



Oxted Woods

Distance: 5 km=3 miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: *The Royal Oak (Grumpy Mole)*

Map: Explorer 147 (Sevenoaks) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Long wide woodland trails, secret paths, bluebells, great pub, views

In Brief

Just south of Oxted in Surrey there is a group of ancient woodlands, popular with local families and casual walkers, but little known by ramblers who live outside the area. This walk makes a wide loop to visit each wood, with a contrasting section in open country where there is one of the great traditional Surrey pubs. (To enquire at the *Grumpy Mole*, ring 01883-722207.)



In April and early May this is a *Bluebell Walk* to rival the best we have on this site, with entire long sections carpeted as far as the eye can see in that purply blue. But all year round, this is one of the best woodland walks in the county, with a mixture of tree species that make it always interesting. There are some unexpected twists and unsigned turns and these might call on your navigation skills, especially during the return route which calls in at the pub for that leisurely hour's rest, taking refreshment on the big lawn. So, compared with one of the simpler three-milers, this walk will seem longer than the stated length.

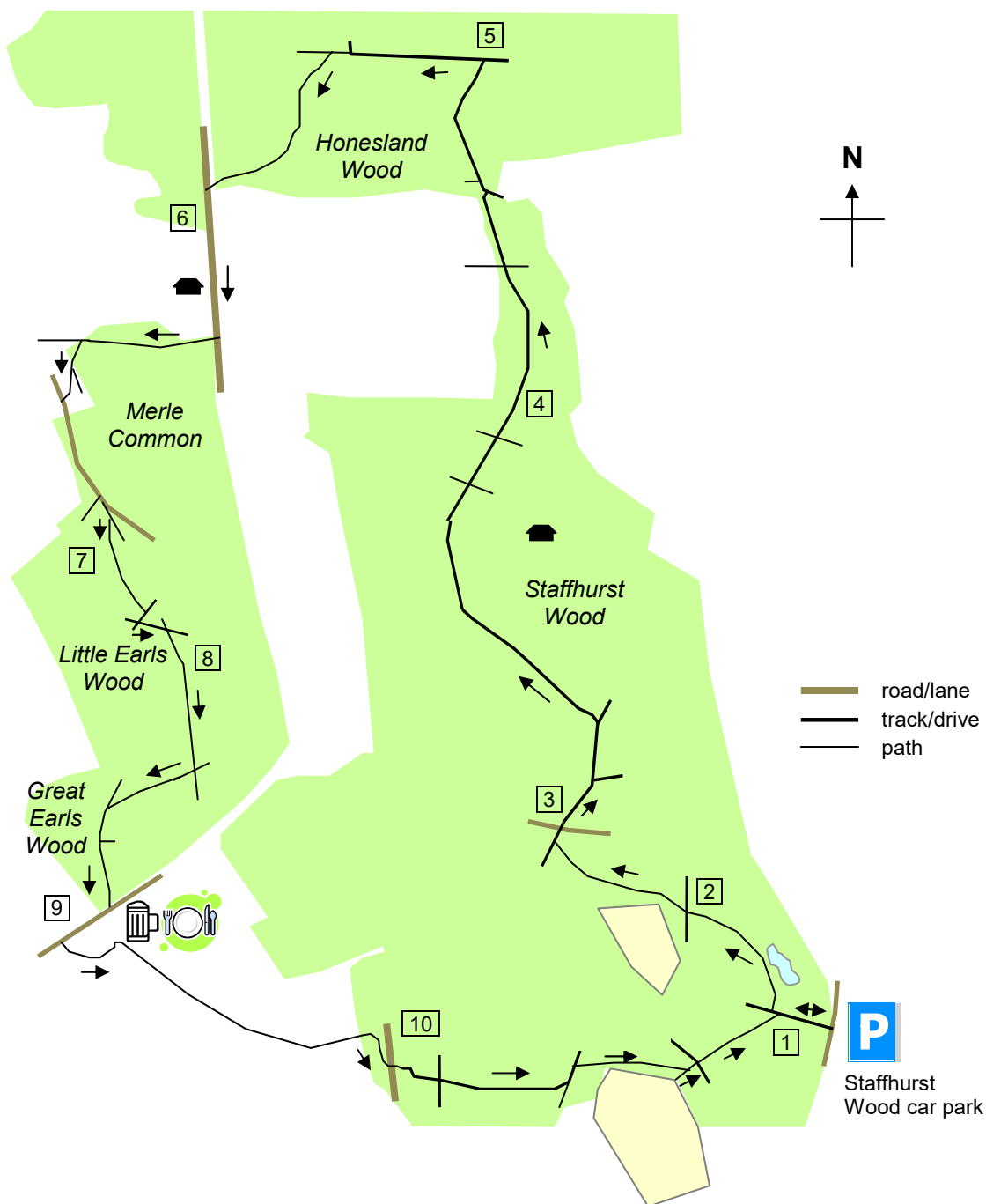


There are no nettles on this walk but shorts are not advisable, at least for the longest option, because one of the paths takes you past an area of brambles. Good strong walking shoes are fine in the warmer half of the year but at other times you may be glad to be wearing something with thicker soles and uppers. For your dog, this walk is ideal.



