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

Leith Hill and Holmwood Common

Distance: 15½ km=9½ miles, moderate-to-easy walking
or 2 walks of 10½ km=**6½ miles** and 10 km=**6¼ miles**

Region: Surrey — Date Written: 13-jul-2009

Author: Schwebefuss — Date Revised: 21-oct-2014

Refreshments: Leith Hill, Coldharbour — Last Update: 6-jun-2026

Map: Explorer 146 (Dorking)

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

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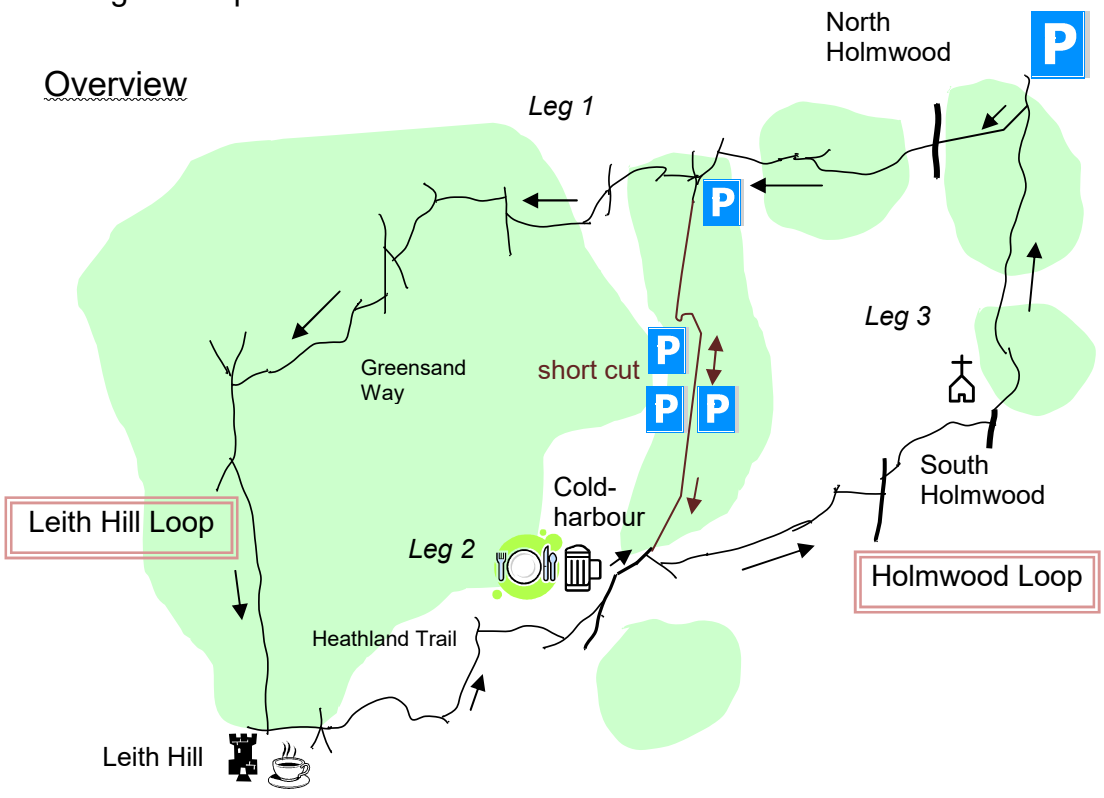
Heath, quiet woodland, hidden paths, hills, views

In Brief

This is a sparkling and inspirational circular walk along some of the hidden paths of Surrey leading up to the famous high viewpoint of Leith Hill Tower but using an unusual route. Even in peak season you may be quite alone until shortly before the Tower. The return also goes by an unusual route and offers terrific views. There is almost no road walking. Indeed, you may hardly see a car except at two busy crossings of the A24. As usual in this series, this walk uses some unregistered paths.

Overview



The walk can be divided into two different shorter walks. The **Holmwood Loop** (10½ km=6½ miles) takes in Holmwood Common, Coldharbour and Anstiebury. The **Leith Hill Loop** (10 km=6¼ miles) goes over Leith Hill. Both shorter walks go through some of the lesser-known dense woodland north of Coldharbour. **All** these walks visit the *Plough Inn* (newly renovated in 2016) in the village for refreshments (for enquiries, ring 01306-735149).

This walk is perfect at all times of the year because of the large stretches of forest with all the seasonal changes of colour. There are some nettles in the main walk, a discomfort for bare legs. In dry weather any strong footwear is fine but in the rainy winter of 2018 there were inevitably numerous muddy stretches in the woods and fields, making boots essential. Your dog can come too.

