



Elstead and Frensham Ponds

Distance: 24 km=15 miles or 2 shorter walks of 14 km=9 miles

moderate walking

Region: Surrey

Date written: 5-apr-2009

Author: Schwebefuss

Last update: 6-may-2023

Refreshments: both Frensham Ponds, Tilford

Maps: 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

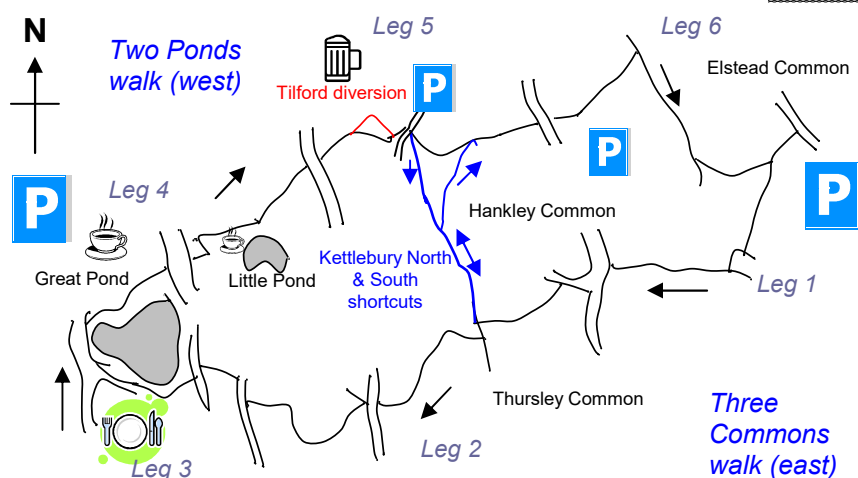
Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

Heath, moorland, lakes, birds, views, optional village

In Brief

This terrific circular walk takes you through the extraordinary austere and desolate landscape of Ockley, Thursley and Hankley Commons and then around the sandy expanse of Frensham Ponds. This is a demanding undertaking, not like the usual country walk. There are no pretty villages (unless you take the diversion to Tilford below), no lambkins or grassy meadows, not even any stiles. There is hardly any road walking, very few buildings, only starkly beautiful moorland, sandhills and lakes. The route will suddenly surprise you with several vast sweeping views, even though there are no steep ascents. It seems unbelievable that such landscapes exist on such a scale so close to London in South East England. Because of its luminosity and the predominance of evergreen trees, this walk is perfect for any season.

Overview



This walk can be done as two separate walks in figure-of-eight fashion as either the *Three Commons* half-walk or the *Two Ponds* half-walk, both 14 km=9 miles. It could also be split into two days with an overnight in Frensham. It could even be *run* as a long half-marathon since the paths are mostly long and wide.



There are no nettles and any sensible clothing and footwear is fine. Your dog will enjoy the walk too.

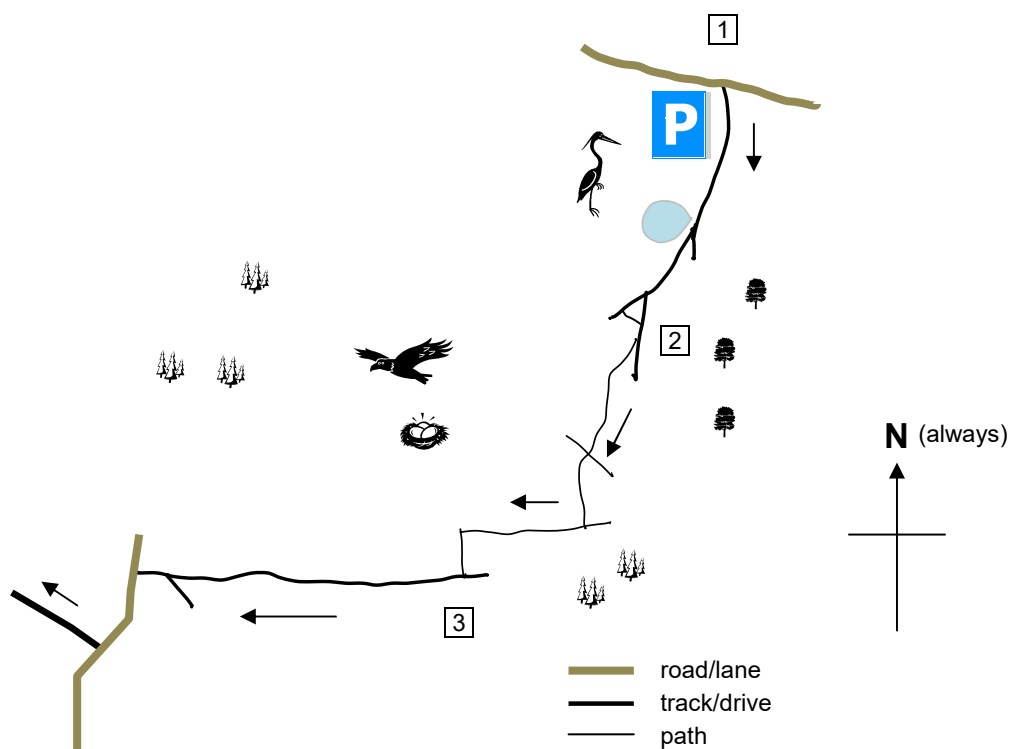
The route runs over Hankley & Ockley Commons which are a Managed Access training area for the military and they ask you to follow some restrictions. There is a very accessible [MoD](#) website with details.

