



Southwater and Madgeland Wood

Distance: 14½ km=9 miles moderate walking with long easy stretches

Region: West Sussex

Date written: 20-apr-2012

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Refreshments: *Bax Castle*, Southwater

Last update: 13-feb-2024

Map: 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, meadows, old railway path, country park

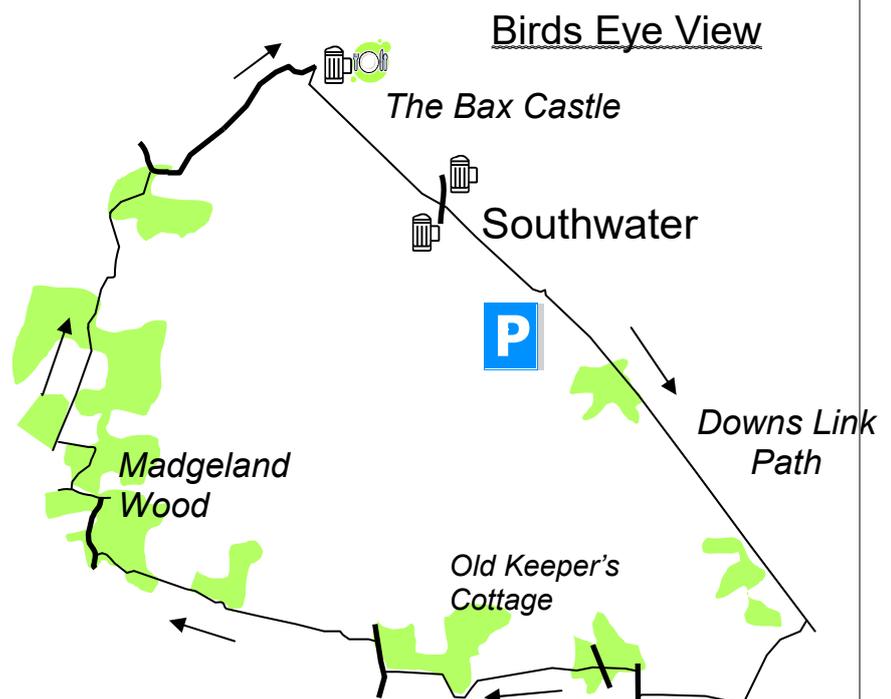
In Brief

This is a delightful gentle walk in the Sussex woods and grassy meadows with an easy stretch along the Downs Link path, a popular route for walkers, riders and cyclists, that takes you deep into the country.



In the high summer season, there are patches of undergrowth on the paths which makes shorts uncomfortable but at other times the paths are fairly clear. Boots are advisable even if the weather has been dry because of the need to cross pastures. There is a 150m section very close to the edge of the main A24 road through undergrowth which makes this walk unsuitable for dogs and young children. *In 2020-22 walkers reported this section as hazardous because of the untrimmed verge beside the main road.*

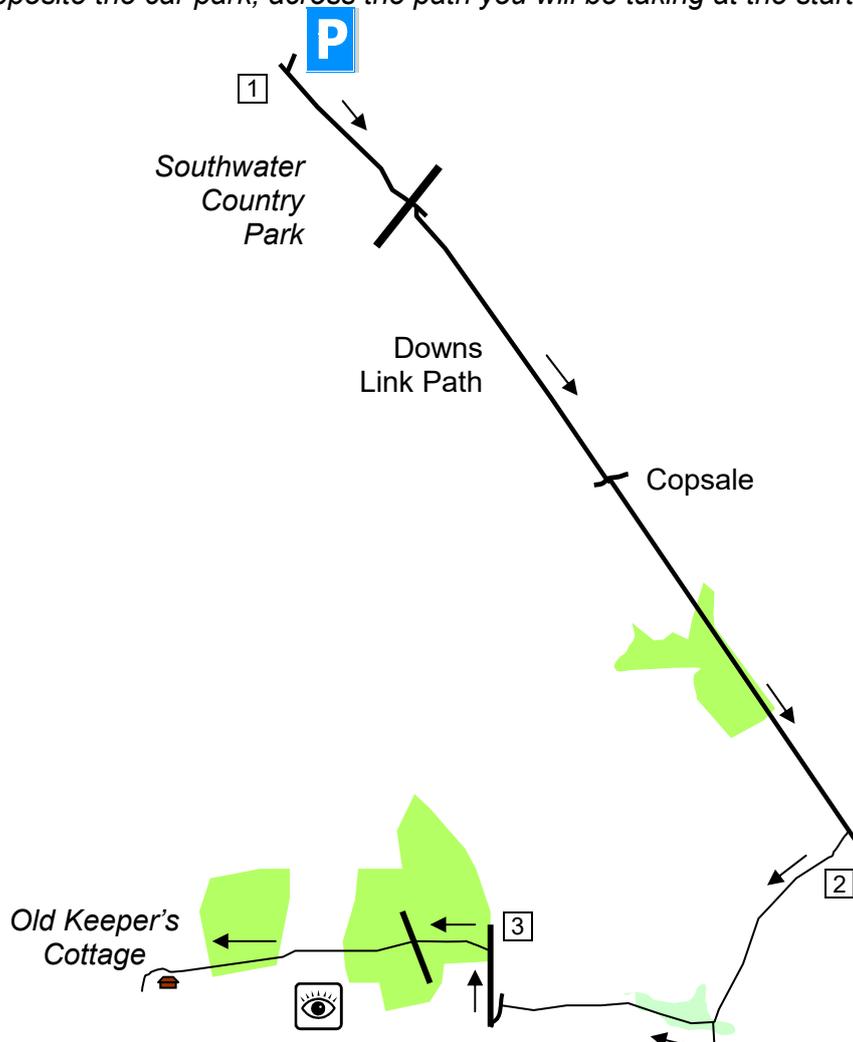
The walk begins at the **Southwater Country Park** in West Sussex, **postcode RH13 9UN** (£3 all day as 2018-20). Alternative free car parks are on the Downs Link at Copsale (**postcode RH13 6QT**) or near the *Bax Castle* (nearest **postcode RH13 0LA**). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

