



Witley, Hambledon, Chiddingfold

Distance: 14½ km=9 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Surrey

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Author: Schwebefuss

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Refreshments:

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Map: Explorer 133 (Haslemere) *but the maps below should be suffice*

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

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Heath, villages, woodland, historic cottages, church

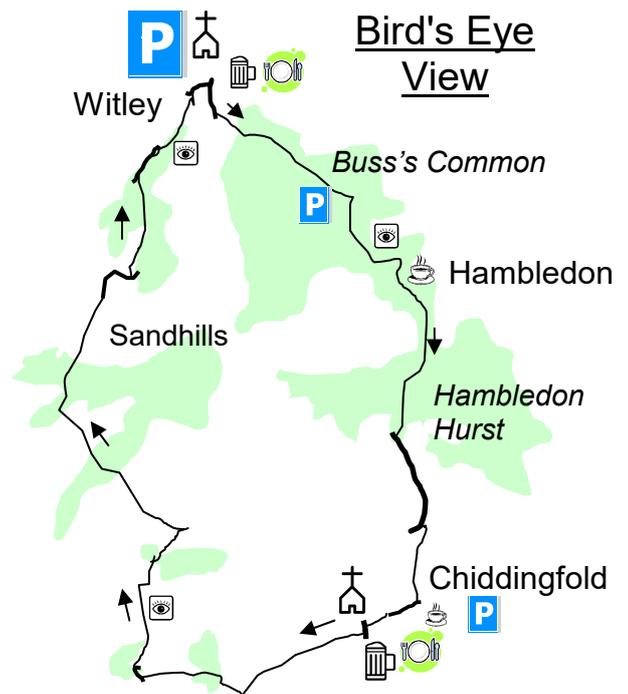
In Brief

This is a completely new walk through a favourite part of south-west Surrey. Some of the villages en route will already be known to people who do these walks, but most of the paths will be quite new even to regular walkers and a number of surprises and gems will be revealed along the way. Because of the great variety of twists and turns and constantly changing terrain, people have remarked that this walk seems much longer than the given distance – so allow plenty of time!



There are some nettles and tall under-growth on one or two of the paths, especially in high summer, enough to make long trousers preferable. The going is generally easy, so any sensible footwear should be fine in dry conditions. After wet weather there is bound to be some mud in the fields, especially around Chiddingfold, and boots are definitely needed. There are nine unavoidable stiles on this walk, one quite high, so a certain level of fitness is required (and perhaps a sturdy pole). Because of the twists, some walkers measure a longer distance. Your dog is welcome.

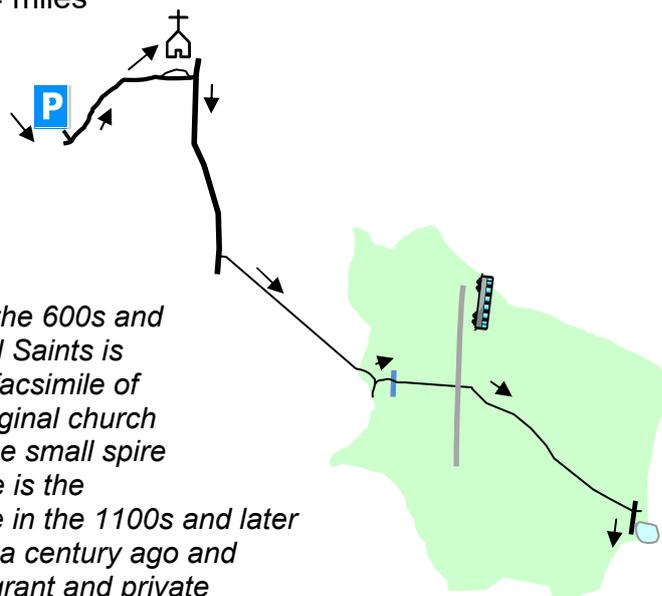
The walk begins in Church Fields, off **Church Lane, Witley, Surrey**, postcode **GU8 5PP**, www.w3w.co/rifled.sneezing.ducks. Good alternate starts are the Sweetwater Pond and Chiddingfold. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

Leg 1: Witley to Chiddingfold 6 km=4 miles

- 1 Go back along the lane to the church and the school and go **left** through a gate into the churchyard, giving you the opportunity to visit this remarkable church.



