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

Haslemere and Blackdown

Distance: 13 km=8 miles — easy walking

Region: Surrey, West Sussex — Date written: 12-aug-2021

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Refreshments: Haslemere

Map: Explorer 133 (Haslemere) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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Country town, high hills, views, long woodland trails

In Brief

Here is a circular excursion from a Surrey town into the wildest parts of the next county and you can arrive by train! Haslemere is a charming country town with excellent chances for refreshment and the wild country is only a heartbeat away.

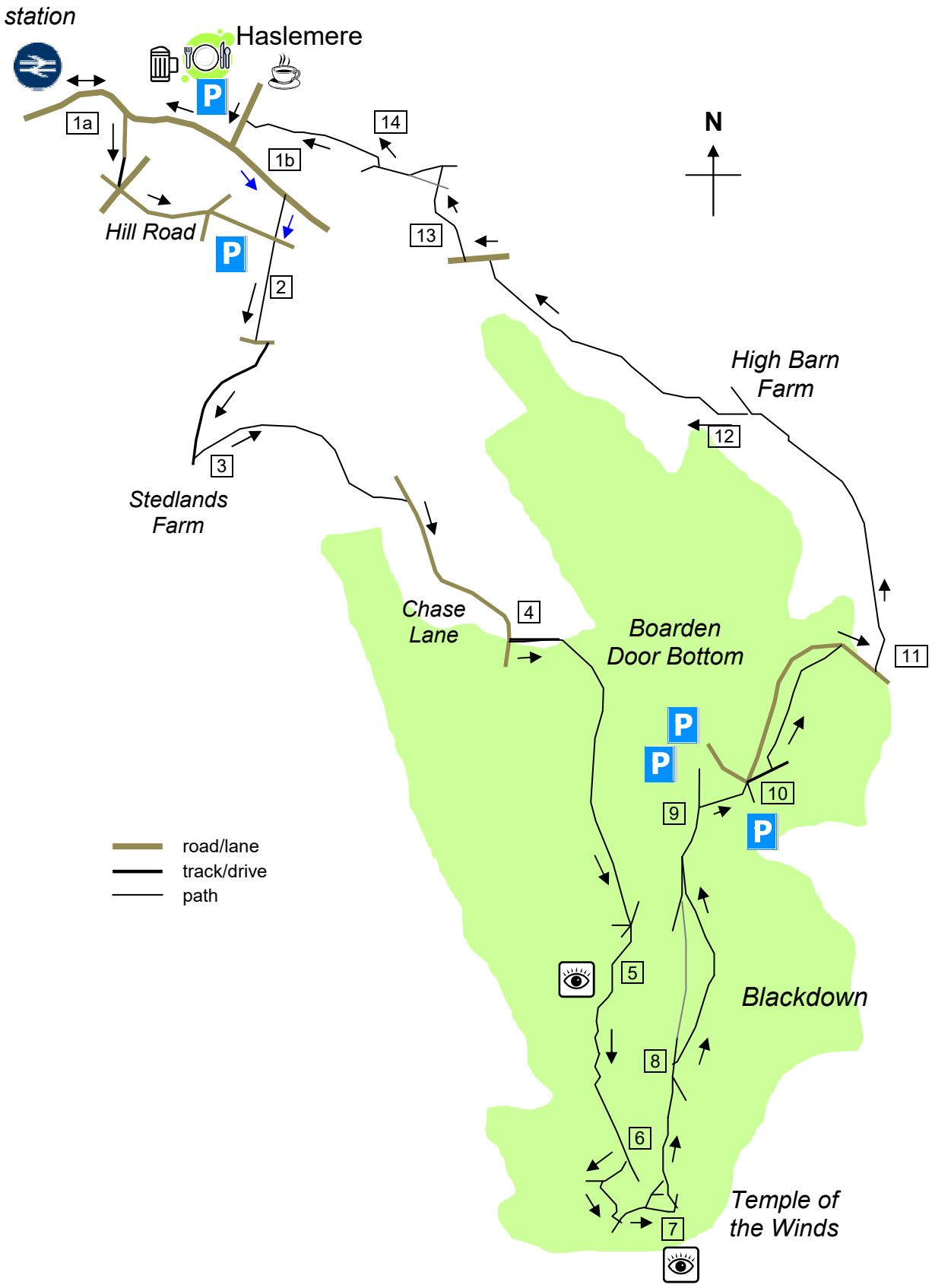
This walk is just as good if you come by car (or bus). There are large car parks in the town and easy parking in side roads (see *Getting There*). Alternatively, for a mid-walk lunch in Haslemere, you can use one of the free car parks at Blackdown.

There is no farm land across the route, so nettles and other undergrowth are mainly absent, making shorts wearable. The route is tarmac, plus high woodland rambles and wide tracks. There is one short muddy section as you cross the road near Haslemere, making boots preferable. With **no stiles**, this walk is fine for your dog too.

