



Abinger Villages, Holmbury-St-Mary

Distance: 9 km=5½ miles

easy walking with one short ascent

Region: Surrey

Date written: 15-nov-2011

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Sutton Abinger ??, Abinger Common
Holmbury-St-Mary, Peaslake

Map: Explorer 145 (Guildford) and 146 (Dorking)
but the maps in this guide should be sufficient

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

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Woodland, villages, pubs, views

In Brief

This is a walk with huge variety, with a circuit of three Surrey villages (including two Abinger villages, the oldest parish in the UK!) and lovely mixed woodland and pine forests. Along the way, there are three classic pubs* all serving excellent food. Because of the winding paths and hilly terrain, you may measure this walk as rather more than the length given in the summary. (* In November 2022, the *Volunteer* was closed.)

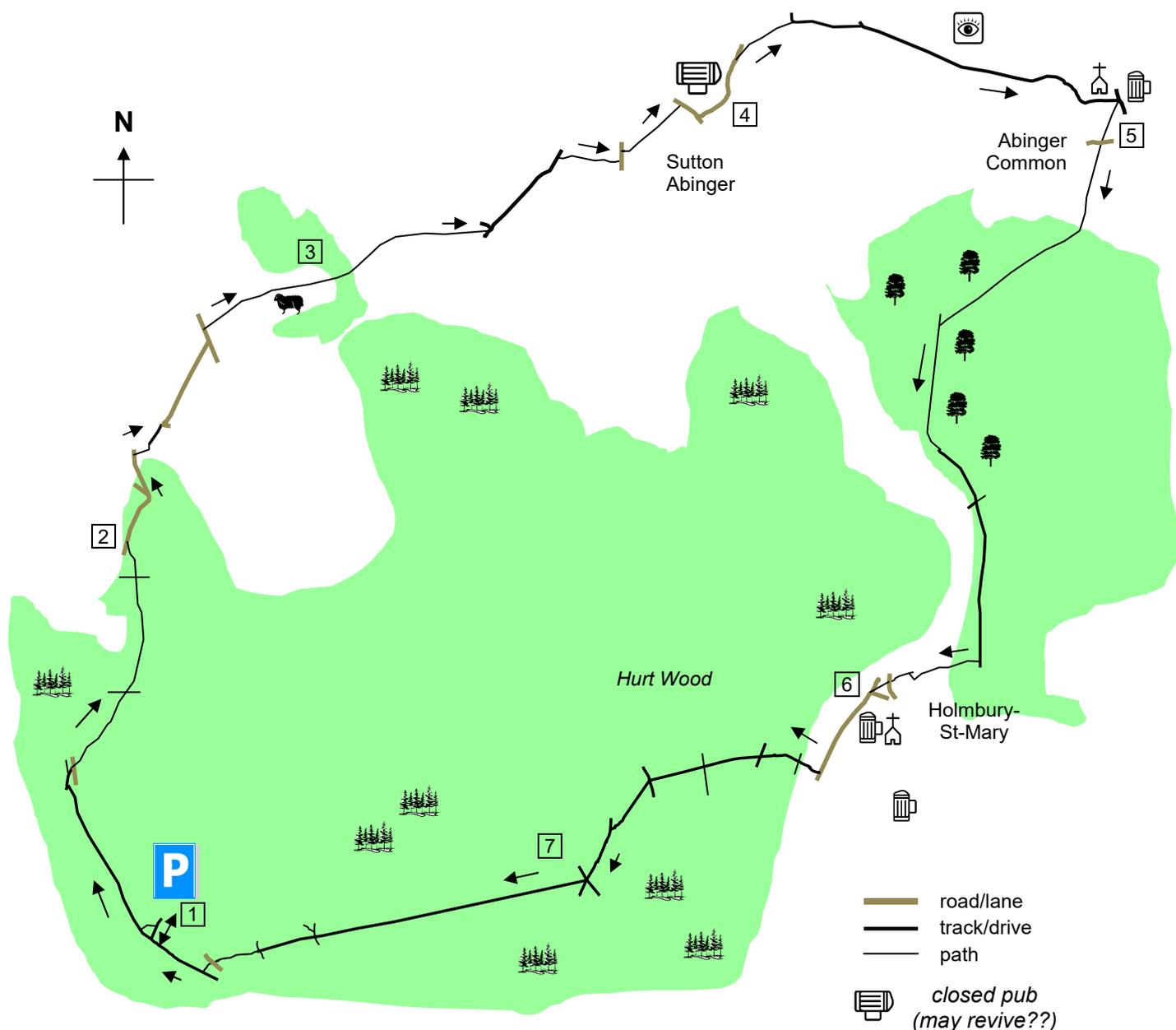


There are one or two paths with nettles where shorts will be uncomfortable, but there is normally a way around. In high summer, some of the enclosed paths may be overgrown and a hiking pole may be useful to get through and to help clear the path for other walkers. Any kind of sensible footwear and clothing should be fine and your dog will enjoy the walk too.

