



Gunpowder and Deep Silence Newlands Corner, St Martha's, Blackheath, Shere

Distance: 17 km=10 miles or 13 km=8 miles easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Surrey

Date written: 5-jan-2011

Author: Schwebefuss

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Refreshments: Chilworth, Shere, Albury

Last update: 29-jul-2022

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

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

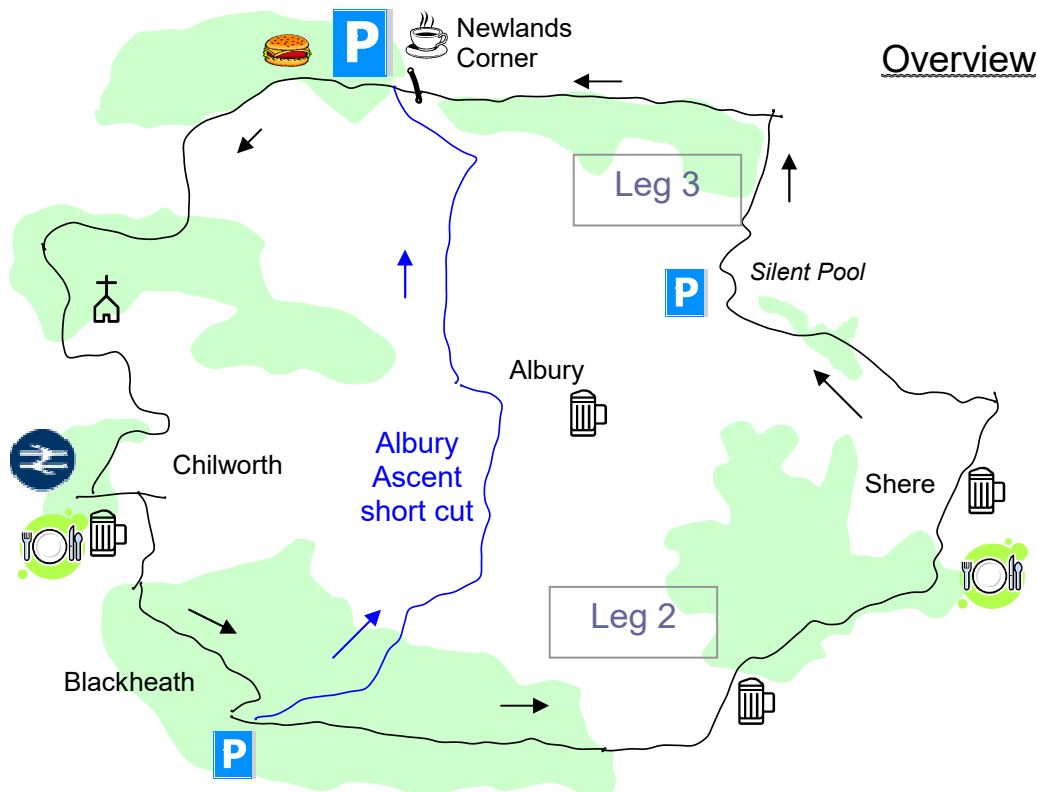
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Lake, village, woodland, water, river, hills, heath

In Brief



This is an absolutely tip-top walk giving you wonderful views of the North Downs and Greensand Hills with some fascinating feature at almost every mile. As you might expect from this series, the route takes some unusual paths that even the seasoned walker may not know. In the summer there are a lot of nettles, so shorts not advisable.



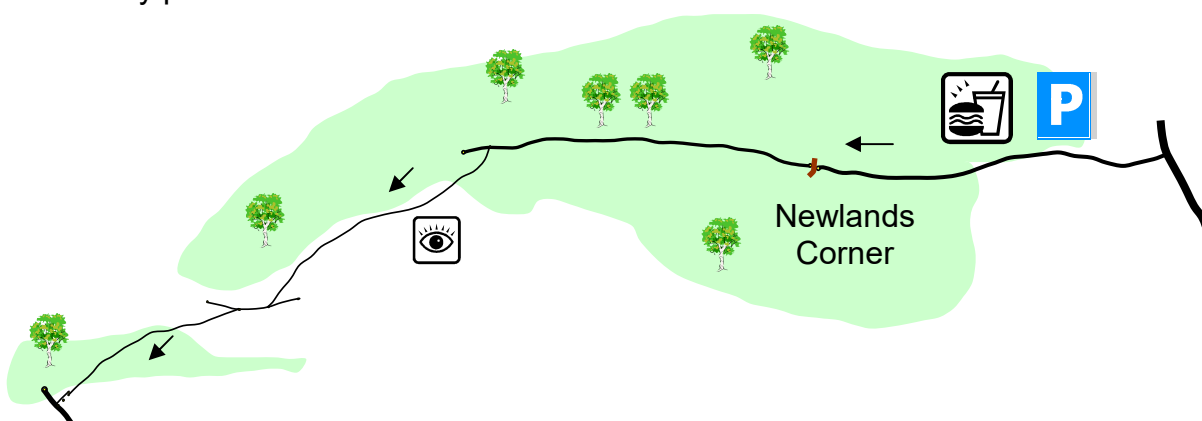
Nominally, the walk begins at **Chilworth station** or at the **Newlands Corner** car park (**postcode GU4 8SE** grid ref 042492). There is now no charge for parking. However, with so many evenly-spaced excellent places to stop on the way, this is

