Fancy Free Walks

point your feet on a new path

Four Commons and a Mill
Rodborough, Milford, Thursley and Witley Commons

Distance: 12 km=7½ miles or 9½ km = 6 miles — easy walking

Region: Surrey — Date written: 1-dec-2012

Author: Schwebefuss — Date revised: 11-feb-2016

Refreshments: Thursley — Last update: 19-jun-2026

Map: Explorer 145 (Guildford) and 133 (Haslemere)
but the maps in this guide should be sufficient

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

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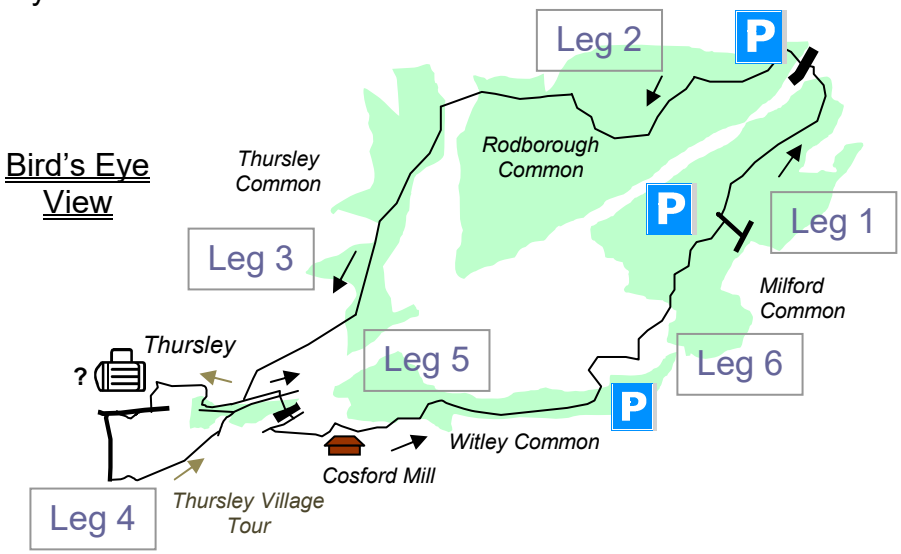
Woodland, wild heath, village, views

In Brief

This is a perfect winter walk (excellent in summer too), especially in the silvery magic of a frosty morning. It takes you through the glowing heather, birch and gorse of four commons, some of which may be unfamiliar – secret treasures perhaps. The walk is entirely on heath and in woods, mainly pine, except for an optional tour of the village of Thursley and a captivating surprise that is Cosford Mill.

There are some hidden nettles in the rather dense crop field on the village tour but otherwise this walk is clear of undergrowth, so any kind of attire should be fine. If you go after rain, you tend to meet clear water running in the sand which you can hop around, rather than mud, so boots are optional, depending of course on the season. This walk is not just *ok* for your dog: it is *made* for him and he will be able to come off the leash for much of the way.

