



The Lovelace Bridges of Horsley

Distance: 9 or 10 km=5½ or 6 miles easy walking with one steep section

Region: Surrey

Date written: 17-jan-2010

Author: Schwebefuss

Date revised: 13-aug-2015

Refreshments: East Horsley after the walk

Last update: 31-jul-2024

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

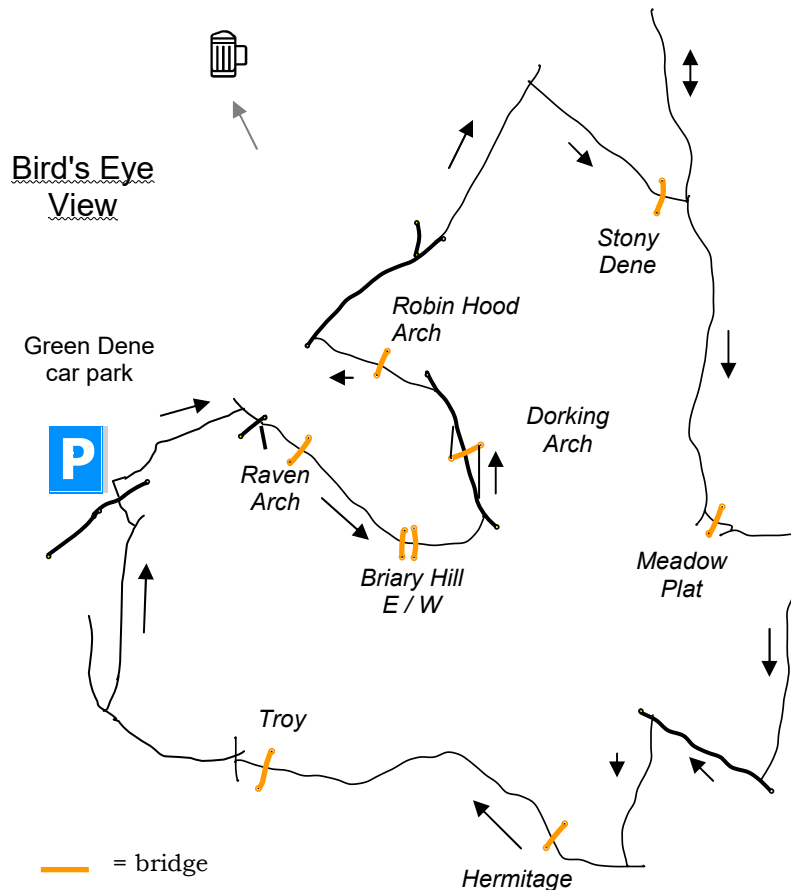
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Woodland, historic bridges

In Brief

The Earl of Lovelace built these notable bridges in the woods around Horsley to facilitate the transport of timber by horsecart from his forests to the depot. Of the original fifteen bridges, ten are still intact. This walk takes in the nine bridges on public view in a circular route.





There is some mud on this route, especially under the first few bridges, although the rest of the walk is relatively dry; so waterproof boots or wellingtons are advisable, but only in winter or after rain. You will encounter a lot of woodland debris strewn along the way. There are some brambles across the paths which make good clothing essential. The final climb through Mountain Wood will test you, especially if your footwear is smooth-soled. You could certainly take your dog on this walk. Refreshments are available after the walk, in East Horsley.

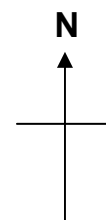
The walk begins at the **Sheepleas Green Dene car park** near East Horsley, 200m north of postcode **KT24 5TA**, grid ref TQ 090 510, www.w3w.co/badly.gifted.secret. The White Down car park is 1½ km from the walk, making an attractive prelude/postlude. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Jan 2024: The Green Dene car park is **open** again after a brief closure for ash die-back clearance.

