Fancy Free Walks

point your feet on a new path

Normandy

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

Region: Surrey — Date written: 20-feb-2012

Author: Botafuego — Last update: 16-mar-2017

Refreshments: Pirbright, Ash

Map: 145 (Guildford) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Woodland, high moors, lake, views, meadows

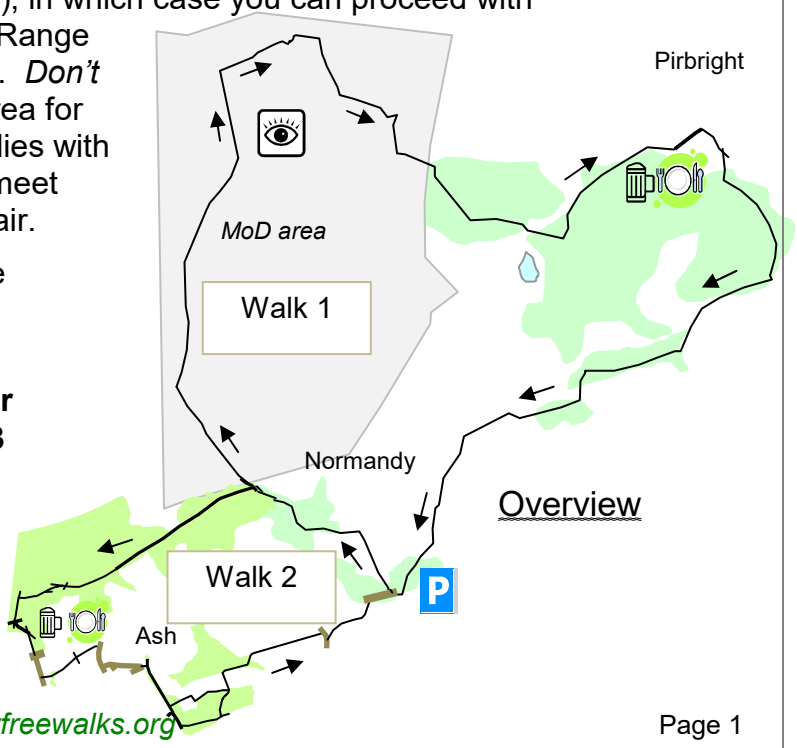
In Brief

Here are two perfect walks starting in the quiet Surrey village of Normandy. The *longer walk* takes you over the highest points of Ash and Pirbright Ranges with fabulous views, via a good pub and back through heath and gentle woodland to the quiet village of Normandy. In case the Ranges are closed (as if you needed a reason) there is a *shorter walk* which takes you in a different direction through the woodland of Normandy Hill and back through pastures and woodland. As you might expect, these walks find some fabulous paths known only to locals that you would not see on the map, so as to give you an intimate feeling for the whole area.

The longer walk goes over Defence land and there is a chance that the area may be closed either for the day or until about 3pm, indicated by a **red flag** or **red lamps**. This is can happen on any day, and on other days there is occasionally "dry" training (with no live ammunition), in which case you can proceed with caution. If in doubt, you can ring the Range Officer in advance on 01252- 325233. *Don't be put off by this*: this is a favourite area for walkers and horse riders and for families with children; and on a good day you will meet locals and visitors enjoying the fresh air.

There are no nettles and any sensible footwear is fine. Lots of local people walk their dogs there.

The walk begins at the **Normandy car park**, Guildford Road, **postcode GU3 2DA**. For more details and a recommended route, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

Normandy is a parish of several hamlets, some better recorded in history than the village itself. In fact the origin of the name has been a mystery. It may have nothing to do with the Normans but simply mean "no man's land".

Normandy to the Ranges 1½ km=1 mile

This starting section is the same for **both** walks.

