



Withyham and the Five Hundred Acre Wood

Distance: 7 km=4½ miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex

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Author: Stivaletti

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Refreshments: Withyham

Map: Explorer 135 (Ashdown Forest) *but the map in this guide should suffice*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Parkland, green meadows, woodland, views

In Brief

This short walk through the best of the rolling country near Ashdown Forest includes some of stretches already familiar with regular users of this site. But it finds other paths which are less known.

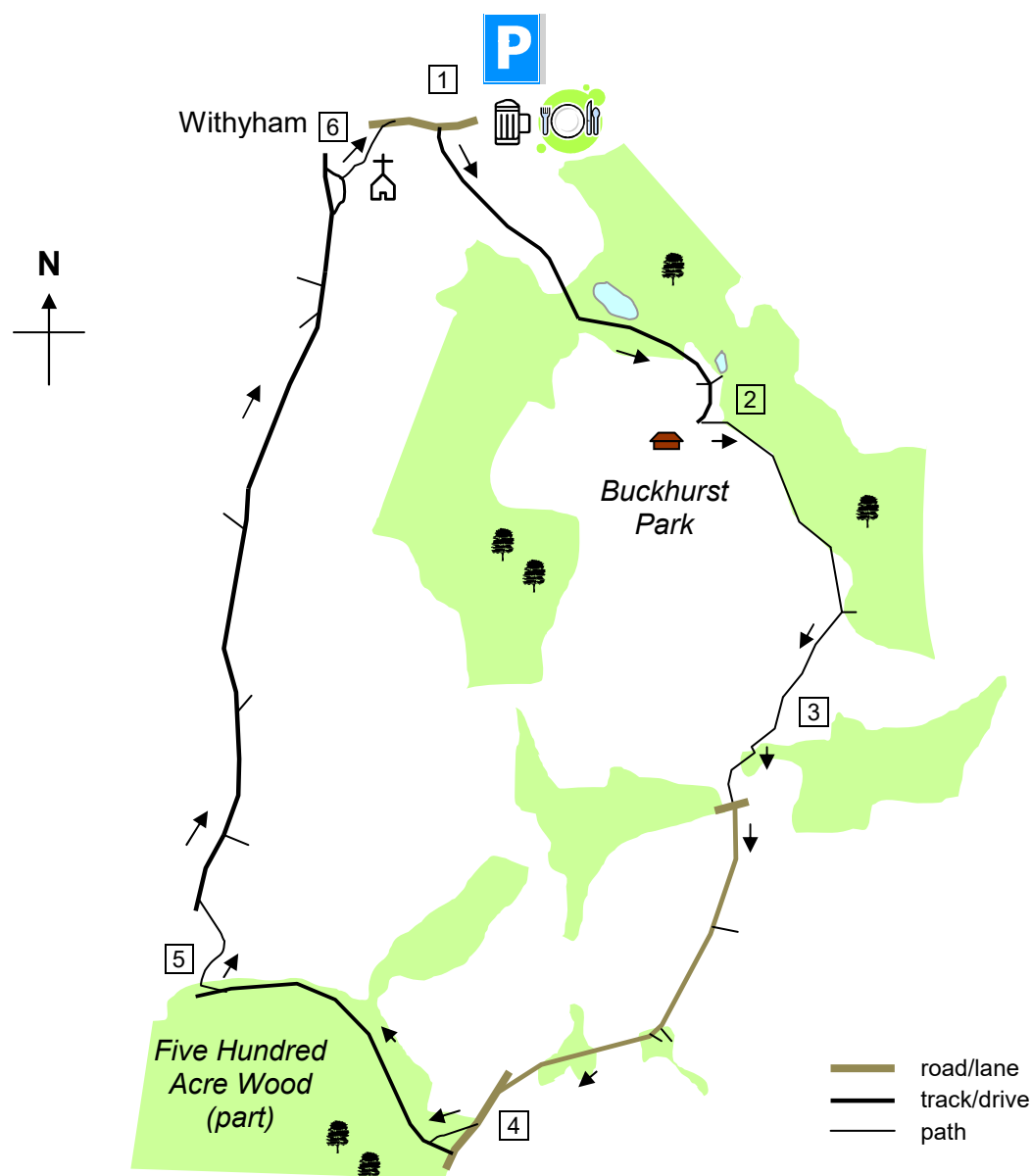


There are no nettles or undergrowth worth a mention on this walk. Boots are necessary in the wetter months, but about 70% of the walk is on surfaced drives, making walking shoes or trainers a viable alternative if the weather is fairly clement. With hardly any main roads, your dog will be very welcome on this walk.

