



Fittleworth

Elgar and a Woodland Trail

Distance: 20½ km=13 miles or 16½ km=10½ miles or 5 km=3¼ miles
easy-to-moderate walking

Region: West Sussex

Date written: 17-apr-2011

Author: Hautboy

Last update: 11-mar-2025

Refreshments: Lower Fittleworth

Map: Explorer 134 (Crawley) and 121 (Arundel), hopefully not needed

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

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Woodland, views, canal, historic cottages, village, secret paths

In Brief



This is a peaceful mainly woodland walk through one of the wildest nature reserves in south east England. It runs through the hilly country just north of the village of Fittleworth, taking you along little-known paths, visiting the cottage where Elgar composed many of his later works, with fine views and refreshments in the village. The half-timbered houses and cottages in this region, some hidden in the woods, are enchanting and of unrivalled quality. This walk has an astonishing return route that brings you, by a magical unmapped path, back to the car park.

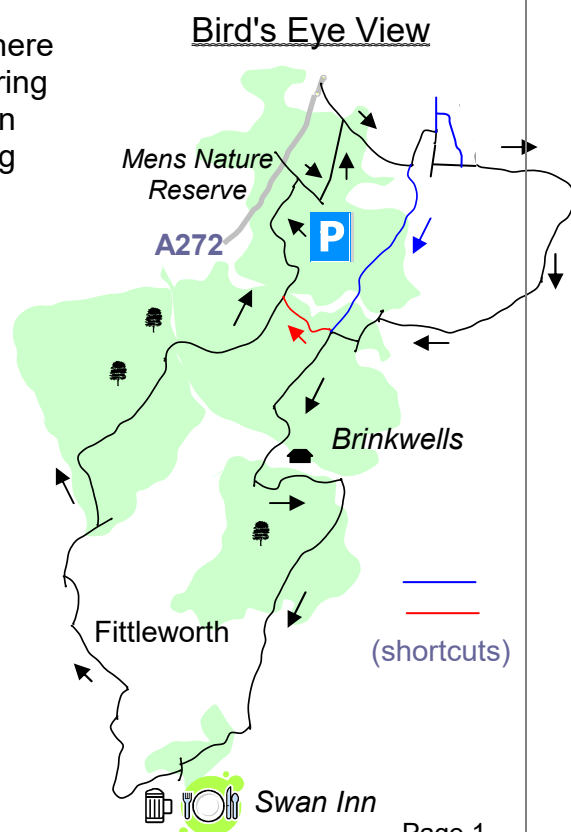
Roughly half-way round, you have the chance for refreshments at the excellent *Swan Inn* (www.swaninnhotel.com) tel:01798-865154.



?? There are few nettles on this walk but in high summer there are some *very short* sections of dense shrubbery, requiring grit and a spirit of adventure. Because this is a Wealden walk, boots are definitely recommended. A strong hiking pole will come in handy. Dogs should be welcome.

As a shorter option, the **Divertimento** shortcut saves 4 km=2½ miles, missing the canal and some fine open country. [2021-23: the Canal route has a temporary wide diversion.] The **Intermezzo** is a brief woodland walk that returns to the start after 6km=3¾ miles.

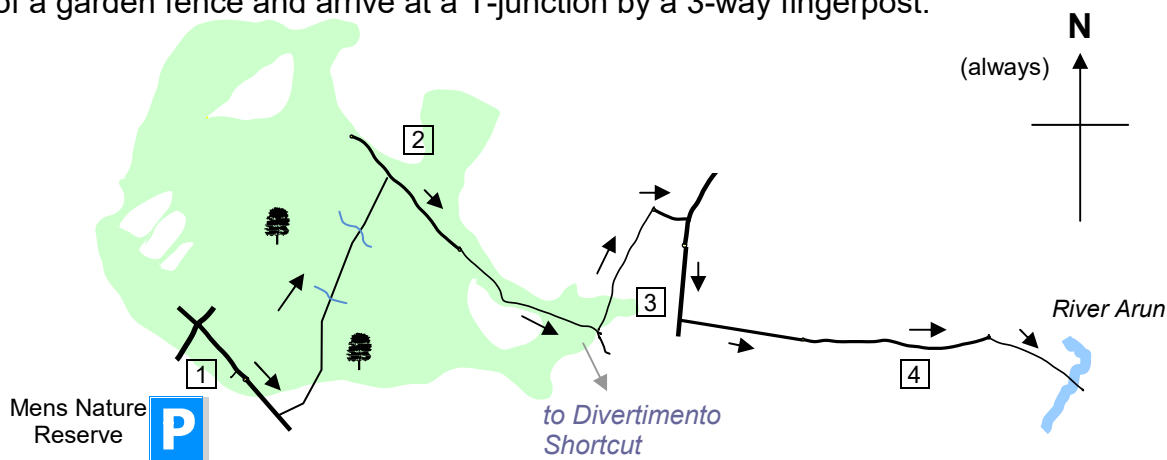
The walk begins at the **Mens Nature Reserve** car park, just off the A272 4km=2½ miles south of Wisborough Green, West Sussex, marked with a **P** on the OS Explorer map, www.w3w.co/zebra.playful.menswear, nearest postcode **RH14 0HS**. **Warning! isolated car park: see Guidelines.** The turning is clearly signposted *Crimbourne Coldharbour*. The small unsigned car park is only 150m on the right. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