The walk begins at the **Hurtwood Control Car Park 11**, nearest (but only approximate) postcode **GU5 9SZ**, www.w3w.co/corner.pushy.driver. This is just off Radnor Road, south of Peaslake. **Warning! isolated car park: leave car visibly empty - see Guidelines.** You can get there from Peaslake by going past the shop and immediately forking **left** uphill on the very narrow Radnor Road. Go carefully because of bikes! The unmarked car park is about 1 km=¾ mile on the **right**. The signs which used to be here have vanished, so you need to go slowly so as not to overshoot. You can also start at any other suitable point along the route. For a precise map, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk



- 1 Leave from the left-hand corner at the back of the car park, by a small wooden post [Mar 2022: grounded], on a narrow path. In only 10m, at a fork in the path, take the **right** option (although the left fork has the same result). In 30m, at a T-junction, turn **right** on a wide stony bridleway. (*) After 400m through pinewoods, the pines come to an end and a track comes in from your left. Ignore a narrower path ahead and instead turn **right** with the main bridleway to meet a tarmac lane. Cross straight over the lane to a bridleway on the other side, leading over the heath (cleared of trees in 2018). In 150m, you are joined by a wide path from the right. After another 40m, you come to a crossing path. Go straight over and stay near the paling fence belonging to the house on your left. You come to another crossing path near a hedge. (This path may be familiar to walkers who have done the *Holmbury and Pitch Hills* walk in this series.) Go straight over in the direction of a blue arrow [2013-18: still missing]. The path crosses a lawn and goes between gate posts near a house and garden, then down a gravel drive to fork **right** on tarmac, soon joining another tarmac lane coming from the left.

2 Follow the lane round until you reach a small parking area where a bridleway also joins you from the right. The lane forks here. Take the **right** fork, Colmans Hill, going slightly uphill. Shortly, about 20m before some garages, turn **right** at a signpost onto a footpath going uphill. The footpath leads you round **left** and between posts to a residential road. Where a lane joins from the right, keep straight on. As you near the end of the lane, ignore a footpath on your left and turn **left** at the T-junction onto another tarmac lane. In 20m, turn **right** on a drive, initially tarmac, marked as a footpath. Where the drive forks right to a field gate, keep straight ahead on a narrow path. The path leads over a stile into a sheep / horse pasture.

3 Go across the centre of the pasture, over a stile and straight on down through trees. Ignore a footpath on the right and continue up between fences. Go up some steps, through a small wooden gate and along a track that turns to tarmac. At a T-junction with a tarmac drive, cross straight ahead on a narrow path between a fence and a hedge, soon reaching a lane. Turn **left** on the lane, ignoring a left turn. You have fine views ahead of the North Downs as you go past a noticeboard showing a plan of Sutton Place. After a left bend, go **right** on a footpath uphill through some post and rail fencing. (Ignore the new wooden gates sharp right.) The path runs between fences, then via a metal barrier to a lane. Turn **left** on the lane and, in 20m, at a signpost, turn **right** on a path that runs downhill between meadows and wire fences. Below, in the valley, the *Volunteer* ex-pub, your next destination, comes into view. Having reached the road via steps (care! sudden traffic), turn **right** into the village of Sutton Abinger. Turn **left** on Raikes Lane, passing *Tudor Cottage* and Water Lane on the right.



Sutton Abinger is a hamlet (since it has no church) of the parish of Abinger, the name meaning simply "southern settlement" (as Norton, Easton and Weston). It is renowned for its immaculate half-timbered houses and manicured hedges. Prunella Scales (Sybil in *Fawlty Towers*) is one of the residents. *The "Volunteer" is now sadly closed: picture and description retained in hope of a revival.* The "Volunteer" (Hall & Woodhouse) is one of the great outdoor pubs. Its setting is perfect, especially as you saw from the hill earlier, and its very isolation makes it an irresistible destination. The "Volunteer" was re-opened under new management in July 2017 with largely favourable reviews.



4 Continue on the road uphill. In about 150m, at a signpost, go steeply up steps on your **right**. Follow the narrow enclosed path beside a field, arriving at a track at a curve. Turn **right** on the track between hedges. Soon you are joined by a wider track from the left and the country opens out with views all around, the pathway becoming grassy. As you go, the spire of St James's church comes into view. Go through a swing-gate and later a small metal gate into the churchyard. After possibly visiting the church, continue to the road. *Note the stocks on your left!* The *Abinger Hatch* pub is on the other side. Welcome to the oldest village in the UK!



This area was inhabited since mesolithic times, around 7000 years ago. The site is just south of here, off Hollow Lane, and was excavated by none other than Louis Leakey who famously traced man's ancestry in Africa. The parish includes Abinger Hammer and Sutton Abinger, but also extends for ten miles to the Sussex border. When the Normans came, a church already stood here. The oldest part of the current structure dates from 1086 with many later

additions. 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. Four rotated guest beers are served. Inside is the long airy bar area and a room furnished like a New York loft. Outside, white ducks paddle the stream, spilling into the road and a long lawn with plentiful benches give scope to al fresco quaffing and seasonal barbecuing. The “Hatch” is open all day at weekends, for drinks at least.

