



Midhurst, Stedham and Iping Commons

Distance: 9 km=5½ miles

easy walking with one short steep climb

Region: West Sussex

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Refreshments: *Half Moon* (Midhurst)

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

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Extensive heath, pinewoods, views, heather, winter colour

In Brief

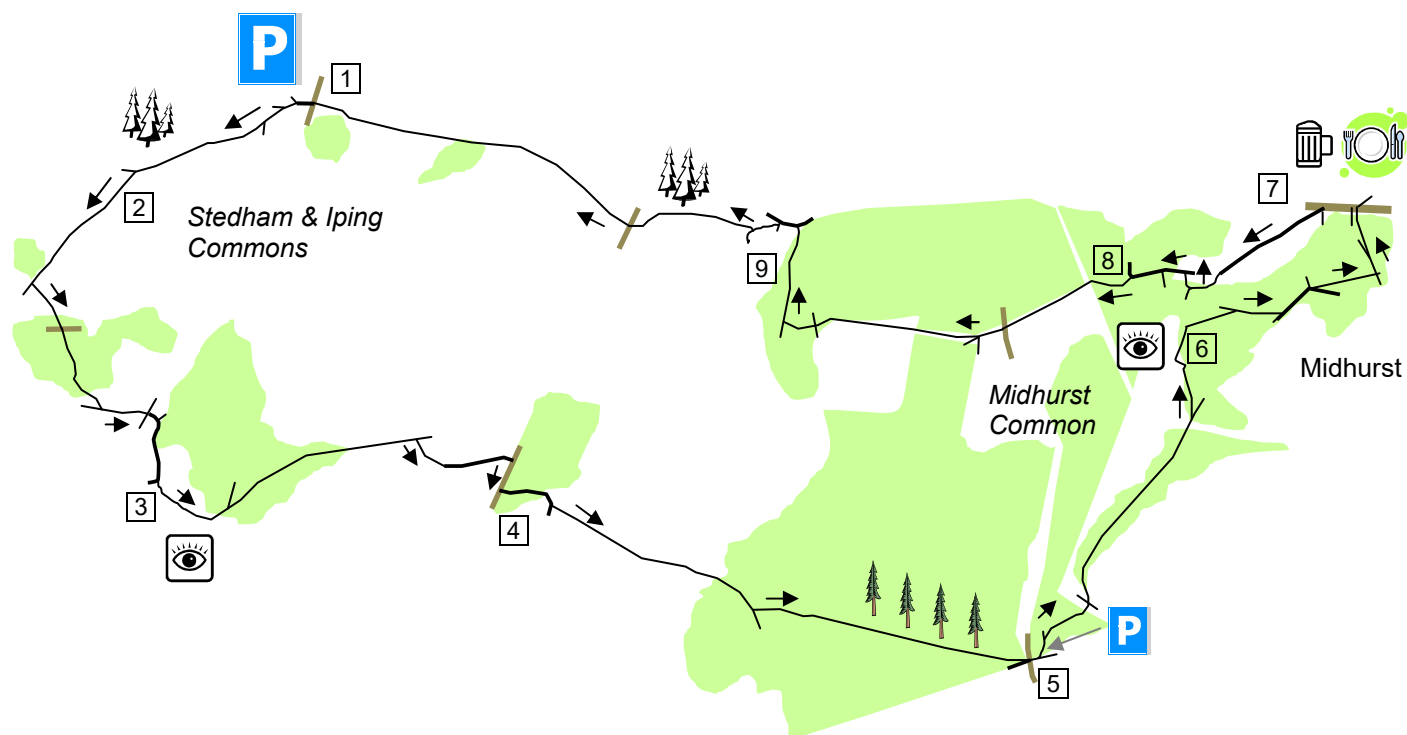
This is a resplendent walk for any time of the year. The pine forests which dominate this part of the Sussex sandstone make this a truly evergreen walk. In winter, the colour of the heather will be enhanced, especially on a frosty morning. There is just one modest climb on this walk with a spectacular view at the top. For refreshments, there is a good pub on the outskirts of Midhurst which serves food at any hour (to enquire at the *Half Moon*, ring 01730-859001).



One of the paths on this walk has a fringe of nettles but this is probably not enough to deter wearers of shorts. The paths are all well-established and the majority are quite dry. In the wetter months there is certainly to be more mud in the forested areas, making boots a good option. These commons are a huge favourite among dog walkers.

