



Southwater and Madgeland Wood

Distance: 14½ km=9 miles

easy walking

Region: West Sussex

Date written: 20-apr-2012

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Last update: 21-feb-2018

Refreshments: The *Bax Castle* or Southwater

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

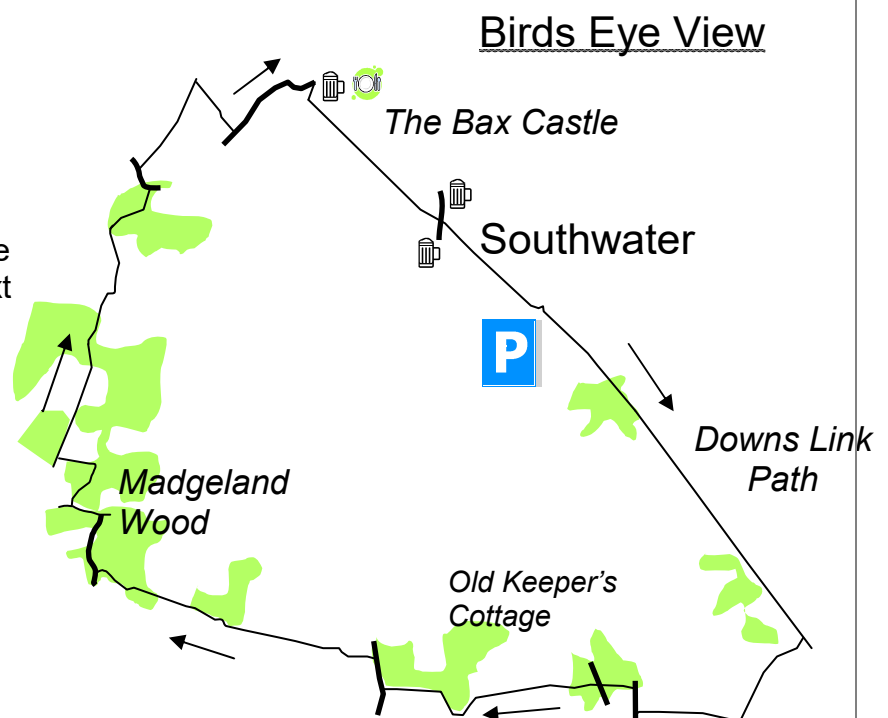
In Brief

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 unless the weather has been dry in which case sensible shoes are adequate. There is a 150m section very close to the edge of the main A24 road through undergrowth which makes this walk unsuitable for young children and inexperienced walkers.

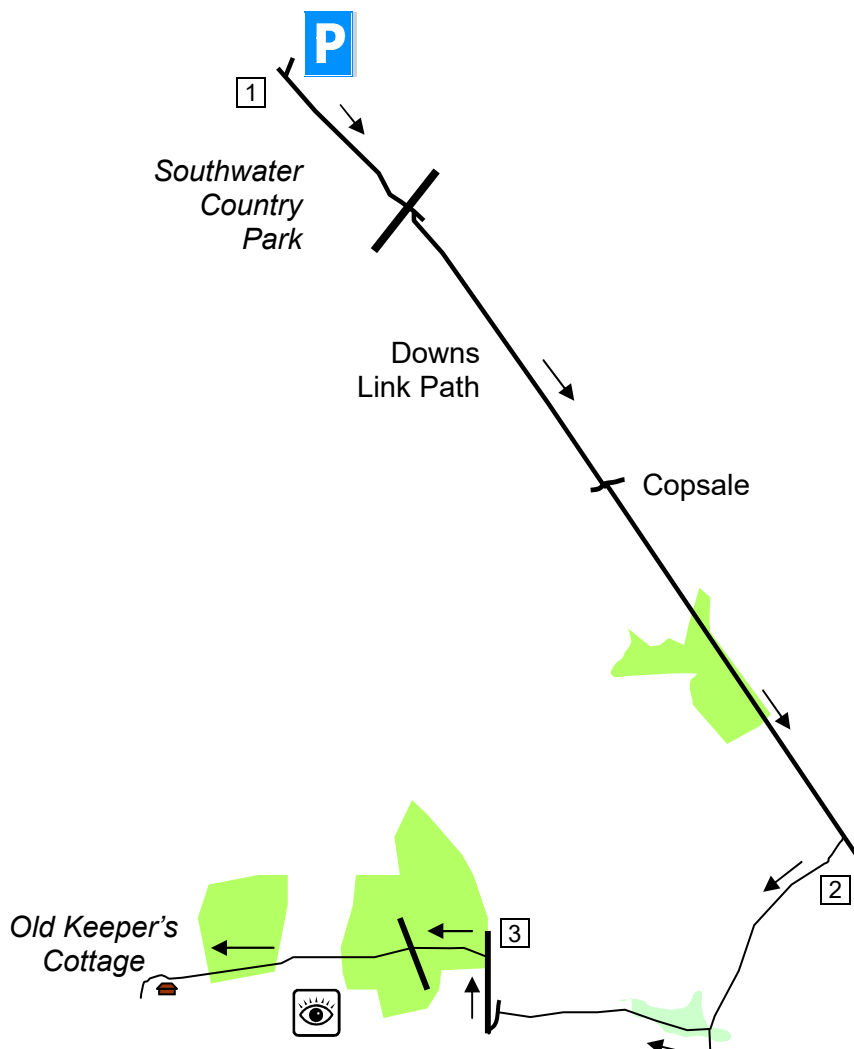
The walk begins at the **Southwater Country Park** in West Sussex, **postcode RH13 9UN**. Alternative starts are at Copsale (**postcode RH13 6QT**) or near the *Bax Castle* (nearest **postcode RH13 0LA**). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



