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## Leith Hill from Holmwood Common

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Distance 15 km=9 miles, moderate-to-easy walking

Region: Surrey

Written: 13/07/09

Author: Schwebefuss

Refreshments: Leith Hill, Coldharbour

Map: Explorer 146 (Dorking)

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

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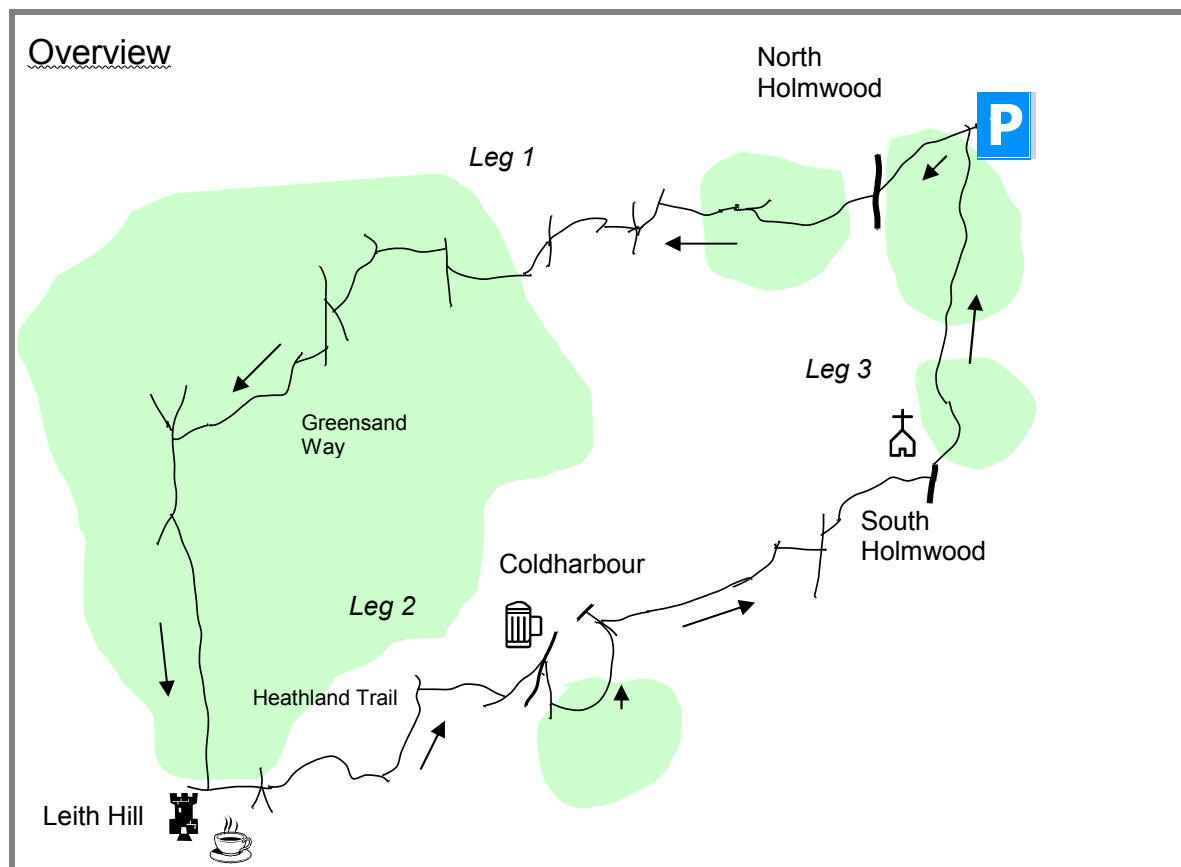
*Heath, quiet woodland, hidden paths, hills, views*

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### In Brief

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This is a circular walk along some of the hidden paths of Surrey leading up to the famous high viewpoint of Leith Hill Tower but using an unusual route. Even in peak season you may be quite alone until shortly before the Tower. The return route also goes by an unusual route and offers terrific views. There is almost no road walking. Indeed, you may hardly see a car except at two busy crossings of the A24. As usual in this series, this walk uses some unregistered paths.





