



Durford Abbey, River Rother, Durleighmarsh

Distance: 6 km=3¾ miles

easy walking

Region: West Sussex, Hampshire

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Refreshments: picnic

Map: Explorer 133 (Petersfield) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Historical site, easy field paths, river, ancient bridge, woodland

In Brief

This is a walk taking you back into history where very little seems to have changed for centuries. You pass the site of a medieval monastery, cross the River Rother and, after a woodland walk, cross it again via an ancient bridge.



There are no nettles and no scratchy undergrowth on this walk. Sensible walking shoes or trainers are adequate, although in winter boots are preferable because of the damp forests. Your dog can certainly come if he is not too large, on account of the stiles.

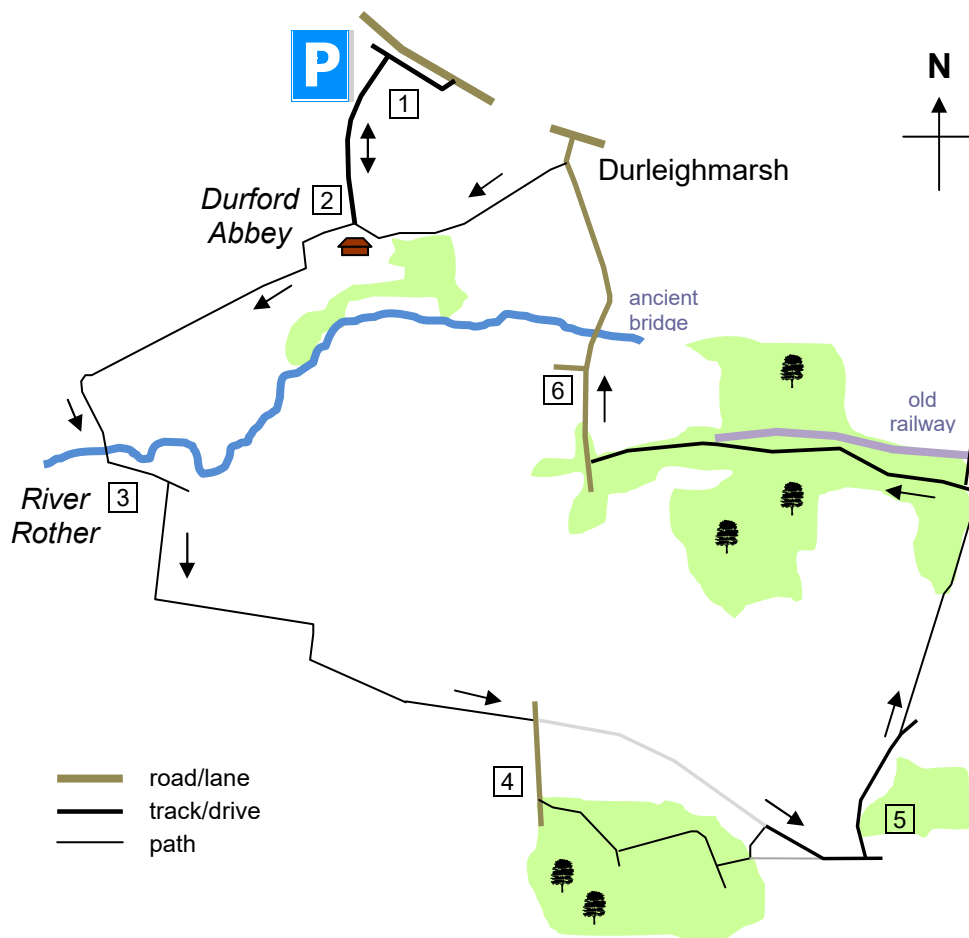


The walk begins in a side road just off the south side of the A272 at the corner of the road leading to **Durford Abbey Farm House**, W.Sussex, near Petersfield, nearest postcode **GU31 5AU**, grid ref SU 779 238. This is *not* the lane signed to Durford Mill. For full details (important!), see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



Another good place to start is **Durleighmarsh Farm**, postcode **GU31 5AX**, on the other side of the A272, just east of the walk. There is ample parking, a farm shop and an excellent café (the Tea Barn, NB closed on Monday). Crossing the main road is pretty safe with good sight lines. After crossing, turn **right** on a parallel side road and join the walk at Durleighmarsh. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1** Just before the last house in the side road, turn onto a tarmac lane leading away past more houses, heading for the South Downs, giving you some great views including, over to the right, Butser Hill with its transmitter tower. At the end of the lane is the entrance to Durford Abbey Farm House, a historic house concealing an even more ancient structure, not open to the public unfortunately.




Durford Abbey was one of about 700 monasteries in England which held great wealth and power, although it was peopled by "Premonstratensians", an order which still survives today, made up of the more pronounceable "White Canons", who are not actually monks but rather a sort of community of priests. Much of the monastery fabric and earthworks remain within the present-day farmhouse, including some of its water-driven threshing apparatus. The monastery was founded by Henry Husey, lord of the neighbouring manor of Harting, in 1161 and dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist. It suffered two robberies in the 1300s and 1400s and a fire and the church tower was struck by lightning. The abbey was dissolved in 1534 but the new secular owner left the layout intact with its inner square and cloister. The frater (refectory), undercroft (cellar) and stable block are still recognisable.

- 2** Turn **right** just before the Farm House on a wide waymarked footpath. *Note: you are on part of the Serpent Trail (ST), a long-distance trail. You are also in Hampshire or a short stretch until you cross the river.* Very shortly, after a pond on your left, go **left** over a stile and follow the green meadow with the Farm House in view on your left. At the corner of a fence, turn **right** to go over another stile. Keep the same direction across the next field, passing close to an oak tree, heading straight towards Butser Hill. On reaching far side, keep ahead through a modern kissing-gate, thus leaving the ST

(which turns right here). Your path takes you after a splendid new bridge over the River Rother (which you will encounter again and in other walks in this region).