almost a “start-where-you-like” walk. Other first-class starting points are **Blackheath** (grid ref 036462, **postcode GU4 8RB**) and the **Silent Pool** (grid ref 060487, **postcode GU5 9BW**), placing the steep climb at the start. For locations, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Leg 1: Newlands Corner to Chilworth 4½ km=3 miles

- 1 Walk the whole length of the car park away from the main road and continue past a barrier on a wide track and then through another barrier. Just over 300m from the car park, you see on your left, at a *Deer Trail* marker post, a wide gap in the trees and the open hillside. Fork **left** through the gap. You now have a wonderful view across the valley to the Greensand Hills beyond, with a taste of what is to come. Veer **right** keeping to the top of the slope passing several seats. The shallower sides of Holmbury and Pitch Hills are straight ahead, with Hascombe Hill to the right and, in the distance, the unmistakable long straight outline of Black Down in West Sussex. Stay on the tree-line, gently descending, until you meet a crossing path with a wooden post. Turn half **right** on the crossing path, going past a fingerpost with a yellow arrow, indicating that you have joined the North Downs Way (NDW). In just 5m, take the **left** fork downhill between trees. The path goes rather steeply down between trees and eventually past a broken wooden barrier to a lane.



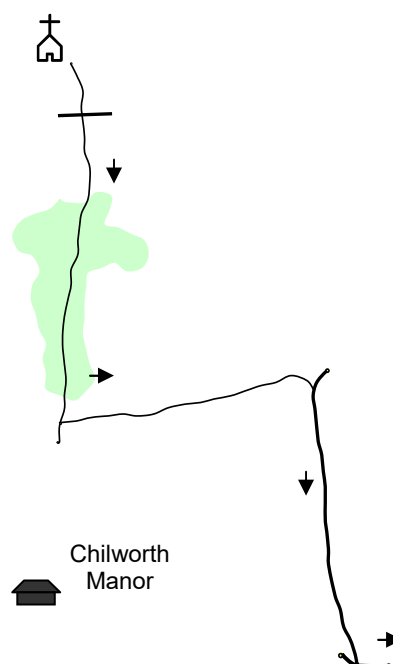
- 2 Cross straight over the lane and up steps on the other side to a footpath which bends left to run parallel to the lane. On your right is a large meadow with a lovingly restored natural hedge. The path touches the road briefly and runs through trees again before reaching a house. Turn **left** at the house by a wooden gate and immediately **right** at a fingerpost indicating the NDW. After about 100m through the woods, you reach a junction with two posts where the NDW continues ahead. Instead, turn **right**, following a sign for the *self-guided trail*. Follow this wide path through birches and fine tall conifers. Soon the meadow and valley on the right come into view. Eventually, the path winds uphill and curves left. At a fork, by a marker post, keep **left** uphill, still with the self-guided trail, ignoring the right fork downhill. At a T-junction with



a wide sandy path, turn **right** in the direction of a purple arrow. In 50m, turn **left**, also at a purple arrow. This path leads up to St Martha's Church-on-the-Hill. *For a picture and brief history of this famous little church, see another walk in the series [Dragonflies and a Church-on-the-Hill](#).*

- 3 Go through the churchyard by a gate in the stone wall and exit through another wooden gate at the bottom (the far southern side) between two carved yews. [The villages of Chilworth and Albury are now visible in the valley below](#). Take the descending sandy path ahead. The path crosses a bridleway and becomes very steep, sunken and narrower, and great care may be needed. Eventually the path emerges from the trees and Chilworth Manor is now in view down on the right.

Chilworth Manor stands on the site of a monastery which was dissolved under Henry VIII. The present house dates back to about 1600 with major additions later, especially after 1720 under Sarah, widow of the Duke of Marlborough, who built the fine garden terraces. The garden can be visited as part of the National Garden Scheme.