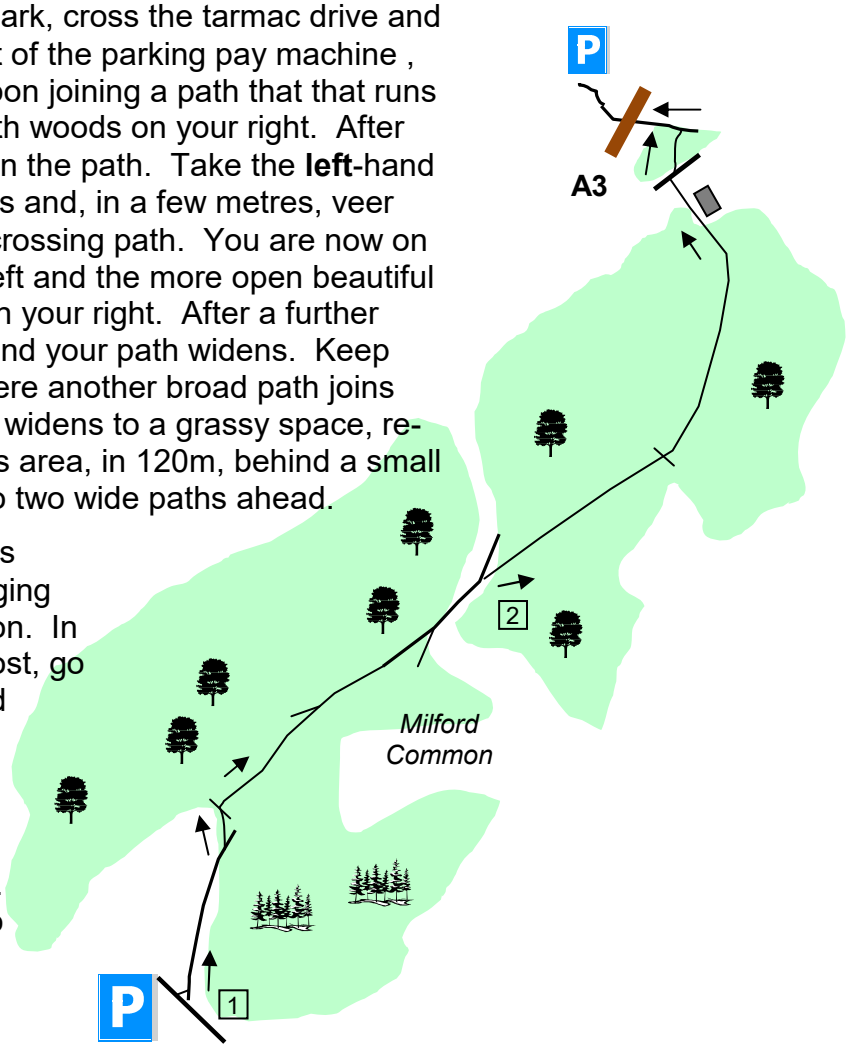


Nominally, the walk begins at the National Trust **Witley and Milford Common** car park, Webb Road, Witley, Surrey, (postcode **GU8 5QJ**, w3w:hired.pancakes.improvise). The NT has just introduced charges (2020: up to £6 for all day, free to members). At the **Rodborough Common** car park (w3w:dearest.milkman.brilliant, nearest postcode **GU8 5BJ**), charges are *voluntary*, making this a good option (begin at Leg 2). You can park *free* in Thursley on the roadside or in their car park near the cricket green. The author always parks in the *free* **Lea Coach Road** car park, just off the A3 road, after the bend, w3w:tumble.forkful.frog (begin Leg 6 section 2). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Leg 1: Milford Common 1.3 km=0.8 miles

1 Starting at the Webb Road car park, cross the tarmac drive and take the path that runs to the left of the parking pay machine , marked Heathland Hike (HH), soon joining a path that that runs beside the heath on your left, with woods on your right. After about 100m you come to a fork in the path. Take the **left**-hand path, leading away from the trees and, in a few metres, veer **left** and **right** as you go over a crossing path. You are now on a good path with trees on your left and the more open beautiful landscape of Milford Common on your right. After a further 150m a path joins from the left and your path widens. Keep dead straight ahead for 70m where another broad path joins you from the right and your path widens to a grassy space, re-joining the HH. At the end of this area, in 120m, behind a small isolated tree, your path forks into two wide paths ahead.