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** 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 path 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 mainly 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, 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 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 a barrier. After some distance, your path goes

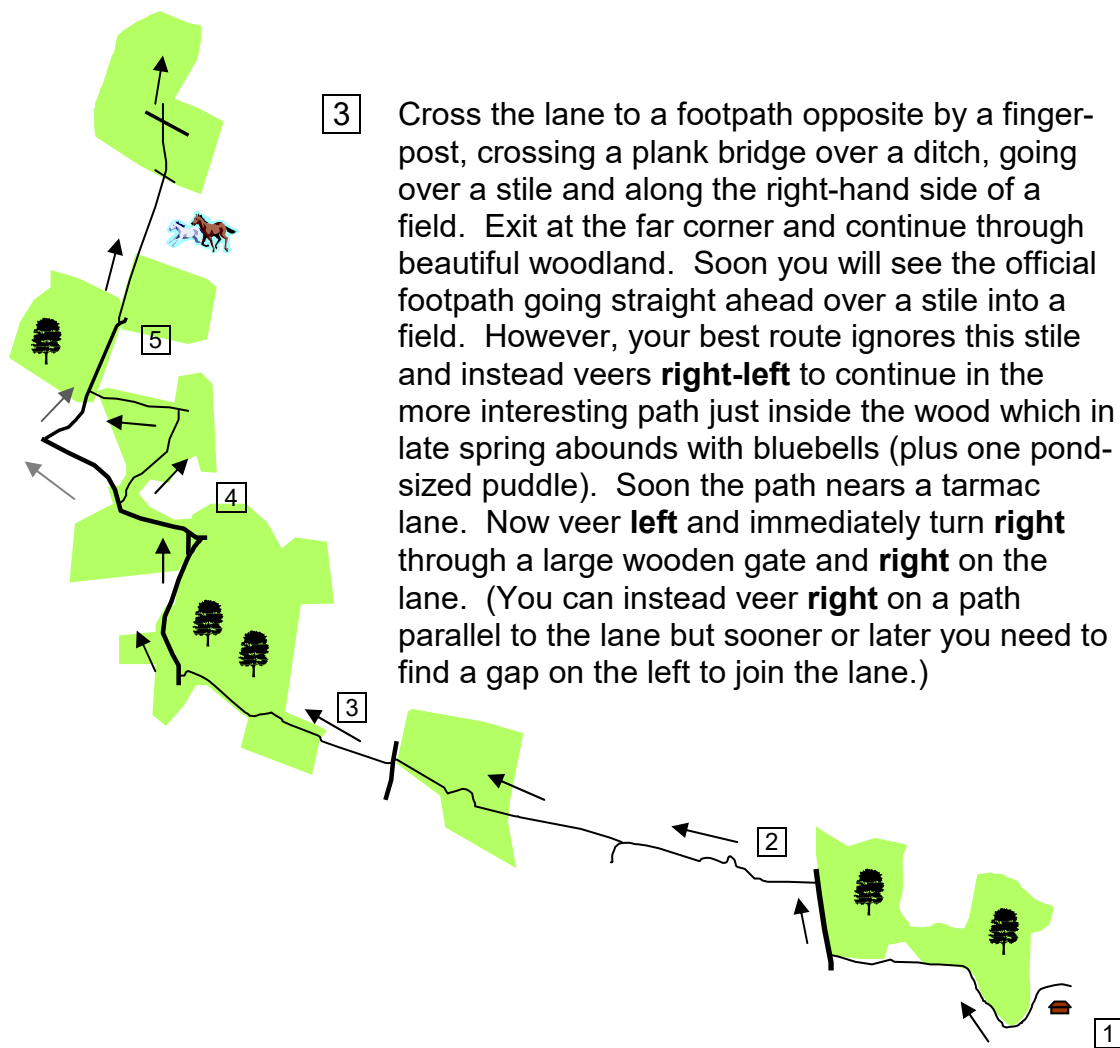
through a cutting. Where it emerges, exactly 2 km from the A24, you will find a four-way fingerpost near a bench. Turn **right** here on a much narrower path.