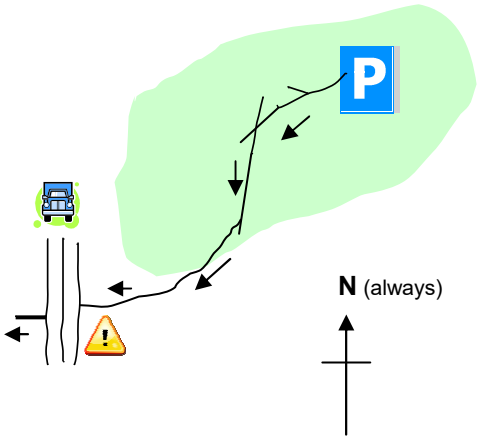
The **full walk** and the **Holmwood Loop** begin in the **National Trust Inholms Lane** car park in North Holmwood, w3w:office.puts.snail, postcode **RH5 4JH**. The **Leith Hill Loop** begins in one of **four** small car parks off **Coldharbour Lane** between Dorking and Coldharbour. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

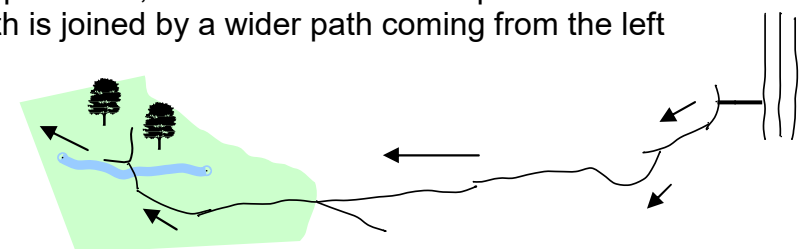
Decision point. If you are doing the shorter **Leith Hill Loop**, omitting Holmwood Common, skip to the **end** of this text "Coldharbour Lane car parks" and follow the directions under the car park you have chosen.

Leg 1: The Long Green Ascent 5½ km=4 miles

1 From the Inholms Lane car park, take the wide stony tarmac path straight ahead past a noticeboard, ignoring minor paths on the right and left. In 100m, go straight across a grassy clearing to a large 3-way fingerpost on the other side. Veer **left** here on a wide track in the direction of the *Circular Trail*. Within 200m you reach a second large fingerpost. **Leave** the Circular Trail here by forking **right** onto a narrower green path. The path gradually curves right and eventually joins a surfaced drive passing some garages and reaching the main road. Shift **left** a bit to cross the dual carriageway carefully to a stony lane on the other side, Swallow Lane.



2 Fork **left** before a fence and continue on a track across the centre of the green. About 20m before houses, fork **left** on a curving path and then almost immediately fork **left** again, and go straight over a track at a fingerpost [Nov 2024: grounded], beside more houses. On reaching the start of woodland, turn **right** as directed by a 1-arm fingerpost, past gardens on the right. 50m later, go through a metal kissing-gate to enter a meadow. Follow the path uphill across this large grassy space, passing under wires. On the other side pass through a temporary metal gate, to the right of a collapsed stile, into a dark wood. Keep to the main path through the wood. The path is joined by a wider path coming from the left and crosses a stream.

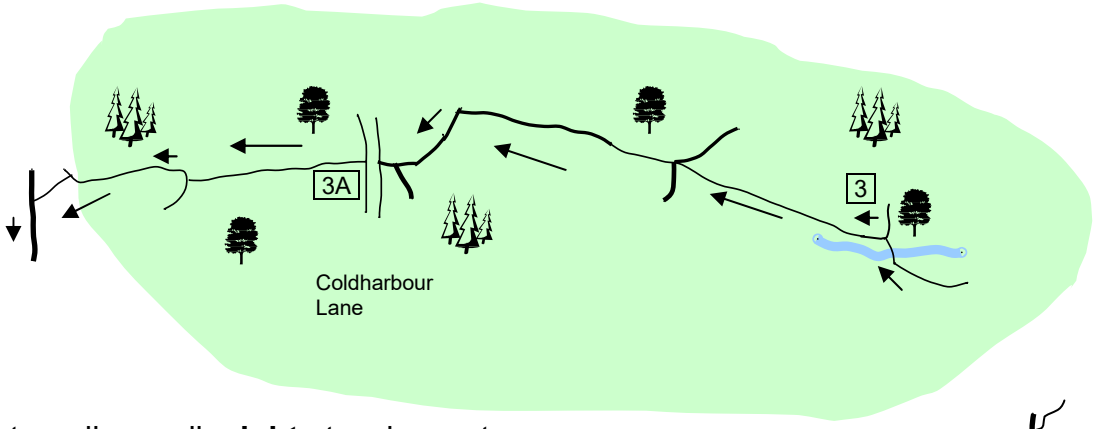


3 After crossing the stream turn immediately **left**, on a path that runs at first parallel to the stream [partly rutted by forestry trucks]. After about 300m, a bridleway joins from the right at a marker post with blue & yellow arrows. Go **straight on**, ignoring the wide track that curves away left. After a steep rise you come to a T-junction opposite a stand of pines with a metal fence and a reservoir beyond. Turn **left** here on a wide forestry track and in 40m cross straight over another wide crossing track which goes uphill on your left. Keep ahead, heading for a one-bar barrier, a small parking area and a road, Coldharbour Lane.

