



Devil's Punch Bowl Lion's Mouth, Thursley



Distance: 16½ km=10 miles

moderate walking

Region: Surrey

Date written: 24-oct-2010

Author: Schwebefuss

Date revised: 28-nov-2014

Refreshments: Thursley, Punch Bowl Café

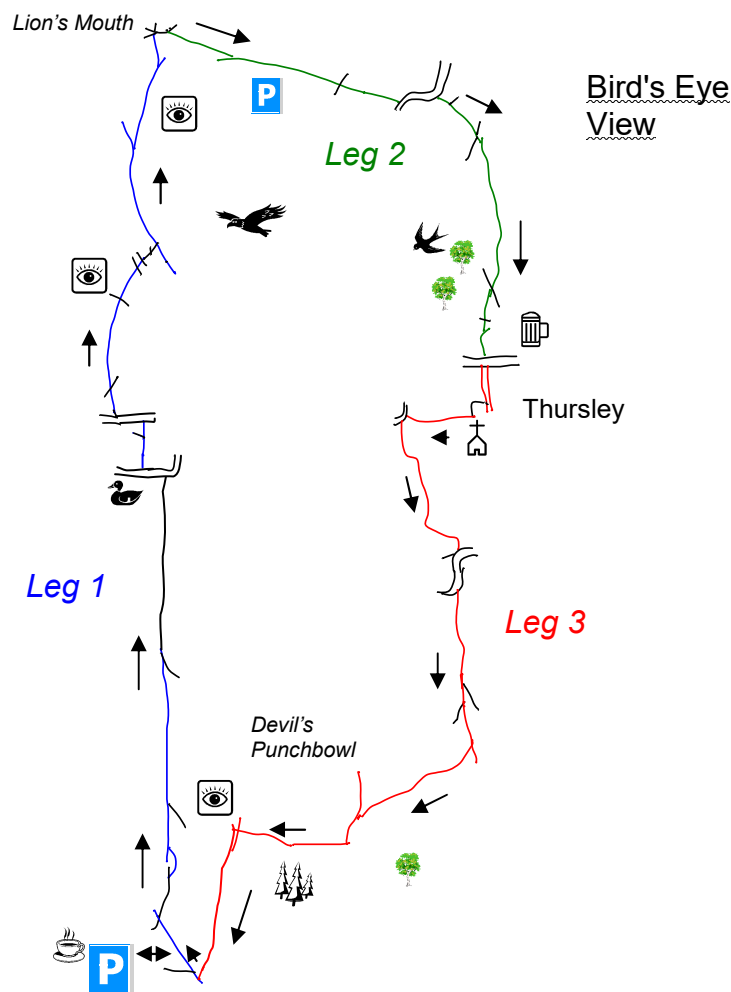
Last update: 15-jul-2023

Maps: Explorer OL33 (Haslemere) & 145 (Guildford) *hopefully not needed*

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

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Dramatic hills, village, views, extensive heath



In Brief



This walk takes you from the Devil's Punch Bowl over the remarkably desolate landscape of Kettlebury Hill and back through the pretty village of Thursley, giving you on the return leg an intimate view of the Punch Bowl from its gentle depths. There is one long descent and one long ascent, near the start and finish, and a few easy ups and downs. Except in a wet winter, the ground is mainly sandy or dry, making the walk pleasant underfoot. There are nettles on the path just after Thursley, making bare legs inadvisable. The route seems fine for a dog, provided you keep him on a tight lead in the sheep pastures and in the Punch Bowl area where the highland cattle run free.