The walk begins at the **Staffhurst Wood car park**, Grants Lane, south of Limpsfield, Surrey, www.w3w.co/rewarding.bumpy.fakes, approximate postcode **RH8 0RH**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk




- 1 Starting in the Staffhurst Wood car park, go past a heavy metal barrier into the wood. Take a wide path straight ahead in the direction of the *Self-Guided Trail*, passing a noticeboard. In about 40m, avoid a wide path on your left. (This will be your return route.) Just 10m after this junction, turn **right** on a much narrower side path (unsigned, although it is part of the *Self-Guided Trail*). [Jun 2024: the narrow trail is unpassable because of fallen trees; until they are cleared, use the **wide path route** described below.] You pass an attractive pond on your right with tall reeds. Your path goes over a narrow petrified wooden bridge. The atmosphere here is light, due to tall oaks, but quickly darkens as you enter a thick group of beech and yew. The path crosses a marshy section. (You can avoid the marsh completely by taking a very wide dry circuit round on the right, beginning by forking

right in front of a yew tree.) You arrive at a wide crossing path, Cross straight over onto a wide diagonal path on the opposite side.

Wide path route. This route is used to avoid the narrow trail which was blocked by fallen trees. Ignore the narrow side path and continue on the main path for another 150m, till it ends at a T-junction in front of a big meadow (a sea of buttercups in June). Turn **right** for 70m to a junction. (On your right is the intended narrow path, blocked by a tree.) Turn **left** here on a wide diagonal path. Continue with the next section.

- 2 This broad, rather irregular horse path runs alongside a meadow partly visible on your left. After 100m the path curves a fraction right and runs for a further 50m through dense woods. Finally you pass the remains of a wooden barrier and arrive at a 3-way junction with two more wide paths. Fork **right**, quickly reaching a tarmac lane. Cross the lane to go through a wooden swing-gate, past a *Welcome* sign for Staffhurst Wood.

The 51-hectare Staffhurst Wood dates back to Saxon times. It was restored as a nature reserve after WW2 and is a nationally important site boasting 200 species of plant and 288 species of moth including the rare lead-coloured drab moth. (There are 60,000 species of moth in the world, compared to 17,500 species of butterfly; only a tiny minority attack clothes.) The small fields amongst the woodlands which you pass are clearings or "assarts" originally made about 700 years ago. Surrey C.C. now manage the woods in a bid to restore some of the original character of the area.

- 3  In late spring you will encounter the first extensive show of bluebells here. You will be following this wide path, almost straight on, avoiding turn-offs, for nearly 1km through Staffhurst Wood. In 80m ignore a wide path on your right. In a further 80m avoid a wide forking path on your right by staying on your main path which forks left. (As a guide, just 20m after this junction you will see on your right a large round concrete water tank.) Your path now runs smoothly, gradually wheeling right, for 400m under beeches. Look out now for a crossing path which has a wooden post on your left and an info tablet on your right. Keep straight on. In 40m the path starts to descend a little. 50m later, an official footpath with a yellow arrow intersects your wide raised path. (There is a small bench seat down on your right and, in season, an ocean of bluebells.)

Decision point. Here you have the option of taking the footpath straight to Red Lane. At the time of writing, you had to climb a 3-bar wooden fence, with a short section across a cattle pasture. Not suitable for the over-80s.

First Footpath option. Turn **left** on a wide path in the direction of a yellow arrow on a post. The path runs fairly straight through the wood, a pasture visible on your right, soon gently uphill. In 250m the path end at a T-junction. Turn **right** on a narrow path, immediately reaching a stile into a large pasture. [Jun 2024: the stile had vanished leaving a fairly easily climbable 3-bar wooden fence.] Go diagonally **left** across the corner of the pasture, heading for a stile visible in the hedge. After the stile, cross straight over the busy Red Lane onto a narrow winding fingerposted woodland path. Now resume the walk from Section 6.

Otherwise, keep straight on over the intersection on your main wide path. You are now traversing a narrow strip of woodland. In 250m an official footpath with yellow arrows crosses your route. There is a large cattle pasture on your left.

Decision point. Here you have the option of taking another footpath straight to Red Lane. The route crosses the centre of a cattle pasture. The cattle are docile, but some walkers might shy away from this option. The official exit at the other side has completely disappeared, so walkers use the same stile as the first footpath option.

Second Footpath option. Turn **left** onto the intersecting footpath, going over a (high) stile into the cattle pasture. Instead of crossing straight over (there is no stile at the other side), veer a little to the **left**, heading for a stile less than 100m from the far left-hand corner. After the stile, cross straight over the busy Red Lane onto a narrow winding fingerposted woodland path. Now resume the walk from Section **6**.

Otherwise, keep straight on. This final more adventurous option completely avoids stiles and cattle.