This walk is perfect for summer and is also ideal until late autumn because of the large stretches of colourful forest.



There are no nettles to trouble bare legs, any sensible clothing and strong footwear is fine and your dog could come too.



**A note on the diagrams:** There is a separate mini-map for each section. All the maps have **north** pointing **upwards**. They are not all drawn to the same scale.

The walk begins in the **National Trust Holmwood Common** car park. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

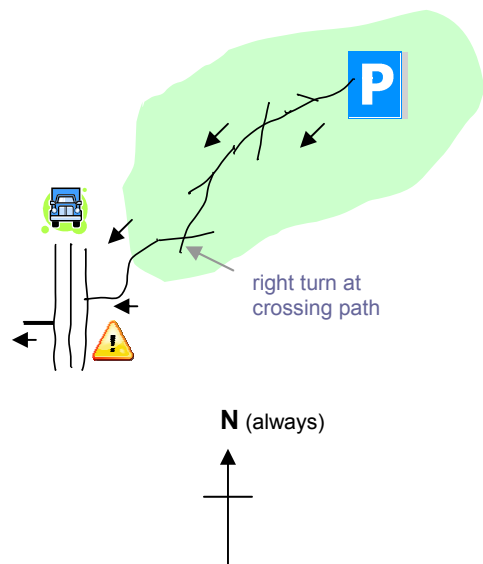
## The Walk

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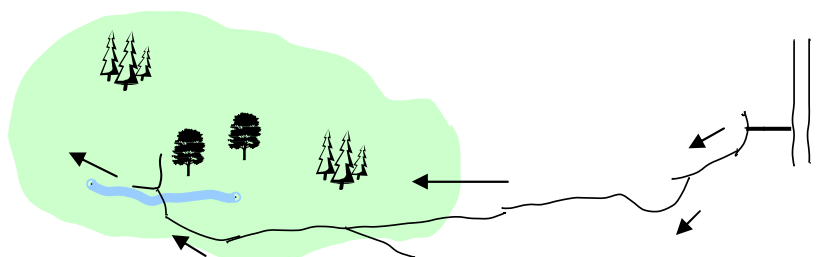
### Leg 1: The Long Green Ascent 5½ km (4 miles)

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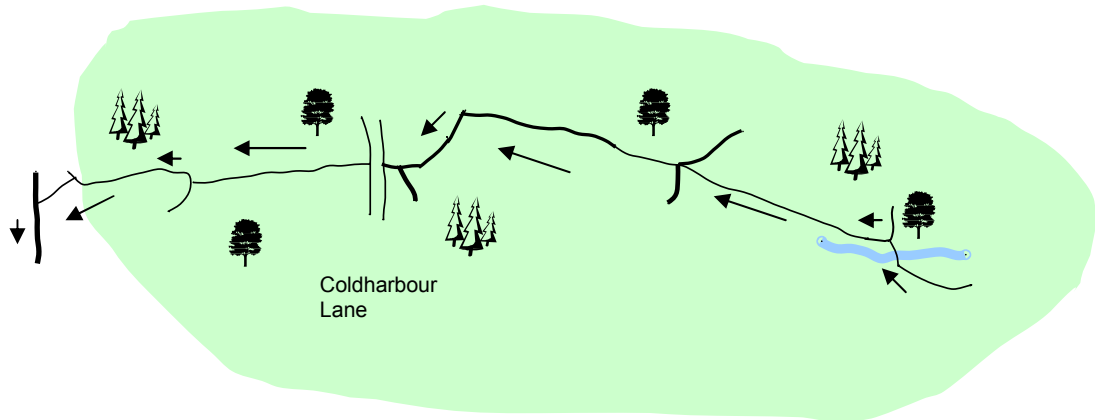
- 1 From the car park, take the wide grassy path straight ahead past a noticeboard and ignore lesser paths forking right and left. In 100m the path crosses a clearing and 2 diagonal grassy crossing paths. Stay on the path ahead into trees, past a post with blue arrows, ignoring all branches off. The path curves left and in 200m you reach a definite fork in the path with views to the right across to Abinger Common. Take the **left** fork into trees. In 100m a path joins from the right. In another 100m you reach a crossing path with several arrows on a post. Turn **right** here and join a stony lane. Turn **right** with the lane after garages to the main road. Sidle **left** a few steps and cross the dual carriageway carefully to a stony lane on the other side, Swallow Lane.