The walk begins at the free **Stedham and Iping Commons** car park, on the **Elsted Road**, just off the A272 near **Midhurst**, West Sussex. There are no buildings nearby but the postcode of the houses on the other side of the A272 is **GU29 0PB**. There are other small car parks on the route but none better than this one. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 From the back left-hand side of the Stedham and Iping Commons car park, near a noticeboard, take a wide path marked as a bridleyway. **As the sign indicates, this is also part of the *Serpent Trail (ST)*, a sinuous long-distance path which you will meet several times today.** In 10m, avoid a right fork, staying on the main path. Shortly after, ignore a minor path that forks off left (part of the *Heathland Trail*, worth exploring another time). Keep following this sandy path across a gleaming landscape of gorse, heather and birch, avoiding all minor paths off, however tempting. In 300m or so, you pass a post with blue arrows and a sign confirming that you are still on the ST. 100m later, your path becomes grassy and you reach a definite fork in the path. Take the **left** fork, thus leaving the ST.
- 2 You are now on Fitzhall Heath and the outlook is more open with extensive sweeps of heather. In 300m, your path runs under a cover of pine trees. As you come out of the pines, you will see a concrete post on your right and a marker post on your left. Turn **left** here. In 150m, you reach a tarmac road. Cross straight over and take a footpath opposite, through dark laurels. This is the Fitzhall Plantation, part of a large estate from early Elizabethan times. Ignore several paths off and keep straight on, uphill through rhododendrons. In 200m or so, you reach an oblique T-junction. Turn **left** here on a wide dusky path. In 100m, it takes you past a large wooden gate to meet the driveway of *Fitzhall*. Cross straight over onto a track opposite and, in 15m, keep **right** to avoid a bridleyway on your left. The track leads through a deep cutting in the sandstone and, after 150m, passes the entrance to a house. Keep **left** here, passing the garden of the house on your right. Just after the end of the garden you meet a three-way fingerpost.
- 3 Keep **left** at the fingerpost on a path curving uphill. This is a lovely spot and at the top there are views across the green horse pastures to the South



Downs. Your path leads between two posts into a pinewood. At a 3-way fingerpost, keep straight ahead, ignoring the left turn. Your path is lined by rhododendrons (now regarded as an invasive species) and any mud in the path can usually be avoided through the trees on your right. This is followed by an area of light birch and you may glimpse on your left the large sandpit formed from Minsted Quarry. At the end of the first field on your right, you meet a 3-way fingerpost. Turn **right** here. Follow this wide track, bearing **left** past a small piggery and farm cottages, to reach the Minsted Road. Turn **right** on the road.

4

In 70m, turn **left** on a wide track marked as a footpath. The track zigzags to a small farmstead. Keep **left** past a cottage to reach two metal gates. Go through the right-hand gate and straight on along the left-hand side of a crop field. You now have great views right to the South Downs (*see the Bpton, Harting and Marden walks in this series*). Behind you, to the right, is *Minsted House*. After a stile (the barbed wire can be lifted), your route is across a grassy patch to a strong metal gate. Go through the gate (being careful to open *forwards*) and over a sturdy bridge into the pinewoods of The Warren. In 100m or so, just before a hillock and a marker post, take the **left** fork, a long straight path between tall ranks of pine and birch. Soon the path becomes raised and brick-lined, suggesting its historical usage.

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You reach a tarmac drive by the well-named *Oakwood House*. Turn **left** to a tarmac road and cross straight over into a small parking area. (Or, as a short diversion, turning **right** on this road past houses for 200m will take you to the *Country Inn*, a rather unassuming little redbrick with some hilariously contrasting reviews, mainly pejorative, probably due to an absentee chef.)



5

Avoid the path straight ahead by a large metal gate and instead take a path on the **left**, between two wooden posts into Midhurst Common. Just 10m later, take the more prominent **right** fork, a winding woodland path. In 100m, as your path goes under power lines, go straight across a path that runs beside the power lines. Your path immediately curves left and gets much wider and clearer, running not far from those power lines on your left. The path rises gently to give you views of the open heath on your left and the forest on your right. As the path rises more steeply, you pass under a pair of overhead wires and your path forks at a marker post. Choose the **left**-hand option – a steep narrow sandy path. In 70m, avoid a level path on your left and keep climbing! In another 70m, you reach the top and the reason for this choice is clear. There is a seat giving you views, framed by pines, of the territory already covered and the South Downs beyond. A recent memorial plaque commemorates a local soldier.



