



Ebernoe Common and Kirdford

Distance: 14½ km=9 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: West Sussex

Date written: 1-may-2016

Author: Hautboy

Last update: 2-mar-2024

Refreshments: Kirdford, Balls Cross

Map: Explorer 133 (Haslemere) and 134 (Horsham)

but the maps in this guide should be sufficient

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

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Woodland, water, green meadows, village, pubs, spring and summer flowers

In Brief

A perfect walk to go with the sunshine, showing the absolute best of peaceful Sussex, ideal throughout the drier months of the year. This route takes you through Ebernoe Common which has a kind of mystical quality. As well as bluebells in late spring, you will see primroses, violets, pale pink cuckoo-flowers and purple orchids. The landscape is like somewhere long forgotten. Indeed, you could be in almost any century with few reminders of modern times.

At each extreme of the walk is a different village, one just a few scattered ancient cottages and farmsteads, the other perfectly formed with its church, thatches and two pubs. The outward journey is on narrow paths through woodland and delicious green meadows, with several stiles. The return journey is easier with wide comfortable tracks and another perfect little country pub, until you are plunged back into the labyrinth of Ebernoe Common.

This is an adventurous walk, with some sections calling on your navigation skills in the forest and, following the gales of early 2016, your creative approach to some woodland debris. For these reasons, and because of the distance, the walk will seem longer than its given length and boots are necessary. (The feet in the boots could be of any age however.) There are some sections of undergrowth, especially later in the year, making bare legs inadvisable. Just *one* of the stiles is not dog-friendly, requiring a heave-over.

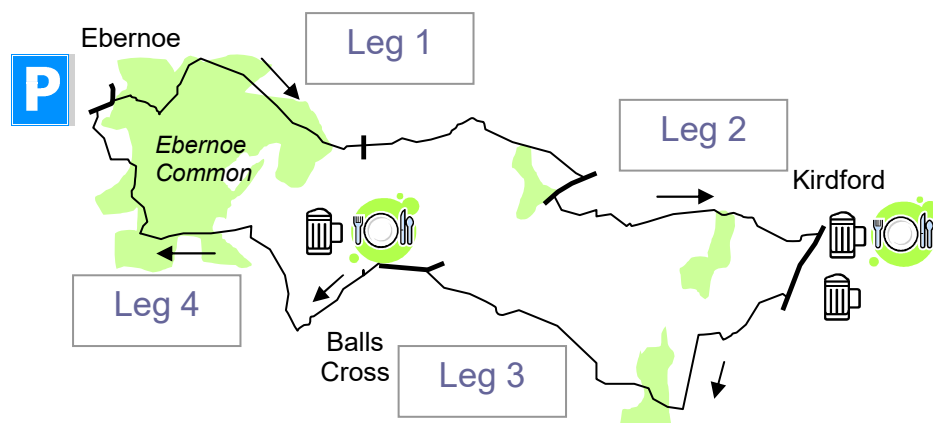


Pub checks: for the *Half Moon*, Kirdford, ring 01403-820223; for the *Foresters*, 01403-820205; for the *Stag Inn*, Balls Cross 01403-820241.

