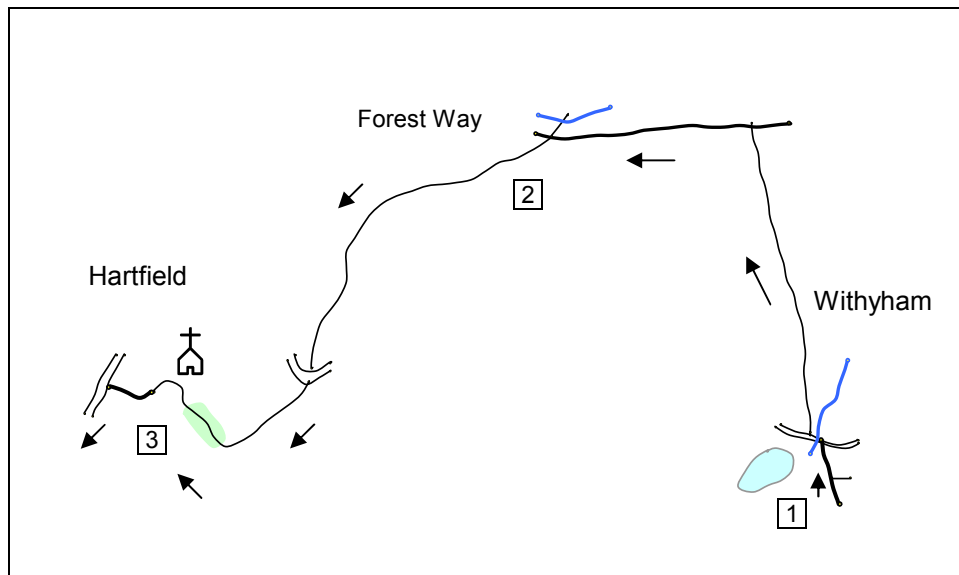
- 1 The track joins a drive coming from *Kovacs Lodge*. The drive bends left by a junction of tracks and passes a footpath on the right. Where the lane splits soon after, take the **left** fork and the tarmac road that goes past a small pond on the right. In 20m, take a footpath on the **right** that runs parallel to the road, going over a stile into what is part of the Buckhurst Estate.



- 2 The footpath bends left round the side of meadow and comes to a lane by a large property called *Fisher's Gate*. Go over a stile and turn **right** on the lane. There are views left over fields and, just before a house, appropriately called *Thatchers*, you have a view of Hartfield church. Soon you reach the first houses of the village of Withyham. After the fence, turn sharp **right** to make a small diversion to Withyham church.

Although Withyham is not mentioned in the Domesday Book, a church stood here at least from the late 1200s. The Church of St Michael and All Angels at Withyham as it stands today is mainly the result of a rebuilding finished in 1672 after the earlier edifice was almost destroyed in a thunderstorm, together with some sweeping Victorian alterations. The church is crammed full of historical detail, from furniture to windows, plaques to pictures. Dominant everywhere are references to the Sackville family with several contributions by way of pictures and memorials and especially the Sackville chapel in the north-east corner which is owned outright by the family. The centrepiece here is the monument to the young Thomas Sackville and his father, with his mother gazing on. Vita Sackville-West, poet and creator of Sissinghurst is also commemorated here.

Leg 3: Withyham to Hartfield 2½ km (1½ miles)



- 1 Retrace your steps to the lane and continue down to a main road, the B2110. Turn **left**, cross a bridge over a tributary of the Medway, and immediately turn **right** over a stile in the direction of the 'WW' symbol. As you go, keep roughly central in the meadow, between the stream on the right and a hillock in the left. Go over a stile by a metal gate [Nov 2010: there is now just a gap in the fence here] and continue in the same direction across a grassy meadow. On the other side, go over a stile and turn **left** on a fine straight gravel track. This is *Forest Way*, a dismantled railway and also part of the Sussex Border Path and a country park. After an all-too-short 400m on Forest Way, you reach a crossing path indicated by footpath signs. Turn **left** over a stile by a wooden gate. Suddenly you have a full view of the church.
- 2 Aim slightly to the right of the church, go through a gap in the hedge, along the right-hand side of the meadow and over a stile in the corner into another meadow. Go over another stile and take the **left**-hand choice of paths, over a bank and across a meadow to a stile by a metal gate on a