The full walk and the **Three Commons** half-walk begin in the small free car park off the B3001 road near Elstead, www.w3w.co/scrabble.crimson.position, approximate **postcode GU8 6HZ**. The **Two Ponds** half-walk begins in the Frensham Great Pond car park, nearest postcode **GU10 2QB** (moderate all-day charge). For more detailed information, see **Getting There** → at the end of this text.

The Walk

Begin here if you are doing the full walk or the Three Commons half-walk. If you are doing the Two Ponds half-walk, begin at Leg 4, the Frensham Great Pond car park. You can also begin the full walk there, indeed at any point in the circuit.

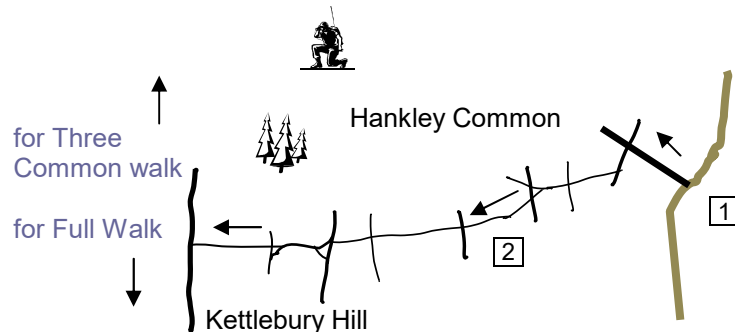
Leg 1: Elstead Road to Thursley Road 4½ km=3 miles



- 1 From the car park, go past a large wooden gate and take the excellent surfaced track across Ockley Common. In about 500m the track curves right by a pond on the right. Avoid all turnings off the main track. About 350m later, the track wheels left over a bridge, meeting a field on the right. In 70m, you pass under wires. About 70m further, take a major **left** fork marked by a blue arrow, a very sandy horse track. *In many places there are signs warning you that this land is used for military exercises and that you should not touch any suspicious objects. If you have a dog, please keep it under close control as there are many ground nesting birds in the marshy areas as well as deer and other wild animals on the heath.*

- 2 The track is met by two more tracks coming from the right just before a ditch. In 100m, you go past a Nature Reserve information board for Thursley Common next to a MoD sign. Ignore a left turn here. 30m after the board, there is an optional marked bridleway forking off **right**. (This path goes across an area of open heath and you can take it, if conditions are dry, to view the nature reserve up close, joining the route and turning right at point (*) below. Larks and other ground nesting birds can be observed here and the atmosphere is memorable. Unfortunately this area is sometimes waterlogged.) Ignore this turn-off and stay on the main track for exactly 1 km. The slopes of Thursley Common and the area around the Devil's Punch Bowl are visible ahead. Your track enters an area of pines. 40m after entering the trees, on your right you will see a post with blue and yellow arrows. 10m **before** the post, turn **right** on a wide path which may be rather tatty because of forestry work. In 100m, a path joins you from your right. (*) The path runs along a wide fringe of pines just inside the wood (2015: you may have to jump over a few logs) and emerges onto open heath. In 100m or so, you pass on your left a tiny pine-topped hillock. About 100m further, you meet a grey post with a label for the *Heath Trail* on the other side. Turn **left** here up a marked wide sandy track. In 150m, at a wide crossing track *, turn **right** following the red arrow on another grey post.
- 3 Stay on the wide track, going over several crossing tracks with marker posts and ignoring all turnings off for 1 km. If the sand is uncomfortable, you can use a little path between the heather which runs parallel to this horse track. Your track finally passes a green noticeboard and a metal gate. The track joins another track coming from the left and reaches Thursley Road. (See the walk *Devil's Punchbowl, Lions Mouth, Thursley* in this series.)

