



Abinger and Wotton

Distance: 15 km=9 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Surrey

Date written: 19-jul-2009

Author: Schwebefuss

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Refreshments:

Last update: 13-may-2021

Sutton Abinger, Friday Street, Wotton

Map: Explorer 146 (Dorking) and 145 (Guildford)
but the maps in this guide should be sufficient

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

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Woodland trails, bluebells, villages, hills, pubs, variety

In Brief

This is a walk of extraordinary variety showing you many different aspects of the Surrey countryside between Dorking and Guildford. You will see great views from near the North Downs, then villages and woodland, plus a lake hidden in the forest. Some of the best Surrey pubs are also on your route.



In late spring, this is also a *bluebell walk*, since much of the woodland is carpeted with those purple flowers.



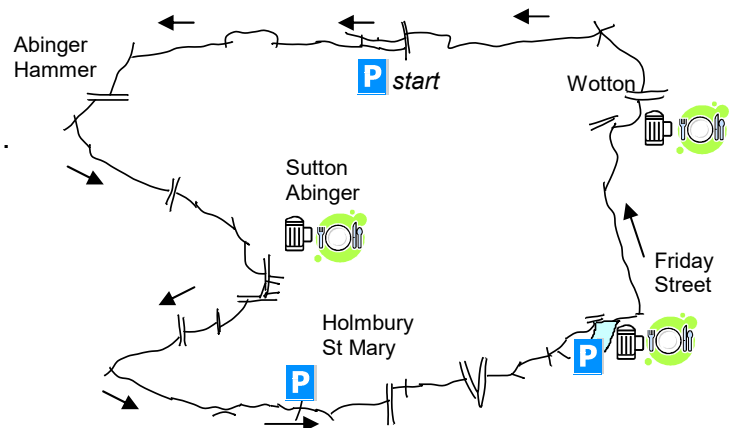
There are just a few nettles around the stiles but elatively little mud, except in a wet winter, and the route seems fine for a dog. The stile count is moderate.



Gomshall railway station is only 600m from the walk (cross the footbridge to the south side, go down a passage to the main road and turn **left**).



The walk begins in the **Abinger Roughts National Trust** car park, www.w3w.co/piano.epic.chase, nearest postcode **RH5 6PZ**, grid ref TQ111480. It is often full, but there are spaces on the grass verge. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



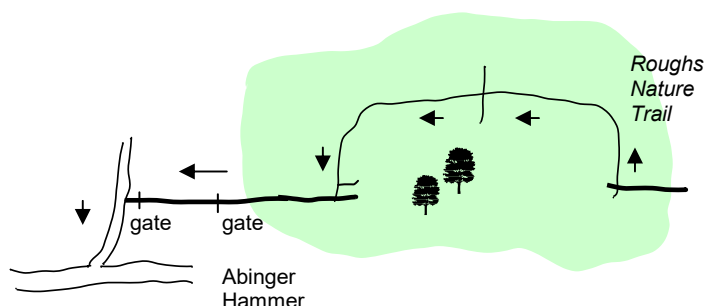
Bird's Eye View

The Walk

- 1 At the far end of the car park go through an gap next to a large single-bar gate. Continue on a fine grassy path, immediately joining a path from the right, gradually descending. *You pass on your left the knotty Witches Broom Tree, a massive old beech.* After 300m or so, continue straight ahead, joining a wider track coming from the right, avoiding all side paths. In a short distance, the gravel track begins to rise and passes close to a wooden gate and a field on the right. About 30m further up the track, look out for a post with blue and yellow arrows at a crossing path. Turn **right** here.



- 2 You are now on part of the Roughts Nature Trail. In 60m, just after a bench, the path forks at another post. Take the **left** fork, the higher of the two options. The path curves left, goes past another bench and through rhododendrons. Follow the path all the way to a post and a shallow crossing path. Continue straight over on a narrow path. The path widens, passes another post and an open area, and curves left by a fence. On reaching a wide gravel track, by a marker post, turn **right**. Follow the track to a gate and continue ahead on a fenced path. The path takes you through another gate and down to a lane. Turn **left** arriving shortly past cottages into the village of Abinger Hammer.



