



Ashdown Forest, Hartfield, Pooh sites *Poohsticks and Sandpits*

Distance: 17 km=10½ miles or 2 walks of 10 km & 10½ or 9½ km =
6 & 6½ or 5½ miles easy walking with one moderate ascent

Region: East Sussex

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Author: Stivaletti

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Refreshments: Hartfield

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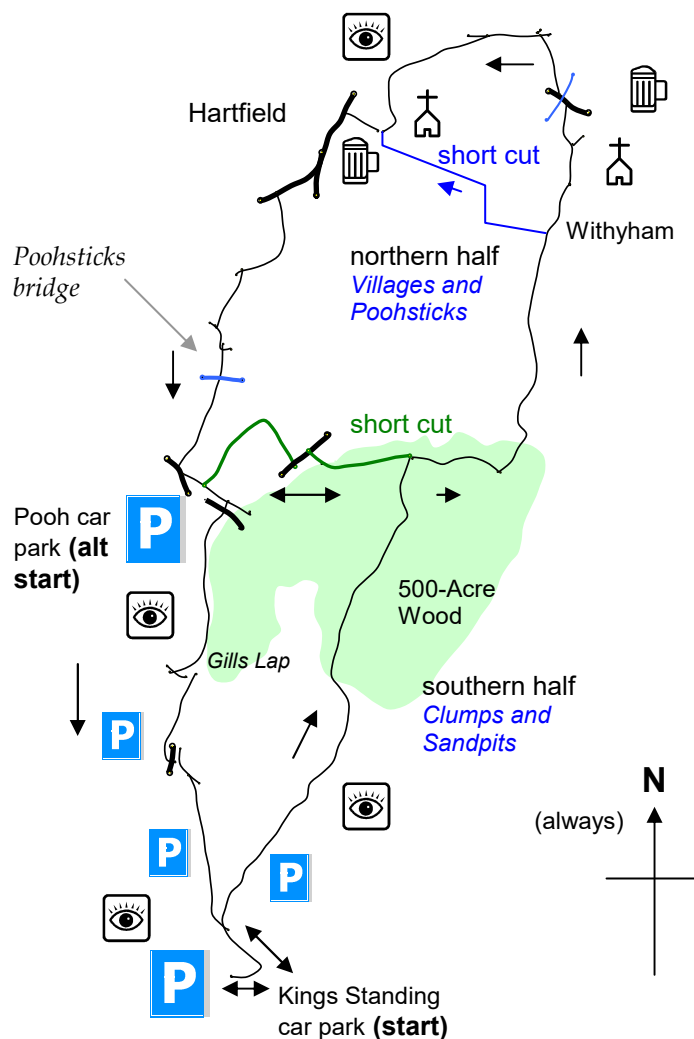
Map: Explorer 135 (Ashdown Forest) *but the maps in this guide should suffice*

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Heath, villages, woodland, literary references

Overview



In Brief

This circular walk in East Sussex shows the best of the heathland and woodland of Ashdown Forest and of the small towns that surround it while visiting many of the magical sites mentioned in the *Winnie-the-Pooh* stories.

The walk can be divided into two shorter walks: **Villages and Poohsticks** (10½ or 9½ km=6½ or 5½ miles) is the twisty northern walk. **Clumps and Sandpits** (10 km=6 miles) is the breezy southern walk which takes in the wilder spaces and the other Pooh sites.



There are a few nettles in the northern walk near Hartfield and some brambles a little later, making shorts inadvisable. The going underfoot is generally easy with good paths. Dogs are welcome, especially on the open heath of the southern walk. From 2015 there are now several *firebreaks* across the heath that you need to take into account.

The full walk begins at the **Kings Standing** car park (gridref 473302, approximate **postcode TN22 3JD**) in the centre of Ashdown Forest. If you are doing the *northern* walk, you should begin at the **Pooh** car park, which can also be used to start the full walk. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

If you are doing only the *northern* walk, **Villages and Poohsticks**, beginning at the **Pooh** car park, you need to start with **Pooh to the Hundred Acre Wood**, a short cut described at the end of this text. If you start the *full* walk there, begin at Leg 5 below.



The **Ashdown Forest Monster** joins the walk here.