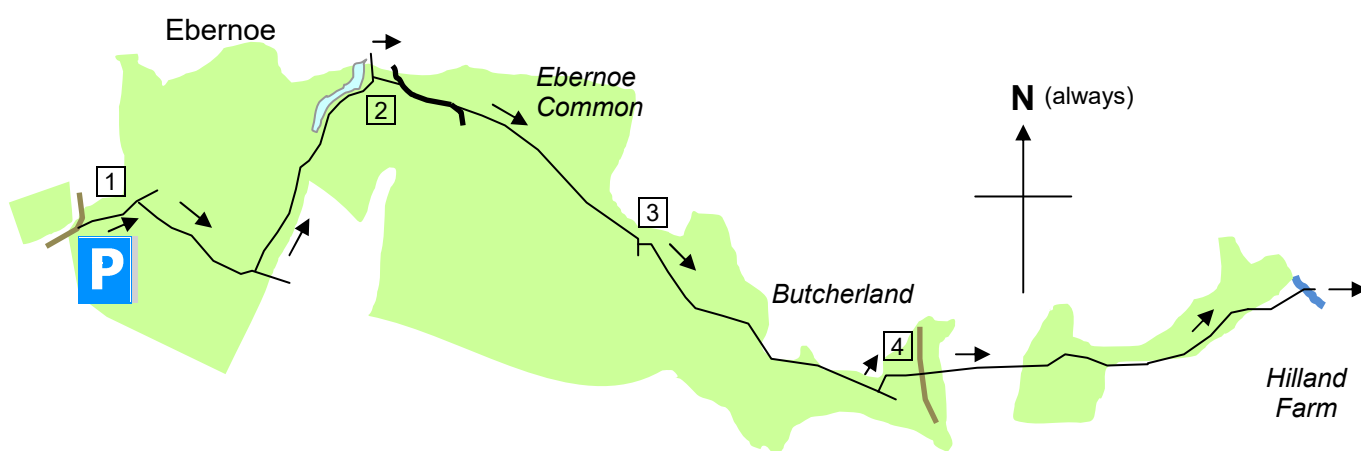
The walk has an unusual starting point at **Ebernoe Common**, West Sussex. The improvised parking area is at a bend in the road leading to Ebernoe, off the A283 Petworth Road, www.w3w.co/restored.rosette.backfired and therefore easy to reach from London or Guildford. The nearest postcode is **GU28 9LE**. Other possible starting points are Ebernoe Church (postcode **GU28 9LD**), Kirdford and Balls Cross. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Bird's Eye View



