



Betchworth and Buckland

Distance: 8 km=5 miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: Betchworth

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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Villages, windmill, watermill, views, woodland, streams, churches, pubs

In Brief

This fascinating, mostly level, walk with occasional moderate inclines seems to pack a new surprise at every bend. The two villages hold a long history which somehow seeps into you as you walk through them. Away from the villages there is some austere atmosphere which is never boring. A silent companion which pops up in places along the way is the River Mole where otters have been seen.



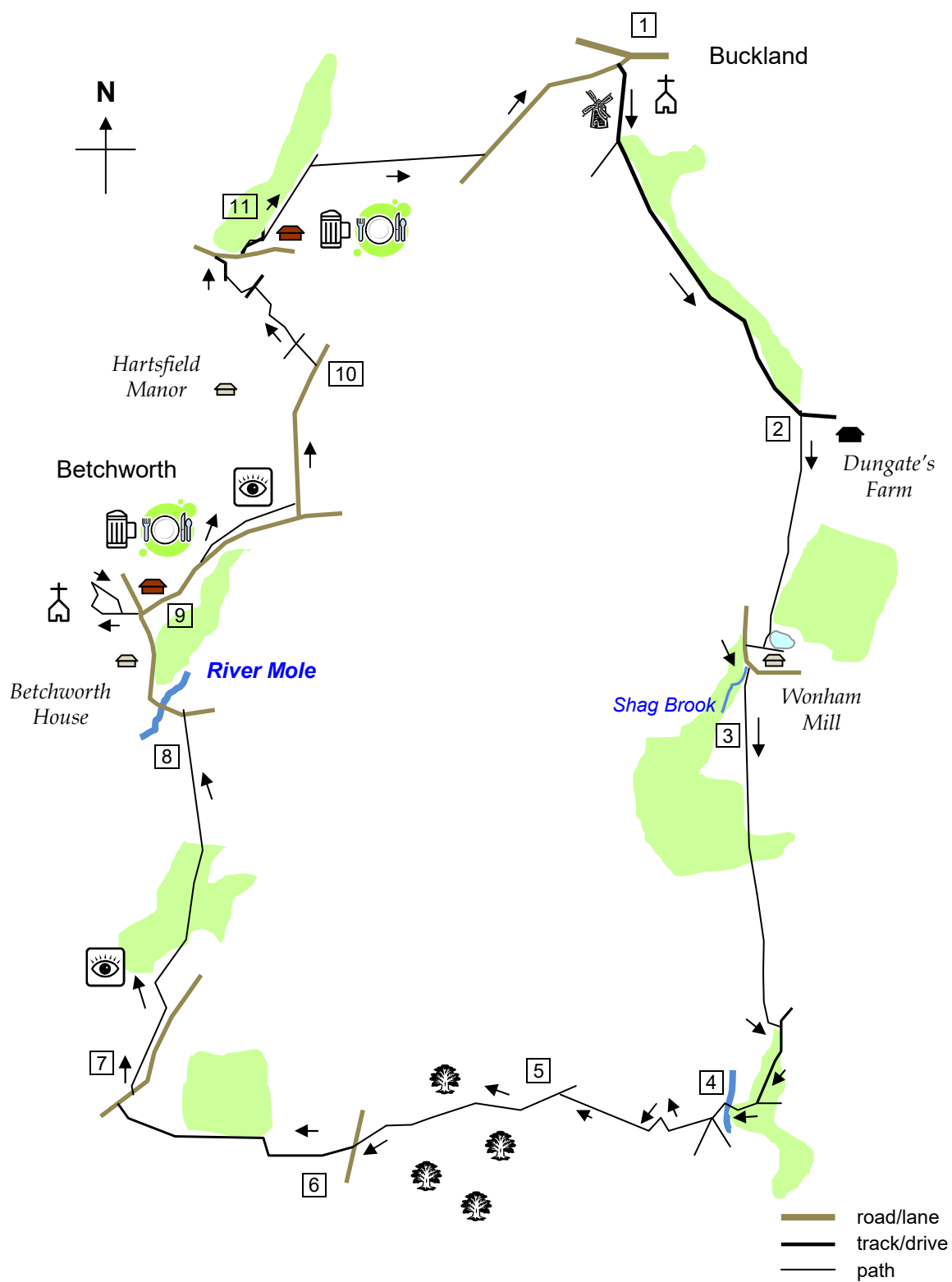
There are two great pubs on the route (to enquire at the *Dolphin*, ring 01737-842288; for the *Red Lion and Cellar Room*, it's 01737 843336). They both open at 12 noon. The little shop at Buckland offers teas and coffee.



