



Abinger: Roughs, Common and Hatch

Distance: 8 km=5 miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

Date written: 20-aug-2014

Author: Fusszweig

Date revised: 21-may-2022

Refreshments: Abinger Common

Last update: 13-may-2025

Map: Explorer 146 (Dorking) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Woodland, green meadows, quiet lanes, pub, bluebells

In Brief

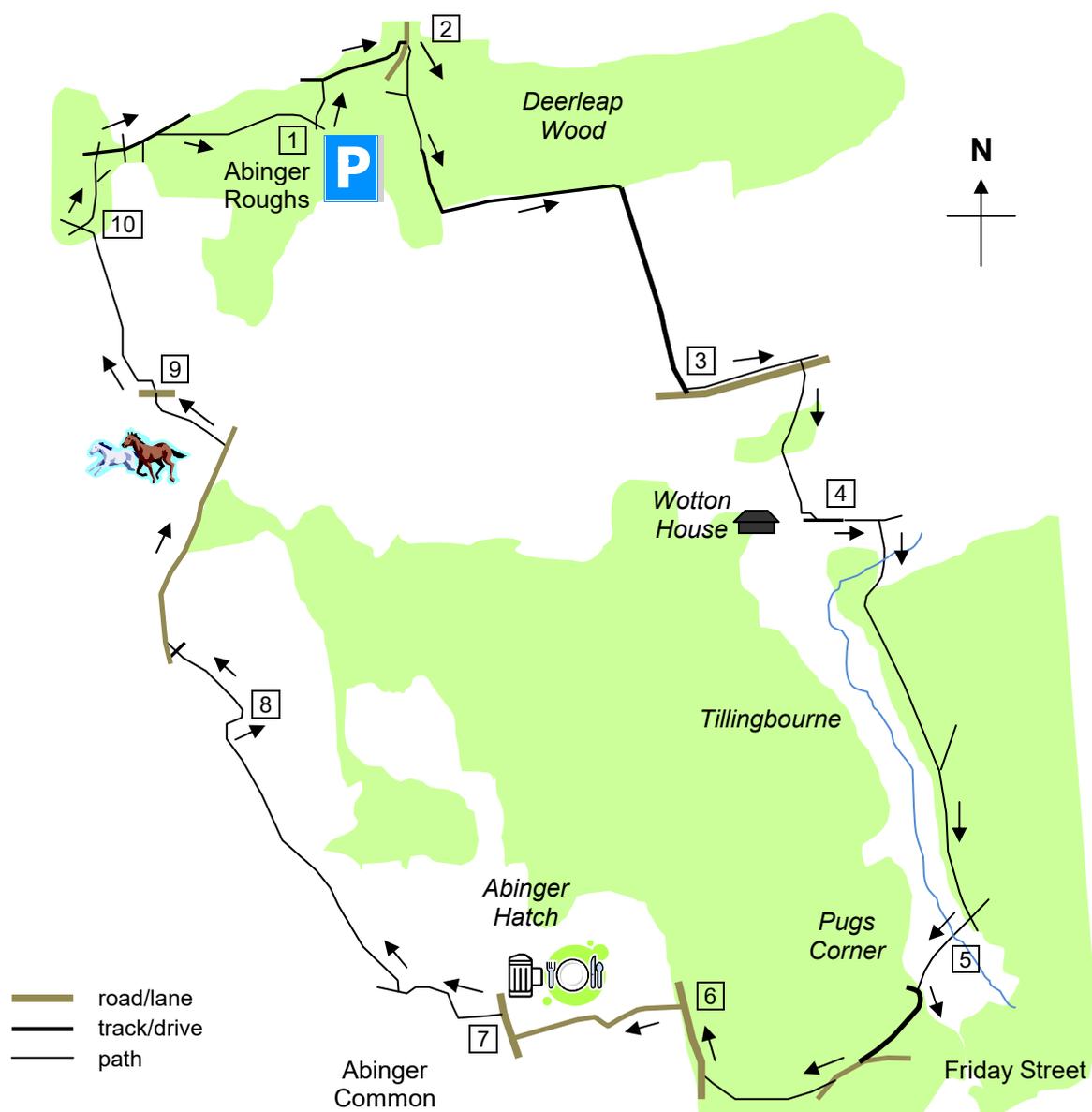
This is a gem of a walk starting in a familiar spot near the foot of the North Downs and taking you on paths that may not be familiar, even to seasoned users of this site. It shows off some of the gentler and most delightful features of this part of Surrey, without any steep gradients, making it an ideal stroll for anyone who would like to spend two or three stress-free hours in the country. The highpoint of the walk is a visit to the oldest village in the UK! You can treat this walk as a *pub walk* since the *Abinger Hatch* forms the half-way stop. (For enquiries, ring 01306-730737).