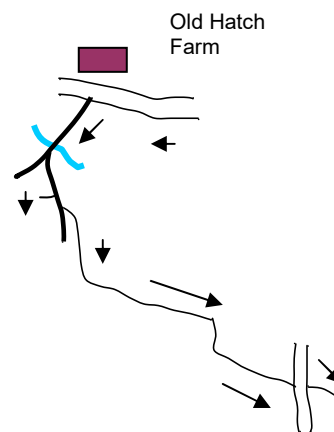
Abinger is the name of a group of villages and a civil parish. It is referred to in the Domesday Book as Abinceborne. The parish is agricultural, but at Abinger Hammer, on the Tillingbourne river, was an iron forge, hence the name. Everyone passing on the busy road knows the village from the clock with the Jack-the-blacksmith figure striking the hour with his hammer. Abinger Hammer has one of the best cricket pitches in the county and you will often see a match in progress if you walk of a summer weekend. The Abinger Cookery School (previously a pub) is just on the right.



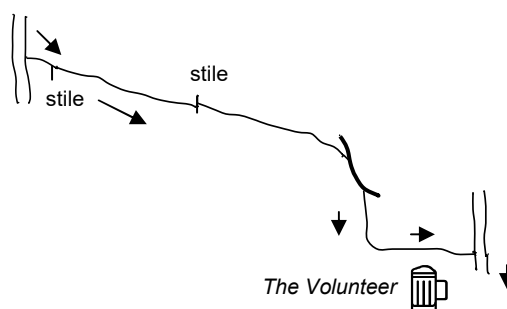
About 100m **left** along the road is the General Store and Annie's Tea Room.



3 Cross the busy road and turn **right** by the antique shop. In 200m, opposite is one of the gems of Surrey, the house of Old Hatch Farm, with its ancient walls and roof, looking untouched by the last two centuries. Turn **left** opposite the house on a concrete track that leads over the Tillingbourne. The track ends at a fork of two sunken brideways next to a gate. Take the **left** fork. In 150m, the path goes past the remains of a stile on the right. 60m further, turn **left** through an unneeded stile. The path runs at first parallel to the brideway. In 150m, at a signpost under a tree, it turns **left** across the field. There are fine views left to the North Downs (when the maize crop permits). At the end, the path goes over a rugged stile (now unneeded) and turns right by a fence and then left and down, with a meadow on the right, to a road.



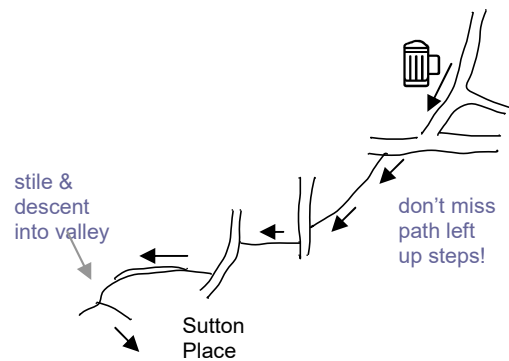
4 Cross the road carefully over a stile opposite and over a bridge on an ascending fenced path. *Oxmoor Copse on the right (not on the route) belongs to the Woodland Trust.* Go over another stile and follow a path across the field. (If the path is not clear, just keep straight on, to the right of a patch of woodland ½ km ahead.) Observe the footpath sign at the edge of the woodland which directs you along the **left**-hand side of a crop field. Now shift to the **right** and keep going straight ahead. You reach a small gap which takes you under some overhead wires. On reaching a T-junction with a three-way signpost, turn **right**, effectively straight ahead. In 100m, at the next three-way signpost, do *not* go through the wide gap ahead but turn **right** on a path with a field on the right, following the wires. The path becomes sunken and darkened by holly trees on either side. *Note the stone sculpture in the garden on the right belonging to the house "Sheiling".* The path passes the garden of the pub and leads down to a road. Turn **right**, arriving immediately at the *Volunteer* pub.



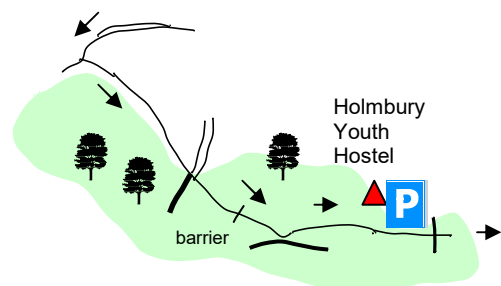
The Volunteer (Hall & Woodhouse) is one of the great outdoor pubs. Its setting is perfect, especially as you will see from the hill later, and its very isolation makes it an irresistible destination. The poem on the wall is not remarkable.



5 From the pub, continue along the road, ignoring a road on the left, past the charming cottages of Sutton (“south settlement”) Abinger. At a T-junction, turn **right**. In 50m, turn **left** on a footpath up some steps. As you proceed, it is worth glancing back at the merry sight of the *Volunteer* snug in the valley. At the top, turn **left** on a lane. In 20m, turn **right** past a barrier on a footpath. At the end of the footpath, go through a wooden barrier and turn **left** on a road heading towards the exclusive settlement of Sutton Place. In 250m, just after a side turning, turn **right** on a footpath alongside a fence. The path runs between houses and gardens and reaches a residential lane where it goes straight ahead and continues later on a grassy path down to a gate. Go down to the bottom of the valley and at the end of a fence, still in the valley, turn **left** at a crossing path, indicated by a yellow arrow on a post.

