



Polesden Valley and Tanners Hatch

Distance: 4 km=2½ miles or 3½ km=2 miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: Polesden Lacey

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

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Historic house and cottage, valley walk, parkland, views, woodland

In Brief

This walk is a gentle stroll along one of the most captivating small green valleys in Surrey, a delight at any time of the year. It takes you past a little gem of a cottage in the woods, a Youth Hostel, which the author first stayed in as a youngster. Polesden Lacey offers an excellent selection of nature trails which should definitely be tried. But this walk does not require entry to the garden area.



The two entrance courtyards contain a general National Trust shop plus a crafts shop containing a wholefoods café. There is also a garden shop and an excellent restaurant. You don't need to pay the entrance fee for these facilities, but a visit to the house and garden (free to NT members) is one of the great pleasures of Surrey life.

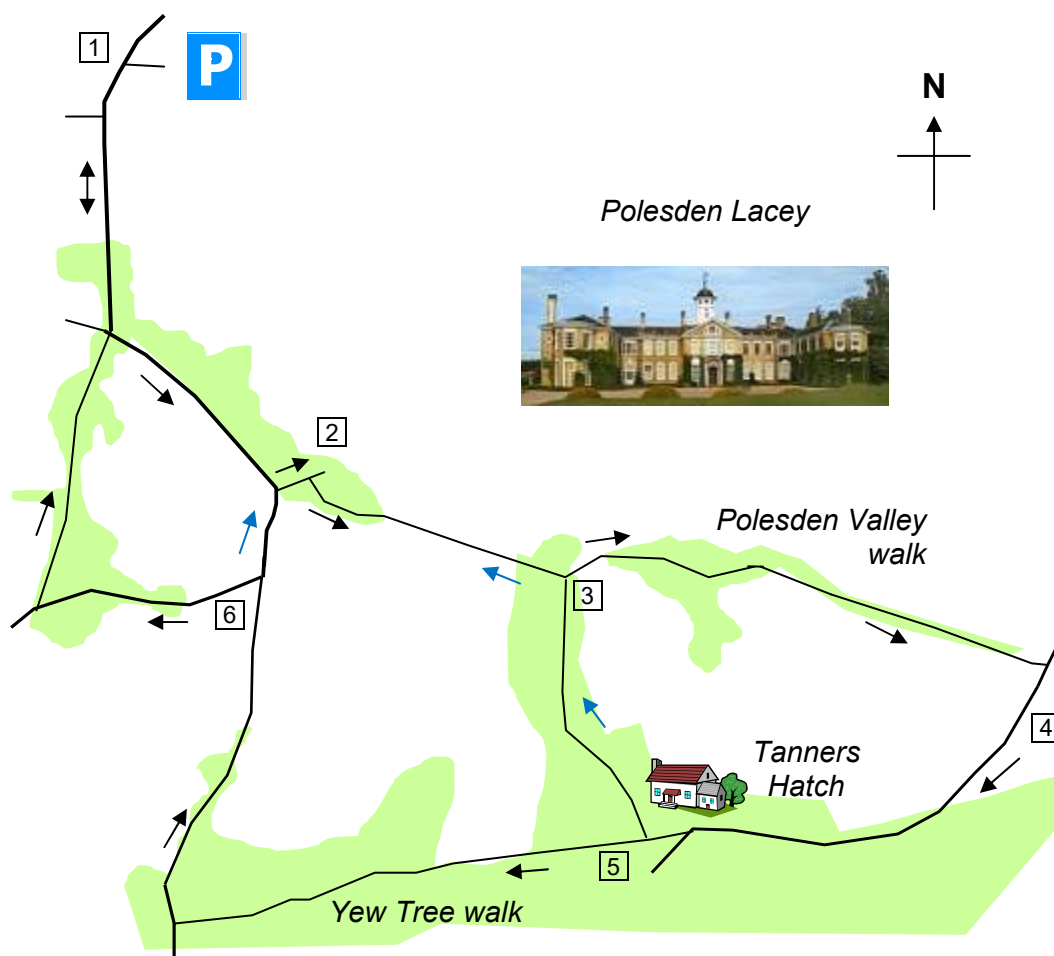


There are no nettles or brambles on this walk and any kind of sensible footwear will be fine. This walk is also perfect for your dog, with a lead of course.

The walk begins at the **Polesden Lacey** car park, postcode **RH5 6BB**. There is a modest charge (no coins) for non-NT members. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

The Edwardian house, Polesden Lacey, was the creation of a remarkable woman, Margaret ("Maggie") Greville, daughter of the wealthy Scottish brewer William McEwan. She married into "class", was soon widowed, and used her abundant charm to play hostess to kings and princes, holding discreet weekend parties in this country estate. The future King George VI and Queen Elizabeth spent part of their honeymoon there in 1923. Polesden Lacey, estate and house, now belongs to the National Trust. The house and garden are open every day except at Christmas. There is a good restaurant, a tearoom and shops. A visit to the house and garden is an absolute must, but an entrance ticket is required for non-NT members. The house is full of fine art (William McEwan was an avid collector) and the garden features a long terrace, a rose garden and an orchard, plus a downward sweep of lawn with views across the valley.



