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## Coulsdon, Chaldon, Happy Valley

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Distance: 13 km=8 miles or 9 km=5½ miles or 7 km=4½ miles  
easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Surrey, Greater London

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Refreshments: Coulsdon Common

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

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*Hills, woodland, historic church, views, nature reserves, island community*

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### In Brief

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Happy Valley always lives up to its name and never disappoints. You will be walking with a crowd of happy Londoners or suburbanites with their children and perhaps their dogs. There is one obvious popular route through the valley and many paths criss-crossing it. This walk takes a rather different northerly route on a high path, enabling you to look down from a height on the valley and pause on one of the many scenic bench seats, with a surprise at the end which few visitors experience.

The longer choices, including the walk starting at the the car park, take you through some remarkable places: an "island village" with a tower and one of the oldest churches in Surrey containing a unique treasure. At the southern end there is a good pub stop (at weekends you need to reserve at the *Fox* - ring 01883-340737) .

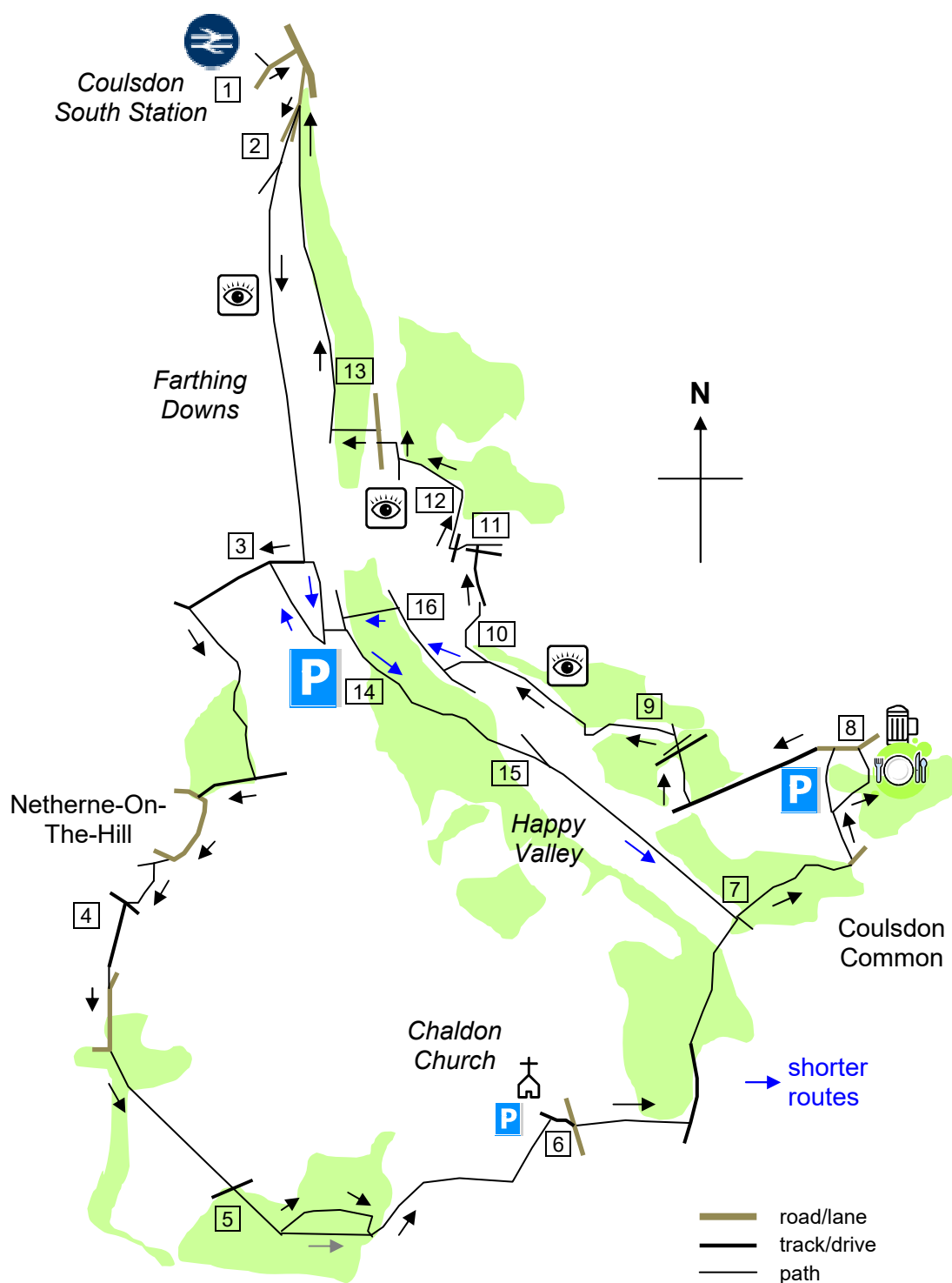


There are some nettles on this walk in summer, so shorts may be a problem, depending on the season. Good walking shoes or trainers are adequate for this walk: you do not need to wear boots but as always they will be of some benefit. There are a few small muddy patches by the farms but on-the-whole this is a dry walk. Together with the open views, this makes it a very good *winter* walk, fine in all seasons. Your dog will also thrive on this walk.



The full walk, including the Valley option, begins at **Coulsdon South station** (or its **carpark**), nearest postcode **CR5 3EA**, with easy access from London Bridge and East Croydon (10 minutes away). Coulsdon South station is inside the *Freedom Pass* zone. The medium-length Village Walk begins at the free **Farthings Downs car park**, postcode **CR5 1DA** where there are loos and a limited number of spaces (begin at section **3**). Note that the Farthing Downs car park **closes at dusk**. You can also begin any of the walks at the free **Happy Valley car park**, nearest postcode **CR3 5QS**, in Coulsdon Common (begin at Leg 2). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