The Horsley Countryside Preservation Society's Lovelace Bridges Conservation Project has undertaken the restoration and preservation of the existing bridges. More details are on their website at <https://www.hcps.online/>. Most of the bridges, including the lost bridges, have a plaque or noticeboard with historical details [**Aug 2020: four plaques and two stands now vanished: HCPS please note!**].

William King, first Earl of Lovelace (1805-1893), was appointed Lord-Lieutenant of Surrey in 1840. He bought the East Horsley estate in 1840, gradually moving there from Ockham Park. He married the poet Byron's only (legitimate) daughter Ada (after whom a US Defense computer language is named) and named their first son "Byron". He built a vast number of buildings in Horsley using every architectural style. Not content with rough-and-ready crossings for his timber wagons, he had the bridges of Horsley meticulously shaped and designed in the Moorish manner, built from local flint and bricks, emblazoned with heraldry and finished with parapets.

Note on the maps. Each mini-map below is **accurate but not all the maps are to the same scale. North is always up.**

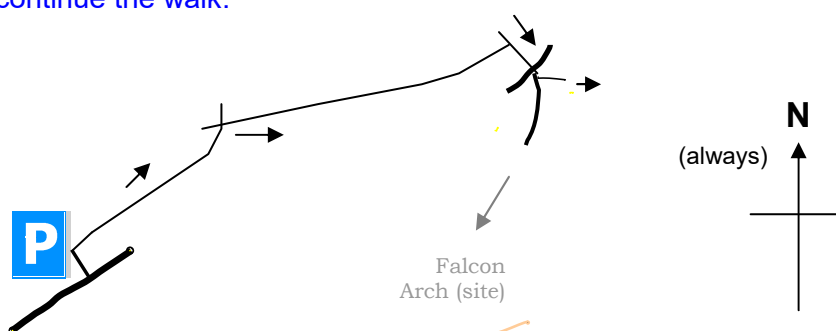


The Walk

If you arrived by **bus**, get off at the **Salmons Road** stop. Walk on the main road, away from Salmons Road, using the footway, for just over ½ km to the junction with Dirtham Lane on your right. Continue another 20m, cross the road and take a signed footpath on the left, just after a gated drive, beside a post, passing a house. In about 150m, **ignore** a footpath on your right and continue straight ahead, beside a wire fence. In another 200m, look for the remains of an old bricks construction between banks. This is the lost **Pine Grove** bridge. Now continue for 500m to begin the walk at section **5**, going straight on at the crosspaths.

The main walk is described on the next page.

- 1 Near the road there is a plaque [Oct 2020: lost during the car park refurb?] showing the entire area of the Bridges with routes and a suggested Lovelace Bridges Trail. *This walk follows it with some variations.* With your back to the road, take the exit furthest from the road, at the far **right-hand** side of the car park. Ignoring a small path that leads ahead uphill, turn **right** following the sign for the Self-Guided Trail (a white arrow outlined on a white background) on a path parallel to the road on your right. In 150m the path curves left uphill. 20m after this, turn **right** on a narrow crossing path, so that you are once again walking parallel to the road. In 250m you reach a wide crossing track. Turn **right** on the track, quickly reaching the road Green Dene at a fingerpost. Cross the road, slightly right, to a junction with a lane, Honeysuckle Bottom. **As an optional diversion, if you follow Honeysuckle Bottom, you will reach in about 400m the site of one of the lost bridges, Falcon Arch.** (2022: The plaque recounting the history of the bridges has unfortunately disappeared). You will need to retrace your steps to continue the walk.



- 2 Do not follow Honeysuckle Bottom but turn **left** at the corner of the junction on a narrow fingerposted bridleway that goes up past, and to the right of, a sign for *High Hazels*, into the woods and shortly goes under ...