The walk begins at **Withyham**, East Sussex, postcode **TN7 4BD**.. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

In the Winnie-the-Pooh stories, the Five Hundred Acre Wood was close to Cotchford Farm, near Hartfield, which A.A. Milne and his family rented for the summer. But in the book it becomes just the "Hundred-Acre Wood" or simply "The Wood" and Christopher Robin and Pooh go there regularly because in the middle of the wood is Owl's house. The drawing by E.H. Shepherd shows The Wood surrounded by Eeyore's Gloomy Place, Piglet's House, the Heffalump Trap, Kanga's House and Rabbit's House. Several of these places can be seen in the neighbouring walk "Poohsticks and Sandpits".

The Walk



- 1 Beginning next to the *Dorset Arms*, take a tarmac drive, just to the right of small red postbox, through a large open gate. Soon you are in wonderful open country, with pot-bellied Thelwell-type ponies on your right and the Withyham Cricket Club's ground on your left. A bridge over the River Medway leads past an old well head, some whiteboarded houses and a lake on your left. You reach a junction by the Upper Lake. Keep straight on along a curving drive uphill leading to the private estate of Buckhurst Park.

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.

- 2 Before the drive veers right towards a wooden gate, turn sharp **left** by a footpath sign. Ignore a farm gate and track on your right and keep straight on along a path under trees. In nearly 400m there is a large metal gate across your path. Go **right** here over a stile and **left** on a grass path in a large meadow, rising to the top of a low hill. Ignore a stile on your left here and instead turn **right** across the centre, passing several large oaks on your left. Your path diverts a fraction to the right away from the oaks, heading for a stile in the fence ahead, just to the right of a line of trees and cottages, at the point where the wire fence begins.
- 3 After the stile, follow the edge of this large sloping meadow with great views ahead. Part-way down, after less than 250m, find a stile on your **left** leading you into woodland via a wooden bridge. Turn **right** on a wide woodland path leading downhill, leading to a busy road. Carefully cross straight over the road to a tarmac lane, White House Lane. In 300m, ignore a footpath on your left. *(This footpath is used on the great Ashdown Forest walk, in reverse direction, through some wonderful landscapes.)* Continue on this very quiet lane. *(With moss in the middle, it is more like a private drive.)* Later, ignore a stile and footpath on your left and, immediately after, ignore a track on your left, also marked as a footpath. The lane leads over a bridge across the River Medway and reaches the main road. Turn **left** on the road.
- 4 Just after the woodland begins on your right, fork **right** on an unmarked path into the woods. In 100m, this winding path meets a shallow bank. Keep your direction, on either side of the shrubbery, keeping left to avoid a number of fallen trees, to meet a very obvious wide metalled drive. Follow this drive for a total of 700m, soon being rewarded by open views on your right. Finally, at a major fork in the drive, take the **right** fork, *(The left fork leads in 1 km, through deep woods, to the Church Hill car park.)* As the drive wheels right, avoid a private left fork leading to stately metal gates of *Fisher's Gate*, passing a small pond on your right.
- 5 Just before a gate, take a footpath on the **right** that runs parallel to the drive, going over a stile along the edge of a meadow in what is part of the Buckhurst Estate. Go over another stile and turn **right** on the main drive-way. Soon there are views left over fields and, just before a house, appropriately called *Thatchers*, you have a view of Hartfield church. In 400m or so, ignore a fingerpost on your left for *Old Buckhurst*. In another 40m, ignore a fingerpost and stile on your left. Continue on the drive until you reach the first houses of the village of Withyham. After you pass a green with a large house beyond, turn sharp **right** on a drive and shortly sharp **left** to Withyham church.

Withyham is not mentioned in the Domesday Book but a church stood here at least from the late 1200s. The Church of St Michael and All Angels as it stands today is mainly the result of a rebuilding finished in 1672 after the earlier edifice was almost destroyed in a thunderstorm. 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 (see the "Knole" and "Sissinghurst" walks) is also commemorated here.

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Go past the church on your right. Immediately opposite the **far** corner of the church, turn **left** on a path across the grass. Go through a wooden swing-gate down the grass, keeping a raised section on your right, down through a metal kissing-gate, down steps, to the main road. Cross the road and turn **right** on the footway which shortly bends left-right past the village hall. In no time, you are back at the centre of the village and the *Dorset Arms*, where the walk began.



Getting there

By car: The best-known scenic route to Withyham is through Hartfield. If coming from the London area, take the Kent Hatch Road (signposted *Edenbridge*), the B2026, and go through Edenbridge to Hartfield. Turn left at the start of the village to arrive in minutes into Withyham. There are parking spaces either side of the lanes that approach the pub, as well as on the right. You can also park tight on the right of the driveway to Buckhurst Park.

By bus/train: bus 286 from Tunbridge Wells. Check the timetables. There may be other services, possibly with a change.

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