



Leigh and Highridge Wood

Distance: 12½ km=8 miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

Date written: 17-apr-2012

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Refreshments: Leigh

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

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

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Woodland, meadows, village, views, bluebells in spring

In Brief

This is a gentle ever-changing walk amidst the woodland and meadows of Southeast Surrey. It begins in a Forestry Commission local woodland of great charm and interest, well-known to local people but a secret outside the area. It visits green pastures and many small woods, with no ploughed fields, and calls in at a charming friendly pub.



This is an easy walk on good paths. However, there are some patches of nettles and tall undergrowth making shorts uncomfortable in summer. Unless the weather has been very dry (when any sensible shoes are probably fine) you will encounter some muddy sections on this Wealden walk and will be glad of good boots. A small or medium-sized dog will be fine but a large one will have a problem with some of the stiles.

The walk begins at the **Highridge Wood** car park off the north side of Brockhamhurst Road, 350m west of the junction with Leigh Road, SE of Dorking, Surrey, near Betchworth, Grid Ref TQ197474, **postcode RH3**



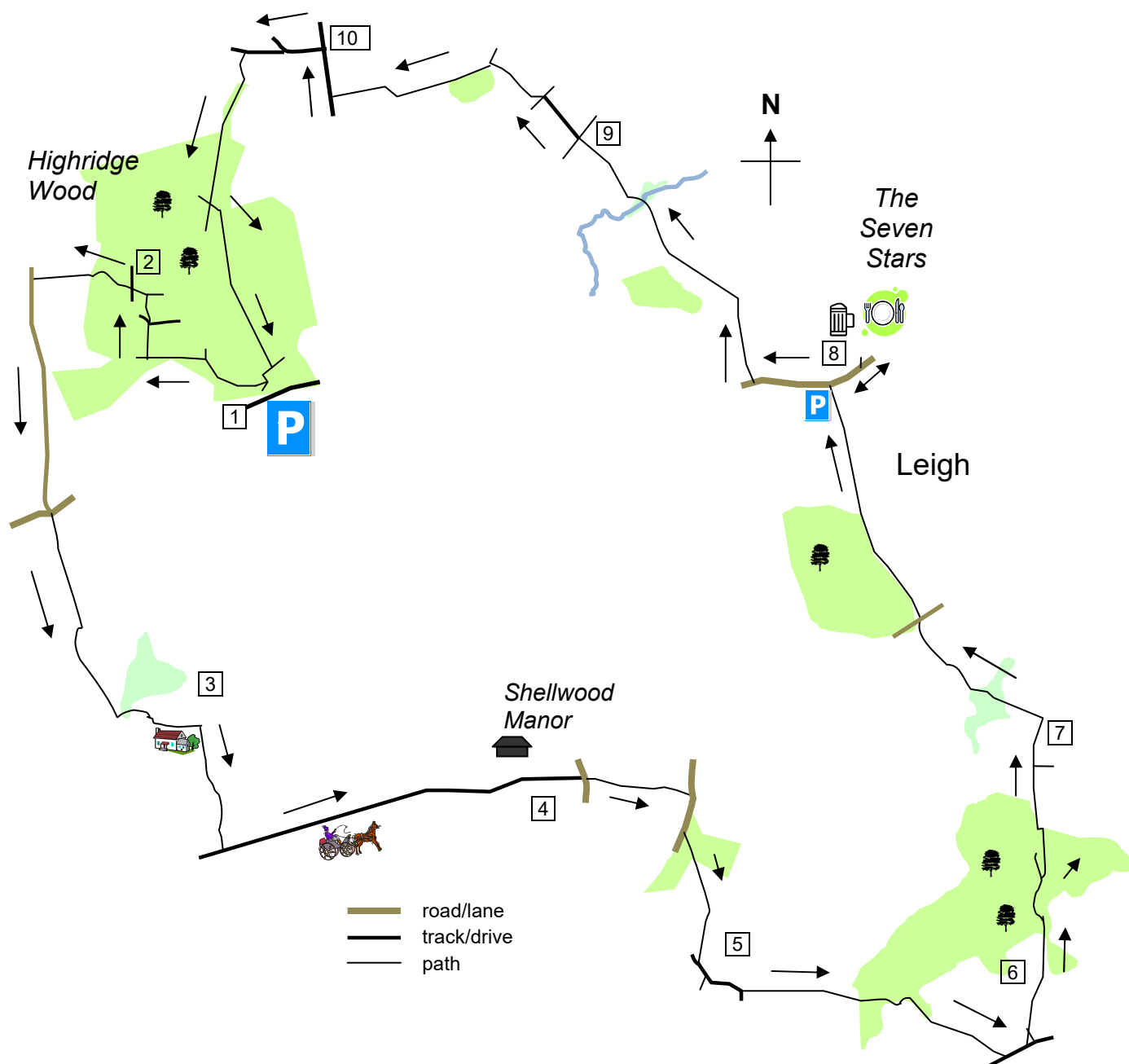
7AP. Warning! isolated car park: leave car visibly empty - see Guidelines.