## The Walk



If you are starting the walk at the **Farthing Downs Car Park**, skip down to just before section **3** and do the preliminary part in **Blue** colour.

### Leg 1: Farthing Downs to Coulsdon Common 8¼ km=5 miles

If you arrived by **bus**, or by any means other than train, you need to start the walk at Marpit Lane (\*), going under the railway just by Coulsdon South station.

If you parked in the **station car park**, cross the tracks first by the footbridge at the southern end of the platforms.

1 From Coulsdon South station, take the **eastern** exit, on the opposite side from the main station building, follow the footpath up steps to a residential road and turn **left**. Continue to a T-junction with a major road, Marlpit Lane (\*), and turn **right**. Almost immediately fork **right** on a minor road, Downs Road, uphill. You pass the big black sign board of the City of London Corporation for *Farthing Downs and New Hill*. Ignore a tarmac path on your left and, where the lane shortly splits in two, keep **left**. Soon you reach the start of Farthing Downs where the lane goes over a cattle grid. Here, go through a small wooden gate on your right, marked as part of the London Loop, onto the wide grassy slope.

2 Keep to the main ascending path, soon avoiding a minor right fork. Your path stays roughly 50m from the tarmac lane on your left. As you ascend, the views open out. *Cane Hill Water Tower is on your right, all that remains of Cane Hill Psychiatric Hospital which treated Michael Caine's half-brother Stanley and David Bowie's stepbrother Terry. This walk will take you through the site of another psychiatric hospital.* On your left is the leafy town of Old Coulsdon and, further back beneath those white cliffs, the Waitrose Depot. Your path passes wooden posts and benches and reaches a large 4-way fingerpost under trees: continue ahead as for *Chaldon*. On your left is a trig point showing various destinations and mileage. Ahead to your right now you see the top of another water tower, soon to be encountered on the main walk. Soon the Farthing Downs car park comes into view with Boxers Wood on your right and Happy Valley extending ahead to your left. You meet a long wooden fence across your path. Go through one of the small wooden gates.

