



Forest Green: Woods and Green Meadows

Distance: 10 km=6¼ miles or 4 km=2½ miles easy walking
add 400m each way for the NT car park

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: Forest Green

Map: Explorer 146 (Dorking) and 134 (Horsham)
but the map in this guide should be sufficient

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

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Village, green meadows, fine houses, ancient cottages, bridges, woodland, hidden paths, easy country tracks, country grocer, foodie pub

In Brief

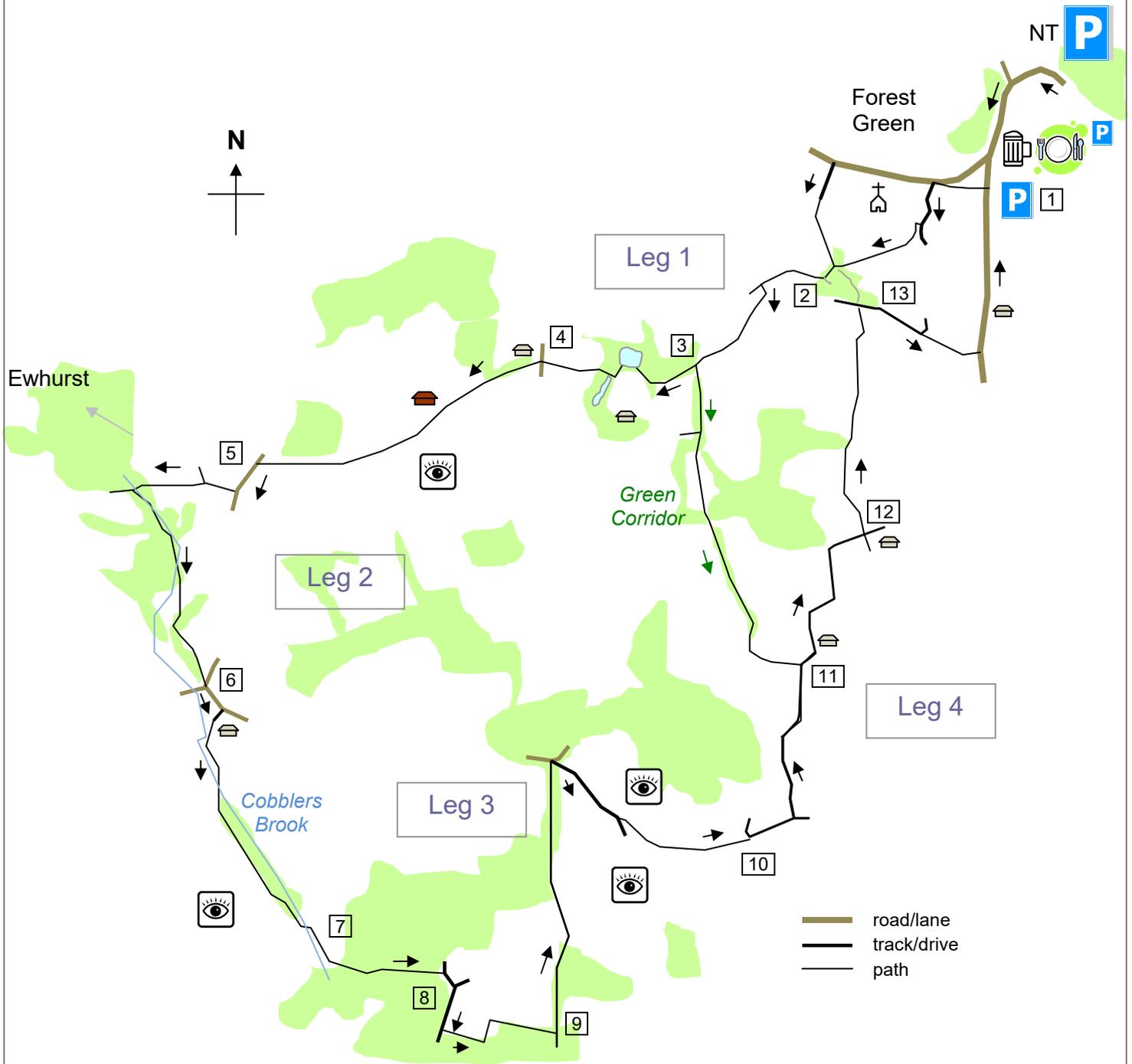
Forests and greens abound in England but there is only *one* Forest Green. There could hardly be a more gentle, spiritually uplifting, walk than this one, in the green pastures of Surrey, where little woods mix with pastures, few crops or livestock, and easy gradients. The ancient cottages (marked **thus**), many in dazzling flowery gardens, are unmatched anywhere, giving you a feeling throughout the walk that nothing has changed during two centuries. For visitors who simply want to stretch their legs before relaxing at the *Parrot*, there is a *very short* 2½-mile option.



