Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Woolbeding Village and Common

Distance: 10 km=6½ miles moderate walking with long easy sections

Region: West Sussex Date written: 12-jul-2021

Author: Hautboy Last update: 9-nov-2026

Refreshments: picnic, or nearby inns after the walk

Map: Explorer 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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Historic village, cul-de-sac lanes, heath, woodland, high hills, views

In Brief

Here is a walk through the familiar wonderful landscape of this part of West Sussex, but along paths which are mainly unfamiliar and new to most walkers. The walk includes two rambles along unsigned paths, so characteristic of this website. One gives you rare insight into the heathland of Woolbeding Common and the other is a magical ending to the walk with Woolbeding House summoning you like a homing beacon. There are no major roads or reminders of the present age, and all that you see could have been unchanged for at least a century.

Woolbeding and its Common, 4km north of the village, are one of the "strip parishes" giving each settlement its own narrow portion of arable land and heathland. The village is dominated by Woolbeding House whose legendary gardens belong to the National Trust and can be visited on certain days (see the end of this text where you will also find some history of this area).

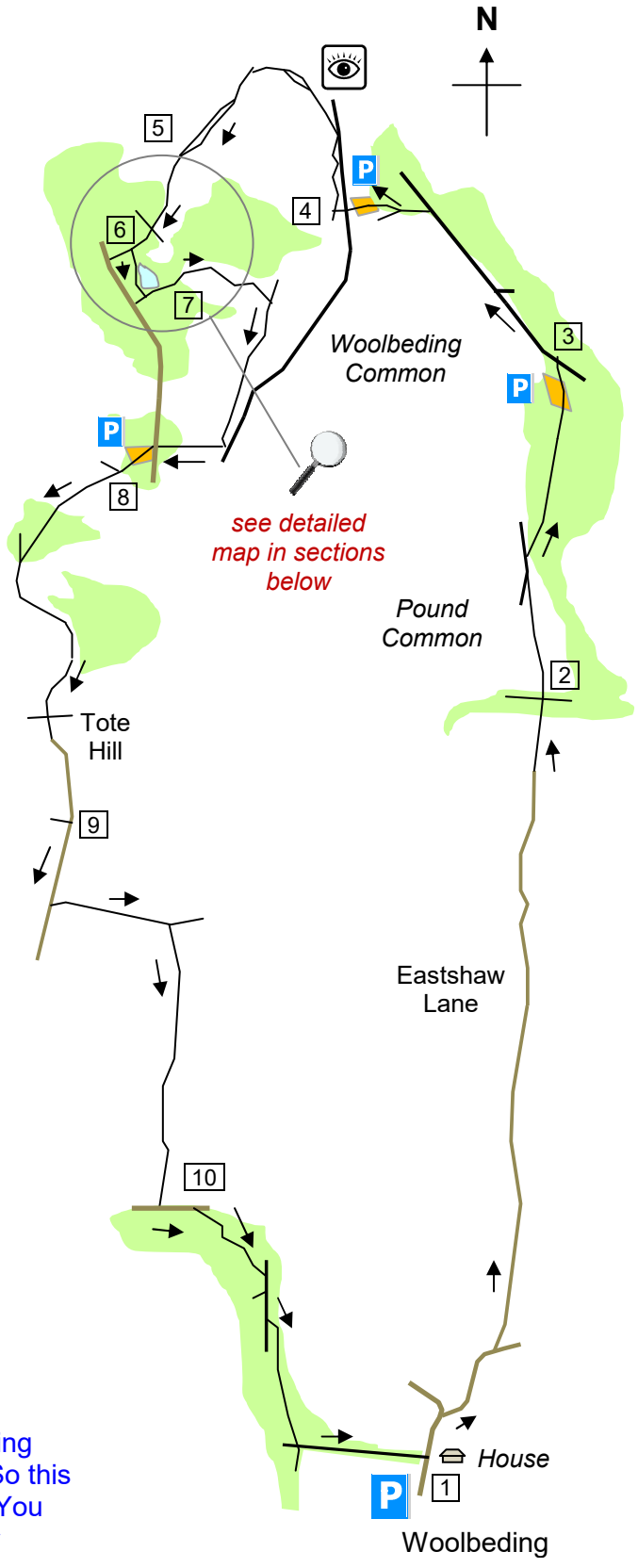
Shorts are wearable but not advisable for this walk because of one or two very short overgrown sections. Boots were not essential when the walk was researched in summer, because the route avoids the marshy areas and stays on the relatively dry heath. Many people will wear boots nonetheless. With no main roads, no livestock and **no stiles**, this walk should be ideal for your dog.