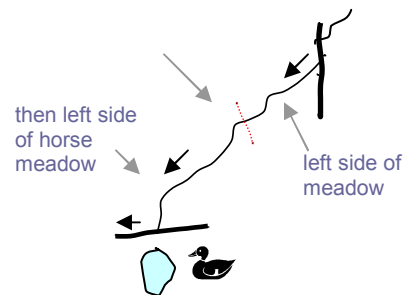
- 2 Turn **left** before a house and continue on a track across the centre of the green. About 20m before houses, fork **left** on a curving path and veer **right** next to houses at a fingerpost. On reaching the start of woodland, keep **right** in the direction of the signpost, past houses on the right. After the houses, keep right at a fingerpost and 50m later go through a swing gate into a meadow. Follow the path uphill across a large grassy meadow. On the other side, go through a swing gate into a dark wood. Keep to the main path through the wood. The path is joined by a wider path coming from the left and crosses a stream.



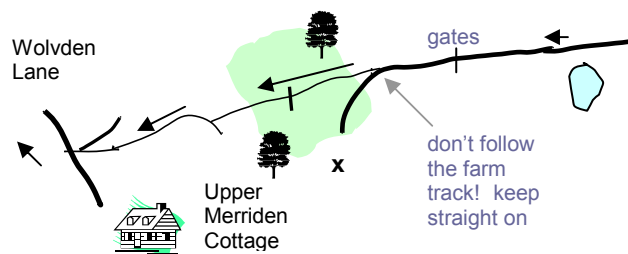
- 3 After crossing the stream turn immediately **left**, on a path that runs at first parallel to the stream. After about 300m, a bridleway joins from the right at a junction. Go **straight on**, ignoring the wide track that curves away left. After a steep rise, on coming to a T-junction, turn **left** on a wide forestry track. Cross more tracks and continue straight ahead to a one-bar gate and a road, Coldharbour Lane. Cross straight over, veer **right** on a track through a one-bar gate and immediately turn **left** on a footpath downhill. Soon you come to a track at a hairpin. Turn **right** on the track which immediately curves left, thus maintaining your direction. Near the end of the track, turn **left** down to a concrete drive and turn **left** on it.



- 4 In a 40m, turn a quarter **right** at a signpost by an unneeded stile along the left side of a meadow. On reaching a gap in the fence, go **left** over a stile and continue along the left-hand side of the next meadow that sometimes has horses in it. At the end, go over a stile by a duckpond and turn **right** on the track leading away from the farm.

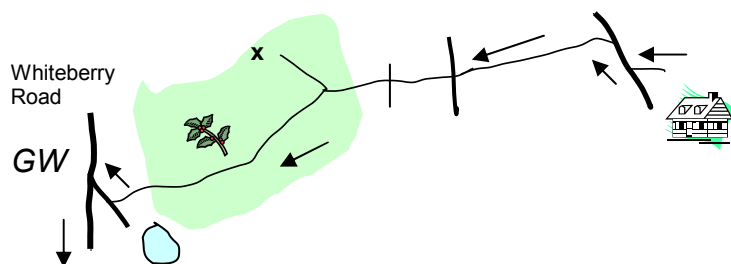


- 5 Go straight on past some metal gates. When the farm track curves left across the grass, keep **straight on** keeping close to the fence on the right, heading for trees ahead. You pass a post with arrows, up through hazels, and are suddenly in a wonderful beechwood. When you come to a wide forestry track, cross straight over, slightly left. On reaching a wooden fence by a meadow, turn **right** on another footpath at a signpost. Continue straight on meeting, at a junction, a broad sandy byway known as *Wolvden Lane* at an isolated house called *Upper Merriden Cottage*.