Leg 1: Ebernoe Common to Hilland 3 km=2 miles

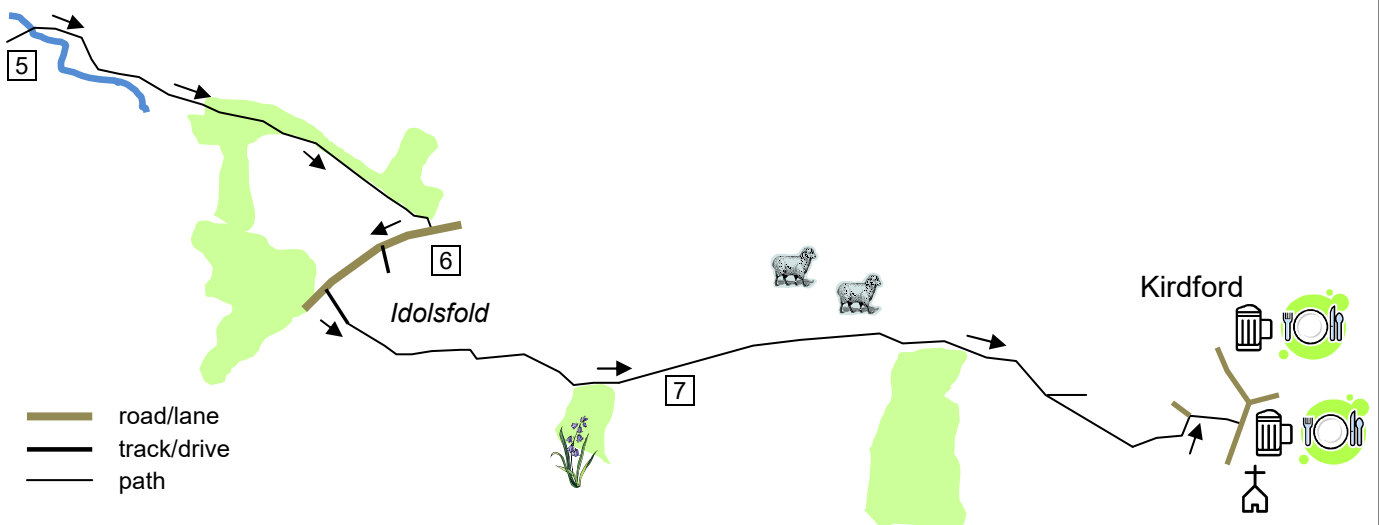


- 1 From the improvised parking space on the corner of Streels Lane, take the **leftmost** footpath into the woods, avoiding the path on your right (now used for forestry work). A field is visible close by on your left. In 120m you reach a fork and a marker post. Take the **right** fork as indicated by the arrow. Keep straight on as you pass two-way fingerposts after about 100m and 200m, after which your path descends to a stream. Go left-right to cross the stream using a bridge with rail and immediately step over another small stream. Now **leave** the official footpath, which leads straight on up the slope, and instead turn **left** following the stream on your left. The path may be obscure at first because of woodland debris but it soon gets wider and easier. **You are in Ebernoe Common Nature Reserve, in a botanically rich area with a great variety of wild flowers.** The path runs a little higher above the stream and curves right uphill. Soon, down on your left is Ebernoe Furnace Pond and your path descends to go over a sturdy bridge, bending left along the head of the pond for a short distance. **By diverting straight ahead and up a series of steps, you would reach Ebernoe Church, an alternative starting point.**

Ebernoe is a village of scattered farmsteads. Its name means something like "tree by a stream" and its history goes back far into the past. Ebernoe Common is one of the few roosting areas in the UK of the rare bechstein bat and the barbastelle bat (with the snub nose) which need old dying trees with a deep "understory" (covering the forest floor) - exactly what you will see on this walk. For more information on Ebernoe see the other walk "Ebernoe Lurgashall".

- 2 In only 15m from the left turn after the bridge, turn **right** on a path away from the pond. This path goes over a bridge to a T-junction with a wide track. Turn **right** on the track. Go through a wooden gate by a grid, passing a board with info on Ebernoe Common. You come to a 3-way fingerpost. Keep straight on, on a "Public Way" beside electricity wires on your left, thus leaving the main track. Almost immediately, veer **right** onto a path through the trees on your right. In around 250m you pass, on your right, the old kiln and shed of the Ebernoe Brickworks. *The works may date from the 1700s; bricks were moulded by hand in the shed.* You pass a reedy pond on your right as your path becomes wider and stonier, winding uphill. As a meadow comes into view on your left, just after a 3-way fingerpost, your path forks. Take the **left** fork, staying within sight of the meadow.
- 3 Your path winds through an especially lovely area of woodland with some marsh (easily avoided), bluebells in spring, mosses and violets. You come through a wooden gate beside a grid where the arrow shows that you are on part of the *Ebernoe Common Heritage Trail (a 3.3 km=2 mile loop starting at Ebernoe Church)*. Suddenly you come out of the woods into the open by a fingerpost onto a large lawn with Butcherland Farm and its fine house on your left. Cross straight over their grassy driveway to another fingerpost and keep straight ahead across the lawn as the space narrows into a lovely wide grass avenue between a hedge and woodland on your right. Ignore a small wooden bridge on your right and, as the hedge curves left, keep dead straight on on a path into the trees. In 20m, you reach a 3-way fingerpost [[care! some walkers go astray here](#)]. Turn **left** here on a narrow path [[2016-20: fallen trees and a dense overgrowth of nettles : walkers found the path obscured or completely obliterated by them and went back to where the hedge curves left and followed it to the road](#)]. Minding the bluebells as you go, cross a bridge with rails. Your path leads up to a road, Pipers Lane.
- 4 Cross straight over the road, a fraction right, to a signed footpath opposite, through a swing-gate. Keep dead straight on through a line of thorny shrubs to find yourself in a very rough pasture of clods and tufty grass with no discernible path ahead. Minding your ankles, take a course straight across the pasture, heading for a line of low woodland ahead, enjoying great views to your left. [There is evidence of cattle here, although the author found none: the field is large enough to avoid them if you wish.](#) At the other side, 180m distant, you will see a small wooden swing-gate. Go through the gate into woods on a path so overgrown that it feels like virgin territory. Purple orchids can be seen amongst the coppices. A fingerpost [[Feb 2024: finger missing](#)] points you diagonally right into a crop field. Follow the long left-hand side of the field. Hilland Farm, marooned in the fields, is on your right. At the end of the field, keep ahead on a grassy path as directed and go over a bridge across a wide stream, a branch of the River Kird.

