Fancy Free Walks

point your feet on a new path

Box Hill, Mole Valley, Mickleham Downs

Distance: 7½ km=4½ miles — easy-to-challenging walking

Region: Surrey — Date written: 29-jan-2017

Author: Schwebefuss — Date revised: 23-may-2020

Refreshments: Mickleham, West Humble — Last update: 16-oct-2026

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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High hills, views, long ascents and descents, river meadows

In Brief

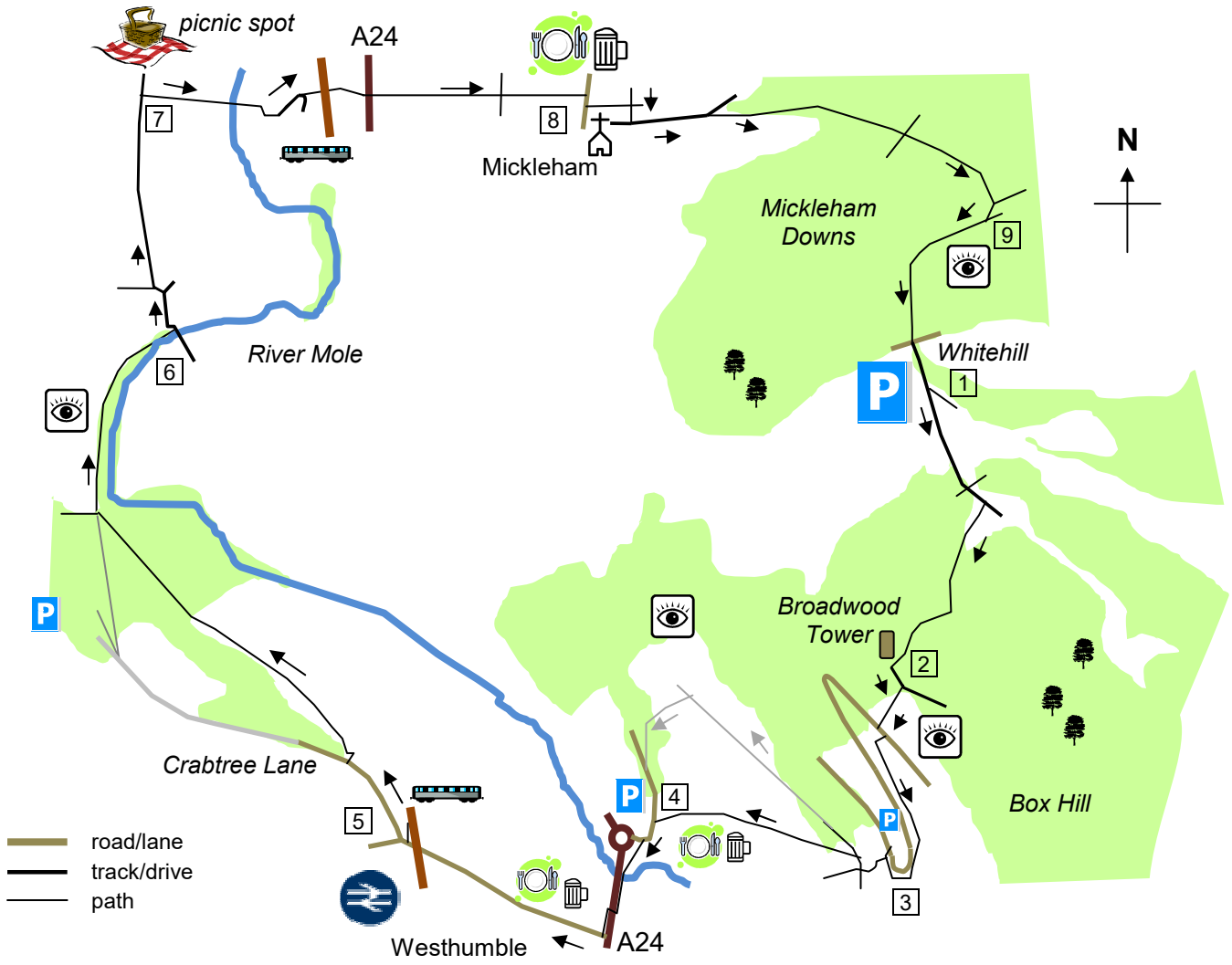
This is the first walk on this site to be a little tougher than “moderate” in one or two parts, although walkers of any age need not be daunted as all the paths are well made, with flights of steps on the longest ascents and descents. Between taxing stretches at the start and finish there is a soothing episode in woodland and by sheep fields beside the River Mole. This is an excellent winter walk, when views of the river are enhanced.

There are at least three possible places for refreshment along the route, especially in Mickleham where you will find the *Running Horses* (for enquiries, ring 01372-372279 or email *book@therunninghorses.co.uk*).

There are nettles on one stretch of this walk during summer when long trousers are recommended. Boots are also recommended because of the steep terrain but many walkers will use trainers whatever the weather since the paths are all dry. A hiking pole is all but essential. With only one easy stile, this walk is perfect for your dog too, although a short lead will be necessary because of the occasional sheep fields and a crossing of the A24 road.