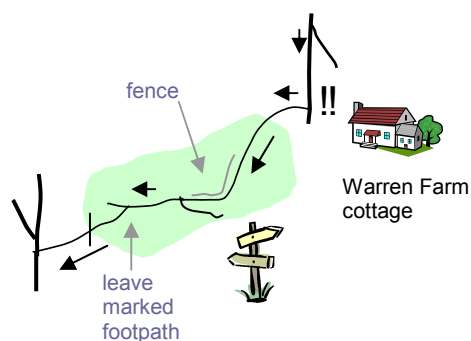


- 6 Turn **right** on the track for 50m and at the next junction turn **left** (actually two quarter turns) at a low bar onto a broad path. The path crosses first a wide sandy track and then a narrow path and enters woodland going through a wooden barrier. Here take the **left** fork on a level path through holly and down through laurels to an

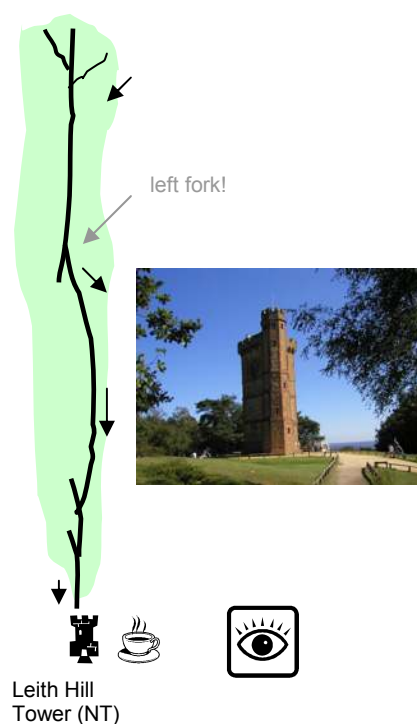
area known as *Tilling Springs*. On your left is a garden and a pond with swans. Go over a rushing stream, through a barrier and, at a wide T-junction, turn **right**. Shortly, on reaching another T-junction with an even broader track, turn sharp **left**. This track is an ancient byway known as *Whiteberry Road*. *It is also part of the Greensand Way, a long-distance footpath which runs from Haslemere in Surrey to near Ashford in Kent.*



- 7 In about 150m, immediately opposite the fine old cottage of Warren Farm, 20m before a junction of tracks, turn **right** onto a narrow footpath at a signpost. *(This turning is easy to miss as the signpost may be somewhat hidden in trees.)* The path leads up through bracken and into another fine beechwood where it finally levels out. At a signpost at the end of a wire fence, turn **right** as indicated, still following the wire fence. A sunken footpath joins from the left at a signpost. Continue for about another 100m staying near the fence until you reach a post with a yellow arrow. Do *not* follow the yellow arrow but instead take a path forking **left**, thus leaving the official footpath. In about 200m the path goes over a small crossing path. Continue until you reach a single-bar gate and, a few paces further, a junction of major tracks with a signpost.

