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## Old Simms Copse and Piney Copse Beggars Lane, Abinger Roughts, North Downs

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Distance: 7½ km=4½ miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Surrey

Date written: 20-apr-2020

Author: Zweigknospe

Last update: 12-may-2024

Refreshments: Abinger Hammer (optional)

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

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

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*Bluebell wood, woodland walks, views, nature reserve, literary links*

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### In Brief

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This is a woodland walk showing the best of Surrey. Even seasoned walkers will meet some unfamiliar spots in this inexhaustible Home County. In April and early May, you will be mesmerised by the glorious show of bluebells near the start. We can imagine Old Simm as a woodsman of centuries past who tended and carefully harvested the forest, casting a cheerful greeting or a rough curse at the people who trudged over the paths. Piney Copse is also a mystery because there are no needle trees, only oaks and other leaf trees. We do know that a famous novelist bought it and called it “my wood”. Abinger Roughts is a favourite beauty spot with nature trails.



In autumn, because of the heavy leaf fall, the normally very clear path through the first Copse is hard to see and you may need to rely on a good sense of direction to navigate the numerous twists in the path, as well as looking at the ground for the most obvious route.

**Spring 2024: The start of this walk is badly affected by the recent work of heavy forestry vehicles, resulting in churning up of the paths and some deep rutting; woodland management have promised to rectify.**

