



Ranmore Common and Polesden Lacey

Distance: 9½ km=6 miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

Date written: 20-dec-2016

Author: Fusszweig

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Refreshments: Polesden Lacey
Denbies Hillside?

Last update: 15-jan-2022

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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Woodland, parkland, hills, views, historic house

In Brief

This walk breaks new ground on this website because it is *uncomplicated*. Apart from a waltz around Polesden Lacey and a famous FFW “twist” at the end which the author could not resist, there are basically just *three* long smooth straight paths with fairly easy gradients. For this reason, this walk is ideal for the nattering classes, since if any junction is missed the likelihood is “just keep straight on”. “*No natter!*” warnings have been posted at key turns.

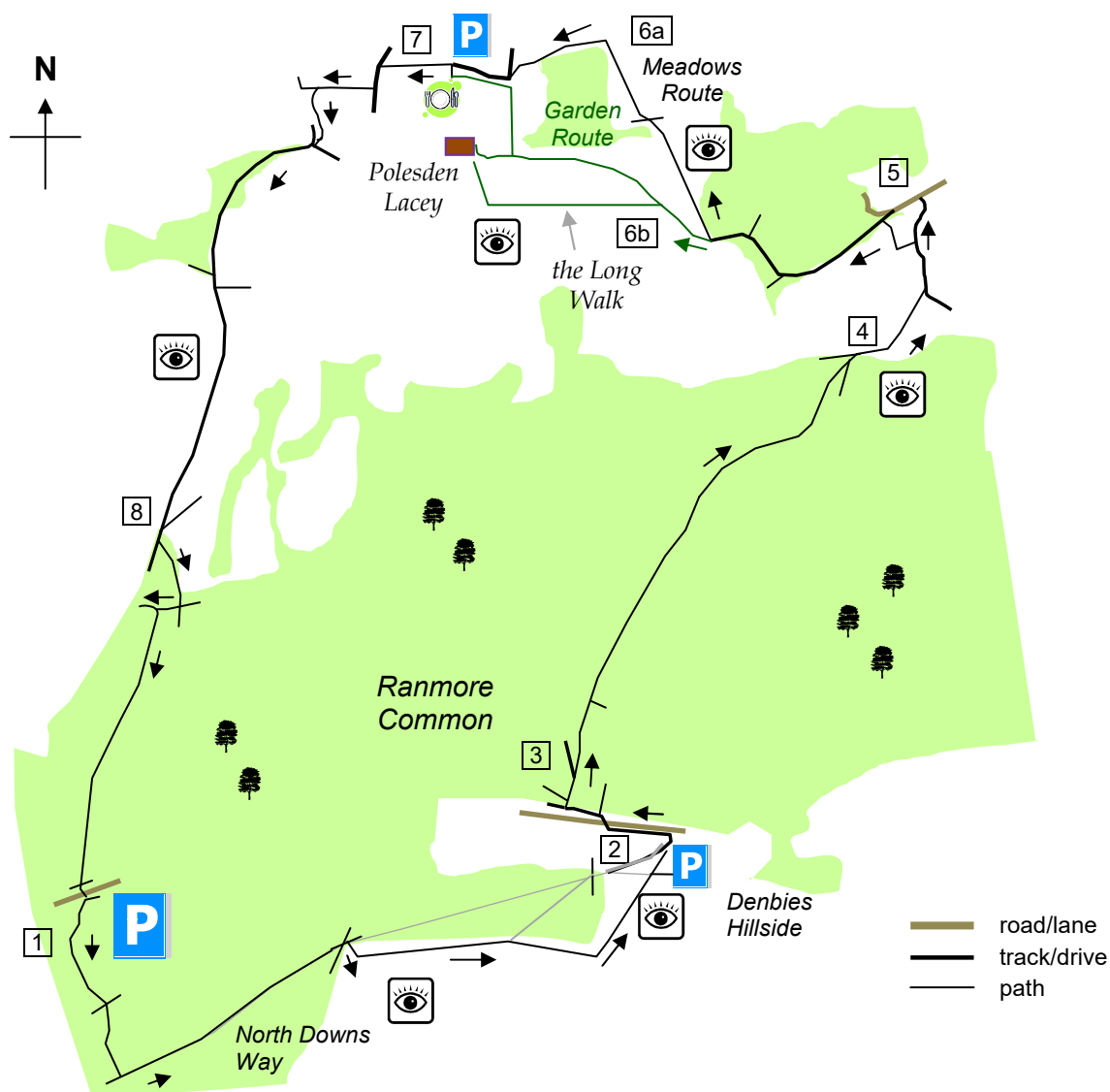
The walk goes through the Polesden Lacey estate with its celebrated country house. The attractive main route avoids the garden area and takes you round to the entrance where you can use the shop, loos, café and restaurant (closed 24-25 Dec) without having to pay the entrance fee. There is an alternative route through the garden area (closed 24-25 Dec), and past the house, for NT members (or visitors happy to pay the entrance fee).