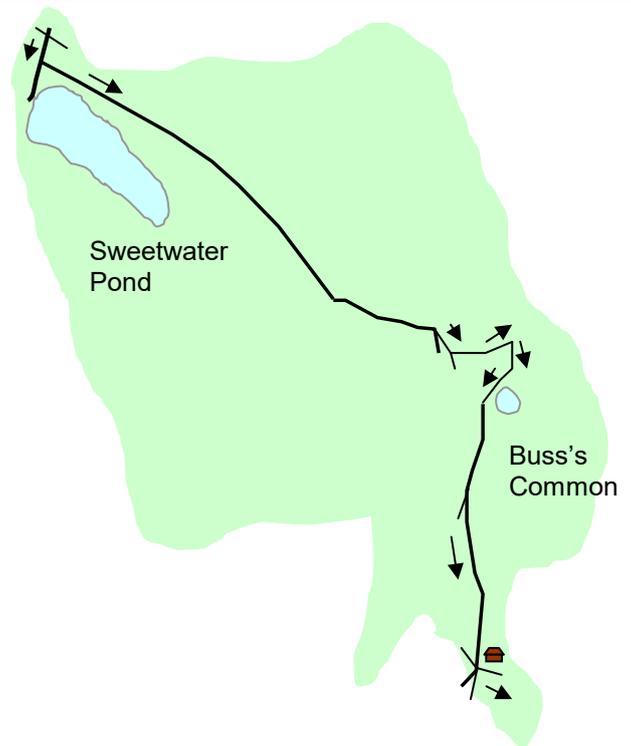
A wooden church stood on this site from the 600s and even the nave of the current Church of All Saints is pre-Norman. At the back, you will find a facsimile of the Domesday record. The rest of the original church was completed by the late 1300s when the small spire was added. The most remarkable feature is the priceless wall paintings. They were made in the 1100s and later covered over with lime until rediscovered a century ago and restored in recent years by Government grant and private donations. The paintings are true frescos (painted on wet plaster) arranged in three tiers and the subjects are most unusual. The top tier shows the Virgin and the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. The middle tier shows Jesus, Mary Magdalene and others, plus Hell at the far end. The lower tier shows a Consecration and the miracle of the fishes.

Witta's Leigh or Witley (a "leigh" is a forest clearing) is Saxon in origin. Until Tudor times, Witley had royal connections. For one week in 1305, Witley was the centre of England when Edward I held his court here. You may have noticed the walls or gatehouse of the huge Witley Park to the west of the village. After centuries of royal ownership, it passed in 1890 to Whitaker Wright who had made countless millions in mining. He spent a prodigious amount on the house and landscape. The house boasted a theatre, a palm court, a hospital and even an underwater billiards room, built under one of the artificial lakes. He also held Lordship over Hindhead Common and the Devil's Punch Bowl (see that group of walks in this series), which later passed to the newly-formed National Trust. His exit was dramatic. In 1900 his City funds collapsed and he was sentenced for fraud, but escaped jail by swallowing a cyanide capsule. He is buried in the church. The estate was then bought by William James Pirrie, chairman of the shipbuilders Harland and Wolff and designer of the Titanic, and passed to other owners and finally into neglect, until it was destroyed by fire. There is now a planning application on file for a new house "of classical design" so perhaps a new Jeff Bezos-type figure will soon be in residence.