**Decision point.** If you want to follow the crowds direct to Happy Valley, missing Chaldon Church and some other rare sights, continue ahead to the car park and resume just below at **Starting at Farthing Downs Car Park**, choosing the **Valley Walk** option.

Turn **right** downhill on a stony track. (Or, if you would like to learn more about the history of the various downs, continue ahead for 70m to the information boards at Farthing Downs Car Park and then return diagonally down the slope to rejoin the stony track near the bottom.) At the bottom, at a junction of paths and a post with many arrows, keep straight on downhill on a winding stony path. Skip the blue text below, resuming at section [3](#).

Starting at Farthing Downs Car Park 6 km= 3¾ miles

**wc**

The free Farthing Downs car park has a limited number of spaces and – please note – **it closes at dusk**. It has a loo.

**P**

You have an immediate two-way choice:

**(1) Village Walk.** Go to the far side of the car park, furthest from the road, where there is a gap in the low wooden boundary wall. Go through the gap and diagonally **right** down the grass. When you meet a narrow flinty path coming down from the right, bear **left** on it. In 150m you come to a crossing path at a post with many arrows. Turn **left** here downhill on a winding stony path, joining the main walk. Now resume at section [3](#) below.

**(2) Valley Walk.** *This is the short walk which follows the crowds direct to Happy Valley, missing Chaldon Church and some other rare sights.* From the car park, go out through the entrance, cross the road and take a narrow path ahead down the grass. At the bottom, turn **right** by a house and a fingerpost on a wide path, ignoring two paths on the left. Now skip to near the end of this text and do the section headed **Valley Walk**.

## Village Walk

- 3 Your path goes steeply down between two large fields. *In the dip there is a short patch of mud which you can escape using the field on your left.* The path rises again. 300m from that last junction, as you pass a field gate on your right, turn **sharp left** at a marker post with a yellow arrow. *Don't miss this turn!* You now have a good path along the right-hand side of a large field. After 250m or so, the path turns abruptly **right** into the woods where it veers left again. Your path snakes its way through the left-hand side of Boxers Wood sometimes on a slippery slope, always more-or-less straight ahead. After 300m, you reach a T-junction and a marker post. Turn **right** rather steeply uphill. You reach a residential road with modern houses. Turn sharp **left** on the road, admiring the pristine brick mansions and their front lawns. The road gives way to some new wooden bollards and resumes on Bowen Way. Follow this road as it curves right. Where it turns right again as Rookery Mead, **leave** the road by forking **left** through parking spaces and along a tarmac footpath into what should be called the church square. Except that this is no church. *Nothing in Netherne is what it seems.*

*Yes, this is supposed to be a country walk, but the new village of Netherne-on-the-Hill is truly remarkable. An island community, only sinuously connected to the outside world. The ex-chapel is a leisure centre and swimming pool, the focal point for an otherwise deathly-quiet population. The green with its sculpture is partly encircled by those many-door maisonettes, ending in the old Asylum. For this is what Netherne was for most of the 1900s.*

*Netherne Mental Hospital was a pioneer in the care of mental patients, allowing them natural pursuits such as farming, handicrafts and drama. It played a vital part in the rehabilitation of war servicemen and became part of the NHS after WW2. In 1961 Enoch Powell (no less) stood in front of the Water Tower and made a case for the winding down of mental hospitals in favour of what later became Care in the Community. The hospital closed in 1994 and ten years later the redevelopment you see now began. The Water Tower, which can be seen from miles around, was fitted with a lift and redeveloped as a smart exercise in vertical living.*

