



Ravines and Parkland Ashdown Forest, Church Hill, Withyham

Distance 16½km=10 miles or 12½km=8 miles easy walking
+ an optional extra 3km=2 miles section

Region: East Sussex

written: 24/07/10

Author: Stivaletti

Refreshments: St Johns, Withyham, Boarshead

Map: Explorer 135 (Ashdown Forest)

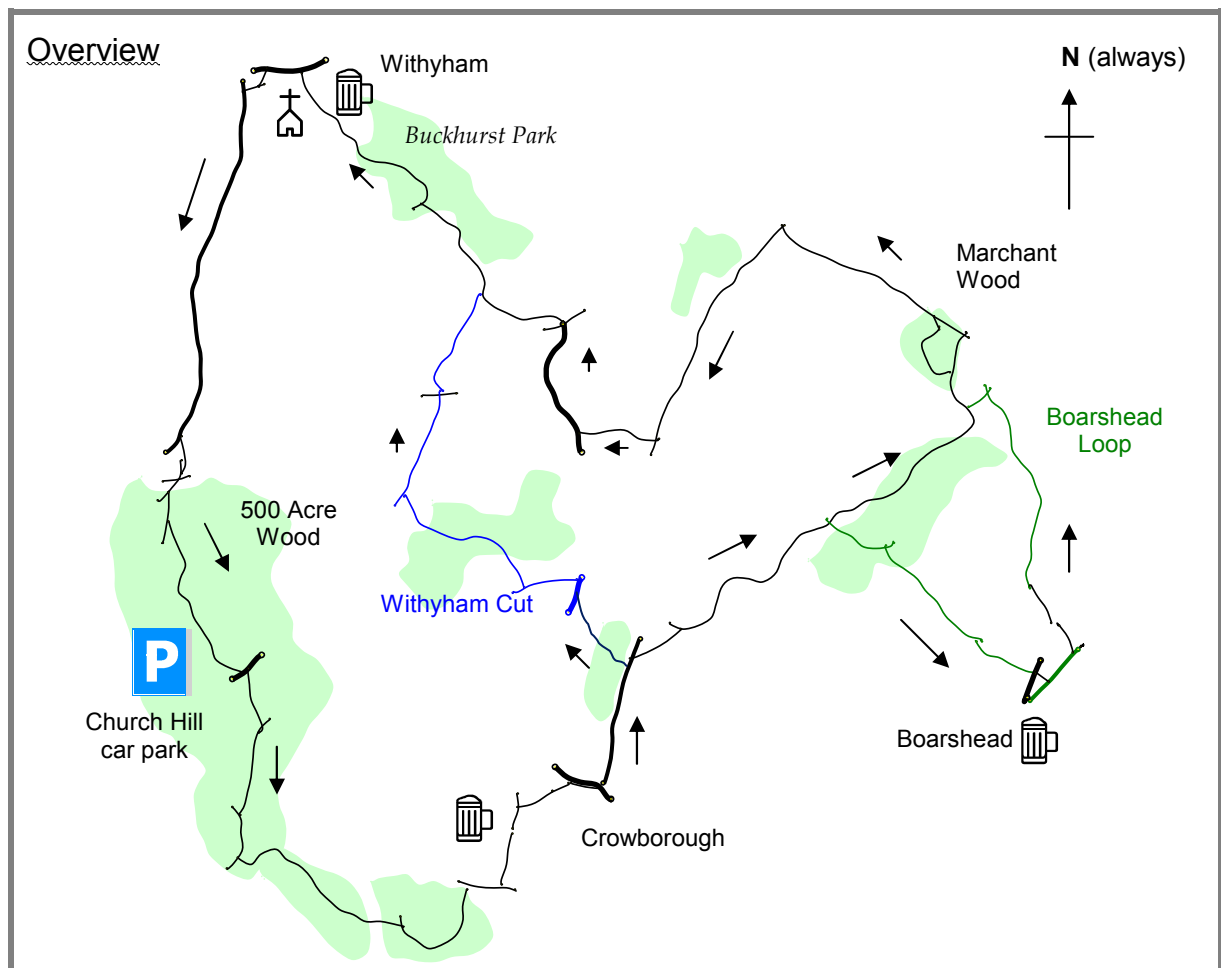
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Woodland, hills, heath, deep valleys, parkland

In Brief

This walk explores the remarkable eastern parts of Ashdown Forest, venturing into the bordering countryside and discovering surprises along the way.





A short cut, the **Withyham Cut**, reduces the walk by 4km (2 miles) but omits some pretty landscapes. An optional excursion to **Boarshead** adds 3km (2 miles to the walk).

