



Northchapel, The Lake and Birchfield Copse

Distance: 11 km=7 miles

easy walking

Region: West Sussex

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Refreshments: Northchapel

Map: Explorer 133 (Haslemere) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Village, woodland, lake, quiet forest trails, views, long hedged avenues

In Brief

This walk takes you through an area of astounding beauty in the Sussex borderland. You will find peace amongst the long shaded paths than run in woodland strips across the landscape. The walk is peppered with surprises, some eye-popping like The Lake and the vast unknown forest, some endearingly small like a hidden seat or a plump of white ducks. Yet footprints are few along the paths, indicating that you may have the entire area to yourself, barring the odd angler, lawn-tender or woodsman. The walk skirts a small corner of the great Birchfield Copse, a superb natural forest, bereft of people and posing therein a mystery.

There is a good inn in the village, at the start and end of the walk (to enquire at the *Half Moon*, ring 01428-707270). The village store is open all day, including Sat, but closed Sun (except for morning papers?).



There were very few nettles and brambles when the walk was done in October, because the land is chiefly green meadows with wide clear paths.

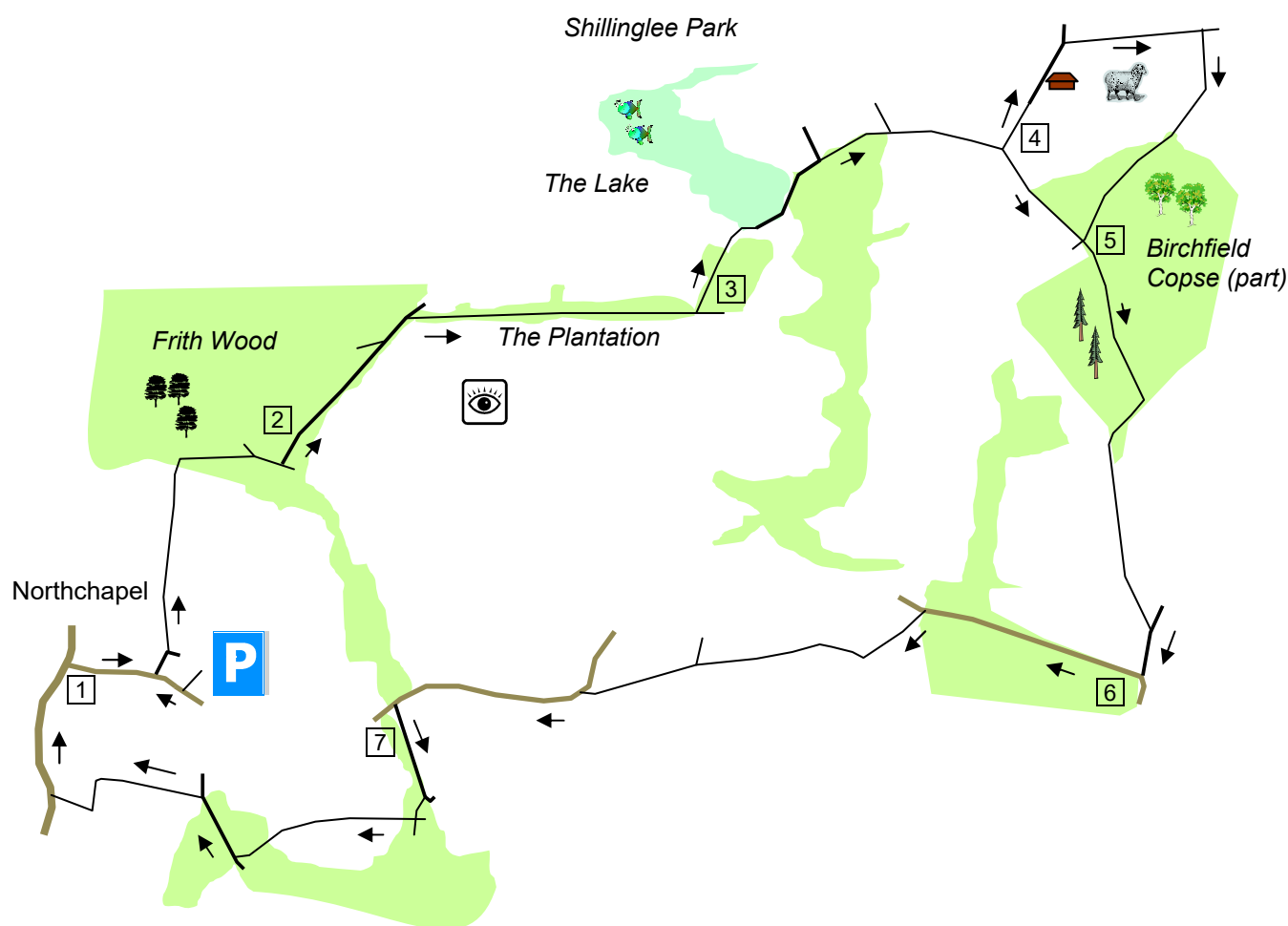


There is one marshy area, with a hint to avoid it (which was quite deep in the wet autumn of 2019), and maybe one or two wet patches, making boots necessary except in a dry summer. With no cattle, only a small flock of sheep, and only ramshackle stiles, your dog will also enjoy this walk.



The walk begins in the Village Hall car park in Pipers Lane, **Northchapel**, W.Sussex, near the Surrey border, on the A283, **postcode GU28 9JA**. Pipers Lane is just off the main road, **first left** (if coming from the Guildford / London direction) at the start of the village, by the green. The village hall is 300m on the left. In case there's a big event, or in case they take exception to all the FFWalkers using it, simply park on the roadside. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 From the Village Hall, turn **right** on Pipers Lane towards the village and, in 40m, just before a children's play area, turn **right** on a tarmac drive. Where the drive bends right to a house, keep ahead on a path up the left-hand side of a crop field. Do the same for the next, smaller field. The path leads you into the great darkness of Frith Wood. *This is a notable place for a pheasant shoot in autumn and you may need to make yourself visible – it's only polite!* Immediately turn **right** at a T-junction, as indicated by a white arrow on a post. After 200m or so, under a canopy of oaks, ignore a sharp left turn at a fingerpost and carry straight on. In another 50m, continue through a large metal gate and immediately, at another fingerpost, turn **left** on a tarmac driveway. *(It's a private drive but a public bridleway!)*