The paths used in this walk are all well-made: either gravel tracks or quiet tarmac or mown grass; so there is very little undergrowth to impede you and shorts should be fine. In dry conditions trainers or walking shoes will serve; in the wet (or after a downpour) you will be glad to be wearing boots in case of the occasional splash, rather than for mud. With only **one** easy stile, this walk should be ideal for your dog as well as for your own knees!

The walk begins in the village of Buckland, Surrey which lies on the A25, east of Dorking, so easy to reach by car. The postcode is **RH3 7EF**, w3w location is www.w3w.co/family.jazzy.plenty. Park in front of a shop only if it is *closed*, or on the side of the tarmac, or along the lane. You can also park anywhere round the green on the other side of the (rather busy) main road. Another possible starting place is by Betchworth Church, postcode **RH3 7DN**, www.w3w.co/insert.spicy.pinch (however, starting in Buckland places the pubs nearer to the end.) For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



Buckland's name is a kind of general name for any land held by "written charter" ("Buck" comes from "book"), as opposed to "folk land" meaning land held by common custom. The village is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 but Bronze Age settlers lived here at least two millennia before that. The Buckland Estate, which includes the big lake, has been in the same family since 1654. Buckland once had three village greens, with just one surviving. The Towered Barn (Grade II listed) is early 1600s, timber-framed, restored in the 1900s, now a private house.

*Buckland Church was built in 1380. It was restored by the Victorian architect Henry Woodyer. The Towered Barn (see above) was used as a church during the restoration and some of the old timbers were used to build the windmill (see below). For the summer visitor, the most striking and charming feature is the long double line of rose bushes which seem to chaperon you from the entrance up to the door of the church. **The roses and the interior are an absolute must-see before you set out.***

- 1 Starting the walk in the little square next to the craft shop in Buckland, walking away from the main road, take the private cul-de-sac to the left, called Dungate Lane. After *Jokers Moon* on the left, in only 70m you pass on the right *Yewdells*. In the back garden is a remarkable sight - a small windmill.

*Buckland Windmill is real, not a folly! A working windmill, but it doesn't mill anything. It is a **sawmill**. The Udall family, after whom the house is named, were sawyers and carpenters. They built the 12-metre-high windmill in around 1860-1870 to drive the mechanism. In 1995 the new owners found a derelict heap in what they thought was an old shed and, lo and behold!, they realised it was a windmill. The official catalogue didn't list it because it was so hidden away. The windmill was completely restored starting in 1995. The current owners have occasional open days (phone 07786-966841).*

In a further 60m there's a major fork in the driveway: take the **left** fork, staying on the tarmacked hedged drive. In 700m, you suddenly approach Dungate's Farm. Before the big ancient barns of the farm, your first encounter is with a cottage in a rose garden, usually with some friendly golden retrievers and a table and chairs (not for public use!). Your route turns **right** here *before* the cottage, leaving the driveway, on a narrow footpath with a signpost [Nov 2024: grounded], keeping **right** past a redundant stile.

- 2 Your path runs beside a pasture on your left, then through a small metal gate, between pastures and through a similar small metal gate. Keep straight on, seeing Wonham Mill ahead getting ever closer. Finally, your path goes through a new metal kissing-gate, passing the mill pond on your left, arriving at a T-junction in front of the huge converted mill house. Your route is **right** here, but first it is impossible to resist going left (it is still a public footpath), over a bridge and millrace, alongside the mill pond as far as the sluice gate. (A tactful glance over the wall gives you a view of the old mill channel and the gardens and converted buildings.)

Wonham Mill on the Shag Brook is unrecognisable today after its repurposing in 2013 as smart dwellings. But it was milling flour until 1930 and stood as an empty relic after WW2 when it had been used as a wartime storehouse. First mention was in 1328 when it was part of Reigate Priory before King Henry's dissolution. The elegant Georgian redbrick miller's house dates from 1740, showing how lucrative the milling business was in those days.

