



Friday Street, Coldharbour, Leith Hill

Distance: 10½ km=6½ miles easy-to-moderate with one steep descent

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: Coldharbour, Leith Hill

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

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Woodland, water meadows, high hills, lake, tower, pub

In Brief



This is an unforgettable walk from a tranquil lake to the highest of the Surrey hills, taking in water meadows, magical forest and an ancient track, perfect for all seasons. There are no nettles and good sensible shoes should be fine. There is one short but steep descent that can be tricky in wet conditions. This walk is ideal for your dog too.

The walk starts at the **Friday Street** car park, www.w3w.co/stick.humid.scam, postcode **RH5 6JR**: see map and guide at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

This walk is also the start
of the **Surrey Greensand Monster**.



The Walk

- See map overleaf.** From the Friday Street car park, walk parallel to the tarmac lane down on your left, along a knobbly narrow path, next to some wooden railings. After about 100m, a set of steps take you down to the lane, reaching the lake shortly after. Leave the lane here by turning **left** just before the lake down a tarmac track. This leads past a cottage that usually has jam and relishes for sale, over a ford with a little bridge and past picturesque *Yew Tree Cottage* with its scarecrow family, eventually reaching a crossing path before a large gate. To the left is a beautiful old weir bridge with the Tillingbourne and water meadows on each side, but your route is **right** through a small wooden gate, up a steep path. Keep to the main path and, after some distance where it twists left, avoid all turnings off and "Private" signs. After 400m on this path, you reach a 4-way fingerpost at the corner of a mature wood with a large meadow on your right. Keep straight on here between the wood and the meadow, ignoring the wide path that curves away to your left. Your path takes you through a wooden swing gate to a narrow lane. Cross straight over the lane through another wooden swing gate and turn immediately **left** down a fenced path that soon begins to descend.



- 2 Soon your path becomes narrower and winding. The steep descent is now made easier by a flight of steps, but you still need to take care in wet or icy conditions! Follow the path over a stile, along the left-hand side of water meadows, across another stream and eventually up two steps, over another stile, to a T-junction. Turn **left** on a wide path. *This is part of the Greensand Way which runs from Haslemere to East Kent.* In about 100m, at a 3-way fingerpost, turn **right**, going over a stile, on a fenced path that runs up the right-hand side of a pasture. The path soon leads you over another stile and onto a very broad sandy trackway at the top of a ridge. Turn **right** on the trackway which is known as Wolvens Lane. (You can stay on the narrow winding path through trees, high above the sunken track, because it eventually merges with the track itself.)
- 3 You will be following this ancient trackway for nearly 3 km, all the way to the village of Coldharbour, ignoring the many tempting turnings off. After nearly 500m, you pass some wooden railings and a steep bank on your right. (If you're tired of the sand, you can take an interesting, very twisty and scenic alternative path up the bank here. In 150m, at a crossing, keep straight on. This path is used by horses – and bikes, as you see from the two signs you pass. After

1 km, at a 4-way junction in front of a large rhododendron, keep **left**. Cross straight over a sandy path and turn **right** back on the track.) Just after half way you pass a house *Wolven Cottage Stables* on your left. Stay on the main track, avoiding all side turnings. At Coldharbour you are greeted by a red phonebox, a pub and probably a bunch of cyclists.



Coldharbour was long regarded with fear and superstition by the inhabitants of Dorking as a dark and dangerous habitat of smugglers. The Plough Inn (renovated in 2016) has a big garden in the back, offers accommodation and runs a good kitchen with a range of burgers and some of the best pub chips. (But Leith Hill tower, half an hour away, is ok for light snacks.) It has a good selection of real ales, including those from its own Leith Hill Brewery (currently named Tickety-Boo, Crooked Furrow, Beautiful South and Tallywhacker). The Plough has opened a little shop selling teas, proper coffee, cakes, warm generous very yummy made-today sausage rolls and other bites. Note: this is also a "comfort stop": there is no loo at the Tower.



4 Turn immediately **right** uphill along an unmade road past some cottages on your left. Fork **right** after about 50m to avoid going into a private entrance. The road becomes a track and leads upwards towards Leith Hill. Ignore all footpaths leading off, staying on the main track. Half way up, there is a bench with fine views south for a welcome pause. Finally the trees on your left give way to a clearing, with a cricket pitch (the highest in Surrey) and pavilion ahead on your right. *There are views left here on a clear day to Gatwick Airport.* 30m before the nearest corner of the cricket pitch, **leave** the track by forking **left** between stumps on a path across the grass. Follow this path straight ahead into woods and through a wooden barrier. There is a green-topped post here indicating that you are on the Heathland Trail walk.