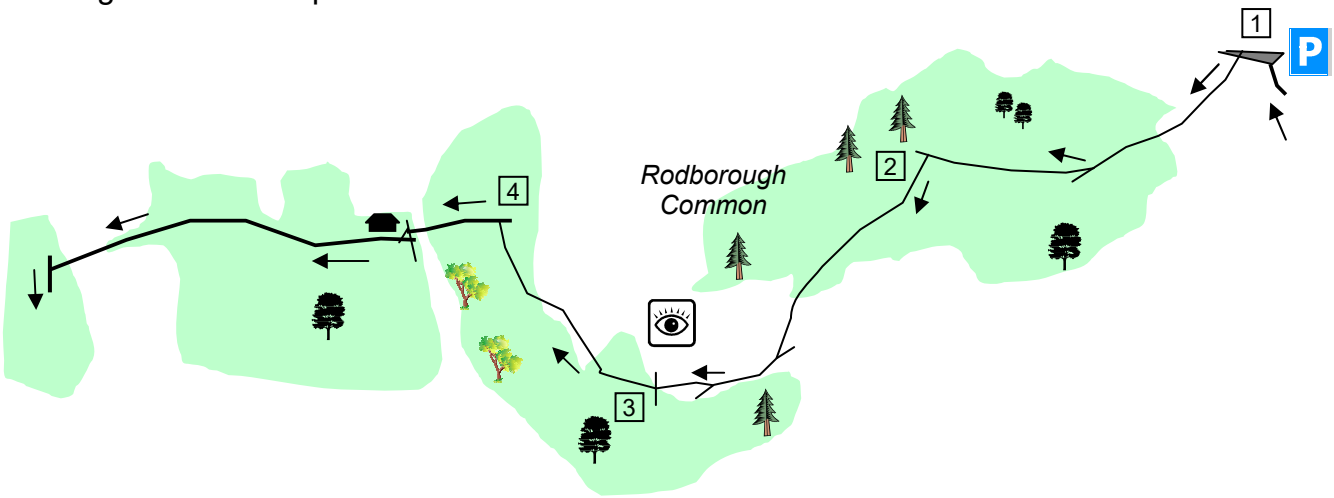


2 Choose the **right**-hand option, as directed by a marker-post, diverging slightly from your original direction. In 200m, at a crossing path by a post, go straight over, leaving the HH and joining a blue-arrowed route, indicating a National Trust permissive bridleway. Keep following those blue arrows as the path twists this way and that. Eventually the path curves left to pass the Mousehill pumping station on your right and reach a road by a metal barrier. Cross straight over the road to a narrow path opposite through woodland.

P Soon you reach a tarmac track. Turn **left** on the track, going under the A3 road via a tunnel. The tarmac track leads to the car park at Rodborough Common. Welcome to one of Surrey's least-known and most beautiful wild heaths!

Leg 2: Rodborough Common 2.2 km=1.4 miles

1 Start walking through the Rodborough Common car park and, about 20m before the end, go **left** over a 2-plank bridge. In 20m, ignore a minor grass path that branches off right and keep straight ahead on the main narrow sandy path that runs over the open grassy silver birch heath. Soon your path veers right into trees where you find a marker post, shortly with a glimpse of a white house ahead to your right. The post has a red arrow indicating the self-guided *Lizard Trail* and you will be following it for some way. The trail is not the shortest way but it will give you a wide view of the best of the Common, possibly with horses grazing. Follow the wide woodland path down into a dip. Fork **right** here, following a red arrow on a marker post [Jun 2021: propped up against a tree – thanks GJ!]. On your right now is the boundary fence of the garden of that white house. Your path goes over bumps and, 250m from the last fork, comes out of the trees to a junction of paths in a sunken more open area rimmed in the distance by some fine large ornamental pines.



2 Turn immediately **left** here, as indicated by the familiar red arrow. Keep all the time to the wide level path straight ahead, avoiding branch offs, running through a line of enormous pines and continuing over an open space of bracken and heather. The path soon curves to the left, rising gently, as you pass a rectangular smooth section on your left, heading for the trees. A path joins you from the left and you pass another red arrow and your path goes down into a birch wood. As the path rises at the other side of the wood, keep **right** to another red arrow. *You have terrific views to your right across to the Hog's Back.* Your path curves left, runs level and descends into a dip with a crossing path.

3 **Leave** the self-guided trail here by ignoring the right-pointing arrow and keep straight ahead on a rising winding path which immediately snakes right and left, passing through a resplendent area of tall purple and pink heather. After about 300m on a gradual right bend, your path ends between some metal posts onto a wide crossing track with a wooden gate ahead. Turn **left** on the track.

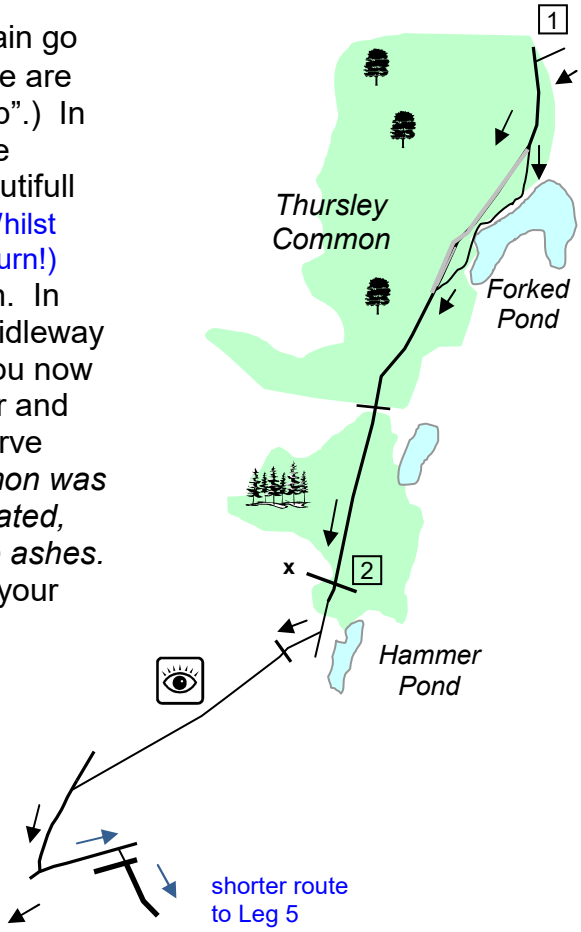
4 In under 150m, you reach a crossing driveway with the gates of Borough Farm on your right. (See another walk in this series: *Elstead, Ockley Common, Peper Harow*.) Cross straight over, in the direction of the bridle-way fingerpost, and immediately **right** on a track. Pass to the side of the large, padlocked, wooden gate beside *Little Borough*. Follow the wide