2023: there were army closures earlier in the year, none reported so far - but see the note in blue at the end.

wc The walk starts at the **National Trust Punch Bowl** car park, **postcode GU26 6AG**, www.w3w.co/lizards.cooked.totally, charge to non-NT members. Alternative free car parks are available. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



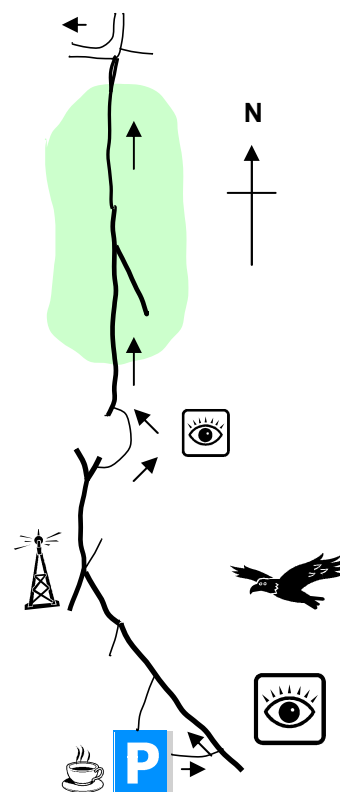
The **Haslemere-Guildford Monster** joins this walk here.

Leg 1: Punch Bowl to Lion's Mouth, 7½ km=4½ miles

- 1 From the back of the car park, go past the noticeboard and the Surrey Hills pole to the famous viewpoint over the Devil's Punch Bowl. Turn **left** here along a wide level path, passing a group of mature pines. After about 700m with fine views, you reach a junction of tracks at Highcombe Edge near a prominent relay mast. Bear slightly **right** in the direction of the *Highcombe Hike*, shortly going through a metal gate beside a cattle grid and a noticeboard. In 100m, just after a seat, it's best to fork **right** on a narrower path that re-joins the main track. A little further on, fork **right** with the main track but immediately fork **right** again, still on the *Highcombe Hike*, on a lesser path that leads to a seat and a memorial to the bequeathal of Highcombe Copse to the National Trust, with great views of the Punch Bowl.

Highcombe Copse is one of several pieces of donated land that make up the Devil's Punch Bowl. Historically, the Punch Bowl was regarded with fear and superstition as a dark malevolent province of smugglers and deadly spirits and few people dared to set foot there.

Continue onwards to re-join the main track. After about 800m, just after entering trees, the main track curves sharp right by a post with many coloured arrows, to descend into the Punch Bowl. **Leave** it here by continuing straight ahead on a broad path, thus leaving the *Highcombe*



Hike. Stay on this path, ignoring a right turn in 150m, as it narrows and becomes sunken, passing through a gate. It becomes even more sunken but later gets easier. Finally, it joins a farm track and leads out to a tarmac lane, Hyde Lane, at a bend.

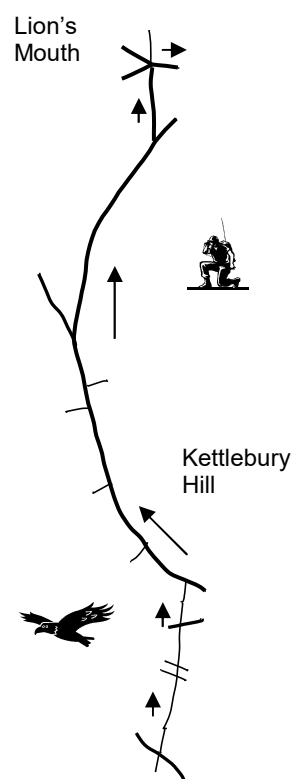
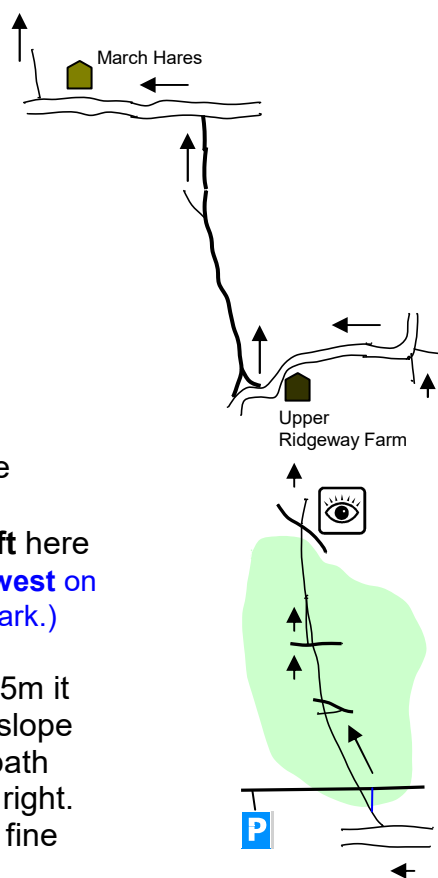
- 2 Turn **left** on the lane uphill. The lane curves left and right around the picturesque *Upper Ridgeway Farm* with its duckpond. 20m after the farm, turn **right** on a track. At a junction of paths, keep straight ahead. When the track forks, take the **right**-hand, more sunken, track. Eventually, the track passes some houses and reaches a road. Turn **left** on the road. After about 250m, you pass a house called *March Hares*. After this house, turn **right** on a narrow path across the heath.