Leg 2: Hilland to Kirdford 3 km=2 miles



- 5** Bear immediately **right** in a beautiful green meadow and walk its entire length, with the stream getting closer on your right. At the end, go through a small metal gate [Sep 2020: now gone leaving a gap]. Walk between a new post and some wire fencing, along the next green meadow for 150m as far as a wooden gate and fingerpost, almost underneath a double HT electricity pole. Aided by an old fingerpost, take your next path immediately over a small bridge and through a thicket of hawthorn. As you approach a green meadow, keep **left**, avoiding a right fork to a gate, and go over a (rather dog-unfriendly) new stile in a fence into this large meadow. Go all the way along the left-hand side, sometimes with a lot of young frisky horses along this section, to arrive in the far corner in about 350m. Here, go over a stile and a bridge with rail onto the Petworth Road.
- 6** Turn **right** on the road, passing the entrance to *Idolsfold*. After nearly 250m on the road, go **left** at a sign for *Idols Fold House*. Go over a stile beside their large wooden gate and follow the tarmac drive. You pass a sunken pond on your right to continue on the drive. As you pass the house, fork **right** across the grass, enjoying the view of another pond slightly to your left. *Note the duck and ducklings weather vane (soon a swan too)*. You pass a small pond on your left under weeping willows. Go over a stile and cross a cinder drive, a fraction right, through a wooden swing-gate and along the right-hand side of a grassy meadow. In the first corner, go **right** through an (open) metal gate into the next pasture and follow the right-hand perimeter. A large metal gate (sometimes open, possibly tied with rope) beckons you into the next pasture. Stay on the perimeter as it curves round to the left, passing on your right Rookery Copse, a spectacular bluebell wood, giving access only to deer. Another large metal gate takes you into a crop field.
- 7** Take a path across the field, slightly left, clearly marked by a farm vehicle. At the other side, cross a dirt drive and go over a (shaky) stile into a sheep pasture. Cross straight over, heading for the wide gap ahead. In the right-hand corner, go right and left over a stile into woods. Your path runs along the left-hand side of the wood, giving you your first view of Kirdford Church. Go over a stile and along the right-hand side of a meadow. In the corner go



over a (hoppable) stile, through hawthorn and beside a meadow on your right. As you come out into an area of scrubland with houses visible on your left keep straight ahead on a narrow path, with a low two-wire fence on your left, until you reach a sign; veer **left** here towards the church with the fence still on your left. Go over a stile, **right** and **left** on an enclosed path, **right** on a residential road and straight through a kissing-gate into the garden of the *Half Moon* pub. Welcome to Kirdford!



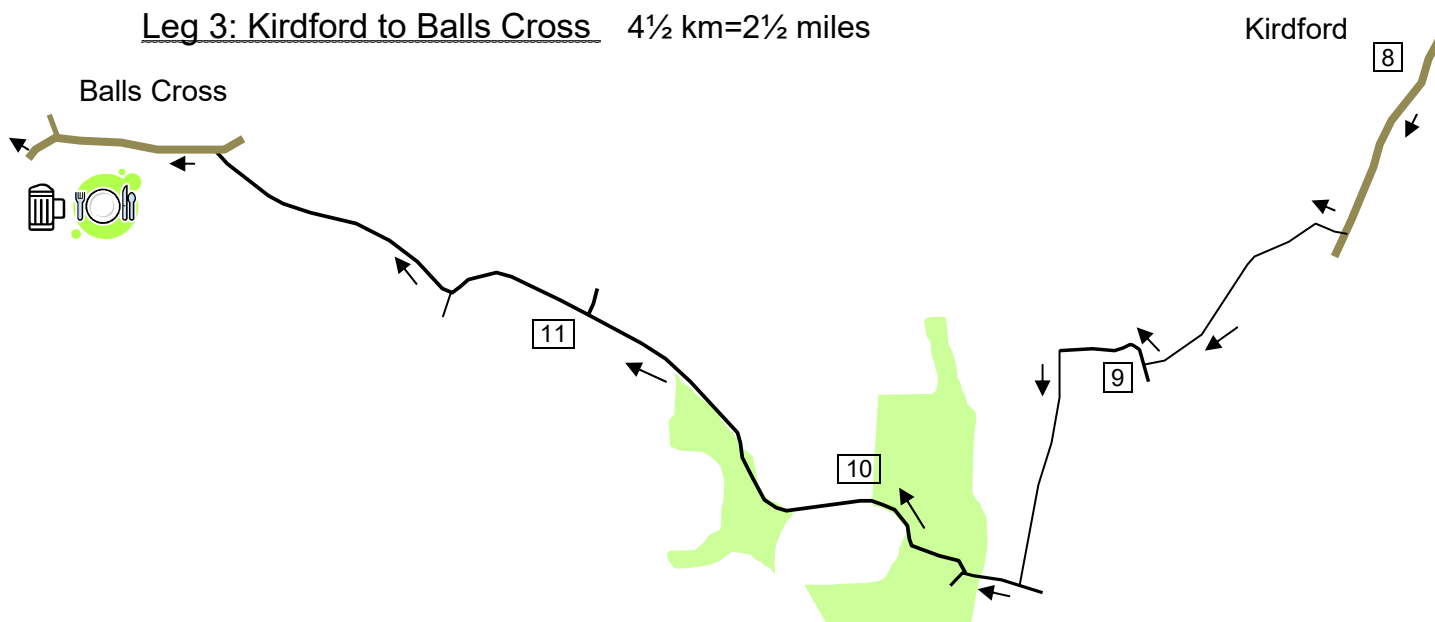
“Cynered's Ford” is Anglosaxon by name but goes back to pre-Roman times, as you will see on the time-line plaque in the centre of the village. The River Kird, a tributary of the Arun, was named after the village. The Church of St John the Baptist dates from the 1100s, was reconstructed about two centuries later, just one of many listed buildings in the village.