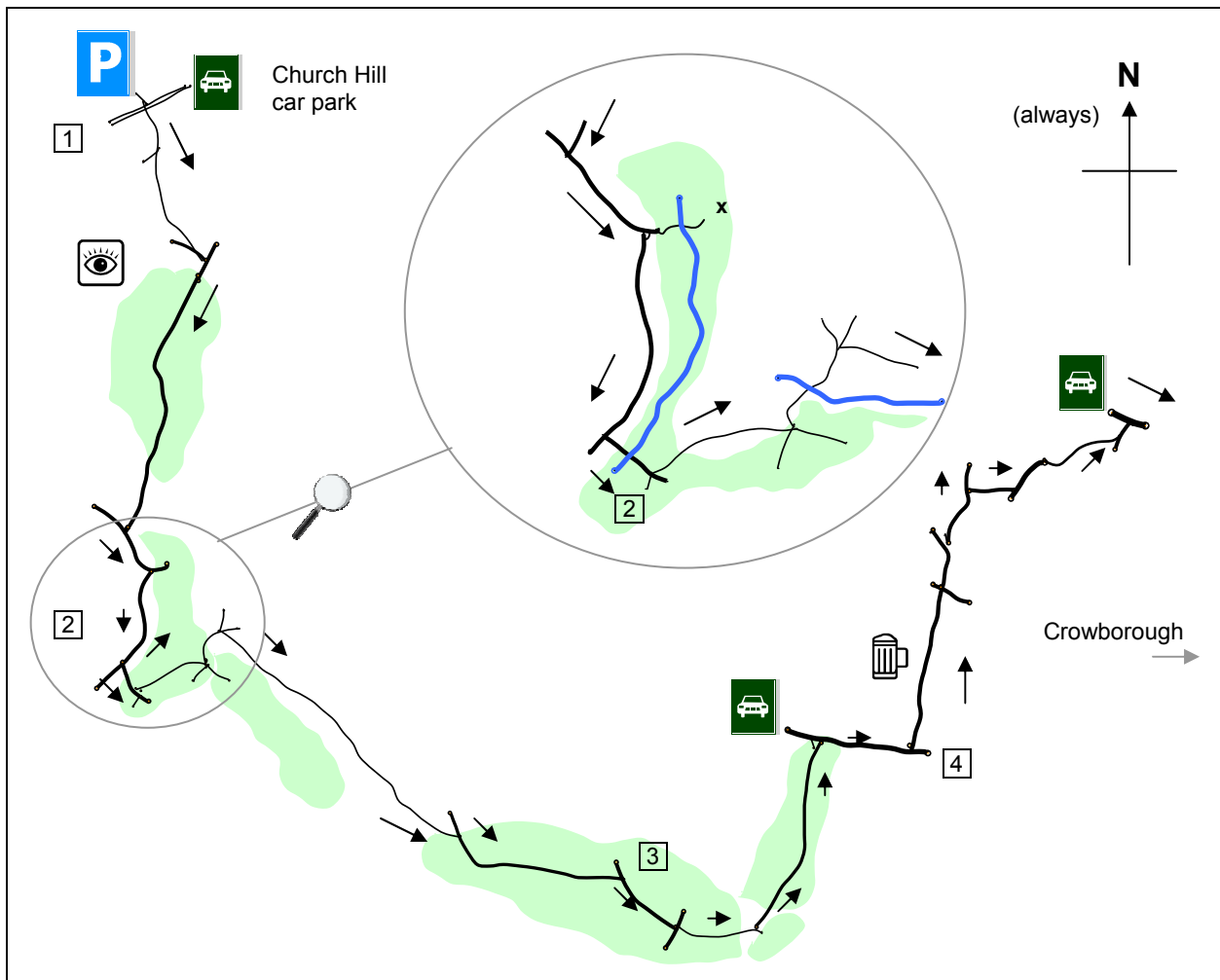


The going underfoot is fine so boots are not essential, though recommended as always. This walk is nettle-free. Dogs thrive on Ashdown Forest, but this walk goes wider afield.

The walk begins at the **Church Hill car park** (grid ref 494327) on the B2188 just northwest of Crowborough, East Sussex. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Leg 1: Church Hill to St Johns 3½km=2¼ miles



- 1 *Already, from the car park, you have a stunning view south across the Forest to the hilly area that will soon be under your feet. Cross the road and take the wide path, south, opposite. The path zig-zags right-left over an open area and then goes over a small crossing path, always going downhill. It joins a track coming down from the right and in 20m reaches a T-junction. Turn **right** on the wide sandy track. After some distance through fine woodland, the track goes through a large wooden gate and,*

after further woodland, it comes to a T-junction with a surfaced track. Turn **left** here. Shortly you come to an area used for stacking timber with a stone bridge on the left and your first view of the deep stream valley. Don't cross the bridge but zig-zag right-left keeping ahead in the same direction on the straight gravelly track with fine views down to the stream valley on your left. Soon you reach another stone bridge on the left. Turn **left** over it on the main track, ignoring a track that goes straight ahead. *This stream valley is a hidden delight, off the usual walkers' beat.*