6

After a possible breather, continue straight ahead on the high path, still enjoying open views on your left. In 100m, you pass another seat. Bear **right**, as indicated by the yellow arrow, on a wide path through woodland. In 100m, you are joined from the left by another path at a marker post. Continue straight on, avoiding all paths off. You come down to a garden hedge belonging to a house, *Cherries*, where you meet a path coming from the right. Bear **left** beside the hedge. In 80m, continue straight on by a marker post, ignoring a footpath on your left. Immediately your path forks. Take the **left** fork, the narrower option, actually straight ahead. In 150m, you reach a small clearing with another seat and a 4-way fingerpost. Turn **left** here on a grassy path, signed as a bridleway. In 40m, the path splits: take the **right** fork, the footpath, marked by a yellow arrow. This path leads



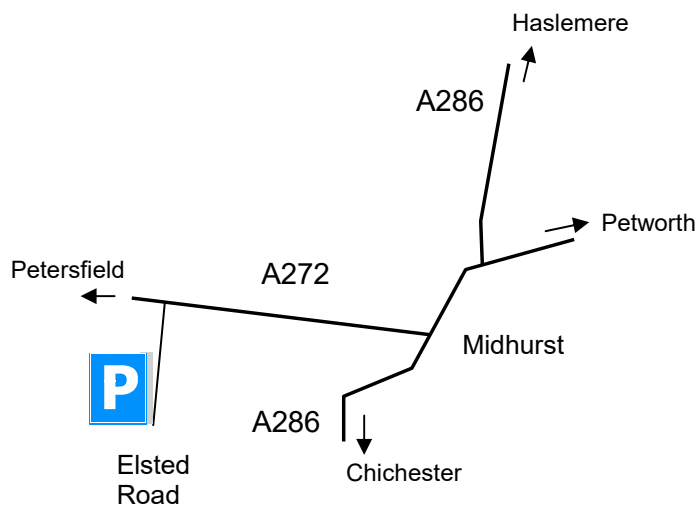
down to the main road opposite the *Half Moon* pub. For refreshments, first cross with care!

The Half Moon is a very average pub but you will be able to make the best of it. The Village Bar is a friendly place with a pool table and a darts board which have witnessed several triumphs in the Sussex leagues. Adjoining it are the Saloon Bar and large dining room. Food is of the comfort variety. The guest beer is Greene King IPA (no worse for being the only one). The Half Moon is very welcoming to walkers. It is closed on Mondays but open all day on other days and food seems to be available whenever the pub is open. It is worth noting that the Half Moon also serves coffee and tea.

- 7 Without crossing the main road (except to visit the pub), turn **left** for 25m and fork **left** at a fingerpost on a tarmac drive marked as a footpath. Immediately ignore a blue arrow and bridleway on your left and stay on the drive as it gradually diverges from the main road. As you pass some cottages, immediately after the brown-coloured *White House*, ignore a footpath on your left. After the entrance to *The Severals*, your path suddenly becomes a narrow woodland path. In only 30m, you meet a 3-way fingerpost. Go **right** here up a bank onto a path that runs beside the wire fence of *The Severals*. Your path, which may seem a little obscure in parts, veers **right** by a wooden shed and comes out onto the house's driveway. Veer **left** on the drive. In 50m, ignore a footpath on your left, re-joining the ST. In another 50m or so, where the drive curves away right, leave it by continuing straight ahead on a narrower path, as indicated by a yellow arrow.
- 8 You are in a wondrous pine forest, a particularly attractive part of this walk. In 100m or so on this curving path, you reach a 4-way fingerpost. Go straight over, passing under HT lines. After 200m on this straight trail, you reach the Severals Road. Cross straight over onto a permissive path. In 50m or so, you reach a multiple fork with three paths ahead. Take the **rightmost** path and follow this rough, sometimes grassy, course through bracken and firs. In 400m, at a marker post, keep straight on, thus re-joining the ST. The path goes down through rhododendrons to a T-junction. Turn **right** on this path to reach a tarmac drive after 200m or so, audibly close to the main road again. Turn **left** on the drive, going over a bridge.
- 9 Just after the bridge, turn **left** on a track and immediately turn **right** on a woodland path. In only 50m, at a marker post with blue arrows, turn **right** on a narrower path uphill (*don't miss this turn!*), still on the ST. The path runs uphill under tall straight pines, leading to a heather-covered plateau. You soon reach the Minsted Road. Cross the road to go through a wooden gate and take a sandy path across Stedham Common. Keep straight ahead all the way across this landscape, crossing under wires, through a woodland of birch and pine, across the open heath, skirting groups of pines and finally through more woodland to a wooden gate and the road opposite the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Midhurst is on the main Chichester road, the A286. If coming from the London / Guildford direction, through Haslemere, turn **right** through Midhurst and turn **right** again in the middle of the town at a mini-roundabout onto the A272, signposted *Petersfield*. Go just over 2 miles and turn **left** as for *Elsted, Harting*. The car park is 250m=280 yds on the **right**.



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