- 3 Follow this winding path ignoring all turnings off. The official bridleway is clearly visible ahead, forking left. Shortly, the path meets a track under wires. Turn **left** here and immediately **right**, following the arrows. (100m west on the wide track would take you to the Thursley Road car park.) 80m later the path goes over a narrow track and immediately a wider one that crosses obliquely. In 25m it comes up to a wide track with a steeply descending slope ahead. Go straight over the track on a descending path that widens and runs parallel to a sunken cleft on its right. At the bottom, you come out of the trees and have a fine open landscape of Kettlebury Hill ahead.

- 4 Continue on a path that goes straight over the wide sandy track and across the heath heading for the hill. The path crosses a sandy track and rises towards the wooded hill. Near the top, go over another track and continue into trees. At the top, you meet the broad track that runs along the top of Kettlebury Hill. Turn **left**. *There are great views on all sides with little sign of human habitation, remarkable for a part of Surrey and so close to London.* In about 400m you pass a practice pillbox known as the Hankley Common Bunker. *Later you will see some army buildings down on the right. These commons (Ockley, Thursley and Hankley) were used for many years for army training. You may have noticed warning signs. (Access, by the way, is not restricted and there are no "live" military exercises.)* About 300m after the pillbox, the track forks with a post and blue arrows in the middle. Take the **right** fork with open views to your right. After another 600m, you can just see the charred remains of a line of stumps across the main track. Fork **left** here on a downward track. *On your left is a thick stone wall. This is the Atlantic Wall used in WW2 for training for the D Day landings, worth a visit.* The track leads down to the wide sandy area known as the *Lion's Mouth*.

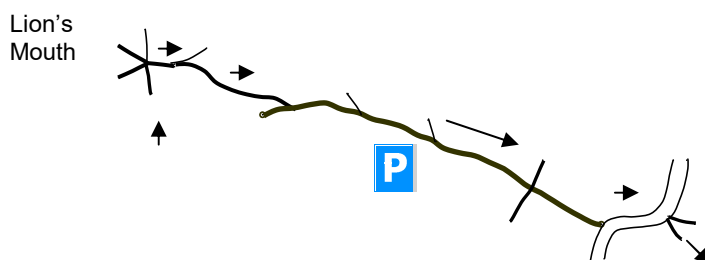


This section of the **Haslemere-Guildford Monster** ends here by keeping straight on instead of turning right.

