



Bookham Common and Slyfield

Distance: 8½ km=5½ miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

Date written: 11-dec-2009

Author: Schwebefuss

Date revised: 8-oct-2023

Refreshments: Fetcham

Last update: 6-feb-2025

Map: 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, meadows, lakes, historic house

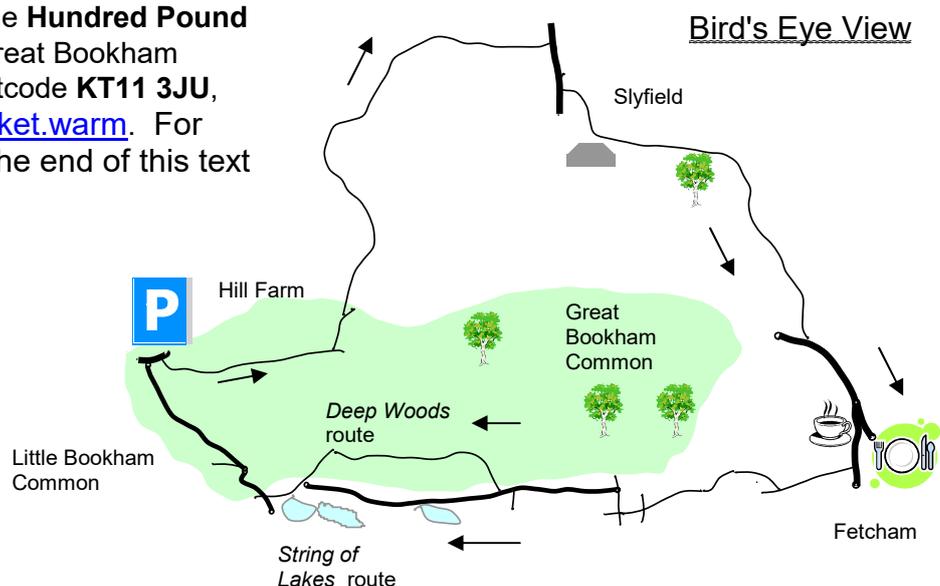
In Brief

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.



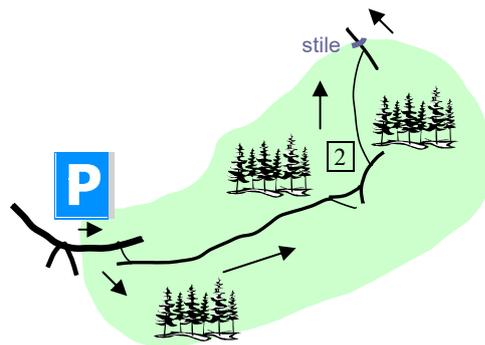
This is an excellent walk in dry or frosty conditions but after rain you will encounter (mainly avoidable) squishy patches in the first half of the walk where boots are advisable. Some paths are a little overgrown in summer, making bare legs uncomfortable. There are some enjoyable challenges underfoot on the section after Slyfield due to wanton neglect of the footpaths. The Commons are perfect for your dog but this particular walk would take him through pastures, over two roads and over stiles.

The walk begins in the **Hundred Pound Bridge car park** on Great Bookham Common, nearest postcode **KT11 3JU**, www.w3w.co/drain.bucket.warm. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



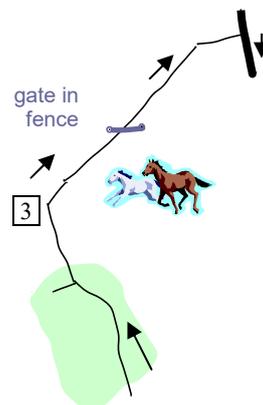
The Walk

- 1 From the car park, continue ahead on the wide gravel track that you arrived on, passing a sign reading *Vehicles to Hill Farm only*. In 20m, turn **right** through the remains of a wooden barrier onto a footpath signposted *Slyfield*, joining a path coming from the right. The path rises and goes past a field on the left with farm buildings visible. Ignore all turnings off, including a footpath left just after the field. **In damp conditions you will find quite a bit of mud which you can usually escape along the green edges. The second half of this walk is dry.** At the next waymarked junction with crossing paths, go straight over, following blue and green arrows. In 120m, ignore a path curving off right and 30m later veer **left** on a very wide gravel bridgeway coming from the right.



- 2 In just 5m, turn **left** on a grassy path marked "NT" on a blue arrow. Avoiding tracks made by forestry vehicles, follow it for 100m. You finally reach a clearing where there is a post with blue arrows. Avoid a path that wheels away to the right and keep straight ahead along a wide woodland path which curves away to the right. You pass many heaps of stacked timber and you are soon aware of a meadow close by on your left. After nearly 200m, your path ends at a T-junction by a fence. Turn **left** and immediately go over a stile (bypassable at the time of writing). In 170m, the path curves left by a fence. In about 100m, **ignore** a modern kissing gate on your left and keep straight ahead on a wide grass path between hedges. *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.* Finally, go through a metal kissing gate, out of the woods and into an open area of pastures, usually with horses grazing.