1 Exit the car park at the back left-hand side, over a little bridge. Follow the footpath over another bridge and alongside a tennis court to a small parking area and a tarmac drive. Turn **right** on the drive for 20m and then go **left** over a 2-plank bridge onto a narrow path through woodland. Stay on this path for more than 200m as it runs quite close to the road on your right and finally veers left over a bank into a parking area near a cricket pavilion. Keep **left** through the parking area and, about 30m past the building, by a sign on a wooden post, turn **right** on a footpath marked with a yellow arrow. In only 15m, there is a yellow arrow and a stile on your right. **Ignore** both and instead, 15m later, fork **left** on a narrower path that runs parallel to and, at first, very close to the path you were on. The path soon runs under tall firs and oaks with the cricket pitch close by on your left. It then runs through the centre of the wood, guided by the occasional marker post, and finally goes up a series of steps to a main road.

2 Cross directly over the main road to a wide track opposite next to *Hillside*. The track bends left past the backs of more houses. In only 15m, opposite the back gate to *Summer Place*, go **right** over a bank onto a narrow path into woodland. The path becomes wider and sandy and meets a wider path from the left. As you approach the open heath ahead, go over a wide diagonal crossing path to a metal gate and fence by a flagpole.

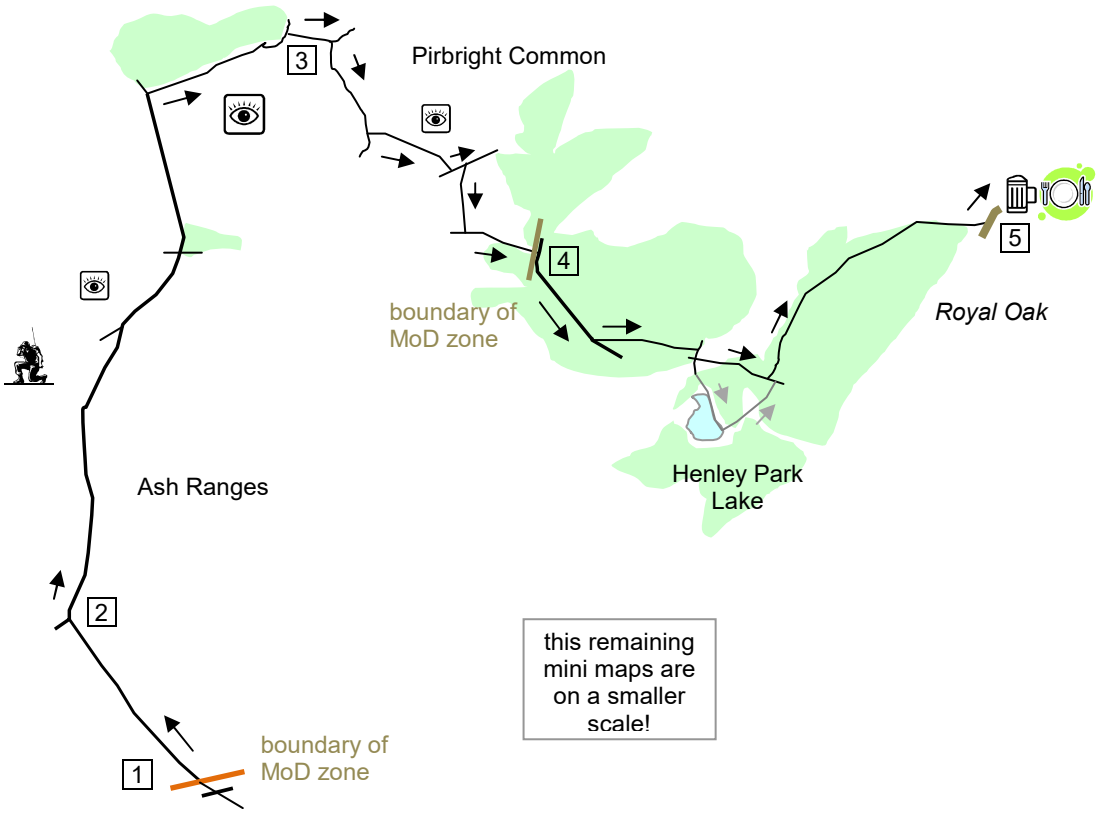
Decision point. Now you need to choose between two walks.