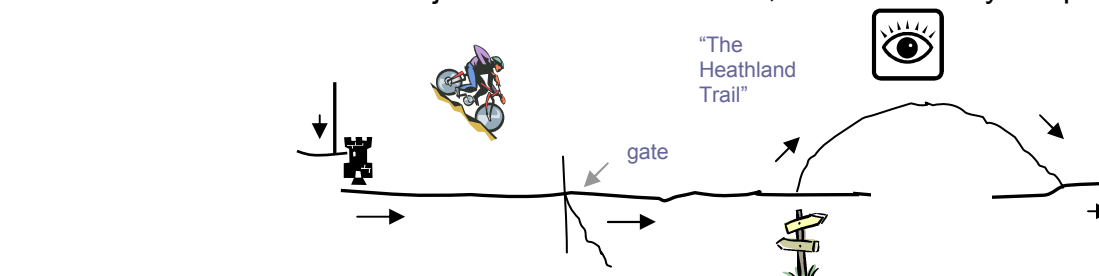


- 8 Turn **left** at the junction onto a wide track that leads gradually uphill. You may now see other walkers for the first time today. After roughly 300m you reach a major fork in the track. Take the **left**, slightly narrower and rougher, track, *not* the sandier brick-clad track to the right. This track will take you, after some distance through varied terrain, to the top of Leith Hill. Near the end, it is joined by two tracks coming from the right and ascends more steeply. In each case, keep to your general uphill direction. Finally you reach Leith Hill Tower with its fine views south over the Sussex Weald. *At weekends\* there are refreshments and nice homemade cakes. (\*This extends to Fridays from April to October.)* You can ascend the tower where there is a view all round with miles of seeming wilderness. The tower was built in 1766 to raise the height of Leith Hill to the 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 Weald is the area between the North and South Downs, its name coming from the Saxon word for forest.

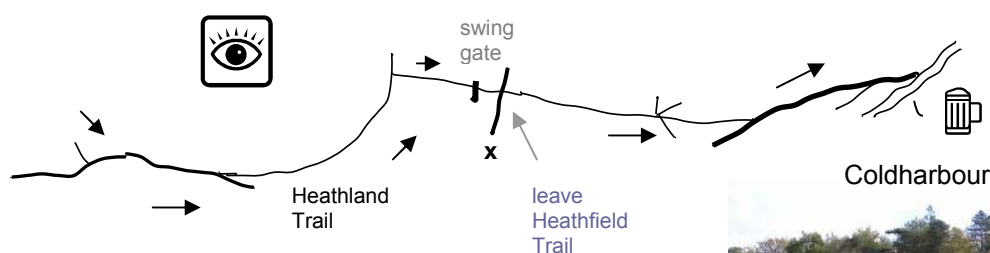


## Leg 2: Around Coldharbour 4km (2 miles)

- 1 Turn **left** past the tower on the main wide sandy path, soon steeply downhill. At the bottom is a junction with a deep hollow on your right. Take the path **straight ahead** through a wooden gate at a National Trust sign for *Duke's Warren*. There is also a sign identifying it as Coldharbour Common and the *Heathland Trail*. From this point, this walk is marked by green-topped posts. In about 150m, at a junction, turn **left** as indicated and follow a semi-circular path with fine views north. The path comes round to another junction. Turn **left** here, as indicated by the post.



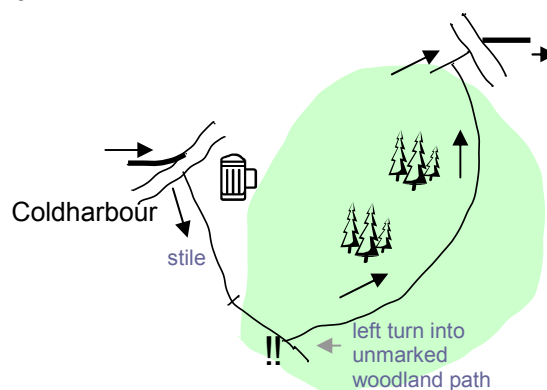
- 2 At the next junction fork **left**, staying with the Heathland Trail. The track curves left, still with fine views. After some distance, you need to pass a green-topped post on the right bearing the letter **N**, followed by another green-topped post on the left, just before a gap in the pines. Turn **right** here on a narrow path uphill. The path takes you over a pine-fringed heath and through a metal kissing gate. Cross over a sandy track, thus **leaving** the Heathland Trail. The path goes through pines, across a clearing and back into woods. At a multiple junction, keep straight ahead on a downward path that eventually comes down to an unmade road. Turn **left**, shortly reaching the village of Coldharbour.