Leg 1: Kings Standing to the Hundred Acre Wood 4km=2½ miles

You begin in the very centre of the forest. As you see, this is not woodland. The word 'forest' originally meant 'the woods outside' as opposed to the lands inside the lord's enclosure. The king would ride out and at this spot he would have stood waiting for the deer and other game to be driven past him. The clumps of scots pines were planted here and in other areas of the forest by Arabella Diana, Duchess of Dorset.

- 1** **See map overleaf.** Facing the view at the back of the car park, turn **right** past an information tablet so that the Kings Standing clump is just on your right. In 50m, just before the start of the bracken, turn **left** on a narrow grassy crossing path. The path descends and bends left again. In 150m your path veers left as a path joins from the right by a line of trees and comes to the B2188 road by the entrance to a Kingstanding Farm. Turn **right** on the road for 15m and **left** on a track. In 100m or so, the track is joined by another track from the left and veers right. You will be following this path for over 1 km to where it meets the Wealdway (WW). Always keep to the main winding path. In 400m, as you pass a clump of pines, you see the Black Hill car park on your right. Your path now goes straight uphill. After another 700m, you meet an even wider path joining from the left, part of the Wealdway. *The Wealdway is a long-distance footpath running from*

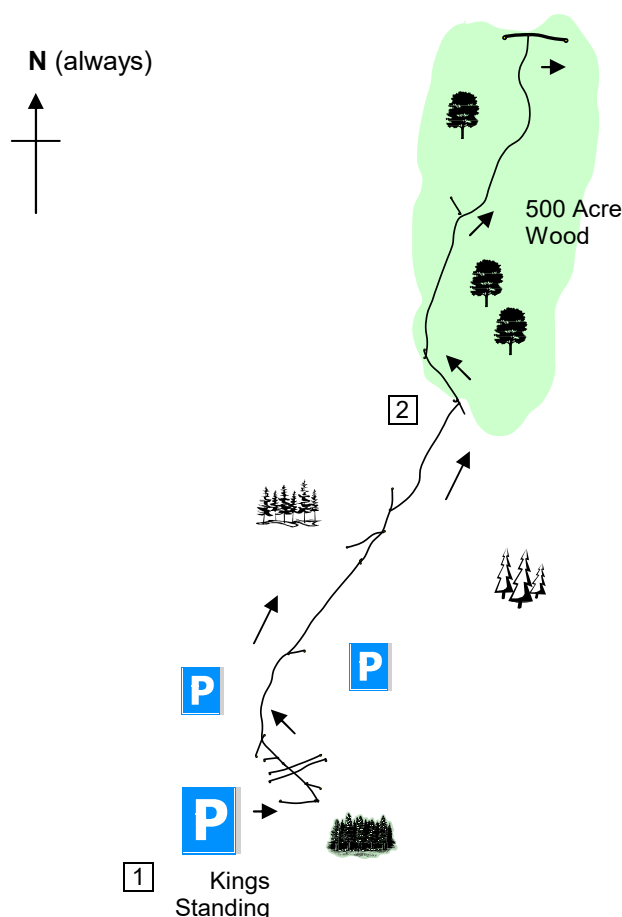
Gravesend on the Thames estuary to the sea near Eastbourne. In 20m, take the **right** fork, thus joining the Wealdway.

- 2 In 50m, look to your left for a 'WW' post and fork **left** onto a narrower path through woodland. Your path goes over a crossing path and runs through open gorse with great views left. After 500m, you meet a pinewood at a fork. Take the **left** fork, keeping the wood on your right, with good views on your left. Your path enters woodland and is met by a path coming in from your right. In 50m avoid a left fork, following a 'WW' on a post. Continue on this lovely woodland path, sometimes with a bank on your right. After winding downhill, your path goes through a small wooden gate into the Five Hundred Acre Wood. *The 'Hundred Acre Wood' referred to in the Pooh stories is probably this one.* After another 700m you reach a green metal barrier and a T-junction at the edge of a field.

Decision point. If you are doing only the *southern walk, Clumps and Sandpits*, skip to near the end of this text and do **The (Five) Hundred Acre Wood to Pooh**.

