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## Headley and Langley Vale

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Distance: 6¼ km=4 miles or 8 km=5 miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

Date written: 8-jun-2020

Author: Zweigknospe

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Refreshments: Headley

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

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*Stud farms, woodland trails, secret paths, flowery meadows, church, pub, Soldiers sculpture, Cherry Avenue, naval monuments*

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### In Brief

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This is a walk through horse breeding country, perfect at any time in the year, but especially in early summer where you can marvel at the spectacular oceans of white ox-eye daisies that fill one valley after another. The route goes under the M25 motorway twice, but quickly leaves the traffic noise behind. The walk takes a path, which is a new local secret, over the valleys and through little woods, part of the 1914-2014 Centenary project. One longer option takes you to the **Soldiers** memorial field.



This walk is also a *pub walk*, based at the *Cock Inn* on Church Lane, a popular and well-laid-out pub and restaurant in an ideal setting near the church. If you park here, please be sure to use the pub and restaurant either before or after this walk. (For enquiries, ring 01372-377258.)



? There are some nettles on parts of this walk, so shorts may be uncomfortable. Boots were not needed when this walk was researched in early summer and the paths were fairly dry in winter too. With only two stiles and no main roads, your dog is welcome on this walk, but please be careful in the paths that run close to the horse paddocks.