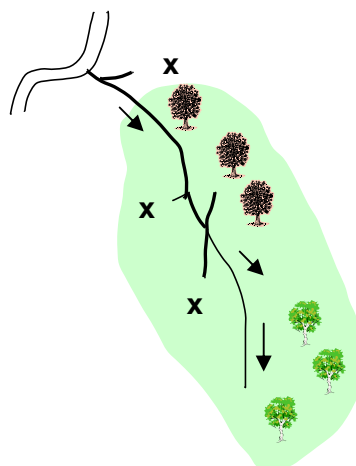


Leg 2: Lion's Mouth to Thursley, 3 km=2 miles

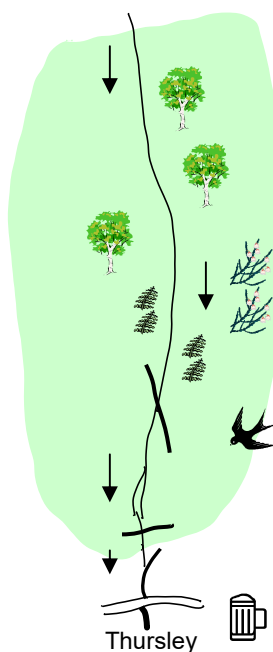
- 1 Turn **right** on a very broad sandy track, marked on a post on your left as a bridleway and an MoD trail. In 20m, ignore a left fork and continue on the main track which curves right and in 250m reaches a tarmac road. Turn **left** on the road. The road goes uphill eventually passing a car park on the right and going through a metal barrier. In nearly 300m it crosses a marked signposted bridleway and runs beside a October Farm on the left. At a T-junction of roads, turn **left**. In a short distance, turn **right** onto a bridleway with a double fingerpost.



- 2 In 15m, ignore the left-forking track and stay on the main track heading towards a house. The track leads into woodland. Stay on the track for around 150m until you reach a fork. Take the **left** fork, ignoring the track to the right that leads to a field gate. Stay close to the field boundary on the right until soon a track joins from the left. 15m later, **leave** the blue-arrowed bridleway which forks right close to the field and stay on a gently rising path between birches.



- 3 The vegetation changes from birch to bracken as the path runs across Thursley Common. Stay on the path avoiding minor turnings off until eventually the path meets the bridleway again at a sharp angle. Turn **left** and, after only 10m, take a **right** fork as directed by a blue arrow on a post. The path rises gradually again and becomes a bit overgrown, so it is sometimes easier to take a higher path running just to its right. At the top, the path crosses a wide level path and leads up to a driveway. Keep straight ahead to a road. Welcome to Thursley!

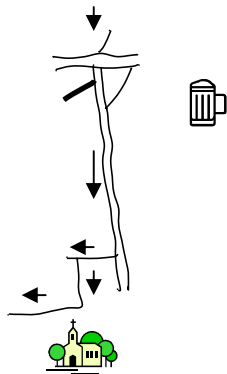




Thursley takes its name ultimately from the nordic god Thor, as seen on the village sign on the green. Historically it was important as a staging post on the Portsmouth Road. Its industries were glass-blowing and iron making but it lost its iron industry to the North of England when coal began to be used. The architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, who designed New Delhi, Castle Drogo and Hampton Court Bridge amongst other places, grew up in the village. The "Three Horseshoes" pub is a short distance on the left along the road. As well as a good range of real ales, it offers (very generous) homemade pizzas. Note that it is closed 3-5 weekday afternoons but on Sundays it is open till late.

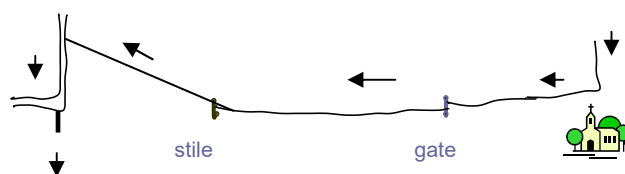
Leg 3: Thursley to Punch Bowl, 6 km=3½ miles

- 1 Cross over the main road, past the triangular green and the colourful village sign, to The Street, passing The Lane on the right. (Thursley people do not seem to go in for swanky names; the house at the corner is called, you guessed it, *The Corner*.) The Street passes some charming buildings, beginning with a fine cottage on the right. Just after *Wild Goose Cottage*, turn **right** at a signpost and, at the end of the track, turn **left** up a slope to the church.



