



Box Hill: Whites and Stepping Stones

Distance: 4 km=2½ miles

moderate walking

Region: Surrey

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Author: Fusszweig

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Refreshments: Box Hill café, Burford Bridge

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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Hill, views, woodland, river, stepping stones

In Brief

This is such a favourite walk, it can hardly qualify as a “new path” (as per our motto). But with so many Box Hill walks now published on this site, it seems inexcusable not to include this one, the most famous of all, which many of us did as young kids, may be as the first country walk *ever*.



There are no restrictions on clothing and footwear but bear in mind that the descent may have some slippery patches, so you need shoes or boots with a good grip. A stick (hiking pole) may also be useful in damp conditions.



Your dog is very welcome and will be in good company.



The final stage includes the famous stepping stones over the River Mole. However, if you are of a nervous disposition, there is also a sturdy bridge.

This is a short walk, with a tea shop at the top and an inn and a café at the start / finish. Once at the top, you can extend the walk considerably by following the North Downs Way to Headley or by exploring the woods over to the left, possibly by following one of the other walks published here.

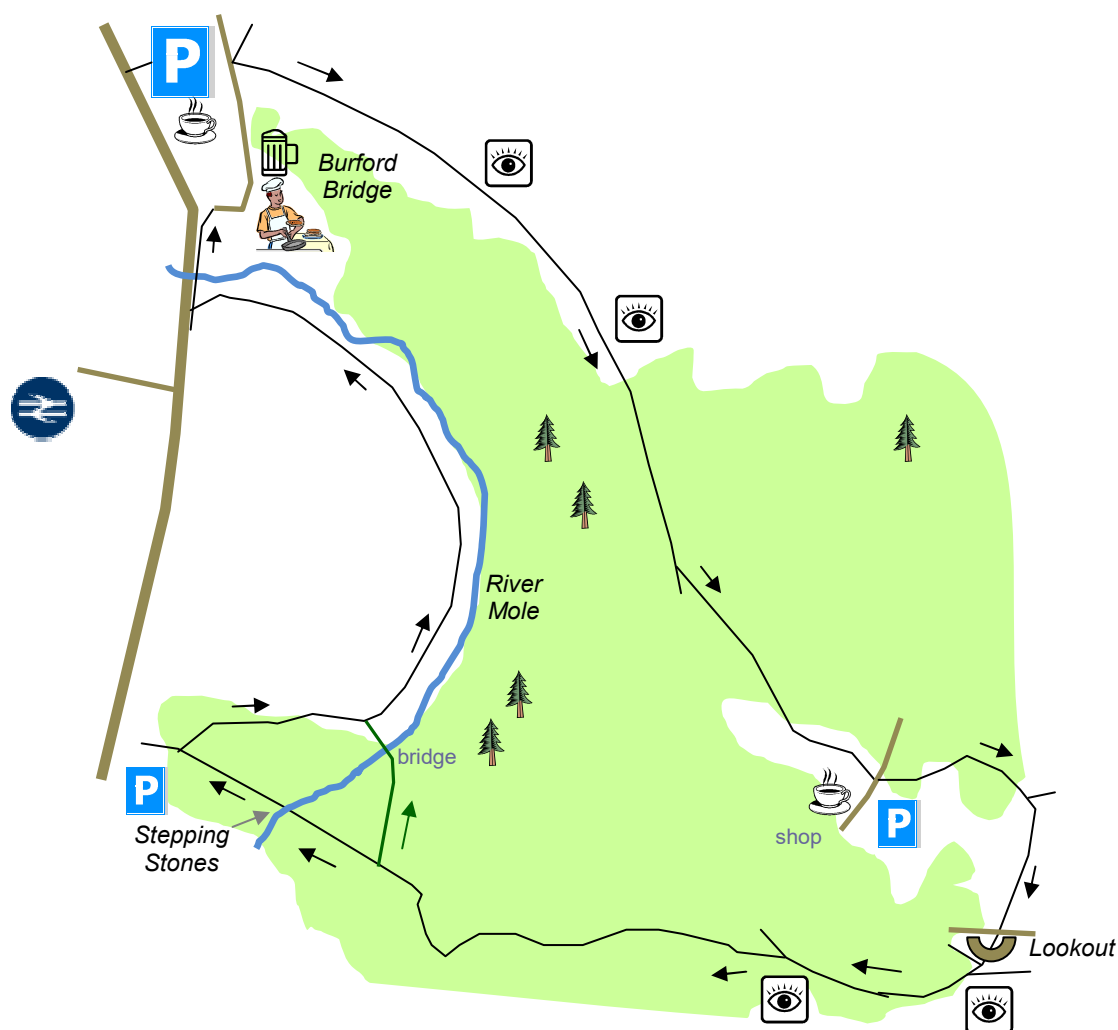


The walk begins at the free **Rykas Café** car park, postcode **RH5 6BY**. This is the first car park if coming from Leatherhead, just before the Burford Bridge roundabout (look out for a closure time). You can also start the walk