- 1 With the entrance to the house on your left and car park on your right, walk to the far end, go out through a small wooden gate and turn **left** on a wide driveway. Stay on the driveway as it narrows and dips down, running under a quaint thatched and timbered bridge, followed by a wooden bridge (both of which can be used by visitors to the grounds of Polesden Lacey). At a 4-way junction, turn **left**, staying on the tarmac driveway, with great views across the valley.



- 2 As the driveway curves right towards a farmhouse, fork **left** by a small fingerpost beside a large wooden gate onto a wide dirt track. In 20m, at a marker post, turn **right** on a narrower path downhill. You are on part of the Polesden Valley walk, marked with green arrow symbols. The path runs level

beside farm buildings and leads through a wooden gate into a green meadow. Keep to the left-hand side of the meadow, going through another wooden gate, passing a small pond on your left. On your right is a wide strip of woodland rising up the hill (one of your possible return routes).

- 3 Keep to the left and veer **left** on a path beside a wire fence, leading you through more woodland and up to a wooden gate. You come out into a large green meadow. Follow the sheltered path straight ahead by a line of trees, occasionally with wonderful views to your right, especially of the timbered cottage of Tanners Hatch – your next destination. In a total of 300m or so, the path ends at a sunken track.

- 4 Turn **right** on the sunken track, uphill. **You are now on part of the Yew Tree walk, marked with purple arrows.** The track curves right beside the meadow on your left. Soon you reach the small timbered cottage, *Tanners Hatch*, which is also a Youth Hostel, situated in a garden with fruit trees and a camp site, with bluebell woods all around.

Tanners Hatch dates from 1642 when it was two cottages. After the war, it was restored by YHA members. It still has its original features, such as gas lighting, open fires and triple bunks. Provided the house is not on special hire, it is usually possible to use the outside loos, maybe against a small donation to the YHA(?).

Continue ahead past the garden fence and leave the drive, which curves left uphill, by keeping straight ahead past a fingerpost on a path into a beechwood. In 20m, you have a choice of routes.

Decision point. There is an optional short woodland return from this point: Turn squarely **right** down into the wood, passing just to the left of a long fallen tree trunk, on a faint unmarked path. (The exact route is not important – you are descending a strip of woodland down to a path at the bottom.) You come quite close to the right-hand edge of the wood before your path veers left away from the edge to avoid a fallen tree. It veers right again past hollies and runs down through more hollies and under larches, now close to the right-hand side. Soon you reach the path that you came on at the end of section 2. Turn **left** on the path and re-trace your route back to the start. Otherwise ...

- 5 Ignore any narrow paths on the right and keep straight ahead on the main path. Soon the woodland clears and you have the best view of Polesden Lacey house. The path re-enters woodland and rises quite steeply for a short distance. It comes up to a T-junction with a wide track, near a flint cottage on your left. Turn **right** on this track. Very shortly, there are benches on your left for a quick breather to enjoy the view. Keep straight on through a small wooden gate (or the large gate, if open) on a cinder path which runs downhill between sheep pastures. At the bottom go through another small wooden gate (or the large one) to reach a wide rough farm drive at a bend. Once again, you have a choice of route, with the slightly longer main option in 6 below offering the most rewarding landscape to end the walk.



Decision point. If you veer right on the track, you quickly pass the farmhouse you saw at the start of section 2. Keep **left** on the driveway, re-tracing your route back to the start. Otherwise ...

- 6 Turn sharp **left** on the rough farm drive, soon walking through a avenue of tall oaks which curves left and rises gently. Just before you reach a large wooden gate leading into a sheep pasture on your right, at a fingerpost, turn sharp **right** on a bridleway. The bridleway runs under chestnuts and field maples and then becomes a kind of raised causeway between dark yew trees. At a 4-way junction, keep straight on along the driveway you came down on, passing under the two bridges and reaching the car park on your right where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Polesden Lacey is in the outskirts of Great Bookham, near Dorking, Surrey. If coming from Dorking or Fetcham, take the A246 in the direction of Guildford until you come through the village of Great Bookham. Soon after you come through traffic lights by a filling station, look for a brown National Trust sign for Polesden Lacey and fork **left**. In a very short distance, turn **left** at a similar sign. This narrow road runs for $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, out into the open, to a junction. Avoid a minor road straight ahead here and turn **right**. The drive runs through the parkland, forking left and running through the gatehouse. The car park is on your **right**.

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