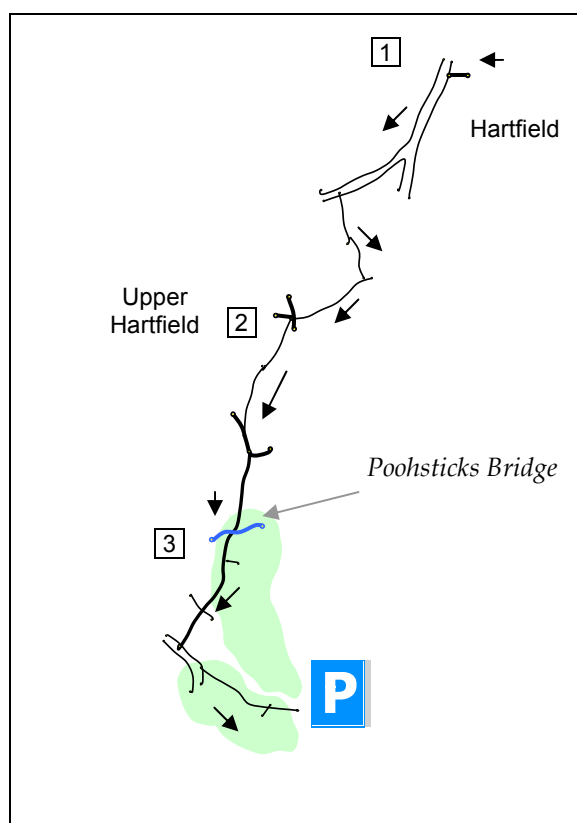
road in Hartfield. Cross the road to a footpath opposite and over a stile by a metal gate. Ignore a footpath on the left and follow wires to the far corner which is usually rather overgrown. Here go over a stile onto a sunken path and shortly emerge suddenly by the church. Go **left** on the drive and immediately **right** up four steps into the churchyard.

The Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Hartfield has stood for 700 years replacing a possibly 300 year old building. It was enlarged in the 1300s and 1400s when the Rectory and the Lych Gate Cottage appeared. The oldest parts are the lower parts of the tower and the north wall of the nave where traces of two 13th century windows are visible. The Church is now floodlit nightly providing a fine spectacle for all around.

- 3 Turn **left** along the side of the churchyard and exit it through a little timbered house known as the *Lych-Gate Cottage*. Go down the lane past attractive cottages and the Anchor, a fine pub that serves a collection of real ales including Larkins. At the far side of the pub is a converted oast.

Hartfield is referred to in the Domesday Book of 1085. In medieval times it grew from a poor agricultural village to a centre of the iron and timber trade. Hartfield was the home of A.A. Milne (1882–1956), author of the Winnie the Pooh books. Brian Jones, guitarist and founder of The Rolling Stones, who was found dead in his swimming pool in 1969, also lived here.

Leg 4: Hartfield to Pooh Car Park 3½ km (2 miles)



- 1 Turn **left** on the main road past another pub *The Hay Waggon*. On the left is another converted oast and on the right a souvenir and tea shop that sells all the A.A. Milne books. At a road fork, take the **right** fork, the B2110 signposted to Forest Row. In 350m, at the entrance to Hook Farm House, turn **left** on a footpath by a wooden gate. At the corner of the first meadow on the left, fork **left**, staying close to the fence, and follow an enclosed path. At the next junction, at the corner of another meadow ahead, keep straight ahead with the fence on your left.