The whole route is either through green meadows, on wide woodland paths or on farm tracks, with very little undergrowth, so shorts would be wearable. In the dry September of 2022, any type of walking shoes were adequate but in winter the ground can be very boggy making high boots or even wellies necessary. There are a number of stiles on this walk, none of which cause any real problem, unless you are unassisted and of short stature. This walk is fine for a small-to-medium dog who can manage the stiles.

The walk begins at the free car park next to the *Parrot* in Forest Green, Surrey, postcode RH5 5RZ, www.w3w.co/hamster.committee.hissing. This is a small public car park beside the road on the south corner of the pub. Another possible parking place is the big car park used by customers of the pub and other businesses: there is no sign saying this is *only* for customers and you will certainly be one soon, but on a busy day it is kinder not to monopolise a space. A good option is the small free National Trust *Etherley Copse* car park, www.w3w.co/describe.drawn.caps, on the Ockley Road just 400m away. You could also start at Ewhurst, with a short mapped hopover. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



This walk crosses several long bridges made from wooden slats which break easily. At the time of writing the first footbridge was closed, and the second footbridge was not in perfect order either. To lose any more would be a disaster. So ... when you cross a bridge, please go one at a time and tread gently!

The hamlet of Forest Green was originally called "Gostrode" or "Gosterwood", and from 1580, "Folles Green". Tillies Cottage, dates from the 1400s. The wooded landscape here is partly thanks to the diarist and part-time royalist John Evelyn, owner of the estate, who wrote in 1664 a "Discourse of Forest Trees" to encourage owners to plant trees everywhere. The triangular Green covers approximately 10 hectares=26 acres. The hamlet still retains its old Forge and a Mill on the north side which was acquired by Marylebone Grammar School in 1908 for summer adventures and the young visitors, known locally as the "Mill Boys", worked on many improvements.

The Parrot, about 300 years old, is now a notable gastropub. The pub has a number of real ales poured direct from casks on the counter. The restaurant is eclectic with a modern touch and its menu includes home-grown produce and excellent gluten-free options. Next to the Parrot is the Butcher's Hall, a quality deli where you can pick out a very decent 3-course takeaway meal at a bargain price.

If you are parked in the NT's Etherley Copse car park, do as follows: Turn **right** on the road, soon making use of the grass bank on the left, then the wide grass verge. Just after seeing a side road on your right, cross over the main road to the verge on the right side. Walk next to the line of trees on the right, crossing two driveways to the Forest Green Forge. When you reach the road, cross straight over to a signed track towards houses. Resume at the blue text in the next section, or at the normal text that appears below it.

Leg 1: Forest Green to Lyefield 1 km=0.6 miles

- 1 Beginning the walk next to the *Parrot*, cross the road and walk across the grass on a faint path, heading for a small group of trees and meeting the main road on your right. Your route is immediately **left*** on a track towards houses, signed as a footpath, leading to the (restored) footbridge no.1.

* BUT in damp conditions, or if you like fewer stiles, there is an excellent alternative, as follows: Continue along the main road for a further 300m, using the grass verge, passing the entrance to the interesting *Holy Trinity Church* (see the walk *Greensand Hills from the South*). Opposite *Forest Green House*, turn **left** on a tarmac drive, signed as a footpath. Where the drive bends left to the unusual house, *Okebrook*, keep straight ahead, down a narrow path, across the Oke Brook by a long bridge (footbridge no.2) and through a small metal gate. Keep **left** along the side of a green pasture, soon ignoring a footpath and bridge on the left. Skip to section 2. Otherwise ...

Follow the drive as it zigzags left-right past a house. Just after the second house, *Tumblers*, its garden and a small wooden garage, fork **right** on a farm track, but immediately turn **left**, before you reach some metal gates, onto a grass path. After a stile, go along the right-hand side of a pasture next to a fence on your right. Another stile and pasture lead to a third stile, down into trees and across a footbridge over the Oke Brook. Keep straight ahead, over a (redundant) stile into a large green meadow. Turn **left** along the edge.