track, lined by paling fences, for ½ km, going over a stream, keeping left at a junction, until finally you go through a small (open) wooden gate into the wide open space of Ockley Common. (Perhaps this walk should be called *Five Commons* but the high heath of Thursley Common soon awaits.)

Leg 3: Thursley Common 2.1 km=1.3 miles

1 Turn **left** on a bridleway and keep to the main path through pinewoods. Soon you pass a large shed on your left. Fork **left** here on a minor path, temporarily leaving the bridleway, taking you along the banks of the Forked Pond. (The pond itself is private.) Where the path approaches the bridleway again, keep **left** to enjoy the pond for a little longer. Eventually, back on the heath, your path veers left to rejoin the bridleway. Stay near a wire fence on your left, following the blue arrows and avoiding several tempting paths forking off right across Ockley Common. At a crossing bridleway, with a building on your left, continue **straight on**. (The path on your left leads to the Silkmill Pond. *Do **not** try to take a short cut here to the Lea Coach Road: the A3 road is impassable and extremely dangerous.)*

2 In 400m, at a 5-way junction with blue arrows, again go **straight over** regardless. (As a quick check, there are some warning signs on your left about the "A3 gap".) In another 100m, you come to another post with blue arrows, with the Hammer Pond (in 2023, now beautifull restored and looking magnificent) on your left. (Whilst you gaze admiringly at the pond, don't miss this next turn!) Turn **right** here on a wide gently rising sandy path. In 100m, the path crosses a concrete ramp and a bridleway and continues uphill, going over a horse track. You now begin a wonderful trek up and up over the heather and gorse of Thursley Common National Nature Reserve with gradually widening views. *Much of the common was burned by a heath fire 2006 but it quickly regenerated, with the fire-friendly gorse pushing up through the ashes.* At the top of the rise, with great views all around, your path is joined by a very wide sandy track coming from the right. In another 200m, as you approach the village of Thursley, you reach a T-junction.



Decision point. You now have a chance for refreshments (?) and a short tour of the charming village of Thursley. If you prefer to skip this section and go straight to Cosford Mill and Witley Common, do as follows:

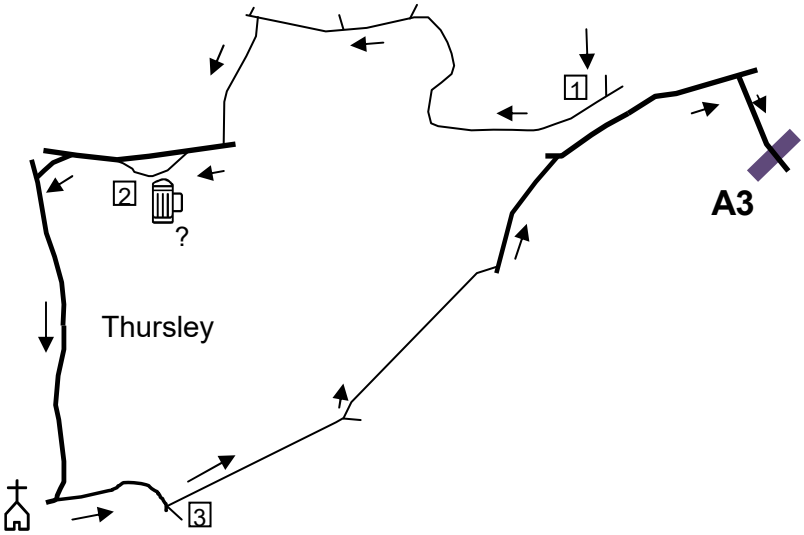
Turn sharp **left** at the T-junction on a wide sandy path. In 180m, turn **right** on a narrow path opposite a green Nature Reserve noticeboard, cross the Old Portsmouth Road and take the road directly opposite, leading to a bridge over the A3 road. *Now continue the walk from Leg 5, **Cosford Mill**.*

