Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Box Hill via Dorking Stations

Distance: 8 km=5 miles — moderate walking

Region: Surrey — Date written: 7-jan-2018

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Refreshments: Box Hill, Westhumble, Dorking

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

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River, high hills, views, vineyards, country town

In Brief

The famous beauty spot of Box Hill looms over the country town of Dorking but ramblers arriving by train aiming for a stimulating climb usually stop one station short in Westhumble (as you can for this walk). However, what is little known is that there is a very attractive route starting in either of the two railway stations, going up the southern flank. In fact this route seems to be the most comfortable way. This is a circular walk which also takes you down the famous “Whites”, through the villages of Westhumble and across the Denbies vineyards.

This walk is just as good if you come *by car (or bus)*. There are several free car parks along the route and, although the walk goes past the railway stations, it quickly leads you back into magnificent open country.

For refreshments, there's a wide choice of cafés and pubs, both on the top and in the village of Westhumble.

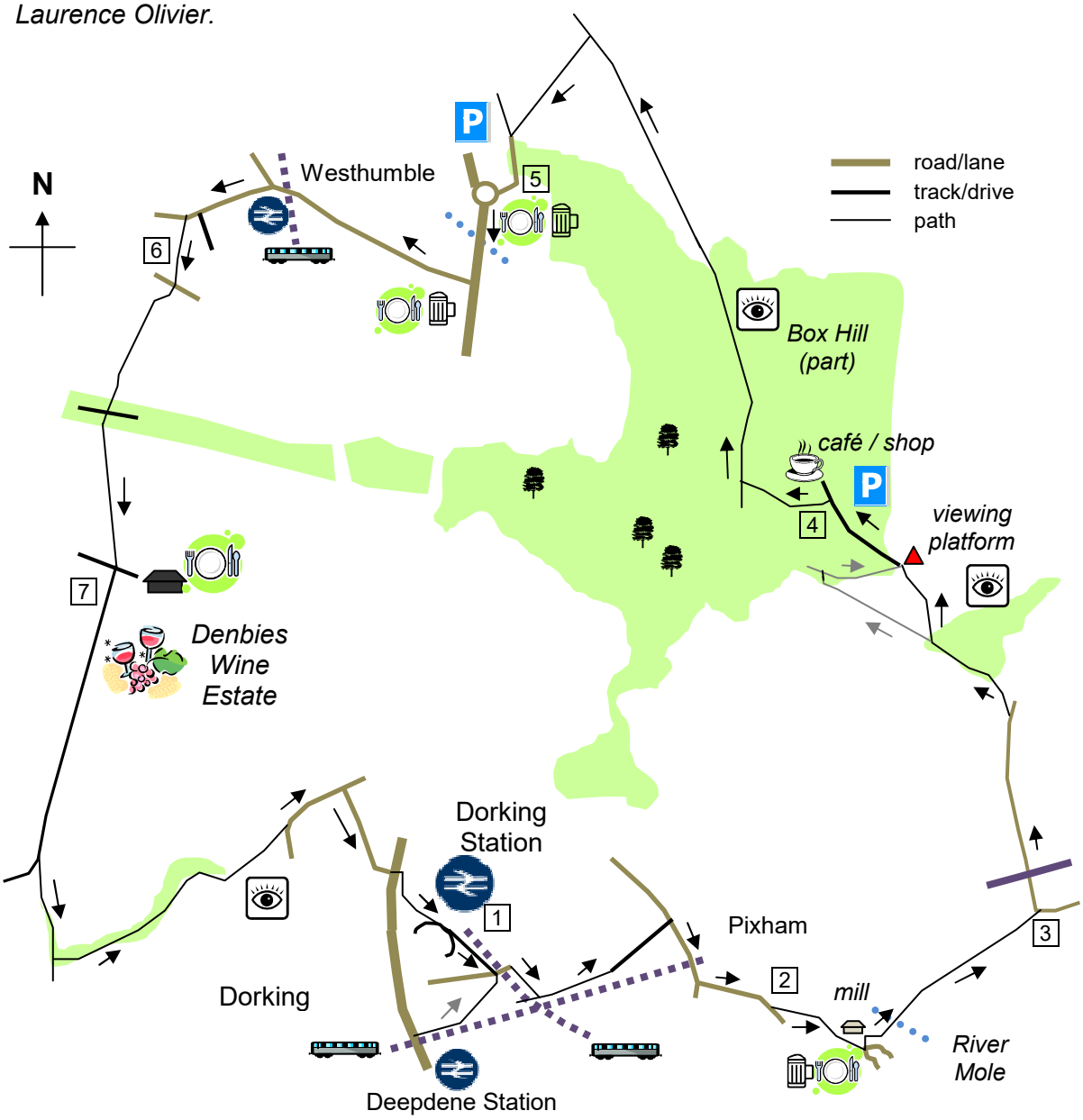
The first part of this walk can be used as the start of a 16-mile Dorking-Guildford *station-to-station* walk along the North Downs Way using the Guildford-Church-On-The-Hill walk at the western end.