First Movement (Allegro con Brio): The Canal 5km=3 miles

- 1 The car park is situated in a quiet woodland nature reserve run by the Sussex Wildlife Trust – quiet except for the shrill songs of many unusual bird species, including nightingales. The path by the noticeboard will be your return route at the end of the walk after an amazing trail, ending on a long unmapped path. Begin the walk by going out to the road. Turn **right** on the road, soon passing Hartsmead stables, with a pond on your left. Immediately turn **left** at a signpost on the tarmac drive for *Crimbourne Stud* and keep **left** beside the wall of the building to enter a deep holly wood [2019: soon skirting a fallen tree]. Your path goes down over a 2-plank bridge with rail and up again, soon again down steps, over a bridge and up. Finally you pass the corner of a garden fence and arrive at a T-junction by a 3-way fingerpost.



- 2 Turn **right** on a wide track. After a big white house *Freelands*, zigzag right-left onto a narrower bridle path through attractive woodland which in late spring is decked with bluebells. At the corner of meadows, you pass a notice telling you that you were in another stretch of the Sussex Wildlife Trust nature reserve. Keep straight ahead to go shortly over a wide footbridge (newly built in 2012). Go 20m further to a junction with a 3-way fingerpost.

Decision point. If you are impatient to get to *Brinkwells* and the village and are not tired of the woodland, take the **Divertimento** shortcut at the end of this text. [Feb 2021-Nov 2022: on the main (Canal) route, the bridge over the Arun canal is still **closed**: the wooden slats are rotting and many of them are cracked and dangerous, but there is a wide diversion available – see below.]

- 3 The following sections are retained, despite a delayed repair of the Arun bridge (or use of the diversion – but see blue section below). Turn sharp **left** on a narrow path. Shortly, go over a narrow bridge, over a stile and uphill across a meadow (we found no bull, by the way), then over a stile and across a larger meadow aiming for a silvery metal gate half way across the other side. Go over a stile to the left of the gate, turn **right** on a tarmac farm track and follow it to a T-junction with a road. Turn **right** on the road, passing a plantation of poplars and a house and going over a stream. After 300m or so on the road, opposite a fingerpost [May 2023: hidden in a hedge], turn **left** on a wide track, going through an open metal gate next to an old wooden gate. Follow this tarmac drive for 300m where there is a ridge running across the drive. **If you have a dog, keep him on a lead because the horse fence can be breached!** There is a signed bridleway* on your left here.

* A resident of Shipbourne Cottages and a walker offer this rather long diversion (nearly a mile?) to get you over the Canal. Turn **left** on the bridleway, follow it for about 300-400m and turn **right**. The path goes down the right-hand side of a field then diagonally left and down through a couple of gaps in the corner of two fields and along the Arun and/or its flood plain. After about ½ km, turn **right** along a path that goes down the centre of a field straight to a bridge over the Arun. Turn **right** immediately before the Canal. This towpath takes you to section **5** of the Second Movement (Andante Con Moto) in The Cottage section of the intended route below.