Leg 2: Thursley Road to Kettlebury Hill, 2 km=1 mile



- 1 Turn **left** on the road for 50m, using the rough side-path, and turn **right** on a tarmac lane, signed as a bridleway. In nearly 400m, where the meadow on the right ends, turn **left** on a crossing bridleway with a 4-way fingerpost. In 200m, opposite a steel *No Parking* barrier, turn **right** uphill on a wide track, following the **red trail** arrow. This sandy track goes over another track and under power lines, levels out. (Some power lines are being re-routed underground; they may possibly disappear at some places referred to in this guide.) At another crossing path, ignore a post [jun 2019: broken, on the ground] with arrows pointing left and keep straight on. After another 50m, you come to a fork just before another wide crossing track. On the other side, two paths diverge in widely different directions.
- 2 Take the **left** fork and hence the **left**-hand of the two paths on the other side of the path. Suddenly spread out before you is the vast expanse of Kettlebury Hill, your immediate destination, an overwhelming sight. If you go astray at any time in this complex section, simply aim squarely for the ridge ahead. The path descends



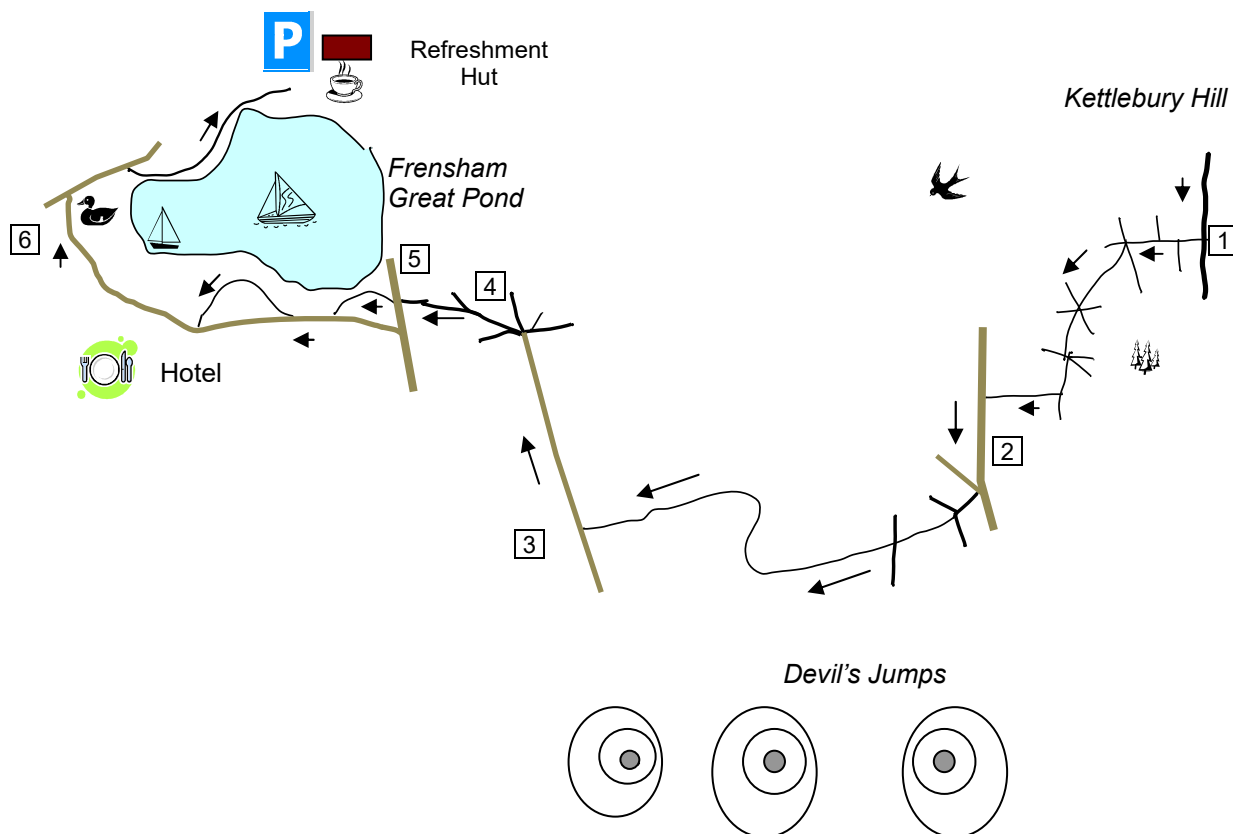
and in 170m crosses a wide sandy track: keep ahead on a narrow path through heather. At the bottom it crosses some narrow paths. (If the way ahead is waterlogged, turn **right** on the first of these paths, turn sharp **left** at a very broad sandy track and, in 200m, turn **right** to resume the walk after the next sentence.) Your path then crosses a very broad track. Continue directly over on yet another wide sandy track. In 40m, your track is met by another one coming in from the left. In another 20m, just 30m before the treeline, fork **right** towards the trees. Cross a path and take a narrow sandy path uphill with pines on the left and more open ground on the right. At the top of the hill you meet a very broad path – a popular ridge walk.

Decision Point. You have reached the centre of the figure-of-eight. If you are doing only the *Three Commons* half-walk, go to near the end of this text for the **Kettlebury North** shortcut.

For the **full walk**, turn **left** on the broad path at the top of Kettlebury Hill. In 50m look out for a narrow sandy path that descends steeply on the right between banks.