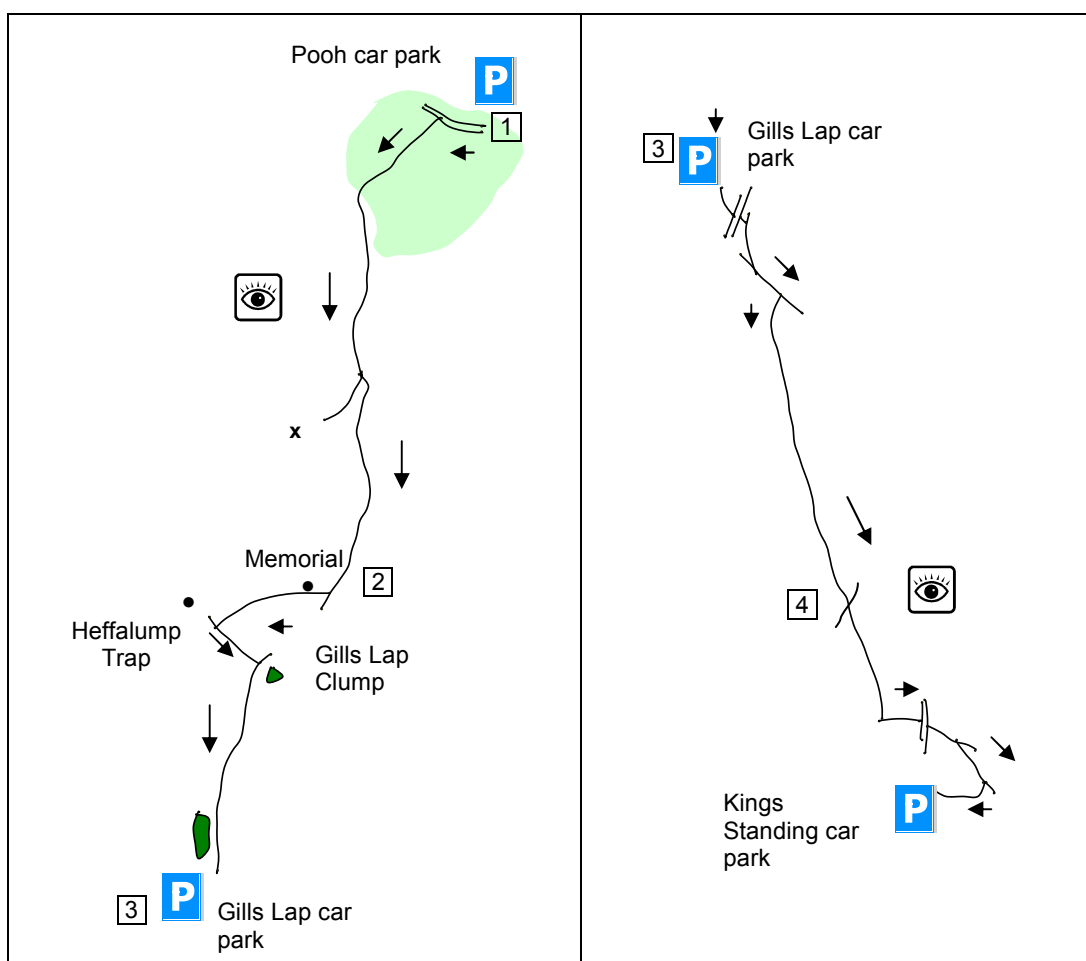
- 2 Go through two wooden swing-gates, then through another out to a lane in the hamlet of Upper Hartfield. Immediately go **left** over a stile marked *Pooh Bridge*. You are on a lovely grassy meadow with views ahead. At the bottom, go over a stile, across the next meadow and over a stile into a lane and continue past *Mole End*. Where the lane bends left, continue ahead on a rougher lane and in 30m keep ahead through posts on a track which takes you to the Poohsticks Bridge.