*Coldharbour must be one of the most romantic isolated villages of the Surrey hills. For many years it was looked on with fear by inhabitants of the lowland towns as a refuge for smugglers who would keep their caches of contraband in safe underground sites and would deal ruthlessly with any outsider who interfered. The Plough Inn serves several real ales, including three brewed next door in its own brewhouse, and has a garden in the back. It is now also an English Steakhouse.*



- 3 Turn **right** on the road in front of the Plough Inn for just 25m as far as a signposted footpath through a wooden gate on the **left**. Follow this hedged path between gardens, over a stile and along the left hand side of a lovely grassy meadow. At the other side, go over a stile onto a level path through dense woods. In about 100m, just before the path veers right, and just after a series of fallen trees, take a distinct path on the **left** leading up




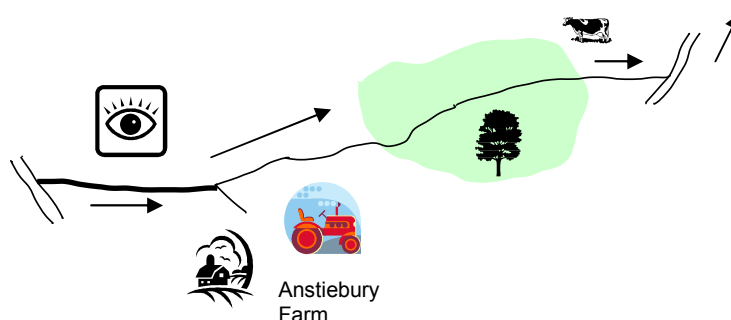
through bracken. *This path is easy to miss as it is not signposted.* It leads through a wonderful larch wood on the side of Anstiebury Hill, one of the best secrets of this area. It is not a public right of way but it is used by local people and is mentioned in the classic 1915 book *The Surrey Hills* by F. E. Green. Nevertheless, it is probably private woodland, so please use it with care and discretion. If you are a large group, it may be better to go round by the road.

*Anstiebury Hill is the site of Anstiebury Camp a hillfort constructed during the 2nd or 1st century BC. It is described as "triple-vallate" which means it had three ramparts (walls and ditches) around it, clearly a formidable defensive position. It may have been abandoned after Caesar's landings in 55 and 54 BC and later reoccupied in the Roman period. It is not accessible however.*

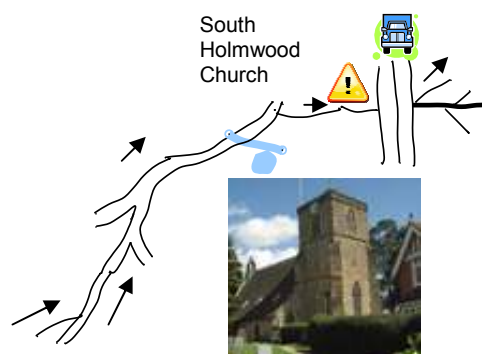
At the end of the path turn **right** at a T-junction and in 30m reach a road.

### Leg 3: Descent with Views 4½km (3 miles)

- 1  Cross directly over the road, ignoring the stile in the corner, and take a concrete drive heading for Anstiebury Farm. *Historic Anstiebury Farm is a group of buildings perched on the hill. The main farmhouse is 17<sup>th</sup>-century but has been much modified.* There are fine views ahead to the south and east with Gatwick Airport clearly visible. After passing the farm, avoid a marked right turn and follow a fenced grassy path between hay-fields. Your route goes over a stile or through a gate, over another stile to skirt left round some properties at Anstie Grange and continues onwards through charming woodland. After some distance it goes over a little footbridge, over a stile and along the right-hand side of a pasture. (Occasionally there are a few cattle here but no bull.) It finally meets a lane via a stile or a metal gate. Turn **left** on the lane.

