



Leith Hill and Holmbury St Mary

Distance: 8 km=5½ miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

Date written: 13-oct-2013

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Refreshments: Holmbury St Mary, Leith Hill

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

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Woodland, heath, views, village

In Brief

Leith Hill is inexhaustible source of great walks. For views, delicious woodland where autumn only sings the edges with a delicate brown, well into November, there is nothing to match it. This woodland walk uses some paths new to this site. Hot drinks are available at the Tower with an excellent pub in the village as a pit-stop (and there is also the *Royal Oak*, to enquire: 01306-898010). To enquire at the *King's Head*, ring 01306-730282. Perfect all the year round.

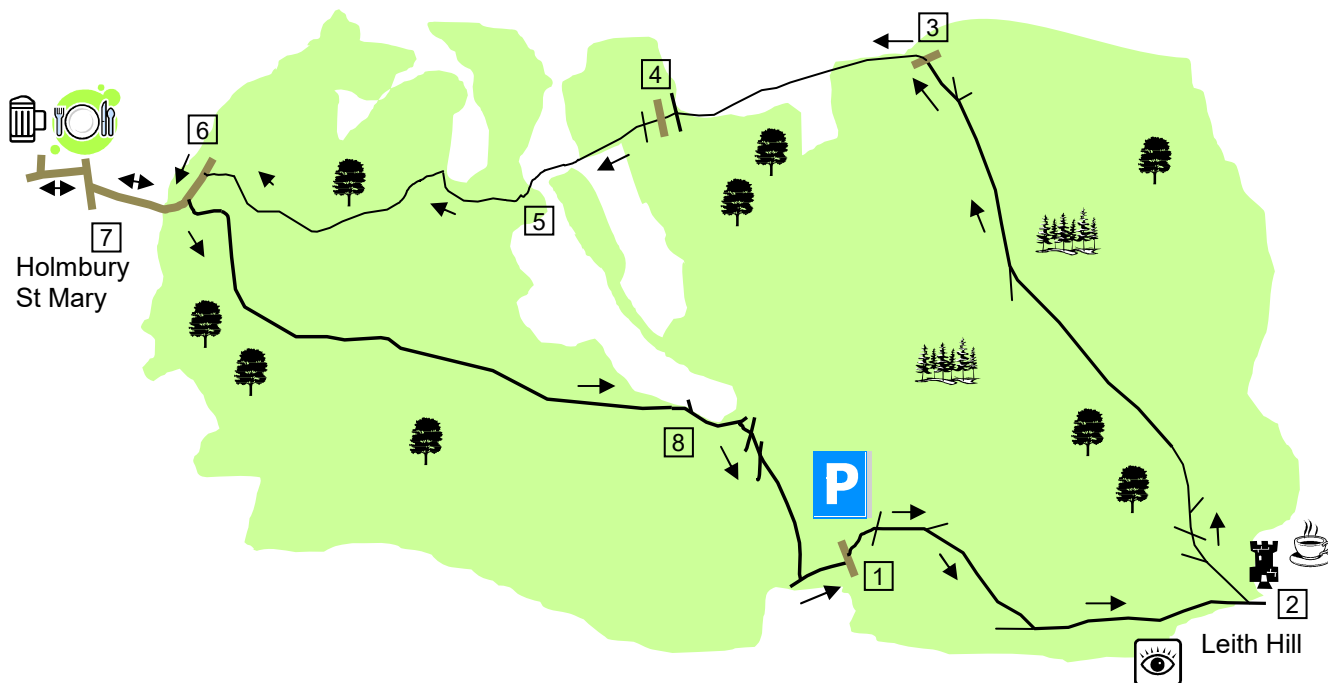


? There are a few nettles and brambles on the narrow path north of Leith Hill, but probably not enough to rule out wearing shorts. Sensible walking shoes or trainers should be fine – but do make allowances for the season and the weather as the ground may be a little soggy in parts. (In winter 2021 there was much churning up by forestry work.) This walk is perfect for your dog too, having only one stile.