?? In a wet winter, such as Jan 2020, you definitely need good boots to keep out the wet, especially in the area around Friday Street. In high summer, there may be some dense patches of nettles along the path before Raikes Lane and beside the main road: you may find a hiking pole useful here. At other times there are few nettles or brambles on this walk, so shorts can be worn. Your dog can come too, with a lead of course, provided he is not too large to be lifted over one or two of the stiles.

The walk begins in the **Abinger Roughs National Trust** car park, grid ref TQ111480, www.w3w.co/piano.epic.chase, nearest postcode **RH5 6PZ**. You could also begin the walk near the Abinger Hatch pub, postcode **RH5 6HZ**. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 Go to the end of the Abinger Roughs car park (furthest from the road). But don't go through either of the wooden gates at the end: instead, turn **right** through a small wooden gate in the fence and go up a sandy path to an open area with a picnic table. (You can avoid a steep descent by turning right here, passing the picnic table, wheeling down left, and right at the bottom. Otherwise...) Continue down to a memorial with a stone cross. *This cross commemorates bishop Samuel ("soapy Sam") Wilberforce (son of abolitionist William) who was killed in a fall from his horse in 1873. For more details see the walk "Abinger and Wotton".* Ahead of you is the 16th-century Leasers Barn, preserved by the National Trust and used to rear livestock in the traditional way. Turn **right** on a wide path through the woods, going through one of two wooden gates. In 200m, just before a road, keep **left** past a steel barrier and thence out to the road. There are two footpaths on the other side. **Ignore** the footpath a little to the left, indicated by a fingerpost on the other side of the road. Instead take the footpath a little to the **right**, indicated by a fingerpost on your side of the road. This footpath leads off at an angle into the woods.

- 2 Your path runs briefly through some undergrowth, then on a lovely path through Dearsleap Wood with a mixture of every kind of tree. At a fingerpost, keep straight ahead, ignoring a right turn. You come out onto a dirt track by an isolated house, *Dearsleap Cottages*. Keep **left** and follow the track with woods on both sides. You reach a T-junction with a little house ahead. Turn **left** and keep straight on along a narrow path that runs just inside the wood. [2022: you have to go round a fallen tree trunk.] The path widens to a track and you pass two houses. At a T-junction, turn **right** on a semi-tarmac lane, West Lane. You pass a big arable farm on your right. Finally you reach the main A25 road.
- 3 Turn **left** on the road using the tarmac footway which soon has a hedge to shelter you from the traffic. You need to measure just over 250m. (That's about 400 paces or 300 yards or 2 minutes walking.) Here, look out for a small gap in the tall nettly hedge on your right and a signpost on the other side of the road. This is the first slightly tricky move because the gap sometimes gets clogged with undergrowth and you have to watch out for traffic on the busy road. As a guide, the signpost is 50m before a 40 mph road sign. The signpost is sometimes pasted with a notice about a local event. Cross the road carefully to a narrow footpath opposite leading you in 10m to a stile. After the stile, go straight ahead with a wire fence on your right, through a small gate. Now take an attractive but rather twisty grassy path through conifers and maples. You come down to a small gate. Go through the gate into a sloping pasture belonging to Manor Farm. If there are cattle in the field, they are the gentle belted Galloway variety. You have a wide view of the Greensand hills ahead. Follow a faint path down the centre. At the bottom, continue down to a tarmac drive by a stone wall.
-  4 Turn **left** on the drive. On the right, the drive leads to the historic prestigious austere Wotton House, a huge hotel and convention centre, with a wonderful belvedere. In 100m, just after Bentley Cottage, go **right** through a solid swing-gate at a fingerpost. (Wave your arms if you see a shooting party – it's only polite!) Follow this pleasant grassy path down the left-hand side of a meadow. The path takes you across the Tillingbourne Stream, through another swing-gate and uphill through trees, up shallow steps. At the top of the steps, bear **right** over a crossing track, past a metal gate, to continue uphill. After 400m on this wide path between wire fences, another wide path joins you, coming down from the left. Continue onwards with views right of the water meadows of the Tillingbourne. In another 400m your path takes you through a small gate beside a large wooden gate to a 4-way junction. This is the most charming spot in Surrey and five other walks in this series go through it.
- 5 Turn **right** at the junction, going across an old bridge-weir over the Tillingbourne. Go through a swing-gate and follow the woodland path to a tarmac drive of a house, *Pugs Corner*. Turn **left** on the drive which curves right through Millpond Copse uphill, runs straight with tall pines on your right and, after 200m, takes you through a (usually open) large wooden gate and reaches a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane (called *Friday Street*, like the hamlet) immediately ignoring a private track on your right. Immediately after this track, fork **right** on a narrow unsigned path that runs parallel to the lane. Shortly, the path veers away from the lane and runs above a sunken track on your left. Soon your path joins the track and follows a deep-set course, under several overhanging trees, down to a road, the aptly-named *Hollow Lane*. Turn **right** on the lane which soon runs between two old gateposts which have survived from a quieter age.