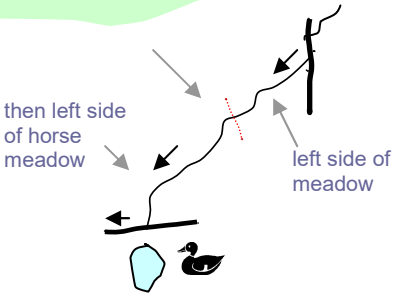
Decision point. If you are doing the shorter **Holmwood Loop**, omitting Leith Hill, skip to the end of this text and do the **Coldharbour Woods South** short cut.

The **Coldharbour Woods North** short cut joins the main walk here.

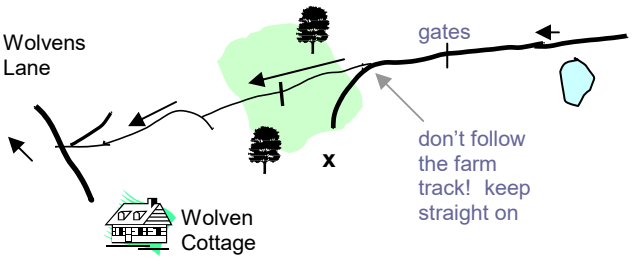
3A Cross over Coldharbour Lane, a fraction right. Take a track opposite, passing a large green metal barrier, and immediately turn **left** on a footpath downhill. In 150m, at a crossing track, your route veers **right** and immediately **left**, thus maintaining your direction. Near the end, the track turns left down to a concrete drive. Turn **left** on the drive.



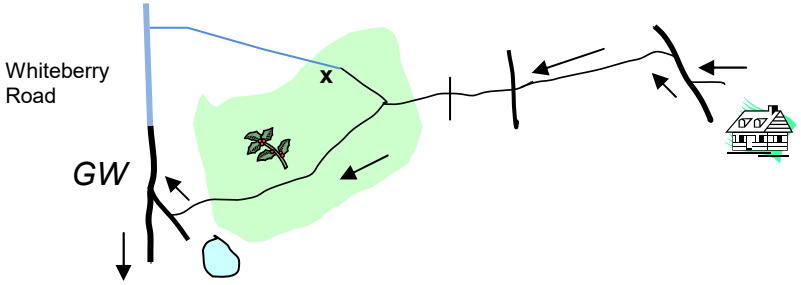
4 In 40m, turn diagonally **right** at a signpost, go over a stile, and proceed along the left side of a meadow. On reaching a gap in the fence, go **left** over a stile and follow the yellow arrow along the left-hand side of the next pasture, sometimes churned to mud by horses. At the end, go over a stile by a duckpond and turn **right** on the track leading away from the farm.



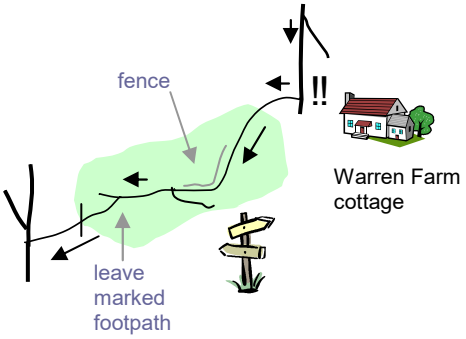
5 Go straight on past some metal gates. Where the farm track curves left across the grass, keep **straight on** keeping close to the fence on the right, heading for trees ahead. You pass a post with arrows, go up natural steps through hazels and are suddenly in a wonderful beechwood. On meeting a wide forestry track, shift left a bit and cross straight over as directed by a yellow arrow. On reaching a wooden fence by a meadow, at a signpost, turn **right** on another footpath. Continue straight on meeting, at a junction, a broad sandy byway known as *Wolvens Lane* by the isolated *Wolven Cottage Stables*.