- 5 Immediately after the lychgate, turn **right** into a small green meadow (or if you went to the pub, turn **right** on the same side of the road as the church and immediately turn diagonally **right** into the meadow). Go past a children’s play area, cross Hollow Lane, go up steps and over a stile into a crop field. Follow the path across its centre and go over a stile down into a holly wood. Your route is down into the beautiful mixed Pasture Wood. The path is narrow through bracken, passing under wires where a path joins from your left. After a cut down section, another path joins. The path, now wider, runs along a beautiful valley, curves left with the wires on the right, heading for the first houses of Holmbury-St-Mary. There are larches on your left and beeches on your right as you go through a small wooden (bypassable) swing-gate beside a large gate. Immediately ignore a bridleway and footpath at a 4-way junction and keep straight on. A little later, ignore another bridleway on the left. Follow this wide woodland path for about 400m, up a shallow gradient and round a double bend, until you see a yellow arrow on a post, easily missed. Turn **right** here on a narrower path. The path goes over a 3-plank bridge, beside a fence and round an oak, then right at a corner. Turn **left** on a drive leading out to the main road. Cross the road and the triangular green to reach a residential road in Holmbury-St-Mary by the *Royal Oak* pub.

Welcome to “heaven’s gate”! This is what George Edmund Street, the eminent Victorian architect (of the London Law Courts among other things), called it when he visited the tiny valley settlement of scattered cottages and decided to set up home here and built St Mary’s church in 1879, just before he died. Holmbury-St-Mary is a Victorian concept. It was originally called “Felday”. The village was renamed after the church and the nearby hill and soon attracted new well-heeled settlers from London. Holmbury-St-Mary may be the model for the fictional village of Summer Street in E.M. Forster’s “A Room With A View”.



2015-2019: The “Royal Oak” is definitely open (but, in case it closes again, note the good alternative below). This pub is a very welcoming unassuming local with good food. It is now a freehouse and even has its own microbrewery, brewing beers under the “Felday” brand. Its other great asset is the attractive lawn in front of the pub with numerous tables from where you can watch village life pass by. *The other excellent pub is the “Kings Head” in Pitland Street nearby.*



- 6 With the pub on your left, continue up the residential road, called Felday Glade after the old village name. In 200m, just after *Holly Cottage*, turn **right** at a signpost on a track marked as a footpath. Go up steps, through a barrier and up more steps. The path now leads you over a wide crossing path and on a rather steep irregular uphill course through trees, over roots. This is the only steep section of this walk, unfortunately coming just after the final pub stop, but at least it is fairly short. In 60m, you meet a wooden barrier and a very wide track at the top of the hill. Go straight over on

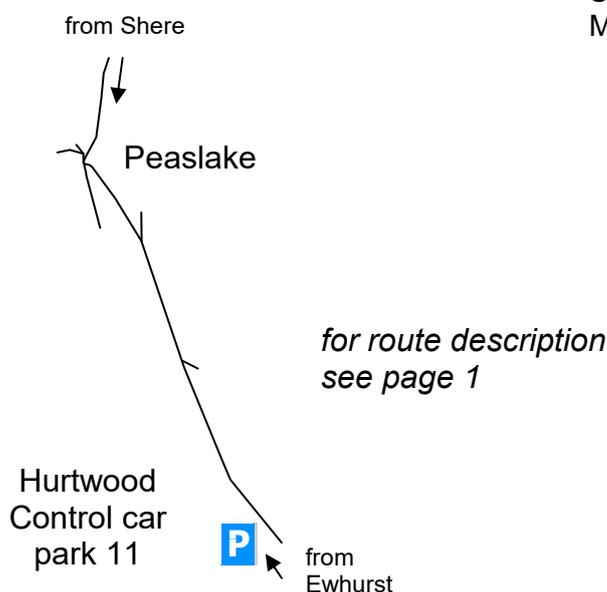
another wide sandy track ahead. In 150m, you cross a straight narrow path under overhead wires. In another 100m, you go over a narrow crossing footpath and 50m later you reach a wide crossing track. Go straight over and immediately keep **left** on a wide track downhill, avoiding a narrow right fork. In 150m, veer **left** to join a broad track coming from your right. In another 150m, you reach a junction with a choice of two divergent tracks on your right. Take the **second** path on the **right**, a sandy wide rather steep uphill path.

- 7 This broad straight level path is fringed with some spectacular pink heather in every season. After a pleasant 700m, you come down to a wide oblique crossing track at a junction of paths. Abandon the wide track here by keeping straight ahead on a narrower track, going uphill. In 150m, you meet a very wide crossing track. Continue straight ahead here, going into woodland on a more grassy path. In 100m or so, you come to a tarmac lane between concrete bollards. Go straight over the lane onto a narrow path, reaching a T-junction after 30m. Turn **right** at the T-junction onto a wide sandy bridleway. In 150m, on your right is a narrow peaty path (or if you miss it, there's a second path shortly after). (If you did *not* start this walk in Hurtwood Control Car Park 11, simply stay on the bridleway and re-join the walk at point (*) in section 1.) Turn **right** on this side path, arriving promptly back at the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car:

By train/bus: bus 21/22/32 from Dorking, check the timetables. Start the walk at Holmbury-St-Mary.



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