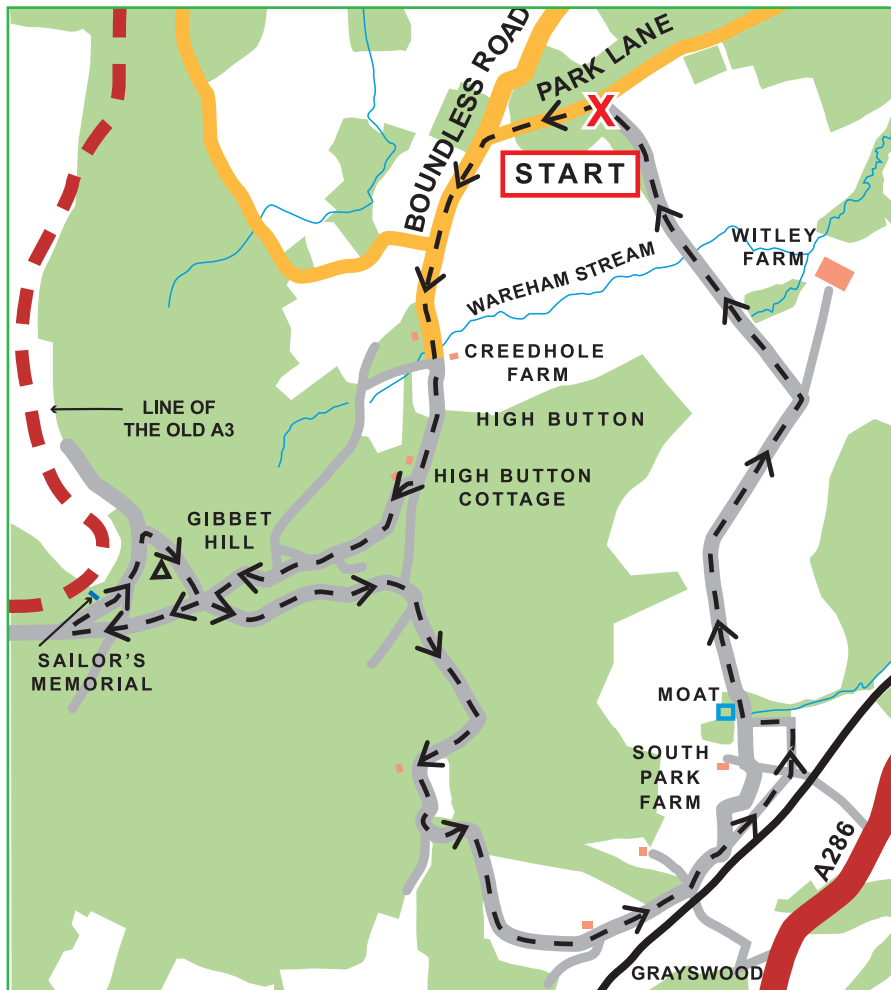










Walk 4

Gibbet Hill and Witley Deer Park



-  ROADS
-  ROADS
-  FOOTPATHS & TRACKS
-  ROUTE OF WALK
-  WOODED AREAS
-  BUILDINGS
-  RAILWAY LINE

Map: OS Explorer Map 133 – Haslemere & Petersfield

Start: Witley/Thursley parish boundary – Park Lane.

Grid Ref: SU912372

Distance: 5 1/4 miles

Parking: Limited. Coming from Brook, park in Park Lane beside road on left, about 200 yards after Park House and near a public footpath sign. Alternatively start at Hindhead or Grayswood.

Terrain: Steep climb at start. Some paths very muddy after rain. Boots & sticks advisable.

Refreshments: The Wheatsheaf A286 Grayswood, National Trust café A3 Hindhead (both just off the route). Picnic spots with seats – Gibbet Hill and Medieval Moat.



Walk 4

Gibbet Hill and Witley Deer Park

Directions

Walk south-west along Park Lane; at the first junction bear left into Boundless Road; at the second junction take the no through road to High Button. Note on your left the iron gates erected in the 1920s by Lord Pirrie to define his estate, after which you cross the Wareham stream, which rises beneath Gibbet Hill and feeds into the River Arun in the east beyond Hascombe.