- 4** Continue a further 300m to reach *Shipbourne Cottages*. Ignore a small metal gate on your right here, stay on the track, going past a large metal gate, and turn **right** along the far side of a horse exercise arena. (This is the much better alternative route. The original footpath goes through a small metal gate on the right, across a clumpy horse pasture to the far left-hand corner and right on the track.) Go through a large metal gate and cross the centre of the next meadow to meet the River Arun. [May 2019-2023: there was a “closure” notice on the bridge which is now completely fenced off.] Cross the long bridge over the river to come immediately to the Wey-Arun Canal and a swing-bridge, the only one of its kind on the canal. *During the 1800s this canal made it possible to travel by boat from London to Littlehampton on the south coast. Much of it has now been restored by The Wey & Arun Canal Trust and boat trips can be taken on several large sections.*

Second Movement (Andante Con Moto): The Cottage 4½ km=3 miles

- 5** Cross the swing-bridge and go through the pedestrian gate on the track. Veer diagonally **right** across the field to the corner of the building. Here, go through another pedestrian gate and continue ahead between the building and the hedge. At the track turn **right**. At a fingerpost, go straight ahead on the track, avoiding a track on your left. *The tower visible up on the hill half left, is the Toat Monument, a folly built in 1827 for Samuel Drinkwater a racing fan who, according to legend, is buried there upside down astride his favourite racehorse.* After 600m, the track bends left and soon meets two wooden gates ahead. Turn **right** here, as indicated by the little arrow, going over first the (dry) canal, then the River Arun, through a (open) gate and across the grass. The path goes through two small metal gates either side of a stream, crosses a meadow to a wooden gate, then follows a track between a hedge and a fence. At *Furnace Pond House and Cottage*, cross the lane and continue ahead on a track.



On rare occasions there may be cattle in the “grassy meadow” below. If so and if they worry you, take this alternative: Turn **right** down a private road with a *No Right Of Way* sign. This eventually leads to a wooden automatic gate. Press one of the buttons on a large pole on the right to open the gate. *Residents are apparently okay with walkers using this route.* Once through, follow the road until you reach a T-junction. Turn **left** and follow this road. It eventually takes you to the lane in section 6 below marked with a * symbol, before the “*Low Flying Owls*” notice.

- 6 Go through a wooden gate into a beautiful narrow curving grassy meadow, one of the delights of this area. Down on your right is a stream valley with a variety of different trees, a haven for birds. Follow the meadow, avoiding a footpath forking right, until eventually you go through a gate into woodland (clumpy at first but soon improving). This path finally ends through a gate to a lane. Turn **left** on the *lane. Ignore a signed footpath right on the drive to *Horsebridge House*. Notice the warning sign “*Low Flying Owls*” by the barn on the left. Pass *Westland* and *Westland Cottage* on the left and immediately go **right** on a signed footpath into woods. Keep ahead at all times through fine beechwoods. In 250m, you reach a 4-way fingerpost under an electrical junction box. Turn **left***

The **Divertimento** shortcut rejoins the walk at this point. *By keeping straight ahead instead of turning left, you could do the *Intermezzo* shortcut, returning to the car park omitting *Brinkwells*, the village and a chance for refreshment.

- 7 Go through the hollies and between barriers either side of a track and following the yellow arrows. The path runs dead straight through the woods gently uphill, passing another fingerpost. Soon after, it approaches the corner of a garden and crosses a track, continuing uphill and, after 800m on this path, reaches a lane. Turn **left** on the lane. Soon, at a T-junction, turn **right** uphill on a lane signposted *Fittleworth*. The lane passes *Springs Hanger* and goes through a cutting where tree roots penetrate the sandstone layers. At the top, you have great views left to the South Downs. Avoid the first footpath left for *Springs Farm*, avoid two footpaths right and take the next footpath **left** at a sign for *Brinkwells*. Soon you pass the thatched cottage itself (see the plaque on the wall).



Edward Elgar was born in humble circumstances, the son of a piano tuner and a catholic, far from the typical Edwardian gentleman as he is usually portrayed. In later life, he had a constant stream of visitors at his London flat and needed a quiet place to work. It's hard to imagine a more peaceful and isolated place than this one, a long “primrose-lined walk” on country lanes from Fittleworth Station, a refuge from the war. He and his wife Alice rented Brinkwells from the artist Rex Vicat Cole, beginning in 1917, and later tried to buy it. Elgar composed three major chamber works here and part of the Cello Concerto. A portrait of wartime life and the deep love and understanding both families had for the countryside is portrayed in the book “Elgar, Vicat Cole and the Ghosts of Brinkwells”.