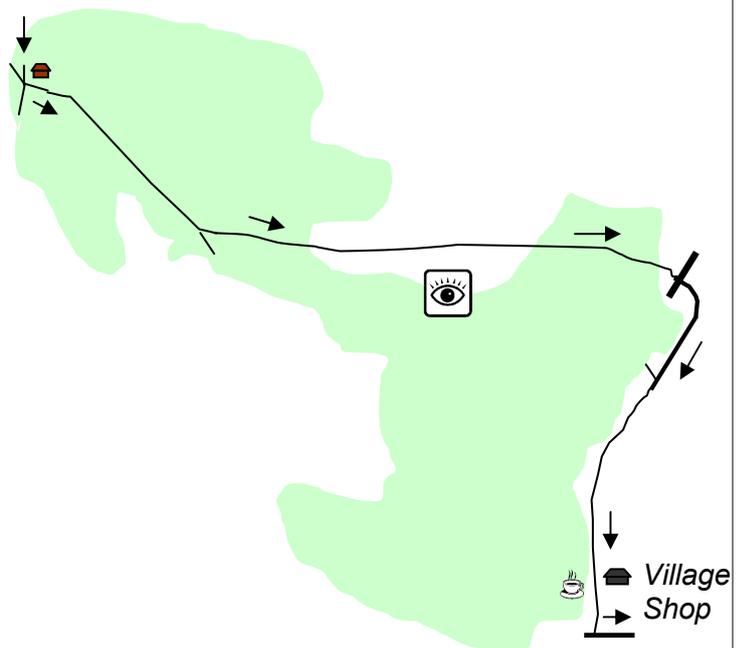


Pass the church on your left and exit the other end down some steps, back to the lane and its junction with the main A283 road, opposite the *White Hart* (an excellent Youngs inn – try the ribs smoked on the premises). Turn **right** on the road and, just after the last building, the Chichester Hall, cross the road and go **left** through a little wooden gate on a signposted footpath diagonally across a recreation ground, keeping to the left of a small playground. Go between posts into trees and continue straight ahead down a track by a fence. At the corner of the fence, turn **left** on a narrow path, over a small concrete bridge and straight ahead through an arch under the railway. Your path takes you straight on through beautiful woodland, finally arriving at a road with the Sweetwater Pond on your right. Turn **right** on the road, avoiding the footpath straight ahead.

2 In just 10m, turn **left** on a bridleway beside the pond onto Sweet Water Lane. The car park on your left is an alternative start. *Enton Hall* is soon just visible up on your left. The wide path continues past houses with large gardens (including *No Turning Cottage*) and enters more woodland. At the start of a fence on your right, you come to a post with a blue arrow. (There now follows a one-minute excursion to take in a delight of Buss's Common. You could, if you like, simply stay by the fence.) Fork **left** in the direction of the blue arrow and, in 25m, at another blue arrow, fork **left** again. Avoid a footpath with a yellow arrow on your left to pass a post in the middle of the path. 15m after this, turn sharp **right** beside a holly on a narrow path. You pass a charming pond on your left, worth pausing at. Soon after, you are back at the fence. Turn **left** on a wide path beside a black shed and the fence. Continue through woodland and, in 100m, at a blue arrow, keep **left**, avoiding a path on the right at a wooden barrier. You come out at a multiple junction by the scenic heath of Hambledon Common, next to the timbered *Moor Cottage*.



3 Veer **left** in front of the house and take a path beside its garage, keeping straight ahead at a marker post on the main path. *You are on the Greensand Way (GW) long-distance footpath*. At the start of high open heathland, you come to a marker post with yellow and blue arrows. Take the **left** fork, following the yellow arrow. The GW takes you to a high spot with railings, a pet's commemorative bench and a direction finder pointing to the great views you have to Blackdown, the Weald and the South Downs. After trees, there is another spot with a seat and views. Finally the path leads down through trees down to a road. Cross straight over and bear **right** on Paddocks Close, a residential drive. In 100m or so, keep ahead on a narrow tarmac footpath on the right of a fence, marked *Cycling Strictly Forbidden*. The path crosses a tarmac drive and leads you to a picnic area, pond and the *Hambledon Village Shop* with its view over the cricket green.