Bridge No. 1: Raven Arch, a single-parapet bridge

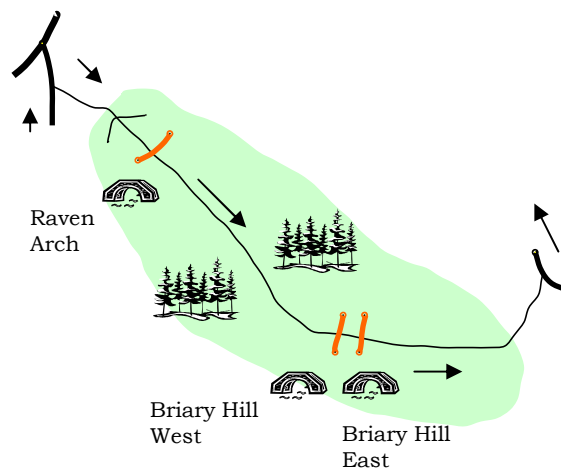
In 50m, at a junction, ignore the forestry tracks on each side and instead take the **right-hand** of the two uphill walks straight ahead. After 250m through a majestic pine forest, you reach ...

Bridge No. 2: Briary Hill West, a typical Lovelace bridge with flint walls, brick facings and horseshoe-shaped arches with rounded tiled tops.

and, after 100m and a wide crossing track:

Bridge No. 3: Briary Hill East, a similar bridge.

Continue on the path until you reach a farmhouse. Turn **left** to a road, *Crocknorth Road* and turn **left** on it.



- 3 In only 50m, opposite a wide driveway and metal barrier on your left, turn **right** through a gap in the wooden fence on a narrow unsigned bridleway into woods. In 250m you reach a crossing path with tall beeches on your right. Turn **left** on this narrow path soon passing over:

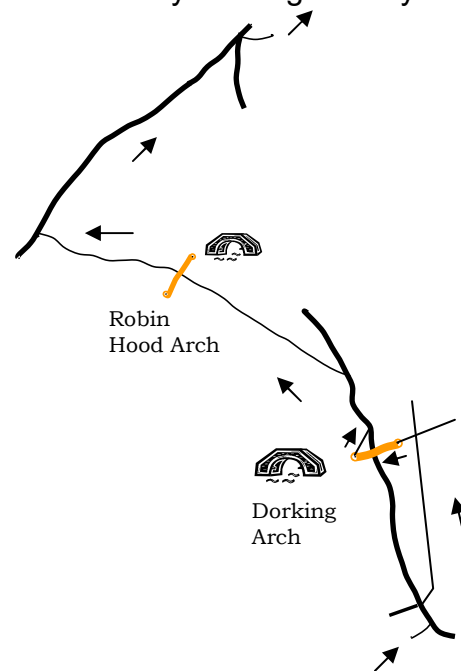
Bridge No. 4: Dorking Arch. This is the largest Lovelace bridge and the most elaborate. It has arrowslits in the parapets.

Immediately after the bridge go **right** steeply down the grass slope to join the road. (Care! very steep with deceptive footholds – at the bottom there’s a gap giving you two steps down – but watch for traffic! Some walkers went back over the bridge and used a path on the right.)

Turn **left** on the road, continuing for only 30m, and, at a fingerpost, take a bridleway forking off **left**. This has a fence on the right and runs through Round Wood. After about 300m downhill, you pass under ...

Bridge No. 5: Robin Hood Arch.

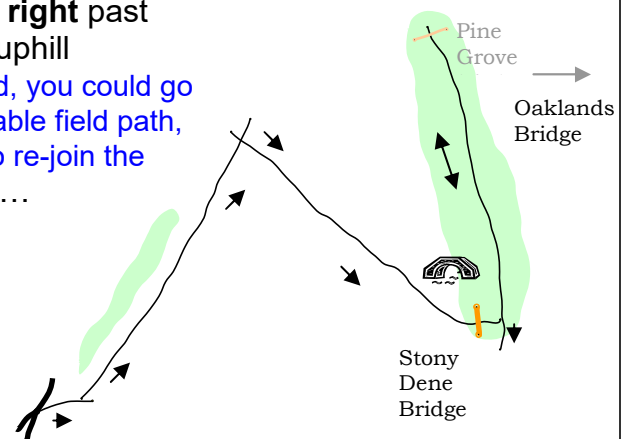
Continue downhill, back to the road Green Dene and turn **right** on it. In about 300m, you reach the junction with Crocknorth Road on the right. Do not turn sharp right into Crocknorth Road but cross it and go straight ahead into woodland on a bridleway which gradually bears left.