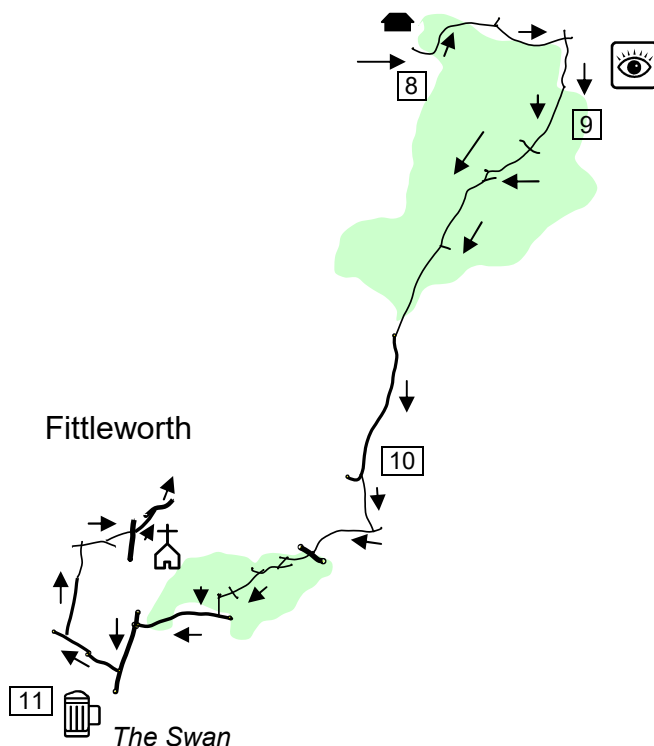
Third Movement (Scherzo Allegretto): The Village 5½ km=3½ miles

- 8 **See map overleaf.** Go past the cottage keeping **left** on a small grassy footpath (quite overgrown in high summer) that hugs the edge of the cottage’s garden and then descends steeply to the **left*** into a dense ferny wood. [* **Care! do not miss this left turn.**] The path turns right over a two-plank bridge and across a stream near a fingerpost in dense hidden woods that in late spring are aflame with bluebells. It runs straight and clear and

wild garlic now takes over. It meets a track by *Springs Farm*. Keep ahead over a stile and, as the meadow opens out, follow the fence along the right-hand side to a small wooden gate by a 4-way fingerpost in the far left corner. Turn **right** here along the right-hand side of a meadow. *You have fine views from here ahead to Fittleworth Common, Stopham Church and Park Mound and, behind them, the South Downs.*



- 9 The path veers left round the corner of the meadow. About 30m later, at a fingerpost, go **right** through a small wooden gate into woodland with a line of rowan trees on your left. Soon the path descends quite steeply through Chance Copse and begins to rise again through Fittleworth Wood. At a crossing of paths, ignore a signed footpath left and go straight ahead uphill through a coppice. Fingerposts now direct you on a compulsory course through the chestnut coppice: at the top, turn **left** and at a T-junction, turn **right** on a track. 50m further, turn **left** following a blue arrow on a post. Disregard several paths leading off later, always staying on the main path. After more than 1 km, the path graduates to a grassy highway between hedges. This path is sometimes quite muddy in places but it soon clears. Soon you pass *Limbourne Farm House* on your right. Shortly after, where the tarmac curves right near a large hopper, keep straight ahead on a track.



- 10 The track curves left uphill. At the top, by a fingerpost, turn sharp **right** on a footpath. As the path enters pinewoods, keep straight ahead, avoiding a waymarked path that forks left. In 100m, at a 3-way junction in a clearing, turn **left** to reach the main road (the A283) in 50m, skirting a marshy spot. Cross the road onto a footpath opposite into the hilly and wooded Fittleworth Common. In 100m you are following a fence on your right. In another 50m, at a signpost, fork **left**, steeply uphill. At the top of the bank, turn **right**, following a yellow arrow. In 100m, this path goes down into a dip. *Note the oak trees here, still thriving although lying on their sides.* You immediately have a choice ahead, marked by two yellow arrows. Take the **left** fork. The path goes over a crossing path as it approaches a fence ahead. When you reach the fence corner, turn abruptly **left** and follow the

fence on your right down till you reach a lane, Sandy Lane. Turn **right** on the lane. *As you go, you have more views of the South Downs.* When you reach a main road, the B2138, cross it and turn **left** along the raised sidewalk going past cottages. Soon you reach *The Swan Inn*.



The Swan Inn was renovated and re-opened in 2024. The inn is so proud of its location it even has a sign over the road, as if any passing driver would fail to notice it. For this must be a perfect place to find an old friendly coaching inn (dating back to 1382). It was a resting place for horses of the royal couriers before the long climb up the South Downs at Bury Hill. A plaque records that in 1925 one of the first meetings of the Ancient Order of Froth Blowers was held here; the Swan is still called "Vat No.0". There is a good garden to enjoy the inventive menu and drink al fresco. The Swan is also a hotel, boasting four-posters in some rooms. It also serves as the village tuck shop.