Having turned right at the T-junction, follow the concrete path out to a lane and turn **left**. In 60m, opposite a corner of the mill house, by a fingerpost, go **right** over a bridge-with-rails onto a narrow footpath. The stream is the Shag Brook, subject of a dark legend.

Don't do this walk on Halloween! There is a legend surrounding a weird and terrifying monster called the Buckland Shag who lives by the brook. Described as four-footed, covered in a shaggy coat, either as a gorilla or as a dark horse, it had the nasty habit of dragging travellers to the Shag Stone (a large boulder in the brook) and devouring them. The legend is celebrated by the Buckland Shag Morris Men who perform outside the Skimmington Castle pub (see the big sister walk "Pilgrims Way and Mole Villages").

- 3 The path follows the stream for 50m and then takes you left through a wooden swing-gate, up the right-hand side of a large grassy meadow. You come through a metal swing-gate beside a large metal gate and continue along the left-hand side of the next meadow. The path skirts around the garden of the historic 17th-century *Ricebridge Farmhouse* on your left. Immediately after, go **left** over a stile next to a large metal gate and quickly turn **right** at a T-junction onto a wider path. The path soon narrows, running through a scrub of balsam, then under tall oaks. You reach a 3-way fingerpost. Keep **right** here, curving round a dry water channel to cross the River Mole by a heavy concrete bridge, where it is worth loitering awhile to admire the lily pool.

*The River Mole is known for its strange sink holes, known as "swallows", which have even put local houses in peril. They were described by Daniel Defoe, author of Robinson Crusoe, in the early 1700s. But the river probably got its name **not** because of its escapades underground but from the Latin "mola" (= "mill") and from Molesley where it discharges into the Thames. It rises near Horsham and the young river is seen on other walks of this series (e.g. Rusper). Otters still flourish in the river and have been seen here from this bridge.*

- 4 Keep straight ahead, on a steep knobbly path, up into a crop field. There is a choice of three paths here: one runs along the left edge and then cuts across a corner of the field; one runs straight across the centre of the field; yours is the *third* option: along the **right** edge of the field, under oaks. Follow the edge for 100m, to 20m before the far corner where the edge of the field bends away left. Go **right** here (just follow the grooves in the path) between oak trees. Your route does not enter the meadow ahead but turns immediately **left** on a grassy path between bracken. This path curves right and leads out into a crop field with a long clear straight path across the centre beckoning ahead.
- 5 At the top of the field, by a 2-way fingerpost, bear **left** to walk beside the hedge of a meadow on your left. Entering the next meadow, continue along the right-hand side. **You are in a land of great oaks! Looking around, you see them standing like guardsmen.** You come over a 2-plank bridge and through a modern kissing-gate, passing a fallen oak. As you pass a gap in the hedge with an old large metal gate on your right, go diagonally **left** to a modern kissing-gate almost hidden from view beside a large metal gate in the hedge. This leads out to a road, *Snowerhill Road*.
- 6 Cross straight over the road to a track on the other side, signed as a foot-path. You pass *Sunny Cottage* with the wry humour displayed on its gate. The track leads through a kissing-gate beside a large metal gate and zig-



zags right-left. Finally, go through a metal swing-gate on the right of a large metal gate, out to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on this quiet lane, *Wellhouse Lane*. After only 50m, long before you reach the next house, *Holly Cottage*, go **left** over a 3-plank bridge, through a modern kissing-gate, into a large sloping meadow.

- 7 Keep **right** so that you are walking near the right-hand edge of the meadow. In nearly 200m, you meet a fingerpost and a kissing-gate in the boundary hedge. Turn squarely **left** here, to cross over to the other side of the meadow, passing more great oaks and the remains of a stile. (Seasoned walkers and those familiar with this guide always take a short cut from the first kissing-gate.) Now turn **right** along the edge of the meadow. *But first, if you divert just 15m to the left, you will reach a viewpoint with a fabulous bucolic scene: ideal for a photo.* In the corner, go through a kissing-gate onto a woodland path. The path goes over a bridge-with-rails. Follow a knobbly path up into a field and follow the clear path straight ahead, leading out, via a kissing-gate, to the *Snowhill Road* again.
- 8 Turn **left** to cross the historic Betchworth Bridge over the River Mole. Immediately take a footway on the left. It becomes a raised path running beside the ancient wall of *Betchworth House*. As you come to a road junction, your route continues **right** on Wonham Lane. First though, it would be unthinkable to miss the chance to keep **left**, through an archway, into the churchyard.

