



Abinger Common: a woodland round

Distance: 4½ km=2¾ miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: Abinger Common

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Map: Explorer 146 (Dorking) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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Winding woodland trails, village, bluebells, pub

In Brief

At last some shorter walks! When this site was founded, about 10 years ago, it was normal for walks to be well over 10 miles long (some even up to super-marathon length). Now, by popular request, walks are getting shorter. (This might also have something to do with the author's own rebellious leg joints.) But for those who like a slightly longer challenge, this walk can be combined as a "figure-of-eight" with other walks on this site that go through the village of Abinger Common.

The *Abinger Hatch* pub, described below, is a perfect central spot. It is advisable to check their website or ring (01306-730737) first, as sometimes the pub closes for a private event.



In springtime there was nothing on this walk to worry bare legs. But in high summer the nettles and undergrowth can be quite prolific, making long trousers necessary, and possibly a stick to swish the path clear. There was some mud at the time of writing on the track where they are doing the forestry work, so boots might be advisable unless the weather is dry. This walk is fine for your dog too (with a lead of course) as there is no livestock along the way.

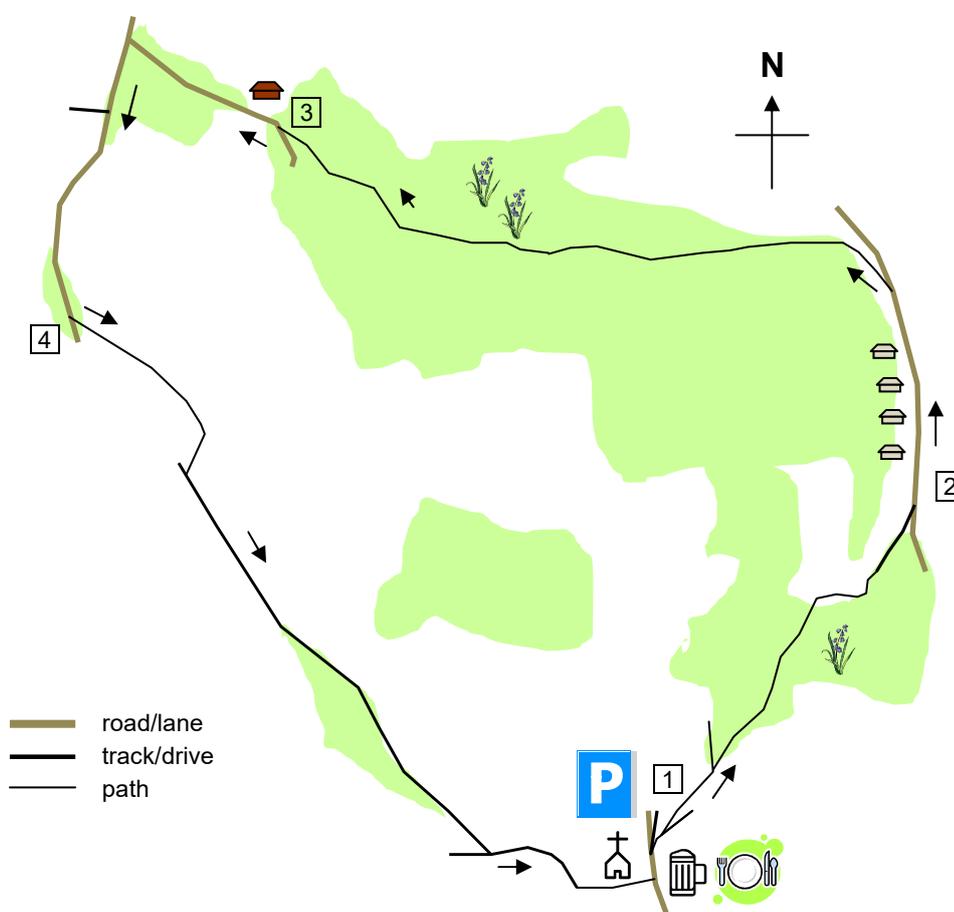
The walk begins at the car park opposite the *Abinger Hatch* pub, Abinger Common, near Dorking, Surrey, www.w3w.co/basis.polite.engage, postcode **RH5 6HZ**. The car park is only about 10m from the pub, on the opposite side of the road, easily recognised by a horizontal bar. You're expected to spend some money in the pub (now or later, or both) in return for the privilege of parking, but that is hardly an imposition, given that this is such a delightful place to take refreshment. Although it is of a decent size, the car park might be fully occupied for some "event" (of the pub or the village hall or the church), so be prepared if necessary to park further up on the roadside. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Abinger may be the oldest village in the UK. A site just south of here, off Hollow Lane, was excavated by none other than Louis Leakey (famous for mapping man's ancestry in Africa). It showed human habitation since mesolithic times, around 7000 years ago. A church already stood here before the Norman conquest. The oldest part of the "new" church dates from 1086. In 1944 a flying bomb badly damaged the church and in 1964 the tower was damaged by lightning, both giving the church a phoenix-like reputation.