The walk begins at the **Starveall** free car park off the B2126 Leith Hill Road, grid ref TQ130432, nearest (in 300m) **postcode RH5 6LS**, which places a refreshment break $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way round. You could also park on the road side near the pub in **Holmbury St Mary, postcode RH5 6NP**, so as to make an excursion to Leith Hill and back, or in the Landslip car park below Leith Hill. If you have done this walk before, it may be a good idea to do it *in reverse*, with the ascent of Leith Hill near the end, for views and a possible refreshment break. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 The walk begins with an easy level path to the top of Leith Hill. From the back of the car park, look for a signpost with a white tower shape, or simply follow the crowds. In 50m your path crosses a bridleway at a fingerpost. Soon after, your path forks **right** by a white tower symbol on a level path. Later another wide path joins you from the right at a marker post, part of the Greensand Way long-distance footpath. 20m after, fork **left** at a footpath sign. This path runs parallel to the main track, partly to protect you from mountain bikers. The footpath crosses the track and continues on the other side of the track before rejoining it. You now have terrific views south over the Sussex Weald to the South Downs. After you pass a noticeboard, continue uphill to Leith Hill Tower with more fine views. The servery has refreshments and nice homemade cakes, now open daily, closing at 5, or 3 weekdays. You can ascend the tower where there is a view all round with miles of seeming wilderness.



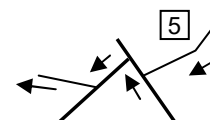
The tower was built in 1766 to raise the height of Leith Hill to a symbolic 1000 feet. It later fell into disuse until 1864 when the side-tower staircase was built and was fully restored by the National Trust in 1984.

- 2 After a scenic breather and refreshment, facing the tower, turn **left**, back in the direction you came, but immediately fork **right** on a level path that runs between low wooden railings and down into the woods. At a distance of 70m from the end of the railings, you reach a clear fork in the path. Take the **right** fork, a path that soon gently descends. You will be following this path straight on for 1 km through magnificent ever-changing woodland. Your path goes over a crossing path: keep to the main path downhill. After 50m or so, at the bottom of a slope, you pass a post with a blue arrow and paths leading off. [Jan 2021: churned up by tractors and the post gone.] 20m later, avoid a path forking right downhill and stay on the more level path with rhododendrons visible ahead (2020: almost entirely cut down). The terrain soon becomes sandy amidst bracken and pines. About 1 km from the tower, your path meets another wide path coming from the left. After

another 300m, you come to a junction of several paths with a 3-way fingerpost and a wooden barrier [Aug 2021: both broken] on your right. Take the **left** fork, a wide slightly rising path. In 100m you pass another fingerpost and reach an open area and a narrow lane.

- 3 Cross the lane to a new fingerpost, about 5m to your left, and take a footpath through the beechwoods running not far from a fence on your right. In 200m your path leads you through a swing-gate and straight across a crop field. It leads to another swing-gate and a narrow path between hedges. Continue beside a house and garden on your left. Your path soon goes downhill, beside a replanted area on your right, to meet a wide crossing path by a 3-way fingerpost.
- 4 Cross straight over the path, keeping **left** after 10m, on a narrow path steeply uphill into woods. It takes you up to a road, Leith Hill Road. Cross the road to a narrow footpath opposite, soon arriving at a crossing path and a 4-way fingerpost. Again, continue straight over. Your path runs under hollies to a stile leading into a field. Ignore a wide gap on your left and keep straight ahead, along the left-hand side of a pasture. On the other side, go through a swing-gate and along a narrow path, fenced on one side.

- 5 See *mini-map*. At the end of the barbed-wire fence, turn **right** and immediately **left** on a wide path, following the markers. In only 15m, at a post with a yellow arrow, turn **right** on a path entering Upper Foxmoor Wood. In 200m or so you will see a field close by on your right and a house in the distance. As you reach the **first** corner, your path continues straight on, under overhanging trees, with the field on your right. At the **second** corner, after 50m, where the field bends right by some heavy wooden posts on your right, turn sharp **left** on a woodland path. (Do *not* go in the direction of the house.) You are shortly guided by blue marks on trees and small posts. You are now in the lovely mixed verdure of Pasture Wood. In 300m or so, your path enters an area of lofty pines, descends over a crossing path and levels out. It crosses another path and descends again on a winding course and emerges through some undergrowth to a road.