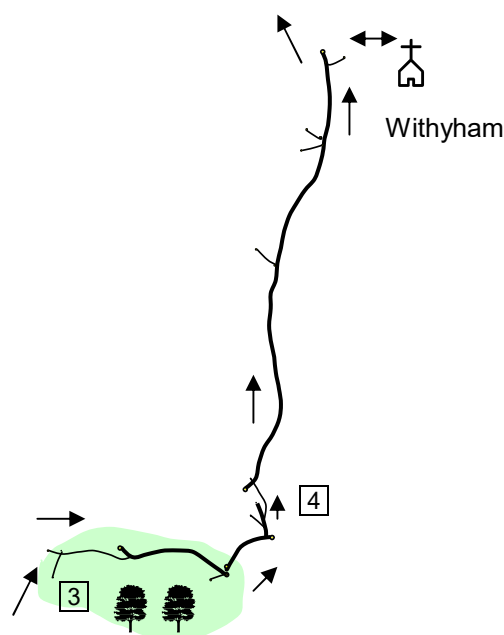
Otherwise, turn **right**.

At this point, the *northern walk, Villages and Poohsticks*, joins the walk.



Leg 2: Hundred Acre Wood to Withyham 3 km=2 miles

- 3 Follow the track downhill. In about 300m, it joins a drive coming from *Kovacs Lodge*. In another 300m, the tarmac drive bends left by a junction of tracks and, in 100m, passes a footpath on the right. Where the lane splits in 70m, take the **left** fork, crossing a drive and heading for a large wooden gate, going by a small pond. Just before the gate, take a footpath on the **right** that runs parallel to the road, going over a stile into what is part of the Buckhurst Estate. *The big house Buckhurst Park is visible ahead on your right (see the other walk, "Ravines and Parkland")*.



- 4 The footpath bends left round the side of meadow and comes to a tarmac lane by a large property called *Fisher's Gate*. Go over a stile (avoidable with a squeeze) and turn **right** on the lane, soon passing a row of houses on your left. After a good 700m further along the lane, with good views left over fields, you finally get a glimpse of Hartfield church. Just after that, you pass a lonely house, appropriately called *Thatchers*. Walk a further 400m or so and **ignore** a sign on your left pointing to *Old Buckhurst*. In another 40m, you see a fingerpost and stile on your left, hidden in a hedge.



Decision point. If you want to shorten the walk by 1 km and go direct to Hartfield, but missing Withyham and the Forest Way, go the end of this text and do the **Hartfield Cut**.

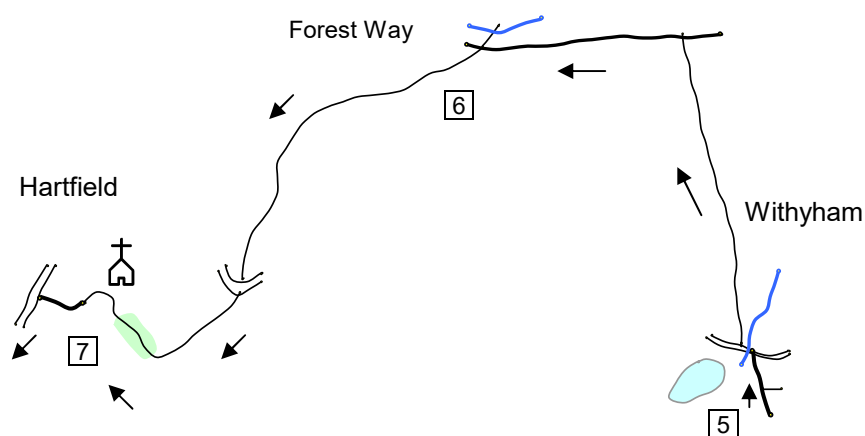


The **Ashdown Forest Monster** takes this short cut.

Ignore the stile and continue on the lane until you reach the first houses of the village of Withyham. After a fence, turn sharp **right** to make a small diversion to Withyham church.

Although Withyham is not mentioned in the Domesday Book, a church stood here at least from the late 1200s. The Church of St Michael and All Angels at Withyham as it stands today is mainly the result of a rebuilding finished in 1672 after the earlier edifice was almost destroyed in a thunderstorm, together with some sweeping Victorian alterations. The church is crammed full of historical detail, from furniture to windows, plaques to pictures. Dominant everywhere are references to the Sackville family with several contributions by way of pictures and memorials and especially the Sackville chapel in the north-east corner which is owned outright by the family. The centrepiece here is the monument to the young Thomas Sackville and his father, with his mother gazing on. Vita Sackville-West, poet and creator of Sissinghurst (see the "Knole" and "Sissinghurst" walks) is also commemorated here.