The walk begins in Woolbeding Village, near Midhurst, West Sussex, postcode **GU29 9RR**, w3w:throat.juggles.blushes. (The "village" is really only a handful of houses.) Some walkers found it easier to park opposite the cemetery, before the long wall. There are other car parks along the route (see mini-map), but any other starting point would spoil the idea of a there-and-back excursion "into the hills and far away". For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

1 Starting in Woolbeding village, walk north along the busy road with the cemetery leading to the church, the House and a long tall brick wall all on your **right**. At a junction, keep straight ahead on a minor lane signposted *Easebourne*. Ignore a footpath and steps on your right and stay on this shady rising lane until it curves right. At a junction, turn **left** on a narrow lane, Eastshaw Lane, marked as a cul-de-sac. You are now in open country with ancient hedgerows on each side. You will be walking the whole length of this lane, about 1½ km, passing along the way an ancient farm, an irrelevant footpath, a hidden house and another group of traditional stone houses, before the surface changes to rough grass. You come out to a 3-way fingerpost in the depths of Pound Common.

2 Continue straight ahead. You come to an open grazing area. Depending on the livestock, there may be a small wooden gate to go through (lift and replace the hook) and another similar one on the other side. The stony path runs beside a wood on your right, then in open heath and into a birch wood. After about 400m from the fingerpost, your path merges with a wider path from the left at a marker post. In only 50m, look for a fingerpost on your right: Fork **right** here on a path into woodland *(don't miss this turn!)*. Follow this clear woodland path, soon with a low wall on your right which marks the boundary of Woolbeding parish. After nearly 500m in this handsome wood, the path bends left and comes out, passing a 3-way fingerpost, into Woolbeding Common car park No.1.

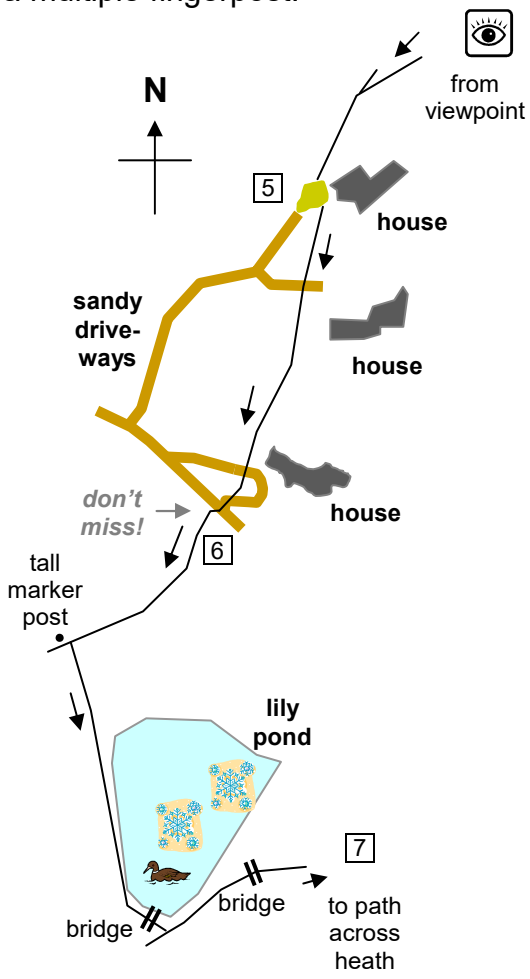


P There are at least two car parks on Woolbeding Common. They don't seem to have names. So this one, the "woodland car park" will be "No. 1". You will shortly visit car park No. 2, "the heath car park".