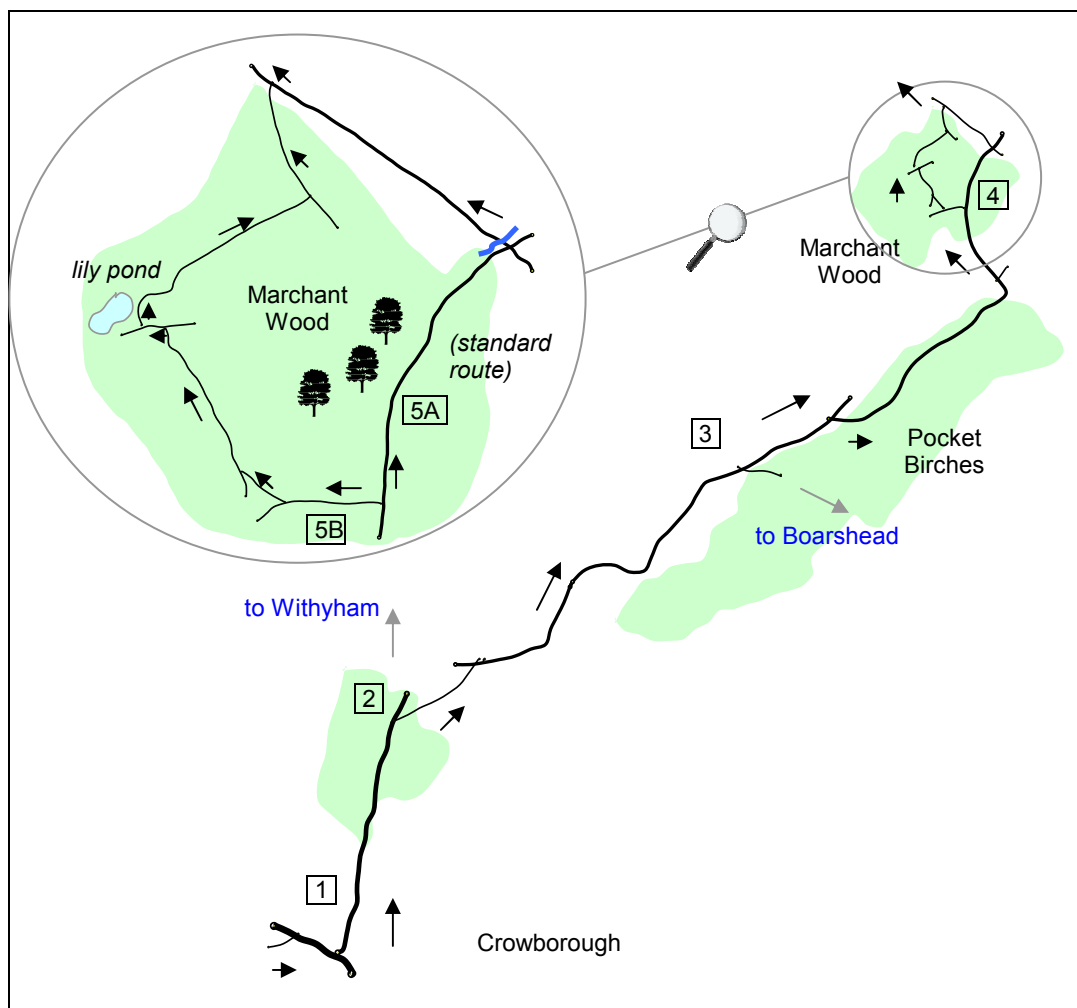
- 2 Immediately after the bridge, **leave** the main track by taking a narrow path that forks **left** downhill. The path winds through woodland and comes to a junction with a straight path coming from the right and, on your left, a ramshackle wooden fence. Turn **left** between the posts of the fence and follow the winding path down to a stream. Step across the stream, up the other side where there is a choice of three paths ahead. Take the **rightmost** rather narrow grassy path. The path winds upwards through young birch and oak trees and follows the course of the stream, visible down on your right in the shallow valley. Stay on the main woodland path, avoiding smaller paths that descend to the stream. The path gradually climbs higher above the stream. Eventually the path reaches an open area and a T-junction. Turn **right**, entering more woods and eventually coming to another T-junction. Turn **right** onto a wide track.
- 3 In 100m, the path goes over a wide crossing track, with a residential road visible up on the right. Continue uphill on a narrower winding path. At the top, go up a bank into a clearing. Cross the clearing, veering **left** in the middle, to head for the corner. Follow the wide path uphill, eventually reaching a road at St Johns, one of the villages that make up the large town of Crowborough. Turn **right** on the road.
- 4 In 150m, turn **left** downhill on Coopers Lane. This is a road of modern cottages, each with its own distinct charm. *You pass on the way the excellent Coopers Arms, a free house.* At the end, go straight ahead down a narrow lane to the left of a pair of redbrick cottages. At the bottom, avoid a path left that crosses a bridge and continue straight ahead across a small yard with a white cottage on the left. Continue up a fenced path and, as it begins to level out, fork **right** on another fenced path. At a T-junction with a small residential road, turn **left**. In a few paces, take a narrow enclosed path running between *Sally Gap* and *Springwood*. At the end, go **left** on a drive, immediately coming to a main road. Turn **right** on the road, London Road, Crowborough.