- 6 In 150m, turn **left** on the first quiet narrow lane (unsigned but actually called Donkey Lane). The lane rises gently, then descends, goes round a double bend passing *The Glebe House* and then rises again. After 400m in total, it arrives at a T-junction with Abinger Lane. Turn **right**, immediately reaching the *Abinger Hatch*. Welcome to the oldest village in the UK!

This area was inhabited since mesolithic times, around 7000 years ago. The site is just south of here, off Hollow Lane, and was excavated by none other than Louis Leakey who famously traced man's ancestry in Africa. The parish includes Abinger Hammer and Sutton Abinger, but also extends for ten miles to the Sussex border. When the Normans came, a church already stood here. The oldest part of the current structure of St James's church dates from 1086 with many later additions. In 1944 a flying bomb badly damaged the church and in 1964 the tower was damaged by lightning, both giving the church a phoenix-like reputation.



The "Abinger Hatch" is a classic local, attracting trippers from way beyond. The food is quite a business here with a well-thought-out menu, usually available all day. In summer there is a teepee and waitress service. Four rotated guest beers are served. Inside is the long airy bar area and a room furnished like a New York loft. Outside, white ducks paddle the stream, spilling into the road and a long lawn with plentiful benches give scope to al fresco quaffing and seasonal barbequeing. The "Hatch" is open all day at weekends, for drinks at least.

- 7 After your break, turn **left** through an old kissing-gate beside the lichgate, passing the church on your right. At the other side of the churchyard, go through a pair of ornate metal gates onto a gravel path. Your path runs by a house on your left with good views right to the North Downs. After a generous wooden swing-gate, keep ahead for just 10m. Here, **leave** the level path, which continues straight ahead, and instead fork **right** downhill on a grassy path. Follow this path beside a long green meadow on your right and, on your left, a bluebell wood. **Later, looking back, you have another view of St James's church.** After two long fields, you pass a smaller field, followed by a dividing hedgerow and another small field. **Care: do not stray! Do not** continue into a large grassy meadow visible ahead but fork **right** diagonally up the centre of this second small field. **In summer this field is a mass of wild flowers with some garden flowers – cosmos and sunflowers – thrown in.**



- 8 At the top, turn **left** beside a wire fence with a crop field on the other side. After 200m, the path crosses a cinder track. **In high summer, the nettles may grow quite thick here and a hiking pole may come in handy.** It now goes down through trees to Raikes Lane. Turn **right** on this road, in 200m passing a settlement called *The Dene*. Go straight past a junction on your right with Abinger Lane and, just after a concrete-and-steel railing, go **left** over a stile beside a metal gate into a horse pasture with the Tillingbourne stream on your left. **If there are horses here, they are very friendly because the local children ride them, but don't worry if you don't like horses: just ignore them.** In the far right corner, go **right** over a stile to the A25 main road.



- 9 Cross this busy road carefully and take a narrow footpath opposite, a fraction left. The path leads to a cinder drive: veer **left** on it, passing to the right of a large brick shed. Follow the path through shrubs with wild sage, blackberries and the tall yellow flowers of verbascum. Go through a metal kissing-gate beside an old wooden gate into a wide sheep meadow. Go straight ahead across the centre, following the string fence on your left, going through a temporary metal gate (close it!) and continue in the same direction. (The fencing could change in the future.) Your target is a large turkey oak on the other side. Here you will find another temporary metal

gate, a metal kissing-gate and a new wooden gate, taking you into Abinger Roughts. [This radiant piece of ancient woodland is well worth exploring, now or another day.](#)

- 10 In only 50m, at a junction of paths by a post with arrows, turn sharp **right** on a path which is part of the Nature Trail (in reverse direction). [Care: do not stray!](#) Follow this clear sandy path as it curves left and runs straight ahead slightly uphill. Just before you reach the trees, avoid a right fork (although it also joins your route) and keep ahead uphill to reach a wide crossing path by a marker post. Turn **right** on the path downhill, through the smaller of two wooden gates, following a blue arrow. Keep straight ahead over a crossing track by a field gate, through a wooden gate, ignoring a yellow NT arrow pointing right. In 15m, avoid another yellow NT arrow on the right. In another 25m, fork **right** in the direction of a yellow arrow on a wide path, passing the Witch's Broom Tree beside its info board (a useful pointer). *This twisted beech was a favourite with children for climbing before the days of health-and-safety.* In 350m, avoid a left fork, arriving back in the Abinger Roughts car park where the walk began.

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 north on White Down Lane, 1 mile after of the *Wotton Hatch* (if coming from Dorking) or 1 mile after Abinger Hammer (if coming from the Guildford area). The lane is opposite a signpost for Abinger Common but is not itself signed. Go 650m=700 yds and turn **left** into the car park, marked with a little wooden NT signboard.

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. (It is easy to miss the little NT signboard and overshoot the entrance.)

