



Bookham Common and Slyfield

Distance: 8½ km=5½ miles, easy walking

Region: Surrey

Written: 11/12/2009

Author: Schwebefuss

Revised: 16/03/2012

Refreshments: Fetcham

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

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

Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

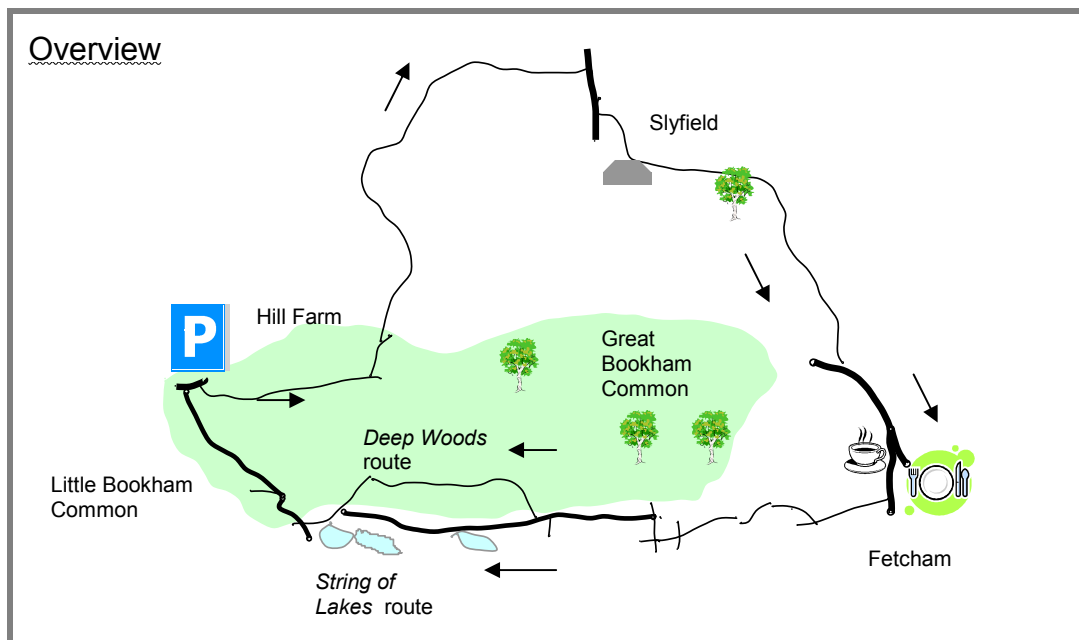
Woodland, meadows, lakes, historic house

In Brief

The Bookham Commons (“Great” and “Little”) are a wild expanse of dense woodland and lakes like a triangular gemstone set between the fields and settlements of Surrey. This walk shows different aspects of the Commons and makes an excursion out to an historic Jacobean house.

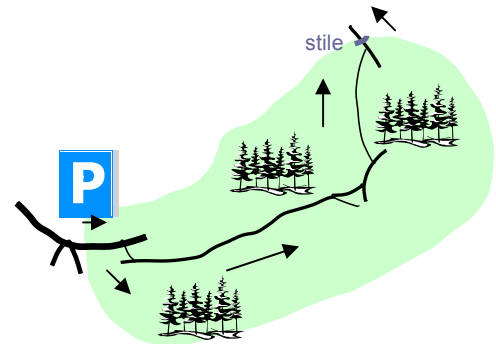


There are no nettles on this route but good boots are recommended to get you through some muddy patches. The Commons are perfect for dogs but this particular walk would take them through some pasture and over two roads.

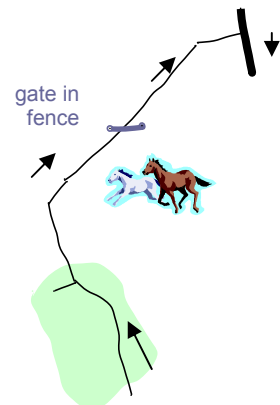


The Walk

- 1 Continue ahead on the wide gravel track that you arrived on, ignoring the bridledways to the right. In 20m, turn **right** through a wooden barrier onto a footpath signposted *Slyfield*. Join a path coming from the right. The path rises and goes past farm buildings and a field on the left. Ignore all turnings off, including a footpath left just after the field. At the next junction with crossing paths, go straight over. In 120m, ignore a path curving off right and 30m later veer **left** on a very wide cinder bridledway coming from the right. In just 5m, turn **left** on a grassy path marked "NT" on a blue arrow. Under 100m further on, take the **left** fork, following two posts ahead marked with the blue "NT". The path winds for some distance, soon with a md on your left, and ends at a T-junction by a fence. Turn **left** and immediately go over a stile (bypassable at the time of writing).