Kirdford has its share of ghosts and witches. According to legend, one piece of ground is barren because “the blood of a poacher was spilt there”. A villager, Margaret Cooper, in 1572-4 was tried for witchcraft and presumably hanged. She “bewitched” Henry Stoner, William Fowler and Elizabeth Fowler (no relation but she must have disliked the name) all of whom “languished and died at Kirdford”.



*Kirdford is blessed with two excellent pubs. The “Half Moon” is sister pub to the “Bat and Ball” in Wisborough Green offering several local brews such as Langham and a winsome menu of well-dressed standards, mostly sourced locally, all in a quite delightful setting. The “Foresters Arms” (turn **left** and **left** again for 300m) is much more a friendly chatty locals’ pub, in a lovely listed building, with H&B ales, and accessible fare; the menu is divided into Walkers, Flyers, Swimmers and Growers; try the Foresters Burger. (See the pub walk “Kirdford: The Foresters Arms” in this series.) [2016: about to change hands in October?] Before you visit either of these pubs, be sure to read the stern warning which you will see on a stone wall by the church. This is the famous “Degradation of Drunkenness”, taken from a Puritan sermon. The village was also a centre of apple growing, presumably providing cider, another evil route to “the throat of a fish, the belly of a swine and the head of an ass”.*

Leg 3: Kirdford to Balls Cross 4½ km=2½ miles



- 8 After your break, turn **right** on the road, passing the church on your left. Follow the road, ignoring a footpath on the left, using the raised walkway. A bridge crosses the River Kird. Just after the last line of cottages, turn **right** at a fingerpost on a narrow path between two drives. Your path turns left before some stables, passing a field of goats, leads through a small metal gate and a wooden swing-gate, now on a narrow path between fences. A