- 2 This attractive path runs between willows with wild garlic in abundance. Go over a stile (or through the old metal 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 a grassy path between shrubs and past a small pond on your left. Go over another stile, along the right-hand side of a meadow and under grid wires. Continue ahead on a track and over a bridge across a stream to a three-way fingerpost. Stay on the track, ignoring the left turn. Keep ahead on the track along an elongated meadow. (The official path keeps to the left in the meadow, as you see from the distant fingerpost.) At the other side, by a fingerpost, continue straight ahead on a narrow path through the wood. (However, walkers have found the undergrowth dense and the signage poor and walked round the side of the field.) This leads 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

- 1 **See map overleaf.** Keep **right** round the house's fence and, at the edge of the wood, turn **left** as directed by a fingerpost. 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. Finally your path takes you **right** and immediately **left** through another tall swing-gate and out to a road. Turn **right** on the road.
- 2 In under 100m, turn **left** at a signpost onto a drive soon reaching Goffsland Farm. Veer **right** to a fingerpost then **left-right** zigzagging between farm buildings. Goffsland Farm has calves, geese and chickens 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 track 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 over a stile into woods. This woodland path bends right and left past a pond on your right. Shortly it zigzags right-left again, still just inside the wood. (Strictly, the footpath runs along the edge of

the field ahead and over a stile at the end, but most walkers prefer to stay in the wood.) Finally you emerge beside a metal gate out to a lane.