Leg 3: Kettlebury Hill to the Great Pond 5½ km=3½ miles

- 1 Turn **right** down the very steep sandy path. You pass paths on the left and the right and, after the path levels out, you come to a five-way junction. Veer **left** by taking the **second** path from the left, avoiding a more grassy path straight ahead. At a six-path junction go straight ahead, still on a broad sandy track. At a five-path junction with a MoD warning sign, go straight on following overhead wires. In about 150m, opposite another warning sign, between the remains of a wooden fence, turn **right**. The pond of an angling club is on the left, you pass a metal bar and continue to a road. Turn **left** on the road.



- 2 In a short distance, go past a junction with Sandy Lane and, immediately after, take the enclosed signposted footpath on the **right**. At a junction at the corner of the fence, continue **straight ahead** on a sandy path uphill,

ignoring yellow arrows pointing to footpaths left and right. **After the previous stretch, you might have expected a contrast to the open landscape, but here once again you are ringed by a horizon of wilderness.** Ahead of you are the curious round hills known as the Devil's Jumps (*see the walk "Frensham Little Pond" which goes over one of them*). The route will run to the right of them. As you near a meadow on the left, a path meets you from the left and a wider track joins from the right. Keep straight on, ignoring a blue arrow pointing left, soon with the meadow and a fence on your left. Stay on the main track for nearly 700m, passing blue-topped posts, with sloping woods on your left, until the track eventually bends right by another blue-topped post. This excellent well-defined track winds and curves left again. Stay on it at all times through pine woods until eventually you are on a permissive horse track and have pastures and the buildings of Crosswater Farm on your right. Where you finally emerge on a quiet tarmac lane, turn **right**.

- 3 The lane becomes sandy and passes *Crosswater House* on the right and, as it begins to ascend, now a mere track, it passes *Harold's Hill* on the left. Finally you are in the wilds of Frensham Country Park and are faced with a bewildering choice of paths.
- 4 Ignoring the first path left that goes rather steeply upwards, take the **second** path from the **left**, marked as a bridleway, more gently uphill. Near the top, ignore the uphill path on your right and instead take the path that curves **left** downhill, as directed by a blue arrow. Stay on this main path for about 400m to the main road, the A287, just outside Churt.
- 5 Cross straight over the main road to a path opposite and veer **left** alongside Frensham Great Pond. The route will do a clockwise circuit. *This is a favourite place for sailing and boats of all classes make a glorious sight.* Where the path meets a minor road, turn **right** on it. After a house, *Heather Warren*, and fence, take the path again on the **right**, wheeling **left** along the pond side with more views and later re-joining the road. You cross a stream and pass Frensham Pond Sailing Club (www.sailfrensham.org.uk is their excellent website: it has a real-time weather display). Soon you reach a sign warning drivers that ducks frequently walk in the middle of the road and a little bridge and island by the Frensham Pond Hotel (4*) which boasts a good restaurant.
- 6 Turn **right** at a T-junction of roads and soon take a signposted footpath on the **right**, returning to the waterside. Stay on this path more or less straight, with the lake on your right, all the way to a large hut that houses a snack bar, near a car park and amidst the first crowds that you will have encountered today. *There is a beach to the right which is popular for bathing and has a genuine seaside atmosphere. There are benches for picnics or bought food and drink.*



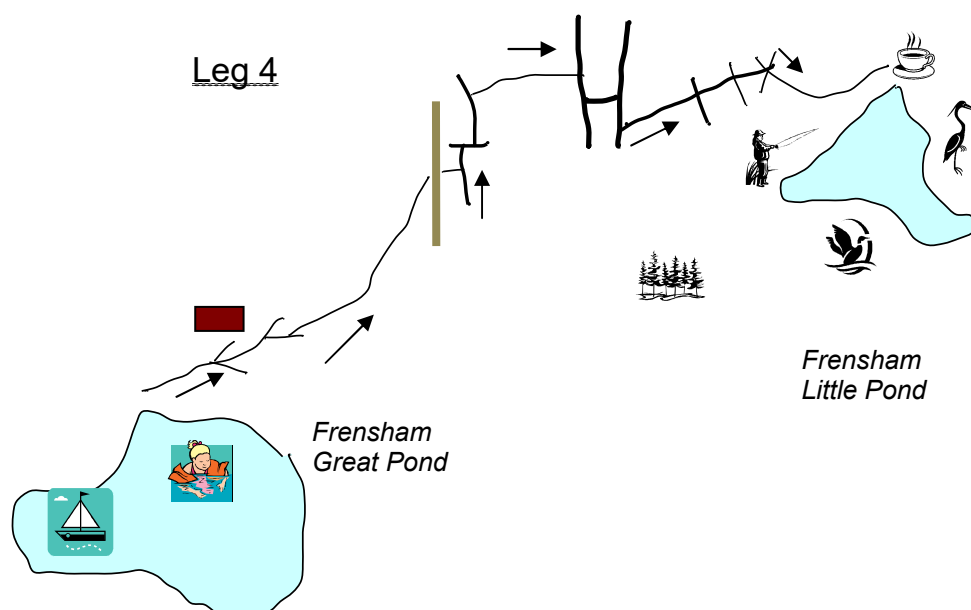
Leg 4: The Great Pond to the Little Pond 2½ km=1½ miles

Begin here if you are doing the Two Ponds half-walk.