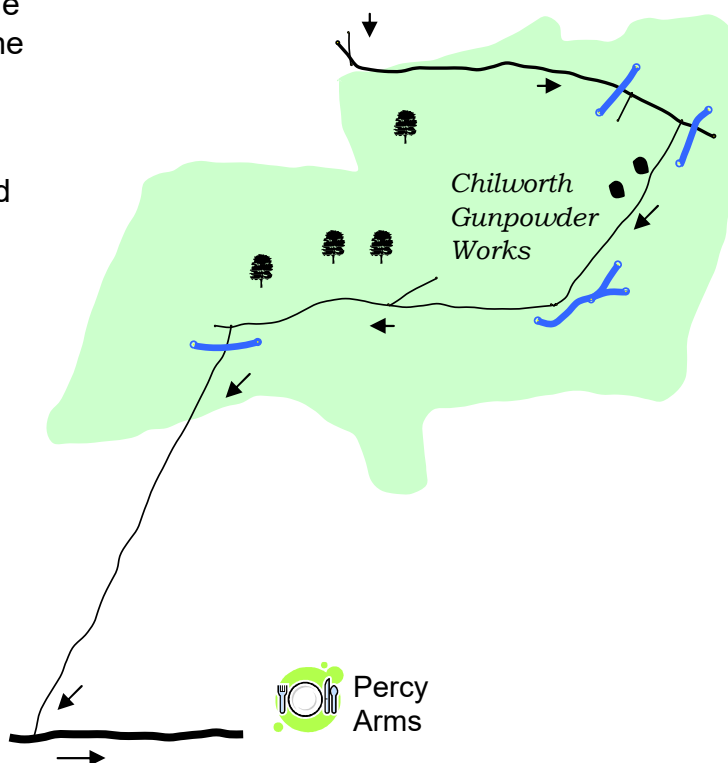


Before you reach the house, turn sharp **left** by a derelict wooden swing-gate* onto a permissive footpath. [**2022 care! the gate may have disappeared.**] The path goes uphill at first. Keep straight ahead along the right-hand side of this fine meadow with great uninterrupted views to the right. At the end, go **right** through a wooden gate, down steps and turn **right** on a bridleway. *This path is part of the "Downs Link" that runs all the way from St Martha's to the South Downs Way and ultimately to the sea.* At the end, turn **left** on a broad track.



- 4 The track soon crosses a bridge over the Tillingbourne stream. In 10m, **ignore** the wide path on the right and continue for another 50m. Turn **right** here, just before another bridge, on a clear path. This path leads to the remains of the old gunpowder works [**Dec 2020: now almost fully restored**] which can be explored.

Chilworth Gunpowder Works were established in 1626 by the East India Company. At peak times, such as during the Napoleonic Wars, the works employed 600 people. The location was ideal because of its isolation and the presence of fast running water to power the mills. Charcoal was available from nearby alder trees and the saltpetre, instead of being imported, was later manufactured from boiled down guano and urine, leaving only sulphur to be shipped in. The works switched to making cordite –



related to dynamite, Alfred Nobel's invention. Explosives were stored and re-processed in nearby millhouses. One such millhouse was devastated by an explosion so strong that St Martha's church, half a mile away, collapsed. Such fatal accidents were all too common. Perhaps surprisingly in the light of history, the mills were taken over in 1885 by a German company. During World War I, the factory was defended with anti-aircraft guns and the landmark St Martha's Church was camouflaged. In 1915 a German Zeppelin looking for the gun-powder works dropped bombs near Guildford. The only casualties were a swan and 17 chickens. The works finally closed in 1920. They are now an archeological site, preserved by Guildford Council.

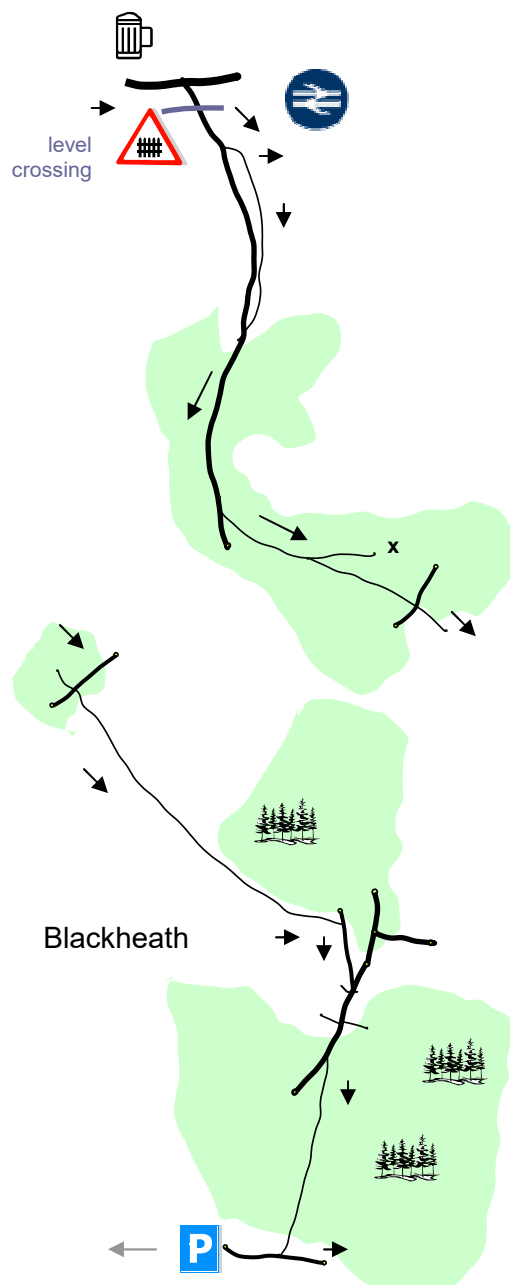
The path curves right by a confluence with a wooden snail (now badly weathered but (Feb 2022) a replacement is on its way) on the other bank in memory of a pupil at the nearby infant school. Another path soon joins from the right and soon you reach a picnic area. Fork **left** here over a bridge and continue straight ahead on a path between meadows. The path leads out to the main road at Chilworth. Turn **left** on the road shortly reaching the *Percy Arms* pub and restaurant.