- 3 Go diagonally **left** across the centre of the meadow to a metal gate (or a wide gap if the gate is open) visible in the opposite fence. *The M25 motorway will by now be much in evidence and beyond it Stoke d'Abernon church and Manor.* Cross the next pasture to the far right corner to go through a small metal gate in the corner. Keep the same direction across the next pasture to go through another small metal gate, just to the left of a pair of oaks. Veer a fraction right to cross one more meadow to the opposite far corner. Here go through a metal kissing gate, over a farm track and directly through a small metal gate, which is disused because the large metal gate beside it seems to be always open. Avoid the first opening on the right which (in 2023) was the entrance to a construction site but veer **right** along a metalled track that runs close to the meadow on the left. Where the track bends left, **leave** it to go straight ahead on a narrow path, through a modern kissing gate, in some rather dense undergrowth. Take a gentle slope on the **right** up to the main road where there is a fingerpost.

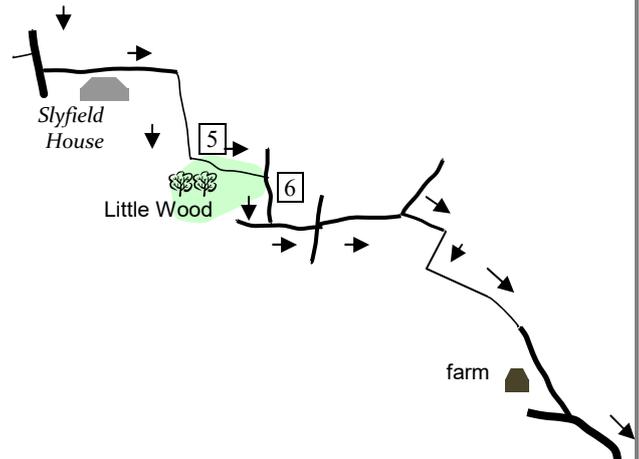


- 4 **See map overleaf.** Cross the road, go **right** for 50m, and turn sharp **left** onto a driveway opposite the Menuhin School, signposted to *Slyfield*. Keep right to go past the gates of *Slyfield Farm House*, past *Lower Slyfield* [2023: under heavy repair] and the fine *Slyfield House* with 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 a fence and a hedge to meet a meadow and a wire fence or wooden barrier where a stile used to be. Do *not* enter the meadow, but turn **right** along the overgrown fringe between the wire fence on your left and a ditch on your right. (It looks too rough but the fringe is quite easy to walk along.) In the far corner, pass a yellow arrow to go between rails into Little Wood.



- 5 Little Wood is notable in autumn and winter for its spectacular proliferation of different mushroom species and in spring for its bluebells. In 2024-25 there is a route change since Surrey C.C. closed public access to the wood: instead, follow the clearly-marked yellow-arrowed path **left**, skirting the wood along the meadow’s edge, leading to the farm track at the end of this section. At the time of this revision, Little Wood was very overgrown and looked impenetrable, but it can be traversed quite easily with the added bonus of bluebells in spring. The best course is as follows:



(1) turn **left** along the edge for 5m; (2) turn **right** into the wood and go about 15m, stepping over some small fallen trees trunks; (3) look to your **left** for a clear passage and pick your way through the trees and shrubs and debris, staying within sight of the meadow on your left - you need to improvise a twisty path but there is always a clear way through; at one point you will meet the path along the left-hand edge of the wood which was blocked near the entrance; (4) in about 100m look left into the meadow to locate a metal gate in the corner; shortly after this gate you will see a gap, sharp **left**, which leads out of the wood onto a farm track.

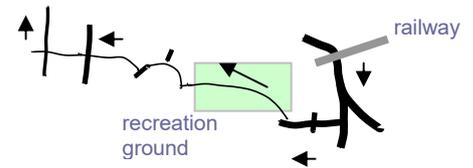
- 6 Turn **right** on the track. On reaching a concrete track by a farm, turn **left**. After a large barn, at a 4-way crossing, keep straight on along a track between fields. In 200m, at a 3-way junction, avoid a track on your left. In 130m, the track zigzags right-left and runs along the left-hand side of a field, turning right in the corner. In a further 350m you pass on your right the massive buildings of Barracks Farm. Go over a stile (or through the open gate) and continue along the wide track which soon becomes tarmac. On reaching a road, opposite the beautifully restored *Monks Green Farm*, turn **left**.

