



Beyond the Punchbowl

Distance 7¼ km=4½ miles, easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Surrey

Author: Schwebefuss

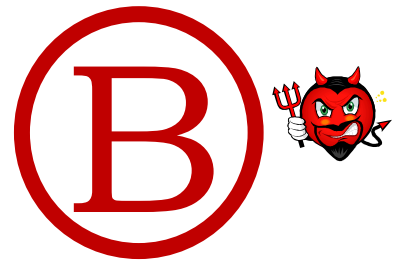
Refreshments: Hindhead

Map: Explorer 133 (Haslemere)

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

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Dramatic hills, woodland, views

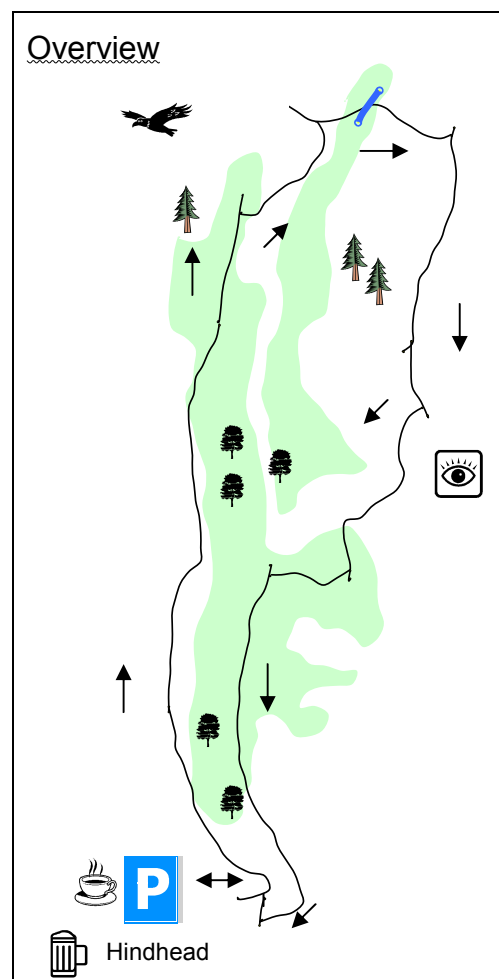


In Brief

This walk takes you first round one rim of the Devil's Punchbowl in Surrey giving you a dramatic high view into the depths that made it a subject of such superstition in the past. It then makes a short excursion to a hamlet and gentler farming country before returning through the centre of the Punchbowl to show you its gentler qualities.

There are no steep climbs – just one slow ascent at the very end. The ground is mainly sandy and dry, occasionally stony, making the walk generally pleasant underfoot so any sensible footwear is fine. There are no nettles, so shorts are ok but the route is not perfect for a dog because of the Highland cattle that roam freely.

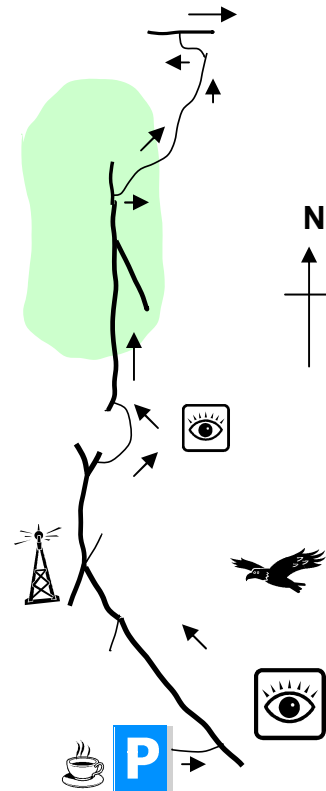
The walk starts at the **National Trust Punchbowl** car park (postcode **GU26 6AB**). For more details, see map and guide at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

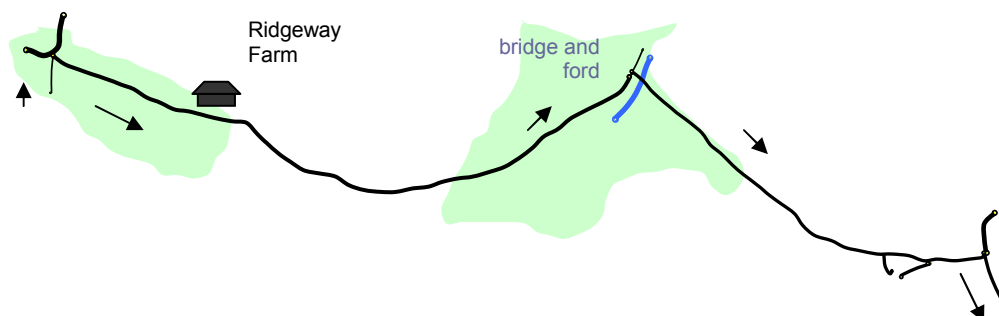
- 1 From the back of the car park, go past the noticeboard and the Surrey Hills pole to the famous viewpoint over the Devil's Punchbowl. Turn **left** along the wide path that runs along the rim of the valley. After some distance with fine views, you reach a junction of tracks near a prominent relay mast. Bear slightly **right** past a noticeboard. In 100m fork **right** on a narrower path that rejoins the main track while giving better views of the Punchbowl. A little further on, fork **right** with the main track but immediately fork **right** again on a lesser path that leads to a seat and a memorial to the bequeathal of Highcombe Copse to the National Trust.

Highcombe Copse is one of several pieces of donated land that make up the Devil's Punchbowl. Historically, the Punchbowl was regarded as a dark malevolent province of smugglers and deadly spirits and few people dared to set foot there.