- 2 After nearly ½ km in a mixed wood with chestnut and birch and occasional views, you pass *Frith Hill Court* with its old barns, its little clock turret and its nice belvedere. At a fingerpost opposite the entrance, ignore the sharp left turn and carry straight on. In another 50m or so, you meet another fingerpost. **Leave** the main track here and take a much narrower bridleway forking **right**. In 40m you pass through a small wooden gate and you have terrific views on your right to the South Downs. A little decorative stone seat here acts as a focal point on the view-line from the house and they must have to tolerate opportunistic poseurs. Another small wooden gate leads into a path along a strip of holly wood, known historically as *The Plantation*. After a pleasant ½ km, ignore a small wooden gate and fingerpost on your right. 50m later, you meet another fingerpost. Turn **left** here on a narrow footpath.



- 3 The path leads you over a stile on a grassy route beside a fence and horse pasture. You descend through trees and come up onto a green space where you suddenly meet The Lake.

This huge lake was formed from the damming of the valley and fed the Mill here at the east side, as well as machinery for brickmaking etc. But it greatly contributed to the landscaping of the southern end of Shillinglee Park. With its various creeks and inlets, it covers about 14 ha (about 35 acres). Much of Shillinglee Park was famously planned by Capability Brown in around 1760. For notes about Shillinglee House, see the walk "Chiddingfold and Northchapel" in this series.

Go over a stile onto a driveway which runs beside the lake, passing Park Mill Farm and houses, one of which has a lakeside terrace. After passing over the sluice gate, the tarmac drive veers uphill past another house. As the drive bends left, **leave** it by continuing straight ahead across grass, over a stile or through a large wooden gate (with a stiff latch). You are now walking along the right-hand side of a meadow with the deep woods of Mill Copse on your right. At the end of the meadow, at a fingerpost, ignore a tempting left turn and continue through a large metal gate. Your path follows the left-hand side of a large meadow and, after a hedgerow, a second meadow similarly. In the corner, ignore the first large wooden gate but go **left** through a small wooden gate beside the next gate. Immediately on your right is yet another large/small wooden gate combination. Just ahead to your left is a small pond overlooked by a rather fragile bench seat.

Short cut. The next little loop was done only at the author's whim, to give you a chance to see a farmstead, a little more of the forest and a view, on a possibly *drier* route. If instead you would like to take a short cut, turn **right** through the small wooden gate and follow a grassy path in a woodland strip between meadows. Soon there is a wood on your left and a tiny pond. You reach a 4-way fingerpost: keep straight on to re-join the walk at section 5.