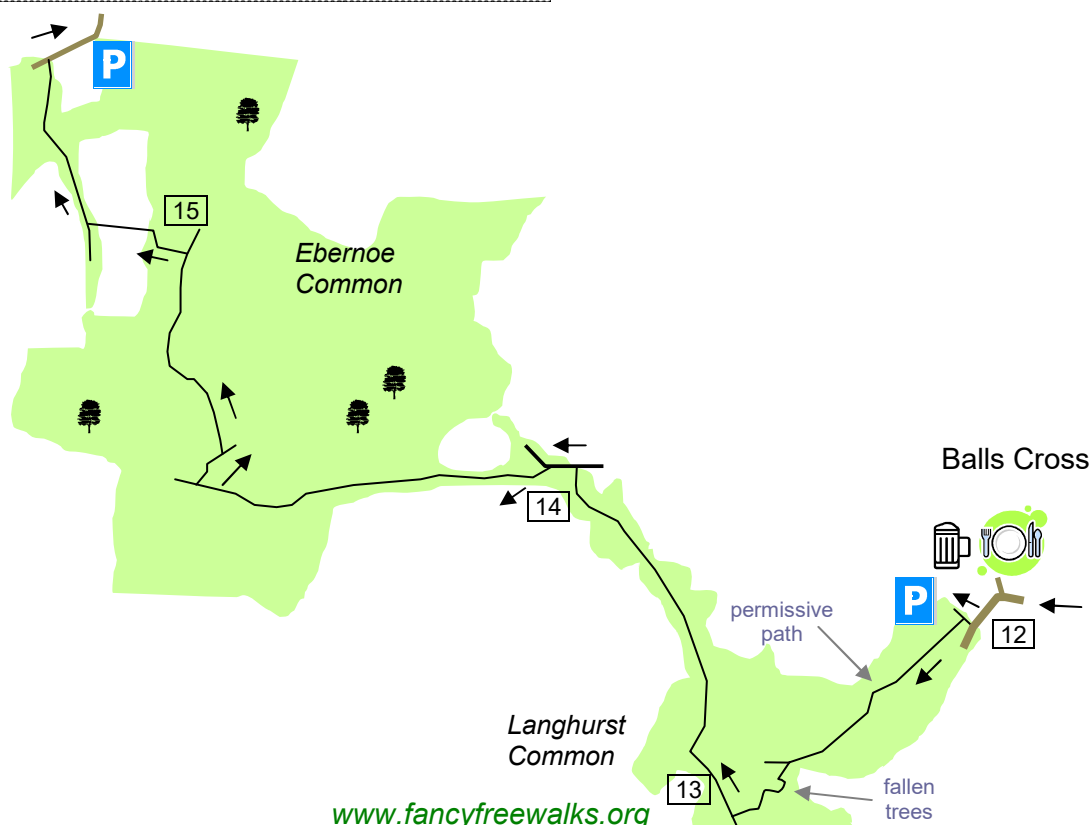
small wooden gate takes you onto a wide grassy path beside a large paddock. Go over a stile (or through a large metal gate) to a track.

- 9 Turn **right** on the track and stay on it as it bends left, avoiding any paths leading into fields. In another 150m or so, your path turns abruptly **left**, with a meadow ahead behind a fence. Follow this easy path beside a large field for 500m all the way to a T-junction with a wide byway, Gandergate Lane. (You may need to step over a ribbon.) Turn **right** on the byway, shortly entering the woods of Crawfold Furze. Immediately, at a 3-way fingerpost, ignore a bridleway left and keep straight ahead on a wide path which curls through the wood.
- 10 As you come out of the wood, keep straight ahead with a field on your left. This rather rough track curves left and right and leads through more woodland. On your right is a series of ponds, sluiced from the river, now a conservation area offering nature trails. In late spring you are walking between fringes of bluebells. You exit the wood between two fields, peeping with skylarks. Finally you reach a house, part of Crawfold Farm, a site of small country industries such as joinery.
- 11 Keep straight on along a tarmac drive. Stay on the drive as it curves left and bends suddenly right after 300m. After another 600m you come to a T-junction with a road. Turn **left** on the road to reach the 3-way junction, a garage, pub and a few houses which constitute the hamlet of Balls Cross. Bear **left** to the *Stag Inn*. After such a long easy stretch, make good use of this brief refreshment, as the next section will test your forest navigation skills.



The Stag Inn (Hall & Woodhouse) is a rare survivor as a village pub since almost all its (very committed) clientele drive here (or walk) from some distance away. It's easy to see why and you may want to stay longer than planned, although you will probably arrive too late for the (very good) lunch menu. There are also small bites (out of lunch hours?) and of course Badger ales. The Stag is open all day weekends. The pretty garden sometimes closes early.