Leg 3: Withyham to Hartfield 2½ km=1½ miles



- 5** Retrace your steps to the lane and continue down to a main road, the B2110. Turn **left**, cross a bridge over a tributary of the Medway, and immediately turn **right** over a stile in the direction of the 'WW' symbol. As you go, keep roughly central in the meadow, between the stream on the right and a hillock on the left. Go over a stile by a metal gate (which is usually open) and continue in the same direction across a grassy meadow. On the other side, go over a stile and turn **left** on a fine straight gravel track. This is *Forest Way*, a dismantled railway and also part of the Sussex Border Path and a country park. After an all-too-short 400m on Forest Way, you reach a crossing path indicated by yellow arrows. Turn **left** over a stile by a wooden gate. Suddenly you have a full view of the church.
- 6** Aim slightly to the right of the church, go through a gap in the hedge, along the right-hand side of a pasture and over a stile in the corner into another meadow. In the corner, go over another stile where there are two yellow arrows. Take the **left**-hand choice of paths, steeply over a bank and diagonally across a meadow to a narrower section in the farthest corner to a stile by a metal gate on a road in Hartfield. Cross the road to a footpath opposite and go over a stile by a metal gate. Immediately ignore a footpath on the left and follow wires to the far corner which is usually rather overgrown. Here, go over a stile onto a sunken path to emerge shortly and suddenly by the church. Go **left** on the drive and immediately **right** up four steps into the churchyard.



The Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Hartfield has stood for 700 years replacing a possibly 300-year-old building. It was enlarged in the 1300s and 1400s when the Rectory and the Lych Gate Cottage appeared. The oldest parts are the lower parts of the tower and the north wall of the nave where traces of two 13th century windows are visible. The Church is now floodlit nightly providing a fine spectacle for all around.

- 7** Turn **left** along the side of the churchyard and exit it through a little timbered house known as the *Lych-Gate Cottage*. Go down the lane past attractive cottages and the *Anchor*, a fine pub that serves a collection of real ales including Larkins. At the far side of the pub is a converted oast.

Hartfield is referred to in the Domesday Book of 1085. In medieval times it grew from a poor agricultural village to a centre of the iron and timber trade.

Cotchford Farm (½ mile south on the B2026) was the holiday home of A.A. Milne (1882–1956), author of the *Winnie the Pooh* books. Brian Jones, guitarist and founder of *The Rolling Stones*, who was found dead in his swimming pool in 1969, also lived here.

Leg 4: Hartfield to Pooh Car Park 3½ km=2 miles

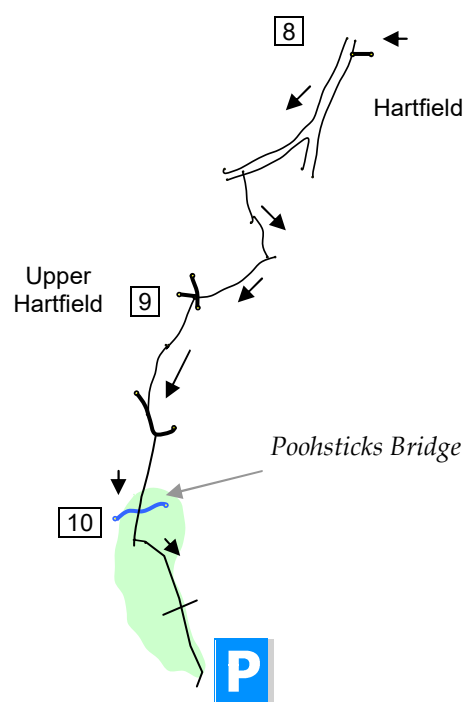
8 Turn **left** on the main road past another pub *The Hay Waggon* (dating from 1540). On the left is another converted oast and on the right a souvenir and tea shop that sells all the A.A. Milne books. At a road fork, take the **right** fork, the B2110 signposted to Forest Row. In 350m, at the entrance to Hook Farm House, turn **left** on a footpath by a wooden gate. At the corner of the first meadow on the left, fork **left**, ignoring the yellow arrow and staying close to the fence, and follow an enclosed path. At the next junction, at the corner of another meadow ahead, keep straight ahead with the fence on your left.