- 2 After some distance, the path curves left by a fence. At a fingerpost, keep straight ahead over a stile and follow the grassy path between fences, past a pond and over a stile. *The large farmhouse on your right is Bookham Lodge, an important stud, and beyond it the buildings of the Menuhin (music) School which Nigel Kennedy attended, among many others.* Go **half left** across the centre of the meadow and through a metal gate in the middle of the opposite side. *You may need to cross some ribbon electric fences here. They are absolutely nothing to worry about and will not harm you in any way. Just find the widest section, place your instep on the ribbon and press it down to the ground.* The M25 motorway will be by now be much in evidence and beyond it Stoke d'Abernon church. Cross to a stile in the corner and keep the same direction to another stile and cross the meadow to the opposite far corner. Go over the stile on the left (or through the gate) and along the track that runs close to the meadow on the left. The path goes over a stile and up to a road.

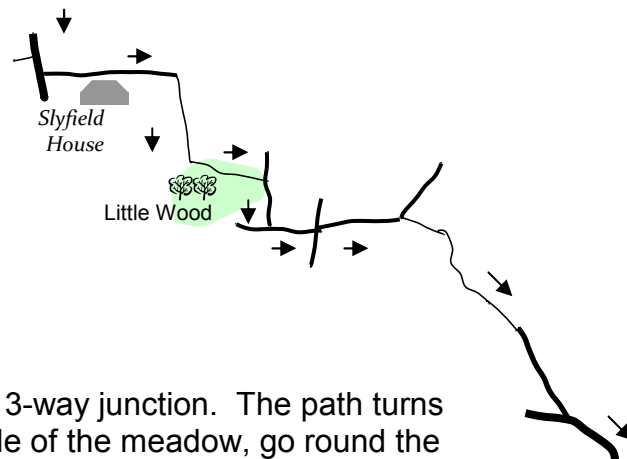


- 3 **See map overleaf.** Go **right** for 50m and cross the road to a driveway to Slyfield, opposite the Menuhin School. Go past the gates of Slyfield Farm House, past lower Slyfield and the fine Slyfield House with the River Mole on the left.

The "new" Slyfield House dates from 1615, rebuilt from a probably 14th century manor by George Shiers, apothecary to James I. Originally there was a Great Hall in addition to the house itself and the farmhouse and barns. The interior is without grandeur, relatively narrow and with the typically Jacobean low ceilings, oak panelling and magnificent wood carved beams. The house has its ghosts of course but some are non-human. Next to the staircase there is a picture of a donkey surrounded by blue haze;

each November 14th at midnight the donkey supposedly leaps over the gateway to the stairs and vanishes at the top. Outside the haunted bedroom window horses' hooves can be heard, rumoured to be those of the king's men in pursuit of Sir John Fenwick who took refuge at Slyfield after a plot against king William III. (He was tried for treason and beheaded.) Not visible from the path is the Elizabethan formal garden. Slyfield House is open on Heritage Open Day in September and at occasional other times by special arrangement.

Continue between fences, go over a stile into a meadow and turn **right**. Go over a stile in the corner into Little Wood. *This wood is notable in autumn and winter for its spectacular proliferation of different mushroom species and in spring for its bluebells.* Stay near the left-hand edge and at the next corner go over another stile and **right** on a track. Turn **left** on reaching a concrete track by a farm.



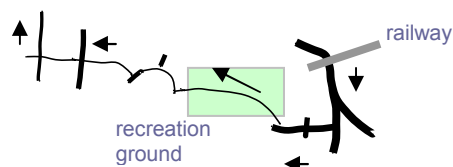
Keep straight on at a crossing path and at a 3-way junction. The path turns right over a stile. Keep to the **right**-hand side of the meadow, go round the corner and go over a 3-plank bridge and a stile in the next corner. Cross the next meadow, aiming for the left-hand side of the farm buildings ahead. Go over a stile (or through the gate) and along the wide track which soon becomes tarmac. On reaching a road, opposite the beautifully restored *Monks Green Farm*, turn **left**.