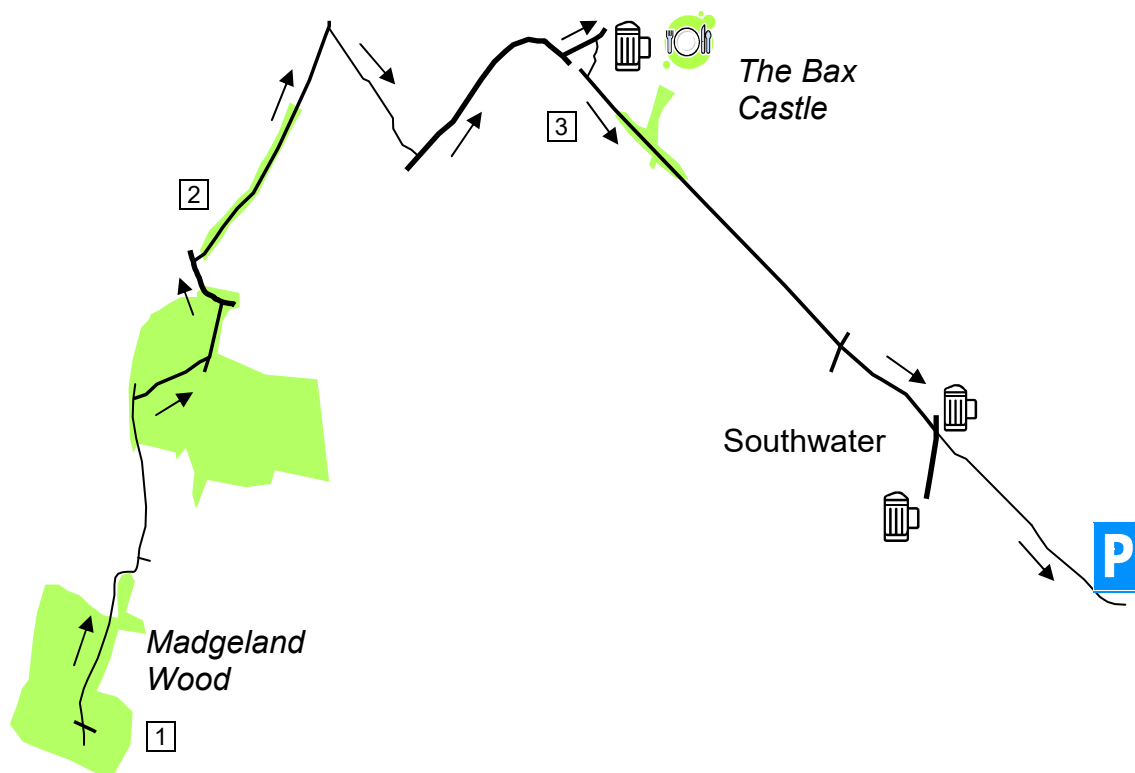


3 Cross the lane to a footpath opposite by a fingerpost, crossing a plank bridge over a ditch, going over a stile and along the right-hand side of a field. Exit at the far corner and continue through beautiful woodland. Soon you will see the official footpath going straight ahead over a stile into a field. However, your best route ignores this stile and instead veers **right-left** to continue in the more interesting path just inside the wood which in late spring abounds with bluebells (plus one pond-sized puddle). Soon the path nears a tarmac lane. Now veer **left** and immediately turn **right** through a large wooden gate and **right** on the lane. (You can instead veer **right** on a path parallel to the lane but sooner or later you need to find a gap on the left to join the lane.)

4 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. Immediately after the bridge, turn **right** on an unmarked permissive rider's path. (In case in the future this path should be closed to visitors, or if you are a large group, continue instead on the lane for 250m, turn **right** over a stile on a signed footpath, go along the left-hand side of a field, at right angles to the road, and through a large metal gate.) The path runs parallel to the stream that you just crossed, rises, bends right before a meadow and wheels right over a bank. At a T-junction with a meadow ahead, turn **left**. This beautiful woodland path eventually passes a meadow on your left and two metal gates, one on each side. Immediately turn **right** at a T-junction. [Feb 2018: walkers report serious problems in navigating this rider's path.] You are now on the official footpath.

5 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 and then a horse pasture. At the far side, cross a wide path straight into woodland by a signpost. 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



- 1 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 over a wooden swing-gate and a 2-plank bridge into woodland again. Soon, at a 3-way fingerpost, turn **right**, avoiding the unmarked path straight ahead. At the next signpost, turn **left** on a very wide path. Go through a wooden gate to the road. Turn **left** on the road. (Non-purists can turn right on the road for a shorter route to the *Bax Castle* but with a longer road walk. [See note below on crops.]
- 2 In just over 100m, turn **right** through a wooden swing-gate on a footpath through a strip of woodland. At a fingerpost, ignore the left turn and keep ahead. You pass various grounds on the right and a large wooden gate. After the next pasture, turn **right** at a fingerpost through a metal gate and go diagonally across the meadow. Cross a stile in the hedge and go diagonally across the next field [2012:if blocked by maize crop, take right edge and go left at corner]. Go through a gap by a fingerpost and a small pond, after which the path wheels left over a stile by a metal gate to a road. [2015: it may be hard to see the path if there are crops in the field, in which case look ahead and to the left towards the road (evidenced by occasional traffic) where you will see the gate and stile.] Turn **left** on the road. Stay on the road for a total of 500m, passing on the way the grand *Croft House*. Where the road bends right, 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. 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.

- 3 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. Where the path reaches a junction with a concrete drive, go straight over through a wooden gate and across the centre of a grassy field. At the other side, go through a wooden gate, along a fenced path and 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 round the corner in Stakers Lane.

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

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