The game of Poohsticks is first mentioned in 'The House at Pooh Corner'. It can be played on any bridge over a stream with each player dropping a stick on the upstream side of the bridge and seeing whose stick appears first on the other side. The bridge here was originally called Posingford Bridge. The bridge fell into disrepair until rescued in the late 1970s by a nationwide campaign and reopened by Christopher Robin Milne. So many visitors came that in 1999 East Sussex county council successfully appealed to Disney and others for funds to replace the bridge. The game is still played here but visitors are asked to bring their own sticks because earlier visitors have damaged the nearby trees.

- 3 Continue onwards up a bank, avoiding a gate on the right. After some way, continue over a tarmac farm drive and eventually reach a road. Turn **left** on the road. Where the road bends right after a few metres, keep straight ahead on a footpath next to *Andbell House* with its large horse-head gate posts. After 200m, ignore a marked footpath left, keeping to the main woodland path and avoiding all paths off. Soon you have a small wooden post on the right and you reach the Pooh car park, 40m on, visible just ahead where the path forks up a slight slope.

If you are doing the *northern half*, the walk ends here. If you are doing the **full walk**, continue with **Leg 5** below.

Leg 5: Pooh Car Park to Kings Standing 4km (2½ miles)



- 1 Exit the car park to the road and turn **right**. In 50m, turn **left** onto a sandy path. The path curves left and you are in a wild terrain with fabulous views on the right. Soon you reach a junction with a seat on the left and a path ahead curving right on the contour round the valley. Don't take the

contouring path (regretfully) but fork **left** past the seat on a wide sandy ascending path. The path goes gently uphill, then a little more steeply. In 450m, after a steep section and almost at the top, there is a clump of assorted trees on the right. Turn **right** here to a plaque commemorating A.A. Milne and E.H. Shepard.

A.A. Milne (1882-1956), a noted essayist and playwright, bought a country home in nearby Cotchford Farm and here had the idea for the Pooh stories, based around his son Christopher Robin and some soft toys. E.H. Shepard (1879-1976) was a cartoonist and illustrator who took on the job of bringing the characters to life pictorially. Neither man was able to live down the huge success of the Pooh stories. Shepard based the Pooh image on his son's own bear who was called 'Growler'.

- 2 Don't go back to the track but veer **left** between two posts in a fence and follow a narrow path between gorse bushes. At a T-junction, turn right for 10m to see the Heffalump Trap.

The Heffalump Trap is a large sand pit with a sole conifer. It is here that Pooh and Piglet bravely try to capture a heffalump and in the second book 'The House at Pooh Corner' are themselves trapped.

Backtrack and continue ahead to a T-junction with a wide sandy track. On the other side of the track is a clump of pines known as Gills Lap.

'... and by and by they came to an enchanted place on the very top of the Forest called Galleons Lap' (or 'Leap'). This is really Gills Lap, a particularly fine clump of pines. 'Roo's Sandpit', 'Eeyore's Sad and Gloomy Place' and the 'North Pole' are also nearby.

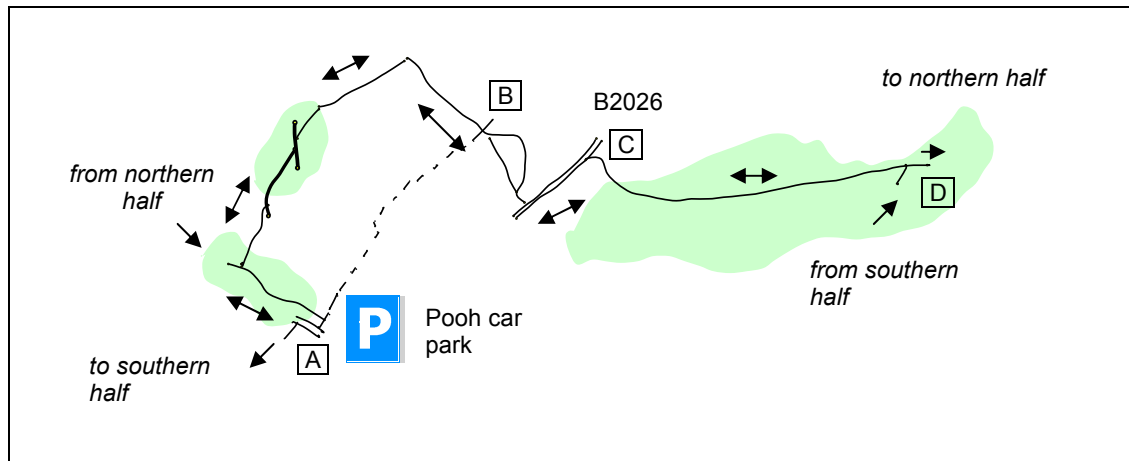
Turn **right** on the wide track. In about 200m, you pass a bench and there is a line of pines ahead. Fork **left** before the pines to emerge at the Gills Lap car park.