3 Go straight through the car park, exiting at the far end. Veer **left** on a very wide sandy driveway. In 250m you pass a signposted junction on your right coming from Scotland Farm, joining the Serpent Trail (ST) *(see the longer walk in this series "Woolbeding Common and the Temple of the Winds")*. *The Serpent Trail is a twisty 64-mile=103 km long-distance footpath between Haslemere and Petersfield; there are carvings of the eponymous serpent in various spots beside the paths here.* In a further 250m look for an electricity pole *(don't miss this landmark or the next more subtle turn!)*. Turn **left** here (soon passing on your left one of those carved serpents) onto a sandy downhill path. In only 80m, take a hidden unmarked path *(don't miss!)* that forks **right** into the trees, still on the ST. You pass a marker post and come through hollies and bracken to reach Woolbeding Common car park No. 2. Go straight through the car park to meet a tarmac drive. Your route is **right** on the drive, but first you will be drawn to the open space ahead with a stunning view to the South Downs and Hampshire with a rustic bench from which to enjoy it.

4 Having turned **right** on the tarmac lane (you can instead turn right on a narrow rather prickly path just before the seat), walk 200m or so till you see a fingerpost on your right. Turn **left** here, by a bench seat, and immediately turn **right** on a sandy path through the gorse, still on the ST, with more great views. The path gradually curves left along the rim of the hill. (Where the path splits, you can take either fork as they quickly join up again.) You reach a tempting rustic bench. Turn **left** (well, you can hardly keep straight on!) on a path that snakes quite steeply down (care!) left-right through woodland. Where the path splits in front of a dead tree, you can take either fork as they soon meet up again.) You come down close to a house with red wall tiles, *Barnetts Cottage*, on your left, and a multiple fingerpost.

5 **See adjoining mini-map.** The next section is critical to finding the footpath towards the road and the turning past the pond. You can refer to the mini-map to find the correct route. If any of the paths are unclear, there is an alternative way using the sandy driveways. Keep straight ahead past the house, keeping **left** next to their wooden fence, on a narrow footpath. In 40m the footpath crosses the entrance drive of a second house. Keep straight on with the house on your left. In nearly 100m your path comes down the grass close to a third house on your left. Cross over their U-shaped entrance drive, over a short patch of grass, to meet a wide sandy driveway. Cross straight over the driveway onto a narrow footpath opposite through bracken. This path is crucial -- it is directly opposite the curving driveway to the third house.



6 The bracken soon improves and the path gets wider and enters deeper woodland. After 100m you can glimpse a road ahead but this is not your route. Look for a tall marker post bearing the usual black-on-yellow arrow. Disregarding the direction of the arrow, turn squarely (not sharp) **left** on an unmarked path. This path shortly runs beside a large lily pond on your left and leads over a wide wooden bridge. Turn immediately **left** on a path that joins you from the right, with more glimpses of the pond, shortly taking you over a wide flat bridge.

7 Your route is uphill, although the path is well carved out through the dense bracken, giving you a reasonably clear passage. After a snaking 400m, the path rises to meet a more level path at the top. (One walker offers extra detail: As the path levels out for a short while, and bends left, take an overgrown (brackeny) path on the right of the bend.) Turn **right** here on a well-defined scenic path through the gorsey heath of Woolbeding Common, with great views right to the South Downs. After 400m, your path finally curves left to approach a tarmac lane. Just *before* the lane (NB!), turn sharp **right** on a signed footpath. This path leads down through heath and woodland and finally reaches the Linch Road.

8 Cross straight over the road to a dusty car park. Take a wide path in the left-hand corner. In 50m or so, ignore a metal gate and a signed footpath right and stay on the main path. This path now leads gently down in attractive woodland. Soon, after a 4-way fingerpost and an electricity pole, a meadow comes into view ahead. At a fingerpost your path joins a bridleway coming from the right and veers left past a second fingerpost. You now pass the venerable buildings of Woolhouse Farm, with its tall chimneys, thatched car port and gypsy caravan. Follow the gravel drive till you arrive at a tarmac junction. Keep straight on at all times, passing a long house and garden, followed by the cream-coloured Tote Hill Farm House. You are now on a narrow lane between hedgerows.