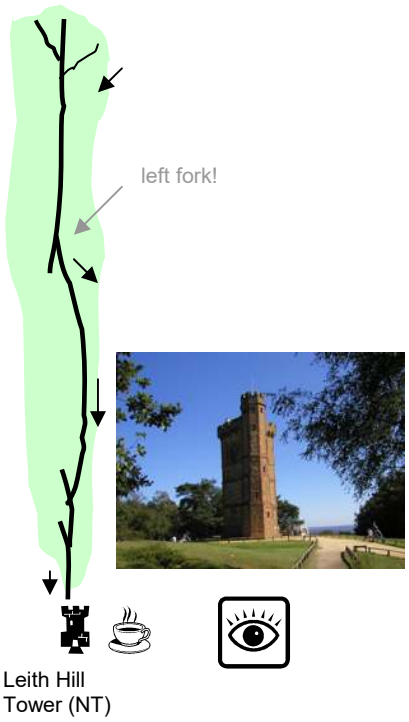
6 Turn **right** on the track for 50m and at the next junction turn **left** at a low bar onto a sandy path. The path crosses first a wide sandy path and then a narrow path and enters woodland going through a wooden barrier. Here take the **left** fork, the more level path through holly, quickly dipping down through laurels (and stepping under and over several fallen tree trunks) to an area known as *Tilling Springs*. (Jan 2026: the tangle of laurel bushes has now been removed, leaving a clear, but rather muddy, path.) On your left is a garden and a pond with swans. Go over a rushing stream and, at a wide T-junction next to a 3-arm fingerpost, turn **right**. Shortly, on reaching another T-junction with an even broader track, turn sharp **left**. This track is an ancient byway known as *Whiteberry Road*. *It is also part of the Greensand Way, a long-distance footpath which runs from Haslemere in Surrey to near Ashford in Kent.*



7 In about 150m, immediately opposite the fine old cottage of Warren Farm, 20m before a junction of tracks, turn **right** onto a narrow footpath at a fingerpost. The path leads up through a clearing in another fine beechwood. It follows the left-hand edge of the hill until it finally levels out. At a signpost at the end of a wire fence, turn **right** as indicated, still following the wire fence. A sunken footpath joins from the left at a signpost. Continue for about another 100m staying near the fence until you reach a post with a yellow arrow. Do *not* follow the yellow arrow but instead take a green path forking **left**, thus leaving the official footpath. In about 200m you go over a small crossing path. Continue until you reach the remains of a single-bar gate and, 10m further, a junction of major tracks with a signpost.

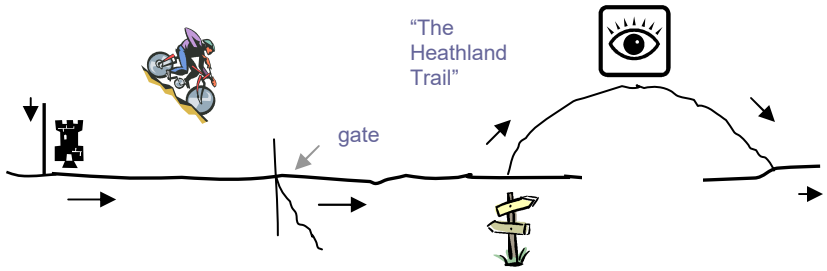


8 Turn **left** at the junction (disregarding any minor forester's tracks) onto a straight very wide track that leads gradually uphill. You may now see other walkers for the first time today. After roughly 300m, a narrower path forks off to the left. (This is the first significant left fork since joining the very wide track.) Take this left fork. This track will take you in 1.3 km through varied terrain, to the top of Leith Hill. Near the end, it is joined by two tracks coming from the right and ascends more steeply. In each case, keep to your general uphill direction. Finally you reach Leith Hill Tower with its fine views south over the Sussex Weald. *The servery has refreshments, open 10-3 Mon-Fri, 9-5 at weekends. You can ascend the tower at weekends where there is a view all round with miles of seeming wilderness. The tower was built in 1766 to raise the height of Leith Hill to the symbolic 1000 feet. It later fell into disuse until 1864 when the side-tower staircase was built and was fully restored by the National Trust in 1984. The* Weald *is the area between the North and South Downs, its name coming from the Saxon word for* forest.

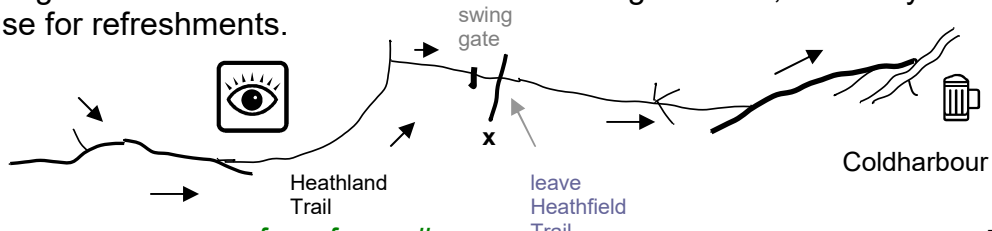


Leg 2: Around Coldharbour 4 km=2 miles

1 Facing the view south, turn **left** on the main wide sandy path, passing a mountain bikers' noticeboard, soon steeply downhill. At the bottom is a junction with a deep hollow on your right. Take the path **straight ahead** through a wooden gate at a National Trust sign for *Duke's Warren*. There is also a sign identifying it as the *Heathland Trail*. From this point, this walk is marked by green-topped posts ("GTPs"). In about 150m, at a junction, turn **left** as indicated by a green arrow and follow a semi-circular path with fine views north. The path comes round to another junction. Turn **left** here, as indicated by the GTP, back on your original path.