- 2 In the corner, avoid a path on the left and turn **right**, staying beside the meadow on your right. In 150m your path takes you over a stile, across a rather indistinct farm track, continuing beside the next meadow. But, in *only* 30m, at the start of a hedge, turn **left** over a stile onto a narrow path. *Don't miss this hidden turn!* In 10m, go **right** over a stile and walk along the right-hand side of a sheep pasture. The stile into the next large sheep pasture is on the right of a farm gate, but you need to open and close a small temporary metal gate first. Continue as before and, in the first corner, go **right** over a stile into a narrow strip of trees.

Decision point. If you are doing the very short option, skip to near the end of this text and do the section called **The Green Corridor**.

Leg 2: Lyefield to Plough Farm 2.7 km=1.7 miles

- 3 Ignore a path on the left through the corridor of trees and go straight ahead over another stile into a meadow. Avoid a prominent path across the centre and stay on the **right**-hand edge, under tall oaks. A stile and a shallow ditch lead up into a meadow of waving grass with mown strips, belonging to the beautifully appointed 16th-century *Lyefield Farm House*. Turn immediately **right** along the edge. You arrive at a small pond where a seat around an oak tree gives you a chance to pause and imbibe the magic of this location. Turn **left**, stay next to the pond for about 50m, and turn **right** to pass between two ponds towards a large metal gate. Go over the adjoining stile (or through the gate) and cross straight over the grass to meet the corner of a hedge on your right. Follow the hedge, over a stile, to the tarmac of Lyefield Lane. Your route is straight over the lane, but it is worth shifting quickly to the right to admire the 16th-century half-timbered **Cobbetts**.
- 4 Cross to a narrow footpath opposite, beside a fence. A redundant stile, another path and a small metal gate serve up a welcome surprise: an open green landscape, sloping up into to the distance, with odd trees and occasional sheep, once the manorial lands of North Breache. Keep to the right as usual, till suddenly the trees on the right give way to a view of a haha and **North Breache Manor* beyond. Continue dead straight across the centre of the grass, passing solitary oaks, through a kissing-gate. A path between hedges, a kissing-gate, a narrow fenced path between meadows, finally lead you rightwards through a (redundant) kissing-gate, over a 2-plank bridge, to North Breache Lane. (** Grade-II, built in 1881*)
- 5 Turn **left** on the lane. In 100m, immediately before the first barn of *Yard Farm*, turn **right** and keep left through a small metal gate onto a woodland path, passing one of the ancient buildings of the farm. Ignore a footpath on the right and continue between paddocks on a path which, in our children's future, will be a line of great oaks. Your path goes through a holly wood and across a long bridge. Immediately after the bridge, turn **sharp left** onto a narrow unmarked woodland path, with the Cobbler's Brook running on your left. You cross the brook by another long bridge and come up beside a meadow on your left. Where the woodland bends away to the right, keep straight ahead on a faint path across the centre. At the far side, veer **right** and then **left**, on a woodland path. An unneeded stile leads you across a wooden bridge. (**Tread carefully! Do not break any more slats! Do not report minor damage in case they close the path.**) Continue ahead along the right-hand side of a meadow, past a redundant stile, down a slope with slatted boards, to meet a 3-way road junction on the outskirts of Ewhurst.