- 1 **See map overleaf.** From the open area between the snack hut and the lake, facing the lake, turn **left** and shortly take a very sandy path ahead that has a long wooden railing on **each side**. Where the railings end, veer a fraction **right** across an area of grass and sand to a post with a dark green arrow. After just 5m turn **left** on a path between gorse bushes. After a

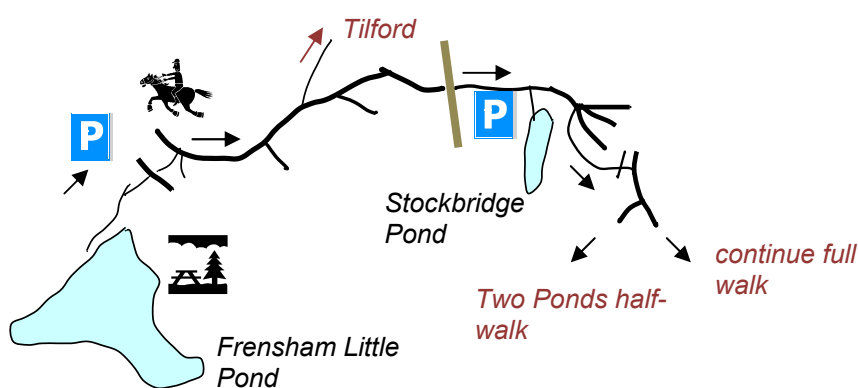
while, your stony path becomes faded tarmac. Keep straight on, gradually meeting the main road on the right.


- 2 Cross the road carefully over a bank to a very small path on the other side. Immediately turn **left** onto a wide sandy track running parallel to the main road. (Note the devastation from the fire of July 2010. This will regenerate in time.) At a T-junction turn **right** and then immediately **left** on another track. In 100m where the main track wheels left into pines, turn **right** on a narrow path uphill. This path leads up to a broad track at the top of a ridge, a favourite promenade. Turn **right** here. There is a bench seat here at a splendid viewpoint looking back over Frensham Great Pond.




- 3 In 25m, opposite a bench, turn **left** across the grass and, in 30m, zigzag right-left by another bench downhill heading for Frensham Little Pond which you can see below. At the bottom, go straight across a broad track and a little further on go straight across a narrow track. Next, at a junction of six paths, take the **second** path on the **right**, thus veering right from your original direction. This path leads down to the pleasant waterside.

Leg 5: The Little Pond to Stockbridge Pond 3 km=2 miles



- 1  Continue along the bank with the Pond on your right. You eventually pass *Pond Cottage* at the waterside and come out of the pinewoods. *The adjoining Tern Café serves teas and snacks most days.* Veer **right** across a grassy area to reach a tarmac lane at the point where the drive from *Pond Cottage* meets it. Go straight over on a narrow unmarked path opposite. This path veers left and comes to a T-junction with a wide straight track. This track has red arrows and a stern notice about litter. It is an ancient byway used by horses, cycles and walkers. Turn sharp **right** on the track. You will be following this excellent route for nearly 2 km to the next road. It runs up and down over dips and crosses a ford, where you have the use of a little bridge. Avoid a signposted bridleway on the right. Soon there is a small wooden gate and a footpath branching off left.

Decision Point. If you would like a short diversion to visit the River Wey and the delightful village of Tilford, then go to the end of this text, resuming at section 3 – highly recommended if this is the only opportunity for a visit. Otherwise continue straight on with the next stage.

- 2  Ignore the footpath and continue on the track, ignoring a bridleway forking right and eventually reaching a T-junction. Turn **right** here, reaching the Tilford Road. Cross the road beside the Stockbridge car park.

 For refreshments, the *Duke of Cambridge* pub is 500m **right** along the road. From there, you can take a footpath beside the pub to rejoin the walk.

- 3 Continue straight ahead on the stony track. *Crooksbury Hill with its aerial is visible on your left.* In 500m, you pass Stockbridge Pond on the right. Ignore a path on the right at the head of the pond and stay on the track, curving right past a metal barrier. Ahead of you are three wide sandy sunken paths, like three prongs of a fork.

