



Beyond the Punch Bowl

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

Region: Surrey

Date written: 19-jun-2011

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Refreshments: Hindhead

Map: Explorer 133 (Haslemere)

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

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Dramatic hills, woodland, views



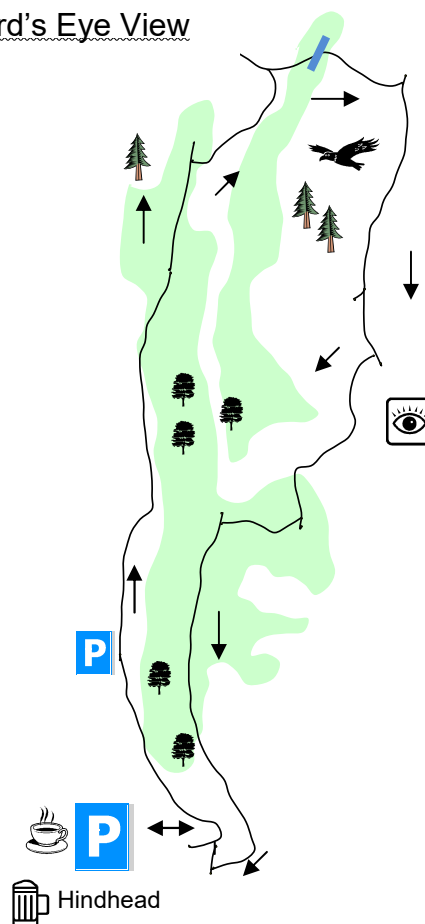
In Brief

This walk takes you first round one rim of the Devil's Punch Bowl 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 Punch Bowl to show you its gentler qualities. This walk is perfect at all times of the year, including winter.

There are no steep climbs – just one slow ascent at the very end – and no stiles. 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. If you bring your dog, be sure to have a lead handy because of the Highland cattle that roam freely.

The walk starts at the **National Trust Punch Bowl car park (postcode GU26 6AB)**. There is a small charge to non-NT members (as 2016: £4, or £2 if you spend £10 or more in the shop/café). There is a small *free* car park at Highcombe Edge at the end of Gorse Hill (**postcode GU26 6SJ**). For travel details, see map and guide at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Bird's Eye View

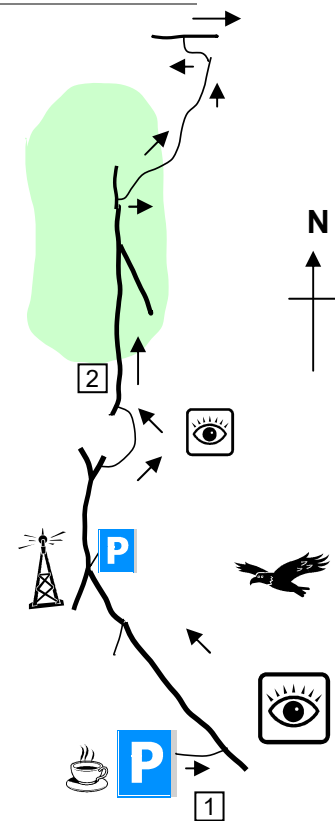


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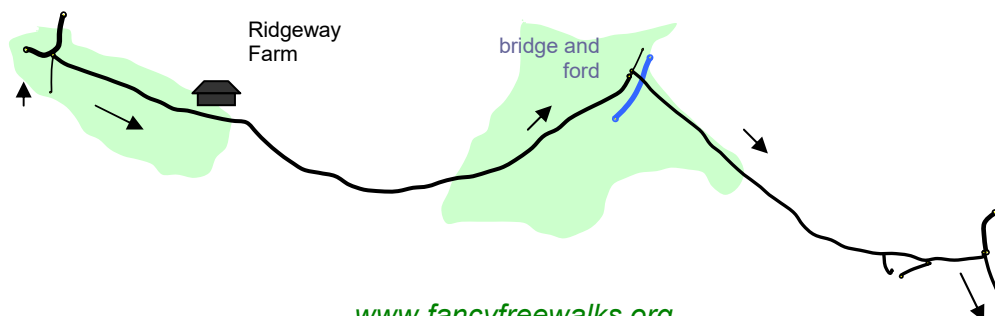
The Walk

- 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 Punch Bowl. Turn **left** along the wide level high path, passing some tall pines. After about 700m with fine views, you reach a junction of tracks near a prominent relay mast, by the small Highcombe Edge car park. Bear slightly **right**, through a gate or over a grid, passing a noticeboard. In 100m fork **right** on a narrower path that rejoins the main track while giving better views of the Punch Bowl. A little further on, by a marker post, 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. Continue onwards to rejoin the main track.