The Percy Arms pub offers several real ales and is equally famous as a restaurant especially known for its grill providing pork ribs and steaks, all with a South African flavour. They also sometimes offer pétanque in the excellent garden. The Percy Arms is open all day every day.

Leg 2: Chilworth to Shere 7 km=4½ miles

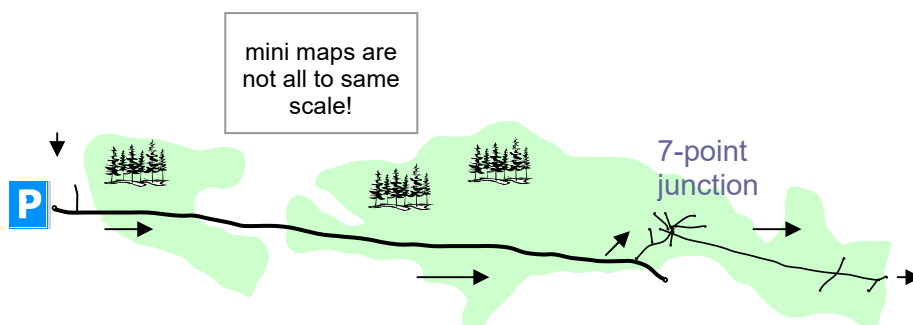
- 1 Opposite the pub, turn **right** through the level crossing by Chilworth Station onto Sample Oak Lane. In no more than 100m, just after *Oak House*, turn **left** and immediately **right** on a footpath which takes a higher route parallel to the road. [Jul 2021: overgrown and impassable: use in winter? as better than the road.] It later rejoins the road. Just over 200m further, past a house called *Pilar Lodge*, fork **left** at a fingerpost on a bridgeway [also overgrown!]. Near the end of a fence, fork **right** at a yellow arrow, thus leaving the blue-waymarked bridgeway. At the top of this narrow sunken path, cross straight over a wide sandy track onto a sandy path with trees on your left and open heath on your right. This path meets another crossing track by some wooden railings, our friend the Downs Link path. Cross over the track onto a horse track across open heath where the war memorial can be seen [2014: harder to see, now that the heath is peppered with many young trees].
- 2 The track eventually reaches a tarmac lane. Turn **right**. In 25m ignore paths left and right. Soon after, just as the lane begins to bend right, turn diagonally **left** through a gap, as directed by a fingerpost [Aug 2021: grounded] onto a bridgeway. (Don't miss this turn!) In only 5m, at a T-junction, turn **right**. The bridgeway soon leads you to the main car park at Blackheath.



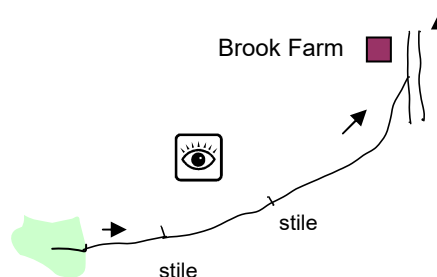
Blackheath, called Blackfelde before the Normans, was one of the 'hundreds' of Surrey, meaning a subdivision of the county where leaders met regularly. It encompasses eleven nearby parishes including Albury, St Martha's, Shere and Hascombe. The vast beautiful heath itself is a prime centre for rambling, orienteering and geocaching. The famous fingerpost at the village crossroads has pointers indicating THIS WAY, THAT WAY, SOMEWHERE ELSE.

Decision point. If you would like to take the shorter route back to Newlands Corner, missing Shere and the Silent Pool, go to the end of this text and do the **Albury Ascent**. Otherwise, continue with the next stage.