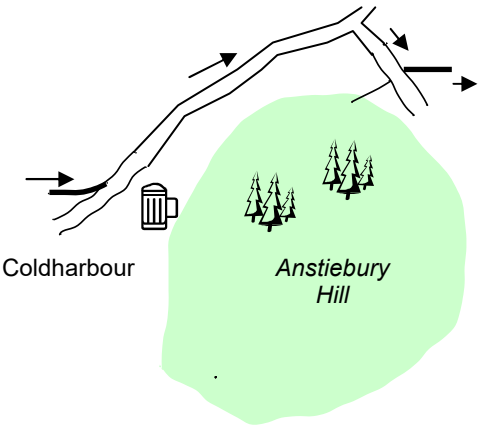


2 At the next junction fork **left**, staying with the GTPs. The track curves left, still with fine views. 450m from the fork, just before a gap in the pines, there is a GTP with a clear right-pointing arrow. *Don't miss!* Turn **right** here on a narrow path steeply uphill. The path takes you over a pine-fringed heath and through a metal kissing gate. At a GTP, cross straight over a sandy path, thus **leaving** the Heathland Trail. The path goes through woodland, across a clearing and back into woods (watch out for bikes as the notice says!). At a multiple junction, keep straight ahead on a downward path that comes down to an unmade road. Turn **left**, shortly reaching the village of Coldharbour. Your route is **left** along the road, but first you may like a pause for refreshments.



Coldharbour must be one of the most romantic isolated villages of the Surrey hills. For many years it was looked on with fear by inhabitants of the lowland towns as a refuge for smugglers who would keep their caches of contraband in safe underground sites and would deal ruthlessly with any outsider who interfered. The Plough Inn *serves several real ales, including three brewed next door in its own brewhouse, and has a garden in the back. It also offers accommodation. 2016: The Plough has opened a little shop selling teas, proper coffee, warm sausage rolls (very yummy) and other bites; it is open 9-2 Mon-Fri, 9-3 at weekends.*

3 Facing the *Plough Inn* turn **left** on the road. On your right you can see Anstiebury Hill.



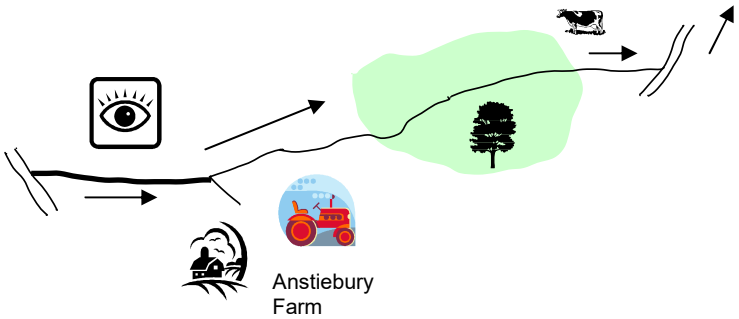
Anstiebury Hill is the site of Anstiebury Camp a hillfort constructed during the 2nd or 1st century BC. It is described as "triple-vallate" which means it had three ramparts (walls and ditches) around it, clearly a formidable defensive position. It may have been abandoned after Caesar's landings in 55 and 54 BC and later reoccupied in the Roman period. It is not accessible however.

Decision point. If you are doing the shorter **Leith Hill Loop**, omitting Holmwood Common, skip to near the end of this text and do the **Coldharbour Woods North** short cut.

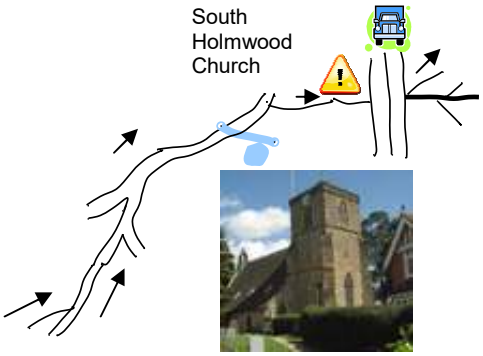
In 300m turn **right** on Anstie Lane and, in only 100m, turn **left** on a concrete drive.

Leg 3: Descent with Views 4½ km=3 miles

1 The drive leads to Anstiebury Farm. *Historic Anstiebury Farm is a group of buildings perched on the hill. The main farmhouse is from the 1600s but has been much modified.* After you pass straight through the farmyard, there are fine views ahead to the south and east with Gatwick Airport clearly visible. Avoid a stile and a marked right turn and keep ahead between meadows soon following an oaktree bank on your left. Your route goes over a stile (or through the gate), over another stile to skirt left round some properties at Anstie Grange and continues onwards through charming woodland. After some distance your path goes over a footbridge and, in a further 250m, through a large metal gate or over a stile into a pasture. Continue straight ahead along the right-hand side of the pasture. Finally you meet a lane via a stile (or a metal gate). Turn **left** on the lane.