- 4 Follow the tarmac round clockwise, going past the village shop. Immediately after the shop, turn **left** on Stoney Croft, marked as a cul-de-sac. This road abuts another by way of two large wooden gates. At the end, go straight over a road, between some posts opposite on a tarmac path and ahead on tarmac Netherne Lane. Where the lane bends sharp right in 200m, keep ahead between concrete posts on a path into the woods. At a marker post, keep **left**, staying in the woods. You come out into a field: take the path straight ahead across the centre. At the other side, a modern kissing-gate takes you past the entrance to the large Alderstead Heath caravan site.
- 5 Cross straight over the driveway past a one-bar metal barrier on a sign-posted concrete footpath. In 20m, keep **left** across a clearing to enter Furzefield Wood. In 200m, on your left is a clear path. *You can simply keep straight on here but lovers of this wood like to take this little three-sided tour, only a fraction longer.* Turn **left** on this wide side path. In 100m the path bends right and, in another 200m, right again. In 30m, go **left** through an unneeded wooden swing-gate into a field. Turn **left** along the edge of the field and, in 40m, at a corner, leave the edge by taking a marked path diagonally across the field, in the same general direction, going by a redundant stile. You pass, over on your left, the buildings of Court Farm.

At the far side, go through a gap in the hedge and diagonally left across the next field. Your path leads out over a low stile onto a track by Chaldon Church. Your route is **right** on the track but this medieval church is not on any account to be missed.

*After the Normans took over in 1066, they recorded Chaldon as "Chalvedune, being of two hides (200 acres) and a church". At that time, the church was already built of stone, recently replacing the four-centuries-old wooden church, and, despite later additions, much of what you see now dates from then. There is much of interest inside, such as the medieval St. Kateryn's Chapel (south of the chancel) with scenes from the life of St. Mary in the east window. But the most striking and astonishing item is the near-perfect large painting on the west wall. It depicts Heaven (a wispy suggestion at the top), Purgatory and Hell, a visible warning to illiterate worshippers. The Tree of Good and Evil is depicted at the bottom right. The artist must have borne a grudge against dishonest tradesmen because a series of them are shown on the "bridge of spikes". Most of the seven deadly sins are portrayed in some way. This is such a complex and detailed story, it is essential to pick up some literature to explore the details.*

- 6 After your visit, go out by the track, keeping right, to a road. Turn **right** on the road and immediately **left** into a field. Follow the right-hand side with a wire fence on your right. *There is a patch of mud at first but it soon clears.* Soon you have a paddock on your right and a private wood on your left and your path comes out to a tarmac lane. *On your right is Leazes Avenue in Chaldon (or Caterham), known for its giant sequoias, but your route is the other way.* Turn **left** on the lane, passing bungalows and a paddock, and where the tarmac ends, continue on a wide path through Piles Wood. As you emerge from the woods, your path runs down beside a fence with views to your left of Happy Valley.

*If you want to follow the crowds, you can fork **left** just before the fence and veer left into Happy Valley, picking up the walk later. But, this being FFW, that would be too simple and you would miss the pub and a wonderful high path.*

You pass a 4-way fingerpost at the bottom of the valley.

- 7 Keep straight on uphill on a rather steep narrow and stony path. The path levels out and runs straight and takes you out past a metal barrier onto a residential road. In 20m, on your left is a big black City of London sign board for Coulsdon Common. Turn **left** here, with a wooden fence on your right. In 150m, go through a small wooden gate on your **right**. *(Or, to skip the pub, keep straight on.)* Fork a fraction left across the grass and, where you hit the trees in 150m, go **left** through a wooden swing-gate, leading quickly to the Fox on Coulsdon Common.



*The "Fox" is a real historic inn and has stood here since 1720. During the early days of the Cold War, the "Fox" acted as an informal HQ for the Military School for Linguists who were undergoing an intensive course in Russian. As part of a chain, the "Fox" has a comprehensive menu (delivered in a van) but booking is essential at the weekend (01883 340737) or you may be left standing around. There are normally three real ales on tap.*