For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk


- 1 See map overleaf.** From opposite the entrance to the car park, go past a heavy steel barrier into an open space used by foresters. In only 10m, immediately before the first oak tree, turn **left** on a very narrow path into the trees. The path immediately snakes left and right through brambles and bracken. Stay on this path for just over 100m where you will see a field ahead, just as the path ends at a T-junction. Turn **right** here on a path which is in fact an official footpath, running alongside a stream, soon entering the thick forest. In only 50m, turn **left** over a huge fallen tree trunk. This is much easier than it seems! (There is a marker post here with yellow and blue arrows but it is completely hidden in undergrowth.) *However, all*

the local dog walkers bypass the tree trunk by turning **left** on a narrow path **5m before it**. Follow this path, with that field still visible on your left, with a pinewood on your right. In 200m, turn **right** at a post with a yellow arrow (*don't miss it!*) over a 2-plank bridge, into the depths of the wood. The path goes over two more bridges and, after a little more than 100m, meets a wide forestry track. Cross straight over the track, going up four steps on the other side. Continue for another 70m through birches to a crossing path near some ditches. Turn **left** here.




2 In 50m, the path crosses a wide grassy path, weaving right-left. In another 150m, it leads you out of the wood and over a stile. Go across the centre of a large grassy meadow, heading for a large metal gate, with the chalky North Downs in view on your right. Go over a stile and turn **left** on a quiet tarmac lane, Roothill Lane. Continue on the lane for 700m all the way to a junction with a main road. Cross the road to a concrete drive opposite, signposted as a footpath. In 450m, ignore a footpath on the right, soon passing *Wisteria Stables* and, 350m later, the tasty *Snellings Cottage*.

3 Your path now goes through a small wooden gate and **right** along the edge of a meadow. It takes you over a new stile, along the edge of the next meadow and, after 350m total, over a stile. Turn **left** on a wide track. *You may occasionally see a horse and trap on this peaceful straight gravel track.* In 700m you pass *Shellwood Manor Cottage* and Farm, with its wooden sculpture, followed by a farm house, a converted stable house and a pond. Another 350m takes you to a road. Cross straight over the road onto a cinder track. Follow this delightful route under oak trees for 350m, leading to another road, Clayhill Road. Turn **right** on this road.

 4 Pass the entrance to Little Shellwood Farm and, in 40m, turn **left** at a fingerpost into woodland which is thick with bluebells in spring. Go over a stile and diagonally up the gently rising part of a meadow, then through a wide gap in the hedge by a large oak. Continue along the left-hand side of the next meadow, with a hedge on your left. At the corner, go **left** over a hidden stile, **right** over another stile and out to a concrete drive. Turn **left** on the drive, ignoring a footpath and stile straight ahead. Proceed between stables and other farm buildings, hop over a stile in the fence straight ahead (or through an open metal gate) and continue along the left-hand side of a meadow.