At the time of writing, all the paths on this walk were completely clear, so there was no challenge to bare legs. However, in high summer, especially in the last section, you may find some high scratchy undergrowth, making long trousers by far the better option. The terrain underfoot is clear, but in a wet winter **boots** are necessary in case of ice and several muddy patches. With only one seasonal sheep pasture, one minor road, and *no stiles*, this walk is ideal for your dog.

The walk begins at the National Trust (NT) **Ranmore Common** car park, nearest postcode **RH5 6SY**, www.w3w.co/banana.joke.noise, grid ref TQ127502, just off the Ranmore Common Road near Dorking, Surrey. This is **not** the Denbies car park but the *free* car park a mile further west along the road. You could also park at Denbies or at Polesden Lacey (whose car park is open every day). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 From the back of the Ranmore Common car park, take the broad path near the entrance, past a heavy metal barrier, leading into the woods. Follow this wide zigzagging path, avoiding all turn-offs, for 300m where you meet a wide crossing path. Go straight across regardless. Your path winds and begins to go downhill, bringing you after 250m to another 4-way junction with a fingerpost. Turn **left** here on a wide level path, part of the North Downs Way (NDW). *This long-distance path runs from Farnham to Dover, via Folkestone or Canterbury in Kent.* Your path runs under austere beeches and yews, giving you views to your right into the Tillingbourne valley where the foliage permits. After more than ½ km you reach a slanting crossing path. Keep ahead on the NDW for another 30m and go **right** here through a wooden swing-gate onto the open hillside where there are two wooden benches from where you can admire the view. (If you want to keep the walk *ultra-simple*, you can stay on the NDW through the woods all the way to Steer's Field.) Turn **left** past the second bench on a level path, parallel to the path you were on, still with great views. In 300m you pass another two bench seats. **Avoid** a wooden swing-gate here where a path leads back into

woods (it re-joins the NDW just before Steer's Field). Follow one of the narrow paths along the hillside, not far from the fence and woodland on your left. In another 300m, the woodland on your left ends and your path suddenly bends **left** and takes you through a small wooden gate past a NT sign for *Steer's Field*. (If you see cattle here, they are the mild-mannered belted Galloway variety.) Go straight up the steepish grassy slope, going over a crossing path, heading for the road and car park. Here, at Denbies Hillside, you have the best views.



This famous viewpoint is named after the nearby Denbies Estate with its vineyard. You have views south to Westcott and Dorking and to Leith Hill Tower.

2



Warning: no natter section! Exit Steer's Field through a wooden gate into the Denbies car park where there is usually a small café-on-wheels. Turn **left** beside the car park, parallel to the road. After passing a red-tiled house on your left, switch to the other side of the road. Ignore the first fingerpost pointing into the woods and continue parallel to the road, passing a grey house, a cottage and another red-tiled house. Turn **right** after this house, ignore a metal barrier on your left and keep ahead past a new metal barrier, on a wide bridleway, close to the house and its garden.