- 3 Turn **left** through the car park, go out through the main entrance and cross the main B2026 road to a path opposite. In just 20m, turn **right** on a grassy path that runs parallel to the main road. In 100m, the path meets another path coming from the right and veers away from the main road. Just 80m further, turn **right** on a wide clear sandy path uphill. You are now walking parallel to the B2026 road again and will follow this path for some distance.

- 4 Eventually the path is intersected by the Wealdway, familiar from its 'WW' symbol. Further on, the path meets the B2026 road at the Pines car park, opposite the Busky Willows car park. Veer **left** away from the main road again and follow a narrow path, keeping the same direction through a number of small junctions, down to the B2188 road. Cross the road and take a path to the right of an entrance to a riding centre. Shortly, fork **right** on a wide path uphill. Veer **right** at the top and veer **right** again in front of the Kings Standing clump, and thence back to the car park.

Pooh to the (Five) Hundred Acre Wood 2km (1¼ miles)

This is a short cut for walkers doing the *northern* half of this walk, **Villages and Poohsticks**. It takes you direct from the Pooh car park to the Five Hundred Acre Wood. You can see the wild open spaces of Ashdown Forest another day by doing the southern half.



- A** With your back to the road, turn **left** from the car park, past a notice about guarding your valuables, down a slight slope to a broad woodland path. Continue for about 200m and take a path on the **right** going through the trees where you can see a fence and a meadow ahead. Go over a stile into the small meadow, which usually has horses, and at the end go over another stile and join a stony path ahead, with a view on the left to the pond belonging to *Hurstlands*. Go through a small wooden gate and join a track coming down from the right. In just 30m, fork right on a path through Posingford Wood, indicated by a yellow arrow. After the wood, go over a rather primitive stile onto a grassy path between fields of horses. At the far corner, turn **right** onto a sandy track (or onto the grassy path this side of a ditch).
- B** At a junction with farm buildings on your left, continue straight ahead over a stile into a rectangular area used for exercising horses. You may either go straight across the area or walk on two sides round the perimeter. On the other side, there is a wooden barrier and you continue (turning left if you used the perimeter route) on a narrow path to the main B2026 road. Cross the road and turn **left** on it. (There is a kind of narrow grassy sidewalk to help you avoid the traffic.)
- C** In about 150m, opposite *The Paddocks*, fork **right** away from the road downhill on a narrow footpath. This winding sunken path runs downhill through woodland and goes over a sturdy footbridge across a tributary of the Medway. Note how the tree roots also bridge the stream. Continue through the woodland until you meet a path coming from the right at the edge of a meadow on the left.

You now join the main walk at **Leg 2**.



The (Five) Hundred Acre Wood to Pooh 2km (1¼ miles)

This is a short cut for walkers doing the *southern* half of this walk, **Clumps and Sandpits**. It takes you direct from the (Five) Hundred Acre Wood to the Pooh car park. You can see the villages and the Poohsticks bridge another day by doing the northern half.