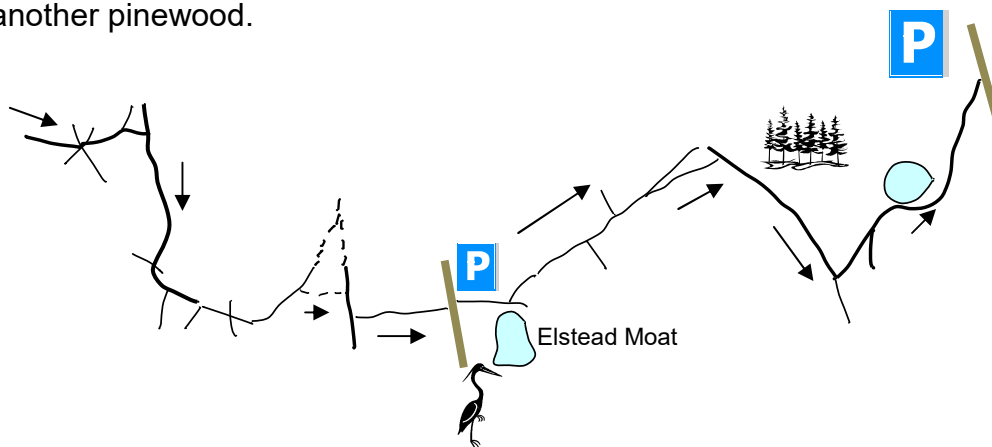
- 4 Choose the **rightmost** of the three paths, but only briefly. In just 15m turn **right** on a narrow path uphill that runs to the right of a very steep bank (*not* the path up the bank). (*The route given here was chosen because it is more “scenic” but some people avoid this right turn and stay on the simpler main path.*) Follow this distinct, rather winding, path through pines. Keep to the main path, avoiding side branches and keeping left at a fork after 100m. In another 50m, your path goes straight over a crossing path, winding its way onwards. At a T-junction with a wide track, turn **right**. After 20m you begin to emerge from the pines and meet a fork at a post with a blue arrow.

Decision Point. You have reached the centre of the figure-of-eight. If you are doing the *Two Ponds* walk, go to the end of this text and take the **Kettlebury South** shortcut. Otherwise, continue with the next leg.

Leg 6: Stockbridge Pond to Elstead Road 7 km=4 miles

- 1 **See map overleaf.** Fork **left**, as indicated by a blue arrow, staying on the main path. You are now back on the open moorland of Hankley Common. Yagden Hill is visible ahead right. In 250m, at a five-path crossing, go straight on. At the next junction, veer **left** with the main track and stay with it as it wheels **right**. In about 70m, continue ahead on a straight sandy track going slightly uphill, ignoring a track that wheels left.

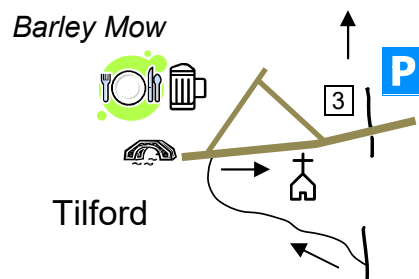
- 2 In 400m, at a major junction of paths, keep straight ahead. In about 50m, take the **left** fork, as per a blue arrow, going over a pine-topped hill under power lines. As the path descends, you reach a 3-way junction at the tree line. Turn **left**, thus avoiding a path that curves away right. Stay close to the tree line, ignoring a path coming in from the left and avoiding another shortly forking off right into trees, and turn **left** at the next T-junction, beside another pinewood.



The *Three Commons* half-walk re-joins at this point

- 3 Ahead of you soon are some posts by a large metal gate. Go between the posts onto a fenced path. The orthodox route is onward to the next junction and then sharp right on a tarmac drive, but there is a shortcut: **Immediately** after the gate, turn **right** off the track into the trees. The path, if there is one, is very indistinct but all you need to do is keep within sight of the garden fence on your right, taking any easy route between the bushes and pine trees. Eventually you reach a ditch, a bank and a tarmac drive. Turn **right** here, thus ending the shortcut, soon approaching *Elstead Manor*. Note the carved bird on a tree trunk in the garden on your right. On reaching the swanky iron gates, turn **left** on a marked bridleway. This path goes over a bridge over a marshy stream and between some mysterious iron gates and reaches the main road opposite Elstead Moat.
- 4 Cross the main road and go through the car park of the Elstead Moat Nature Reserve. Go forward past a noticeboard with the pond on your right, with posts marking, in green, the *Heath Trail*. In about 50m, with the pond still on your right, take the **left** fork on a broad straight path, thus prematurely leaving the Heath Trail. The path crosses a path diagonally under wires and continues on a splendid new pathway over a marshy area giving you the chance to view dragonflies. On your right soon is the start of a new boardwalk, worth exploring on another occasion. You pass bridleways on the right and left and enter a region darkened by tall pines. Soon, where the path splits, keep **right** alongside a bank. (If there is mud here, you can use a well-trodden path through the trees on your right.) Finally, you reach a T-junction with a wide surfaced track.
- 5 Turn **right** on this comfortable wide track and stay on it as it curves gently right. Follow this track now for nearly 600m across the beautiful Elstead & Ockley Commons, keeping right where a minor track joins you. Eventually you meet a group of wide dark green pines. Turn **left** here with the main track, quickly crossing another bridleway. You soon reach the turnoff point of the outward journey. Keep straight on along the surfaced track, eventually reaching the car parking area where the walk began.