Walk 1 "Over The Tops" takes you over Ash and Pirbright Ranges, via a good pub and back to the start through heath and woodland. **If a red flag is flying, you cannot do Walk 1.** (It may be worthing waiting for the exercise to stop. Another option is to turn **right** following the MoD fence for approx 2k until the fence turns sharp left. About 60m after the turning, there is a track veering off to the left which leads directly to Henley Park Lake. From there it is easy to pick up the walk at section 5.) There are other walks nearby, for example at Worplesdon and Aldershot.)

Walk 2 "Through the Forest and Meadows" avoids the MoD land and goes counterclockwise over Normandy Hill and back through pastures and woods.

Walk 1: Over the Tops 11½ km=7 miles

1 Go straight ahead, crossing a wide track, on a track going uphill into the distance. This are is known as Ash Ranges, with the principal closed firing ranges a good distance away on your left. Always keep to the main track, avoiding all turnings off, until you reach the top of the hill where there is a T-junction and a white pillar marked with an "E" on the other side. Turn **right** at the T-junction.



2 You have good views south which will accompany you for most of this part of the walk. After some distance, you pass another white pillar, with a "D" on it. After almost 1½ km on this high path, you some to a crossing track with a pillar bearing the letter "A" by a small pinewood. Continue straight ahead with the wood on your right and follow the straight path, veering a fraction left, out into the open moor again. In about 500m, you come to another line of trees with a thinly wooded closed area and warning signs. Turn **right** here on a track with the wood and warning signs on your left. After the fence

ends, keep ahead on a high level promontory, which gives you wide views ahead as far as the tall buildings of the City of London. After a while, the path descends fairly steeply and bends left. Just 50m after the bend, turn **right** on another path, avoiding the downhill path ahead.

3 In 150m, you come to a Y-junction. Turn **right** here, staying with the main path and avoiding the path that veers left ahead towards pine woods. Your path descends and zigzags through heather in an especially attractive part of Pirbright Common dotted with pines and surrounded by small hills. Soon you reach the corner of a fence with another pillar, this time with a letter "C". Keep straight ahead with the fence on your left. Avoid a grassy path on your left and, just 20m before your track bends right, turn **left** on a wide heather path heading for an upward slope ahead. At the top of the slope, you are on another high level path. This is a good vantage point for observing nature with several species of bird evident from their song. The path now goes steeply down to a wide sandy path at the bottom. Turn **left** on the path and, in 50m, turn **sharp right** on another path. In 250m your path reaches a T-junction. Turn **left** here on a wider path. This path leads, in nearly 300m, to the boundary fence with a large metal gate. 100m or so to the right of this is a smaller gate. [2016-2017: walkers found this gate padlocked and had to climb over. You can instead turn **right** and stay inside the fence line for about 500m to Henley Gate where you can exit the MoD land. You will see the car park for the Henley Park lake immediately on your right. Continue from the end of para 1 in the next section.] Leave the MoD area through this gate and turn **right** on a broad track.