9 Your path goes round the side of a wooden fence, through a wooden swing-gate and out to a lane in the hamlet of Upper Hartfield. Immediately go **left** over a stile marked *Pooh Bridge*. You are on a lovely grassy meadow with views ahead. At the bottom, go over a stile, down the right-hand side of the next meadow and over a stile into a lane and continue past *Mole End*. Where the lane bends left, continue ahead on a rougher lane and in 30m keep ahead through posts on a track which takes you to the Poohsticks Bridge.

The game of Poohsticks is first mentioned in 'The House at Pooh Corner'. It can be played on any bridge over a stream with each player dropping a stick on the upstream side of the bridge and seeing whose stick appears first on the other side. The bridge here was originally called Posingford Bridge. The bridge fell into disrepair until rescued in the late 1970s by a nationwide campaign and reopened by Christopher Robin Milne. So many visitors came that in 1999 East Sussex county council successfully appealed to Disney and others for funds to replace the bridge. The game is still played here but visitors are asked to bring their own sticks because earlier visitors have damaged the nearby trees.

10 Continue onwards on the main path, in the direction of the *Car Park* sign. Before a metal gate your marked path bends left and goes over a bridge. As the path rises you go by a bench on the right and, 100m later, pass a small 3-way fingerpost. (If you are doing the **northern walk** and you did **not** park in the Pooh car park, your route is **left** here: see the note immediately below.) Keep straight on, ignoring a footpath on the right, passing an artistic bench and quickly reaching the Pooh car park.

If you are doing the **northern walk**, **Villages and Poohsticks**, it ends here.
If you are doing the **full walk**, continue with the next leg below.



Leg 5: Pooh Car Park to Kings Standing 4 km=2½ miles

- 11** Turn **right** immediately before the entrance to the car park and follow the path to the road. (Or, if you parked here, take the new path out to the road.) Cross the road carefully to a wide sandy path opposite. The path curves left and you are in a wild terrain with fabulous views on the right. 600m from the road, you reach a junction with a seat on the left and a path ahead curving right on the contour round the valley. Don't take the contouring path (regretfully) but fork **left** past the seat on a wide sandy ascending path. The path goes gently uphill, then a little more steeply. In 450m, after a steep section and almost at the top, there is a clump of assorted trees on the right. Turn **right** here into the trees where there is a group of stones and a plaque commemorating A.A. Milne and E.H. Shepard.

A.A. Milne (1882-1956), a noted essayist and playwright, bought a country home in nearby Cotchford Farm and here had the idea for the Pooh stories, based around his son Christopher Robin and some soft toys. E.H. Shepard (1879-1976) was a cartoonist and illustrator who took on the job of bringing the characters to life pictorially. Neither man was able to live down the huge success of the Pooh stories. Shepard based the Pooh image on his son's own bear who was called 'Growler'.

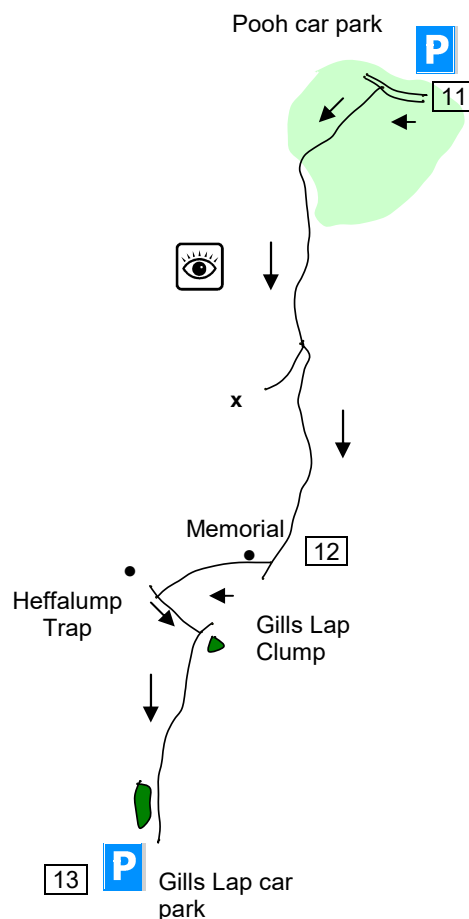
- 12** Don't go back to the track but take a narrow path in the corner veer **left** between two posts in a fence and follow the [Aug 2019 very overgrown! please persevere] path between gorse bushes. In 150m, at a T-junction, turn **right** for 10m to see the Heffalump Trap.

