



White Down, Ranmore and the North Downs

Distance: 12½ km=8 miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

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Denbies Hillside(?), picnic, *Polesden Lacey* (option)

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

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

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In Brief

This is a dazzling, mainly woodland, circular picnic walk on some familiar and some lesser-known paths in Surrey, on the North Downs with a wide excursion into the Polesden Estate and Ranmore Common. In autumn the colours are magnificent, in summer the shade is cool, in spring the blue-bells are on show and in the winter the views are enhanced, so this walk is ideal for any season.

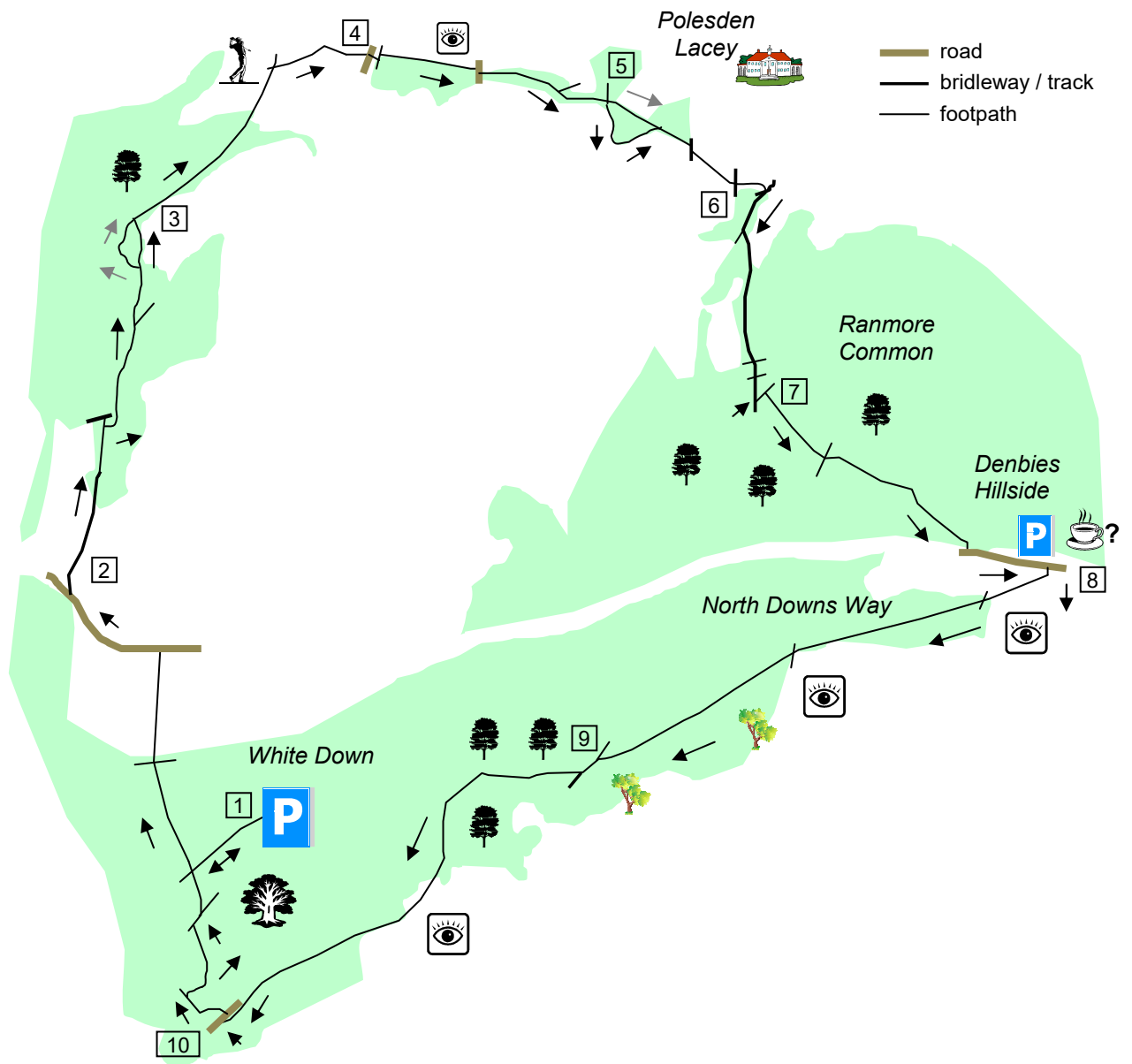


There are very few nettles on this walk, so shorts can be worn. The North Downs Way is quite easy and fairly dry underfoot but there are a few rougher patches on the tracks in Ranmore Common, so boots are recommended in winter. Tree falls occur unexpectedly in these woods and you need to be prepared for them. Your dog is very welcome on this walk, because of the open woods and the two dog-friendly stiles.