Leg 1: Southwater to Old Keeper's Cottage 5 km=3 miles

Southwater Country Park was created from a former brickworks to provide water sports and adventure on or around the lake. There is also a wildlife centre for conservation with nature trails. The visitor's centre is directly opposite the car park, across the path you will be taking at the start.



- 1 From the back of the Southwater car park, turn **left** through metal barriers on the well signposted wide Downs Link path. You will be following this lovely easy path for a good proportion of this walk, both now at the start and at the very end.

The Downs Link is a 59 km footpath or bridleway linking the North Downs Way near Guildford with the South Downs Way near Steyning (plus a bit more by the coast). It was created from the course of two railways, closed in the Beeching era.

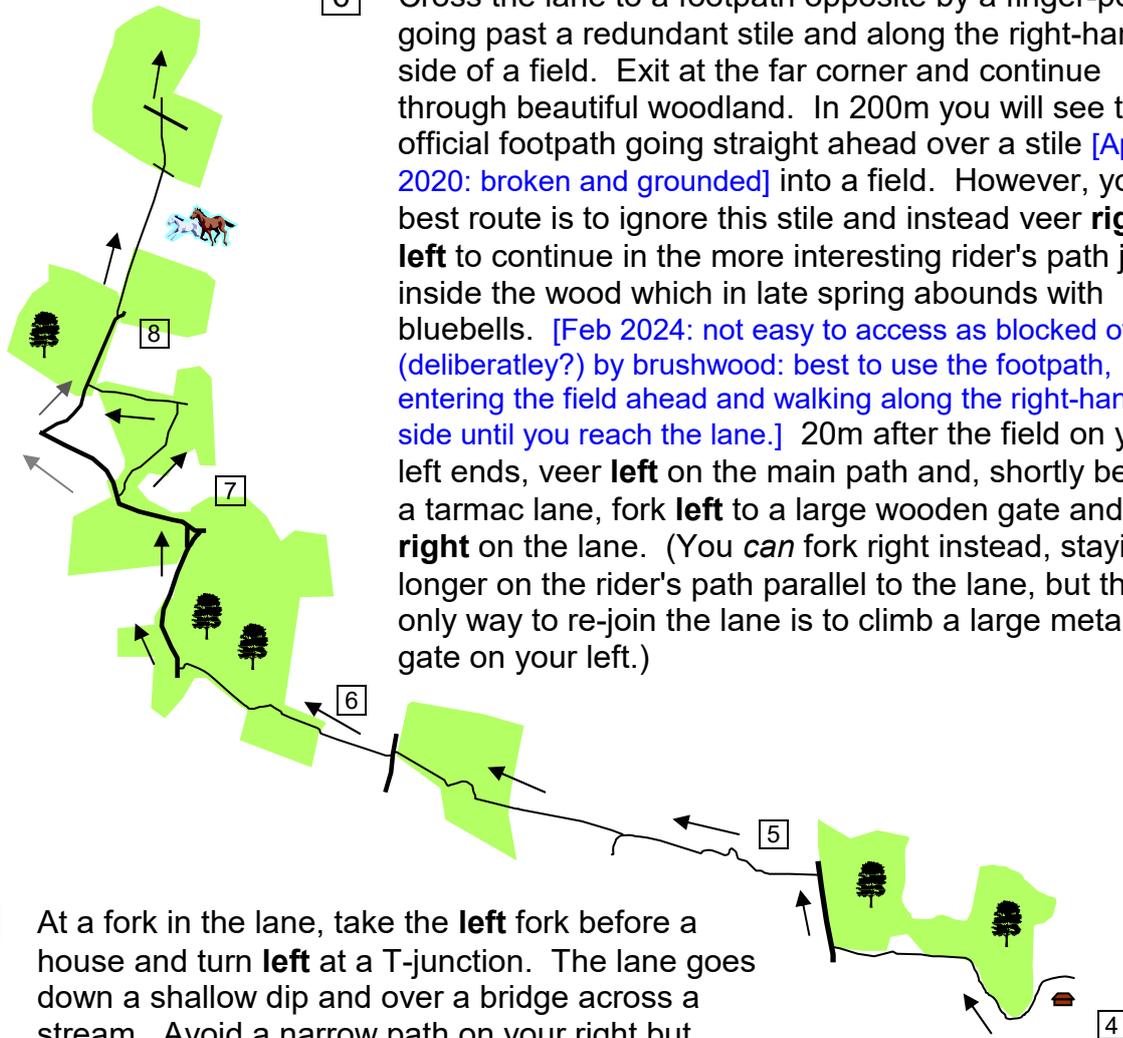
Immediately cross a road and continue on the tarmac of Stakers Lane. Follow it under the main A24 road and veer **right** at a junction, past a large wooden gate, still on the Downs Link path. Soon you are out of the town with meadows on one side and a stream valley down on the other. 1 km from the A24, your path crosses barriers either side of a lane in the hamlet of Copsale. **P** *The Bridge House pub here is now sadly closed.* There is a small car park opposite (an alternative start). Continue over, through another barrier. About 700m after Copsale, your path goes through a cutting. Where it emerges, exactly 2 km from the A24, you will find a four-way fingerpost near a bench. Turn **right** here on a much narrower path.