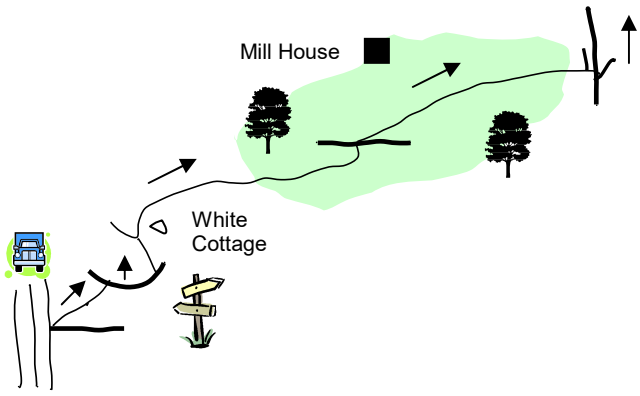


2 The lane passes several junctions of paths and tracks until it approaches the houses of South Holmwood. *Note the fine timbered Betchets Green cottage on the left.* After passing a pond on your right, turn **right** on a signposted path leading to South Holmwood Church. (In summer tall vegetation can make the pond difficult to see. Your path is the *second* signposted path on the right after after the smart buildings of *Betchets Green Farm Cottage*.) Go through a small wooden gate into the churchyard (or *round it* if you have a dog). *The church of St Mary Magdalene was built at the start of Queen Victoria's reign, replacing the original small rustic building.* Exit via the lichgate to the A24 road. You need to cross a fast stretch of the dual carriageway. In view of the number of accidents that occur here, it is safer to use the underpass, just 200m to your **left**. You should *definitely* use it if there are children or slower walkers in your party. On the other side is the start of a lane. Here and just ahead you have a bewildering collection of signposts to choose from.

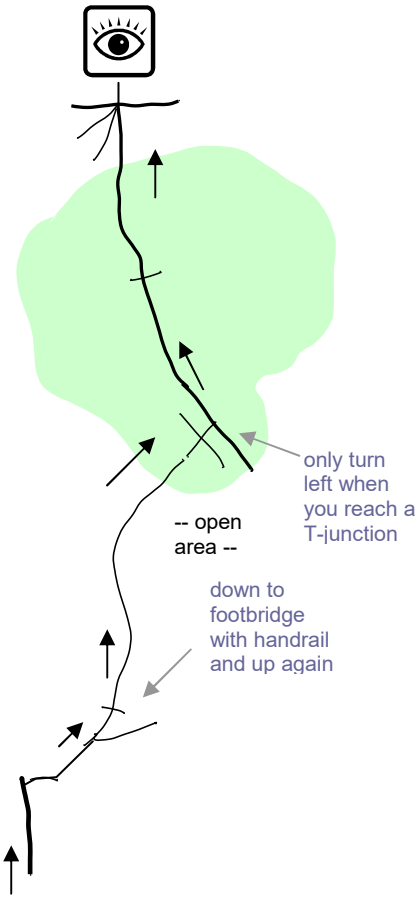


This last stretch through Holmwood Common is the most complex and you need to concentrate more than usual. This beautiful route takes you back to the car, showing off on the way some of the Common's best features.

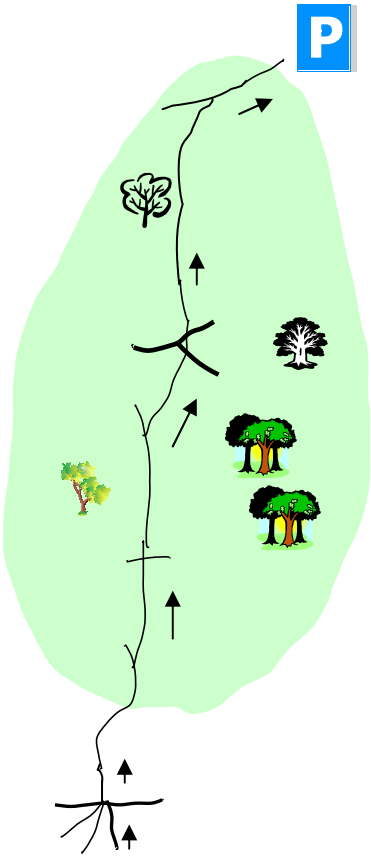
3 **Do not enter the lane** but take the **first** signposted path at the corner immediately **left** downhill. At a T-junction with a drive near houses, turn **right**. In 30m, at a signpost, turn **left** across the grass, as indicated, to pass to the left of *White Cottage*. Just behind the cottage there are two quite distinct paths forking off. Yours is the narrower **right** fork, immediately after a tiny yard, curving away **right** into the woods **behind the houses**. *Don't miss this turn!* This straight woodland path passes an impressive Victorian red tile-hung house on your right. In around 250m the path reaches a road. Cross the road, a fraction right, to a gap by another signpost [Mar 2021: grounded] and a footpath on the other side. The narrow grassy path passes the large garden of the house on the left (*a platform in the beech tree visible in winter*). After some fine woods, your path ends at a T-junction with a very wide roughly-surfaced track near a junction of drives on your right. Avoiding the junction, turn **sharp left** on this wide track, soon passing *Holly House*.