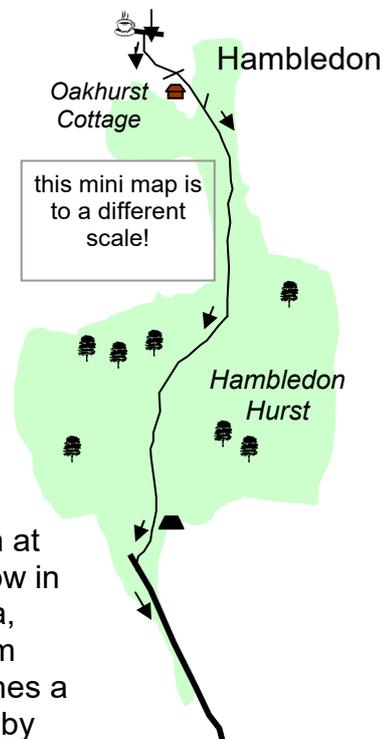


Often photographed as a symbol of this unpretentious village, the Village Shop is also a café and post office. The local volunteer staff dispense hot snacks and drinks for walkers as well as serving the locals. All at quite outstanding value. There is nothing pleasanter than sitting on the sunny side watching village life go by and contemplating the next leg of the journey. Unfortunately, the shop closes in the afternoons at weekends.

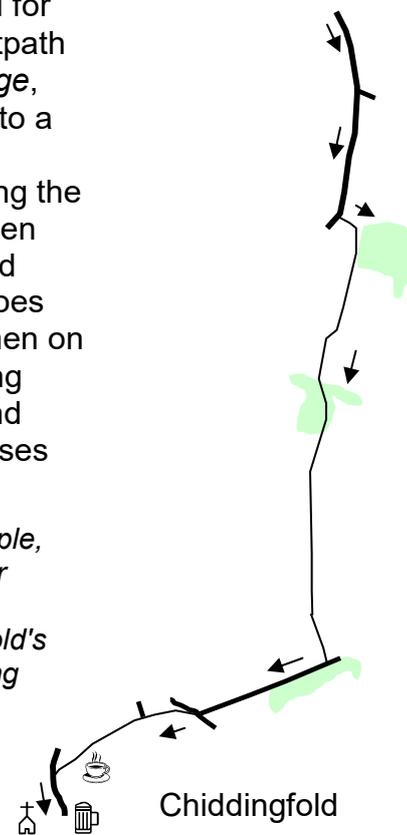
- 4 Go down to the road, turn **left** for only 10m and go **right** along the side of the cricket green to the far corner where you find the perfectly charming historic *Admers Cottage*. Turn **left** on a track going past more cottages and a cricket pavilion. Take the next turning **right**, going past more cottages on your right. Continue ahead over the grass. The last tiny half-timbered cottage is a national treasure.

Oakhurst Cottage is a simple labourer's dwelling, inhabited for 400 years until 1952. The cottage and its garden were restored and refurbished by the National Trust. It is open from April to October but only by appointment. Ring 01483-208936 in advance. However, you may be lucky if you drop in off-chance when a tour is starting.

Continue through a flimsy wooden barrier. Keep to the main path at all times as it curves right and zigzags over a stream. You are now in an arm of Hambledon Hurst, one of the largest woods of this area, passing through holly and oak. Your path zigzags over the stream again and crosses the stream by a bridge. It rises a bit and reaches a junction by a marker post. On your right is a parking space used by trucks, fairground rides and so on. Keep straight ahead at the junction. Eventually, you pass a red tile-hung cottage on your left. Continue along its drive to the main road and turn **left** on the road, using the footpath on the other side. You pass on your left the old *Winterton Arms*, once a favourite pub, now sadly closed.