5 After 350m, at the far side, go over a stile, over a bridge across a wide stream (a tributary of the River Mole) and over a stile into a meadow. The official route here is a fraction **left** up to a metal gate (which you do *not* go through) and **right** along the top edge of the meadow. Go over a stile and keep the same direction across the next meadow. *(If you see a herd of cattle ahead, you can avoid them by keeping **right** round the edge of the meadow, picking up a wood-chip track and following it, curving **left**, picking up the walk in the next section. But in 2017 all the cattle seem to have gone.)* Aim for just to the right of an electricity pole in the centre where your route goes between two wooden posts in the fence. Veer **right**, then keep dead straight on just to the left of an oak and onwards to the corner of a wire fence. *(Temporary fencing changes a lot here: in 2017 you need to lift a hook.)* Turn **left** on a farm track towards farm buildings.

 6 In only 40m, your route doubles back across the meadows. Opposite a stile on your right, go **left** through an opening in the fence. *(In 2017 you need to climb over a plastic sleeve; but instead, a little further on, near a junction of tracks, you can lift a hook.)* Take a diagonal path across the meadow, aiming for a three-gabled red-tiled house in the distance. You pass about 30m from an oak in the middle of the field on your left. You should now see another pair of uprights in the flimsy fence about half way down the long side of the pasture. *(In 2017 there is a plastic sleeve).* Now veer a little to the right to head for the corner of the garden hedge of the house where you will meet a fingerpost. Veer **left** here as directed. Exit the meadow *[Jul 2017: possibly stepping down over an electric ribbon fence]* over a stile or through a large wooden gate on a wide path into woodland. Your path elbows right and, just over 150m into the wood, reaches a 3-way fingerpost *[2017: still lying on its side and hidden in undergrowth]*. Turn **right** at the fingerpost and in only 5m turn **left** on a path through woodland, parallel to the one you were on. (This path is pleasanter than the muddy track and is a grand bluebell walk in spring.) At the end of the wood, keep straight ahead into a large field and proceed along the left-hand side.

- 7 In 250m, at the next corner of the large field, disregard a footpath right and continue ahead between fields. In 100m, at the other side, go just past a hedge on your left. *The official footpath cuts the corner beside what was a small cabbage field, now merged with the large one. So...* Turn **left** with the hedge and immediately veer a little to the **right** across the field to a wooden post and yellow arrow visible at the other side. Here, go down into low-level woodland, over a stile, over a bridge across the same wide stream and along a strip of stunted woodland between fields. Next are an unneeded stile, a small metal gate and a path between fences or hedges, arriving at a lane. Cross the lane, a fraction right, up five steps and through a wooden swing-gate. *(In late spring, there is a wonderful bluebell wood straight ahead, parallel to the field. Where the woodland path bends left, keep right at a T-junction. You need to exit back to the field before the far corner because there's no other way out. The exit is opposite a side path and leads out by an old metal gate.)* Now continue along the left-hand side of a field. When you reach the corner, the path continues straight ahead uphill across the field. *(In 2016 this path was ploughed over and walkers went left-right round the edge; no problem in 2017.)* In the far corner, go through a small wooden swing-gate and along an enclosed path to the road near Leigh by a small car park (alternative start). The *Seven Stars* is only 150m to your right. You need to retrace your steps afterwards.