4 Continue for about 100m to a line of red-stone cottages. Turn **right** here on a wide grassy path in front of the cottages. At a curve, your path is joined by a narrow path from the right. About 100m from the cottages, the path forks at a marker post. Take the **left** fork, going down to a footbridge, and rising to an open area. Immediately take the narrower **left** fork and keep to the **left** side of the open area. The path passes a bench seat and then bends right. You soon reach a marker post with a blue arrow. Here you will find two wide crossing paths running parallel to each other. Cross over the first wide path and 10m later, at the edge of the woods, turn **left** at a T-junction onto the **second** wide path. (This is because the parallel paths later diverge.) After 200m, this very wide fine woodland path reaches a bridleway marked with a fingerpost. Continue straight ahead. After another 200m, you come to a hillside viewpoint with several benches, many paths on all sides, and a magnificent view ahead. The North Downs can be clearly seen on a normal day with the spire of St Barnabas Church at Ranmore visible on the skyline.

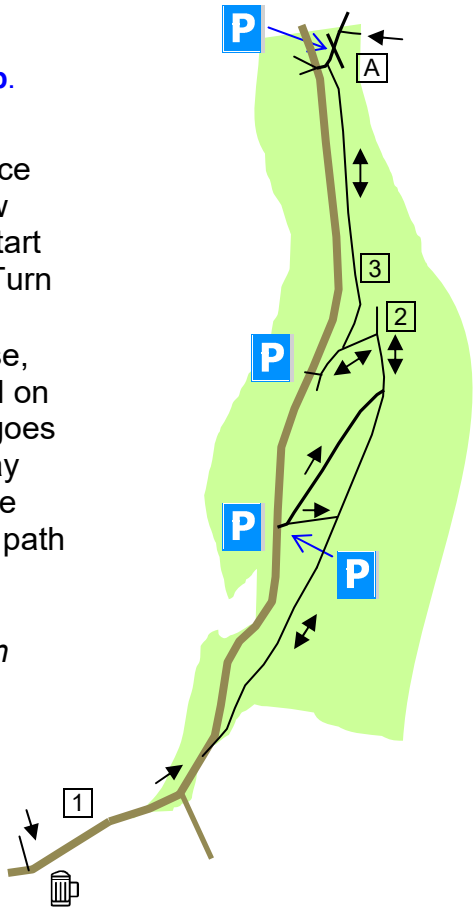


5 After admiring the view, continue down the steepest part of the slope ahead on a very broad grassy path. At the bottom of the slope, the path becomes a well-made cinder path, a welcome final treat for the feet. It curves right and left and comes to a fork, indicated by a large fingerpost. Take the **right** fork, in the direction of *North Holmwood*. This comfortable level path winds through wonderful extensive woodland that exhibits a remarkable selection of different trees, including several species of oak, hawthorn, birch, hazel, ash and holly. The path goes over a signposted crossing path with a house just visible on the right. Keep at all times to the main winding path, ignoring all lesser branches and crossing paths. The path eventually ends at a T-junction with a 3-way fingerpost and five different route options. Cross straight over the two gravel drives heading, a fraction to your left, to a 1-arm finger-post. Keep straight ahead in the direction of *North Holmwood and Inholms Car Park*. Stay on the main path till you pass another fingerpost familiar from your outward journey, and enter a clearing. Keep **right** at a fingerpost to arrive back at the car park where the walk began.



Coldharbour Woods South 2½ km=1½ miles

Use this short cut if you are doing the shorter **Holmwood Loop**.



A Only 15m before the barrier and the road, fork **left** on a narrow path running between tall pines. This path runs nice and straight through woodland, gradually widening. It now goes gently uphill and winds bit. Finally, 650m from the start of the path, you come to a T-junction with another path. Turn sharp **left** to meet a T-junction in 80m with a wide shingle track. Turn **right** on the track. In 150m, at the top of a rise, leave the shingle track as it curves right by keeping ahead on a narrower path, as indicated by a blue arrow. The path goes up through pines and soon widens, bringing you to a 3-way fingerpost. Keep straight ahead on grass, followed by pine needles uphill. A field becomes visible on your left. Your path soon leads down to join the road just before Coldharbour. Turn **left** and, at a junction by the 1640-vintage *White Cottage*, keep straight on. Soon you reach the *Plough Inn* and the centre of the village.

After refreshments, resume the main walk at Leg 2 section 3.

Coldharbour Woods North 2½ km=1½ miles

Use this short cut if you are doing the shorter **Leith Hill Loop**.