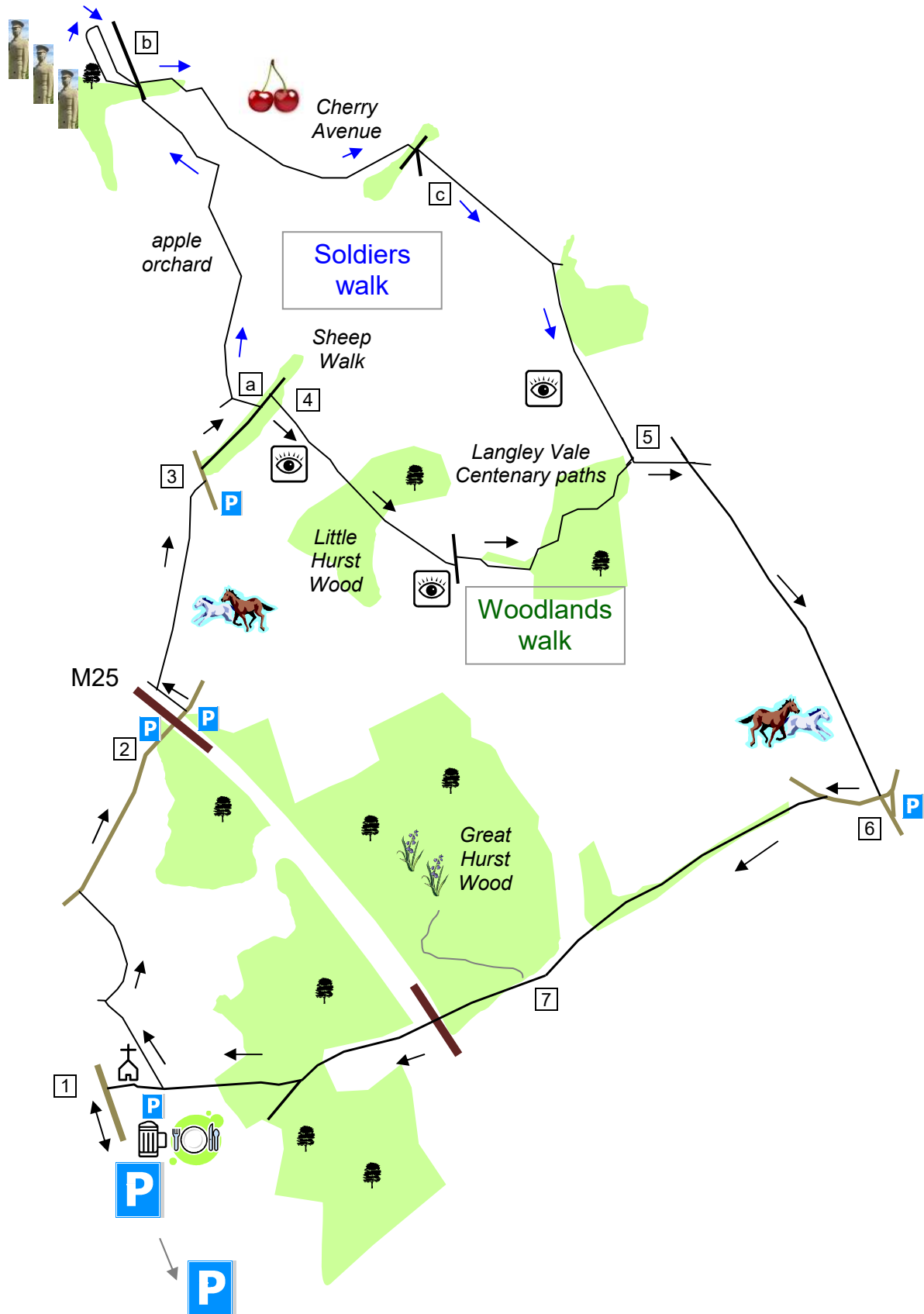


The walk begins at the *Cock Inn* in Headley, Surrey, postcode **KT18 6LE**, gridref TQ205548, [www.w3w.co/lots.hiking.covers](http://www.w3w.co/lots.hiking.covers). Other possible starting points are: (1) the main Headley Heath car park with a 1km hop each way (you can avoid the road for the entire route, along parallel paths, on the *left* as far as the first (Leech Lane) road junction, then switch to the *right* for the rest of the route); (2) Hurst Lane, ([www.w3w.co/wide.fingernails.budget](http://www.w3w.co/wide.fingernails.budget)), just before or just after the M25 underpass (see the notes); (3) in Walton-on-the-Hill, either by the Mere Pond with a 1km hop each way (see the “Walton-on-the-Hill” walk) or somewhere near the triangular junction of Ebbisham Lane and Hurst Road. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

# The Walk



On the far side of the car park of the *Cock Inn*, there are the *Headley Village Stores and Tearoom* (open 8.30 to 3.30), in case you need purchase a snack or two before starting out.



- 1 From the car park of the *Cock Inn*, go out to the road turn **right** and immediately **right** again on a driveway leading to *Headley Church of St Mary The Virgin*.

*Headley began as a tiny settlement in the manor of Hallega, which means "clearing in the heather". Headley Church goes back to Norman times but it was rebuilt around 1850 by the Victorian restorer of castles and churches, Anthony Salvin. The rector from 1916 to 1941 was T.E.R. Phillips the astronomer and meteorologist who mapped the swirling gaseous surface of Jupiter.*

Go through the lichgate into the churchyard. Turn immediately **right** and **left** along a cypress avenue ([see important note at end!](#)), leading to another lichgate with a small circular swing-gate. Turn immediately **left**, at a yellow arrow, on a crossing path, with the hedge on your left. You pass rolling horse pastures on your right with views on a clear day as far as London. At a 3-way junction at the end of the pasture, turn **right**. This path leads between hedges and, in 300m, reaches a road, Hurst Lane, next to the Wingfield Stud. Turn **right** on the road.



- 2 In 350m, the road passes Gasston Stables opposite which there are a few parking spaces along a strip on your left, and goes under the M25 motorway. (There is space to park on the right here too.) Immediately after the underpass, turn **left** by a large metal gate and unneeded steps on a wide footpath. In only 80m, at a truncated fingerpost, go **right** over a stile onto a (periodically) roped-off path beside a horse paddock, leaving the traffic noise behind. Another stile takes you onto a narrow path between fences. More paddocks follow, many with prancing or nuzzling thoroughbreds, a constant feature of this walk. In early summer the white ox-eye daisies give you another foretaste. You pass a horse exercise arena. *On your left you can see a white fence, part of a large training circuit belong to the racehorse trainer Adam West.* Your path finally zigzags to reach the Walton Road. Turn **left** on this road.

- 3 In only 30m, turn **right** on a wide bridleway signed to *Tattenham Corner* and *Langley Vale Wood*. This is the Sheep Walk, well-named for obvious historical reasons. After 250m on this wide country highway you see on your left a generous wooden swing-gate.

