



Sheepleas, Lovelace Bridges, East Horsley

Distance: 9 km=5½ miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: East Horsley

Map: Explorer 146 (Dorking) and 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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Woodland, chalkland, historic bridges

In Brief

South of East Horsley there is a large hilly forested area criss-crossed by paths many of which are known only to locals. Hidden in the woods are many surprises, especially the stone bridges built in the 1800s by the Earl of Lovelace to transport his timber wagons. This walk visits **three** of these bridges and the sites of two "lost" bridges, using several rare paths. (If you would like to visit all *nine* intact and accessible bridges, see the sister walk *The Lovelace Bridges of Horsley*.) The village too has a number of eccentric flintstone buildings, most notable of which are Horsley Towers, Guildford Lodge and St Martin's Church.



There are no nettles on this walk. It is also *comparatively* dry, so any sensible clothing can be worn and boots are only *essential* in wet seasons. It should be fine for your dog too with just two crossings of the A246 but *no stiles*. There is a good pub en route in the village (check *The Duke* at East Horsley on 01483-282312).

The walk begins at the **Sheepleas Shere Road Car Park**, nearest postcode **KT24 6EP**, www.w3w.co/safe.energy.prone, grid ref TQ 085 515. (*Don't confuse it with the Sheepleas Green Dene car park!*) For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

- 1 From the Sheepleas *Shere Road* car park, take the path between stumps beside a noticeboard. In 150m, where you see a T-junction with two fingerposts ahead, fork **right** and veer **right** on a bridleway. In just 20m you come to a junction with a 2-way signpost [2019-2021: one finger broken off & missing] pointing forward and back to two car parks. Ignore both directions and instead turn **left** on a side path. Another path quickly joins from the left. Almost immediately, you come to a fork. Take the **left** fork, thus staying on the main path. In 30m you go past a post saying *self-guided trail* [Feb 2022: gone?] on the other side. In 100m you reach a 3-way fingerpost: veer **right** here on a public bridleway.



- 2 In 30m you come to a Y-junction: fork **right** here uphill on a flinty path. In 150m or so, you come to a major crossing track with a 4-way fingerpost: go **right** and immediately **left**, thereby keeping your direction. Your path crosses an open area. Ignore minor paths left and right to reach another fingerpost. Keep straight ahead over an oblique crossing path, in the direction of the bridleway, passing the fingerpost on your left. Your path goes for some distance downhill under a tall canopy of various trees. Finally it comes down to the Green Dene road, opposite its junction with Honeysuckle Bottom.

- 3 Cross straight over, a fraction right, to a small signpost and footpath **left**, just after *High Hazels*. Follow the path between gardens and straight on into woodland. Your path goes under one of the Earl of Lovelace's famous stone bridges. This one is *Raven Arch*, a single-parapet bridge. (For a walk that includes all **nine** accessible bridges with a full description, see the walk "The Lovelace Bridges of Horsley" in this series.) Your path shortly comes up to a major junction of tracks. Take the wide forestry track **very sharp left**, almost doubling back. The track gently rises and curves right, ever tighter, until it has come almost half-circle. As it begins to flatten out, where you see it curving left about 50m ahead, look for a marker post on your left with a white badge indicating *Lovelace Bridges Trail*. Turn **left** here on a much narrower path and follow it through rhododendrons. It soon leads you over the largest of the Lovelace bridges, the *Dorking Arch*, with the Crocknorth Road below.
- 4 On the other side, continue ahead on a path into woods. In 50m, your path goes over two crossing paths and enters beechwoods with a green meadow visible on the right through cypresses. Finally, your path comes to a bank, just after the site of one of the lost bridges, *Oak Hangers*, as indicated by a plaque on your left. Go down the bank and turn **left** on a sunken path. In 30m, you reach a large sign for *Oldlands* and a junction of paths. Go straight ahead, ignoring a forestry track left, and in 20m, at a marker post, take the **right** fork, a fraction uphill. In 150m, your path forks: take the **left**-hand fork the narrower option, marked by a blue arrow [Apr 2021: badly faded – don't miss!]. Your path runs gently downhill under beeches and soon becomes a splendid avenue of yew trees. You arrive at a junction with some oblique crossing paths: keep dead straight on along a good path, soon going over another Lovelace bridge, *Stony Dene*. *This bridge was the first to be fully restored by the Horsley Countryside Preservation Society and a plaque describes the project (although you would need to climb down to read it).*
- 5 Continue over the bridge for another 100m where you meet an oblique, very obvious, crossing path. Fork **left** onto the crossing path. In 500m, in a slight dip in the path, you pass the site of another lost Lovelace bridge, *Pine Grove*. Some of the brickwork can still be seen. Your path continues by a wire fence, eventually meets another footpath from the left and runs beside a house to reach the main A246 Guildford Road. Cross this road carefully, turn **right** for 20m and quickly **left** on Dirtham Lane / Calvert Road.
- 6 Follow the lane beside the old flint wall of Effingham Lodge on your left and bungalows on your right, where it is amusing to note their names, some clichéd, some fancy. By *Lusty Glaze*, take the **left** fork, staying next to the wall, on the aptly-named Dirtham Lane. You pass the entrance to Dell Farm with its concrete sheep, after which the surface is rougher. Ignore posts with a yellow badge [Feb 2022: gone?] soon on your right for the *Horsley Jubilee Trail*, although on another day this is well worth exploring. The crumbling flint wall is now a ruin in parts. You come to a 3-way junction at a new one-way fingerpost [Jul 2023: gone]. Keep straight on, as for *East Horsley*, avoiding the path right for *Effingham*, still beside the flint wall. *On your right is Great Ridings Wood, explored in another walk in this series.* At the corner of the wall, at another fingerpost [Jul 2023: gone], turn **left** for *East Horsley*. At a marker post, keep straight on by a fence, ignoring a footpath on the right. Finally your path goes by a small metal gate and under a stone bridge (not a Lovelace bridge, though built in the same spirit by the owners of *Innisfree*).