The village's name comes from "Becci" an old English given name and "worth", a smallholding enclosure. It is recorded in the Domesday Book as one of the 176 manors held by prominent Norman Richard fitz Gilbert. Betchworth is an L-shaped cluster of houses, the south part extending round the church with Betchworth House and the River Mole at the far end. Betchworth Castle (not on this walk) is further west, a romantic ruin (visited on the "Brockham and Deepdene" walk in this series).



*Betchworth church dates back to at least Norman times. Some lancet windows, pillars and arcades are from the 1200s. It once served Brockham as well as Betchworth, hence its size. Inside are many fascinating and marvellous artefacts. On the west wall is a memorial to Arthur Woodriff Jaffray who built Hartsfield Manor in the 1860s and was killed in a shooting accident. Betchworth church was used to film scenes in the film *Four Weddings & a Funeral*.*

The usual route is to keep left round the church, having a look at the interior, and coming out at the little cul-de-sac of Church Street (alternative parking) where some of the oldest houses are, including the big furniture design workshop of Charles Wheeler-Carmichael. It is best to loop round and return through the arch to avoid traffic on the road.



Diagonally opposite is the *Dolphin* pub/restaurant. *The Dolphin is a traditional cosy pub, open all day every day; it offers a small well-chosen lunch menu; being a Dorking Brewery pub, it is strong on craft beers; it has a pleasant patio and beer garden. The Queen Mother once served drinks here (photo in the bar).*

- 9 Having turned **right** on quiet Wonham Lane, follow it beside a wide section of the River Mole for a short distance until, 150m from the junction, you see a small fingerpost on your left. Go **left** here up steps on a footpath which runs high above the lane. The path crosses a track and runs along the right-hand side of a crop field with good views of the pine ridge which is on your route. At the end, go through a portal of clipped trees to a side road, *Sandy Lane*, and turn left. In 300m, just before a house, you will notice a fingerpost pointing left.



- 10** Turn **left** here on a driveway and keep straight ahead up two flights of concrete steps. *On your left is the handsome manicured lawn of Hartsfield Manor, now a hotel and, incidentally, open for afternoon teas.* Pass a fingerpost [Nov 2024: upright but sloping precariously] to cross the hotel's tarmac driveway, through an old kissing-gate, alongside a rough field on your right. The path turns right in the corner and left through an old kissing-gate onto the tarmac drive of a nursing home. Turn **left** for a very short distance and immediately before the start of the building, go **right** between fences on a narrow path. The path bends left and right between fences and walls for some distance before discharging you onto a driveway. Turn **right** to reach a lane, *Old Reigate Road*. Turn **right** to reach the *Red Lion and Cellar Room*, a rather fine country pub & celebration venue. Turn **left** immediately before the pub to come out at the cricket green and the pub entrance.



This pub dates from 1759 and still has original features. But what strikes you is its quirkiness with bark figures of a dinosaur, eagle and stags, making the patio a thrilling spot for a drink and a meal - if it wasn't for the continuous music! Author didn't eat here but reviews are really good, especially if you happen to be vegan. The pub is open every day from 10am. The cricket pitch is home to the Reigate Pilgrims C.C. so it stands to reason the beers must be pretty good.

- 11** Go straight ahead along the left-hand side of the cricket green. In the first corner keep straight ahead through trees, following a yellow arrow, to reach a crop field with a choice of paths. Take the **right**-hand option to cross the centre of the field, with a good view of the North Downs. At the other side, keep ahead on a narrow path between properties, out to a lane, *Old (Reigate) Road* again. Turn **left** to reach, in 350m, the little square in Buckland where the walk began.



For final refreshments, one of the great roadside pub/restaurants of Surrey, The Pheasant at Buckland, is only ½ mile east along the main A25.

Getting there

By car: Buckland lies on the A25 Dorking-Reigate road. Turn off into the little square or park beside the green. Betchworth is also signed off a roundabout on the A25. Turn **left** and **right** to reach the old village. Turn **right** on narrow Church Street and park near the end of the cul-de-sac.

By bus/train: bus 32 from Dorking, Reigate & Redhill; check the timetables. Betchworth station is $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the walk and therefore not an ideal starting point, unless you take a taxi.

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