- D** **See map above.** At the T-junction at the edge of the field, turn **left** and continue on a wide path through woodland and eventually go over a sturdy footbridge across a tributary of the Medway. Note how the tree roots also bridge the stream. Follow a winding sunken path uphill until you reach the main B2026 road opposite *The Paddocks*. Turn **left** on the road. (There is a kind of narrow grassy sidewalk to help you avoid the traffic.)
- C** After 150m, turn **right** at a footpath sign onto a narrow path that leads to a rectangular area used for exercising horses. You may either go straight across the area or right and round the perimeter on two sides. On the other side, go over a stile to a junction of tracks with farm buildings on your right. Go straight ahead on a sandy track (or on the grassy path to the left of a ditch).
- B** At the far corner, turn **left** on a grassy path between fields of horses and at the end go over a rather primitive stile into Posingford Wood. After the wood, join a wider track coming from the right. In just 30m, leave the track by going through a small wooden gate straight ahead on a stony path. There is a view on the right to the pond belonging to *Hurstlands*. Where the path curves left, leave it by going over a stile ahead into a small meadow, which usually has horses. At the other end go over another stile, keep ahead a short distance through woodland and at a T-junction with a wider path, turn **left**. After about 200m, you reach the Pooh car park.

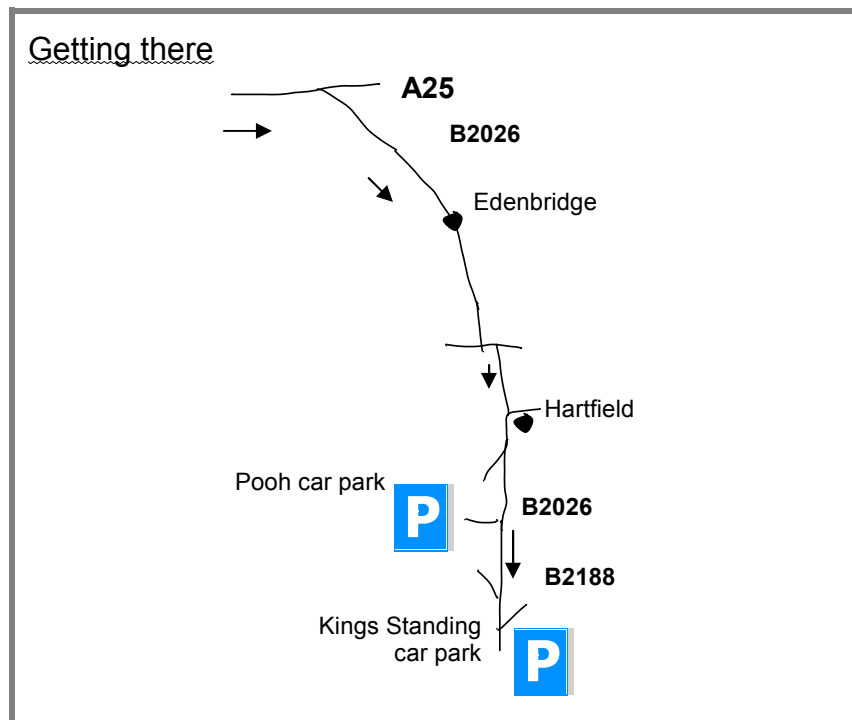
You now join the main walk at **Leg 5**.



Getting there

By car: Ashdown Forest is just west of Crowborough in East Sussex. The **Kings Standing car park** (grid-ref 473302) is 14km (9 miles) south east of East Grinstead. It is on the B2026 half way between Maresfield and Hartfield, just south of its junction with the B2188 (*Groombridge Tun Wells*). The **Pooh car park** (grid-ref 471332) is just west of the B2026, down Chuck Hatch Lane.

One possible scenic route, if coming from the London area, is through Edenbridge and Hartfield on the B2026.



fancy more free walks? www.fancyfreewalks.org