9 You pass on your right the entrance to Stedham campsite. 300m later, by the next stone barn, turn **left** on a footpath, going up a grassy slope onto a path that runs along the right-hand side of a cereal field. The adjoining field on your right is visible through the hedgerow. You next turning is at the junction of the two adjoining fields. This comes after 300m, roughly half way along the path. Your cue is a line of trees, especially a large oak, that form the boundary, next to which there is an easily-missed 3-way finger-post. Take a narrow, rather overgrown, path on the **right**. It becomes a path, fenced on your left, which runs all the way down the right-hand side of a field. (At the time of writing this field was fallow and a mass of wild flowers.) In just over 400m you reach the end of the field. Go through the tall wooden gate and then avoid the track immediately on your left. Keep the same direction alongside the next field. In 150m, where the farm track bends away left, continue straight ahead on the grassy fringe. Finally, the path discharges you, via another tall wooden gate, onto quiet Stedham Lane. Turn **left** on the tarmac.

10 The next turning is unexpected and easily missed: you need to be alert for an opening in the woodside bank. In 100m, go **right** through a gap in the bank, leading into the woods and turn **left** on a woodland path. *In the stillness of the forest, you can hear the rushing of the River Rother in the valley below.* In about 300m, the path ends at a junction with a wider path. Keep straight ahead on a wide level path with the woods falling away steeply to your right. In only 120m, where the path forks, take a much narrower **left** fork. This

path leads through more dense woodland for 350m, getting gradually wider. Finally you arrive at an opening in the tree canopy where a wide green pathway runs across your route. Turn **left** on this straight wide grass highway, a remnant of the long-past imposing entrance to Woolbeding House. The house fills your frame of vision as it gradually gets closer and closer, till you almost believe you will enter by the front door. (If you parked opposite the cemetery, the following avoids the busy road: At a crossing path turn **right** into the adjacent field and walk almost parallel to the hedge to an opening in the hedge by the road, which brings you out to the edge of the car park opposite the cemetery.) But, just before a drop to the road, your path turns abruptly **left** and winds down to the road in Woobeding Village where the walk began.

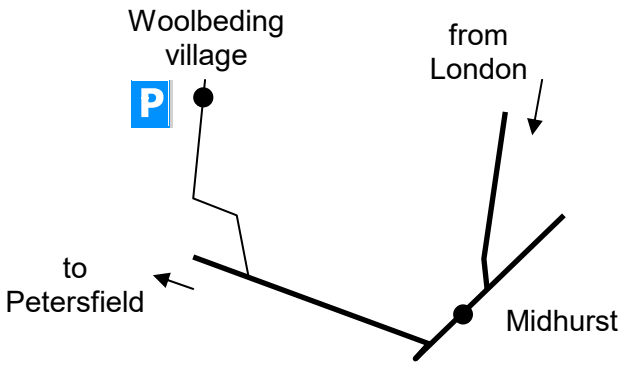
Woolbeding (pronounced "Woolbeeding") is a medieval village and parish. Woolbeding House was built in the early 1700s. The house and garden are owned by the National Trust and was leased to Simon Sainsbury who died in 2006. The gardens are open in the summer, currently (in 2021) on Thursdays and Fridays by booking. In 2021, the garden on the south side of the church was under development, featuring a "kinetic" glasshouse whose ten "petals" open like a flower. The glasshouse will contain flowers, shrubs and trees that depict regions of the Silk Route from Asia to Europe.

The little pre-Norman All Hallows church is reached at the end of the yew-lined cemetery.

Woolbeding Common, also National Trust, is a Site of Special Scientific Interest because the heath land here supports rare birds such as the nightjar, woodlark and Dartford warbler as well as insects such as the heath potter wasp. Most of the boundary banks on the Common date from medieval times.

Getting there

By car: the easiest way to Woolbeding is via Midhurst. If coming from the north, take the A286 from Haslemere, through Fernhust, and turn right into Midhurst. At a roundabout in the centre of this town, turn **right** as for *Petersfield*. In 8/10 of a mile, you will see a junction on your **right** sign-posted *Woolbeding*. In 6/10 of a mile, passing over the ancient Rother bridge, you will see the high stone wall of Woolbeding House ahead. There is a dirt strip on your right and another a little further along on your left, opposite the cemetery. It's best to park at right angles if possible to allow more cars.



You can also reach Woolbeding from the north, via the A3, turning off at Liphook, giving you a preview of the scenery to be seen on the walk.

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