- 4 Follow the road under the railway bridge into Fetcham where there are a number of useful shops, including a sandwich bar, a trattoria, a fish bar, a Chinese takeaway and a general store. There is a WC in the garage. Fork **right** into The Street. *You pass Yew Tree and Tea Tree Cottages, once an inn, a refugee from old Fetcham, now swallowed up in the genteel sprawl of the modern town.* Turn **right** into Cock

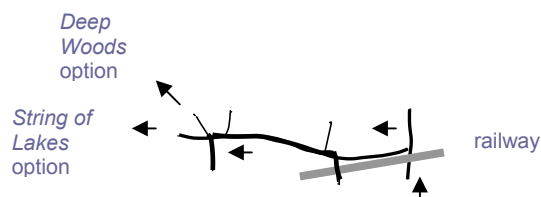


WC

Lane. On reaching a recreation ground on the right, turn into it and walk it lengthwise to a concrete platform by a seat half way up the shorter side. Go up a few steps and turn **right** on a footpath. At the end of the footpath, keep ahead on a residential road, ignoring a brick-paved smaller road on the right. Turn **left** with the road and in 10m turn **right** on another brick-paved residential road. In the far corner, continue on a footpath between fences. The path crosses a road and reaches a bridleway. Turn **right** on the bridleway.

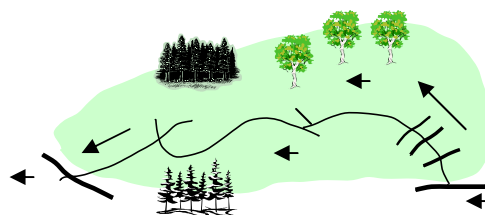


- 5 The bridleway goes over the railway. Turn **left** alongside the railway. At a junction ignore a footpath right and continue along The Glade. This residential lane eventually enters Bookham Common. After the last house, ignore a signposted footpath on the right. A short distance further, the lane reaches a junction with a wide track on the left and a small noticeboard with a sign for *Commonside* (a cul-de-sac).

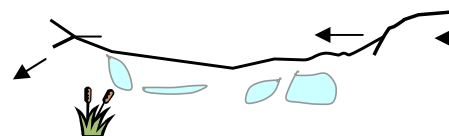


Decision point. The next stage offers *two possible routes* depending on your mood.

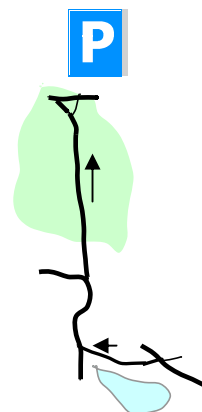
6-1 The deep woods. Turn **right** under a bar into the woods on a narrow path. It winds a great deal and you need to be alert. It crosses first a wide path, then another wide muddy horse path and next a much narrower path, staggering a fraction left. The path winds again through thick woods, veering left, and eventually reaches a triangular junction of paths. Avoid the first narrow path immediately right and, only 5m further, turn **right** at a T-junction on another path. Your path goes over a crossing path and then suddenly bends right and reaches a crossing path, going over a small ditch and a drainage pipe. Turn **left** here alongside the ditch. The path emerges on a very wide track in a clearing. Go straight over the track and through a wooden barrier ahead.



6-2 The string of lakes. Keep straight ahead on the main tarmac track. Where the main track bends left, keep ahead on a narrower track. Stay on the main track as it soon bends right, avoiding a path on the left. The track passes a series of lakes on your left. The first group is followed after some trees by two more. Immediately after the last lake, where the path begins to run in a very wide clearing, turn **left** through a wooden barrier.



7 Veer **right** before a pond on a hard-surfaced path. The path goes past a large pond on the left. Go under a barrier and turn right, opposite a small farm holding, on a hard wide track. At a major junction by a cottage, go **right** by a noticeboard and then immediately **left**. In 10m, at a fork of two wide tracks, take the **right** fork. This track leads back the car park where the walk began.



fancy more free walks? www.fancyfreewalks.org

Getting there

Park in the **Hill Farm car park** on Great Bookham Common. To get there: start in Cobham, accessible from the A3 and near the M25. Opposite Waitrose, turn **right** by the modern catholic church onto Downside Road signposted *Downside, Hackbridge*. Soon after the bridge over the River Mole, ignore a road *Plough Lane* on the right, signposted *Hackbridge* and shortly after, ignore a road forking left, *Cobham Park Road*. 600m further, at a crossroads, turn **left** onto Downside Common Road (*not* the track just before it that leads to the *Cricketers* pub). Bear right at a junction and continue under the M25 and under a railway bridge. When the lane enters the Common over a small bridge, park in the small car park on the left.