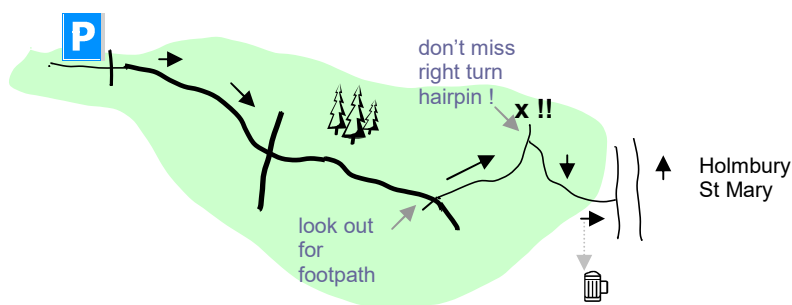


6 The path runs along the pleasant valley. At the end, go over a stile or through a gate, cross a tarmac drive and continue straight ahead on a narrow path. There are houses and gardens on the left and deep woods on the right. The path enters woodland proper via a wooden barrier. It soon approaches a sandy track on the right. Avoid the sandy track by veering **left** on the woodland path ahead. Soon you reach the public car park by Holmbury Youth Hostel. (See the note in the other walk *Holmbury & Pitch Hills*.)

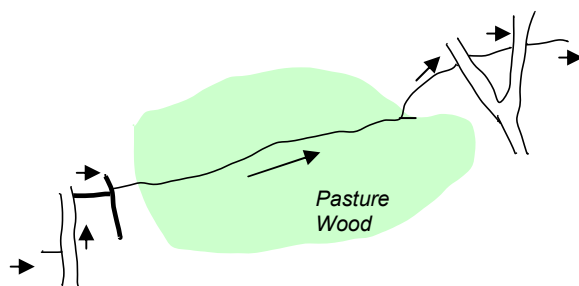


A part of the [Surrey Greensand Monster](#) walk resumes here.

7 With the car park entirely on your left, keep straight ahead and immediately avoid several smaller crossing paths. After about 200m, at a junction, ignore paths left and right and continue ahead steeply downhill. At the bottom, go over a very wide forestry track and continue up the other side. The path flattens out at the top of the hill in a pinewood. Immediately **before** the path begins to descend, at a diagonal crossing path, fork **left** at a marker post with yellow arrows [[May 2021: fallen over & propped up? don't miss!](#)], into trees. Follow the winding path downhill. The path veers **left** round the edge of a pit and runs level for **only another 20m**. Your path now turns **sharp right** round a hairpin steeply downhill. (It is easy to miss this turn as there is also a minor path straight on through rhododendrons. Do *not* go that way!) The path descends to a road ([care! sudden traffic](#)). Welcome to Holmbury St Mary! There is a pub *The Royal Oak* a little way along the road to the right but the route is **left** along the road.



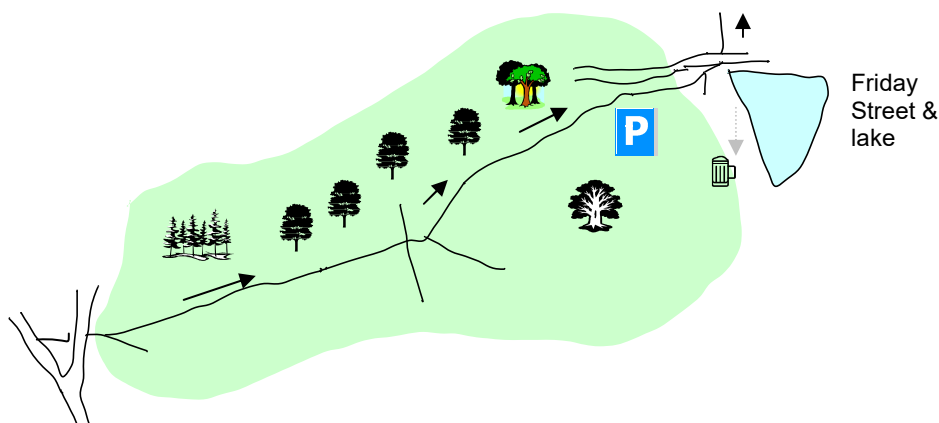
- 8 Go past cottages, turn **right** on a signposted bridleway, ignoring a private drive on your right, and continue on a stony path with a hedge and a hidden pond on your right, allotments on your left. Go straight ahead, over crossing paths, through a wooden gate on a footpath up steps. There are larches left and greenwood right. The path rises quite steeply here. As the path levels out and broadens, ignore a footpath joining from the left, and bear **right** through a pleasant area of silver birches of Pasture Wood [2021: sadly many now felled]. Soon, ignore a wide path right. Later, the path enters deeper woodland and becomes more sunken. When a meadow ahead comes into view, go over a crossing path and veer **left** on the far side of some wooden rails. Later the path runs by a fence beside a garden. The path comes down to the road at Abinger Common. Cross the road and go along a track beside a triangular green with the St James's well visible over on the right. Shortly cross another road and continue straight over to a signposted footpath opposite.