3

After 20m, the main stone-surfaced track forks away to your left towards the Youth Hostel, as indicated by the YH sign. **Ignore** this left fork and keep straight on along a wide earthy path into the woods. You are now on a straight level path through one of the most magical and tranquil mixed leaf-tree woodland which forms part of Ranmore Common. Avoid all tempting side branches. The trees begin to thin out, giving you views of the surrounding hills, as the path starts to descend. You are now in a more open landscape of wild grass and shrubs. Finally, after a total of 1½ km on this path, just before a large green meadow, you come to a junction of paths where a path joins you from the right.

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Ignore a path sharp left and keep straight on along the main path. In 50m or so, another path joins you from the right and you arrive at a large wooden gate. Go through the smaller gate beside it into the grassy meadow. Your path across the meadow will be faint but clearly visible. It passes close to a solitary oak on your right and heads for another double wooden gate. After the gate, you are on a wide path at a bend. Keep **left** on this path, soon passing the buildings of Bagden Farm. Ignore a narrow bridleway on your left (*) and continue on the main path till you reach a tarmac road. (* If you have a dog or you want to avoid a tiny stretch of road, go **left** passing a long farm shed on your right, go through a wooden gate, turn **right** to go through a small wooden gate and keep ahead, close to the house and garden, to a small wooden gate, turning **left** on the "wide avenue" of the next section. Some walkers prefer this route anyway.)

5

Turn **left** on the road and, in only 40m, keep **left** beside Bagden Lodge, leaving the road and going through a small wooden gate next to a large metal gate. Follow this wide avenue through the Polesden Estate, slightly uphill, passing a tempting bench seat. Stay on the main path as it curves right uphill. At a fingerpost, keep straight on, as for the *Chalk Pit Walk*, going over a wide stone bridge. In another 50m, you meet another set of wooden gates marking the *Garden Boundary* and a notice indicating the opening times (10-5 or 4 in winter).

The Edwardian Polesden Lacey house and estate are the creation of a remarkable woman, Mrs Margaret ("Maggie") Greville, born in 1863, daughter of the hugely successful scottish brewer William McEwan. After her husband's early death she became a discreet hostess to kings and foreign princes. For a longer description, see the walk "Effingham and Polesden Lacey". The house and garden are open every day except 24-25 Dec.

You now have a choice.

Through the gate straight ahead is the garden area which is chargeable to non-members of the NT. The notice says "please show your membership card or pay" and this usually means "at the main exit". The grounds offer a number of circular nature walks which go out of the garden boundary and back in again. So the *main option* below is the **Meadows Route**, whilst the **Garden Route** is for members of the NT or fee-payers. (The fee is *not* trivial.)

6a Meadows Route. Turn **right** before the gates, using a different pair of gates to enter a sheep meadow. Take a path which runs close to the woodland on your right at first, then straight up the centre of the meadow. Aim for the far left-hand corner, ignoring a gate into the woods on your left.



Turning round at the top, you can see the steeple of Ranmore church. Go through another wooden gate pair, cross straight over a track, go through another pair of gates and follow a path straight ahead across the pasture. At the corner of woodland, turn smartly **left** and follow a path along the edge of the meadow, past wooden gates, with a wood on your left. In the corner, go through a large metal kissing-gate by a notice board and keep straight on along the approach road towards the car park. Turn **left** through the courtyard for the shop, café, loos and restaurant. Afterwards, go out again and continue your walk beside the car park.

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6b Garden Route. Go straight ahead through the gates and follow the wide track. Soon on your left is a half-ring of seats with a view over the valley showing the youth hostel *Tanners Hatch* at the edge of the forest. Shortly after, on your left is a classical portico. It leads you onto the *Long Walk*, a wonderful scenic saunter along the lawn (sometimes closed to allow the grass to recover), leading to the front of the house. If you decide to stay on the main path, follow it across the grass towards the house, turn **right** past the coffee kiosk and sharp **left** before the fence, leading through the arch in the little tower, hence out by the exit door into the courtyard where there are a restaurant, shop, café and loos. Go out at the main exit and immediately turn **left** beside the car park.