Leg 2: St Johns to Marchant Wood 3½km=2¼ miles

- 1 **See map overleaf.** In 150m, by a red pillar box, turn **left** on a lane. Follow the lane for some distance until it enters woodland. Just after passing on your right a large timber plant you will see a footpath on your left and, just after it, a fingerpost indicating a footpath forking right.
Decision point. If you would like to shorten the walk and take the direct route to Withyham, jump to the **Withyham Cut** described near the end of this text.
- 2 Take the footpath forking **right**. The path goes through woodland and over a stile into a meadow. Go diagonally across the meadow following the very clear marker posts. In the opposite corner, go over a stile and turn **right** on

the tarmac drive. The path goes past an Oast (note the witch weather vane) and the fine long farmhouse of Gillridge Farm. Soon you have great views on the right, and soon on the left too. The path soon reaches Orznach Farm and Oast. About 100m after the Oast, you reach a junction offering an optional right turn.

Decision point. If you would like an optional excursion to Boarshead slightly lengthening the walk but with a fine pub, take the **Boarshead Loop** described at the end of this text.



- 3** Continue on the track, ignoring the path on the right. Soon there is a coppice on the right. Before a gate, veer **right** as indicated by the finger-post into the woodland of Pocket Birches. *You may see deer here crossing the path.* The path comes out into the open and bends left. Soon it meets a footpath coming from the right which is unmarked.

Here the **Boarshead Loop** re-joins the walk.

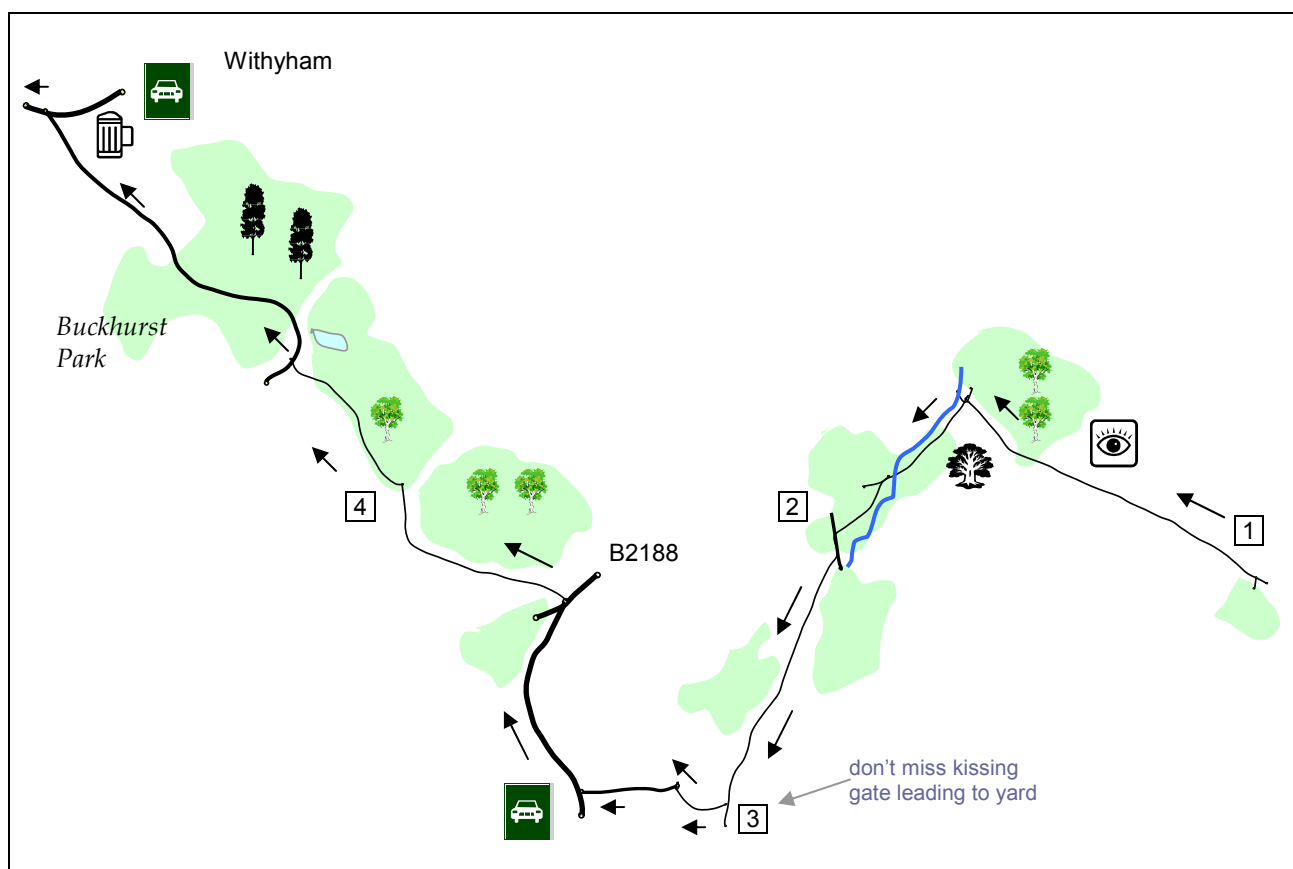
- 4** A little further on, the path enters woodland. In 50m after entering the woodland, you see on your left a sign **no horses in wood please**. *Here there is a "long cut" through Marchant Wood which is one of the unknown delights of this area. It only adds about 100m to the distance. This route is not a right of way, but it seems to be currently open thanks to a kind land-owner. Treat it with consideration and, if you are a large group or in any doubt, take the standard route (Stage **5B**).*