The Heffalump Trap is a large sand pit with a sole conifer. It is here that Pooh and Piglet bravely try to capture a heffalump and in the second book 'The House at Pooh Corner' are themselves trapped.

Do an about-turn and continue straight ahead for 150m to a T-junction with a wide sandy track. On the other side of the track is a clump of pines known as Gills Lap.

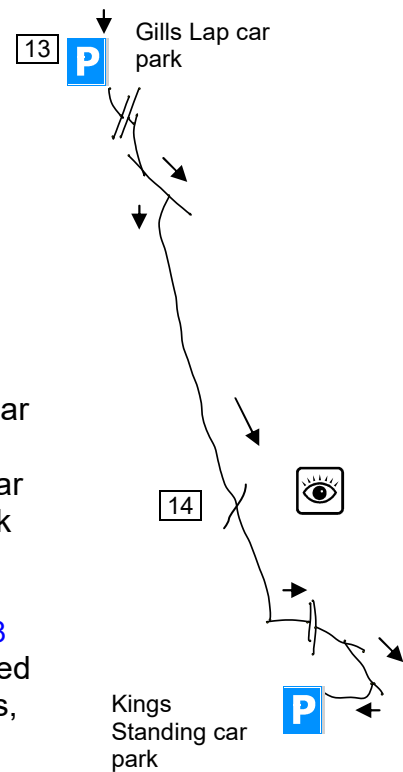
'... and by and by they came to an enchanted place on the very top of the Forest called Galleons Lap' (or 'Leap'). This is really Gills Lap, a particularly fine clump of pines. 'Roo's Sandpit', 'Eeyore's Sad and Gloomy Place' and the 'North Pole' are also nearby.

Turn **right** on the wide track. In about 200m, you pass a seat and there is a line of pines ahead. Fork **left** before the pines to emerge at the Gills Lap car park.



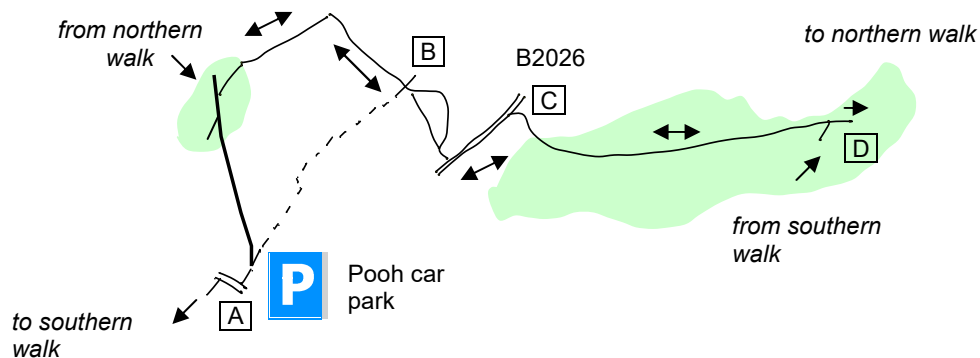
13 Turn immediately **left** at the start of the car park to go out through its main entrance. Cross the main B2026 road, a fraction right, to a path opposite. (2022: Some walkers found the path overgrown and had to walk beside the road.) In just 10m, turn **right** on a grassy path that runs parallel to the main road. In 100m, the path meets another path coming from the right and veers away from the main road. Just 80m further, turn **right** on a wide rather rough grassy/sandy path uphill. You are now walking parallel to the B2026 road again and you will stay on this path for over 1 km.