- 5 Ignore a bridleway on the left and continue along the main road for another 175m, passing a junction on the left. Switch to the footpath on the left-hand side and, at the entrance to *Lincolns Hill Cottage*, turn **left** on a grassy path. Keep straight on to a new stile next to a metal gate and into a meadow. Go up the left-hand side of the meadow and past a [2018: collapsed] stile in the corner. Go along the left-hand side of the next meadow, then across the centre. When you reach a belt of holly trees, ignore a footpath on the right and keep straight on into a large field. Your path across this field goes on the right, then up the centre between sheep-proof fences, then on the left, then on a fenced path down to a road. Turn **right**, going past the *old Post Office*. Cross straight over Pickhurst Road and continue ahead beside the Green, passing some attractive houses and soon reaching the shops and the *Crown Inn*.

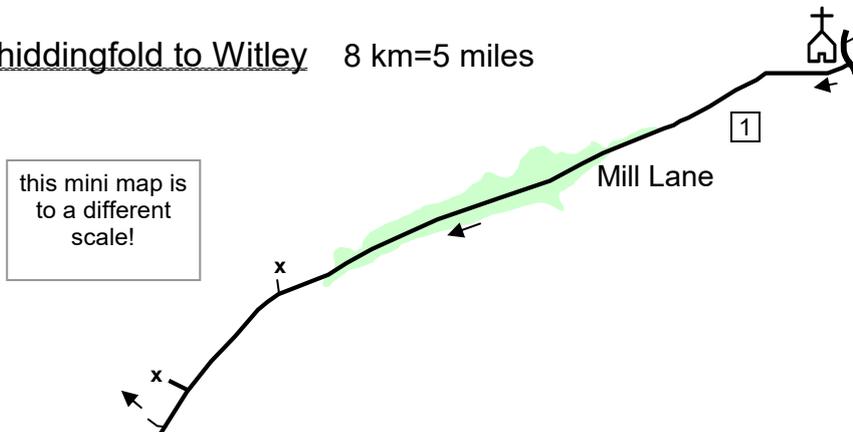


Cedd or Cedda was East Saxon bishop from 654 to 664. His people, the "Cedding", set up an enclosure ("fold") in this valley, but not for the first time as items from the Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Celtic and Roman periods have also been found here. Chiddingfold's November bonfire is one of the best. At first, it was just for clearing unused clutter from the stick factory and had no connection with Guy Fawkes. In the 1920s it caused a riot when a policeman, who had nabbed some school kids for letting off fireworks, was accused of lighting the bonfire prematurely. Ever since Tudor times, Chiddingfold was famous for glass-making and its glass was used in St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster and St George's Chapel, Windsor, among other notable buildings. There are shops here, including "Elliotts Coffee Shop" who serve good tea too and the butcher, famous for amazing sausages.

