



Elstead and Yagden Hill

Distance: 8 km=5 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: Elstead or picnic

Map: Explorer 145 (Guildford) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Lake, woodland, heath, hills, views

In Brief

Hankley Common is used for tough outward-bound exercises, so it's no surprise that it offers some invigorating walks. This one joins the neighbouring collection already on this website, but it makes use of paths which may be quite new even to seasoned walkers. There is one sharpish ascent of Yagden Hill and some tricky navigation required, but otherwise the walking is easy and almost entirely on the level.



There is practically no undergrowth on this walk, so shorts are ok if the weather allows. Terrain is sandy, sometimes quite deep but with grassy fringes. All-in-all, this walk would tolerate robust walking shoes, in dry weather at least. But in a wet midwinter you may occasionally find some extensive shallow water across the path at the start, requiring high boots or wellies, and a pole.

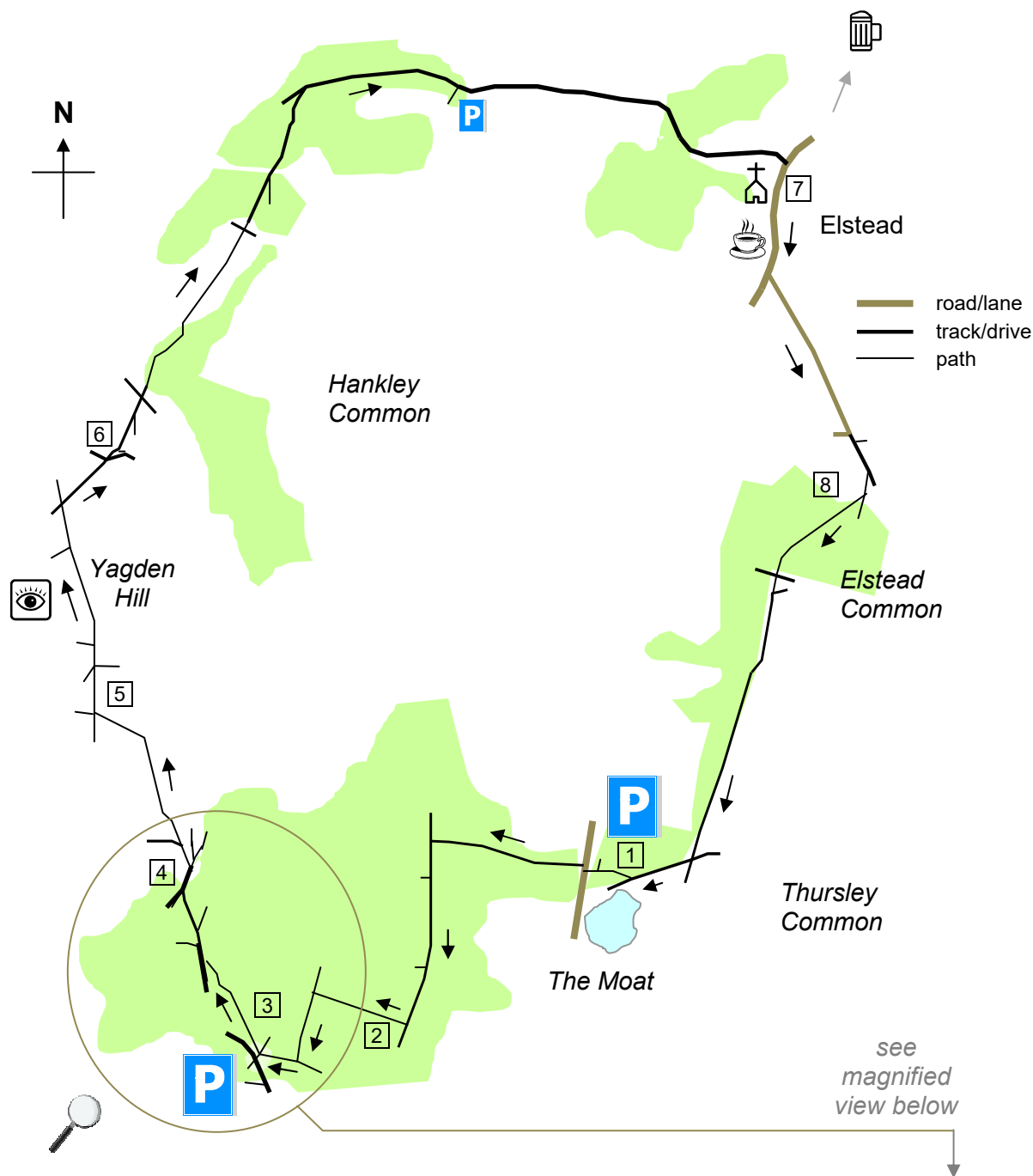
With no stiles (not even any gates) your dog will enjoy this walk too. Because of the wide sandy paths and the pine trees, this is a good winter walk.

The walk begins at **The Moat** car park off the Thursley Road near **Elstead**, Surrey, www.w3w.co/revision.fools.trickster, nearest postcode **GU8 6LW**.