The walk begins at the **White Down car park**, in Whitedown Lane north of Abinger, Surrey, no usable postcode, use w3w: www.w3w.co/mice.poems.brave, or grid ref 115 495. (NB no mobile phone signal !). Another suitable starting point is the **Denbies Hillside** NT car park, www.w3w.co/belt.serves.belt, on the Ranmore Common Road. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

- 1 See map overleaf.** From the back of the car park, follow the main wide path for 250m through beechwoods to a crossing path. Turn **right** here on a bridleway, a stony and sandy path through a woodland of mainly birch, avoiding any side paths made by forestry vehicles. In 400m, you reach a major crossing path. Continue straight over on a footpath running along a narrow strip of trees between two fields. The last few metres are beside the garden of *Red Gables*, through a small wooden gate and along a driveway, via a stile or gate, to the Crocknorth Road. Turn **left** on the road and follow it, making good use of the grass verge, for 400m until you see a new fingerpost. Turn **right** here on a bridleway.



- [2] The path is soon tarmac with a central grass strip, making the going easy. You soon pass *The Old Malthouse*, ignoring a footpath on the right. Leave the drive where it bends right to a second house and continue straight ahead on a narrow path beside a meadow on your right. This takes you to a track in front of a converted farm building. Turn **right** at a post with blue arrows into Long Wood on a path which quickly bends left. In 300m your path forks **left** at a marker post with a yellow arrow. In another 200m you reach a stile into a meadow. The official route is over the stile, along the left-hand side of the meadow, **left** over another stile, back into the woods and **right**. However, if you want to avoid the stiles, you can turn **left** on a narrow path 10m before the stile which snakes its way over or round several fallen trees and reaches the same point.
- [3] Keep to the main footpath through Six Acre Copse, almost dead straight for over ½ km. At first the meadow is still visible on your right. Later your path veers right a fraction and keeps straight on between some metal posts. Eventually you come out, with terrific views, to some links belonging to the Effingham Golf Club. Cross the fairway carefully, a fraction right, aiming to the immediate **left** of a sand bunker and a copper

beech, to a marker post with a yellow arrow. Follow the path into a small wood and, in just 20m, at a crossing path with a fingerpost, turn **right**. Your path crosses a wide path and quickly comes out of the wood back onto the links. Cross over dead straight to the end of a hedgerow 40m away where there is another marker post, and go sharp **right** onto a short gravel path leading to a new wooden gate and a wide grassy path. Follow the path beside the neo-Tudor *Robinswood* out to the road, Beech Avenue.

- 4 Cross the road to a footpath opposite. Turn **left** at a T-junction for just 10m and then go **right** on a path which runs along the right-hand side of a large meadow giving you views of London. At the far end your path meets a tarmac lane, High Barn Road. Turn **right** on the lane for only 5m and immediately go **left** on a wide cinder bridleway to the right of some gates, between a hedge on your left and a ranch fence. This path runs through woodland giving you glimpses of green meadows on each side. Ignore a metal kissing-gate soon on your left, always keeping straight ahead on the main track. After nearly 200m more, you reach a major junction with a wooden fence and a new wooden gate on your left.

