



Bookham Common and Slyfield

Distance: 8½ km=5½ miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

Date written: 11-dec-2009

Author: Schwebefuss

Date revised: 19-feb-2013

Refreshments: Fetcham

Last update: 3-may-2020

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

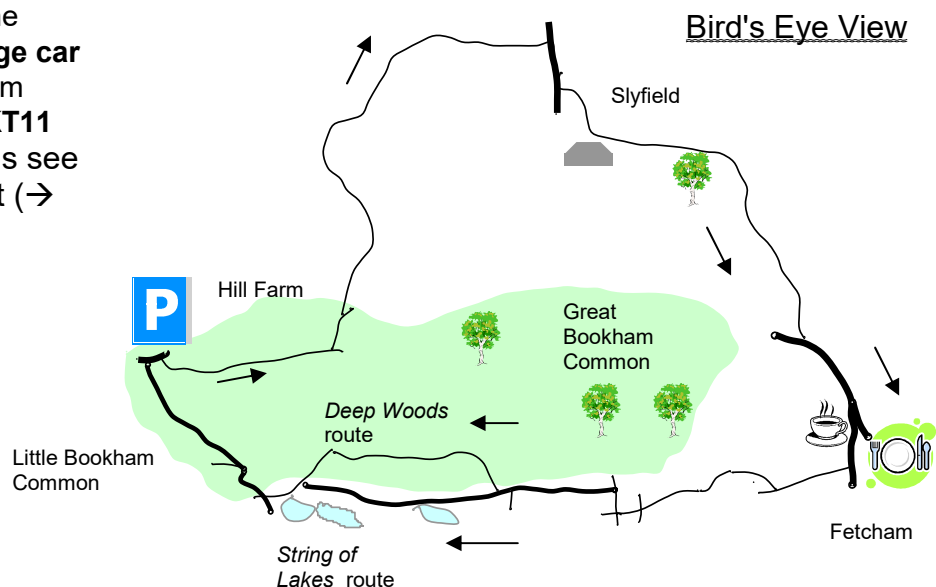
In Brief

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.



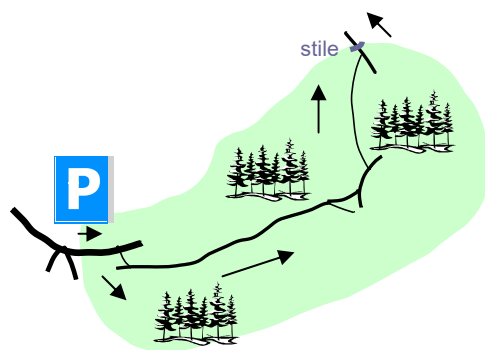
This is an excellent walk in dry or frosty conditions but after rain you will encounter mud in the first half of the walk where good ankle-high boots or wellies are necessary. The paths may be overgrown in summer, making bare legs uncomfortable. There are some hazards underfoot on the section before 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, **postcode KT11 3JU**. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

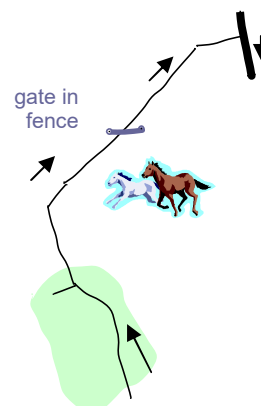


The Walk

- 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 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 junction with crossing paths, go straight over, still following the blue and green arrows. In 120m, ignore a path curving off right and 30m later veer **left** on a very wide cinder bridleway coming from the right. In just 5m, turn **left** on a grassy path marked "NT" on a blue arrow and follow it for 100m. You pass evidence of forestry work, going either side of some trees, passing a heap of tree trunks, and finally reach a clearing where there is a post with a blue arrow. Fork **left** here across some rough grass and into woods. Follow the path as it winds for 100m, ignoring a left fork. A meadow appears on your left and, in nearly 200m, the path ends at a T-junction by a fence. Turn **left** and immediately go over a stile (bypassable at the time of writing).



- 2 In 170m, the path curves left by a fence. At a fingerpost, bear **right** to follow the wide grassy path between hedges, past a pond and through a metal kissing gate. *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 diagonally **left** across the centre of the meadow to a metal gate visible in the opposite fence. *[Jun 2016: this gate may be padlocked, in which case you need to step over the single-beamed fence. The easiest place is on the right where there is a wooden fodder box to act as a hand-hold.]* 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 metal gate in the corner. Keep the same direction across the next pasture to go through another metal gate. Cross one more meadow to the opposite far corner. Here go through a metal kissing gate, over a farm track and directly through the smaller of two metal gates. Now veer **right** along a track that runs close to the meadow on the left. (You may need to negotiate a rope slung across the track.) The path narrows in rather dense undergrowth *[Aug 2017: with rubble, concealed holes, fallen trees and nettles: be careful!]*. Go quickly through another metal kissing gate and up a bank, avoiding a steep part and metal barrier on your left and take a gentler slope to the main road where there is a fingerpost.