Leg 3: Plough Farm to Wastlands 4.2 km=2.6 miles

- 6 Cross straight over the road (Plough Lane) onto Lower Breache Road. You pass *Plough Farm House* and immediately reach the stunning **Old Plough Farm** with its lily pond and resident herons. Your route is **right** here, immediately before the pond, opposite a fingerpost (hidden in a hedge), on a shingle drive. After the shingle, keep straight on on a narrow path by a hedge. You come out into a wide green landscape, with your path running along the left-hand edge beside a string fence, with the Cobblers Brook, mainly hidden in trees, on your left. After 500m the line of trees curves away to reveal a recess where you may see some odd bits of farm equipment. Keep straight on here but at the other side, go over a farm track and **leave** the wide open space by keeping ahead to cross a long bridge with step-overs, into the adjoining meadow.
- 7 Your route is straight across the centre, heading just to the left of a large metal gate visible on the other side. Here you will find a chunky stile, a 4-plank bridge (**care!! bridge in disrepair with some planks not supported at one end**) and an improvised stile. After these, keep ahead along the left-hand side of an area of parkland with various tree species. The path continues through a modern kissing-gate, over a plank bridge, and along a woodland path, ending at a newly-made stony driveway. Turn **right**, shortly reaching a 3-way fingerpost and a junction of tracks.
- 8 **The path through the farm was diverted a few years ago and the signs no longer apply, but the new route is quite pleasing.** Ignore tracks on the left (they're blocked anyway) and veer slightly **right** onto the track ahead. You pass the remnants of a large wooden gate and are joined by a track from the left. From this point, you need to measure 80m along the track to find a rough track on your left. (There may be a lot of timber stacked here.) Turn **left** here but (important!) immediately fork **left** onto a much narrower path. This path runs fairly close to the field on your left before it enters woodland. Follow the path over a hardboard bridge and turn **left**. At the next junction, stay well clear of the remains of a bridge and a deceptive fingerpost ahead, and instead turn **right**, staying on the narrow woodland path, going over another hardboard bridge. The path ends at a 2-plank bridge and a wide ancient trackway known as Lowerhouse Lane.
- 9 Turn **left** on this wide track, giving you a long easy trek through the deep mixed forest. After 800m or so, you reach a junction of tarmac lanes. Turn immediately sharp **right** onto a tarmac drive for *Lowerhouse Farm*. The drive gently rises with views all round. Where the drive curves right to a large wooden gate, go **left** over a stile and take a path diagonally **right** across the sloping meadow. In the top corner, go over a stile and follow a fenced path uphill beside a pasture on your right. The path comes out next to an old metal gate to meet a shingle drive at a bend.
- 10 Keep **right** and follow the drive downhill. **Leith Hill is visible ahead and you can glimpse the tower.** At the bottom, at a 3-way junction, turn sharp **left** on a tarmac drive, which has a warning for satnav users. Follow the tarmac (Pond Head Lane) passing several gems: a wood, a pond, a timbered farm house, giant oaks. At the top of a gentle rise, there is a hidden fingerpost. Ignore paths left and right here and stay on the tarmac.

The **Green Corridor** re-joins the main walk here.

Leg 4: Wastlands to Forest Green 2 km=1.3 miles

- 11 You pass Grade-II listed **Wastlands** with its old timbers, wonderful flower garden and lily pond. The tarmac ends here and the drive is now a wide dirt track. The track goes through a wooden gate and bends right and left, then right again, eventually passing through a wooden gate to reach **Bridgham Farm**. Your route is **left** on a path *before* the houses. *But first it would be unthinkable not to continue ahead for 20m to take a quick peek first at the wonderful old farmhouse in its dense-packed flower garden with its timbers and its scalloped roof, and the ivy-clad outhouse.*
- 12 Having turned **left** at a yellow arrow before the first house, through a small wooden gate, walk along the right-hand side of a sheep meadow. Go through a large wooden gate and diagonally **left** across the next meadow. Aim for the centre of the hedgerow opposite and go over two stiles (isn't one enough? you might think) and along the left-hand side of a larger meadow. At the far side, ignore a gap on the left and go straight ahead through a very large, rather awkward, metal farm gate. Follow the left-hand side of the next field and, at the other side, go between posts on a path between wire fences. At the end, your path leads you right over a stile onto a dirt track which bends left and ends at a T-junction with a 3-way fingerpost.
- 13 *If you started the walk using the first bridge ("footbridge no. 1"), you have the option of returning the same way by crossing straight over at the T-junction onto a hidden permissive path. Otherwise* Turn **right** at the T-junction on a concrete track. Where the track bends left, go straight ahead over a stile (or through the large rusty metal gate, if open) into a horse pasture. Cross the centre to go over two stiles, each just to the left of a large metal gate, which are sometimes open. Another stile leads onto an enclosed path leading to the road in Forest Green. Turn **left** on the road, passing **Tillies Cottage** on your right and soon reaching the *Parrot* where the walk began.

The Green Corridor 1 km=0.7 miles

Follow this section If you are doing the very short (4 km = 2½ mile) walk.

Turn **left** into the narrow wooded strip. Where the strip widens in about 200m, keep to the right and avoid a stile and footpath on the right. A stile takes you into a wild meadow. Follow a path along the middle and, at the far end, go over a (bypassable) stile into more woodland. The wide path leads gently downhill through another woodland strip. This section has a special atmosphere thanks to the tall oaks. Finally, 500m after the wild meadow, your path suddenly bends left in front of a crop field and come out to a tarmac drive. Turn **left** on the drive.

*Now resume the main walk at section **11**.*

Getting there

By car: the easiest access to Forest Green is via Ockley on the A29 road. The major side turning is clearly marked in the centre of the village. The NT car park is on the **right** just before the first house of the hamlet. If coming from the London / M25 area, another "scenic route" is along the B2126 from Abinger Hammer, passing through Sutton Abinger and Holmbury St Mary.

By bus/train: bus 30 or 433 from Dorking. Check the timetables.

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