Leg 4: Thursley Village Tour 2.6 km=1.6 miles

1 **See mini-map overleaf.** Turn **right** at the T-junction on a wide sandy path. Soon you approach the first houses of Thursley and, opposite a long brick building, the path bends **right** at a rather ambiguous blue arrow. As the path turns sharp left again, avoid all paths off to the right and stay on the main path. In another 200m or so, after a garden on your left ends, you come to a junction with a marker post. Turn **left** here, through hollies, between gardens, on a path that leads out to the Dyehouse Road in Thursley. Turn **right** to reach, on the left, the *Three Horse Shoes* [Jun 2026: closed for renovation; description kept in hope of re-opening].

The Three Horse Shoes, known locally as "The Shoes", is a free house country pub with all the highlights you might expect for a pub in such an ideal position: a bower in the front, a perfect concealed garden in the back, a roaring fire in winter and a bevvy of locals with their dogs and horses. Food is locally sourced and ales served include T.E.A. from Hog's Back and Shere Drop from Surrey Hills.

2 Continue past the pub to a road junction by the little triangular green with the village sign depicting the god Thor from whom it gets its name. Turn **left** and **left** again along The Street. You pass many attractive houses, cottages, terraces and gardens. A footpath sign on the right points to the back entrance to the church, although this is not on this route. At the end of The Street, a short diversion to the right will take you to the Church of St Michael and All Angels. (For more details, see the other walk in this series, *Devil's Punch Bowl, Lion's Mouth, Thursley*.) However, your route is **left**, just **before** a fingerpost, on a wide gravel track, part of the Greensand Way.



Thursley people are proud of the name which they maintain is Norse meaning "Thor's field". There is a block of sandstone on Thursley Common called Thor's Stone which was believed to be a thunderbolt thrown by the god. As befits its almighty origins, Thursley was once a vast parish, extending as far as Haslemere. The Portsmouth Road ran through Thursley from the mid-1700s and the notorious murder of a sailor at Hindhead was hatched here at a coaching inn. (See the walk Hindhead and Chiddingfold in this series.) The three ruffians were hung in chains made by the Thursley village blacksmith at Forge Cottage and the sailor was buried in Thursley churchyard. The village's prosperity came from illicit cloth-weaving then, starting in the 1600s, iron smelting as witness the numerous hammer ponds seen on this walk. In the 1800s, Thursley was a centre for smuggling raw silk from France and here it was dyed and woven (hence the Dyehouse Road). During Word War II, nearby Hankley Common was used for training British and Canadian tank units and it was here that Thursley saw its second murder, of a 19-year-old girl by a Canadian soldier who was hanged at Wandsworth Gaol. He had built wigwams for her to shelter in and the crime became known as the "Wigwam Murder". A

famous Thursleyite was the composer Sir Malcolm Arnold. Not surprisingly, several other notable residents were artists and poets.

3 Just after the track bends right to a house, *Cotton House*, go squarely **left** through a small metal gate. Turn immediately **left** and then immediately **right** thus avoiding the clear bridleway to your right. Initially there is no path to follow but, as a guide, there will quickly be a wire fence on your right, a large lonely tree 70m to your left, and eventually a wide aluminium trough visible straight ahead. In high summer the crops may be quite dense and you may need to swish them aside. After the first field, go **left** through a gap into the adjoining meadow and take the clear footpath diagonally across it. At the other side, go through a large metal kissing-gate and continue over a bank with newly-planted trees to a road, the Old Portsmouth Road. Turn **left** on the road, past *Bridle Cottage*, ignoring a now-disused bridleway on the right. At a road junction, turn **right**, using the footway on the other side, and in 250m turn **right** on a side road leading to a bridge over the A3 road, signposted *Bowlhead Green*.