- 11 After refreshment, turn **right** (or left, if coming out of the inn) on the lane beside *The Swan*. Pass *The Grange* and, soon after, turn **right** on a drive, signed as a footpath, gently uphill in the direction of *Rotherwood*. By the entrance to the house, keep straight ahead on a narrower path. The path soon goes through a wooden gate and past a bench commemorating the donor of the aptly-named Birchwalk Wood. Keep ahead through the wood, avoiding turnings off until you go through a wooden gate to a fingerpost. Turn **right** here, passing a white house and staying on the tarmac as it forks **left** down to a main road. Cross the road to a side lane, marked as *no entry*, going past the 11th-century Church of St Mary, Fittleworth. *This is a fascinating church and a must-visit. Two of its bells are of medieval vintage.* At the end of the lane, turn **right** on the road. **NB: this is a potentially dangerous crossing of the busy main road so it's best to avoid the blind bend on your right and cross over to the left side of the lane first. In poor light conditions, or if you have a child or dog, or a slight disability, not to mention too many drinks in *The Swan*, please be extremely careful.** You immediately pass between exquisite timbered cottages in the centre of the village.

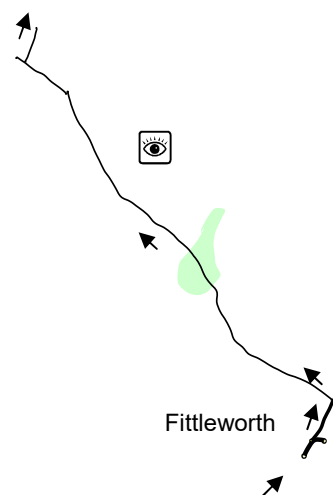
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Fittleworth was called "Fitelwurda" in 1167, meaning "Fitela's enclosure". There are two books describing the village and its history: "Fittleworth a Time of Change" by Kiki Claxton and others and "The Story Of Fittleworth" by Lady Maxse. The painter Charles Sims lived in Fittleworth in the more carefree days before World War I.

Fourth Movement (Ritardando, Sostenuto): The Woodland Trail

6½ km=4 miles

- 12 In a few metres, where the main road bends right, fork **left** on a minor road signposted to *Bedham* passing some more perfect half-timbered dwellings. In only 60m, opposite a pink-washed cottage, turn **left** on a footpath. Go over a stile and pass *Fittleworth House* and garden (open some days for charity) on your right. Keep to the right-hand side of the pasture, going through a small wooden gate and aiming diagonally **right** to the opposite corner of a small meadow, negotiating a stile or wooden gate. You encounter a strip of beeches and are now in a vast wide open field



with views ahead into the distance. Your way across the fields is well marked. At a fingerpost under an oak, keep straight ahead, aiming for a post visible in the trees. Next is a post with yellow arrows: keep straight on, walking with a stream on your left. After 50m, you reach another post with yellow arrows: this time, turn **right** with the stream still on your left.

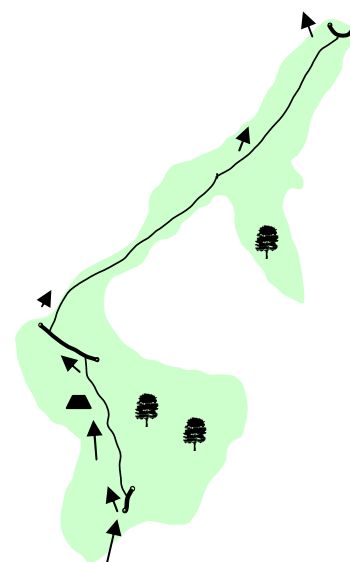
- 13 You are walking slightly uphill in the general direction of a large house up ahead. After the corner of the field, keep ahead between the stream and hollies. At a signpost, veer **left** into the field edge, now heading towards the house. As you get nearer, the path becomes an enclosed path running on the right of the house which turns out to be called *Dyers Cottage*. Join the drive from the house and follow it, over a stile to a lane. Turn **right** on the lane. Pass the *Potting Shed* (which offers accommodation with self-catering) and avoid a footpath left. You are in the hamlet of Little Bognor. *Little Bognor House*, owned by Roxy Music singer Bryan Ferry, is on the right. Just after *The Grove House*, avoid footpaths left and right to pass one of the precious listed buildings of this region, *Crowsole Mill*.