- 4 Follow this path, passing in front of a corrugated barn on your right, between a band of trees on the left and a meadow on the right. In about 500m, at a crossing path, turn **right** past metal gates on a rather rough bridleway running uphill between meadows. (If the path is narrow and rutted, you could go **left** through a kissing gate, along a relatively comfortable field path, exiting through a kissing gate at the top of the field, to re-join the route.) In about 500m, you enter trees and reach...

Bridge No. 6: Stony Dene Bridge. This was the first bridge to be restored. The wooden noticeboard beside it gives an account.

Continue after the bridge for 35m to a crosspaths with a 3-way fingerpost and a marker post.



Decision point. The site of **Pine Grove**, one of the lost bridges, is a short distance from here. To visit it, turn **left** at the crosspaths and proceed for about 500m. The site is in a slight dip in the path and some of the brickwork can be seen. Another existing bridge **Oaklands Bridge** is near here but it is on private land and cannot be visited. You now need to retrace your steps back to the crosspaths.

- 5 Turn **right** at the crosspaths. (If you made the optional trip to the Pine Grove site, continue straight on at the crosspaths.) Ignore one crossing path and, in 200m go straight over an oblique crossing path. In another 150m you pass the site of the lost **Horse Close** bridge. The path passes through Oaklands Wood and Pump Pond Wood, going over crossing paths, and in about another 300m runs alongside meadows on the right. *Bluebells are plentiful in spring in the woods here.* On reaching the far corner of the meadows, avoid the path right that follows the fence and veer **left** away from the meadow into trees and downhill, very soon passing under ...



Bridge No. 7: Meadow Plat Bridge. This is the narrowest of the Lovelace bridges.

You meet a driveway coming from the right. Keep **left** on it, heading towards a house on your left. At the end of the driveway, turn **right** on a narrow bridleway. This path passes a house on the left, joins its driveway and continues for another 400m between fields to the road, *Crocknorth Road* again. Turn **right** on the road.

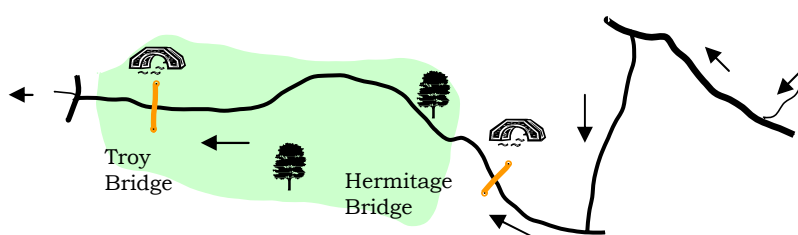
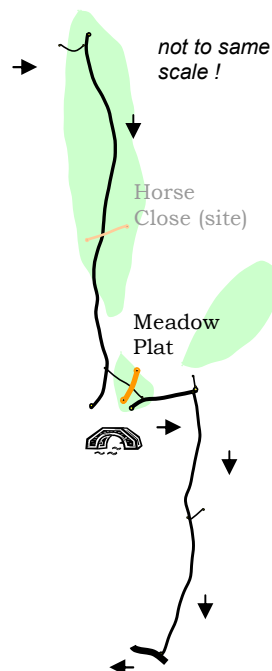
- 6 In 300m, after a dip, turn **left** on a wide signposted bridleway running beside a meadow on your left. In 450m, at a T-junction, turn **right** on a dirt byway called *Sheepwalk Lane*. The drive runs past *The Hermitage* and, soon after, passes under...

Bridge No. 8: Hermitage Bridge. This bridge is in a rather dark part of the lane. A private road runs over it.