Despite threats of closure, the **Hankley Central** (Upper) Car Park is still open at the time of writing, www.w3w.co/begin.magic.cork. The **Westbrook Hill** "car park", at the far end of the tarmac drive beside the church, ½ mile distant, www.w3w.co/thud.breeze.remix, is a tight circle at a junction of drives which no-one seems to use! It is designated as a car park on Google Earth but not on the OS map; be careful not to block access. Another possibility is to park on the roadside in Elstead, making use of the local amenities, such as *The Woolpack* or *The Mill*. Another longer option is to combine this walk with the *Hankley Common: Duke of Cambridge pub walk*, making use of the OS map for places to join and re-join. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk



- 1 Before you set out, don't miss the chance for a look at the big pond known as *The Moat* - ideal for a picture and perhaps some sightings of wildlife. Starting in The Moat car park, go out to the road, turn **right** and immediately **left** on a wide path signposted as a footpath. The path runs through deep woodland, passing between two old tall metal gates (which must have a history to tell). [Dec 2024: there was extensive shallow water (2-3" deep) across the path which had subsided later in the day.] The path ends at a tarmac drive in front of the ornate gates of *Elstead Manor*. Turn **left** on the drive. You pass entrances to various detached properties on your right. The last, after 400m, is *Chailey Wood* with its big black gates. Go another 70m to the corner of the fence where you meet a wide grass path with a *Defence* notice and a 1-bar metal barrier. This is your gateway to Hankley Common!

Hankley seems to be the name of a tiny hamlet by the River Wey, now vanished, but giving its name to a huge (560-ha=1,400 acre) wild area of sandy heath owned by the Ministry of Defence for military exercises and highly valued as a Nature Reserve for all sorts of rare birds and reptiles. A replica of the Atlantic Wall was built here for training before D-Day (see the other walk "Elstead and Frensham Ponds"). A great number of films, including at least three James Bond films, have made use of the bleakness of Hankley Common.

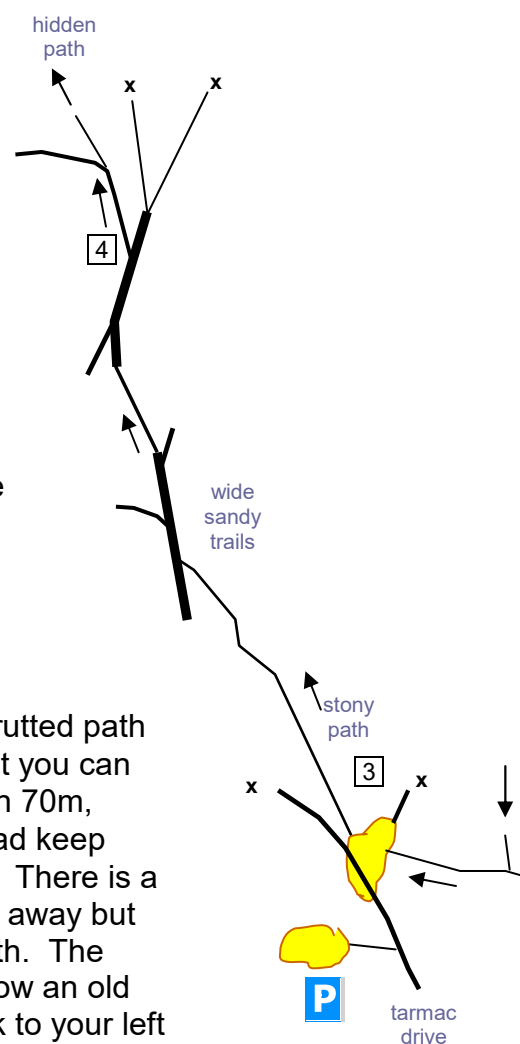
In 1942 Hankley Common was the scene of a notorious murder. The victim was a young woman who was living rough in a shelter made from tree branches rather like a wigwam, thus causing the crime to become known as "the Wigwam Murder". The perpetrator was August Sangret, a Canadian soldier, unschooled part-Cree Indian who, after a lengthy trial, was hanged. The Canadian army recorded his death as "whilst serving with other units".

- 2 Turn **right** on this wide pathway. The pines on your left show signs of scorching from the Hankley Common fire of 2022; you will see more signs during this walk - as well as green shoots. In 250m, at a T-junction with a wide path, turn **left**. In 180m, avoiding a fork to the left, you come to a T-junction with another wide path. Turn **right**. In less than 100m this path leads out into a large open sandy area. Your route continues directly across this open area, ignoring the tarmac drive on your left. For extra guidance: the tarmac drive enters and exits along the left side of the area. Your path is the **next** stony exit to the **right** of the tarmac drive. Do not mistakenly take the clear sandy path that leads off more squarely on the right.


P The Hankley Central (Upper) Car Park is left on the tarmac drive, just past a metal barrier. If you are **beginning** this walk there, go out of the car park back to the tarmac drive and turn **left**, passing a heavy metal barrier; in only 50m, just before the drive starts to descend, turn **right** into a wide sandy area and take the first stony path on the **left**.