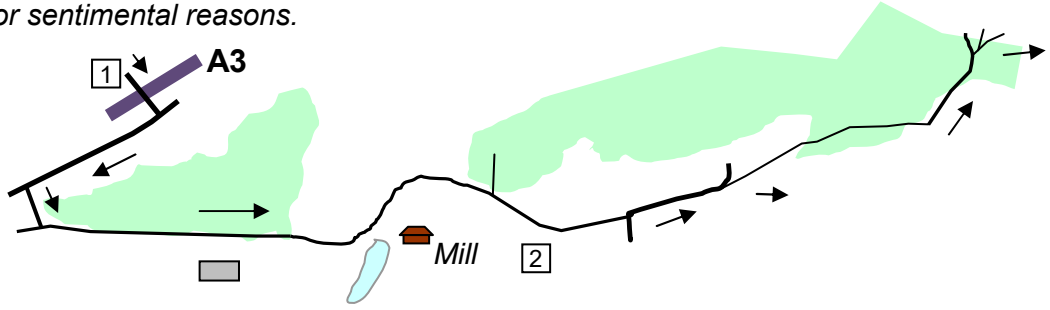
Leg 5: Cosford Mill 1.2 km=0.8 miles

1 After the bridge, turn **right** on the sliproad, signposted *Portsmouth*. Just before a road sign forbidding walkers and horsecarts from joining the main road, turn **left** on a minor road. Immediately, at a T-junction, turn **left** on a rough track, going past farm buildings. Soon you reach a tarmac drive at a hairpin. Keep **right**, going gently downhill, passing a large house *Millhanger* high up on your left.

Millhanger, a magnificent Arts-and-Cafts country house (which you will see shortly looking up from the Mill) was built in 1907 by Harold Falkner (the architect who rebuilt Farnham). It was until recently the home of Queen drummer Roger Taylor.

Over on your right is a large pond, a grassy space and an ancient millhouse. The lawns on each side are private but the lane is a public bridleway. *Because of the isolating effects of the distant A3 road, this is a precious and tranquil place, always an enchanting surprise even for people who know this spot.*

The most ancient section of Cosford Mill, which includes some machinery – the oldest in Surrey, was built in the 1400s. It was enlarged in the 1700s with a new miller's house and a second pair of millstones. The mill is built on four floors, attached at right angles to the mill cottage, which is on two floors. The mill is overshot, the more efficient method whereby the water flows over the top. The mill ceased working in 1888, but the waterwheel has been replaced for sentimental reasons.



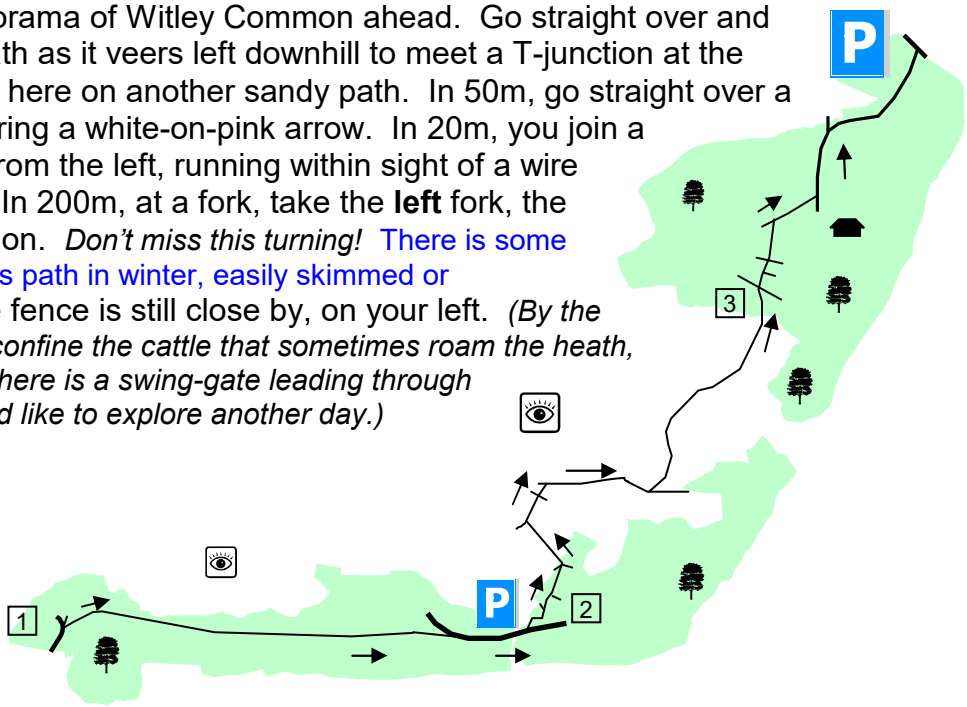
2 After the mill, keep ahead in the direction of a post with blue arrows, on a track uphill. At the top, bear **left** on French Lane. Where the lane bends left in 100m, go **right** at a fingerpost on a narrow sunken bridleway. This path winds its way down to a parking area near one of the gatehouses of Witley

Park. *(See the walk Witley, Hambledon, Chiddingfold in this series for an extra-ordinary account of this quite remarkable estate.)* Keep on, past a pair of houses, arriving at the start of Witley Common where the driveway bends away left.