- 2 This attractive path runs between willows with wild garlic in abundance. In 200m, go through a small wooden gate and uphill on a grassy meadow to a four-way fingerpost. Go straight ahead over a stile and beside a small field on your left. Continue over another stile on [Apr 2020: rotted and followed by a large fallen tree – instead go over the stile to your **right** at the end of the field, keep to the **left**, at the bottom climb over a gate on your left, then turn immediately **right** onto the track, returning to the path by the “unusual stile” mentioned below *] a grassy path between shrubs and past a small pond on your left. Go over another stile, along the right-hand side of a large horse pasture and under grid wires. In the corner, go over an unusual stile* or through a large metal gate and continue ahead on a track and over a bridge across a stream to pass a fingerpost. Ignore the fingerpost and stay on the wide track. Keep ahead on the track along an elongated meadow. At the far side, by a fingerpost, continue straight ahead on a narrow path through the wood. In 350m, this path leads out to a lane by a cottage. Turn **left** on the lane, immediately reaching the busy A24 road.
- 3 Carefully cross the southbound carriageway of the A24 and turn **right** along the verge, taking great care as the traffic may approach at top speed. Go under the grid wires and, after 150m total along the verge, turn **left** at a signpost into woods. In 200m, go through a metal gate and carefully cross the northbound carriageway of the A24 to a footpath opposite. The path takes you through a high fence via a tall swing-gate, then straight ahead through woodland. On your right is a fine stand of scots pines. Suddenly you enter a wide expanse of open terrain along a line of oaks with lavish pastures on both sides and fine views left to the South Downs. Half way across, your path runs between lines of trees and you soon have a large meadow on your right as you approach a house clad in grey timber. This is *Old Keeper's Cottage*.