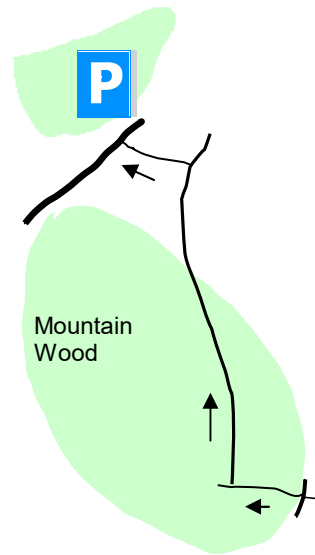
Continue along Sheepwalk Lane for nearly another 1 km through impressive woodland to pass under...

Bridge No. 9: Troy Bridge. This is one of the larger bridges and is in rather a state of disrepair.

Continue for a short distance further and reach a major crossing track, the left track leading to a timberyard and the right track being *Honeysuckle Bottom*.



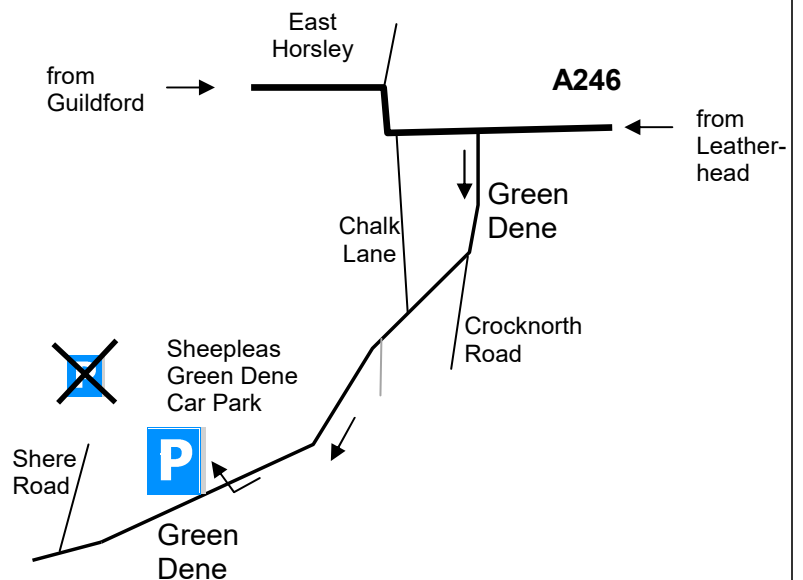
- 7 Continue straight over the crossing, a fraction to the left, to a footpath opposite. The path rises very steeply on a short stretch which can be quite tiring at the end of this walk. As you approach the top of the climb, you pass a yew tree on your right with a very wide trunk. 30m after it look for a narrow unmarked but clear path under a large pine tree over a shallow bank that forks away right through rhododendrons. Turn **right** on this path. It runs straight through pleasant woodland and soon widens into a good forestry path, taking you gently downhill. About 500m from the turn it begins to curve right and comes out of the trees into a more open area. About 60m into this open area, look for a marker post pointing to a very narrow path on your left. Turn sharp **left** on this path which quickly leads you down on an eccentric course to the road opposite the car park where the walk began.



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Getting there

By car: to get to the **Sheepleas Green Dene car park**, East Horsley, from the London area, take the Leatherhead-Dorking Road, the A246. After the junction with traffic lights at Effingham, go over 1 km (nearly 1 mile) towards Guildford, till you pass the sign for East Horsley and the road widens. Here look out for a signpost on the left to *Green Dene, Sheepleas and Shere*. This is Green Dene. (If coming from the Guildford direction, this will be on your *right*.) Follow this lane for a *total* of 2 km=1¼ miles, avoiding two left forks (Crocknorth Road and the very rough Honeysuckle Bottom), always in the direction of *Shere*. The Green Dene car park is on your right.



By bus: Bus 479 from Guildford, Banstead, Bookham or Leatherhead Railway Stations. Get out on the A246 road at the *Salmons Road* stop. See front of walking notes for your starting point.