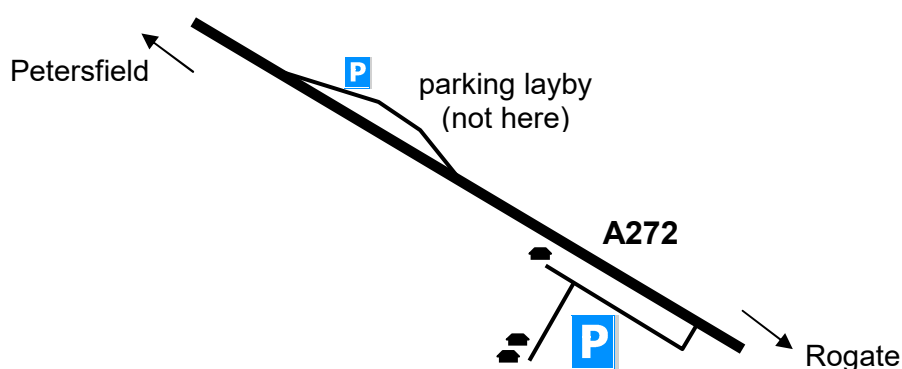
*The River Rother rises in Empshott in Hampshire (on the “Hampshire Hangers Chain” walk on this site) and flows into the Arun near Fittleworth (see the “Elgar” walk). In case you saw the River Rother near Bodiam and were amazed to see how far it reaches – that is a **different** River Rother (our forefathers were not too imaginative when thinking of names for rivers).*

- 3 Turn **left** alongside the field and in 100m, at a 3-way fingerpost, turn **right** on a path across the field, heading for a large house (*Ryefield*). At a fingerpost near the corner of the house, go squarely **left** on a faint path across the field, passing an oak on your left. At the far end, turn right as directed and in 70m, at another fingerpost, go **left** on a path across the centre of the field. At the other side, go through a tall metal gate belonging to Sky Park Farm on a nice wide path between wire fences. At the far end, another gate leads to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** * on the lane. (* Dog walkers may prefer to cross straight over onto a semi-tarmac drive, omitting the wood, to avoid a stile in the next section.)
- 4 In 150m, at a fingerpost, turn **left** on a footpath which initially bypasses the large metal gate. This little wood of silver birch and assorted trees is a local secret, rarely visited by anyone. In 170m, when you come to a 3-way junction, take the **left** fork. In 150m your path turn **right** at the corner. In 70m, at a marker post, turn **left** on a path which takes you over a stile. Immediately go **left** over another stile into the adjoining meadow. (But many walkers unofficially avoid this second stile and simply cross the meadow diagonally exiting through a large gate; this is justifiable since there is another footpath in this meadow – the Sussex Border Path which runs along the far edge.) Aim to the right to a metal kissing-gate and signpost visible on the other side leading out to a drive and turn **right**. Opposite a large silo belonging to Down Park Farm, turn **left** at a fingerpost on a wide track.
- 5  You are now in the *Serpent Trail* and the *Sussex Border Path*. You come through an open metal gate, making the overgrown stile redundant. Ignore a footpath on the left and stay on the track. Where the track kinks right, leave it by keeping **left** past a (broken) stile on a wide path between wire fences. Your path goes over a plank bridge and a stile and continues along the left-hand side of a large meadow. In the next corner, go **left** through a wooden swing-gate and keep **left** on a tarmac drive, ignoring paths on your right towards a house. In late spring there are extensive bluebells on your right, but late developing because of the deep shade. Further to your right is the course of the dismantled old Rother Valley railway line in a deep cutting. You come over a stile beside an electric gate cleverly disguised as a rustic affair. You come out finally to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane.
- 6 Ignore a junction on your left. (*Grade-II listed Durford Mill House, dated 1770, is on private land.*) Soon you reach the River Rother and the ancient Durford Bridge. This wonderful old bridge was built around the year 1600 and restored in 1924; it is preserved as an ancient monument. Continue on the lane till you reach the hamlet of Durleighmarsh, coming close to the main road. Between *Briar Cottage* and *Maryland Cottage*, go **left** on a narrow footpath, then a clear path across a crop field. Continue along the left-hand side of the next field and round the side of an ancient barn. Turn **right** on a tarmac lane leading back to the side road where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: this walk starts from an unnamed side road leading off and parallel to the A272 Petersfield-Midhurst road, just west of the hamlet of Durleighmarsh. If you come via the A3 road, turn off at a sign for *Petersfield, Midhurst, A272*. Follow signs for *Midhurst, A272*, skirting Petersfield. This consists of turning **left** at a roundabout and, about $\frac{2}{3}$ mile later, turning **right** at a junction signed *Midhurst, A272*. In less than 1 mile, on your left you will see a **P** symbol and the start of a layby behind the trees. **Ignore** this parking area, go $\frac{1}{3}$ mile further and turn **right** and **right** again on an unnamed, unsigned tarmac lane leading to houses (which are invisible from the road). (As a guide, there are two white posts with red reflectors at the beginning of the lane.) See the mini-map below. If you pass a group of houses on the roadside, this is Durleighmarsh and you have come 250 yards too far. Park discreetly, e.g. on the grass verge or immediately after a road junction.

Durleighmarsh Farm is a short distance further on the opposite side.



By bus/train: bus 91 / 92 / 93 from Petersfield station towards Rogate, bus 54 from Petersfield or Chichester, mon-sat. Check the timetables. Durleighmarsh may be a request or unscheduled stop.

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