- 3 Your path is a stony rough path at first, going slightly downhill towards a pine forest in the distance. You cross under power lines just before you enter the trees. After a twisty 150m, you come out of the trees to meet a very wide sandy trail which is also a bridleway. Turn **right** here. In 20m avoid a path on your left and continue another 30m to where the trail forks. Take the **left** fork, staying on the major sandy trail. (The right fork is the bridleway, a straight path up through pines.) In 70m the trail becomes extremely wide where it is joined from the left by another path. This area is often used by cadets in training.


- 4 In roughly 60m, the sandy trail begins to split, where a rutted path forks off to the left, heading in the direction of a trail that you can see ahead bending left uphill. Take this **left** fork. But in 70m, **leave** the sandy trail as it bends away to the left. Instead keep **straight ahead** on a hidden path leading up into pines. There is a large fallen tree trunk blocking the path only about 40m away but luckily it serves as a clear marker for the start of the path. The fallen tree trunk may not be easily visible, but if you follow an old vehicle track a bit to the right, you will see the tree trunk to your left in the trees. Go round or step over the tree trunk and your path




ahead is now perfectly clear, and becoming clearer as you go. It leads through another scorched area where another season of rain will encourage more green shoots. The path curves left and, after a total of 400m, reaches a 4-way junction.

- 5 Turn **right** at this junction on a wide sandy path. In 100m or so, your path crosses straight over a major junction and continues, giving you a preview of a climb ahead. At the top of the short steep gradient you are on a high plateau known as Yagden Hill with good views. The descent is also steep.  In roughly 200m you reach an obvious oblique crossing path. Turn **right** here on a very wide grass/sandy path. In 150m you reach a junction with a wide sandy track. Cross straight over to keep the same direction on a path signed as a bridleway which kinks a little right-left.
- 6 Your route is now always straight ahead, avoiding all side paths, soon crossing under HT wires. This stretch may be the most attractive part of the walk, with oak and birch dotted around the green landscape. After 700m on this bridleway, your path crosses another path by a marker post with blue arrows, and enters denser woodland. In another 150m you join a track from the right at the edge of a field, by a tall wire fence. In a further 250m you are joined from the left by a bridleway and a track: bear **right** here, staying on the wide woodland track. In 400m the combination of a parking area, driveways, tall wooden gates and notices inform you that you have reached the boundary of Hankley Common. Keep **left** now on a tarmac drive. You pass Westbrook Farm. The drive doublebends and passes more houses, finally arriving at Elstead Church.

St James' Church is believed to have been founded by the Monks of Waverley Abbey in 1138. Some rubble-stone walls and one window date back to that time. The porch is from the 1300s; all the timbers of the nave roof were installed in the 1400s.

 The “welcoming and reasonably-priced” *Little Barn Café* (closed Sunday) is 250m on your left along the road, requiring a loop back.

7  After possibly visiting St James' church, turn **right** on the main road. In under 200m, on the right, you can have hot drinks and snacks at the *South Downs Coffee Co. at 172*. 300m from the church, just after the Primary School, fork **left** on a straight residential road, Red House Lane. The road narrows after 450m and becomes a tarmac drive. Keep straight ahead but, shortly before a large gate visible ahead, fork **right** on a bridleway, as signed with a blue arrow.

8 Shortly a marker post gives you a choice of two bridleways. Take the **right** fork, the more sheltered option. Your path takes you through a pine forest, over a 3-plank bridge*, and across a clearing. [Dec 2024: bridge was submerged: walkers stayed close to the river on the left, joining the “surfaced rider’s path” earlier than scheduled.] 300m from the fork, go straight over a driveway. In another 50m you meet a special surfaced rider’s path coming from your left. Join this rider’s path for the last stretch of your journey. In nearly 200m ignore a permissive path on your right and continue ahead across the open heath of Elstead Common, now following overhead wires. In a further 500m you come to a very definite oblique wide crossing track. Turn **right** here, soon arriving at The Moat. There is a right fork just before the pond that leads you directly back to the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: To get to The Moat near Elstead, if coming from the north, take the A3 through Guildford and later turn off at the signpost for *Milford, Haslemere, Petworth*. Almost immediately, at the large roundabout, take the third exit, signposted *Guildford, London* and, at the next roundabout, take the first exit signposted *Elstead*. Follow this road for into Elstead village. Just before the green, turn left, signposted *Churt, Thursley*. In 450 yds you pass the church. The Moat car park is 1.2 miles further on the left. The Moat car park is popular and you may find it crowded even if you arrive before 10; but it's worth noting that there are opportunities for "creative" parking, such as forming another line or slipping in between trees. It may be worth hovering waiting for a dog-owner to finish the morning's walkies.

For the Hankley Central (Upper) car park, follow the above directions for The Moat, but continue a further 0.6 mile to where there's a double right-left "kink" in the road. Where the road bends left, leave it by turning **right** on an unmarked tarmac drive, passing October Farm. After an exhilarating ½ mile across the heath, you see a heavy metal barrier. Turn **left** just before the barrier into the large car park.

By bus/train: bus 46 runs between Guildford and Farnham, via Elstead, not Sundays. Check the timetables.

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