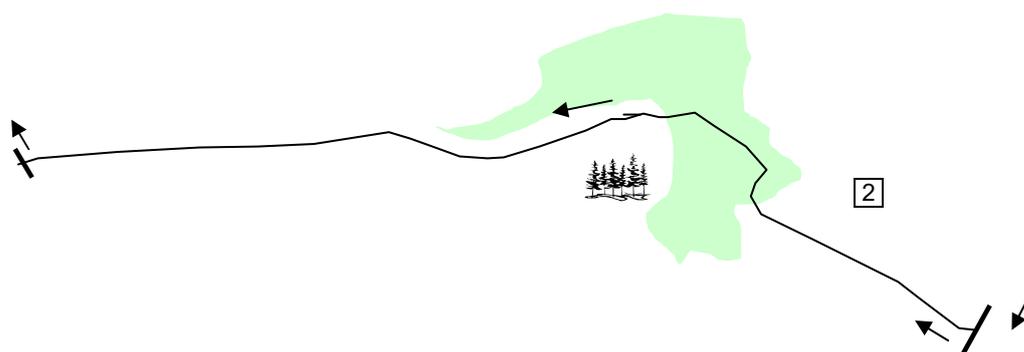


The "Crown Inn" dates at least from 1365, making it the oldest licensed inn in England. A rest house known as the "Hall" stood here before then, probably for use by pilgrims. In the 1300s the owners were fined 15 pence for not displaying a hop garland when a new brew was ready for assessment. In those days, a "conner" would visit, pour ale on a bench and then sit on it. If he found himself partially stuck to the bench, he would be satisfied that the beer was not watered down. In 1847 the local rector bought the inn to stop over-indulgence during services. The "Swan Inn", a stone's throw away, is another good local.

Leg 2: Chiddingfold to Witley 8 km=5 miles



- 1 Cross the road to the church. *Chiddingfold church of St Mary* dates back to around 1190. The church and its churchyard with its notable brick-vaulted graves are worth visiting. Turn **left** on the main road, passing the entrance to the church, and turn **right** on Mill Lane. Follow this cul-de-sac lane for 900m, eventually passing the imposing entrance to *Sydenhurst House* on the right. (The house used to be called *Little Sydenhurst* until a controversial new millionaire's mansion opposite called *Sydenhurst* risked making it feel inferior.) 150m further, you pass the venerable Sydenhurst Farm, ignoring a tarmac lane on the right marked as a footpath. 50m further on, after a modern cottage, turn **right** at another footpath sign through a modern kissing gate.