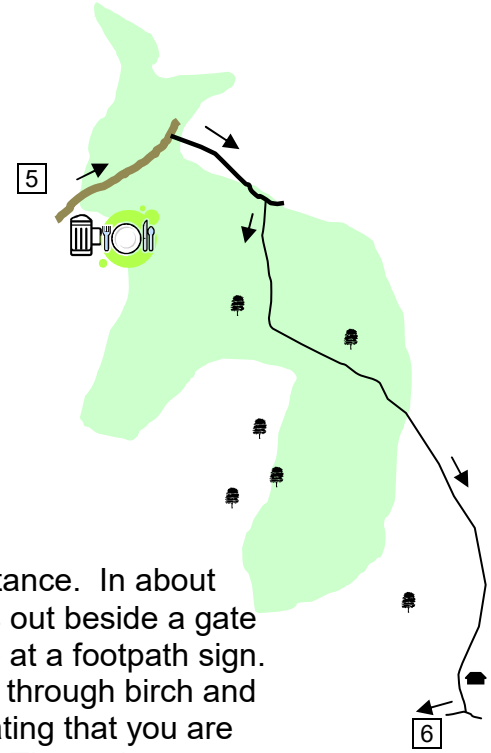
4 The track immediately curves left and and soon you can see Peatmere Pond on your right (summer foliage permitting). At a notice with a barrier visible ahead, fork **left** as indicated by the yellow arrow. Follow this woodland path for some distance, going over a stream at one point. You reach a T-junction with a major path. Turn **right** here, almost immediately reaching a 4-way junction.

> **Decision point.** Only 100m ahead, through a single-bar barrier and over a wooden bridge, is **Henley Park Lake**. Even if you are in a tearing hurry, a quick view of the lake is an absolute *must*. It might even be a suitable place for a picnic (but don't disturb the anglers) or, with a few more minutes to spare, you could walk straight on* along the raised path ahead beside the lake and turn sharp **left** after the sluice at the end, then **left** at a T-junction and first **right** to re-join this walk. (*You *cannot* go round the lake using the anglers' path on the right: it is blocked off later.)

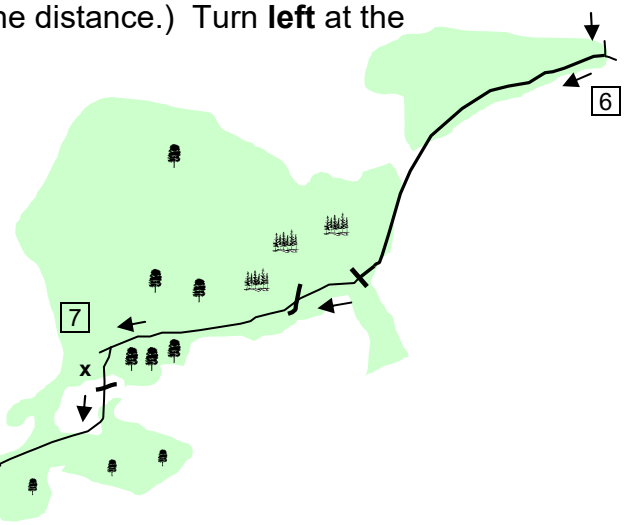
Turn **left** on a wide track. In about 100m, ignore a private track on the left. In another 150m or so, turn **left** at a signpost on a track with signs for *Stream House* and *Bourne House*. Your path passes a garden pond on your left, veers right at the entrance to the second house and follows a wide course between pines. Eventually you pass a house on your left and reach the main A324 road. Cross the road and turn **left**, immediately reaching the *Royal Oak* at Pirbright.

The 300 year-old "Royal Oak" is treasured by local people and you may find they have taken all the outside tables in the attractive front and back gardens. The tie-up and water bowls for your dog suggest he isn't too welcome inside and the pub verges on the posh side, although prices seem reasonable. Best of all: the pub is open all day every day.

5 Continue along the main road for another 150m to a road junction and turn **right** on Ash Road, using the sidewalk on the far side. Just before the road bends left, go **right** by a metal barrier on a signed footpath through a wood of holly and oak. Shortly, the path takes you over a stile by a metal gate. Before the next metal gate a short distance away, the path veers **left** at a yellow arrow beside a wire fence. You now have a quiet walk through a forest of pines and birch. You may encounter a marshy patch, but this is easily skipped over and is strictly temporary. Later you pass a garden and house on your left and reach a T-junction with a drive. Turn **right** on the drive.