There's a huge hoo-ha centred here on the site of a threatened oil and gas exploration. You may see huts and a fence and a protest camp. Latest news (2017) seem to be 'at risk of not happening' as the drilling company is seen by Surrey C.C. to be 'difficult and awkward'.

1 Continue on Coldharbour Lane, ignoring the junction on the right with Anstie Lane. In another 120m, at a fingerpost, fork **right** on a bridleway. Your path gradually rises through pines, losing sight of the field on your right. The surface then becomes grassy and you reach a crossing path with a 3-arm fingerpost. [If you are returning to car park 3 or 4, turn **left** at the fingerpost (ignoring all the "fingers" on the post) and go steeply down to end your walk. Otherwise…] Continue straight on. After a short muddy section a wide shingle track joins you from the left. Keep ahead on the shingle track.

2 After 250m, just 15m before you meet a marker post at a junction where a path joins from the right, turn sharp **left** onto a narrow unmarked path. Continue downhill for 80m until you meet a crossing path. If you are returning to car park 2, continue straight ahead to reach a gap in the bank through which you reach the road and the car park. Otherwise … Turn sharp **right** at this junction onto a narrow woodland path. In 75m, at a clear fork, bear **left**.

3 Your path winds a bit downhill and then runs quite straight on a pleasant woodland course. Finally, after 650m, you reach a T-junction with a wide track by a barrier and the road on your left. If you are returning to car park 1, your walk is ended. Otherwise, turn **left** through the barrier to the road and resume the main walk at Leg 1 section 3A.

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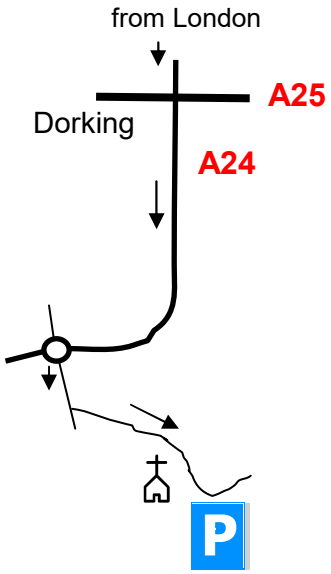
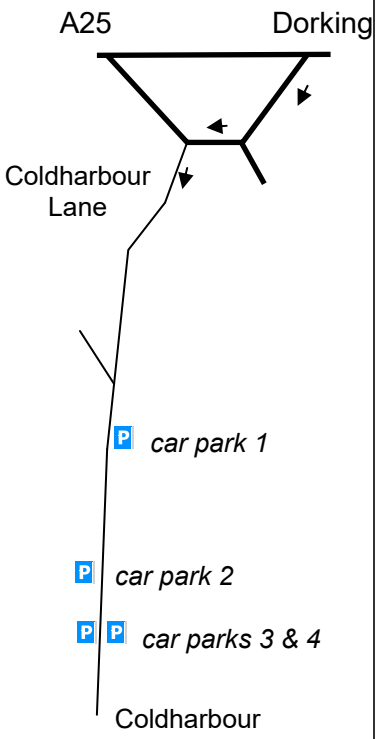
Getting there

By car: The *National Trust* ***Inholms Lane*** car park in Holmwood Common can be reached via the A24 through Dorking. Just over a 1½ miles=2½ km after Dorking you reach the North Holmwood roundabout. Turn **left** here and, soon after, turn **left** on a road signposted *Leigh, Newdigate*. Continue past North Holmwood church to the next sharp bend (careful !) where the car park is on the **right**.





Coldharbour Lane car parks

These are starting points for the shorter **Leith Hill Loop**.

Space in the village is very limited but there are at least four parking spaces on Coldharbour Lane, coming from the Dorking direction. This section pinpoints them and explains how to join the walk from each of them.

Car park 1 www.w3w.co/gloves.fancy.brains is the first coming from Dorking. It is not an official car park but the wide entrance to a forestry area with a barrier. It is used by local ramblers. This "car park" is on your left, about 2½ miles from Dorking and 400m=450 yds after a junction on your right, after you enter deep forest. Park without blocking the barrier, just in case the woodsman needs to open it (rarely, we're told).

If starting in car park 1, join the main walk at Leg 1 section 3A.

Car park 2 www.w3w.co/estate.bugs.sailor is a designated parking space off the road, on your right, 0.7 km=780 yds after "car park 1".

If starting in car park 2, cross the road, go through a gap in the steep bank, turn **left** on a path which veers right past a barrier on your left, take the **left** fork in 40m and join the Coldharbour Woods North section at point 3.

Car park 3 www.w3w.co/popped.fixed.join is an entrance to a forestry area on the left-hand side of Coldharbour Lane, 300m=355 yds after "car park 2". (**Car park 4** www.w3w.co/honest.thank.film is even larger on the other side.)

If starting in car park 3, follow the wide shingle track past a metal barrier and uphill into the woods for 250m, joining the Coldharbour Woods North section at point 2.