- 6 Turn **left** on the road, soon passing a bridleway on your left. This will be your return route. First however, you will want to continue along the road to visit Holmbury St Mary for a pause and refreshments. *In about 100m on the right, at the entrance to a farm/stables, you will see a small caravan selling coffee and snacks, with wooden benches in the open and a covered area. This is the Heartwork Café, open every day except Monday, until about 3pm.* You meet a major road in the village. (Aug 2018: the *King's Head* is closed again for refurbishment. But there is always the *Royal Oak*: turn **right** on the main road using the footway for 500m.) Turn **right** on the road and very shortly turn **left** on Pitland Street. In 100m, turn **right** at a junction, immediately reaching the *King's Head*.



The King's Head is a perfect little freehouse country pub, at least as good, or better, than the Royal Oak in the village centre. The new owners (2016) have re-shaped the interior with a bar, a TV, a welcoming log fire and a generous seating area for snacks and meals. The menu is on the chalkboard. There is a £10 special deal offering a meal and a pint. Five ales are usually on tap, mostly local microbrews such as Ottars. The pub is open all day Friday-Sunday. It is now open on Mondays. Food is served till 2.30 (4pm Sundays) but booking is strongly advisable at weekends.

Holmbury St Mary is described in another walk in this series: “*Abinger Villages, Holmbury St Mary*”. After refreshment, retrace your route back to the main road and turn **right**.

- 7 50m after the junction with Pitland Street, turn **left** on Pasturewood Road. In 250m, just before a left bend, turn **right** at a fingerpost onto a bridleway, also marked as the Greensand Way (GW). You will be following this wide stony path through varied terrain for 1½ km. After some dense woodland, keep straight ahead on a narrower undulating sandy path in a landscape of bracken and birch sloping steeply on your right. You now have a gradual ascent through more woodland to meet a private drive coming from High Ashes Farm. *Here you will find several benches carved from a fallen tree by the landowner/farmer which are perfect for a rest, or a picnic.*

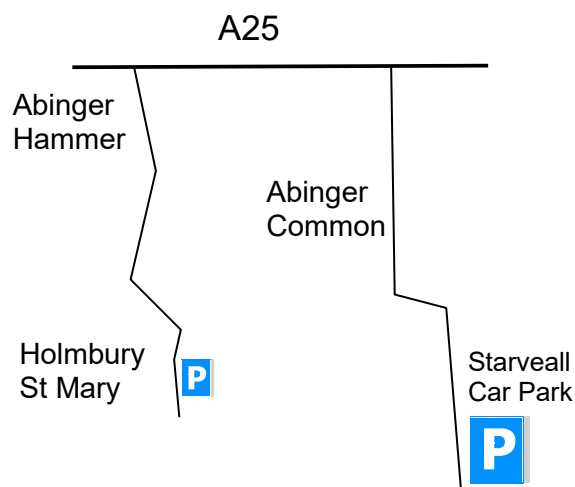


- 8 Continue for 100m next to the farmyard and, just after a horse exercise area, leave the track by forking **right** on a wide path. In under 100m, you meet a crossing track: go straight over on a much narrower path, keeping **right** at a fork. In 30m your path meets another wide diagonal crossing track: go straight over, ignoring the GW arrow on your right. At a T-junction in front of a field gate, turn **left**. In 100m you come to a main road, Leith Hill Road. Turn **left**, immediately reaching the Starveall car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: The Starveall car park can be reached from the A25 road near Dorking. The well-named Hollow Lane is signposted *Abinger Common, Friday Street, Leith Hill*. The junction is about 3 miles=5 km west of Dorking, through Westcott, and about 8 miles=13 km east of Guildford. Follow this lane, sometimes through a dramatic cutting, for about 3 miles=5 km. The large car park is on your left.

For Holmbury St Mary, one of several routes is from Abinger Hammer, also on the A25. Go south on the B2126 Felday Road, signposted *Holmbury St Mary*.



By bus/train: bus 22 goes from Dorking Station and bus 32 from various local stations to Holmbury St Mary. Not Sunday or bank holidays. Check the timetable.

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