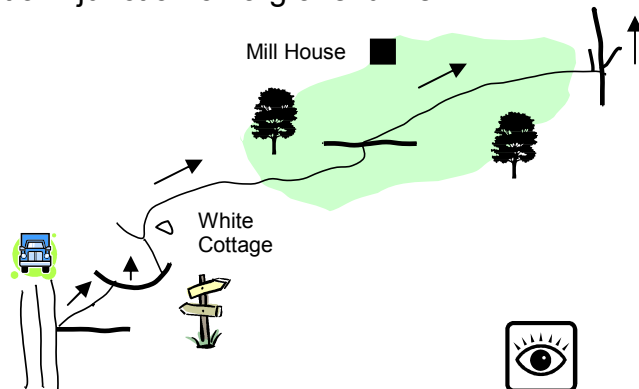


- 2 The lane passes several junctions of paths and tracks until it approaches the houses of South Holmwood. *Note the fine timbered Betchets Green cottage on the left.* After passing a pond on the right, turn **right** on a path leading to South Holmwood Church. Go through a small wooden gate into the churchyard. *The church of St Mary Magdalene was built at the start of Queen Victoria's reign, replacing the original small rustic building.* Exit via the lichgate and cross the dual carriageway carefully to the start of a lane on the other side. Here and just ahead you have a bewildering collection of signposts to choose from.

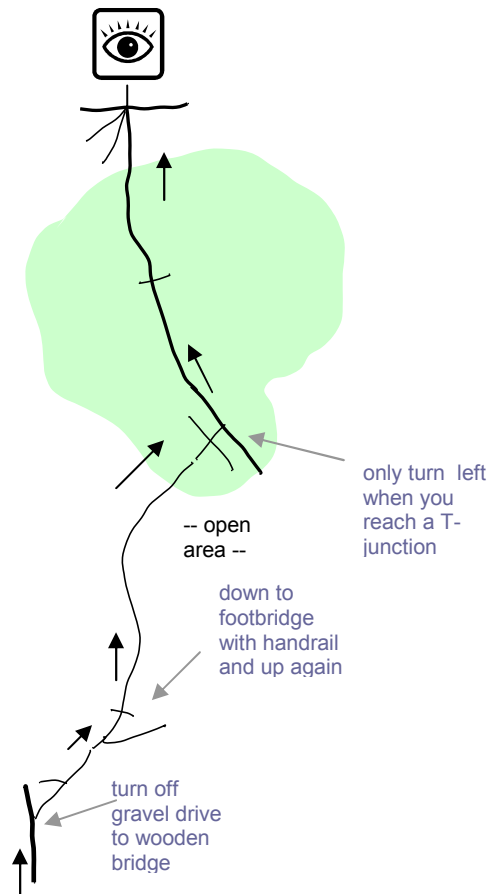


This last stretch through Holmwood Common is the most complex and you need to **concentrate** more than usual. This beautiful route takes you back to the car, showing off on the way some of the Common's best features.