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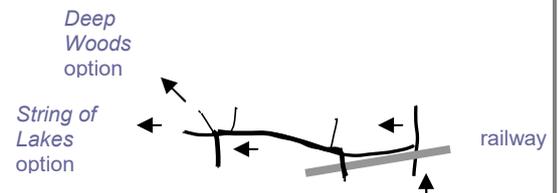
Follow the road, using a bank on the right and/or a footway on the left, under the railway bridge into Fetcham village where there are a number of facilities. The sandwich bar, trattoria, pie shop and fish bar are closed on Sunday. But there is a Tandoori, a Sainsbury and a very good whole foods deli with its own café. 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. Immediately turn **right** into Cock Lane (missing its sign in 2023). 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 over a bridge-with-rail, up a few steps and turn **right** on a tarmac 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 right-hand corner, next to house no. 23, continue on a footpath between fences. Cross a road to a footpath opposite and, in 50m, on a crossing bridleway, turn **right** through woodland.



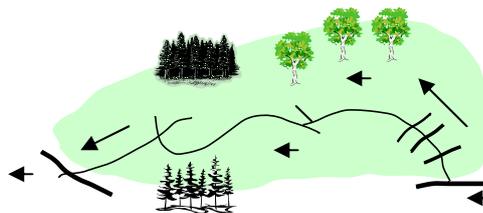
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Follow the bridleway over a railway bridge and in 15m, at a 3-way fingerpost, turn **left** (using a short cut) alongside the railway. In 250m, passing some swanky properties, at a junction, ignore a footpath right and continue along a tarmac drive, *The Glade*. In another 250m, this residential drive enters Bookham Common. After the last house, ignore a waymarked 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).



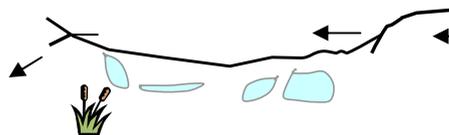
Decision point. The next section offers *two possible routes* depending on your mood and the weather. The first choice is more wild and adventurous and avoids the crowds, best if conditions are fairly dry. The second choice shows the lakes, although summer foliage makes them hard to appreciate in full.

9-1 The deep woods.



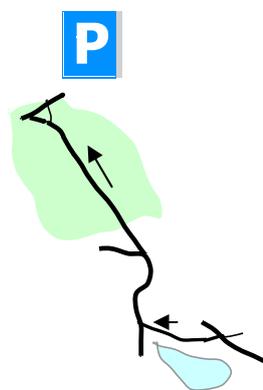
Turn **right**, shortly going under a bar, into the woods on a narrow path. It winds a great deal and you need to be alert. In 120m, it crosses a wide sandy blue-arrowed bridleway, then, in 40m, another winding muddy horse path. In 70m, you cross a much narrower path, staggering a fraction left. The path winds again through thick woods for 50m [2023: over fallen tree trunks], veering left to reach a junction of four paths. Avoid the first narrow path sharp right and take the **second** path on your right, almost straight on. In 200m, your path goes over a clear crossing path and then, 130m further, it suddenly bends right, going over a small ditch to a crossing path. Turn **left** here alongside the ditch. In 130m, the path emerges on a very wide track in a clearing. Go straight over the track and through a large double wooden barrier ahead.

9-2 The string of lakes.



This section takes you past five large ponds, threaded through by the Bookham Stream; some are harder to make out with summer foliage. Keep straight ahead on the main tarmac track. In 100m, where the main track bends left, keep ahead between posts, following the blue NT arrow, on a narrower track. In 50m, at a 3-way junction with a post and blue arrows, veer **right**. In 150m your track passes the Upper and Lower Eastern ponds on your left where birds and other wildlife are a great attraction. After a further 100m or so under trees, avoiding all minor paths leading off, you pass the Upper Pond and Lower Hollows. Immediately after this pond, you will see the path beginning to run in a very wide clearing slightly uphill. Turn **left** here at a marker post to go under a high wooden barrier.

10 Veer **right** on a gravel path with the I.O.W. Pond on your left. The path ends at a wide track opposite the entrance to a farm holding and *Handley's Cottage*. Turn **right** on the track to reach, in 100m, another small group of buildings with a noticeboard ahead: a final check on your return to the car park. Here, zig-zag right-left to keep the same direction on another wide track. In only 10m, at a fork of two wide tracks, take the **right** fork, marked to *Downside* on the back of a fingerpost in a clump of bushes. Keep straight ahead along this track. It takes you, in a leafy 500m, back to the *Hundred Pound Bridge* car park where the walk began.



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Getting there

By car: To get to the **Hundred Pound Bridge car park** on Great Bookham Common: 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.