## Leg 2: Coulsdon Common to Farthing Downs 4½ km=2½ miles

**8** From the *Fox* inn, turn **left** on the lane in front of the green and follow it till it ends at the Happy Valley car park. Continue ahead by a large metal gate, passing a notice board, and continue on a wide straight tarmac drive with a large open space on your left. The tarmac ends and the drive enters trees, now a wide dirt track. **Leave** the track here before it starts to descend and fork **right** on a fragment of a stony or concrete track which immediately leads into a grassy meadow. Keep to the right-hand side, in the direction of a pair of transmitters visible above the trees. At the bottom right-hand corner, go through a gap to meet a wide crossing path. Go straight over this wide path and immediately over a more narrow stony path. Almost immediately, fork **left** onto an open hillside. [The high walk now begins!](#)

**9** Follow the long snaking path that runs near the right-hand edge of the hillside. Just before the end, avoid a right fork, and take the path a fraction left straight into the trees ahead. This path leads out once again onto an open hillside with great views left into Happy Valley. Keep to the right-hand edge, near the tree margin, on a rather unclear path, passing bench seats. Soon a more distinct path joins you from the right. Stay close to the trees, passing more seats. Soon there is a wire fence on your left as you pass an enclosed part of the nature reserve. After more bench seats, your path forks.



**Decision point.** If you want to return to the Farthing Downs car park, skip forward in this text and do the section called **Farthing Downs Return**. Otherwise, continue with the next section.

**10** Leave the wire fence completely by forking **right** and keeping **right**, ascending through trees and shrubs. At an oblique crossing path, go straight over. Your path runs beside a wire fence on your left and comes out by a house, an outpost of Old Coulsdon, with a children's playground over on your right. Wheel **left** before the house to join a wide tarmac path. Your path becomes a farm track, passing horse pastures. About 200m from the house, you reach a T-junction with another wide track.

**11** [The next few manoeuvres are unusual and you need to concentrate during this section.](#) Cross straight over the track, a fraction to the right, on a narrow path through the trees. In 10m, turn **left** on a narrow path that runs beside a fenced meadow on your right. At the end you meet a bank with a choice of paths. Keep **right** to descend onto a wide horse path. Cross straight over this horse path, a fraction to the right, to go through a wooden swing-gate in a wire fence onto a rather scruffy sloping grass field. Turn immediately **right**, staying close to the wire fence, along a level path. [There are great views to your left and on a clear sunny day Wembley Arch can be seen.](#)



After an area newly cleared (2016) of its tall trees, suddenly you come out onto a vast open hillside with a sturdy bench and terrific views down into the valley.

**12** After admiring the view from the bench seat, turn **left** down the hillside heading for the bottom right-hand corner [\[care! some walkers went wrong here\]](#). Here, go through a wooden swing-gate, through a band of trees and down to a path that runs beside garden fences. Turn **right** on this path. In 40m, turn **left** on a tarmac footpath between garden fences and out to a road. Turn **right** on the road and, in 40m, turn **left** through a metal barrier on a signposted footpath. The path goes up a steep gradient which may be

quite taxing at the end of the walk. Near the top, the path goes even more steeply up a bank. Go over a crossing path and through a wooden gate onto the open hillside of Farthing Downs.

- 13 Turn **right** on a path that runs close to the trees on your right and follow this green horse ride for 1 km, all the way to the houses of Coulsdon where a small wooden gate leads you onto a tarmac lane, familiar from your outward journey. Continue down to the main road. *The Memorial Park directly opposite houses the Poppy Café, not a gourmet locale but versatile and cheerful for all that.* To return to the station, turn **left** on the main road and immediately **left** again; then **right** at a signpost back to the station where the walk began.



### Valley Walk 1¾ km=1 mile

Take this route if you want to go from Farthing Downs straight along Happy Valley to re-join the main walk just before Coulsdon Common and the pub. You will miss Chaldon Church and several other sights.

- 14 The signs show that you are following the London Loop and the Downlands Circular Walk. Stay on this wide path through a fine yew forest and, at a 4-way fingerpost, keep straight on. Your path dips left downhill through a hazel coppice. Finally, about ½ km from the car park, you suddenly come out onto the broad grassy slope of Happy Valley.