at the **Box Hill & West Humble railway station**, with an extra short hop each way under the A24 road. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 Exit the back of the car park, cross a road and take a path immediately opposite where there is a marker post and a *Welcome* sign for Box Hill. Ignore the arrow waymarker and turn **right**, going up a flight of steps. (An easier way, not shown on the mini-map, is to keep **left** on a more level path. This path goes parallel to the road, through trees, curving right and, after 200m, meeting the main grassy path up the more gentle slope where you can turn **right**.) A small wooden gate takes you out onto the open grassy slopes of the hill. Follow a narrow chalky path up the steep hill. As the path fades, just continue up the slope, staying not too far from the right-hand edge. *If you turn around, you will see the view opening up of the Mole valley and hills on the other side; at the top, to the right, is the white house Norbury Park (see another walk in this series).* At a marker post, keep **left**, staying on the grassy slope.
- 2 Soon you pick up a nice wide chalky path, one of the paths visible from afar, given the collective name *The Whites*. This path takes you through a small wooden gate. About 60m after the gate, your path forks. Take the **left**-hand path, the lesser, more level option. It joins a stony bridleway coming up from the left. Near the top, you pass on your right the so-called Box Hill Fort.

Box Hill "Fort" was really a storehouse for gunpowder and munitions for ready access in case of invasion. It's hard to fathom now that this was the 1890s (not

the 1790s) and the chief threat seemed to be from our neighbours across the Channel, especially the French who had a large modern navy. Compare Reigate Fort, another in the chain, visited on another of these walks.

Continue to a road where on your right is the Box Hill café, shop and loos.

WC

There is a servery for outside snacks and also a coffee bar in the shop.



Box Hill, named after the evergreen box shrubs that grow on its slopes, must be the most popular excursion spot in Surrey, not only now but centuries back because of its easy attractive situation near the road and railway in the Mole Valley. It was here that Jane Austen's Emma made her thoughtless remark.¹ John Keats, Daniel Defoe, George Meredith and Robert Louis Stevenson were all visitors and derived inspiration here. John Logie Baird had a cottage at the top of this hill from where he made experimental transmissions to test the television he had invented.²

3 After possible refreshment, cross the road opposite the café in the direction of the *Play Trail*. Keep round the side of the car park on your right to come to a very wide open grassy space. Veer **right** across the space heading for the open view, cross the road and make your way down to a stone viewing platform. *From here you have a good view of the town of Dorking spread out below. To the left is the village of Brockham and to the right the line of Greensand Hills (all featuring on other walks on this site).* Drop down some steps from the viewing platform to a path just below it and turn **right** on it. This path is marked with yellow arrows as the North Down Way.



4 After a bench seat, keep straight ahead. through trees and a small wooden gate onto another open area. Here there is another seat with good views of the Greensand Hills and Denbies wine estate. Another wooden gate leads into more woodland. Immediately after the gate, fork **left** down some steps signed *Stepping Stone Walk*. A long series of steps begins shortly, after a grove of yew trees. Although the steps are excellent, you need to be careful in slippery conditions and sideways stepping is a good idea. There are five flights of steps in all, some quite long. Finally, at the bottom, a stone marker indicates two possible routes:



5a **Over stepping stones (in summer).** Keep left on the wide path, arriving shortly at the river side. There are 17 stones, all wide and solid, making an easy crossing provided that the conditions are dry and you don't have giddy spells. In conditions of heavy rain, the stones may be awash, making a crossing here impossible. On the other side take the **left** fork, following a tall metal fence that leads you to a small National Trust car park (payable by non-members by mobile phone). Turn sharp **right** here, past a notice board, on a path through woodland. In 200m, you pass the foot bridge on your right. Keep straight on.

5b **Over the footbridge.** Turn **right** at the stone marker. In 150m your path takes over a strong footbridge across the River Mole. Turn **right**.

6 Follow a route along a green curving meadow with the river on your right. In 600m, you reach a NT sign for *Burford Meadow*. The path leads up to the main A24 road. Turn **right** along the footway crossing the River Mole to the Burford Bridge Hotel, Ryka's Café and the car park where the walk began.



¹ perhaps it was Mr Knightley's reproof that finally bonded them into matrimony?

² really a dead end – Baird's TV used a rotating disc rather than electronic raster scanning.

Getting there

By car: take the A24 between Leatherhead and Dorking. If coming from Leatherhead, turn **left** just **before** the Burford Bridge roundabout into the car park (if you miss it, keep left around the roundabout). If coming from Dorking, turn **right** at the roundabout and **left** to the car park.

By train: from Box Hill & West Humble Station, turn **right** out of the approach road, follow the road, passing the *Stepping Stone* pub (a worthy place for solid and liquid refreshment), turn **left** on the main road, cross it by the subway, and continue to the Burford Bridge Hotel.

By bus: bus 465 runs from Kingston, Surbiton, Chessington and Leatherhead to Dorking, stopping outside the Burford Bridge Hotel, twice hourly (once hourly on Sunday).

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