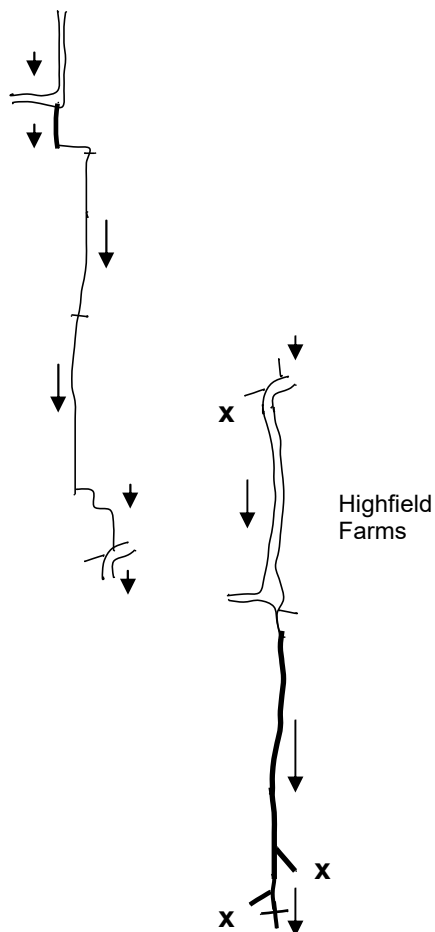
The Church of St Michael and All Angels is of Saxon origin. It dates from the time that Godwin, Earl of Wessex, ruled the territory. He was father to King Harold who was killed at the Battle of Hastings. Inside, it has some perfect timber-framed Saxon windows. Its unusual timber shingled spire is positioned centrally.

- 2 Turn **right** in front of the church. (If you would like to visit it, you need to go left round to the other side.) Follow the path as it runs close to a brick wall and fence on the left. *Note that this route is part of the long-distance footpath the Greensand Way that you come across in so many walks.* The route goes through a wooden gate on an enclosed footpath which offers a good harvest from the brambles in late summer. The path leads into a meadow. The path veers right and leads you down to *Smallbrook Barn and Studio* and a rough lane. Turn **left** here uphill.



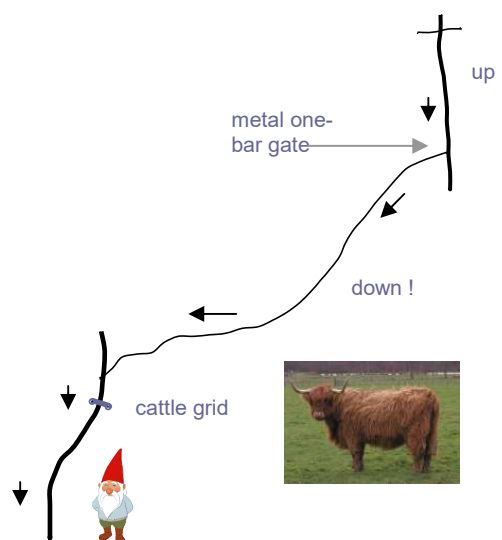
3 At the top, the lane turns right to a gate. Leave it here by continuing straight ahead on a wide path. The path bends left between fences and then right through a wooden barrier. The path (a bit nettly!) runs between fields, turns left and right left and right again, reaching a lane.

4 Turn **right** on the lane. In 20m, ignore a signed footpath on the right. The lane passes Lower Highfield Farm on the left and arrives at a small settlement by a little triangular green. Keep **left** here on a very rough tarmac track that will soon deteriorate. After 650m, the track forks by a National Trust sign. Take the **right** fork. Less than 100m further, after a cattle grid or gate, the track forks again. This time take the **left** fork. Go straight ahead over a crossing track on a stony path that rises towards the rim of the Punch Bowl.

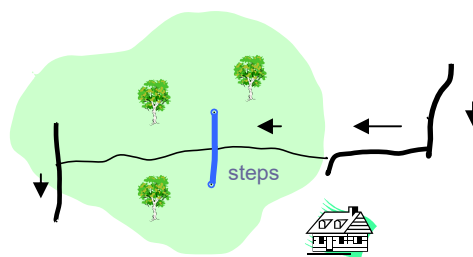


The next stretch takes you down into the Punch Bowl and shows you its wondrous beauty and variety. You will see that, contrary to the superstitions of the past, this is not a deadly morass but an enchanting mélange of sunlit glades, meadows, light woodland and rare plants, trees and birds. There is just one steep ascent, almost at the end of the walk.