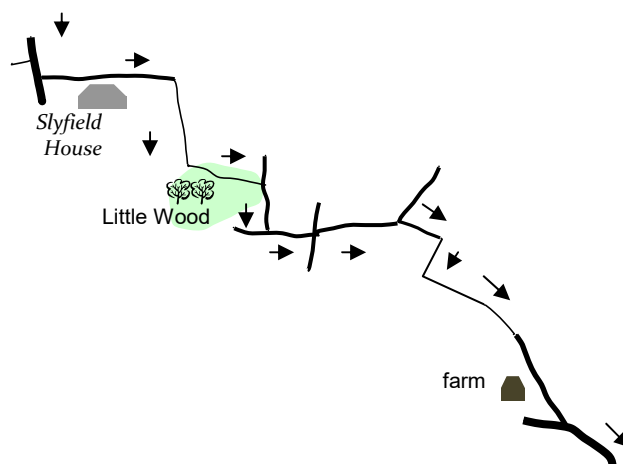


- 3 **See map overleaf.** Go **right** on the road for 50m, cross it and turn sharp **left** onto a tarmac driveway opposite the Menuhin School, signposted to *Slyfield*. Go through the entrance and past the gates of Slyfield Farm House, past lower Slyfield and the fine Slyfield House with the River 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 a fence and a hedge, go over an awkward high stile into a meadow and turn **right** along the edge through rather long grass . [2016-19: on a re-walk, there was a wire along the edge: stamp on it and step over.] In the far corner, go over a rather hidden, partly broken, stile into Little Wood. [2016: stepping right over the wire again.] 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, in 150m, go through a gap where a stile used to be and turn **right** on a track.

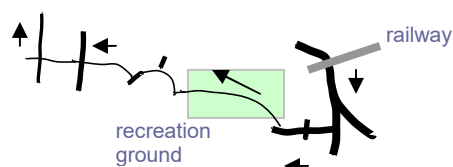


On reaching a concrete track by a farm, turn **left**. After a large barn, at a 4-way crossing, keep straight on between fields. In 200m, leave the main track which bends left by keeping ahead on a grassy path. [2019: there's a large badger (or fox) hole about half way along, in the middle of this path, obscured by very long grass; take great care as a misstep could cause serious injury!] In 130m, the path turns **right** into a crop field. The footpath runs along the right-hand side of the field [Aug 2017: walker reports crops grown up to the edge: you may need to force a passage, or step over a wire on your right into the adjoining green field], shortly following a sparse line of hawthorns. Just before the next corner, turn **left** along the top edge [Apr 2020: ducking under a wire]. In the next corner, go over two little bridges and a (broken) stile in a marshy spot. Cross the next meadow, aiming to the **left** of the farm buildings of Barracks Farm 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**.

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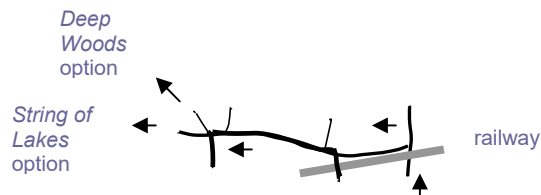


Follow the road under the railway bridge into Fetcham where there are a number of useful shops, including a sandwich bar, a trattoria, a fish bar, a Chinese takeaway, a Sainsbury and a very good whole foods deli with its own café. Fork **right** into The Street. You pass *Yew Tree and Tea Tree Cottages*, once an inn, a refugee from old Fetcham, now swallowed up in the genteel sprawl of the modern town. Turn **right** into Cock Lane. On reaching a recreation ground on the right, turn into it, over a bridge with rails, and walk it lengthwise to a concrete platform by a seat half way up the shorter side. Go over a 4-plank bridge and up a few steps



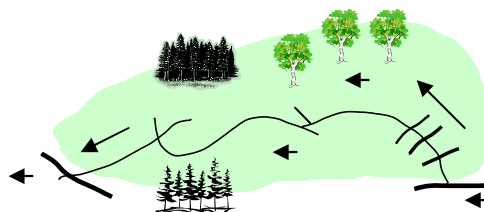
and turn **right** on a tarmac footpath. At the end of the footpath, keep ahead on a residential road, ignoring a brick-paved smaller road on the right. Turn **left** with the road and in 10m turn **right** on another brick-paved residential road. In the far corner, continue on a footpath between fences. Cross a road to a footpath opposite and, in 50m, on a crossing bridleway, turn **right**.

- 5 Follow the bridleway over a railway bridge and in 15m turn **left** alongside the railway. In 250m, at a junction ignore a footpath right and continue along The Glade. In another 250m, this residential lane 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).

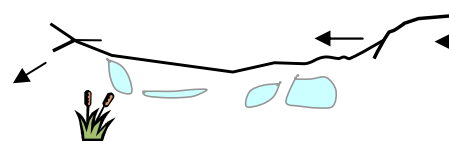


Decision point. The next stage offers *two possible routes* depending on your mood and the weather. The first choice is good in dry conditions.

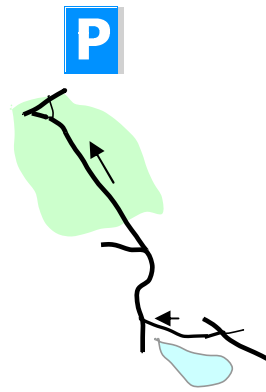
- 6-1 **The deep woods.** Turn **right** under a bar into the woods on a narrow path. It winds a great deal and you need to be alert. In 120m, it crosses a wide path, then, in 40m, another wide muddy horse path. In 70m, you cross a much narrower path, staggering a fraction left. The path winds again through thick woods for 50m, 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 crossing path and then, 130m further, it suddenly bends right, going over a small ditch and a drainage pipe 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.



- 6-2 **The string of lakes.** This section takes you past five large ponds, threaded through by the Bookham Stream. Keep straight ahead on the main tarmac track. In 100m, where the main track bends left, keep ahead between posts on a narrower track. In 50m, at a 3-way junction with a post and blue arrows, veer **right**, avoiding an ascending path on your left. Your track passes the Upper and Lower Eastern ponds on your left where birds and other wildlife are a great attraction. After a short interval of trees, you pass the Upper Pond and Lower Hollows. Immediately after this last pond, where the path begins to run in a very wide clearing with a slight incline, turn **left** through a large double wooden barrier.



- 7 Veer **right** on a hard-surfaced 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 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 on a fingerpost to *Downside*. This track takes you 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.