The walk begins at **Westhumble Railway Station** (begin at section 5) or at the (NB: very small) **Whitehill NT car park**, near Mickleham, Surrey, **postcode RH5 6DF**, grid ref TQ 180 525, w3w:rocky.cape.translated. Other possible starts are the **Zig Zag** car park (begin at section 3) and the **Burford Bridge** car park on the A24 near Dorking (begin at section 4). However, starting at the Whitehill car park divides the steeper sections nicely in two with a long quiet pastoral interval in the middle. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



1 Starting at Whitehill car park, go straight ahead on a wide path. Ignore a wooden gate and footpath that forks off left and stay on the main path. In 250m you come through the smaller of two wooden gates into a more open area. When you pass a stile on your left, ignore a path on your right. (This path leads to the same junction but the next choice is easier.) After another 40m, turn **right** on a path which rises up the right-hand side of a clear wide strip. Shortly, you have a flight of steps to assist you. At the top, go through a small wooden gate into woodland. Continue on a twisty path, always following marker posts until finally your path emerges onto a high point dominated by a curious little flint tower.

Box Hill Tower, also known as Broadwood's Folly, was built by Thomas Broadwood the piano maker around 1814 as something to view from his splendid residence, Juniper Hall, which you can see in the valley.

2 From the tower, veer **left** through a small wooden gate. Immediately a vast open hillside on your right gives you an extensive view across the Mole Valley. Turn immediately **right** on a narrow path down the side of the pasture. (Of course, for a longer trip, you can keep straight [Apr 2026: path temporarily closed?] on to the Box Hill visitor's centre for snacks and a descent down the "whites".) The cattle which you may see here are the mild-mannered belted Galloway variety. The path goes down near the right-

hand side of the hillside, in the direction of the Denbies Wine Estate which you can see in the distance. You come through a narrow V-shaped barrier and down steps to the zig zag road. Turn **left** on the road and, in 20m, go **right** down steps. (!! You need to be specially careful on these steep steps, especially when there is moisture or ice!!) The path veers left, running parallel to the road. After 250m, your path runs close to one of the hairpins in the zig zag road with a choice of paths ahead. Stay close to the road by keeping **right** on a level path. In 50m, your route is **left** up a flight of steps but a few steps on your right lead down across the road to the **Zig Zag car park**, an alternative start.

3 Near the top of the steps, your path leads out of a band of trees onto an open space. Cross a wide stony track and take the flight of steps opposite you that has been cut into the hill. Continue uphill until you reach a wide grassy space at the highest point. This is the famous Box Hill slope leading to the "whites", visible from a distance and hugely popular with families and daytrippers. It has been used is a perfect ski and toboggan run on rare snowy days. Cross the grassy slope and veer **right** to meet a path close to the trees on the other side. (For a less hair-raising descent, you can instead turn right on the grassy slope and take the first path left in nearly 500m.) Stay close to the trees on your left, heading downhill in the direction of the big Burford Bridge roundabout in the valley, finally keeping left, ever more steeply. [**!! Care:** the chalk can be very slippery here, even in dry weather, and has caused accidents - be extra careful !! (It may be best to stay on the grass on your right.)] You come down to a swing-gate in the bottom left-hand corner and out to a road. The Burford Bridge car park and *Ryka's Café* are opposite, an alternative start.

4 Turn **left** on the road, going 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 Lodge* which once housed the *Royal School of Church Music*. Soon, *Box Hill and Westhumble* railway station is on your left (a start for walkers arriving by rail).

5 Continue over the railway bridge and immediately ignore a footpath on your right. *Note the commemorative plaque and see below for more on this story.* Keep to the **right** of the arch on narrow Crabtree Lane, marked as a cul-de-sac, avoiding a private driveway on your right. After 150m, go **right** through a swing-gate, down steps and through a small metal gate; then turn **left** in a sheep pasture passing a bench seat. (On an earlier visit, the author found cattle here, all of the quiet, docile breeds. If you want to avoid this field, simply stay on Crabtree Lane for ½ km, fork **right** past a large wooden barrier on a track and immediately fork **right** again on a track downhill.) Walk along the left-hand side of the pasture and, after 400m, in the far corner, go through a swing-gate onto a wide woodland path. The path soon rises rather steeply and, after 250m, reaches the corner of a meadow where it forks. Take the **right** fork, a narrow unsigned, rather nettly path with the meadow on your left and spectacular glimpses of the River Mole far down on your right, summer foliage permitting.