14 Eventually the path is intersected by the Wealdway, familiar from its 'WW' symbol [2014: only one fallen post remains]. Further on, the path meets the B2026 road at the Pines car park, opposite the Bushy Willows car park. From the back of the car park, veer **left** away from the main road again and follow a narrow rather overgrown path through pines. (If **very** overgrown, you can divert to the **left** to meet the B2188 road *anywhere*, then turn **right** to the farm entrance.) You need to keep the same direction through several small junctions, ignoring first a path on the right and then one on the left, quickly coming down to the B2188 road. Cross the road and take a path just to the right of an entrance to King-standing Farm. In 80m, fork **right** away from the trees on a path uphill. Veer **right** at the top and turn **right** again in front of the Kings Standing clump, and thence back to the car park where the walk began.



Pooh to the (Five) Hundred Acre Wood 2 km=1¼ miles

This is a short cut for walkers doing the *northern walk*, **Villages and Poohsticks**. It takes you direct from the Pooh car park to the Five Hundred Acre Wood. You can see the wild open spaces of Ashdown Forest another day by doing the southern walk.



A From the back of the car park, go through a double wooden gate and take a wide path signposted *Bridge*. After a long artistic bench, in 70m, ignore a 3-way fingerpost on your left. 30m further, fork **right** at another fingerpost, going over some wooden bridges and through Posingford Wood. After the wood, go over a stile onto a grassy path between fields of horses. At the far corner, turn **right** on a sandy track (or along the grassy path this side of a ditch).

- B** At a junction with farm buildings on your left, continue straight ahead into a rectangular area used for exercising horses. You may either go over a stile and straight across the area through wooden gates or walk on two sides round the perimeter. On the other side, there is a wooden barrier and you continue (turning left if you used the perimeter route) on a narrow path to the main B2026 road. Cross the road and turn **left** on it. (There is a narrow grassy verge to help you avoid the traffic.)
- C** In 150m, opposite *The Paddocks*, ignore a wide track but immediately fork **right** away from the road downhill on a narrow footpath. Keep **left** in front of a bank. This winding sunken path runs downhill through woodland and goes over a sturdy footbridge across a tributary of the Medway. Note how the tree roots also bridge the stream. Continue through the woodland until you meet a path coming from the right by a green metal barrier at the edge of a meadow on the left. Keep straight on.

Now join the main walk at **Leg 2**.



The (Five) Hundred Acre Wood to Pooh 2 km=1¼ miles

This is a short cut for walkers doing the *southern walk*, **Clumps and Sandpits**. It takes you direct from the (Five) Hundred Acre Wood to the Pooh car park. You can see the villages and the Poohsticks bridge another day by doing the northern walk.

- D** **See map above.** At the T-junction at the edge of the field, turn **left** and continue on a wide path through woodland and eventually go over a sturdy footbridge across a tributary of the Medway. Note how the tree roots also bridge the stream. Follow a winding sunken path veering right uphill until you reach the main B2026 road opposite *The Paddocks*. Turn **left** on the road. (There is a narrow grassy verge to help you avoid the traffic.)
- C** After 150m, turn **right** onto a hidden narrow path and stile that lead to a rectangular area used for exercising horses. You may either go straight across the area through wooden gates and over a stile or right and round the perimeter on two sides. On the other side, at a junction of tracks with farm buildings on your right, go straight ahead along a sandy track (or on the grassy path to the left of a ditch).
- B** At the corner, turn **left** on a grassy path between fields of horses and, at the end, go over a stile into Posingford Wood. After the wood, veer **left** on a wide track coming from the right. Ignore a footpath on the right in 30m and continue past a long artistic bench, soon reaching the Pooh car park.

If you did not park in the Pooh car park, join the main walk now at **Leg 5**.