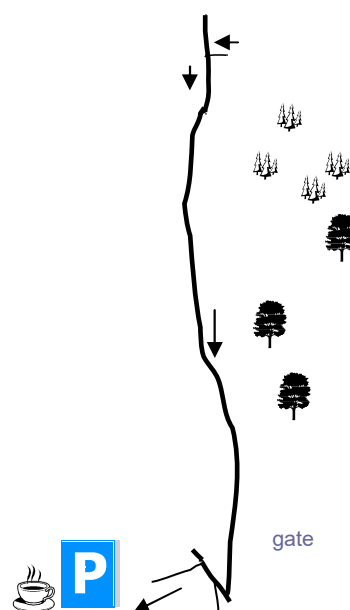
5 Near the top, look for a metal one-bar barrier on your right. (Some walkers like to stay on the rim and return via the new path along the old "A3" road, adding a little to the length.) Turn **right** here on a path that curves slightly left alongside a fenced meadow, then down into the valley where it curves right. *On a sunny late afternoon, the green of the valley and the heather and woodland around it make an unforgettable picture.* The path curves right and, after going over a small ridge and descending, it runs alongside a meadow on the right. *Sometimes you will see ponies or highland cattle in this area. The cattle are gentle animals despite their forbidding horns (think of Glenda Jackson in "Women in Love").* At a T-junction with a track, turn **left** over a cattle grid (or through the adjoining gate), ignoring the drive on the left. The track curves left, descends into a dell and shortly passes *Gnome Cottage* on the left from where they tend the animals. It somehow seems so aptly-named.



6 Ignore a wooden five-bar gate on the right that leads into Two Oaks Field and continue to the next junction. Turn **right** here. The track leads to a picturesque house which used to be a Youth Hostel, with its front meadow on the left. Keep **right** here between stumps on a woodland path. The path soon descends via steps to a bridge with wooden rails over a brook. It then goes up the other side on a sunken path. At the top, go through a swing gate and turn **left** on a wider path.



7 This broad path winds left around an open area. At a junction, ignore a narrow path right and continue straight on at all times past the *Pedestrian Path* sign and through a wooden gate. The path runs for some distance through beautiful beechwoods. Later it begins to rise and this section can be a bit long and arduous except for knowing that this is the *last* bit. On gaining the top, turn **right** through a wooden gate, avoiding a path sharp left. The first or second path **left** take you back to the car park where the walk began.

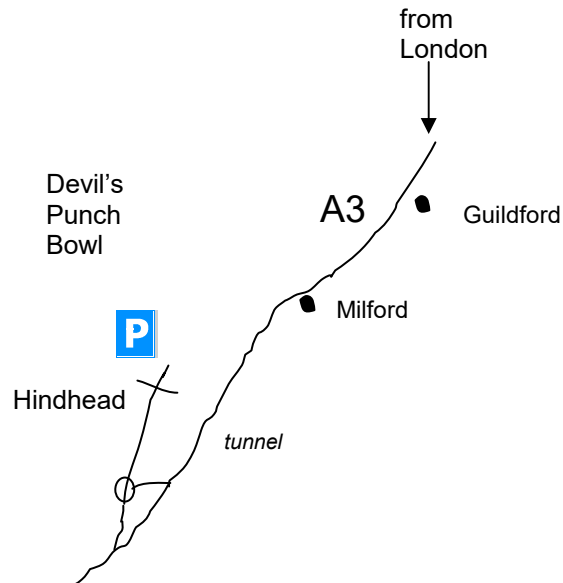


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Army closures. Hankley Common was ***closed to the public*** from 13 Feb 2023 **until 20 April 2023**, except for public rights of way. A similar closure may recur - see "MoD Access Times" on the Guidelines page. This walk uses mainly public footpaths, but you may need to divert in a few places where this walk takes unscheduled paths.

Getting there

By car: To get to the **National Trust Punch Bowl car park**, take the A3 and turn off, just south of the tunnel, at a sign for **Hindhead**. Go through the traffic lights in Hindhead into a cul-de-sac. The car park is on the left. Refreshments are available in the Punchbowl café.



Alternative *free* car parks are (1) Highcombe Edge at the end of Gorse Hill, just west of Hindhead off the Tilford Road before it forks (**postcode GU26 6SJ**) (2) the Thursley Road car park for Kettlebury Hill, just east of Churt, nearest **postcode GU10 2LQ** (3) Lion's Mouth car park on lane off the "kink" in Thursley Road (4) in Thursley village (park considerately).