- 3 Turn **left** through the car park and go past a metal gate onto a wide straight track that leads across the common between pines. Your route is shared by horseriders and probably many other walkers. The track re-enters pines and runs almost straight for some distance, passing through several open spaces. In a total of 1¼ km, the track finally bends right, heading towards a clearing in the distance. **Leave** the track here, before it bends, by forking **left** by a post with a white-on-black arrow. In 30m, fork **right** to arrive at a complex junction of seven paths. Take the path that is **second** from the right. There is a marker post with a yellow arrow and the number 235 to the left of the path. In 200m go over a new stile next to a wire barrier ([Aug 21 : decorated with knitted patterns](#)). Follow the straight path between pines and, when you approach a meadow, fork **left** to a metal gate.

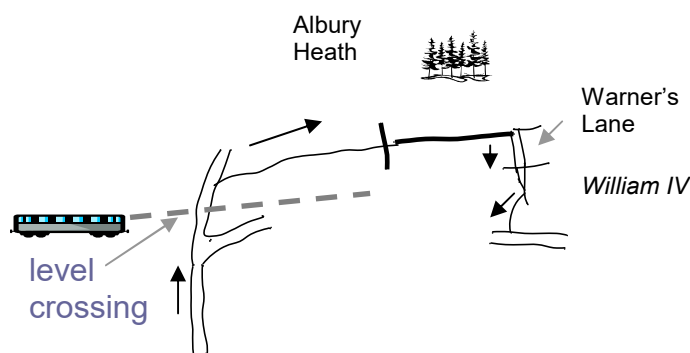


- 4 Go through the gate into a large meadow. You have joined part of the Fox Way. There is now a fine view of the North Downs with the hamlet of Brook ahead. Follow the path between horse paddocks. The path joins a farm track and ends at a tarmac road. Turn **left** on the road. The road passes Brook Farm on the left with its magnificent redbrick house.

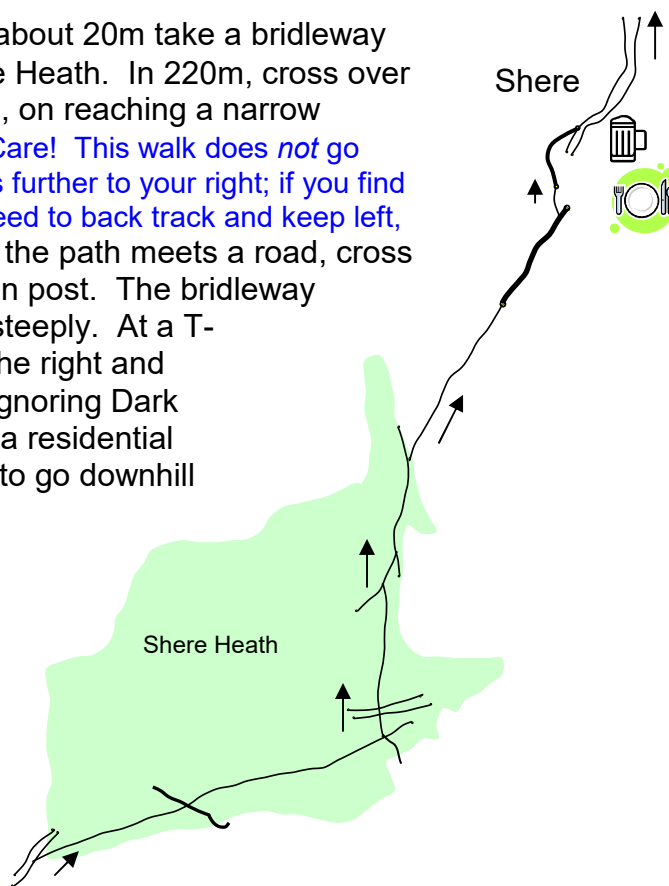


Blackheath Common

- 5 Ignore a road forking right and continue over a level railway crossing. Immediately after the crossing, turn **right** on a narrow path between banks. Once out of the very thick bracken, keep straight ahead on a distinct grass path across the south (right-hand) side of Albury Heath. Cross a wide track by a redbrick shed and continue ahead on another wide track towards houses. In 50m, at a junction of drives, keep straight ahead, slightly left. Always keep the Heath on the left and houses and gardens on the right. 40m after passing a drive by a house called *Heather Lea*, turn **right** on Warner's Lane. Where you reach a junction of drives, keep straight on and, at the end, turn **right** over a stile. The path leads down through a small farm plot and out into the car park of the *William IV* pub. (For more details of the pub, see the walk *Shere and Little London*.)