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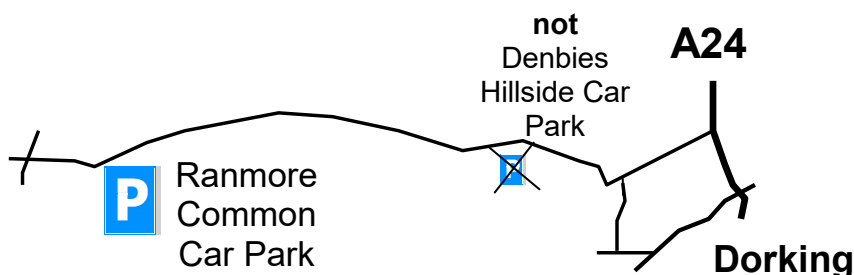
7 Continue past the car park on your right, out through a small wooden gate and **left** on a wide driveway. Just before the driveway suddenly dips down, turn **right** on a path beside the crop field on your right. Just before the first corner, at a marker post, go **left** on a narrow woodland path. You pass a tree garden on your left and come down to a meeting of tracks. Avoid the wooden gates on your left and go straight ahead on a wide track. This track gradually descends with great views to your left, soon on your right too. *Take care as the stony surface may be muddy and slippery in winter! [In Jan 2022 forestry had left deep muddy ruts: this should clear within the year.]* After ½ km, ignore a path on your right, a path on your left and a wooden gate on your left, staying on the main track. Your path is now sunken and gradually ascends. Keep going for just over ½ km.

- 8 **Warning: no natter section!** (If you miss the next turn, the main track will take you to the road near the car park, but the surface is stony and uncomfortable; the way given here is much more attractive.) [Jan 2022: this option was temporarily closed because of ash dieback: stay on the main track.] You will be aware of a large grassy pasture on your left. Just before the meadow ends and gives way to approaching woodland, look to your left for a wooden walker's gate with a waymarked footpath leading sharp left up into the meadow. **Ignore** this gate but **immediately after** it, fork **left** through a horse barrier consisting of a narrow gap between two vertical posts in a wooden fence. (As an extra guide, there's a tiny tag on one of the posts showing number "17" but no other waymarker.) Follow this path into woods with the meadow still visible on your left, and in spring time the strong aroma of ramson (wild garlic). After 150m on this path, the meadow on your left comes to an end. Go another 20m to find a very narrow crossing path, easy to overlook. Turn **right** here on what may be a very overgrown path, quite steeply uphill. In 50m, go past a wooden barrier to meet another path at a bend. Turn **left** on this path which will lead you to the road opposite the car park. In about 300m, the terrain is more open with several banks of silver birch. At a junction of several paths in a clearing, keep straight on. Finally the path leads over a crossing track to meet the road opposite the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Ranmore Common Road is reached from **Dorking**. If coming on the A24 from Leatherhead, turn **right** just before Dorking, signposted *Guildford*, onto Ashcombe Road, keep straight ahead at a mini-roundabout and turn **right** at a T-junction signposted *Ranmore*. Follow the road, passing a junction on the right with the Denbies Hillside car park on your left (*not* your starting point!). Continue another mile to find the Ranmore Common car park on your **left**. (If you pass a junction with Hogden Road on your right, you have gone 200 yards too far.)

If coming from the **Guildford** direction on the A25, turn **left** as you enter Dorking, as for *London*, and keep left at a sign for *Ranmore*, continuing as in the paragraph above. (For the more adventurous, turn **left** off the A25 onto narrow White Down Lane just after Abinger Hammer, turn **right** at a crossroads onto Ranmore Common Road; the car park is $\frac{3}{4}$ mile on your right.)



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