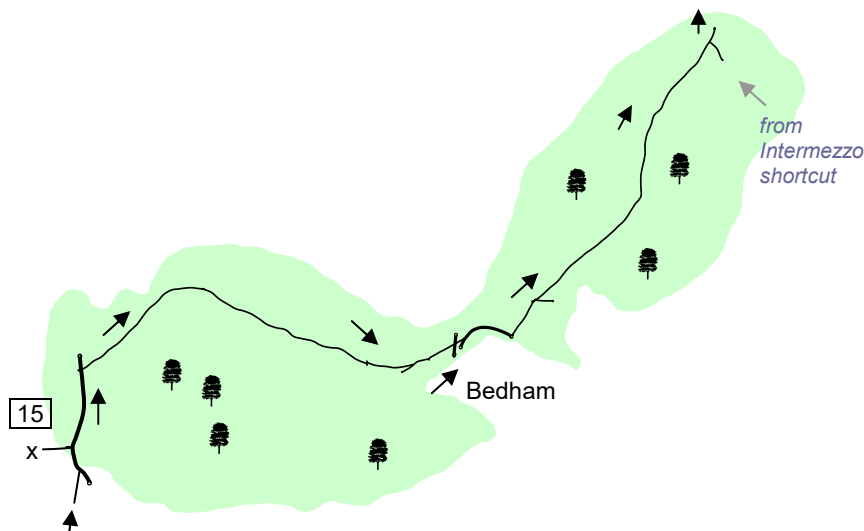


This L-shaped timbered millhouse dates back at least to the 1600s, wonderfully preserved by the modern owners and with a picture-perfect garden. There was a flour mill here as early as the 1100s. It was an "overshot" mill, meaning that the water flowed forward over the wheel from the pond at the top. It ceased working in 1895.

In 100m or so, the lane soon goes under wires. Ignore an unmarked track on the left but, 80m further, go **left** at a fingerpost uphill between banks. The long woodland trail has begun!

- 14 This path is so little known that sometimes a holly tree blocks the path and the owner of the next house says he counts only a handful of passers-by each year. As you go, you have a good view of the lake below, fed from springs. Just before a house and garden, keep **right** up steps (*mind your feet! the steps may be overgrown*) and, at a drive, turn **left**. Avoid the private path down to the house but go straight ahead on a narrow level garden path, between a garage on your right and a box hedge, later walking beside the garden fence (*careful!! thick bracken and rhododendrons in summer, a doughty sense of adventure may be needed – please thrash about to help to clear the path! it gets better in about 50m; W.Ssx Council have been notified*). Continue into woods and onwards to a lane. Turn **left** on the lane downhill. In 120m, at the bottom, by a stream, turn **right** on a signposted footpath. This beautiful path runs between meadows on the left and trees on the right. At a crossing path, the signpost points you straight ahead, deeper into the woods. Soon you have conifers on the left, then holly and beech. After 1 km, you meet a lane at a hairpin. Take the **left**-hand, lower branch of the hairpin, slightly downhill. *Note that you are on the [Serpent Trail](#), a 108-km sinewy path from Petersfield to Haslemere. [May 2019: the "footpath closure" sign refers to a branching path which you don't use, so it can be disregarded.]*

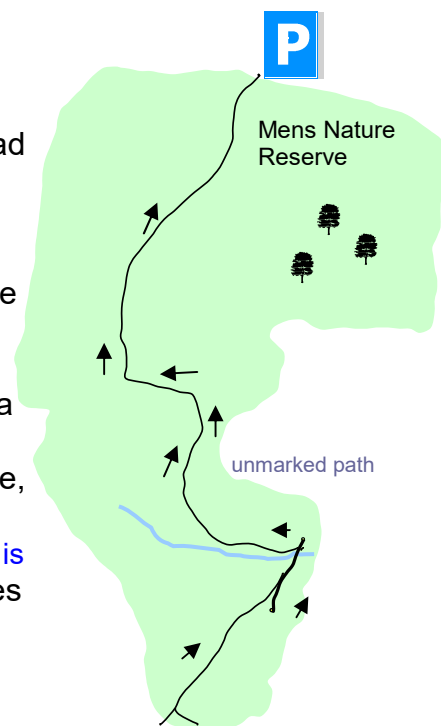




- 15 Stay on the lane, **ignoring** a bridgeway left in only 30m by a large metal gate [May 2023: fingerpost missing?], thus leaving the Serpent Trail. In about 150m, just before a paling fence, turn **right** on a signposted bridgeway. The path is wide and fairly well trodden. It runs within sight of the garden down on your left and then veers right under wires. As you approach the hamlet of Bedham, a signposted track joins from the right. Cross over one drive and, at a fingerpost, veer **left** on another drive, passing a fine timbered cottage and the clipped yew hedge of *The Orchards*. After 100m, by a bench seat, turn **left** at a fingerpost. (Ahead is only a private house.) The fine stone house on the left is *Mants*. The path goes over a (sometimes dry) stream and, in 15m, comes to a marker post. Here, avoid a footpath that forks right and stay on the bridgeway, uphill. [May 2016: a “path closure” notice does *not* affect your route.] You now have a clear, very straight path through Hammonds Wood. In 500m, you reach a 4-way fingerpost. Go straight on.