The walk begins at **Haslemere Station**, Surrey, or in the town car park, or on a nearby road (e.g. GU27 2JN), or in one of the free Tennyson's Lane car parks: w3w?below.genius.labs or w3w:circles.mermaids.miracle or w3w:openings.pickles.unzipped (start at Section 10).

For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Map of the Walk



Haslemere is named from the hazel trees around a lake (long since drained, although the town has several springs). You only need visit the excellent Museum to take in the town's history. Nowadays, mainly a commuter town, it once hosted leather curing, glass blowing, paper making, braid for army uniforms, spinning, weaving and cloth making, later bricks, pottery and chestnut fencing – you name it. The widened section at the top of the High Street is testament to there having been a horse market here in past centuries. Haslemere's most famous son was Arnold Dolmetsch (1858-1940), musician and maker of those famous recorders (i.e. block flutes), known to every school child.

One of Haslemere's notables was James Edward Oglethorpe (1696-1785). A former soldier, he fought a duel in Haslemere High Street, running his opponent through and wounding a bystander. One month later he killed a man in London who had robbed him of a guinea. Clearly the perfect credentials for the MP he became (before he beetled off to found the US state of Georgia).

Most infamous was James Fielding who was curate of the church from 1772 and soon after Justice of the Peace. His first wife died mysteriously and his second wife was nearly 40 years younger than him. Fielding had power over about 200 capital offences. (The awful murder of a sailor at the Punchbowl in 1786 – see those walks – were in his domain.) Several highwaymen were hanged under his watch – but it turned out they were his own employees! But other offences were often "overlooked" in exchange for a donation to the Overseers of the Poor. Strangely, the "Poor" never seemed to benefit much while the Rev Fielding prospered as never before, buying a large estate on Lythe Hill (on your route) where he built an imposing Palladian pile, Denbigh House.

The Walk

If you are starting at **Haslemere station**, do section 1a below. If you came by car (unless you parked on the west side), do section 1b.

If you are parked in a side road in Haslemere, go (with the town down on your left) to where Hill Road narrows just before *Knightswood*, turn **right** through a metal barrier, onto a narrow footpath. Start at section 2.

If you are at either of the **main Tennyson's Lane** car parks, go out to the lane and turn **right** for 300m to a bend. Start at section 10.

If you are at the **Lower** Tennyson's Lane car park, go out to meet the lane at a bend. Start at section 10.

1a Come out of Haslemere station and turn **left** on the main road. In about 100m, cross the road via the pedestrian lights and continue on the other side. Just after the road bends right, fork **right** on a side lane, *Sandrock*, uphill. (The author used the little woodland paths up on your left – too complex to write down!) The lane narrows at the end and, after a total of 250m, you emerge through posts onto the main A286 (Midhurst) road. Turn **left** and cross over the main road to a level minor road, *Hill Road*, a quiet residential road. There is a grass verge most of the way. The road crosses Old Haslemere Road and continues level, passing cottages and more luxurious properties. After a total of 600m on this road, at the point where it narrows, just before *Knightswood*, no.2 Hill Road, turn **right** through a metal barrier onto a narrow footpath uphill. Skip now to Section 2.

1b At the top of the wide High Street in Haslemere, at the T-junction, turn **left** in the direction *Petworth*. Walk 250m along the main road, using the footway on the right-hand side. Immediately before a large redbrick house with black timbers, turn **right** on a narrow footpath up 73 concrete steps. In 150m you meet a residential road, *Hill Road*. Unless you parked near here, cross straight over the road, through a metal barrier, onto a narrow footpath opposite.

2 The footpath runs straight for 350m, passing gardens on your left and soon a sports field. You emerge through a barrier onto a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane and, in 30m, turn **right** on a bridleway between two large houses. The bridleway runs through woodland, soon darkly shrouded by trees, gradually downhill. After 500m, the bridleway ends at the rural settlement of *Stedlands Farm*, with some large properties ahead. But your route does *not* pass any of the properties! *Before* you reach the *first* of them, turn **very sharp left**, almost doubling back, on a wide track, marked as a public footpath [Jan 2022: fingerpost leaning].

3 Keep **right** shortly to avoid a field. You come through two unusual metal gates into a sloping meadow where your path curves right along the edge. You come through a gap into the next meadow, still curving gradually right. *Valewood, the wooded valley on your right, is home to a rare group of beavers.* Go through the smaller of two gates and continue on a track with more great views of that wooded valley. The track ends at a tarmac lane, Chase Lane. Turn **right** on the lane. You pass various large houses set back from the lane. After more than 500m, as the lane bends right, a footpath joins from the left. Go a further 50m, passing the last garden fence on the left, that of *Chase Cottage*, to reach the start of a massive clump of tall trees just ahead. Welcome to West Sussex!