- 5 Most walkers now continue straight ahead on the track beside the meadow on your left, which you could also do. However, there is an atmospheric yew grove here which is much more interesting, and this is the route chosen for this walk. Turn **right** opposite the wooden gate on a narrower path into woods. The path follows a clear but extremely twisty route through trees, curving right round yews and passing some more ancient yew trees. Eventually you come out to a major crossing track. Turn **right** on it, thus resuming your original route. The flinty path goes downhill past the sweeping pastures of the Polesden Estate on your right. At a T-junction, turn **right** on a track. *But turning left on this track will lead you in under 1km to Polesden Lacey with an opportunity for a meal, plus gardens and a historic house (chargeable to non-NT members), with great views; for more details of the house and gardens of Polesden Lacey, see the other walks in this series, "Effingham and Polesden Lacey"* In only 20m, fork **left** through a small wooden gate. The grassy path goes uphill heading for a convenient bench and gate at the top. From here you have fine views back over the terrain you have been covering and possibly a well-deserved breather.



- 6 Go through the wooden gate, cross a track and go up through another small wooden gate directly ahead. Keep along the top right-hand edge of this small meadow from where you have views of the House. At the far corner, go **right** through a small wooden gate to a junction of tracks. Avoid a track curving away on your right and go straight ahead on a very wide stony track, with the red brick wall of Yew Tree Farm close by on your left. *On your left soon is a NT sign and gate into the Orchard, a perfect picnic spot, although you need to return the same way.* At a 3-way fingerpost [Jan 2021: missing] keep ahead, avoiding a footpath that forks right. The track follows an easy upward gradient. *Soon, on your left is a bench giving you a clear view of Polesden Lacey.* Continue onwards to go past a heavy metal barrier. In nearly 100m you pass a marker post with a yellow arrow on your right and a wooden barrier on your left. Ignore this junction and continue onwards for another 100m to meet a junction where the only path is on your left. There is a fingerpost here pointing left with insect symbols. Turn sharp **left** here through a wooden barrier.



7 In only 20m, take the first wide path sharp **right** with a yellow footpath marker, thus leaving the butterfly and dragonfly route. You will be following this path for nearly 1 km through magnificent mature woodland in the heart of Ranmore Common. Some 300m after joining this track, your route drops down to cross a broad flinty path. Continue straight over, steeply uphill, avoiding a vehicle track on your left. At the top of the hill, keep **right**, following the winding path where the wood thickens to a stunning beech-wood and rises to go through a clearing made by a fallen beech. The wood canopy is now tall oaks for some distance. *(It is possible to escape any winter mud by turning right through a gap in the trees, making a shortcut to the road.)*

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Finally you come through a new metal barrier to reach the Ranmore Common Road at a junction of tracks by a tile-hung cottage. Turn **left** along the grass verge parallel to the road. Turn **right** opposite a house on the other side to cross the road and continue to the NT car park at Denbies Hillside (an alternative starting point). *The steeple of St Barnabas' church is visible ahead.* From at least May to October, every day except non-Bank Holiday Mondays, either Sheryl's or Matthew's mobile café should be open for (very good) hot or cold drinks and snacks.



8 Go through the wooden gate by the noticeboard onto the open hillside and picnic area known as Steer's Field, with fabulous views across the valley to the Greensand Hills, including the Leith Hill tower at the highest point. Turn diagonally **right** on a path that runs just to the left of some carvings on the ends of tree trunk-logs lying on the ground. Head for trees and, on reaching them, go through a swing-gate onto a wide path into woods. *This is the North Downs Way (NDW), a long-distance path from Farnham to Dover, and you will be following it to near the end of the walk.* Immediately cross straight over a signposted diagonal path and follow the wide straight level path. In 700m, you pass a wooden barrier and swing-gate on your left where there is a bench for gazing at the views of Westcott below and Dorking on the left. Shortly, at a junction, keep straight ahead on a level path. The trees are now yews and tall slender beeches and this long level stretch is the loveliest part of the North Downs. At another 4-way fingerpost keep straight ahead over a bridleway. The path twists, rises and narrows, taking a more tenuous course under beeches with a steep drop on your left. Eventually, at a fingerpost, your path joins a wide path coming from the right and the flinty banked path comes down to a wooden gate beside a metal gate to a junction of tracks by a wartime pillbox. *The pillboxes were constructed in 1940 as a defensive line against German invasion, partly to keep the Canadian troops occupied; many of the pillboxes are still preserved.*