- 5A** **The Marchant Wood "long cut"** (see detail in map). Go **left** at the sign into the wood and after 40m fork **right** and join a path coming from the left.

In 100m, turn **left** at a T-junction and, in just 15m, turn **right** to a quite enchanting little lily pond. Keep to the right around the edge of the pond and in 10m turn **right** on a narrow path. The path, sometimes indistinct, wheels right after 15m and forks left 5m later. At a T-junction, turn **left** onto a path that has a slatted walkway for much of its course. *Be careful not to damage further the fragile slats.* At the end, go through a wooden gate and turn **left** into a meadow.

- 5B The standard route.** Continue straight along the track. Soon there is a meadow on the left with a house visible in the distance and, soon after, you come to a crossing path indicated by fingerposts. Go **left** here over a wooden bridge and up a meadow towards a house

Leg 3: Marchant Wood to Withyham 5½km=3½ miles



- 1** Go up the meadow to a gap with an unneeded stile. *Here it is worth glancing back to enjoy the view to the east.* You go past, on the right, an authentic oast that hasn't been prettified. At the top, go through a gate (better than the stile) and keep to the right-hand side of the field. Keep straight ahead across the centre of two more fields, over a step-over fence and track and across the centre of another field. Go down through a belt of trees and over a stile and down the right-hand side of a beautiful sloping meadow. Ignore the wooden gate on the right under a tall oak. At the other side, turn sharp **left**, still in the meadow, alongside a stream. Just before the corner, turn **right** through a gate, go over a bridge and **left** again through woodland. *You are now in a lovely stream valley. Up on the left is the famous house and garden of 'Penns in the Rocks', named after William Penn.*

2 At a T-junction with a grassy path, turn **left**. In 40m the path crosses a drive. *Note that you are on the High Weald Landscape Trail (HWLT), a long-distance footpath that runs from Rye to Horsham.* In 15m, turn **left** over a wooden bridge as indicated, over a stile and up a meadow, with a classic landscaped garden on your right, to a gate. Go over a stile by the gate and up a path that seems hewn from the large rocks. Go over another stile by a gate and pass, on your right, a rocky outcrop. Follow the line of birches across the top of a meadow, go through a squeeze stile and continue along the right-hand side of a field. Just after entering a second field, look out for a small kissing gate on the right. Don't miss this turning.

3 Go **right** through the kissing gate and into the back garden of *Home Place*. Continue through the yard by this house and various other properties such as *Park Oast*. Yes, this really is the footpath! Continue along the drive and finally exit to a road. Turn **right** on the road for 600m to a T-junction with the B2188 Lye Green Road and go straight across over a stile into woods. Soon the path goes through a very battered wooden swing gate and continues by a fence. After some distance, go over a stile into a large open pasture. Turn **right** along the edge.

Here the **Withyham Cut** shorter option re-joins the main walk.

4 In about 150m, go over a stile in the fence on the right and keep ahead on a path on the other side of the fence. In about 400m, the path leads out into the imposing landscape of Buckhurst Park. The house, not seen on this walk, is up to the left.

Buckhurst has belonged to the De La Warr and Sackville families since the Norman Conquest. Sir George (Jeffrey) Sackville was given the title Lord of Buckhurst in 1200. Anne Boleyn and her sister Mary ("The Other Boleyn Girl") would have known and visited Buckhurst as girls. Queen Elizabeth I visited and hunted at Buckhurst, a royal tradition that was maintained by Queen Victoria, Edward VII and the present Queen and her relatives. The current house at Buckhurst dates from 1603. The park was laid out by Humphrey Repton in the 1700s and in the early 1900s Sir Edwin Lutyens added a wing and Gertrude Jekyll designed a formal terraced garden. The Estate is a working estate which produces organic meat from the fine herds of Sussex Cattle, Jacob Sheep and Large Black Pigs.