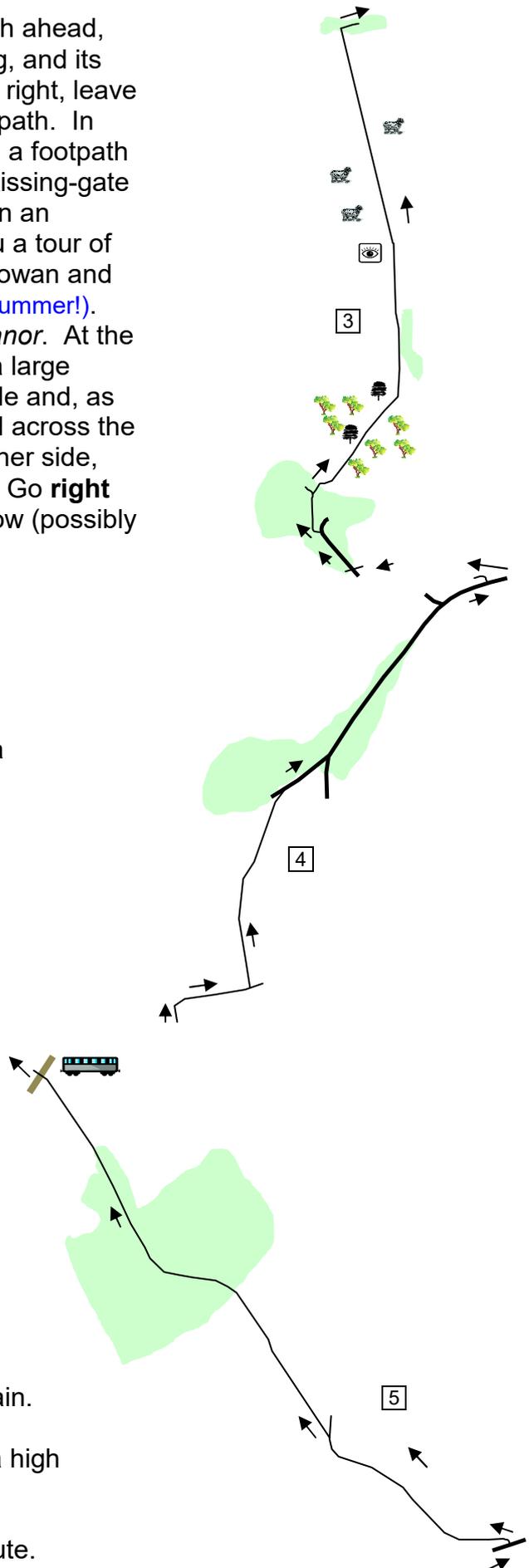


- 2 Follow the path across a meadow - till recently two smaller meadows. (2023: you may need to step over or bypass a temporary electric fence which pens in some livestock.) The path bends **right** at the far end of the meadow, through another kissing gate, round the back of a garden and **left** again on a path enclosed by banks. The path curves left and right though a plantation and then enters a sheep pasture via a large gate or stile. Continue along the right-hand side of the field for some distance and then straight on at the field corner, eventually going through a metal gate to meet a lane.

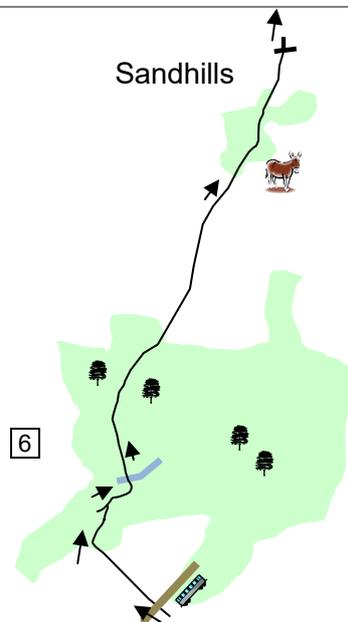
3 Turn **right** on the lane, ignoring the footpath ahead, passing *Hawlands*, a grade II listed building, and its pond. Immediately, where the road curves right, leave it to continue straight ahead on a wide footpath. In just 50m, at a post with yellow arrows, take a footpath forking off **right**, going through a wooden kissing-gate beside a locked metal gate. You are now in an elegant plantation with your path giving you a tour of the birches, the occasional large oak and rowan and some pine and maple (and some nettles in summer!). The big house on the right is *Langhurst Manor*. At the end, go through a gate or over a stile into a large sheep meadow. Keep to the right-hand side and, as the fence bends away, keep straight ahead across the centre, with great views to enjoy. At the other side, you reach the corner of some wire fences. Go **right** here through an old kissing-gate on a narrow (possibly very overgrown) path.

4 In 80m, at a yellow marker, turn **left** at a [2018: collapsed] stile (*don't miss!*) onto a narrow path beside a tennis court and then between fences passing *Langhurst Place* on your right. Continue down a drive by a cottage and turn **right** on a road, passing a road junction on the right. On your left in the distance are the buildings of *Coombe Court Farm* and a side lane, and on your right soon is *Misselbrook Cottage*. Just after *Westerly*, go sharp **left** on a drive marked as a footpath, through the smaller of two metal gates.

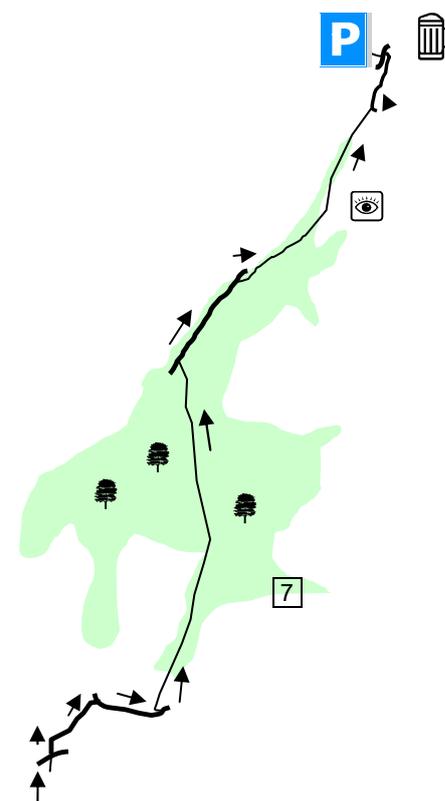
5 In 80m, your path veers right between a metal fence and a yew hedge, passing a pond on your left. After 300m on this pleasant path, go over a stile and along the right-hand side of a pasture, through a metal gate, then continuing ahead over another stile and down through trees. *The woods on each side are used by a simulated battlefield company, using infrared and realistic gunfire: not as lethal as the notice suggests, but it's best not to stray.* Go over a solid bridge across a wide stream, over a crossing path and uphill again. Your path goes over a stile, along a newly-fenced wide path beside a meadow, over a high stile, a track and another stile to reach the railway. Cross the railway line carefully remembering that this is a fast inter-city route.