The road follows the parish boundary with Thursley and is also the northern boundary of the ancient royal deer park established sometime after the Norman Conquest. In 1312, Queen Margaret took five large oak trees from the park to build the roof of Westminster Hall.

Passing Creedhole Farm on your left go straight on at junction up the metalled road. Continue steeply uphill. At High Button Cottage turn right past a metal barrier and into woods. Keep on this path through the woods ignoring joining paths. The path eventually widens and climbs between banks to emerge at a complex junction of paths.

You are climbing up the Hythe Beds of the Lower Greensand. They are called greensand because of the occurrence of the green mineral glauconite, however this is often altered to form the characteristic brown iron staining. This ancient track was one of the main routes off the top of Hindhead before the turnpike was made in 1749.

Above you is Gibbet Hill, known as Kates Knap until 1768. It may have been around here where in 1822 William Cobbett became lost on his way to Thursley.

Follow the red route straight ahead. The land falls away to your left as you climb up on to the level ground at the top. When you reach a metal gate, at a junction of paths, cross over and follow the sign to the café. Continue ahead until you reach a metalled road.

Turn left here for about 600 metres for refreshments at the NT café if required.

Turn sharp right onto the metalled road and follow it round with a wonderful view on the left of the Devils Punch Bowl and beyond. Since the closing of the old A3 many trees have been felled to create this view and below is the line of the old A3 which has been restored to common land. This was the route of the original turnpike road from London to Portsmouth. Watch out on your left for a memorial stone to the sailor who was brutally murdered in 1786.

This was a notorious spot for highwaymen. On 24 September 1786 a sailor stopped at the White Lion in Moushill where he bought drinks for three local men. They befriended him and offered to accompany him on his journey to Portsmouth to find a ship. He bought them drinks again when they stopped in Thursley at the Red Lion. They set off for Hindhead on the old road from the church. When the sailor stopped at the top to admire the view, he was hit from behind, robbed and his body hidden in the Devil's Punch Bowl. The murderers were caught the same day and later convicted of murder. The landowner James Stilwell, of Cosford House, paid for the stone to be erected. The gradient up to this, the second highest point in Surrey after Leith Hill, was too steep for the horse drawn coaches so the road was lowered in 1826 to the route of the A3. The stone was removed, but John Hawkins, Stilwell's heir, had it returned and cursed anyone who would move it.

Continue along the road, ignoring the NT Gibbet Hill sign on the right and soon passing an old milestone (39 miles to Hyde Park Corner, 7 to Godalming, 5 to Liphook). 'Watch for some steps on the right and on the left a marker post 'Hidden Hindhead Trail' and climb the steps to arrive at the large granite cross.

This cross is near the spot where the gibbet was erected on the summit of the hill in April 1787, when the sailor's murderers Edward Lonagan, Michael Casey and James Marshall were hung by chains made by Richard Court, the blacksmith at Thursley. The cross was erected in 1851.

During WW11 there was an RAF station here and a wooden communications mast stood 250 ft high here. This was removed in 1958. From just below the hill a stream flows north which once powered the mill

at Cosford, then the iron works, before flowing into the river Wey at Oxenford, and eventually into the River Thames. The Wareham Stream, which eventually flows into the English Channel, rises nearby.

Cross to the Triangulation Point and admire the view. On a clear day it is possible to see the high buildings in London. Head in the direction of East Grinstead shown on the triangulation point and take the narrow path marked 'Hidden Hindhead Trail' heading down through the trees. Once again reach the complex junction of paths passed before.

This common land is over 3,500 years old and used to be grazed. The NT is actively managing the land to reduce the birch, scots pine and rhododendron, which would otherwise take over. Rare species such as the Dartford Warbler, Nightjar and sand lizard can be seen.

Take the public bridleway 'Hidden Hindhead Trail' straight ahead uphill. Ignore a small path to the left and at a junction fork right onto the path marked NT and 'Hidden Hindhead Trail'. Continue on this path, ignoring a track coming in from the right, until you reach a clearing on the left. There is a good view northwards and a stone 'octagonal floor' on the ground.