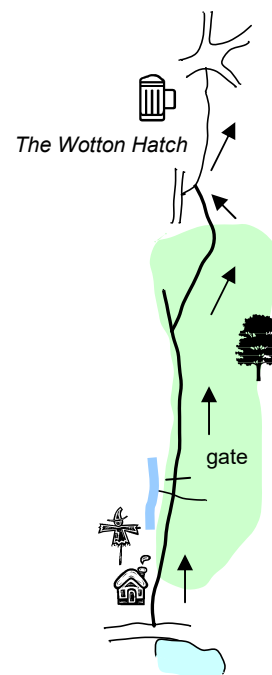
- 9 In 30m you come to a fork in the path. Take the (now more prominent) **left** fork. In about 300m the path descends and goes under wires and over a crossing path. [Mar 2019: the track had been deeply rutted by forestry vehicles; the end of the slope downhill was also muddy due to brutal woodland management; it may be better to avoid the track towards the bottom and instead head **left** of the path, going downhill through scrub and carefully across the muddy track at the bottom, before joining the uphill left-hand track.] On the other side of the crossing path are two paths leaving at an angle. Take the **left-hand** path uphill. The path flattens and runs through twisted young oaks and birch, eventually arriving at the Friday Street car park. Turn **right** through the car park and follow a path with wooden rails running above the road. This path leads down to the road and lakeside at the beauty spot of Friday Street. (The *Stephan Langton** pub which will be found a short distance on the right round the lakeside is now **closed** (2020-21); if it finds a new owner it is worth the small diversion.)



The **Surrey Greensand Monster** walk ends here.



- 10 Turn **left** just before the lake along a broad path by *Pond Cottage*, which usually has jam and relishes for sale. This leads over a ford with a little bridge and past picturesque *Yew Tree Cottage* with its scarecrow family, eventually reaching a crossing path before a large wooden gate. On its left is a beautiful old weir bridge with the Tillingbourne and water meadows on each side. Go through the gate and continue ahead with water meadows of the Tillingbourne on show on your left. After some distance, the broad path comes to a signposted fork. Fork **right** going uphill. The path flattens and eventually descends, over a stile, to cross a water meadow. *In spring there are copious bluebells here.* It then goes up steps, up through trees, curves right by a fence, up a few steps, to a gate (*Gordon's Gate*) leading into a field, sometimes home to some very cute young cattle. Go ahead, slightly right, aiming to the right of a brown hut and a metal kissing gate. The track leads out to the main A25 road by the *Wotton Hatch*. *The Wotton Hatch is an old coaching inn, now well restored, also a stylish eating place, offering generous portions, with numerous alcoves inside and a large garden.*

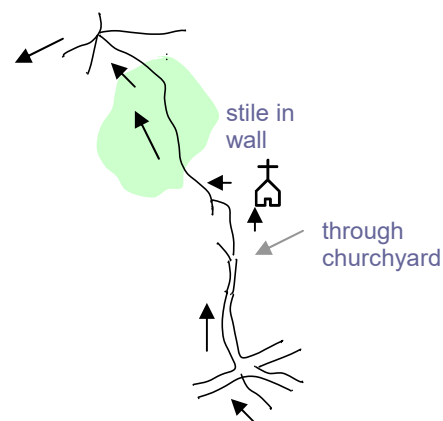


- 11 Go straight over the main road and down a lane, ignoring a footpath right, to the church of St John The Evangelist, Wotton.