5 Follow these green-topped posts through woods for nearly 1 km. Basically, they lead you straight on, parallel to the edge of the hill, with good views to your left where the trees permit and soon a bench seat. There are one or two unexpected turns, so watch out for those posts – or you can simply keep to the edge of the hill. Eventually you see a sign for the Tower carved on the back of a sign for the car park. The walk now curves **right** on a much wider track, descends deep into the woods, and later reaches a deep hollow on your left. Leave the green-topped route here and instead follow the sign for the Tower, going **left** steeply uphill on a broad path frequented by daredevil cyclists, also part of the Greensand Way. *(You can avoid the steep ascent by forking **right** at a blue marker post after 40m. You will soon see the tower on your left and can take any path in that direction.)* In 100m or so you reach Leith Hill Tower.



This part of the **Surrey Greensand Monster** walk ends here.



*The tower was built in 1766 to raise the height of Leith Hill to a symbolic 1000 feet. It later fell into disuse until 1864 when the side-tower staircase was built and was fully restored by the National Trust in 1984. The café in the tower serves refreshments and nice homemade cakes. This was extended to **daily** opening (apart from Christmas Day) in 2013. It closes at 5 weekends and 3 other days. You can ascend the tower where there is a view all round with miles of seeming wilderness.*



6 Continue in the same direction down a very broad path past an information board. **Careful! you need to concentrate here so as not to miss the next turning.** Only 20m after the board, you pass an orange-topped post. In another 80m, there is an unmarked rough path on your right into the woods. (As a

guide, this is the first usable path on your right after the post; it is next to the remains of an old tree trunk and opposite a curious tongue-shaped carving far over on your left.) *Don't miss this turning!* Turn **right** on this path reaching, in 50m or so, a large space full of pines and a maze of twisty paths much used by mountain bikers. **Careful! you need to concentrate here too!** Your path curls right and left and reaches a T-junction with a much wider path. Veer **left** on this wide path. Now continue dead straight on a broad sandy path, avoiding branch-offs, keeping a forest of tall straight conifers on your left. Your path runs between bracken and gets a little narrower. You will be following it for about 1 km as it becomes stony and sandy again. In over 500m, at a 4-way fingerpost [Nov 2021: gone due to forestry work], continue straight on over a crossing bridleway. You finally come out to a road at a junction with a minor road on your right.

- 7 Cross the minor road and veer **right** on the major road, signposted *Abinger Common, Wotton*. Continue along the road for 70m and take a Public Bridleway, fingerposted diagonally **right**. This path crosses a drive and takes you down through beautiful woodland. Veer left at the bottom and follow the path straight on for about 1 km where you reach the remains of a wooden gate and the hamlet of Abinger Bottom.
- 8 The path is reinforced by a tarmac road coming from the right which it follows through the hamlet. Ignore all side paths until you have passed the last house. Take a broad path here diagonally **right**. The path follows a magical route through more forest with wooden stepped bridges on your right. *(Everyone uses the higher path along the bank on the right, winding through trees.) The trees have bizarre shapes: note the little lady with the backpack in a cleft of a tree.* After about 1 km you reach houses and an ex-pub, the *Stephan Langton*. *This pub sadly closed in 2020. Stephan Langton (c.1150-1228) was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1207 and was a central figure in the dispute between King John of England and Pope Innocent III, which ultimately led to the issuing of Magna Carta in 1215.* Keep straight on to reach the lake on your right and the road, familiar from the outward journey. Turn **left**, looking out for steps on your left that take you back to the car park where the walk began.

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Getting there

By car: To get to Friday Street: go to the Dorking-Guildford (A25) road and, 3 miles=5 km west of Dorking, turn **south** on a road marked *Abinger Common, Friday Street, Leith Hill*. After passing houses on the right, going through a rather dramatic cutting, passing a road junction on the right, a footpath on the left and reaching a large house on the right, take an extremely sharp **left** turn signposted *Friday Street*. The signpost is somewhat hidden in the trees and this turn is very easy to miss. After about 400m, look out for the car park on the right, before the lake.