The remains of iron gates and railings, seen in several places on this walk, are a reminder of the late Viscount Pirrie, controller of the White Star Shipping Line, which operated the Titanic and other ocean-going vessels. He bought the Lea estate (now Witley Park) in 1905 and erected the iron fence around his estate. Lord Pirrie erected a monument, called 'The Temple', here in 1921, which could be seen for miles around and from Lea, marking the boundary of this estate. He died in 1924 and the estate was sold in 1927. In 1940 the lead was stripped from the roof causing the building to fall into disrepair, so in 1958 the NT took it down leaving only the octagonal floor.

Keep ahead to a crossroads ignoring a path to the right marked 'Hidden Hindhead Trail'. Turn round here to see that you have come through a gap in a bank with large beech trees. The bank is the boundary of the old Deer Park, which also follows the parish boundary. Do not follow the main path to the left but go straight ahead past a tall pine tree to take a narrow footpath leading steeply downhill through an old chestnut coppice carpeted with bluebells in early May.

At the bottom where the ground opens out, take the track on the right. Follow this forestry track with a few large conifers and other young trees on the left and broad woodland above on the right to a junction. Fork right and very shortly a house appears through the trees. Go through the gate and onto private land past the house. There is livestock here so dogs should be kept on a lead. The track curves downhill above the pond to a wooden gate.

Soon after leaving the private land turn left past a post with a blue marker. Continue for some distance down this rubble-strewn path. The track curves round to the right and eventually comes out of the woods. Here it is fenced as it passes through the fields and curves left to some old barns on the left. The railway is across the field on the right. The track continues parallel with railway until it meets a crossroads with a tunnel under the railway ahead.

Thomas Brassey built the railway line from London to Portsmouth in 1859. Originally single track, this was widened in 1879. During alterations to the line less than a mile to the south, an early Romano-British burial ground was unearthed. Remains can be seen at Haslemere Museum.

If refreshments are required continue through the tunnel to the main road in Grayswood and turn right uphill to the Wheatsheaf pub (about 1/2 mile each way).

Turn as if to go left but take the footpath that runs parallel with the railway to the right of the cottage driveway. Follow this path down through another kissing gate and over a brick culvert. The re-routed path now continues up the slope, running parallel to the railway line. Follow this path, along the field edge with an orchard on your left until you reach the tarmac driveway to South Park Farm.

Cross the driveway, with the railway bridge to your right, and go through the gate directly opposite. Follow the path with the field boundary on your left until you reach the corner of a wood, a few yards short of the field corner. Turn left here and follow the path through the wood until you reach a T-junction with a wider track. This is where the re-routed path re-joins the original route. Turn right here and almost immediately find the Mediaeval Moat on the left.

Surrey Archaeology Society no longer maintains this site. The display board (now barely legible) describes the occupation of the farmstead, built on the Weald Clay.

On leaving the moat continue along the path to the edge of the wood reaching fields with views all around. The path runs between newly planted (2015) Hawthorne hedges and at the crest of the hill look down to Witley Farm straight ahead.

Descend and turn left at the way marker and go through the kissing gate.

This is the Wareham stream. From here it flows eastwards to the site of an old furnace about a mile downstream. Furnace slag in the stream attests to the former use.

After crossing the stream continue between fences and on upwards with the woods on your left until you reach the starting point on Park Lane.

This strip of woodland, Sawpit Rew, is a relic from days when timber production was an important industry here. Felled trees would have been brought for treatment prior to transport along the turnpike to Godalming and the Wey navigation. Oak bark was an important source of tannin for the leather industry of Godalming. Alder was important for gunpowder production at Chilworth and for charcoal. Hornbeam produced high quality charcoal and was used for cartwheel hubs and water wheels. Chestnut was important for laths in buildings, for palings and fencing and in the local walking stick manufacture. Oak, Ash and Beech were important timber trees for construction and Walnut was used for furniture and gunstocks.