**Decision Point.** You now have a choice for the middle section. For the **Woodlands Walk** (1¼ km = ¾ mile) simply continue with the next paragraph. To find the **Soldiers Walk** (3 km = 2 miles) skip to the end of this guide. Both walks meet again at the **Soldiers Bench**.

*The Langley Vale Wood project, begun fittingly in 2014, is both a memorial to honour the war dead, and also a nature reserve. There are plans to open a Visitor Centre with information about the extensive wildlife. Langley Vale Wood contains a memorial to the soldiers of the First World War, including Cherry Avenue with local stories from the war printed on boards; the Regiment of Trees with 12 stone soldiers and eighty trees; Jutland Wood, where 6,097 trees have been planted to remember that number of British sailors lost in the Battle of Jutland. Langley Vale Wood is a huge project spanning parts of Epsom and Ewell, Reigate and Banstead and Mole Valley. There is now (2023) a series of wooden monuments remembering the ships lost at the battle of Jutland. Each one is a ship with the number of lives lost and survivors. At the top of this series is a metal statue of a sailor with a couple of new benches to sit on. There are similar linked projects in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.*

**Woodlands Walk.** Ignore the swing-gate but, just 5m later, turn **right** through a tall wooden swing-gate onto a wonderful meadow of tall grass, along a mown strip.



You have reached the highlight of this walk, one of the many paths that have been laid out by the Woodland Trust as part of the *Langley Vale First World War Centenary Woods*.



- 4 *Headley Church, where you began, in prominent on the horizon on your right.* The hillside is planted with saplings which will eventually turn this into a shady walk. At the bottom, your path goes through a similar tall wooden swing-gate into Little Hurst Wood, dominated by tall ash trees at the start and ending in a hazel coppice. Ignore a junction on your left, soon coming out into another valley which has a generous wildflower fringe. Continue through a tall wooden swing-gate, going down another mown strip. The white ox-eyes are especially prevalent here and skylarks chirrup above as you pass through another tree plantation. Another gate leads out to a wide track, known as the Trial Course. Turn **left** and immediately **right** onto narrow path between fields. In 50m keep **right** and **left** around the wide hedgerow, passing under electricity lines. Your path turns left, rises in the meadow and turns right into the woodland of Round Wood. Keep strictly to the main path as it snakes through the wood, through a beech coppice. Finally you emerge from the wood onto a grassy hillside. The path on the left down the hillside (*not on your route*) leads to Epsom Downs (*see the walk "Epsom Downs and Walton-on-the-Hill"*) but your route will continue after a possible breather, thanks to an elaborately carved seat.



*The Soldier's Bench, one of several pieces of sculpture of the Langley Vale project, is an elaborately carved wooden seat shows a badger, a squirrel a helmet and boots, another touching memorial to the soldiers of WWI.*

- 5 After a welcome break facing the splendid view, as though getting up off the seat, turn **left** and **left** again on a path which runs beside a field on your right. You come through a large wooden swing-gate to reach a junction with a chalky path, a major



bridleway joining Epsom and Walton-on-the-Hill. Turn **right** on this straight narrow path, passing a series of horse paddocks on your right. After 500m, ignore a stile on your left (it leads to Walton-on-the-Hill) and continue onwards, passing stables and eventually a house, after which the path becomes tarmac. You come to a road junction.

- 6 Turn immediately **right** on Hurst Road and follow the road downhill for 150m till you emerge from the trees. Fork **left** here onto a bridleway between metal posts, just to the left of the gates of the Pony Club. This wide shady path (partially cleared with a new hedge in 2021) leads between horse jumps and paddocks for nearly 400m, and runs through a small wood. Your path now runs across an open valley before passing an even larger wood on your right, Great Hurst Wood. A path joins you from the left.

Almost opposite this junction, you may notice a narrow fenced-off path (*not part of this walk*) leading right, over a grounded wire fence, into the trees. This path was one end of an extraordinary route, almost 1 mile in length, through Great Hurst Wood, coming out at the other end via a regular brand-new wooden swing-gate onto Hurst Road, opposite the start of the Trial Course track. Because of fallen debris, it is hard to follow at the start and needs perseverance. The first section goes parallel to the bridleway: if you look to your right after 150m, you can see it as it abruptly bends right uphill into the depths of this great unknown wood.