*Happy Valley is a public park owned by Croydon Council. That explains the fence and the absence of sheep and any merry farmyard sounds. It all goes back to 1935 and the London Committee that set up laws for a Metropolitan Green Belt. Farthing Downs was part of the same scheme. Happy Valley was bought by the local councils in 1937. It is also a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), because of several uncommon herbs and tree species which are found here.*

- 15 Keep ahead on a level course. Straight ahead you can see an upward slope (used by many to get to the car park) but your route is to veer right before the slope, staying on the level, through a wide gap in the trees. You pass (and ignore) a 3-way fingerpost to continue along the bottom of the valley. Stay on the grassy path, avoiding the horse track on your left. Your path goes through a thin hedge by another marker post for the Downlands Circular Walk. Finally you reach the end of the valley at a bank of trees and a junction of paths with a 4-way fingerpost. Turn **left** at the fingerpost.

Now re-join the main walk at Leg 1 section [7](#).

### Farthing Downs Return ¾ km= ½ mile

Take this route down from the high path if you didn't start the walk at Coulsdon South and you don't want to do the full walk to Coulsdon.

- 16 Take the **left** fork, staying by the wire fence, avoiding the trees and ignoring a swing-gate on your left. Your path takes you quite steeply down using steps, still with the wire fence on your left. At the bottom, you reach the main path in the valley by Malcolm Guille's bench. Turn **right** along this valley path. In 200m you pass two small wooden gates on your right just before a right bend. Turn **left** here up a straight steep path, immediately avoiding a path that branches right. After a rather taxing climb, at the top, turn **left** on a wide path.

If you are doing the **Valley Walk** (omitting Chaldon Church) and you began the walk at or near the Happy Valley car park, go back in this text and do the section called **Valley Walk**.

Otherwise, turn **right** in 20m, **right** again at a fence and **left** across the grass to the Farthing Downs car park.

## Getting there

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By car: the starting points are either (1) the **Farthing Downs** car park, from where you can do any of the shorter walks (and even the long walk by making a very sharp left turn at Coulsdon) and (2) the **Happy Valley** car park which is at Coulsdon Common near Caterham. You could also park at Chaldon Church, approximate postcode **CR3 5AL**. Coulsdon itself has very few parking spaces. You can try the Coulsdon Memorial Park car park off Marlpit Lane which has half a dozen places. On the other side of the Memorial Park there is a car park in Nineacres Way (postcode CR5 2SH) but it is for "Users Only" probably referring to the tennis courts. Both car parks are closed when the park closes. There are spaces in Chaldon Way, which is on the walk, postcode **CR5 1DP**. There are also spaces in the residential roads off Marlpit Lane.

Coulsdon can be reached from Croydon, Carshalton or Caterham. For the Farthing Downs car park, you need to go up Marlpit Lane (the B276), turn into Downs Road and follow it, keeping left over a cattle grid, and up over the top of the Downs. You can also reach the car park from the south, via Chaldon Church.

If you are coming from the M25, there is a scenic route starting at the Reigate exit and the big roundabout. Follow the signs for *Reigate* but in 300 yds, fork **left** as for *Merstham*. Follow the road, Gatton Bottom, which later goes under the M25 and reaches the A23 road (London Road North). Turn **right** on it and, in nearly 200 yds, turn **left** on Rockshaw Road, going over a narrow railway bridge. In nearly 1 mile, this road flies clean over the M23 and its feeder roads and comes to a T-junction. Turn **left** for **Chaldon Church** and **Farthing Downs**. For the **Happy Valley car park**, turn **right** at a crossroads before the church, follow Rook Lane for 1 mile and, at a mini-roundabout by the *Clifton Arms*, turn **left** on Coulsdon Road. Follow this road for a mile until you are on the Common. Look for a brown tourist sign pointing **left** to the *Fox* and the car park.

By train: **Coulsdon South station** is two stops away from **East Croydon station** with regular services daily (platform 6). For those of a certain age, note that it is **within the London Freedom Pass zone**.

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