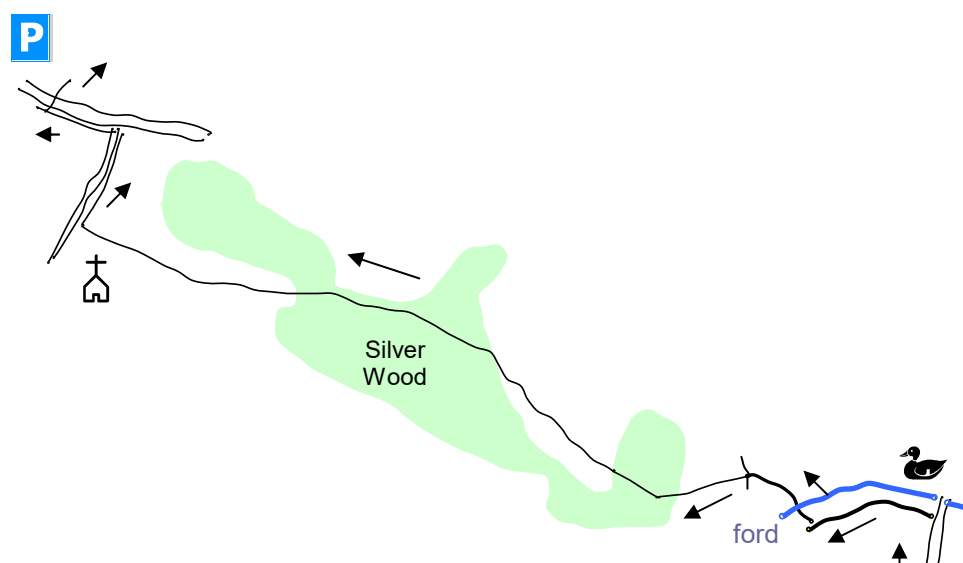
- 6 Turn **left** up the road from the pub. In about 20m take a bridleway forking off **right**. This leads over Shere Heath. In 220m, cross over a wide diagonal path. In another 180m, on reaching a narrow diagonal bridlepath, veer **left** onto it. [Care! This walk does *not* go through the Shere Heath car park which is further to your right; if you find yourself in this little mossy car park, you need to back track and keep left, or go out to the road and turn left.] When the path meets a road, cross the road to a path opposite by a wooden post. The bridleway becomes sunken and descends more steeply. At a T-junction, turn **right**. A path joins from the right and you reach a fork. Take the **right** fork, ignoring Dark Lane which is on the left. On reaching a residential road, keep ahead. As the road begins to go downhill by the last house, fork **left** on a narrow path. Cross over a drive, continue between fences and thence down a tarmac drive and wheel **right** with the drive to the main road. Turn **left** on the road down through the delightful village of Shere. The *William Bray*, an upmarket pub-restaurant, and the *White Horse*, a more basic establishment, are on the left. On the right is the village square with St James's Church. Ahead is the little high street (with snacks and an excellent ice-cream shop) and on the left the Tillingbourne River.



Shere was once an industrial village known for weaving, tanning and iron working. In the 1600s, along a 12-mile length of the Tillingbourne Stream there were as many as 20 mills. The last tannery closed as recently as 1989. The prosperity that all this brought to the town is evident from the fine timbered houses. Today it is often named as the prettiest village in Surrey. Shere's church of St James is a delightful statement in all that is best in an English country church: its location, its twelfth-century tower visible from the hills around and its interior with too many features to do justice to here. With the lychgate and a pub and craft shops, it frames the little village green.

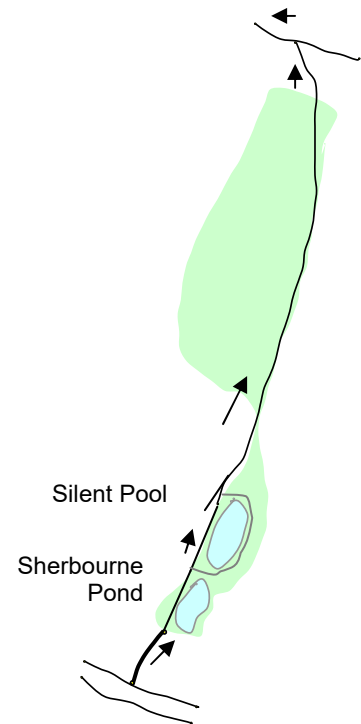
Leg 3: Shere to Newlands Corner 5 km=3½ miles

- 1 Turn **left** along Lower Street following the Tillingbourne stream with white ducks and probably lots of children and families. Pass the Old Forge and other quaint properties, a scarecrow and flowerpot men. At the next junction, go over a ford on the **right** by means of the footbridge. Soon, at a junction of drives, take a narrow footpath diagonally **left** between some houses. *There is a little Free Library opposite and a large white gate to the left.* Follow this path for some distance. It crosses a track, goes through a kissing gate and crosses an open meadow with the garden buildings and orchard of the Albury Estate on your left and fine views of the North Downs on your right. The path now runs through a kissing gate, the woodland of Silver Wood and another kissing gate, and reaches another open area, beside a smart new hedge made by *Surrey Hedgelaying Group*. Soon a church tower comes into view. *This church was built by Henry Drummond the owner of Albury Manor who "encouraged" the villagers to move to the new Albury village and founded the Catholic Apostolic church. The church building is no longer used but looks in fine condition – all a bit mysterious.* Keeping the church on your left, pass through a gate and go down a track to the road. Turn **right** along the road on a sheltered footpath. At the main A25 Shere Road, turn **left**, staying on this side of the road where there is a footpath. In 100m, at a post, turn **right** to cross carefully both carriageways and arrive at the Silent Pool car park.