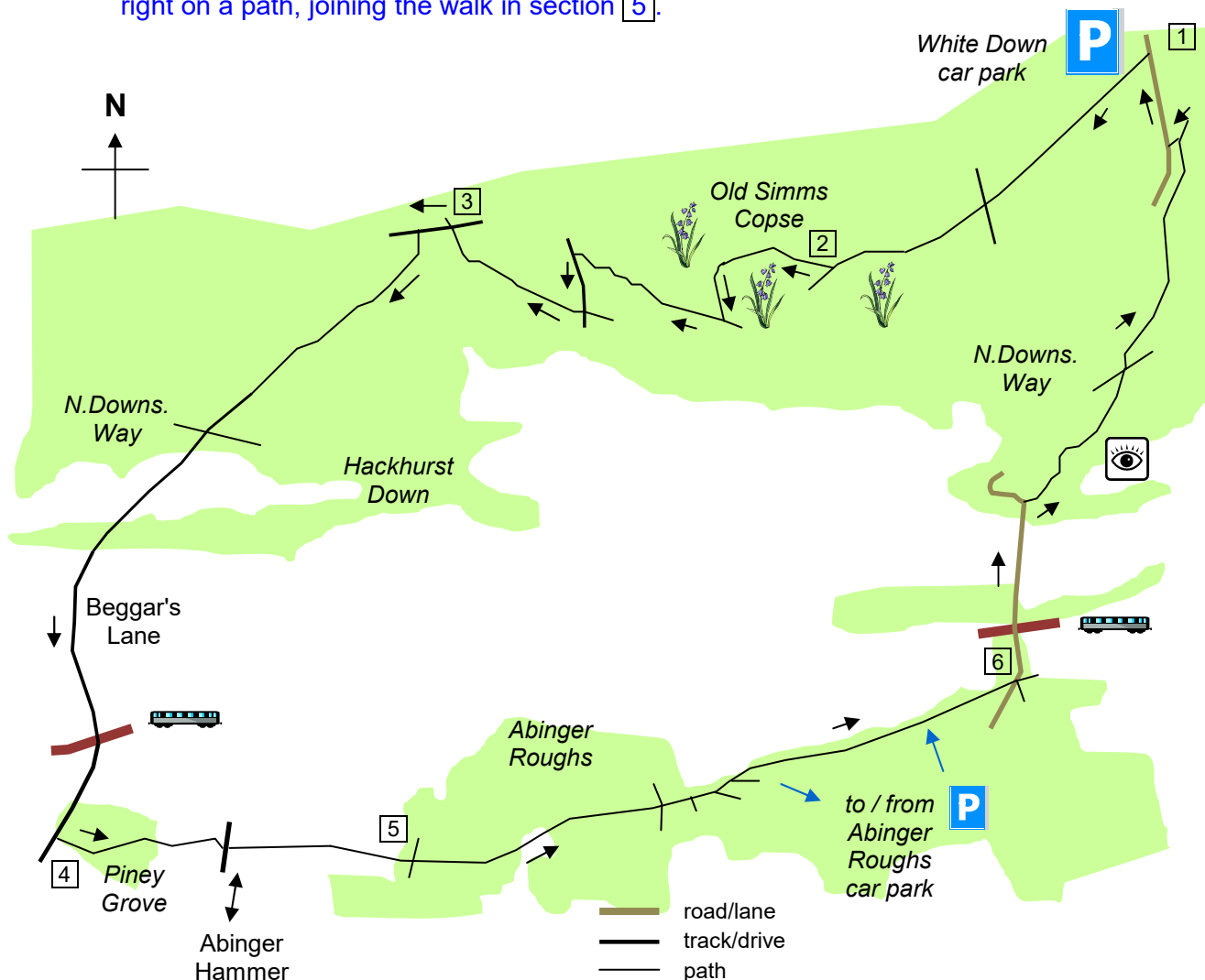


The walk is remote from farmland so there are no nettles. The paths are clear of undergrowth, except for some woodland debris. So shorts are ok. Trainers or sensible walking shoes are acceptable in the summer months. With only one short stretch on a road, this walk is fine for your dog.

The walk begins at the **White Down** car park, very approximate postcode **RH5 6SX**, [www.w3w.co/posed.tribe.season](http://www.w3w.co/posed.tribe.season), grid ref TQ 114 495. You can also begin at the **Abinger Roughts** car park, also off Whitedown Lane. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

## The Walk

If you are beginning the walk at the *Abinger Roughts* car park, go to the end of the car park; avoid the big 1-bar barrier and instead turn **right** through a gap in the fence, up a sandy path, past a picnic table, down to a stone cross, and right on a path, joining the walk in section [5](#).



- 1** From the back of the White Down car park, go past a barrier and follow the main wide path for 250m to a 4-way junction by fingerpost [\[May 2022: now propped up against a tree\]](#). Go straight over a crossing path and continue for another 300m, following the occasional white-on-white arrow for the *Self Guided Trail*. You will notice you have been walking beside a long bank of trees on your left with a parallel path running along the other side. Just before your path joins the parallel path and veers left, **leave** the main path by forking right on a narrower but good woodland path, passing a shallow depression on your right.
- 2** You are on a winding path through beechwoods which in late spring contain one of the most spectacular shows of bluebells in the county. After meandering for 400m through shady and open glades, your path suddenly bends left. [\(In autumn the dense leaf fall completely hides the clear path under your feet: you need to keep essentially straight ahead for 400m, always looking for the most obvious path, twisting left and right under beech trees and round bushes; after 400m you will see your route making a gradual complete left turn.\)](#) in 100m



you reach a 3-way junction with a small triangle of grass. Turn **right** here, through more woodland glades. Your path later becomes rougher with forest debris and, after about 350m, ends at a T-junction with a wider forest bridleway. Turn sharp **left** on this bridleway [May 2022: over two fallen trees] to reach a junction with a 3-way fingerpost after another 100m. Turn **right** at this junction, ignoring all three pointers on the post. This knobbly path takes you through a dusky yew glade. You skim a litter of fallen branches and at one point you have to negotiate a large fallen tree (unlikely to be cleared as this is not a statutory path). After about 300m, your path curves right and ends at a very wide dirt horse track.

- 3 Turn **left** on this track, arriving in 50m in front of a heavy black metal barrier. Instead of heading on past the barrier, turn **left**, passing a *different* heavy black metal barrier. You are now on Beggars Lane, a major high-way. Like a mountain rivulet which gathers tribute and becomes a mighty river, this path begins quietly as a delightful meandering oakwood path with a kindly surface. After 400m you enter an open area and, shortly after, some gates and a fingerpost half hidden in gorse indicate that you are crossing the North Downs Way. A sign now indicates *Byway 515 Shere* (although this path ends at Abinger) and your path becomes steep and chalky. A field gate on your left affords sudden views and a path and gate on your left (not on your route) lead to Hackhurst Down. The byway flattens, passing a crop field on your left, and takes you under the railway. You pass scattered small buildings (*note the boat, far from water*). After passing a heavy metal barrier, continue on the byway for only another 50m. Now fork **left** up a bank on a farm track. (The signpost is visible ahead pointing left, but the gradual slope is easier.) Just before a farm gate, turn **left** to meet a National Trust sign.