6 Go over another stile and straight across a crop field. At the other side, go over a 2-plank bridge and down into woodland. Veer **right** where a smaller path joins from the left, on a wider path in the wood. Your path curves left over a wide bridge across an ample stream and follows a broad course uphill on a rough track. (Care! some walkers went wrong in this section.) Ignore a path on the left at a yellow arrow before your path leaves the wood and joins a cinder track running between fields. On your right is an RSPCA donkey (?) sanctuary (open April to October). The bridleway eventually goes past houses on your right and comes up to a road in Sandhills, an agreeable hamlet of scattered houses.



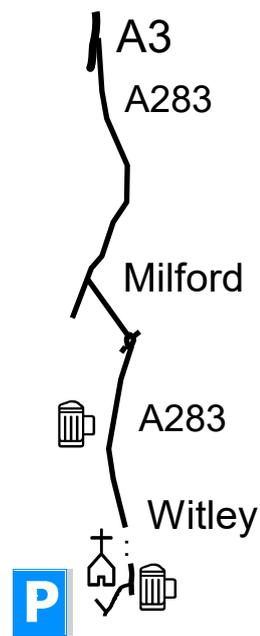
7 Cross straight over the road on narrow Sebastopol Lane, going past the timbered *Rose and Step Cottages* and other dwellings. At a T-junction at the top, turn **right** on another road. As you pass *Sandhills Cottage*, it is worth taking in the view revealed by the gap in the trees. After about 150m, at a fingerpost, turn **left** on a bridleway, going past *Banacle [sic] Edge* and then beside a wall and fence, on a narrower path. Your path goes by a tall gate on the right used by King Edward's School and continues on a wide course through more woodland, ending at an uphill stretch between banks with shallow steps. Bear **right** onto a lane. Avoid a footpath right before *Hangerfeld Cottage* and, after *Hangerfeld*, take a footpath **right** running by a fence above the lane with occasional great views right. The lane below runs in a deep sandstone cutting. At the end, veer **left** on a tarmac drive and follow it down to a road and the car park where the walk began.



For final refreshments, the "White Hart" (Young's) is open till 6pm at weekends. This is a lovely old pub with a log fire and inglenook where George Eliot and Lord Nelson drank (definitely **not** together). It was built in the 1500s on the site of a hunting lodge used by Richard II. A "chosen reward stop" for walkers.

Getting there

By car: Witley is on the A283, Guildford to Petworth Road, 3 km=2 miles south of Milford. To get there from the A3, come off at Milford and take the A283 from the large roundabout. Witley is like two villages with green space in between. Go past the *Star Inn*, continue past shops, and a considerable distance further to the second part of the village where you will see a war memorial and the *White Hart* pub. Turn **right** here on Church Lane. Go past the school and church and follow the narrow lane uphill to a junction. The parking space is here on the right. It is much used by parents taking children to the school, in case you arrive at 9am or 3pm on a weekday, but quickly clears.



By bus/train: bus 70 or 71 from Guildford, Godalming or Haslemere. Check the timetables. Witley station is at least 1 km from the walk.

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