4 Turn immediately sharp **left** at the corner of the fence of the cottage, on a wide path, with those trees on your right and more houses on your left, passing a National Trust sign for *Boarden Door Bottom*. Your path curves right gently uphill through noble woodland of more tall pines and beeches, followed by an old coppice. You come out into the open and through a rider's gate into the wider expanse of Blackdown. Your path is still ascending, leading you to the tallest point in the county. You finally emerge at a junction of five paths. There is a sign here for the Tennyson's Lane car park but that would miss the scenery you have come to see. Instead, ignore a path sharp right and a very narrow path straight ahead and continue in the same direction straight ahead on a very wide sandy path a fraction to your left. This is the main route around Blackdown that many visitors use – and you may for the first time today meet other walkers and families.

5 Soon on your right is a toposcope and seat with fabulous views of the South Downs and Hampshire. *The hill in the distance topped with an aerial is Butser Hill; you can aso see the "golf ball" antennae at RAF Oakhanger (see those walks in the Hampshire section of this website).* In around 200m you pass a second seat on the right, set off from the path. Keep following the main wide path till you see a seat on your left, just as a steep sandy path comes up to meet you from the right *(see the Fernhurst walk on this website)*.

6 The main path curves a fraction left here. Instead, take a path that veers off a little to the **right**, heading for some solitary pines. In 80m, at a fork, take the **left** fork. Your path winds through heather and gorse under tall Scots pines and, after 150m, comes to a T-junction. Turn **left** on this path

in the direction of a white-on-blue arrow. Your path winds through more woodland on the southern end of Backdown. In 150m you will notice a seat just ahead. Avoid a wide path on your left here and keep straight ahead, passing the seat *(with a plaque "Bonnett, Braithwaite, Bennet, Lah Di Dah")*. Stay on the level on the very edge of the hill, soon passing some wooden posts and reaching a toposcope and a large round stone seat. This is the *Temple of the Winds*.

At 280 metres=918 feet, Blackdown (or Black Down) is the highest point in Sussex, being second only to Leith Hill (295 metres, 968 feet) in south-east England. The poet Alfred Tennyson, who lived in a nearby house, Aldworth (see below), used to roam regularly over Blackdown. The last owner, W.E. Hunter, donated Blackdown to the National Trust in 1948 as a memorial to his wife. The Temple of the Winds is the southernmost spot and the inscribed stone seat is a memorial to the Hunters.

7 After a pause to admire the view over Sussex, turn **left** behind the seat on a wide path that rises over a mass of tree roots. At a junction in 50m, keep **right**, still on the main path, following a "snake" symbol (the emblem of the *Serpent Trail*), shortly joining a wide path coming from your left. You are now on the main scenic path that rings Blackdown, this time on the eastern side. In 200m or so, you pass a pond on your right. In a further 250m, you pass a 3-way fingerpost. Keep straight on here. Only 30m after the fingerpost, you will see steps on your right.

8 (Most walkers continue on the main path – which you can also do. The author prefers the lower forest path for reasons to be seen.) Go **right** down the steps and keep **left** on a path that runs below the path you were on, under a canopy of tall beeches. The path descends a little, then runs level with a steep drop on your right. You come through mixed woodland with an occasional ravishing view east where the trees permit. Roughly 500m after the steps, you meet a tall pine in the middle of the path opposite a junction with a side path on the left. Keep straight on for a further 75m to meet a fork. Take the **left** fork, the more level option. In 200m more, you see the main path again – a sunken path running beside you on the left. In 50m you approach a seat ("John Cooper Ainsworth") on a platform. Go **left** by the seat and **right**, back on the main path. (There is also a route to your right, on rather overgrown paths, down, via a wooden gate, to the Lower Tennyson's Lane car park – for the curious and determined rambler.)

9 After 120m on the main path, you will see ahead a notice board and a donation pillar. 20m *before* the notice board, you will see a path forking right. (Keeping straight on will take you to the main Tennyson's Lane car parks, if that is where you began the walk, otherwise … .) Take the **right** fork, a straight downhill path, going through a wooden gate. It leads, in nearly 200m, out to Tennyson's Lane at a bend. (Immediately on your right is the entrance to the Lower Tennyson's Lane car park, if that is where you began the walk.)