- 4** In a further 100m, by the far corner of the pasture, your exit from Staffhurst Wood is marked by a large wooden gate. Go through the small adjoining wooden gate (closing the bolt as the notice asks you!). You are now entering the next wood, privately owned but accessible, Honesland Wood. In 50m you reach a 3-way junction as you pass the corner of two pastures. Turn **left** here and, in 30m, ignore a minor path on your left*, staying always on the main path which curves right. After several more bends your path ends after 200m at a T-junction with another wide path. Immediately opposite is another large round concrete water tank. (*This minor path on the left probably joins your route near the exit to Red Lane, as a short cut; whether it is walkable is not known: feedback welcome!)
- 5** Turn **left** at the T-junction. This wide path runs straight for 170m and then suddenly makes a right turn. **Leave** the wide path here by continuing straight ahead on a much narrower grassy woodland path. In only 35m, look to your left for an unsigned narrow side path (*don't miss this turn!*). Turn **left** on this side path. This winding woodland path is narrow and a little overgrown, but perfectly walkable. Avoid any minor branch-offs. There are some brambles and you may need to be alert to keep to the path, but it is clear and obviously well-used. After 200m you may notice on your left a (useless) barrier of car tyres. In a further 30m you come out to the road (Red Lane) in Merle Common. Turn **left** on the road for 200m (keeping to the right-hand side, as per usual). You pass the entrance to *Mollstone Lodge* and later the large black entrance gate to another property, *Mollstone Wood*. Immediately after these houses, turn **right** at a fingerpost (*easily missed!*) onto a narrow winding woodland path.
- 6** The path leads down into the woods of Merle Common. You come out to a kind of "green" near some houses. Immediately, opposite *Mere Hill Cottage*, turn **left** on a narrow path along the edge of the "green", passing a very decayed bench seat. Fork **right** to come out soon onto the road and turn **left** on it. You will be following the road for 150m (using a footway on the right part-way). After a rise and just before a left curve, look for two signposts on your **right** pointing into the woods.
- 7** Take the **second** of the two signed footpaths. (As a rough guide, your path runs almost straight ahead.) In only 30m, take a slightly narrower **right** fork, to enter Great and Little Earls Woods, passing a *Welcome* sign. (This walk often takes the special routes in preference to the official footpath.) Your path leads over some humps and ditches. **In season, this is another outstanding area for bluebells.** In 120m you reach a T-junction with a wider path.



Turn **right** here and in 25m turn **left** on a wide crossing path. In 40m, turn **right** on a narrow crossing path.

- 8 You are on another of the special paths of the Nature Reserve. It leads over a ditch and past a *Woodland Trust Welcome* sign. In 200m, your path reaches a small clearing where there is a 4-way crossing and an info board about coppicing. Turn **right** at this crossing. In 120m you are joined by a path coming from the right. In 40m ignore a side path on your left opposite a little bench. In 100m you come through a kissing-gate beside a large wooden gate and out to a lane opposite the *Royal Oak (Grumpy Mole)* pub.



The Royal Oak was taken over recently by the Grumpy Mole chain and has become hugely popular as a seemingly-always-open pub and restaurant. The lawn with tables and the patio offer a view over the countryside. Food and drink are available daily from noon till late.

- 9 After a possible pause for refreshment, turn **right** on the lane (i.e. **left** if coming out of the pub). In only 50m, go **left** at a hidden signpost, through a large metal gate (close it!) into a field. Walk along the **left**-hand edge of this large crop (or hay?) field, turning right in the corner. At a join of fields, go straight ahead over a stile into the next large sheep pasture. In the far corner, go through a small wooden gate and continue along a narrow path hemmed in by a fence and a hedgerow. Go over a robust stile into woodland. Your path bends right and forks. (Both choices join up again but the left-hand one is drier.) You come out to a road, Dwelly Lane, known for its ancient timbered farmhouses.
- 10 Cross straight over the road to a signposted footpath opposite. Take a wide horse path straight ahead. In 80m you reach a 4-way crossing. Go straight over on an attractive path into the deep woods. In 80m more you pass a depression on your left: keep straight ahead. A green meadow now comes into view. As you near the meadow, veer **left** at a yellow arrow, to join a path coming from your right. You pass a pond on your left, stepping over a pipe. Immediately turn **right** on the first narrow path which runs **very close** beside the meadow on your right. After nearly 150m the path ends at a T-junction with a short track. On your right is a field gate but your route is **left**, quickly crossing straight over a wide path. In 130m your path ends at another wide path, familiar from your outward journey. Turn **right**, immediately returning to the Staffhurst Wood car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Grants Lane is a continuation of Brick Kiln Lane, leading off the Kent Hatch Road, Limpsfield. One scenic way to the car park is from the A25 in Oxted. Take the B269 Kent Hatch Road, signposted *Edenbridge*. Go ¼ mile and turn **right** on Brick Kiln Road. The car park is 2½ miles along this twisty road on the right. You go over the railway after 1½ miles and postcode RH8 0RH is at this point, giving you another mile to go. Look out for a road joining from the right and then a lane across the open fields on the left: the car park is another 60 yards on your right.

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