The "Abinger Hatch" is another classic local, attracting trippers from way beyond. The food is quite a business here with a well-thought-out menu, and a "2-for-1" offer sometimes on Fridays. Four rotated guest beers are served. Inside is the long airy bar area and a room furnished like a New York loft. Outside, the rippling stream flows beside a long lawn with plentiful benches, giving scope to al fresco quaffing and seasonal barbequing. The "Hatch" is open all day at weekends, for drinks at least.



- 1 From the car par, opposite the pub and on the same side as the church, turn **left** on the road and immediately fork **right** on a tarmac drive which promptly forks again. Take the **right** fork and, 10m later, fork **left** on a flagstone path. This narrow path leads through an old kissing-gate and past a junior school on your left with a marvellous adventure course. Immediately after the school and some gates, where the path forks again, take the **right** fork. The path descends under tall pines and, in late spring, bluebells are abundant. After a wooden swing-gate, you pass on your right an open area used for forestry or for car parking. Shortly, the path joins the track and you come out to a tarmac road.



- 2 Turn **left** on this quiet road. You pass a long line of stone cottages, probably built a century ago for estate workers, with large front gardens, nestling at the back against the hillside. After the last cottage, turn **left** through a swing-gate on a wide woodland path. You now have the delightful prospect of nearly a whole km along this scenic course; bluebells are prominent in late spring. At first there is a new tree plantation down on your right. The path is easy because of the wide vehicle tracks. Soon larch give way to mature beeches. Finally your path emerges by some large fallen trees, near the Tillingbourne River, over a stile to a tarmac lane.
- 3 Turn **right** on the lane, passing *Abinger Mill* on your right, making use of their nicely mown grass verge.



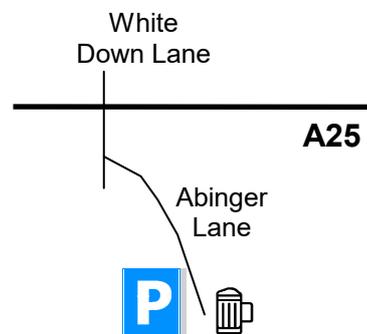
Abinger Mill, also known as Crane's Mill, is noted in the Domesday Book of 1086 as a corn(?) mill, worth six shillings. There was also a fulling mill here from at least the 1200s. Gunpowder was milled here, it's said, from 1589 by the famous diarist John Evelyn and his father. His son Richard converted the mill to a "batter mill" to produce copper kettles, pots and pans. From 1667 the mill ground wheat, barley (for malt) and oats on three separate wheels. Today the remains of the mill include the pond-bay and some of the mill-house foundations, all set in a picturesque garden which have made it a favourite for landscape artists.

In 250m, at a road junction, turn **left** on Raikes Lane, gently uphill. You pass on your right The Dene, a small housing development. After 400m the lane levels off, passes a small red post box on your right and runs beneath some trees. Look now for a signed footpath on your left. *Don't miss this vital turning!* Turn **left** here, up a bank.

- 4 The path takes you past a crop field on your left and straight over a farmer's track. As the large meadow on your right ends, follow the path diagonally right across a small field. At the other side, veer **left** on a wide grassy path. **Abinger Church spire is visible**. Finally, at the top, you meet a wide path coming from the right. Veer left on this path, going through a wooden swing-gate. The winding path takes you through a small metal gate into the churchyard of St James church. Continue out through the lychgate to the road in Abinger Common with the "*Hatch*" straight ahead, where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Abinger Common can be reached from the A25 (Dorking-Guildford) road. Look for a minor crossroads about a mile west of Wotton and turn in the direction *Abinger Common*. Shortly take the **left** fork, also signed *Abinger Common*. The inn and the car park are in one mile.



By bus/train: bus 32 from Dorking. Check the timetables.

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