10 **Leave** Tennyson's Lane at the bend by turning **right** on a tarmac drive for *Aldworth* (once Tennyson's house). (You could stay on Tennyson's Lane but that would miss a spellbinding section of woodland.) Immediately *before* the white gate, keep **right** on a narrow footpath that runs parallel to the drive – but only for a short distance. In nearly 100m you meet a shingle drive leading on the right to a house called *Foxholes*. Turn **left** here, crossing over the tarmac drive, to take a narrow unmarked path opposite, leading up a slope into an area of magnificent pines. In 50m, where a narrow path meets you from the left, keep **right**. Follow this good path over the wooded

hill [Jan 2022: going round a fallen birch]. The path winds through woodland, soon through a clearing under power lines. You come over a high point where a slope falls away steeply on your left. The path now descends through mixed forest over roots, passing under more wires. You meet Tennyson's Lane again, proceeding alongside it for a short distance before joining the tarmac. Turn **right** on the lane, avoiding a private drive to *Owlden*, for another 150m.

11 You reach a fingerpost pointing left to the entrance to *Barfold*. Turn **left** and keep left on a greystone driveway. *Note that you are once again on the Serpent Trail.* The drive goes between clipped hedges, soon with a large meadow on your right. About 200m after the start of the meadow, at a 3-way fingerpost, ignore a footpath right and keep straight on along this easy wide track. The track goes between hedges and zigzags right-left through a large metal gate. You pass orchards, a sheep fold and a paddock of *High Barn Farm*. By the house entrance, at a 3-way fingerpost, fork **left**, staying on the bridleway.

12 The bridleway goes down to a metal gate, taking you into deep woods, passing a memorial plaque. The winding forest path crosses a stream and passes a smallholding on your right. At Lythe Hill you join a tarmac drive. After some more houses, you come out to a junction with the Petworth Road. Ignore a minor road on the left and walk just 50m **left** along the main road. At a fingerpost, turn **right** on a narrow path down through trees.

13 The path runs over a boardwalk (though not long enough to keep you dry shod for very long) and three plank bridges. The path turns right by a fence and you come through a wooden gate to meet a crossing track. Cross straight over through a second wooden gate. (Local people and dog walkers simply turn left on the comfortable track.) In 100m, going over two plank bridges, at a 3-way fingerpost, turn **left**, going over a bridge-with-rail and through a small wooden gate. Keep straight ahead on a sloping meadow, aiming to go through a gap in the tree line and into the next meadow. Finally go through a wooden gate into a yard of Swan Barn Farm, part of the National Trust's *Speckled Wood* project. *(The traditional wooden dwelling is up on your left.)* Turn **right** and **left** on a wide sandy track, soon passing a pond on your left.

14 After 250m on this track, just after a left bend, look for a small wooden gate on your right. Go **right** through this gate into a wild meadow. Any cattle that occasionally browse here are the mild-mannered belted Galloway variety. Keep **left** in the meadow, going over a flat bridge and up a gentle slope. Go through a wooden swing-gate passing a notice board about the walk you have just done. Go straight ahead up a bank into a tarmac parking area. Make your way left-right round a storage unit and out along a driveway to come out into the High Street of Haslemere. A pedestrian crossing leads across the street to *Heidi's Bakery* where you can sit with a coffee and some nice pies. If you began the walk in Haslemere the adventure is nearly finished. Otherwise you have time to chill out in this delightful country town.

If you did **not** start the walk in Haslemere, now continue the walk by re-winding to Section 1b.

If you started the walk at **Haslemere station**, do as follows: At the top of the High Street, at the T-junction, turn **right** in the direction *Liphook*. **Avoid** the road that forks left uphill for *Midhurst*. Cross the road shortly and take

the raised footway on the other side that goes past a series of pleasant terraced cottages. Go over a side road and cross the road at a pedestrian crossing. In a short way, you will find the entrance to the station where the walk began.

Getting there

By train: to **Haslemere station**, frequent trains from Waterloo or Guildford, or from further south.

By car: If you arrive on the A3 trunk road, Haslemere is signed near Milford. Follow the signs, coming down finally to the main shopping street, leading to a T-junction. The main car park is reached by a U-turn and a left turn.

To park (discreetly) in the town. Turn **right** at the T-junction and, almost immediately, fork left on a road uphill signed *Midhurst*. In 400 yds, turn left on Hill Road. There are places to park, other than resident's spots, here or in other side roads. Best is towards the end of Hill Road, over a junction, because there is easier access to the walk.

For the Tennyson's Lane car parks. Turn **left** at the T-junction, signposted *Petworth*. Ignore the first road right (Museum Hill). In about another 400 yds look out for the next narrow road (Haste Hill), just after the main road rises and dips, and turn **right** here. Avoid an immediate turning left for *Lythe Hill* and continue up the road for 300 yds. Avoid a minor turning on the right and continue a further 80 yds to a 5-road junction. Cross straight over avoiding the private lane (Tennyson's Ridge) slightly left and take the lane **slightly right**, marked *Tennyson's Lane and Blackdown*. In 200 yds turn **left** to continue on Tennyson's Lane. The car parks are 1 mile on your right. The first is close to the lane. The second is further down a track. The third (the "Lower car park") is 300 yds further down, unsigned, on the **right**, just before he lane bends left.

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