- 4 Keep **left**, ignoring the gate on the right, on a beautiful path of mown grass. Proceed past the house, sheds and barns of Haymans Farm. You pass a pond with white ducks and geese. Continue along the tarmac drive and, opposite a large corrugated barn, turn **right** through a small (open?) metal gate on a wide grassy path. You pass shortly through another large (open?) metal gate into an open meadow. Continue on the left side of the meadow until you reach another another metal gate by a fingerpost. Turn immediately **right** here along the right-hand side of the meadow.

The path straight ahead (not on your route) leads through woods and across a ravine towards the main Shillinglee Road where it is possible to filter right covertly into the magnificent Kingspark Wood. This wood, which adjoins Birchfield Copse, is privately leased to the Forest Commission. Various wooden seats and gentle notices seen along the tracks indicate past leisure use, although the wood seems to be deserted. The wood is pristine with no signs of felling or other forestry work and contains a dazzling collection of broadwoods and conifers. A credible theory is that it was closed to keep out quadbikes and other joyriders. A vast unknown treasure in the Weald of Sussex.

You have a great view to your right to Black Down (*subject of several walks on this site*). Follow the edge as it elbows right, finally going through a wooden gate into part of Birchfield Copse. Birchfield Copse is another huge pristine forest owned by the Forestry Commission (and so probably allowing public access to other sections). It suffered greatly in the winter of gales of 2014 and the many fallen trees make most of it impenetrable – another mystery. After 100m, where three paths fan out, a fingerpost directs you straight on along the central path through oak woods, soon changing to gorse and birch. After

300m in the woods, you meet a 4-way junction by a footpath. (Straight on, but unfortunately not on your route, is a lovely path across a green meadow.) Turn **left** here on another woodland path.

- 5 You are on a straight wide path through more of the mixed woodland of Birchfield Copse. After more than 300m, you meet a very wide and obvious crossing path. (The path to your left here, not on your route, is the only usable path into Birchfield Copse.) Go straight over. In only 30m, you need to be careful as there is a hidden marsh. *The best idea is to go over the high bank on your left and take a parallel path on the other side; cross back over in about 100m when you see a meadow ahead.* Follow the main path as it bends right in front of a meadow and later curves left. The next ½ km is a delightful green corridor between mixed hedgerows, trees and shrubs of all kinds. The final part is more open with grass hiding the clumpy soil. You come out to a tarmac drive. Turn **right** to reach a road at a bend.

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- 6 Turn **right** on this quiet road. In 400m or so, as the field on your right ends, you pass a cottage on the right and cross a bridge over a deep stream. As the road comes out into the open, opposite the entrance to Dales Farm, turn **left** at a signpost up into a crop field and take a good clear path across the centre. [2017: walkers report crops planted over the path; if possible please try to re-forge the path or go **left** round the perimeter; otherwise stay on the lane.] You have good views of Black Down ahead and, to its left, the transmitter on Bexley Hill. In the next field, turn **right** and follow the right-hand edge round. (It may be easier to follow vehicle tracks about 10m from the edge.) At the corner, by a fingerpost, go straight on along the right-hand edge of the next field. At the far corner, go past a metal gate and veer **left** to re-join the road. On the hill on your left is the VOR/DME (Midhurst MID) air-traffic beacon.

- 7 After two patches of woodland, just before a large barn and a cottage, turn **left** at a fingerpost on a tarmac track. As the track enters woodland, keep **right** on a dirt track. In 50m, at a 4-way fingerposted crossing, turn **right** on a path along the right-hand side of a crop field. In the far corner, go straight ahead on a path into woods. In 150m, you come to a T-junction. Turn **right** here on a wide track, still in woods. As you come out into the open by a hedge, turn **left** and immediately **right** along the right-hand side of a field. (Some walkers prefer to veer right on the track and turn **left** after 250m on a footpath beside the fields, leading to the church.) At the far corner, turn **left** and, in 100m, turn **right** on a narrow footpath (*easy to miss!*). This leads out to a shingle drive by a timbered house and the main road in Northchapel, opposite the village stores. Turn **right** through the village passing various houses, including the hobbitophile *Bag End*, followed by the *Half Moon* pub. *This is a worthy final stop (when open), a 15th- century former coaching inn full of antiques and rustic memorabilia, inside and out; some patience may be needed in this sleepy village.* Continue along the road to reach Pipers Lane on your right, where the walk began.



Getting there

By car: **Northchapel** is on the A283 between Chiddingfold and Petworth. If coming from for the London / Guildford area, turn off the A3 at Milford.

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