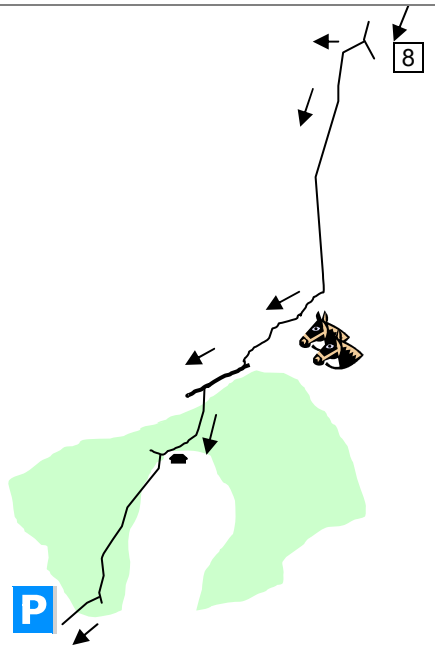


6 Follow this wide woodland track straight on for some distance. In about 700m, the track becomes tarmac by a house and comes out beside a gate to a road. Cross the road to a small metal gate opposite at a footpath sign. You have a beautiful heath on your left as the path goes through birch and bracken. It crosses a tarmac drive by a fingerpost indicating that you are on part of the Fox Way, a 63 km Guildford circular walk. The path runs beside rhododendrons, beside beeches on your right, then under some tall chestnuts. A short distance further under these fine tall trees, you see a low marker post on the left. *Don't miss this junction.* (If you look straight ahead you will see an industrial building in the distance.) Turn **left** at the marker post onto a narrow path.