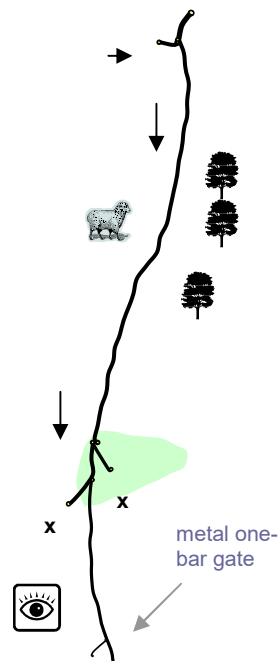
Highcombe Copse is one of several pieces of donated land that make up the Devil's Punch Bowl. Historically, the Punch Bowl was regarded as a dark malevolent province of smugglers and deadly spirits and few people dared to set foot there.



- 2 After nearly 800m, just after entering trees, at a post with arrows, the main track curves sharp right to descend into the Punch Bowl. **Leave** the track here by continuing **straight ahead** on a broad path, always keeping to the right. In 150m, just before the path narrows and begins to descend, turn **right** on a wide path, which may be muddy at first. The path bends left, winds a bit and descends through a coppice. At the end, go through a small wooden gate to arrive at the corner of a grassy pasture. Immediately turn **right** on a wide sandy path. (It is also possible to take a *clockwise route, which may be drier, by keeping straight on, turning right at the first corner and eventually right on a sunken path.*) Your path curves left at the first corner, zigzags right-left at the start of the second pasture. At the far end, turn **left** to stay next to the field, avoiding a steep ravine on your right. At the next corner, by a large metal gate, turn **right** and sharp **right** again on a wide sunken track.
- 3 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 to your left and stay on the wide track which curves away 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, ignoring a track on the right by the cottage, soon coming to the little settlement of Lower Highfield and a 4-way fingerpost.

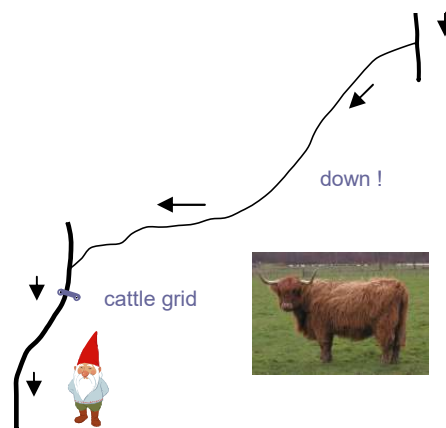


- 4 Turn **right** on a very rough tarmac track that will soon deteriorate. After 650m, the track forks by a National Trust sign. Take the **right** fork, over a grid or through a gate. Less than 100m further, the track forks again, at a marker post. This time take the **left** fork. Go straight ahead over a finger-posted crossing track on a stony path that rises towards the rim of the Punch Bowl. Near the top, nearly 250m from the crossing, look for a green metal one-bar barrier. Turn **right** here. (Some walkers like to stay on the rim and return via the new path long the old "A3" road, adding a little to the length.)

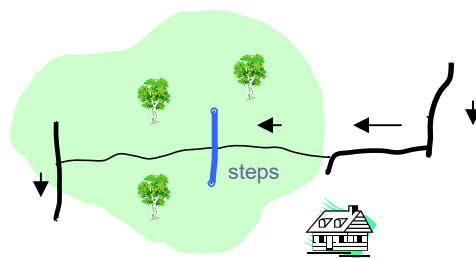


The next stretch takes you down into the Punch Bowl and shows you its wondrous beauty and variety. You will see that, contrary to the superstitions of the past, this is not a deadly morass but an enchanting mélange of sunlit glades, meadows, light woodland and rare plants, trees and birds.

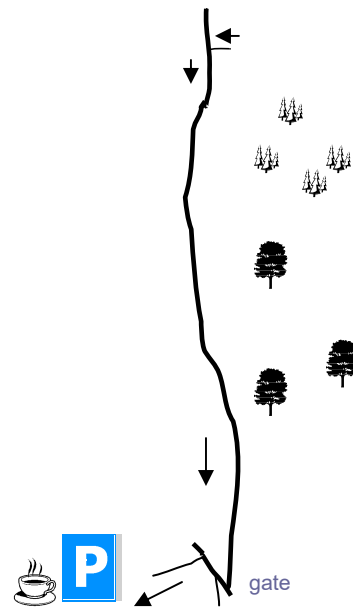
- 5 The path curves left down into the valley. On a sunny late afternoon, the green of the valley and the heather and woodland around it make an unforgettable picture. The path winds right, goes over a small ridge and runs alongside a meadow in the right. Sometimes you used to see those gentle highland cattle in this area, as documented in the lettering carved in the bench seat. At a T-junction with a track, turn **left** over a cattle grid (or through the adjoining gate), avoiding the driveway on the left. The track curves left, descends into a dell and shortly passes *Gnome Cottage* on the left that somehow seems so aptly-named.



- 6 Ignore a wooden five-bar gate on the right that leads into Two Oaks Field and continue to the next junction by a bench and a fingerpost. Turn sharp **right** here. The track leads to a picturesque house, previously a 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.



- 7 This broad path winds left around a forested area of pines, most of which are currently harvested with only stumps remaining. Here, at a junction, ignore a narrow path right and continue straight on, past a *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 continue straight on, back to the car park where the walk began.



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Getting there

To get to the **National Trust Punch Bowl 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 Punch Bowl (or Punchbowl) café.