- 7 Ignore a footpath on your right and continue past tennis courts. The lake on your left is Pennymead as you go over a small bridge to join a tarmac lane. You reach a crossroads with a private road, Pine Walk, on your left. (There is an interesting alternative route here through Horsley Park and past Horsley Towers. This is a private park, hotel and venue but this route is regularly used by dog walkers, young people and local families as the site is fairly relaxed towards *caring* visitors (see the notices). To use this route, turn **left** on this private residential road, leading you to a large wooden gate which is the rear entrance to the park; follow this path, zigzagging past Horsley Towers, with its pond and garden and leave by the main entrance, zigzagging again, to the road near the church. Now skip the rest of this paragraph.) Continue straight ahead passing mock-Tudor houses, eventually reaching the main road at the corner of *Conisbee* butcher / deli. Turn **left** on the main road. (The pavement is rather narrow here and you may wish to hop to the right-hand side and back when the traffic is clear.) You may fork left into Bishopsmead Close later, to take you to the line of shops where there is another charming small deli/café, the *Goose*. Next on the left is the entrance to Horsley Park and Horsley Towers.



Horsley Park is a conference centre, hotel, restaurant and residence all inside spacious parkland with handsome gardens. The main building, the Towers, is another fantastic creation of the Earl of Lovelace, like a full-size château. It is described in J. J. Norwich's "The Architecture of Southern England" as a "grotesque Victorian Disneyland which has to be seen to be believed – and may not be even then". Built in the Gothic style of the same flintstone and polychrome brick as his bridges, it seems to have wandered into the village and pupped in many locations, producing houses, a pub, even parts of a petrol station. The park tolerates visitors who only wish to walk round its garden and along its flint walls to view those quaint bastions, quoins and parapets.



Continue to the Church of St Martin which is worth visiting (when open) and where you can sometimes have a guide and even tea. At the junction with the main road, on the left is *Guildford Lodge* and, on the right, the local pub. *The "Duke of Wellington"* is a genuine English inn which serves food from snacks up to a three-courser. It has a selection of cask ales and, to while away the time, a pool table. Ring 01483-282312 to enquire.

- 8 Turn **right** on the main A246 road using the footway. In 300m, just by a welcome sign for West Horsley, turn **left** onto a signposted bridleway with a noticeboard about Sheepleas, passing a wooden barrier. Follow this wide path for about 700m inside a wide a band of trees with houses or fields on each side. You pass a small untidy timber yard on your left and your path enters thicker woodland. Avoid all side branches, ignoring a signposted horse path until, 200m from the timber yard, you meet two fingerposts. At the second fingerpost, **fork right** for *Shere Road Car Park*.
- 9 This path takes you into a long green valley. Shortly, opposite a marker post, ignore a path (*) that forks right up the side of the valley (although it also leads to the car park) and continue along the bottom of the valley. The path gradually rises and curves right, getting steeper. It leads into a band of trees where [Jul 2023: going left round a fallen tree] you find a large 3-way fingerpost. Keep straight ahead in the direction of the *Shere Road Car Park*, immediately reaching a grassy space with two sets of picnic tables. Continue across the grassy space, leaving the group of large beeches with a yew in the middle to your left, and picnic tables to the right. At the far

side, join a wide path (* the path you ignored above) that runs along the right-hand side of the grassy area. Shortly you reach two fingerposts close together. Keep straight ahead in the direction of *Shere Road Car Park*. Quickly take the **right** fork, then the **left** fork, to reach the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Shere Road is off the A246 Leatherhead-Guildford road at the small roundabout in West Horsley. The **Shere Road Sheepleas** car park is 1 km on the left.

By bus: no. 479 from Leatherhad Station, including Sundays.

By train: Horsley station is just over 1 km from the walk: go south down Ockham Road or take a bus.