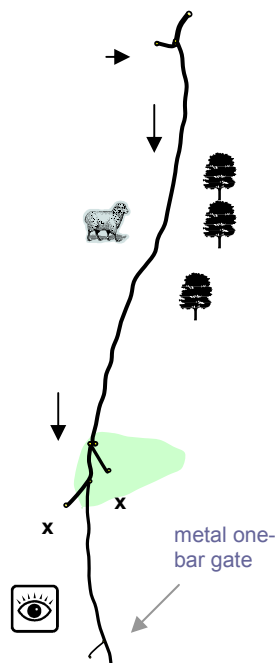


Continue onwards to rejoin the main track. After some distance, at a post with arrows, the main track curves sharp right to descend into the Punchbowl. Leave it here by continuing **straight ahead** on a broad path. In 150m, just before the path narrows and begins to descend, turn **right** on a wide path. The path bends left, winds a bit and descends through a coppice. At the end, go through a small wooden gate arriving at the corner of a field. Turn **right** on a wide sandy track and follow it round several sides of two fields. At the far end, turn **left** again to stay next to the field, ignoring a very narrow path descending right. At the next corner, turn **right** and sharp **right** again onto a wide track.

- 2 The track winds downhill. It comes down to a spectacular section with a stream and a gully on your right with a rich collection of ferns. The track fords the stream which you cross via a footbridge. Avoid a stile and footpath ahead and stay on the wide track that curves off right between banks. Where a cottage comes into view, ignore a bridleway right (really a bypass to save horses the sharp incline) and go steeply up, soon coming to a settlement by a small triangular green.

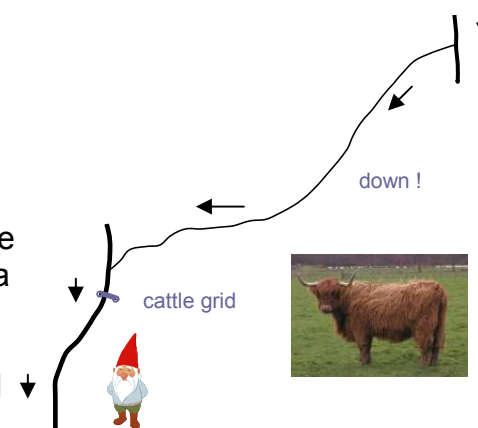


- 3 Turn **right** on a very rough tarmac track that will soon deteriorate. *Note the ironic road sign indicating that 60 mph is allowed.* After 650m, the track forks by a National Trust sign. Take the **right** fork. Less than 100m further, via a cattle grid or gate, the track forks again. This time takes the **left** fork. Go straight ahead over a crossing track on a stony path that rises towards the rim of the Punchbowl. Near the top, look for a metal one-bar gate. Turn **right** here.

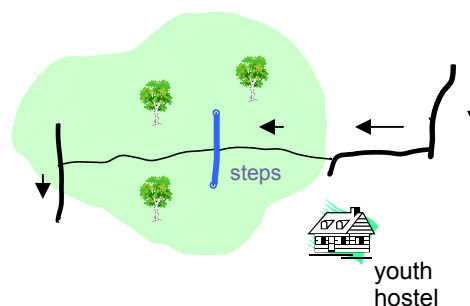


The next stretch takes you down into the Punchbowl and shows you its wondrous beauty and variety. You will see that, contrary to the superstitions of the past, this is not a deadly morass but an enchanting mélange of sunlit glades, meadows, light woodland and rare plants, trees and birds.

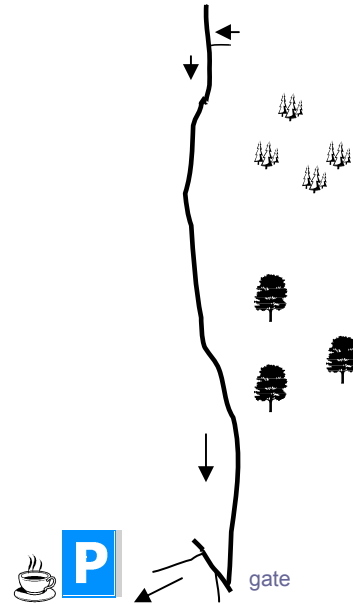
- 4 The path curves slightly left down into the valley. *On a sunny late afternoon, the green of the valley and the heather and woodland around it make an unforgettable picture.* The path winds right, goes over a small ridge and runs alongside a meadow in the right. Sometimes you will see highland cattle in this area. They are gentle animals despite their forbidding horns. At a T-junction with a track, turn **left** over a cattle grid (or through the adjoining gate). The track curves right, descends into a dell and shortly passes *Gnome Cottage* on the left that somehow seems so aptly-named.



- 5 Ignore a wooden five-bar gate on the right that leads into Two Oaks Field and continue to the next junction where there is a YHA (Youth Hostel) sign. Turn **right** here. The track leads to the picturesque Youth Hostel with its front meadow on the left. Keep **right** here between stumps on a woodland path. The path soon descends via steps with wooden rails to a bridge over a brook. It then goes up the other side on a sunken path. At the top, go through a swing gate and turn **left** on a wider path.



- 6 This broad path winds left around a forested area of pines, many of which are currently harvested with stumps remaining. At a junction, ignore a narrow path right and continue straight on at all times past the *Pedestrian Path* sign and through a wooden gate. The path runs for some distance through beautiful beechwoods. Later it begins to rise and this section can be a bit long and arduous except for knowing that this is the *last* bit. On gaining the top, turn **right** through a wooden gate and avoid a path sharp left. The second path **left** takes you back to the car park.



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Getting there

To get to the **National Trust Punchbowl car park**, take the A3 and turn off, just south of the tunnel, at a sign for **Hindhead**. Go through the traffic lights in Hindhead into a cul-de-sac. The car park is on the left. Refreshments are available in the Punchbowl café.