Leg 6: Witley Common 2.5 km=1.5 miles

1 Just after the recently renovated *Witley Park Lake Cottages* turn **right**, thus leaving the main drive. Almost immediately you reach a 4-way fingerpost. Take the **right**-hand of the two bridleways, the one that follows the (over-grown) wall of the Park on your right. Follow this easy stone-lined path gradually uphill over the Common for about 700m, until you suddenly reach a metal barrier and the Lea Coach Road. Turn **right** on the road, immediately passing another gateway to the Park and reaching, in about 100m on the left, a car park, an alternative starting point.

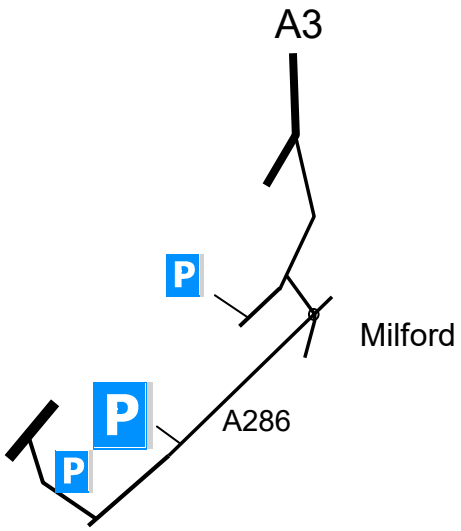
2 Go through the Lea Coach Road car park and take a path to the right of a noticeboard, between stumps. In only 20m take the **right** fork and, 30m later, keep **left**, avoiding a minor path off. The path winds its way through pines and birches and reaches a crossing path with a bench seat to admire the wide open panorama of Witley Common ahead. Go straight over and follow the sandy path as it veers left downhill to meet a T-junction at the bottom. Turn **right** here on another sandy path. In 50m, go straight over a crossing path, ignoring a white-on-pink arrow. In 20m, you join a wide path coming from the left, running within sight of a wire fence on your left. In 200m, at a fork, take the **left** fork, the much narrower option. *Don't miss this turning!* There is some standing water on this path in winter, easily skimmed or bypassed. The wire fence is still close by, on your left. *(By the way, the fence is to confine the cattle that sometimes roam the heath, not to restrict you. There is a swing-gate leading through the fence if you would like to explore another day.)*



3 After 400m on this winding path, you enter woods and reach a major 4-way junction. Keep straight ahead and, in 25m, ignore a junction on the right. In a further 40m, go straight over a crossing path. In 65m, at an oblique T-junction, veer **right** and immediately take the **left** fork, heading for an adventure playground. *The buildings in the distance to your right used to be a visitor's centre, now refurbished as office accommodation and a maintenance yard for the National Trust's rangers.* Join a wide sandy path leading away from the playground. *You have re-joined the Heathland Hike, recognisable from the white-on-pink arrows.* Follow this path, avoiding all side paths, through tall woodland on what is part of a nature trail. Soon you reach a set of posts and a tarmac drive. On the left is the Webb Road car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: the easiest way is via the A3 through Milford. Follow the A283, signposted *Petworth, Haslemere* to the big roundabout and take the A286, signposted *Haslemere*. After 1½ km=1 mile, turn **right** onto Webb Road at a brown National Trust sign. The car park is 200m on the left. Another way, if going south on the A3, is to turn off after Milford on the Lea Coach Road (signposted *Brook*). The Lea Coach Road car park is 1 km on the left after a bend. Or you can turn left on the A286 at the next junction and left again onto Webb Road. The Rodborough Common car park is another alternative start, accessed by keeping straight on through Milford and turning right, soon after the last houses, under a metal bar and through a tunnel under the A3 road.



By bus/train: *Countryliner* provide a bus service from Milford station. Check with their website before setting out.

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