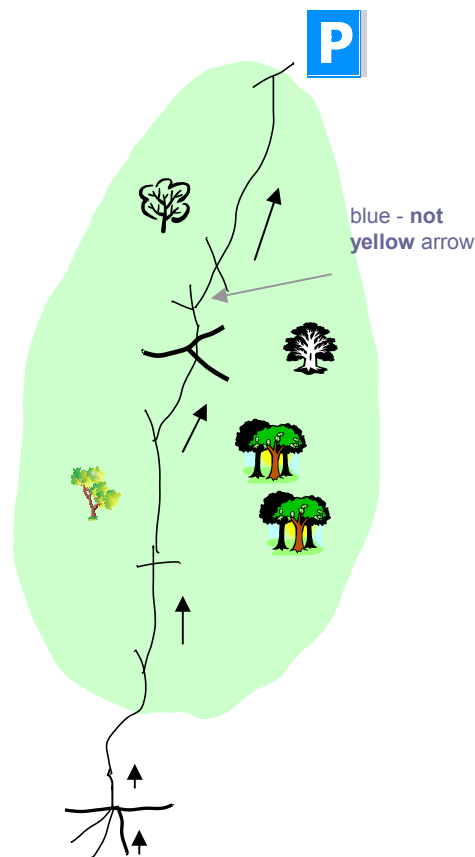
- 3 **Do not enter the lane** but take the **first** signposted path at the corner immediately **left** downhill. At a T-junction with a drive near houses, turn **right**. In 30m, at a signpost, turn **left** across the grass as indicated and pass *White Cottage*. 10m to the left of the cottage there are two quite distinct paths forking off. Yours is the **right** fork, the narrower path, leading off **right** into the woods. Don't miss this turn! This straight woodland path passes the garden of a red tile-hung house on the right. Soon the large gates of the Mill House come into view and the path nears a road on the left. Veer **left** to cross the road at a signpost to another signposted footpath on the other side. The narrow grassy path passes the large garden of the house on the left (*a platform in the beech tree visible in winter*) and eventually approaches a junction. Ignore a bridleway on the left (muddy in winter) and, 5m further, turn **sharp left** at a T-junction on a gravel drive.



- 4 About 50m before a cottage visible ahead, turn a quarter **right** on a footpath marked by a post that is sometimes hidden in bracken. Follow the path over two thick wooden footbridges, ignore a left turn and continue straight ahead on a grassy path. In about 50m the path forks. Take the **left** fork, going down to a footbridge with a handrail and then rising to an open area. Keep at all times to a broad path on the **left side** of the open area. The path winds left by a seat and then right. When the path ends, you come to two wide crossing paths ahead running parallel to each other. Go **over the first** wide crossing path and a few steps later, at the edge of the woods, turn **left** at a T-junction with the **second** wide path. (This is because the parallel paths later diverge.) This very wide fine woodland path runs for some distance, crossing a bridleway marked with a post. Eventually you come to a hillside with several benches, many paths on all sides and a magnificent view ahead. The North Downs can be clearly seen on a normal day with the spire of St Barnabas Church at Ranmore visible on the skyline.



5 After admiring the view, continue down the steepest part of the grassy slope ahead. At the bottom of the slope, the path goes over a crossing path and enters woodland. It curves right and left and comes to a fork, indicated by a post with blue arrows. Take the **right** fork, the more stony path, ignoring the grassy left fork. This comfortable level path winds through wonderful extensive woodland that exhibits a remarkable selection of different trees, including several species of oak, hawthorn, birch, hazel, ash and holly. The path goes over a signposted crossing path with a house just visible on the right. Keep at all times to the main winding path, ignoring all lesser branches and crossing paths. Later the path comes to another fork with a driveway just visible ahead. Take the **right** fork. The path crosses two gravel driveways. Keep straight ahead on a now grassy path. In 30m, at a post with arrows which may be hidden, fork **right** on the narrower path (the **blue**, not the yellow, arrow) and avoid all turnings off. After some distance in more fine woodland, the path finally arrives at the car park where the walk began.



## Getting there

Park in the *National Trust Holmwood Common* car park. To get there from the London area, take the A24 through Dorking. Just over a mile and a half (2½km) after Dorking you reach the North Holmwood roundabout. Turn **left** here and, soon after, turn **left** on a road signposted Leith and Newdigate. Continue past North Holmwood church to the next sharp bend (careful!) where the car park is on the **right**.