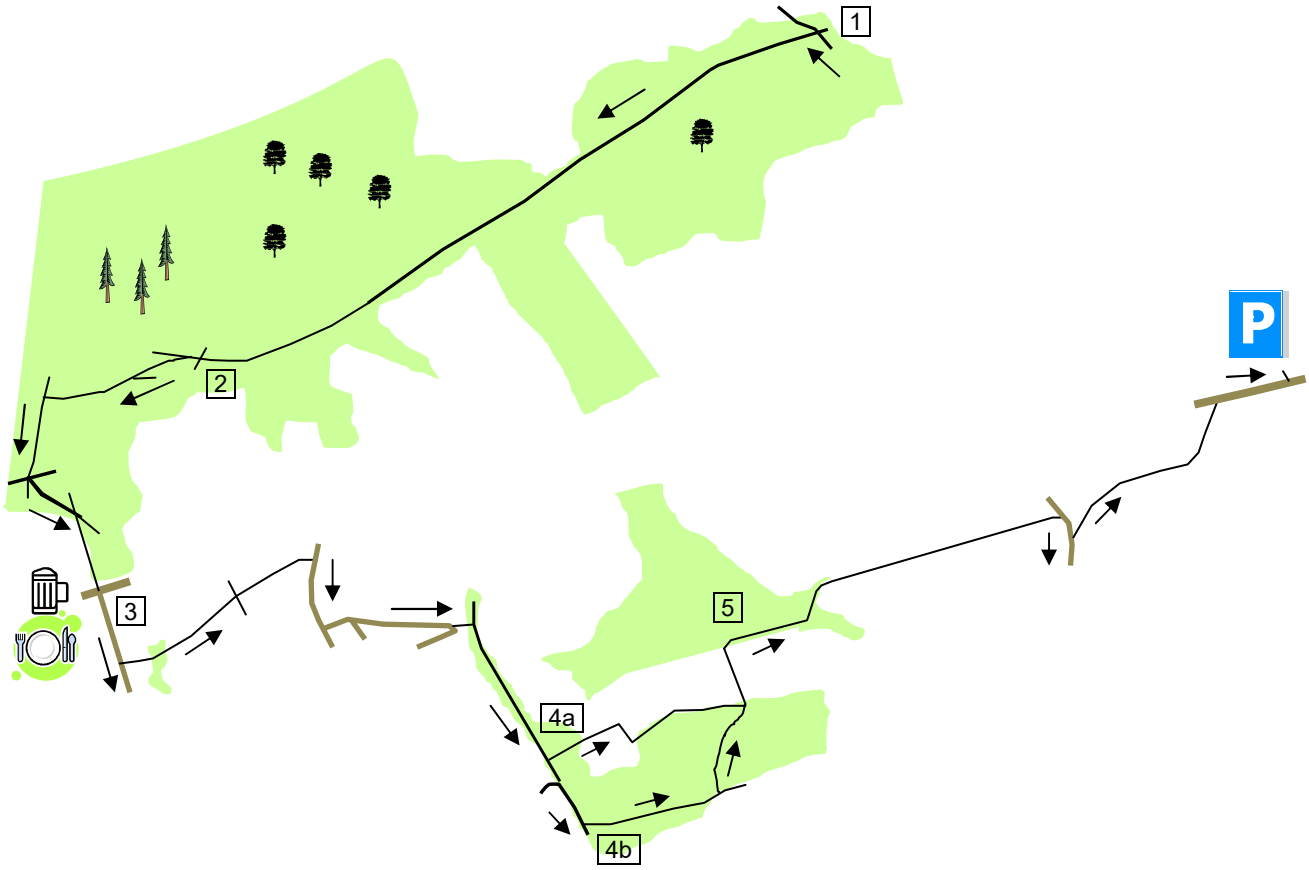


7 The path crosses the tarmac drive at a post with a yellow arrow. Shortly after, veer **right** as indicated by a wooden fingerpost. The path goes under oaks, then between low fences with a large red-brick house on your right. Keep on the path until a junction of paths by a marker post, thus leaving the Fox Way which branches off to the left. Go straight ahead over a little bridge, through a swing-gate onto a grassy path. After going through another swing-gate, ignore a footpath on your right and continue ahead in a recently untidily cleared area. After the remains of a stile, continue ahead between rather rough meadows. Before the end of the meadows, your route veers **left** downhill, crosses a track and follows a narrow path across the next crop field. (Until recently, there were several field boundaries, now all joined into one large field.) Continue to the far end, ignoring a signed footpath on the left. In 20m go **left** over a stile and follow a faint path down the meadow.

8 At the far side go over a stile (or, if not locked, through a metal gate). Pass some stables and go right over two stiles onto a path between pastures. When you reach a tarmac drive by *Huntshill Farmhouse*, turn **right**. In only 40m, at a signpost, turn **left** into woods. Almost immediately when you see the large redbrick *Normandy Hill House* ahead, keep **right** past the house, cross its drive and a patch of grass. Here, at a marker post, fork **left**, walking along the side of the house. Your path runs between ditches and approaches the road in Normandy. After a bridge, turn **right**, arriving back at the car park where the walk began.



Walk 2: Through the Forest and Meadows 5½ km=3½ miles



1 Keep **left** on the crossing path, a very wide route that runs parallel with the open land on your right, but under trees. Keep to the main path at all times, avoiding all turn-offs. Your path goes over a hillock and down a shallow dip. After 800m you pass a field on your left with a farm beyond. About 200m later, the way gets steeper as you ascend Normandy Hill. At the top, you reach a flat area with some crossing paths. For the next ½ km, the best way to summarise your course is “straight ahead at all times”.

2 Carry straight on over the first crossing path and immediately **avoid** forking right at a junction of more paths. Follow the main path down through hollies and keep straight on under tall pines, with a wire fence on your left. You come out onto a wide pine-covered space with the land falling away quite steeply on your left. Keep straight ahead on a level path, passing close to a very small stone enclosure on your left. Now continue straight ahead, slightly uphill, on a very rooty path. In 100m, you reach a steep-sided gully. Go down carefully into the gully and turn **left** on a path running along the bottom. In 150m, you reach a junction of five wide paths. Ignore a wide grassy path sharp left, but take the **second** path on your left. In 120m, at the corner of a house and garden, veer **right** beside the fence and follow the narrow path to the main road. (Or, by keeping straight on to a small car park by the main road, you reach the *Curzon* "Indian" Restaurant.) Cross the road carefully to *The Lion Brewery* in Ash.