Go down the slope and turn very sharp **right** on the wide driveway and follow it past the lake on the right. The driveway passes some white-tiled houses and an old well. It then crosses a bridge over the infant Medway, with a cricket green on the right and some rock formations on the left. Eventually it comes down to a road by the Dorset Arms. *The Dorset Arms is an ideal stopping-off point with its excellent food and ales (all of them Harveys, which is a limitation but not necessarily a drawback) and of course the excellent location with its pleasant little green from which you can watch the world go by.*

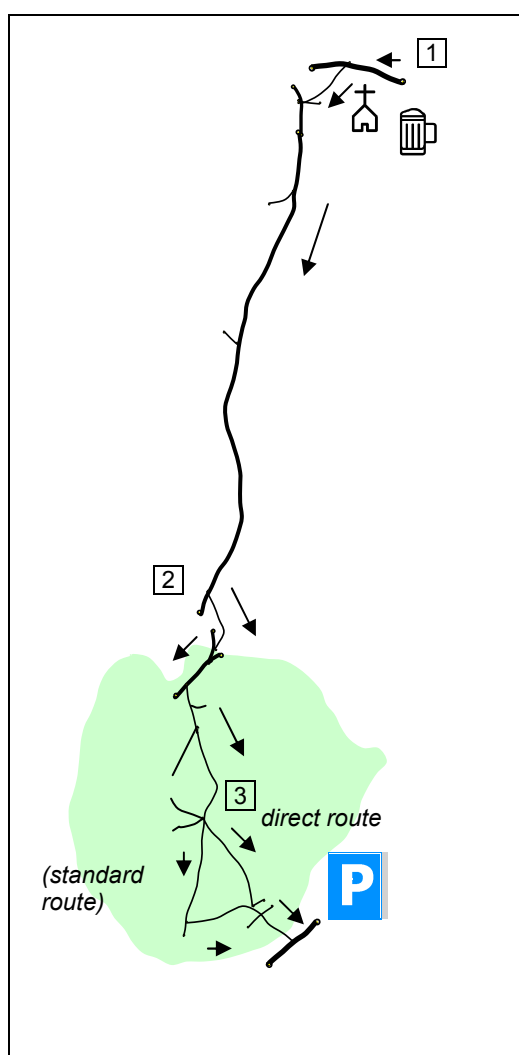
Leg 4: Withyham to Church Hill 3½km=2¼ miles

1 **See map overleaf.** Turn **left** on the road. In 100m turn **left** at a fingerpost through a metal swing-gate and on a path leading up to the churchyard.

The Church of St Michael and All Angels was rebuilt in 1672 but a church has stood here at least from the late 1200s. For more details of the church and the Sackville Chapel that occupies the north-east corner, see the other walk in this series "Poohsticks and Sandpits".

Go round the church and exit the churchyard down from the west door. Go **right** on a drive coming from the Rectory and **left** on a lane. The lane runs for a considerable distance with views to the right and some paths off leading to the occasional farm or house. Finally it reaches the hamlet of Fishers Gate. Before the white gates, go **left** over a stile.

- 2 Keep to the right-hand side of the pasture, rounding the corner, going over a stile, joining the drive and passing a small pond on the left. Go straight over a tarmac drive and turn **right** at a T-junction. In 50m, fork **left** on a stony track, slightly uphill. This is the Five Hundred Acre Wood, referred to in the Winnie-the-Pooh stories as the *Hundred Acre Wood*. In 150m, the track passes a minor junction on the left and comes immediately to a fork. Take the **left**-hand fork, a rather stony track. Keep to the track, avoiding all turnings off, following the yellow arrows, as it curves right and then left and comes to a junction of five paths.