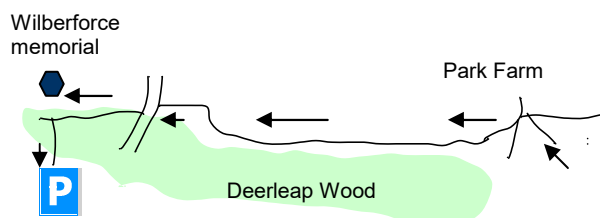


The hamlet of Wotton is very scattered so it is not surprising that the church stands alone, overlooking a broad sweep of the North Downs. The church is originally Saxon though much restored in Victorian times, but there are still original features, such as unusual carved heads beside the internal porch door including those of King John and Archbishop Stephan Langton. The church also holds the tomb of the diarist John Evelyn.

Go through the church yard, ignoring the footpath left. After passing the church on your right, go over a stile in the fence on the **left** and turn **right** to rejoin the fenced footpath, now running between fields. After a hazel hedge the path passes through a wood of beeches, larches and scots pines (more bluebells in spring), goes through a wooden kissing gate and diagonally **left** across a crop field. At the other side, at a junction of tracks, turn **left** on a bridleway.



- 12 Fork **right** on the bridleway towards the large ancient barn of Park Farm, with the bright cream coloured farm house on your right, and pass between the venerable buildings. The path goes along a narrow fenced path beside a field, right-left round the field corner, to reach a road. Cross the road, slightly left, to a marked bridleway opposite. Follow the bridleway, bearing right, shortly arriving at the *Wilberforce Monument* which commemorates the death of Bishop Wilberforce.



Samuel Wilberforce was a son of the abolitionist William Wilberforce. He was a noted public speaker and nicknamed "Soapy Sam" for his alleged saponaceousness. It was he who opposed Darwin's theory of evolution and engaged in the famous debate with Thomas Henry Huxley, "Darwin's bulldog", asking him whether it was through his grandfather or his grandmother that he claimed his descent from a monkey. He was killed here in July 1873 after a fall from his horse whilst riding with Lord Granville. Ironically, Charles Darwin stayed at Abinger Hall and often strolled in this woodland.

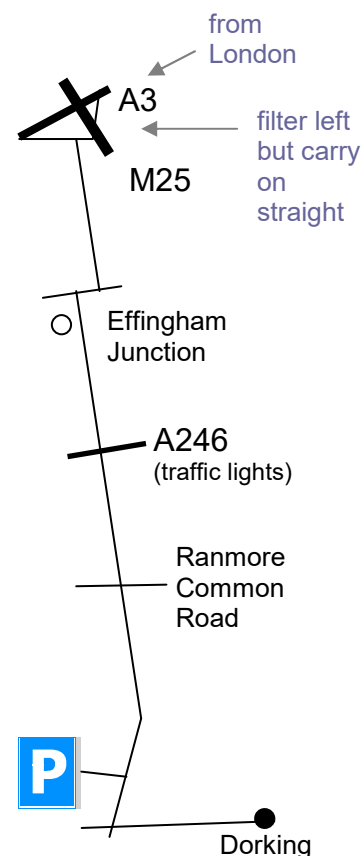
From the monument, turn **left** uphill back to the car park where the walk began.

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Getting there

By car: To get to the Abinger Roughts National Trust car park from the London area, **either** do as follows: Take the A25 Dorking-Guildford road and turn off onto White Down Lane, 1 mile after the *Wotton Hatch* on the **right** (if coming from Dorking) or 1 mile after Abinger Hammer on the **left** (if coming from the Guildford area: White Down Lane is immediately after a small cluster of black timberclad & red roof tiled farm buildings). The lane is opposite a signpost for Abinger Common but is not itself signed. Go 650m=700 yds and turn **left** into the (unsigned) car park.

Or take the following scenic route: At the A3-M25 junction, take the slip road in the direction of Guildford. (If coming from London, you must come off at the slip road but keep straight on.) In about 100m, leave the slip road by turning **left** onto a narrow road signposted *Effingham* which runs through forest by the Boldermere lake. Follow the road all the way to a T-junction. Turn **right** and **immediately left** over a humpback bridge and past Effingham Junction station. Follow the road all the way to Bookham and Effingham villages, going straight ahead at two mini-roundabouts. Go over traffic lights over the main A246 and follow a rather narrow road that runs past some fine properties, down a valley and up again, and straightens and narrows even more to a crossroads with the Ranmore Road where you must **give way**. Go straight over, passing White Downs car park on the right as you enter thick forest. The road crosses the Downs and narrows in parts rather dramatically to a single lane where you hope not to meet another vehicle. The lane twists and goes over a railway bridge. After the bridge, you need to look out for the entrance to the car park on the right after about 300m=350 yds. The entrance is not signed from the road so it is easy to miss.



By bus: no. 22 from Dorking; no. 32 from Guildford Station, not weekends.