*The River Mole is known for its strange sink holes, known as "swallows", which have even put local houses in peril. They were described by Daniel Defoe, author of Robinson Crusoe, in the early 1700s. But the river probably got its name **not** because of its escapades underground (nice thought) but from the Latin "mola" (= "mill") and from Molesley where it discharges into the Thames. It rises near Horsham and the young river is seen on other walks of this series (e.g. Rusper).*

6 After a truly scenic 450m on this little-known path, you come down through a swing-gate to a T-junction with a driveway. A bridge across the Mole is immediately on your right but your route is **left** on the drive. Just before a farm cottage, go **left** through a metal kissing-gate (or through a large open metal gate), avoid a narrow path straight ahead and turn **right** on a track, going past the cottage on your right. *You now have an excellent view of Norbury Park house on the hill ahead, shrouded in trees when viewed from any other position (see the "Norbury Park" walk in this series).* Just before a large wooden gate, at a 3-way fingerpost [Aug 2020-2026: gone!], turn **right** in the direction "Mickleham ½ mile". However, by continuing through the smaller wooden gate you reach a picnic area with tables, a pleasant place for a breather. You need to return to the fingerpost afterwards.

7 Follow this wide path between sheep meadows and over a bridge across the River Mole. Turn **right** in front of a black barn and go **left** and **left** again on a track round it. Now veer **right** up a slope, on a farm track, passing through a wooden gate beside some metal gates. Keep dead straight ahead on a narrower track leading to the railway. Cross the railway line with care, using eyes and ears. *The tunnel on your left claimed the lives of ninety Victorian workmen when it collapsed during construction.* Keep straight on along a short lane leading to the main A24 road. Cross each carriage-way carefully, remembering that not all traffic obeys the 50 mph limit. At the other side, follow a track straight ahead between pastures and the playing fields of Box Hill School. At a signposted crossing path, keep straight on. You come out to the road in Mickleham, next to the *Running Horses*, a pub/restaurant with a pleasant terrace with waiter service from which you can see life passing by.

Mickleham lay along the axis of power during Anglosaxon times because of its situation on Stane Street, the Roman road between Chichester and London. The Regency novelist Fanny Burney, who originated the expression "Pride and Prejudice", married a French émigré in the church here. Her close admirer Jane Austen, who knew this part of Surrey well, made it the approximate location of her novel "Emma" in 1815. (See the Hampshire walk "Walk and Walkability" in this series.) The church of St. Michael and All Angels is a millennium old but was "improved" in 1842 (now a codeword for "desecrated"). Its little squat spire is of Saxon origin. The side chapel, known as the Norbury Chapel, contains several important family brasses and heraldic emblems. The graveyard is unusual for its rare wooden structures (also seen at Chiddingfold).

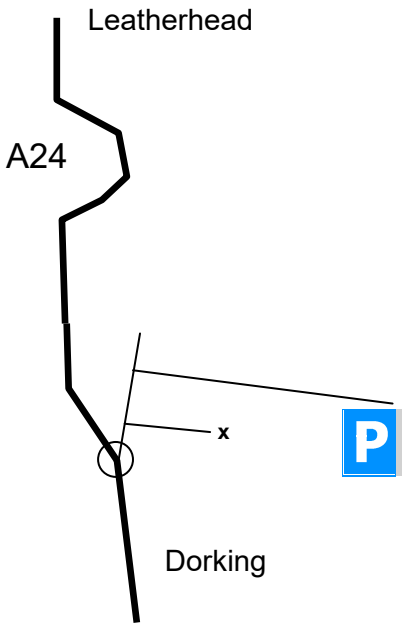
8 After a possible break, turn **right** on the road and immediately **left** into the churchyard, passing the church on your right. Avoid a path on your right beside the church but, half way down, turn **right** on a crossing path through the cemetery. At the other side, go through a double wooden gate and turn **left** on a very wide straight track. Just before some private wooden gates, keep **right** over a stile. The path widens and runs up through woods. About 200m from the stile, you come to a fork with a waymark [Oct 2026: grounded]. Take the **right** fork, starting to go very steeply uphill over

Mickleham Downs. The gradient gets a little easier as you progress. After 150m or so, you meet a wide crossing byway: go straight over regardless, still uphill, on a path strewn with large flint stones. Keep to the main path as it leads you through box trees, which give the hill its name, and a yew grove. Just over 200m after crossing the byway, you come to a three-way junction. Turn **right** at the junction and follow a rather hidden path that veers right through yew trees. Suddenly you are out in the open and rewarded with terrific views across the valley. A strategically placed bench seat enables you to take a breather and enjoy the vista.

9 Turn **right** on a level path. Soon your path veers left and begins to descend steeply. There follows a long flight of 180 steps where you need to take great care and plenty of time, since descent is more hazardous than climbing. Finally, at the bottom, cross a road directly into the Whitehill car park opposite, where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: to reach the Whitehill Car Park, take the A24 between Leatherhead and Dorking, turn off at the **Burford Bridge** roundabout, signposted *Mickleham Box Hill*, go past the hotel on the Old London Road and take the **second** road on the right. This is *not* the **Zig Zag** Road but the road after it, Headley Road, opposite a bus stop. The car park is 600m on the right.



By train: begin the walk at **Westhumble and Box Hill** railway station.

By bus: no. 465 (Kingston to Dorking) passes through both the Burford Bridge and Mickleham sections of this walk. Check the timetable.

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