Leg 4: Balls Cross to Ebernoe Common 4 km=2½ miles



- 12 Turn **right** along the far side of the pub into its car park. In 20m, avoid a track ahead leading to a field gate and instead look to your left for a narrow path, just before the end of the car park. Turn **left** here into the woods, passing a small notice about this permissive path. *This path is little used, for a reason you will shortly see - the area has changed since the time of writing and more feedback is welcome.* Follow this fairly straight path, soon passing another notice, going over a ditch and over or past some fallen trees which present minor problems. After 450m on this path, you pass, close by on your left, a tennis court and a little private gate. This landmark is important! Here, your path veers away **right** towards the stream valley bottom [2017: *don't miss! – you now have to go round a large fallen tree*]. BUT in only 15m, fork **left** on a gently rising path. (The path straight on leads nowhere.) Almost at once you are confronted by three massive fallen trees. (Since this is not an official footpath, it's certain this obstruction *won't* be removed, hence this "permanent" wording.) *Don't despair! Your destination is only 100m or so further on, but even experienced walkers get lost here and navigation has been described as very challenging.* Important! Look to the other side of the fallen trees and make a mental note of the point where the path continues onwards. (Or leave one person there and shout.) Now make a wide **semi-circle** to the **left** round the fallen trees. At the other side, pick up the path at the point you noted. [2017: *it starts immediately behind the "top" (i.e. thinnest) branches of a fourth fallen tree. 2019: a walker ducked under a fallen tree and found the fingerpost in 25m.*] Continue onwards and, in another 40m, be careful not to lose the path as it veers **right**. *You are only 50m from your destination.* Finally, the junction is marked by a very welcome fingerpost.
- 13 Turn **right**, now on the official footpath. (*See the "Ebernoe Lurgashall" walk in this series which also uses this path, in the opposite direction.*) You are in part of Langhurst Common known as Pugs Bottom, like Ebernoe a rich source of wild flora. Your path goes over a 2-plank bridge and, 100m later, another bridge. Ignore a path on your left immediately after this bridge. At a fingerpost, your path bends right over a ditch and soon you pass a 2-way fingerpost. *Soon there is a fallen trunk across the path, providing a perfect seat on which to rest. In early summer, looking around, you should be able to see at least ten purple orchids, together with primroses, violets and cuckoo-flowers.* You pass a swamp on your right and, about 600m after joining the path, you finally enter Ebernoe Common through a swing-gate. You come over a 2-plank bridge with rail [Sep 2020: *A large tree had fallen across the bridge and was resting across the rail, giving a choice of: crawling under, climbing over, or navigating round the dry ditch on the right*], then through a clearing. Your path curves right to meet a driveway beside a wooden gate.
- 14 Turn **left** on the driveway. In only 50m, you will see a 3-way fingerpost on the right of the track. Turn **left** here on a rather muddy path which soon widens and improves. In 250m, you pass a 2-way fingerpost. You have a field on your left and woods on your right. In another 200m, at a marker post, keep straight on. Ignore an unmarked junction on your right in 50m. In another 200m, just before a large grassy field on your right used as a glamping site, turn **right** at a fingerpost. Your path elbows right into a holly wood. In another 50m, at a fingerpost, turn **left** on a narrow path. Follow this winding path through handsome woodland near a wire fence on your left. In 350m, the path takes you over a bridge with rail. In another 100m, you meet a 3-way fingerpost with a swing-gate and wire fence on your left.

- 15 Turn **left** through the swing-gate. (The area ahead has been devastated by forestry work, but it is perfectly navigable. At least one fingerpost is “down”.) The path goes down, over tree roots and down steps. It takes you over a stream via a bridge with rail. Your path now goes uphill and up steps, over a bridge with rail and out into a green meadow. Take a faint path straight across the meadow. At the other side, go through a band of trees to a T-junction with a woodland path. Turn **right** on the path which makes a pleasant end to your woodland adventure. You pass a stream gully on your right and go over two 2-plank bridges. Finally you come out to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane, quickly arriving at the parking space where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: the car parking space is in **Streels Lane**, Ebernoe, near Petworth, West Sussex. There is no postcode for this isolated spot, but setting **GU28 9LE** and *ignoring* the final left turn onto a surfaced track will get you close. Streels Lane branches off eastwards (that's left, coming from London or Guildford) from the A283, 1½ miles south of Northchapel. Look for an old-fashioned signpost pointing to *Balls Cross 3, Ebernoe 1*. Go just under 1 mile to a definite left bend. Park on the bend on a dirt patch by woodland where there is a little signpost. With careful parking there's room for six cars. For larger groups, there is a car park by Ebernoe Church, postcode **GU28 9LD**, requiring a little extra navigation to join the route.

By bus/train: bus 75 from Horsham Station to Kirdford and Balls Cross, not Sunday. Check the timetables.

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