- 7 Stay on the bridleway, soon passing under the M25 motorway. Ignore an uphill track on your left, soon entering woodland. After 100m under the trees you reach a 3-way fingerpost. Fork **right** here on a wide uphill path. At the top, your path goes by a metal gate and runs between paddocks. At a crossing path, go ahead through the lichgate into the churchyard. (*Or, if you did not start in Headley and do not want to see the church, the pub or the shop, turn **right** on the crossing path*). Continue past the church, down to the road and turn **left** back to the *Cock Inn*, where the walk began.

## The Soldiers Walk

- a Turn **left** through this wooden swing-gate into a field of rough grass. In 70m, at a T-junction with a narrow path on your left, turn **right** through a gap in the hedge into a much larger field of grass. Your path is a wide mown strip down the centre of the field, through an ocean of yellow ragwort and white yarrow. Your path slowly winds right, then left, then right again, with views ahead to Epsom Downs, including the Grandstand. After ½ km, you reach a junction of hedges with a choice of paths. Go **left** into a smaller green field. Just ahead you can see an apple orchard surrounded by a fence. Head straight for the orchard and enter via a wooden gate.



*There is a sign asking you not to pick the apples but you can eat your own picnic on one of the new tables. During fruiting times the gate is closed (to thwart raiders who lift the lot in one hit): go round the orchard to the left.* At the other side, exit through a similar gate. Your path goes between two old wooden gate posts and through a band of trees. Almost immediately there are paths on your left and right. The path on your **right** is your return route. But first, on your left is the Field of Soldiers.



*The twelve sculpted figures are the work of Patrick Walls. They show ordinary soldiers up to the rank of sergeant, plus three civilians. There is a new (2023) installation here, a sculpture by John Merrill. It's made of oak and you can walk inside and sit down. There are fragments of war poetry inscribed inside.*

**b** After your visit to the Field of Soldiers, retrace your steps to the wide farm track and cross straight over to a narrow path opposite. In 80m, your path goes **right** through the hedge and **left** along the edge of the adjoining field. In 50m turn **right** with the main path, down the centre of a large meadow. In 200m you pass through a hedge into a new field, the **Cherry Avenue**. *In all these fields you will notice that young trees have been planted everywhere, promising to a future generation of walkers that they will be walking through a wooded landscape.* On each side there are depictions of the life and experiences of soldiers who fought in WWI. You come through a hedge into another field. Follow the path to exit, via a large wooden swing-gate, through trees, to meet a very wide gravel track. This is the Sheep Walk again.

**c** Cross straight over the Sheep Walk. Ignore another wide track to the right and instead go through a new wooden swing-gate. In only 20m, fork **left** onto a green path that leads uphill across the centre of another field of grass with young trees. In 400m, at the top, **ignore** a new wooden swing gate but turn **right** onto a grassy hillside. You immediately pass a wooden sculpture, a tribute to *HMS Paragon*. *This ship was sunk in 1917 in the Dover Strait, with only 9 out of 85 survivors.* Continue straight ahead along the long grassy hillside. On each side of this grass path is a wildflower fringe. The many planted trees will mature over the years, making this a forest walk. In 200m, you enter another meadow and pass a seat with an opportunity to admire the the great views, with the spire of Headley church dominating. Continue to the top where on your left is an elaborately carved wooden seat.



Now re-join the main walk from Section **5**.

**Important note for walkers through Headley Churchyard.** Although this is a public footpath, please remember that this is *consecrated ground*. Keep strictly to the pathway without straying onto the graves. Respect the temporary tape barriers which were placed in winter 2020-21 for a building project. Please be careful when opening and closing the little circular gate!

## Getting there

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By car: Headley is signed off the A24, Leatherhead bypass. There is a left fork ½ mile after the big A243-A24 roundabout, taking you to the northern part of the village; there is also a left turn at the next, smaller, roundabout taking you to the southern part, near Headley Heath.

By bus/train: bus 21 from Leatherhead, not Sunday. Check the timetables.

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