*The village of Leigh (pronounced "Lye", as it was spelt in medieval times) is blessed with two pubs, the other being "The Plough" in the centre (turn right at the crossroads). The "Seven Stars" is a 17th-century tile-hung friendly inn founded on some rare principles: **no** piped music, **no** "machines" and **no** (young) children. There are two sections: a large bar and a dining area which also has a bar. Four fairly standard brews are served and the service, food and atmosphere are very well spoken of. The name of the pub comes either from the Pleiades star cluster (as vaguely suggested by the pub sign), or from the Plough constellation (linking it to the other pub) or from the five planets plus sun and moon known to the ancients. Famous residents of Leigh were Ben Jonson, poet and playwright of Shakespeare's time, and the great conductor / pianist André Previn ("Mr Preview" if you know that Morecambe and Wise show).*

- 8 From the pub, retrace your steps and continue along the road (or turn **left** on the road if you did not visit the pub). In 200m, just past a farm gate and 30m before a road junction, go **right** over a plank bridge and through a swing-gate into a meadow. *There may be cattle here which you may want to avoid: there should be room to give them a wide berth in these large fields.* Follow a wire fence and a line of oaks separating two meadows. In 200m or so, in the far corner, your path goes through another kissing-gate and veers **left** across the centre of the next meadow, leading you, after 300m, through a metal kissing-gate visible just to the left of a large oak tree. Now continue along the left-hand side of the next meadow with freshly planted young trees, and possibly a herd of alpacas, on your right. At the other side, go through a kissing-gate, along a path through hawthorn and over a long bridge across the Gad Brook (another tributary of the River Mole). Keep ahead on the left-hand side of a somewhat wilder lea, soon with the impressive avenue of poplars to Hall Farm on show on your left. After a stile (or a large metal gate), you reach a narrow lane at the far side.
- 9 Cross the lane and go down a gravel drive opposite. In 150m, on reaching a house, bear **left**, ignore a kissing-gate on your left and take a narrow path close to the house's garage. Your path goes over a two-plank bridge, through a belt of woodland and through a metal kissing-gate into a meadow,

keeping to the right-hand side. In 150m, in the far corner, go **right** through a large metal gate, if open. (The official footpath veers **right** just before the corner, over a narrow bridge with a railing and through a muddy wooden swing-gate next to a 3-way fingerpost hidden in the hedge.) Turn immediately **left** along the left-hand side of a field, shortly going alongside a large wood on your left which in spring shimmers with bluebells. In 100m or so, continue over a stile (avoidable via a farm gate on your right) and go along the edge of the next field, ignoring a footpath and stile on your left. Your path bends right and left around the field edge, goes through a modern kissing-gate, over a 3-plank bridge, alongside the next field and via an unneeded stile out to a road. Turn **right** on the road along the grassy verge.



- 10 In 130m, you reach some houses of Strood Green, a satellite settlement of Brockham. Turn immediately **left** on Tweed Lane. (Or, for refreshments, you can obtain hot drinks, homemade sandwiches and cakes at the community shop, 100m ahead; closed 2pm Sundays.) At a junction keep straight ahead, still on Tweed Lane. Note the sign on the house wall about the penalty for not shutting the gate. Just after the roadway ends, turn **left** at a fingerpost on a bridleway with pastures on both sides. In 150m you re-enter Highridge Wood. Take care not to stray during this final stretch! The FC has replanted a large area here for regeneration, mainly on your left; so the landscape is bleaker than usual. In 200m or so, ignore a fingerpost on your right and continue straight ahead on the wide path. In 100m you reach a wide crossing path. Turn **left** here, thus leaving the official bridleway. This path immediately bends right, parallel to the original path, leading you gently uphill. Soon you encounter a fenced clearing on your left and you see the road ahead. 450m from the last junction, avoid a wide track on your right. 100m later, about 100m before the road and just after the fenced enclosure, turn **right** on a narrow crossing path. This path leads you through trees and quickly over a little bridge back to the car park where the walk began.



Getting there

By car: one way, if coming from the London area, is as follows. Take the A24 through Dorking. 1½ km (nearly 1 mile) after the Dorking roundabout, turn **left** on a minor road signposted *Blackbrook*. After 2 km=1.3 miles, soon after the *Plough* pub (now redeveloped), turn **left** at a signpost for *Leigh, Brockham*. The road goes over a railway bridge. The car park is 1 km further, on the left, soon after the start of the woodland.

By bus/train: bus 433 from Dorking, not Sunday. Check the timetables.