There are no nettles on this walk and just a few stretches of mud on the paths through the vineyards. So shorts are fine and you may prefer to wear boots in the wetter seasons. Your dog can come too, with a short lead for one crossing of the main road. A hiking pole is recommended for the chalky slopes.

The nominal starting point for this walk is **Dorking Station** or **Dorking Deepdene Station**. You can also start at **Westhumble Station** (section 5). If you arrive by car, the possible starts are the free Burford Bridge car park (Ryka's Café), w3w:with.fall.behind, postcode **RH5 6BY** at the bottom of Box Hill (look out for a closure time) and the car park at the top of Box Hill, w3w:shout.tiger.nature, postcode **KT20 7LB** (small all-day charge). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Dorking was called "Dorchinges" in the Domesday Book. It was an isolated market town until the turnpike road was built in the 1700s (including the Mole valley road to London) and this brought wealthy developers in search of country air. Denbies was built on one hill, later rebuilt by Thomas Cubitt. Deepdene (later bought by the flamboyant art collector / adventurer / novelist Thomas Hope) was built on another hill. In the valleys, haunted Pippbrook House and Bury Hill House (now owned by Barclays) sprang up. The most notable son of Dorking (unless you follow football rather than the dramatic arts) was Sir Laurence Olivier.



This walk is also the start of the **North Downs Monster** if you come by train.

If you are starting from Dorking **Deepdene** station, do as follows. Exit to the main road and immediately turn sharp **right** away from the road on a sign-posted footpath, going through a metal swing-gate, parallel to the railway. (If you came out at the south side, you need to turn right along the main road under the railway first.) Exit through a metal kissing-gate onto Lincoln Road, turn **right** under a railway bridge and join the walk at point [a] in the section below.

1 Starting at Dorking Station, turn **left** out of the building and keep **left** between bollards into a long narrow car park. Follow it to the end and turn **left** on Lincoln Road, going under a railway bridge. **[a]** Turn **right** on a tarmac footpath which runs beside the railway on your right, going over the Pipp Brook (a tributary of the Mole). At a T-junction, turn **left** in the direction *Pixham*. Continue straight on past allotments. The path widens to become Pixholme Grove with cottages on your right, playing fields on your left. At the end, cross the road and turn **right** on Pixham Lane. *The village of Pixham, where Daniel Defoe (of "Robinson Crusoe") went to school, is now part of Dorking but has not lost its own character.* After passing under a railway bridge, turn **left** on Leslie Road.

2 Follow the road until, just after a side road, it begins to curve right. Now leave the road by taking a signposted footpath on the **left**, coming through a large metal kissing-gate. This path runs beside gardens and a millpond and, in 200m, reaches a junction of paths next to *Castle Mill*. *The man-made sandstone caves (now used as car shelters) are common in Dorking where the largest collection is next to the museum in West Street.* (Forking right ahead and round the hairpin will take you in only 100m to the *Watermill Inn* on the A25, a very popular chain mock-tudor pub with an impressive terrace overlooking the hills and watermeadows.) Turn sharp **left** beside the flowery millhouse on a bridge over the millstream. The path bends right and takes you over a long bridge across the River Mole which can be quite spectacular when in full spate. Keep straight ahead between meadows to a wooden swing-gate and along the left-hand side of a pasture. *The spire of St Barnabas in Ranmore is visible on the hill on your left.* At the far end, go through a large wooden swing-gate and down steps to a tarmac lane.

3 Turn **left** on this quiet lane and follow it under a railway and gently uphill. In 400m, opposite some wooden gates, the lane forks with a rougher track on the left. Take this **left** fork, marked *Box Hill Hike*. In 100m, at a National Trust sign, take the **left** fork, still on the *Box Hill Hike*, going through a small wooden gate beside a large one. Any cattle you may meet on this walk are the mild-mannered belted Galloway variety. Keep **right**, fairly steeply up the hillside, and through a small wooden gate onto a narrow stony path. In 100m, you meet a junction on your right with a marker post indicating the *Box Hill Hike*. Turn **right** here on a steep grassy path. (However, for a less strenuous ascent: stay on the path, passing a wire fence in trees after 200m; at a T-junction with a wooden gate on your left, turn **right** on a level path, part of the North Downs Way, to reach the viewing platform.) In 100m, keep left past some bushes and go ever more steeply up the grass, soon reaching the viewing platform. Go up steps to see the toposcope with views of Dorking and Brockham and pointers to more distant landmarks. After admiring the view, with your back to the viewing platform, turn **left** on a wide surfaced path parallel to the road to reach the NT café and visitor's centre. There is a serving hatch outside and a café inside the shop.

The **North Downs Monster** begins here, although it uses an identical route as far as the arch in Westhumble.

4 Walk past the end of the café and shop on your right and immediately bear **right** across the grass to join a wide path leading away into the trees, passing a private entrance on your left. In 150m or so, veer **right** at a T-junction. Soon on your right you pass an unusual gravestone.