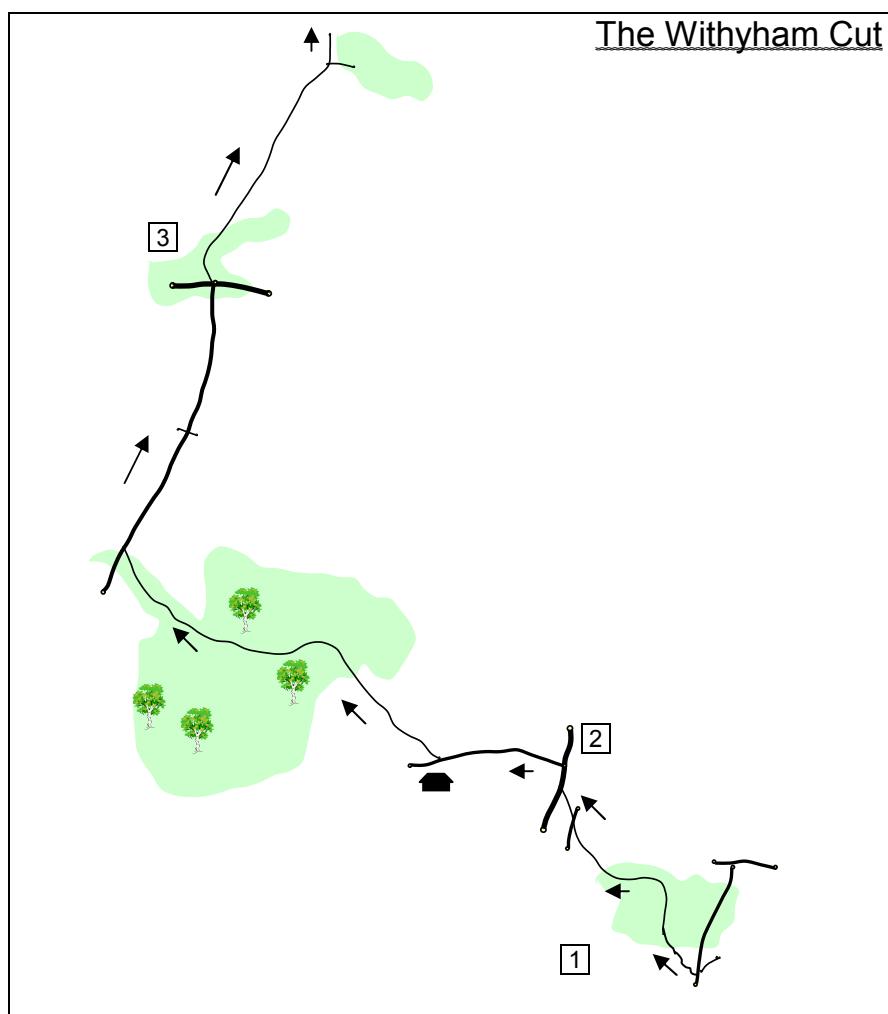
- 3 The **left-most** path will take you, after two crossing paths, direct to the Church Hill car park. It is not marked as a right of way but it does feature on the local-authority-based AONB walking website! If you prefer, take the **second** path from the left, as indicated by a yellow arrow, and continue as follows: in just under 300m, the path reaches its highest point and comes out into a more open and grassy area; soon you pass between trees that carry notices, one on the right indicating that the woods on that side are private and one on the left asking you to keep dogs on a leash; 20m after the notices, turn **left** on a narrower path; the path is joined by another from the right; soon you reach a four-way junction (the path on the left is the direct path referenced at the start of this section). Turn **right** between posts. Follow the path over a crossing path and down to the Church Hill car park where the walk began.

The Withyham Cut 3km=2 miles

This is a short cut for walkers who want to go direct from the Crowborough area to Buckhurst Park and Withyham.

- 1 [Nov 2011: this is a footpath change reported by a walker. Awaiting any further feedback.] Just before the footpath forking right, turn **left** on a footpath. In about 50m, there is a lake on your right and, after some more woodland, a lake on your left. Later, at a gap in the trees, you have good

views left. Follow an enclosed path out to a junction with a farm track. Veer **right** to an enclosed path by a fence, go **left** at the corner and down to a road. Turn **right** on the road.