The **Intermezzo** shortcut re-joins the walk at this point.

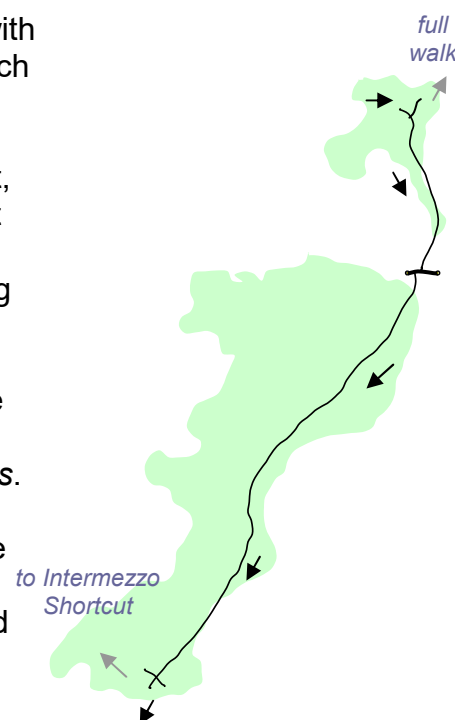
- 16 Nearly 250m after the fingerpost, the main path bends **left** downhill. (It does not matter if you miss this turn and find yourself on an unpromising rather narrow path: both ways lead down to the drive.) At a concrete drive, turn **left**. The drive shortly goes over a concrete bridge. Immediately after the bridge, turn **left** on an unmarked path that runs beside the stream. You are now back in the Sussex Wildlife Trust nature reserve. The way marker posts and arrows have gone and you need to be alert as there are several surprise turns. The path follows the stream for some distance and soon there is a bank on the left to avoid any mud. In 350m, the path veers **left** to cross a stream bed. In only 20m, just after the first tree, turn squarely **left** on a path which looks less promising than the path straight ahead. *Don't miss this turn!* (The marker post is missing.) Your path runs over forest debris and soon becomes clearer. In about 100m your path forks right to avoid a thick fallen tree trunk. Shortly afterwards, turn **right**. (The old marker post has vanished and this turn is **vital!** As a clue, there may be a small tree trunk on the ground blocking the “wrong” way straight ahead.) From here the path is twisty but there are no more unexpected turns. In 500m, suddenly you are back at the Mens car park where the walk began.



Shortcut 1: The Divertimento 1¼ km=1mile

This route cuts out 3¾ km = 2½ miles from the walk by leaving it before the section by the Arun Canal. You miss the canal and some fine open countryside.

Ignore the narrow path on the left and veer **right**, staying on the wider path, going up a bank, past a house and garden with a fine lawn and, in 400m, just after a little wooden shed, reach a lane. Turn **right** on the lane and, in 20m, turn **left** on a signed footpath. Any initial mud will quickly disappear. The path runs more or less straight on through the wood. At first, the route stays not far from a field visible on the left. Later it curves **right** somewhat. Look out for a confirmatory fingerpost as you enter hollies and shortly go over a crossing path. At a 3-way signpost you meet a tarmac drive. Turn **right** on the drive. After a house *Oaklees* keep **left** at a fingerpost on the main drive. At the next junction, where the main drive bends left, leave it by taking a signed footpath straight across the grass ahead, beside the timbered *Saxons*. The path goes downhill and crosses a bridge with rail over a stream. Immediately, you reach a fork at a fingerpost. Take the **right** fork. The path goes straight uphill, skirting a boggy patch, runs with pastures and a fence on your left and crosses a small meadow with horse jumps. Continue into woods to arrive in 100m at a 4-way fingerpost under an electrical junction box.