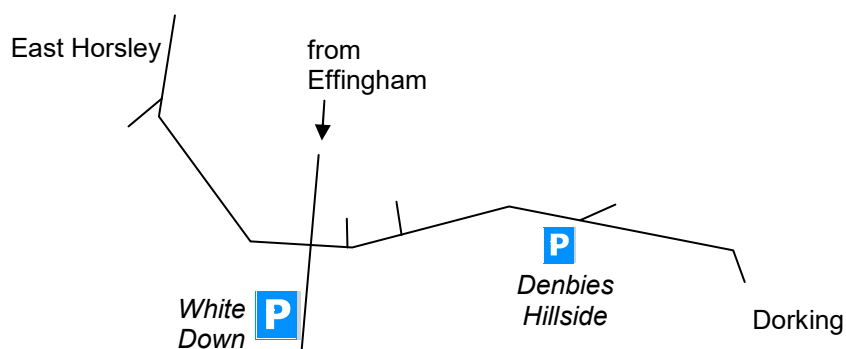
9 At the junction, take the **right** fork, a rising path, still on the NDW. You have a change now to open hillside, dotted with hawthorn and other shrubs, with a good view left across the valley. Park Farm, with its cream-coloured house, is in the valley and, up a little to its left, is Wotton church (see the walk *Abinger and Wotton* in this series). The path goes past a second pillbox and through a swing-gate, and becomes narrower. There are slender beeches again and a third pillbox on your right. Open hillside alternates with beeches for some distance with the occasional pillbox. Finally the path bends right down to a road, White Down Lane. Turn **right** carefully on the road.

10 In only 10m, turn **left** on a path uphill, still on the NDW. At the top of the slope, the path bends left, then right again. After only 50m more, 15m after a bent-over yew tree, turn **right** steeply uphill on an unmarked path, thus leaving the NDW. The path winds up through a coppice, soon with a steep

drop on your right. As the path levels out after about 100m, just after a tall thin isolated beech with a silvery bark, stay on the main path as it bends **left** away from the precipice. Your path soon joins a narrow path coming from the left and becomes much wider. You are now in dense beech and ash woods [2021: also brutally de-forested]. On your left soon is a fenced-off water reservoir. At a T-junction by a corner of the fence, turn **right** on a wide path. In 30m fork **left** on a narrower path. (Alternatively, for the car park, you can continue for 250m on the wide path and turn left on a narrow path leading directly to the car park; as a guide, the turn is the first decent path on the left and it is opposite a more open area of tall trees.) On your right soon are the dramatic remains of a once magnificent great beech. You are in Old Simm's Copse, an area famed for its bluebells. (See the *White Down Bluebell Walk* in this series.) Soon you reach a 4-way junction which, if you started at White Down, will be familiar. (If you began the walk in Denbies Hillside, go straight ahead at the junction and resume the walk at the start of this text ignoring the first sentence and the right turn.) Turn **right** at the crossing path, quickly arriving back at the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: The White Down car park is near the north end of White Downs Lane, which is at a crossroads with Crocknorth Road / Ranmore Common Road. From Dorking, follow signs to *Ranmore Effingham*, follow the road, ignoring three right turns, for 3 miles (5 km) to a crossroads and turn **left**. You can also take the A246 Green Dene from East Horsley, forking **left** on Crocknorth Road after ½ mile, in which case you turn **right** at the crossroads after more than a mile. If coming from the London area, one scenic way is as follows. Take the A3 to the M25 junction and leave the A3 there by the slip road, taking the middle lane. At the roundabout, go **straight ahead**, signposted *Guildford*, as though you had changed your mind and wanted to re-join the A3. In about 100m, leave the slip road by turning **left** onto a narrow road signposted *Effingham* that runs through the forest by a lake on the right. Follow the road all the way to a T-junction. Turn **right and immediately left** over a humpback bridge and past Effingham Junction station. Follow the road all the way to Bookham and Effingham villages, going straight ahead at two mini-roundabouts. Go over traffic lights over the main A246 and follow a rather narrow road that runs past some fine properties, down a valley and up again, and straightens and narrows even more to a crossroads (with Ranmore Common Road and Crocknorth Road) where you must **give way**. Go straight over. The White Down car park is 0.4 mile (600m) on the right. (Note: going back, you cannot turn right onto the A3, so you need to turn left (for Ockham) or right (for Cobham) at the *Black Swan*.)



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