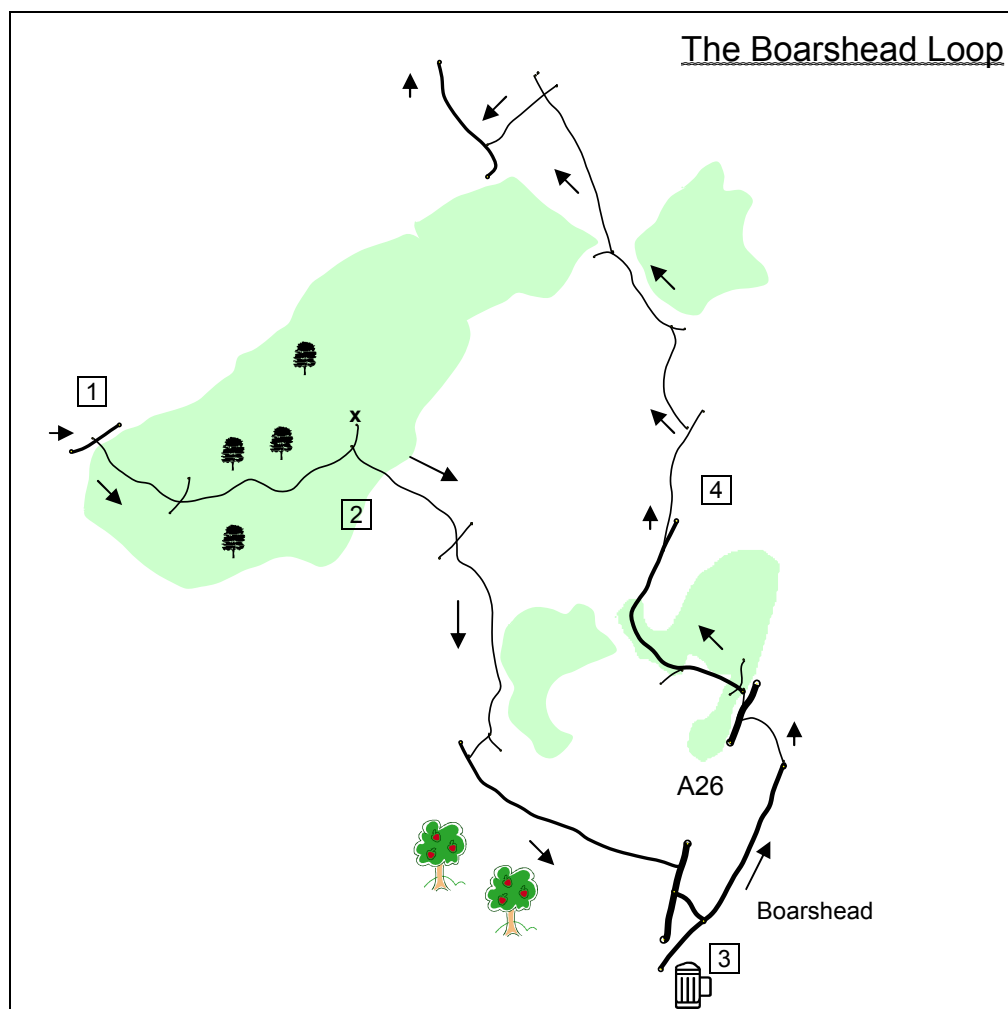


- 2** In 50m, turn **left** on a drive for *Highfields*. It runs parallel to another drive. (You'd think they could share.) Opposite the whiteboard house *Bowmans*, go **right** through a swing gate and follow a fenced path diagonally across the meadow. The path takes you through another swing gate into woodland and, after some distance on a fenced path, on a more winding route leading eventually down and over a stile. Turn **right** on a lane. The lane passes the partially derelict *Whitehouse Farm*. At the end, cross over the B2188 road and go up a sunken woodland path.
- 3** Where the woods end, go over a stile into a large meadow. Keep to the right-hand side and go over a stile at the edge of a wire fence. Keep straight ahead following the ribbon fence between a cattle pasture on the left and a meadow on the right. At the corner of the wood you meet a junction with a stile on your right. Ignore the stile and continue along the right-hand side of the pasture.

Now continue the walk from [Leg 3 stage 4](#).

The Boarshead Loop 4km=2½ miles

This is a short excursion taking you further east across interesting countryside with a good pub en route before re-joining the regular path.



- 1** Turn **right** and follow a narrow path downhill into woodland. At a junction with a crossing track, go straight ahead on another, now wider, track. The track crosses another path and veers right. After passing through a lighter area, the path descends into a darker area and a stream is visible on the right. Here, take a **right** turn to cross a bridge over the stream. (If you find yourself going steeply uphill on the sandy path, then you have missed this turning.)
- 2** Go across the centre of a large field. At the far side, at a 4-way fingerpost, go straight on, along the left-hand edge of the field. At the bottom of the slope, the path turns **left** on a grassy trail, uphill in the open, then over a stile at the top. Zig-zag around the left-hand edge of a big apple orchard. 50m from a corner, find a post with yellow arrows and turn **right** here between the rows of fruit trees. At the next fingerpost, go **left** on a track and follow it all the way to a road, the A26. *There is a farm shop just before the exit.* Go out through the gates, turn **right** on the road for 20m, **left** to a minor side road and right at the T-junction, leading to the Boar's Head Inn.

The Boar's Head Inn is a friendly 17th-century inn just off the main road with a good selection of real ales and excellent food. It has a strict 'no mobile phones' policy and any violation results in a fine that goes to charity.

- 3 After possible refreshment, retrace your steps, **ignore** the side road on the left by which you arrived and stay with the cul-de-sac to the end. Continue on a footpath that curves round to the main road. Cross the road carefully to a path opposite. On reaching a junction of drives, turn left on a track between *Green Loanings* and a metal gate. By a sign for *Leggs Field*, take the **right** fork. Pass *Little Renby* and, shortly after, come to a fence on the left with a sudden fine view. Cross a stile on the **left** and continue in the same direction.
- 4 Shortly, there is a sign steering you onto a dark narrow sunken path through the trees. However, since the path is very gloomy and the sign a little unclear, there's no doubt many walkers stay on the edge of the field and continue to enjoy the view. As the path rounds a field corner, the gloom clears as the path nears the field again and, 50m later, there is a 3-way fingerpost. Fork **left** here and keep to the right-hand edge of the field. (If you were walking along the edge of the field from the start, simply continue.) At the bottom, join a track coming from the right and, 40m later, come to a junction at a fingerpost. Go over a stile on the **right** and diagonally up the centre of two fields. At a 4-way fingerpost, turn **left** across another field and **right** at a T-junction with a track.

Getting there

By train: begin the walk at **Crowborough** station.

By car: the **Church Hill** car park (grid ref 494327) is off the B2188 road. If coming from the London area, one route is via Hartfield and Withyham, or Hartfield and the Kings Standing junction (very scenic). Another route is via the A26 Tunbridge Wells and Crowborough.