Diversion to Tilford



This is the optional diversion mentioned in Leg 5, not long after the Little Pond. It gives you a welcome relief from the austere landscape and the opportunity for refreshments.

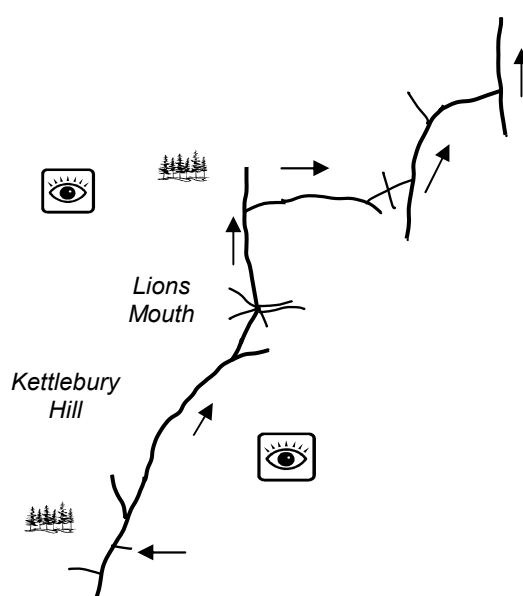
Take the footpath branching off **left**. This leads down through pleasant woodland and joins a drive by a farm. After the track becomes tarmac, look out for a yellow arrow on the **left** and leave the track here on a narrower path. Your path takes you through a small wooden gate and comes close to the river Wey. It becomes fenced and passes between tall garden hedges before a final left-right zig-zag to the road at Tilford. The bridge is just on the left. *Although you do not cross it, it is worth having a look at the bridge, built in the 13th century by the monks of Waverley Abbey. The parallel new bridge was built to take the traffic.* Turn **right** to Tilford Green. *The Barley Mow on the Green is a good traditional pub. (Some walkers have been unimpressed by Tilford Road, but a pub is a pub and the location is perfect.) Note the comical sign. There is often a cricket match in progress if you come on a summer weekend. The shallow river basin here is popular with young families who love to dabble in the water. The village shop and tearoom (which now serves hot lunches) is past the pub and over the other bridge, open every day till 7pm, including weekends.* To rejoin the walk, turn **right** on the main road before the Green, signposted *Churt, Thursley, Hindhead*, going past a school and the church on the right. There is a footpath running parallel to the road beside a field on the left. Soon you come to a wide track and a car park on the left. Turn **left** on the track and resume at stage **3** of Leg 5.



Kettlebury North 2½ km=1½ miles

Take this shortcut if you are doing only the *Three Commons* half-walk. It takes you on a shortcut from Kettlebury Hill to pick up the end of the return leg back to Elstead Common.

Turn **right** on the broad path at the top of Kettlebury Hill. In 80m you reach a major fork in the track by a post with blue arrows in the middle. Take the **right** fork. After 650m, you reach a junction of paths with a line of wooden stumps across your path ahead. Take a track forking **left** downhill. *On your left is a thick stone wall. This is the Atlantic Wall built in WW2 by Canadian troops to simulate the German fortifications as essential training prior to the D Day landings, worth a visit.* This leads to a multiple junction in a sandy area known as the *Lion's Mouth*. Continue straight ahead between stumps steeply uphill on a sandy track.



At the top, stay on the high path for 100m and take a track forking **right**. At the bottom, where the track bends right, leave it by continuing straight ahead on a narrower path. Cross a sandy track coming down from the left and join a track coming in from the right. At a 3-way junction, keep **right**, staying close to the woods on your right. Follow the path as it curves right, ignoring a track that forks right into the woods. At a post marked *108* by the tree line, turn **left** on the main path. Ahead of you soon are some posts by a metal gate.