Leg 2: Old Keeper's Cottage to Madgeland Wood 5 km=3 miles

- 4 **See map overleaf.** Keep **right** round the house's fence and, at the edge of the wood, turn **left** as directed by a marker post. Turn **right** round the edge of the wood, over a bridge on a wide sandy farm track and turn **right** at the next fingerpost with the stream you just crossed on your right. Stay by the wood on your right, going under low tension wires and, in the corner, turn **left**, leaving the wires, close to the line of trees. *The author met a herd of beautiful very shy curly longhorns who quickly hoofed it.* Finally your path takes you **right** and immediately **left** through another tall swing-gate and out to a road. Turn **right** on the road.
- 5 In under 100m, turn **left** at a signpost onto a drive soon reaching Goffsland Farm. At the end of the drive, veer **right** to a fingerpost then sharp **left-right** zigzagging between farm buildings. Goffsland Farm had calves, geese and chickens (but no dogs despite the notice) and a fine white-timbered farmhouse that you will shortly see on your right. Go through a small metal gate beside a larger one, onto a track. Where the bridleway bends left at a fingerpost, leave it to go through a metal gate and straight ahead along the right-hand side of a field. At the other side, at a 4-way fingerpost, go straight through a small metal gate into woods. This woodland path bends right and left past a pond on your right. Where the path zigzags right-left again, **leave** it by keeping straight ahead on a narrow waymarked path running beside a field on your left (*don't miss this turn!*). Finally you emerge via a gate out to a lane.

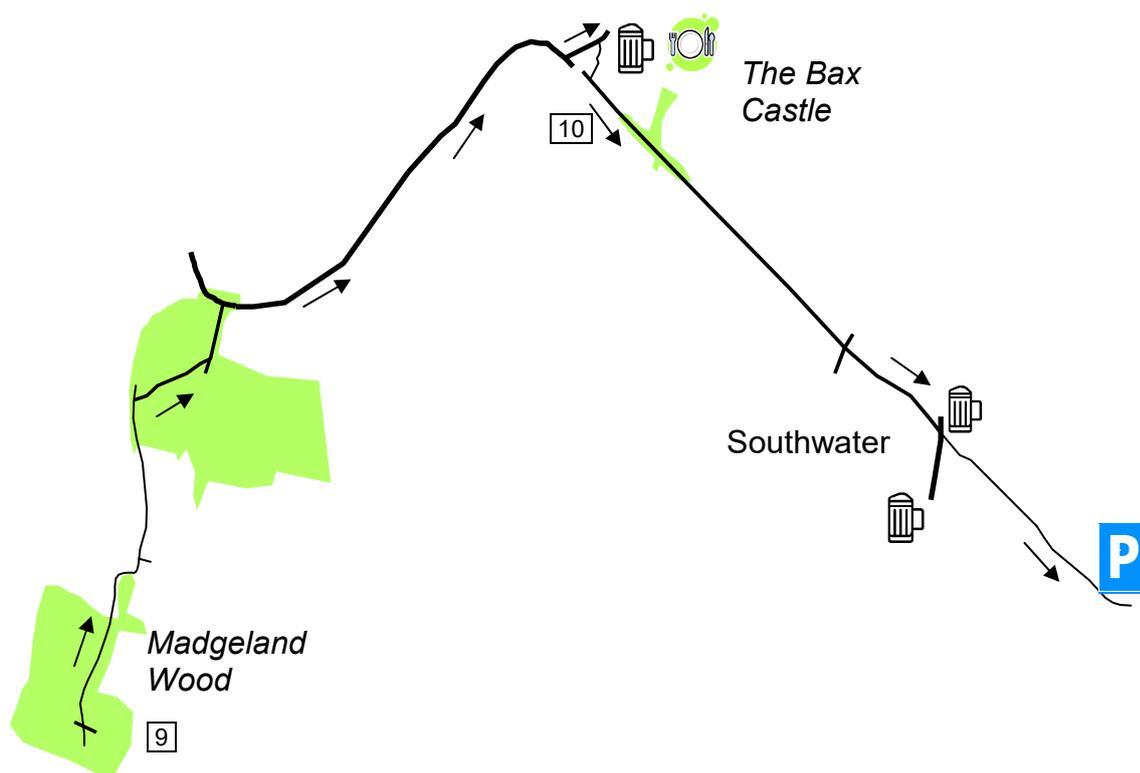
6 Cross the lane to a footpath opposite by a finger-post, going past a redundant stile and along the right-hand side of a field. Exit at the far corner and continue through beautiful woodland. In 200m you will see the official footpath going straight ahead over a stile [Apr 2020: broken and grounded] into a field. However, your best route is to ignore this stile and instead veer **right-left** to continue in the more interesting rider's path just inside the wood which in late spring abounds with bluebells. [Feb 2024: not easy to access as blocked off (deliberately?) by brushwood: best to use the footpath, entering the field ahead and walking along the right-hand side until you reach the lane.] 20m after the field on your left ends, veer **left** on the main path and, shortly before a tarmac lane, fork **left** to a large wooden gate and turn **right** on the lane. (You *can* fork right instead, staying longer on the rider's path parallel to the lane, but the only way to re-join the lane is to climb a large metal gate on your left.)