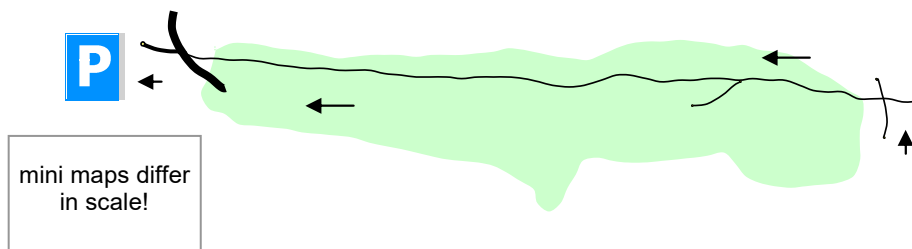
- 2 Keep ahead on a wide driveway. Just on your right is a track (not part of this route) giving you a good view of Sherbourne Pond and leading to Sherbourne Farm that is sometimes open to the public. Keep straight on, with the pond on your right, forking right to reach the Silent Pool.

The water of the deep pool is so clear because it is fed by a spring and filtered through layers of chalk. They also add minerals that give it a blue-green colour. The pool lies on a fault-line between the Lower Chalk in the north, Gault Clay and the Upper Greensand in the south. According to a ghostly legend, a beautiful woodcutter's daughter was disturbed here by a strange horseman while bathing and was lost in the depths. The horseman was even rumoured to be Prince (future King) John. If you stare into the depths at midnight you can apparently see her.



As you reach the pool, keep to the **left**, go up the steps and turn **right** onto the main path. (Note: If you wish to visit the pool first then there are some viewing points at the bottom end, but the walkway which used to go all around the pool is currently closed due to erosion: May 2016.) Keep to this path as it climbs with the Albury Organic Vineyard (whence come some fine quality sparkling and rosé wines) on the left and forest scrub on the right. You now have an ascent to the top of the Downs – the toughest part of the walk, although fairly short at just over ½ km. Near the top you enter yew trees and the path zigzags and passes by some conifers before reaching a crossing path at a fingerpost. The crossing path is on the North Downs Way (NDW).

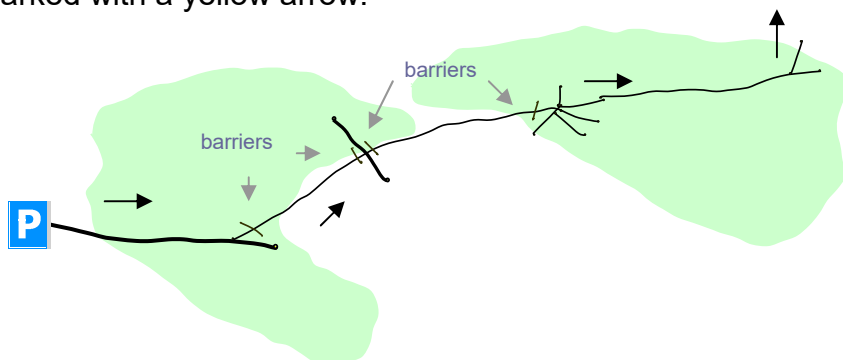
- 3 Turn **left** on the NDW. In 300m, avoid a permissive horse path that forks left and keep going on the level. Just before Newlands Corner you pass a striking new artwork: *Optohedron* by Will Nash, which is also a seat. Finally you reach the main A25 road: cross it carefully to reach the Newlands Corner car park, straight ahead, where the walk began.