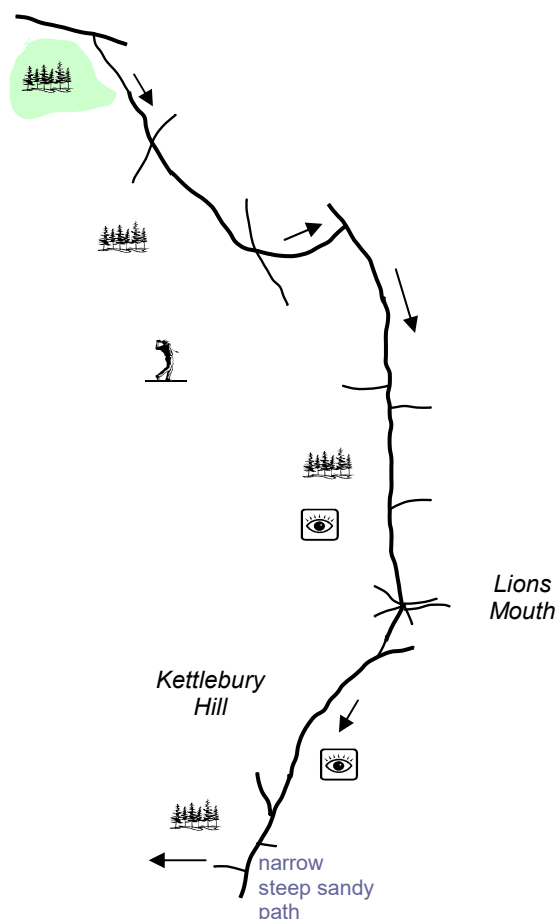
Your walk now continues from Leg 6 stage 3.

Kettlebury South 3 km=2 miles

See map overleaf.

Take this shortcut if you are doing only the *Two Ponds* half-walk. It takes you on a shortcut from the point where you re-enter the open heath after Stockbridge Pond to Kettlebury Hill to pick up the end of the return leg back to The Great Pond.

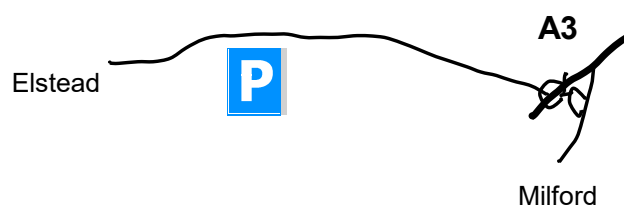
Fork **right**, ignoring the blue arrow, and take a path that runs along the edge of the open heath with a pine forest on your right. Soon you are walking on a fabulous route across the open space of Hankley Common with views all around. Yagden Hill is on the left – your next destination. However, this route takes a gentler route to the top than the direct assault. As the path begins to ascend, it crosses a path diagonally. Keep straight ahead uphill. When the path levels out you meet a junction. Turn squarely **left** here, avoiding a path sharp left. This path loops uphill to the left and takes you to the top of Yagden Hill. At a T-junction, turn **right**.



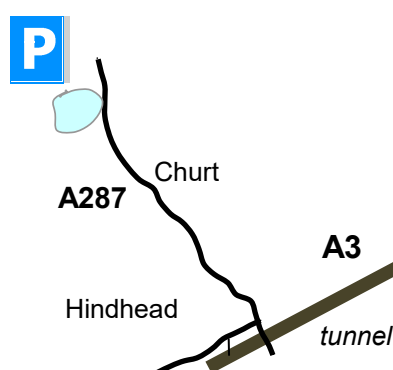
You will be following this high broad sandy track for 1 km, always straight on, avoiding minor branches off. At first it descends steeply, then it winds somewhat. At a fork, stay on the **left**, keeping the trees on your right, soon ascending to a pleasant straight high section with more great views. Finally it comes to a row of stumps and descends sharply to the multiple junction known as the *Lion's Mouth*. Take the gently rising **third** track from the right, almost straight on, avoiding a steeper slope on your left. *On your right you may glimpse a thick stone wall. This is the Atlantic Wall used in WW2 for training for the D Day landings, worth a visit.* This track gradually ascends and reaches the high path again. Veer **right** here, thus resuming your original direction. Follow this high track along Kettlebury Hill for nearly 650m where a wide track comes in from the right by a post with blue arrows. In another 200m, look out for a narrow sandy path that descends very steeply on the right between high banks.

Now continue with Leg 3 Kettlebury Hill to the Great Pond.

Getting there



By car: To get to the small parking space off the B3001 near Elstead, if coming from the north, take the A3 through Guildford and later turn off at the signpost for *Milford, Haslemere, Petworth*. Almost immediately, at the large roundabout, take the third exit, signposted *Guildford, London* and, at the next roundabout, take the first exit signposted *Elstead*. Follow this road for about 1 mile=1.5 km. Soon after the road enters woodland, look out for an unmarked car parking area on the left, just after a pond, in front of a gate. It is about ½ mile=1 km before the centre of Elstead. If the car park is full, there is room for one or two cars beside the road.



To get to the **Frensham Great Pond** car park, one way is to take the A3 to Hindhead and then the A287 north signposted *Farnham*. The car park is about 4 miles=6 km on the left, after the pond which you can see on your left.

Alternative car parks are at Stockbridge Pond just outside Tilbury, at the Elstead Moat Nature Reserve and near the Frensham Pond Hotel.

By bus/train: bus 17, 18, 19 from Farnham station, not Sunday. Check the timetables.

fancy more free walks? www.fancyfreewalks.org