7 At a fork in the lane, take the **left** fork before a house and turn **left** at a T-junction. The lane goes down a shallow dip and over a bridge across a stream. Avoid a narrow path on your right but, immediately after the end of the fence rail, turn **right** on a fairly wide unmarked permissive rider's path. This path is a secret of the area, shared by riders and local people, wonderful in late spring because of the bluebells and yellow stars. (In the unlikely case that in the future this path should be closed to visitors, or if you are a large group, simply continue on the lane for 250m, turn **right** over a stile on a signed footpath, go along the right-hand side of a field and through a large metal gate, skipping the rest of this section.) The path immediately curves left to run close to the stream that you just crossed on your right. About 300m from the road, at a T-junction with a meadow ahead, turn **left** on another beautiful woodland path. In 200m, this path passes a meadow on your left and two metal gates, one on each side. Immediately after these gates, turn **right** at a T-junction. You are now on the official footpath.

8 Follow this wide horse path along the edge of a wood. Where the meadow on your right ends, you will see that the horse track zigzags right-left ahead. **Leave** the wide path here by keeping straight ahead on a narrow path to a metal gate 30m ahead. Go through the gate by a fingerpost and continue along the right-hand side of a meadow. After the meadow, weave **right-left** to the other side of the line of oaks to go along the **left**-hand side of a sheep field. At the far side, join a wide path which veers **left** to a signpost. Turn **right** here straight into woodland. Soon, at a 4-way fingerpost, continue straight across a splendid straight bridleway (looking very much like another dismantled railway line) going ever deeper into the ancient Madgeland Wood.

Leg 3: Madgeland Wood to Southwater 5 km=3 miles



- 9 Continue on a wide woodland path, exit in a corner through a wooden swing-gate and continue ahead along the right-hand side of a meadow with fine views, soon passing a murky pond on your right. Turn **right** at the corner and immediately **left** again in the adjoining meadow. Keep ahead through a gap by a fingerpost, avoiding a footpath right. Stay on the left-hand side of this large meadow, gently downhill. In the corner, go through a wooden swing-gate and a 2-plank bridge into woodland again. In 100m, at a 3-way fingerpost [Feb 2024:grounded] opposite a stile on your left, avoid a good unmarked path straight ahead and instead fork **right**. At the next signpost, turn **left** on a very wide path. Go past a wooden gate to a road. Turn **right** on the road and follow it for 1 km, passing at a bend near the end the grand *Croft House*. Turn **left** over a bridge onto Two Mile Ash Road and turn **right**, immediately reaching the *Bax Castle* pub.



This 15th-century cottage belonged originally to a weaver called "Bax" and he is now remembered gratefully by the many visitors who come to enjoy the real ale and their rather lengthy menu in the informal restaurant. Rabbit stew and home-cooked ham are specialities and food is apparently always available during opening times. For sunny days there is a delightful front rose garden with tables, now popular with families with children. Be prepared for service which switches from rather surly and lackadaisical to bright and friendly, depending on who is behind the bar. Should you do this walk in winter, you may well find a large open fire.

- 10 After possible refreshment, go through the pub's car park, over a bridge and **left** on the Downs Link path. Once again, you have a nice straight easy walk on this dismantled railway between meadows. The path runs over a hump and between more meadows. You pass on your left a grassy area by a new housing estate, immediately followed by a new "pond" (in

Feb 2024, still unfinished with just a small pool of water, but hardly enough to warrant a series of lifebuoys and definitely of no interest to ducks!). You go through, or around, some metal barriers and follow a fenced path under a bridge by a well preserved old sign for Southwater railway station.

You have further opportunities for refreshment here in Southwater. The “Lintot” is a new pub, named after B. B. Lintot (1675–1736) a publisher born here. The “Cock Inn” only 50m to your right is a more traditional pub with a large beer garden.

Cross the main road by the lights and take the concrete path opposite by the big *Village Surgery*. You are back on the Downs Link path, taking you back promptly to the Southwater Country Park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Southwater is just off the main A24 (London-Worthing) road. If coming from the north, stay on the A24 after the Hop Oast roundabout, ignoring the right turn signposted *Southwater* and continue to the next roundabout. Southwater is signed west of the A24 with an extra brown tourist sign for *Country Park & Watersports*. Turn **right** here and, in 250m, turn **right** where there is another brown sign. Keep straight on over mini roundabouts for about 600m on Cripplegate Lane. Ignore the gates on the left next to the lake, turn left soon after on Station Road and park immediately in the large car park on the left. There is usually a sign in the car park indicating when it closes but the time is usually 10pm, at least in the summer months. If in doubt, you can sometimes backtrack and find a space off-road.

By bus/train: bus 23 or 98 from Horsham station, also Sunday. Check the timetables.

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