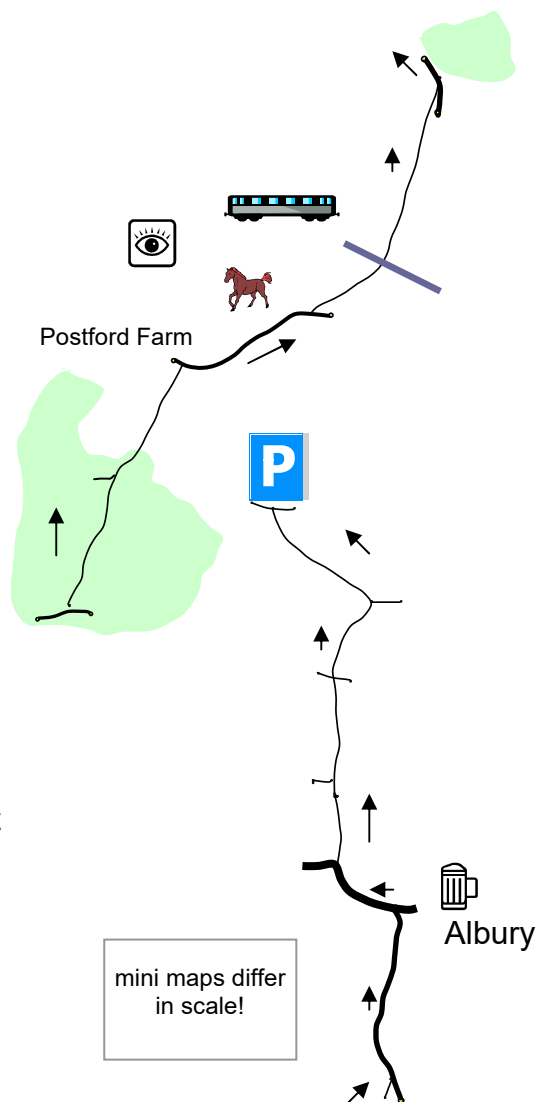
The Albury Ascent

Choose this option if you want to go direct from Blackheath to Newlands Corner, omitting Shere and the Silent Pool.

- 1 Turn **left** through the car park and go past a metal gate onto a wide straight track that leads across the common between pines. In just under 100m, after emerging from pines, leave the main wide track by forking **left** through a wooden barrier. The path leads through two more barriers either side of a crossing path and later goes through a fourth barrier to a junction of paths. A bit to your right is a path along a wide grassy strip. On your left is a path that leads to a circular horse exercise area. Avoid both of these. More directly ahead are two paths. Take the **left**-hand of the two paths, passing two blue-topped posts on your left. In just over 200m, turn **left** on a path by a post marked with a yellow arrow.



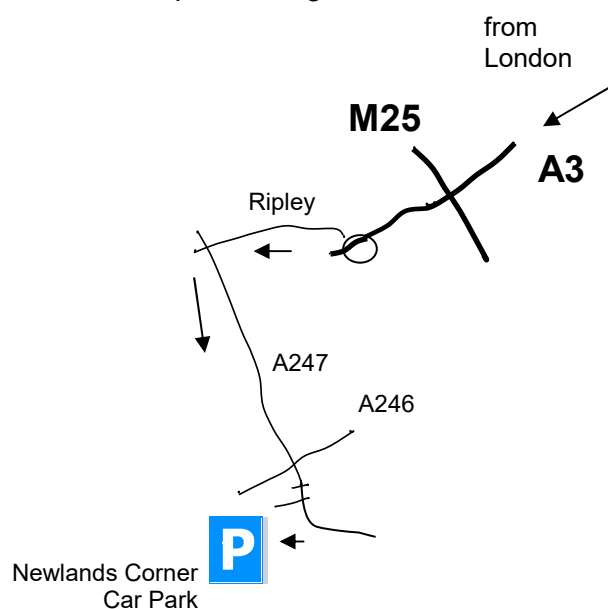
- 2 Follow the path downhill. After a while, the path passes another post with yellow arrows and runs between meadows and then through a barrier, down to a track in the small settlement of Postford Farm. Turn **right** on the track, downhill and over a bridge by a reedy pond. On reaching a horse meadow, go **left** over a stile and continue diagonally across the meadow. Aim for the far right-hand corner, ignoring a stile lower down, and cross the railway via two metal gates. Follow the fenced path alongside a meadow with good views left. The path finally leads out to a lane. Keep the same direction along the lane.



- 3 After a bend, the lane reaches the houses of Albury, ending at a tiny triangular green with an original signpost. (The *Drummond Arms* pub is a short distance on the right.) Turn **left** along the main A248 road. Stay on the road as it curves right and then left. At the bend, turn right on narrow Water Lane. The lane runs past houses and farm buildings and becomes a rough track. At a crosspaths, keep straight on. Soon the track veers right beside what appears to be a small quarry. At a junction, keep to the main chalky path as it turns **left**. After another 500m of gradual ascent, you finally reach the Newlands Corner car park.

Getting there

By car: To get to the **Newlands Corner car park** from the London area, take the A3 towards Guildford and turn off after Wisley onto the B2215, signposted Woking, through Ripley and, 2 miles=3 km after the village, turn left at a roundabout on the A247 signposted West Clandon. Follow the road through the village, past the entrance to Clandon Park and the church, to major traffic lights on the Leatherhead-Guildford road. Go straight over, uphill. The car park is at the top on the right.



By train: start at Chilworth Station.

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