Peter Labelliere was a Huguenot whose family came over from France. Taught only by his widowed mother, he became a school teacher in London and joined the Marines, rising to the rank of major. Back in civvy street, he became a well-known eccentric, walking from Chiswick to London with his rather drab coat pockets stuffed full of newspapers and pamphlets. He moved to Dorking, living in a cottage called "The Hole in the Wall", making eccentric pronouncements, roaming daily over Box Hill. When he died in 1800, the whole town formed a procession, led by black horses and a coffin decked high with box twigs, over the wooden bridge and up the zigzag path in a carnival atmosphere. At his dying request, a child danced on his coffin which was then tipped head-first into the grave. (The Apostle Peter had been crucified head down.) The returning crowd found to their dismay that some local hooligans had demolished the wooden bridge. Whether they all returned by stepping-stones, by swimming, by boat, or by a long diversion is not recorded in history.

In another 300m, after experiencing great views of London, you come through a wooden gate. You are now on the famous "Whites" of Box Hill which mark these well-known chalk downs from a distance. Soon the chalky path gives way to a grassy slope with even wider views. As you descend, keep to the gentle gradient of the long grass slope on the right-hand side, avoiding the steeper parts on the left near the trees. After a breezy 500m or so on this wide path down the slope, look for a line of three isolated trees immediately to the left of your route, the only vegetation on the otherwise bare slope. Just before you reach these trees, turn squarely **left** on a narrow path which leads down the grass and through bushes. (If you miss this turn, simply continue down the easy slope till about 10m from the exit gate and turn **left** on a narrow level path through birch trees, parallel to the road.) Finally, go through a small wooden gate and out to a road, opposite the Burford Bridge car park and *Ryka's Café*. Turn **left** on the road.

5

Go past the *Burford Bridge* hotel, a notable pub/restaurant. (You may need to cross back to the left-hand side to regain the footway.) Veer **left** beside the main A24 road. Keep **left** at a sign for the *Subway*, turn **right** through the colourful passageway under the A24 and **left** on the other side. Turn **right** shortly on a side road, passing the *Stepping Stones* pub. Continue along the road, using the sheltered footway on the right-hand side. You pass *Cleveland Court* which once housed the *Royal School of Church Music*. Soon, *Box Hill and Westhumble* railway station is on your left (an alternative start). Continue over the railway bridge and immediately ignore a footpath on your right. *Ahead of you is an archway with a plaque honouring Fanny Burney the Regency novelist who married a French émigré aristocrat and originated the expression "Pride and Prejudice".* Keep to the **left** of the arch and follow the road, using the sheltered tarmac footway on the left-hand side. At a white fenced entrance to a private road, keep ahead on the main road. Only 20m later, fork **left** at a rather hidden signpost onto a footpath.

6

The footpath runs between fences and comes out to a residential road. Cross straight over on a narrow path with more hedges and fences. You come out through a small wooden swing-gate to cross a narrow meadow. Another swing-gate takes you to a 4-way fingerposted crossing of the North Downs Way. Go straight over, through a small wooden gate into one of the huge vineyards of the Denbies Estate. Go straight ahead on a wide path between the vines. In 350m, you cross a concrete track with the Denbies Winery on your left. *The winery has restaurants, a shop and an art gallery and is well worth a quick diversion.*

7 Carry on straight over on a very wide stony track, heading uphill. At the top of the slope, where the track curves right, leave the track by continuing straight ahead on a grassy path. The path dips into a valley and rises again. Keep to the right, going through an open gate or a small metal gate. At the top of the rise, you meet 3-way fingerpost in trees, with a meadow ahead, popular with dog owners. Turn sharp **left** on a narrow path with the meadow on your right and a woodland strip on your left. In 400m, just before a house, keep **left**. You now have a terrific view of Box Hill and the surrounding valley of the River Mole. Your path comes out to a tarmac road. Keep straight ahead on this tree-lined residential road (Calvert Road). In 150m, turn **right** on another leafy residential road. Follow the road all the way to where it meets the main A24 road. Turn **right** along the A24, crossing Ashcombe Road (in about 125m), then a further 110m to the **subway** that crosses under the A24 with Dorking Station ahead of you, where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: To reach the **Burford Bridge car park** from the north, take the A24 Leatherhead-Dorking road and turn **left** just before the big roundabout. For the **Box Hill car park**, turn off at the big roundabout by the Burford Bridge hotel; follow the narrow road past the hotel and take the **first** road on the **right**; it is signposted with a brown "oakleaf" symbol and the words *Box Hill*; the road goes round two tight hairpins with spectacular views until, at the top, it passes the café / shop continue a little further and turn **left** into the car park.

You can also arrive at Box Hill via the A217 (Burgh Heath) and the B2032 (Tadworth), going through Boxhill village.

By train: Start at **Dorking** railway station, **Dorking Deepdene** railway station or **Westhumble / Box Hill** railway station.

By bus: Bus 465 to the Burford Bridge connects with Kingston, Leatherhead and Dorking. Not weekends. Check the timetables.

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