The Lion Brewery has become a bit of a cult, for its live musical gigs and its very basic amenities. You can get breakfast, ices and reasonable food. This pub seems to go into short-term hibernation but never seems to close.

3 After a possible sojourn, take the minor road, Harpers Road, beside the pub. In only 100m, after a playing field, turn **left** through a car park and take a narrow unmarked path between posts. Your path goes past paddocks and between more posts to cross over a farm drive. At the end of the path, turn **right** on a residential road, using the footway first on the right, then on the left. Turn **left** on the first side road, also a residential road and follow it, ignoring a road on the right, going past a long green on your right. At the far end, follow the path to a T-junction with a track and turn **right** on it. In 300m, you will see on your left a double metal gate with a yellow arrow. Here you have a **choice** of two possible routes, but the slightly longer **second** option 4b is regarded as more interesting because of the woodland.

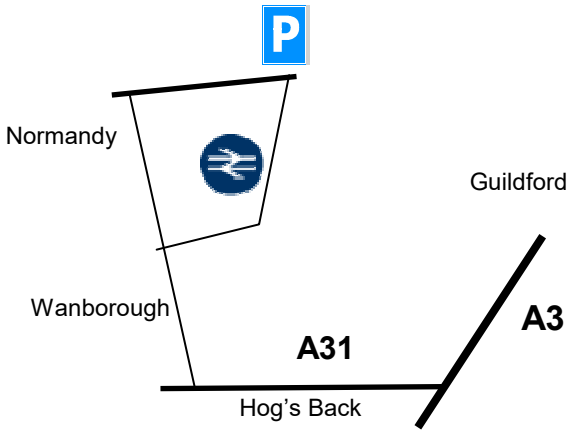
4a **The field option.** Turn **left** through a gap beside the gate and take the footpath through a patch of woodland, straight across a field and through a gap into the next field. Go right-left around the corner of this field and, at the far end, go through a swing-gate and turn **left** on a path between fields.

4b **The woodland option.** Ignore the footpath on your left and carry straight on along the track. In 40m, veer **left** at a junction on a wide track. In 80m, you pass on your left a small car park used by anglers. Immediately after, turn **left** through a metal gate onto a wide woodland path running between fences. In 250m, your path runs beside a large field on your right. Shortly after this, just before the path narrows, turn **left** on another wide woodland path. This path takes you over a small bridge and, in 180m, reaches the edge of the wood by a field. Go left-right, ignoring a swing-gate on your left, and follow a path between fields.

5 At the corner of the pastures, turn **right** with woods on your left. In the corner, your path goes over a bridge, through woodland and between more horse pastures. Finally, you come out beside a house and gardens to a road. Turn **right** on the road and, in 40m, turn sharp **left** on a signposted footpath. This path leads to a stile into a meadow. Follow the right-hand edge to the far end and wheel **left** to come through a large wooden gate and over a stile to the main road. Turn **right** on the road, quickly reaching the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: if coming from the A3, the best route is via the Hog's Back, the A31 (Farnham) road. Come off at a turn-off for *Normandy Compton Puttenham Wanborough*. Follow signs for *Normandy Wanborough*. (At Wanborough it is worth stopping on the way to view the church, the ancient barns and, from outside, the Manor. There is an excellent large car park signed on the right in the village.) Further on, after Wanborough, take the road to the **right** signposted *Normandy*, follow the left bend and drive past Wanborough railway station on your left. On reaching the main road (the A323) at the end, go straight over. The entrance to the car park is on your left.



By bus: There is a regular bus service every day of the week between Aldershot and Guildford bus stations and a bus stop (Glaziers Lane) next to the car park where the walk begins. Buses every 15 minutes weekdays, every 20 minutes Saturday and every half an hour on Sundays. Stagecoach South KITE bus.

By train: Wanborough Station is 1.4 km (about a mile) from the walk.

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