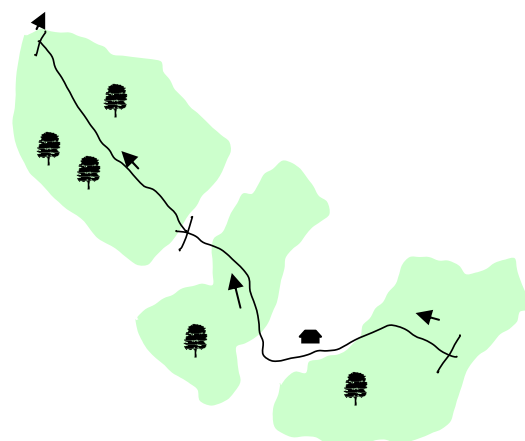
Decision point. For a short woodland walk taking you back to the start without visiting Brinkwells or the village or taking refreshment, turn **right** at the fingerpost and continue with the **Intermezzo Shortcut** that follows below. Otherwise ...

Cross **straight over** at the junction and continue from section **7** of the Second Movement.

Shortcut 2: The Intermezzo ½ km= 0.35 miles

This return route, combined with the *Divertimento* above, makes for a very short and rewarding woodland walk, but omits Brinkwells, Fittleworth, the chance of refreshment and much more besides.

On meeting the edge of a field, turn **left** towards the wooden outhouse of an immaculate timbered cottage. After the outhouse and a shed, turn **right** through a small wooden gate beside a larger one and continue along the shorter side of a quite beautiful grassy meadow. Go through a large wooden gate at the other side and down into the woods. The track crosses a stream and rises up a rather steep bank using steps, to a gate into another meadow. Cross to a 4-way fingerpost. Keep straight ahead, using a small wooden gate on the side and immediately take the **right** fork option. You are in a fabulous wood of tall beeches. The path goes dead straight through the wood (avoiding a right-curving forester's track) and, in about 200m, reaches a 4-way fingerpost. [2019: the "Closed" sign applies only to the path straight over: the bridge is being repaired.] Turn **right** here and re-join the main walk at section **16** of the Fourth Movement.

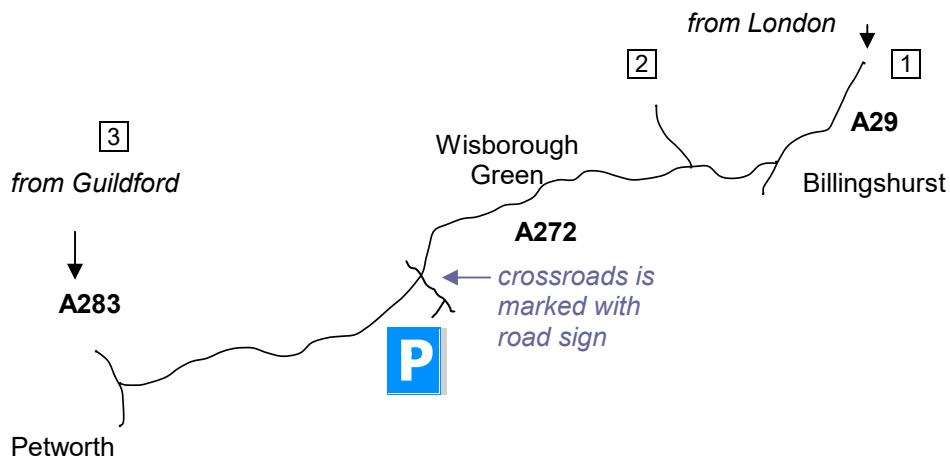




For final refreshments, the “friendly and welcoming” *White Hart* in nearby Pulborough (RH20 1DS) is recommended by walkers.

Getting there

By car: the car park is in **Crimbourne lane**, postcode **RH14 0HS**, grid ref 023 238, 3½ km=2¼ miles south west of Wisborough Green, or 5 km=3 miles north east of Petworth, on the A272. Turn south east into the lane. The small car park is easy to miss and is only 150m on the right, under a tiny wooden barrier. If coming from the London area there are three possible routes: **1** the A29 (Bognor road) through Dorking to Billingshurst (stay on the A29 bypass before the town) and turn right on the A272; **2** the A281 (Horsham Road) from Guildford, change to the B2133 at Alfold Crossways and later follow signs to Wisborough Green; **3** from the A3 at Milford take the A283 to Petworth and turn left onto the A272 at the start of the town. If coming from the south, aim for Pulborough or Petworth; it is possible to reach the start on minor roads, using a good map. If you type “The Mens Nature Reserve” into Google maps, you get a pointer to Crimbourne Lane but the car park is much nearer the main A272 road.



By bus/train: bus no. 1 from Pulborough station to Fittleworth. Check the timetables.

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