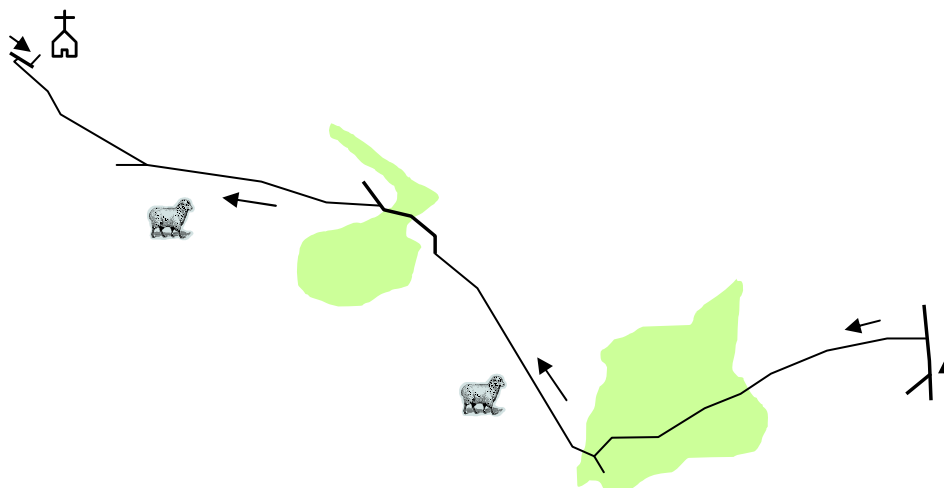


Hartfield Cut 1¾ km=1 mile

Take this short cut if you want to go directly to Hartfield after coming out of the Five Hundred Acre Wood. However, you will miss the church and village at Withyham and the Forest Way.



The **Ashdown Forest Monster** uses this short cut.



Go over the stile as indicated by a sign for the *Landscape Trail*. In 50m your path veers left across grass, heading for a large oak. On your left is a good view of the Tower and Oasts of *Little Buckhurst*. Your path enters a wood where it curves right and left and meets a wide farm track. Turn **right**, going over a bridge and through a small wooden gate beside a large one into a large sheep pasture. Walk up, keeping not far from the right-hand side finally joining a wide sandy farm track in the far corner. Keep **left** between gate posts and up into another sheep pasture to a small 3-way fingerpost. Veer off diagonally **left** on a path that goes up the centre of the field. Veer right a bit to avoid a wider rutted sheep path to your left. Your destination is a line of oaks where you will find a marker post. Keep the same direction across the next field heading for a tall oak at the boundary. Here, go over a stile by a marker post and keep to the right-hand edge of a crop field. Go over a stile and along the right-hand side of a hay field. In the next corner, go **right** over a large stile, down four steps, **right** on a track and **left** into the churchyard.

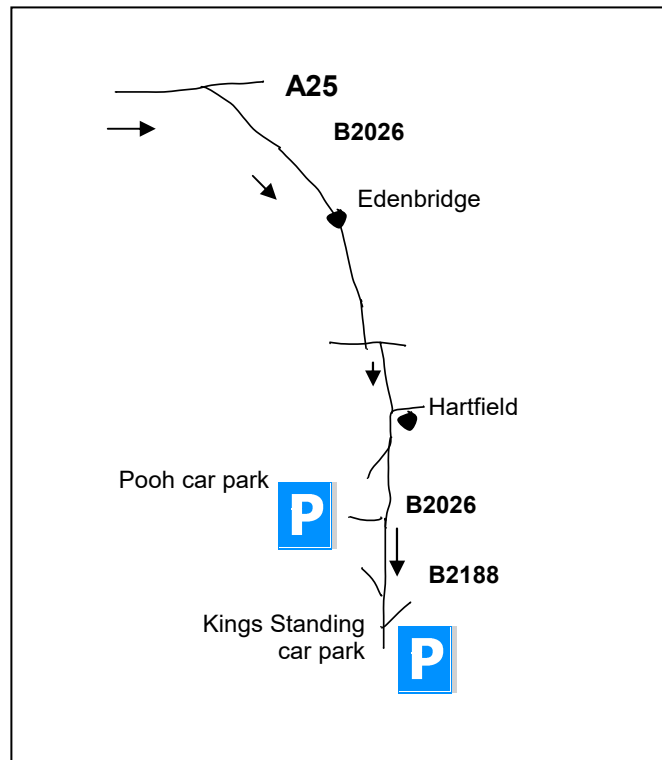


This part of the **Ashdown Forest Monster** ends here.

Now resume the main walk at Leg 3 section **7**.

Getting there

By car: Ashdown Forest is just west of Crowborough in East Sussex. The **Kings Standing car park** (grid-ref 473302) is 14 km=9 miles south east of East Grinstead. It is on the B2026 half way between Maresfield and Hartfield, just south of its junction with the B2188 (*Groombridge Tun Wells*). The **Pooh car park** (grid-ref 471332) is just west of the B2026, down Chuck Hatch Lane.



One possible scenic route, if coming from the London area, is through Edenbridge and Hartfield on the B2026.

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