- 4 The sign announces that you are entering a little wood, *Piney Copse*.

*Piney Copse (which incidentally contains only broadleaf trees) was owned by novelist E.M. Forster who saved it from development in the 1920s using the proceeds from his novel "A Passage to India". He called it "my wood" in a witty essay which ponders the essence of materialism and the seductive energy of human property. When Forster died in 1970, it passed to the National Trust.*

You pass a useful bench seat and soon emerge, via a wooden gate, on a path beside a large field on your left. You come out through a small wooden gate onto a tarmac lane. Your route is directly over, a fraction right, on a narrow path.



But, by going **right** on the lane for 350m, you will reach the village of Abinger Hammer, a place to rest, possibly watching cricket in summer and having tea. You need to retrace your steps to re-join the walk.

Having crossed the tarmac lane, continue on a path running beside another field on your left. You come through the smaller of two wooden gates to reach a crossing path, a marker post [May 2021: missing] and a bench seat. Continue straight ahead on a gravel path uphill.

- 5 The gravel path leads into the dense woodland of Abinger Roughts, a National Trust nature reserve, also known here as Broomy Downs. Your route is straight ahead at all times, but there are tempting nature trails (just follow the signs) giving you a closer view of this area of great oaks and beeches. Your path runs along the left-hand side of an open space and re-enters trees, gently rising and falling for some distance. This very wide path continues beside a field on your left, passing through (or past) two new

wooden gates. Keep **left** at a fork with marker posts. If you parked in the [Abinger Roughs car park](#), fork **right** at the **third** yellow arrow, passing the Witches Broom Tree and reaching the car park in 400m. You pass the Wilberforce Memorial opposite the 16th-century Leasers Barn. *The cross commemorates bishop Samuel ("soapy Sam") Wilberforce (son of abolitionist William) who was killed in a fall from his horse in 1873. For more details see the walk "Abinger and Wotton".* At the end of the path, keep **left** to merge with the road, Whitedown Lane.

- 6 Follow the road over a railway bridge and continue another 250m to just before the road begins to hairpin left. At a small fingerpost (*don't miss!*), go **right** past an old wooden barrier onto a footpath. Just before a metal gate marked *Private*, your path turns **left** up a rather steep bank, keeping a fraction right over the first grassy knoll. It is easy now to lose the path, but the secret is: at the beginning, choose the *steepest* path ahead, and then follow a barbed-wire fence on your right, always going up up! After a strength-sapping 200m, the gradient eases off and you have the compensation of some wonderful views to your right. Soon the new barbed wire fence ends and your path suddenly veers **left** up a slope to meet the North Downs Way at a junction by an old WW2 "pill box" and marker post. Cross straight over, passing the pill box on your left, still going uphill. The footpath is now on a winding parallel course with the road, audible on your left. Your path winds through trees, up banks, passing an old blackened tree trunk, and a post with a yellow arrow, before finally flattening out. You need to skirt around a fallen tree. (There is a marker post with a white arrow in the undergrowth over to your left, although the path now takes a slightly different course.) 500m from the pill box, just before the footpath curves right to meet a wide forestry path, turn abruptly **left** to re-join the road. (Two fingerposts on the roadside to your left mark where the path used to come out.) Turn **right** on the road, quickly reaching the White Down car park where the walk began.



## Getting there

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By car: for the **White Down** car park, from **Dorking**, follow signs for *Ranmore*. Go just over 3 miles, avoiding the Denbies car park and three junction on your right, till you reach a **crossroads** with Critten Lane and Whitedown Lane. Turn **left** on Whitedown Lane. The car park is 600 metres on your right.

You can also begin the walk at the **Abinger Roughs car park**. This is further along Whitedown Lane, just after going over the railway, on your right, but easier to reach on the other side, from the A25.

You can also start at the **A3-M25** junction. Take the *slip road* signposted A3 *Guildford* but, in 100m, turn **left** on a road signposted *Effingham* that runs past a lake through forest. Follow the road to a T-junction and zigzag right-left over a humpback bridge, passing *Effingham Junction station*. At Effingham village, go straight ahead over two mini-roundabouts. Go through traffic lights over the main A246 road and follow a winding road to a crossroads with Ranmore Common Road and Crocknorth Road. Give way (!) and cross straight over. The car park is 600 metres on your right.

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