

Friday Street, Westcott and the Abingers

A long, varied and attractive walk with woodland, farmland, lakes and ponds and doubtless many sights of birds of prey, especially buzzards and red kites.

1. Exit the Friday Street car park to the lane and turn left. At the bottom of the hill look for a lane (a bridleway) there's a sign on the right hand side, turn sharp right and follow the lane. There is lovely open mixed woodland here, mainly coniferous. In October, I heard jays squawking and buzzards mewing overhead. At the bottom of the hill, take the footpath to the right. Cross an old bridge over a stream with a large pond on the right-hand side. Continue straight up the steep hill, it soon levels out. At the end of the fence on the left at the path crossroads, continue straight on with mainly beechwoods on your left to start with, until you reach Sheephouse Lane.
2. Cross straight over and continue on the footpath and then down a steep hill. At the bottom look back and you will see a monument or sculpture on the side of the hill, probably part of the original Italian gardens in the Wootton Estate. Continue over the stile through open fields reaching wood lined ponds to your right and left, part of the Tilling Bourne. I heard many birds here. Go over the next stile and turn left on a wide track, continue just past a pond in the trees on your left to the signposted path junction. Take the narrow path on the right keeping the fields on your left to another stile.
3. Cross the path and then up the steep bank to the wooden posts. Turn right and after very few yards turn left at the footpath sign over another stile. Heading in the same direction, continue across the next path into the woodland. Go straight over the next path and continue downhill. Keep left at the path junction towards the bottom. This keeps drifting downwards. Turn right onto the byway leading to Logmore Farm. Continue on the main track. Plenty of apple trees here and in the summer, the houses on the right-hand side, had many house martins nesting. When I walked past in October they had finally gone. Up another hill on a rough lane you reach a T junction with another lane
4. Cross this, slightly to your left, onto another track which is a public footpath. After a couple of hundred metres, you will see opening up a wonderful view across the valley to the North Downs. Take the narrow footpath to your right with the fields on your left. This path reaches areas where it could get wet underfoot, so there are a number of railway sleepers to assist. When you reach the field continue on the footpath which is quite discernible to the woodland in the opposite corner. Stay on this footpath, I heard the sound of lots of geese, passing some fishing lakes on your right-hand side until you reach a footbridge.

5. Cross and turn left onto a track. Exit the gate onto the lane which is fully manicured both grass and hedges. Stay on this attractive lane now through part of the old village of Westcott, until you meet the main A25 road. Cross straight over the A25 and continue until you reach a footbridge and a metal gate. Go through the gate and ahead to the path crossroads.
6. Turn left. This is a well surfaced solid track often used by cyclists. Keep going and soon on your right is an interesting marshy area. I would like to explore this in spring for butterflies and birds. On my visit, I saw a raven overhead being hassled by a kestrel. Soon you meet a metal gate. The path turns right there is a quick turning to the left which I suggest going through the marshy area. When you meet the footbridge over the stream, turn right and follow the tarmac path alongside another marshy area. Here there is a pond full of reedmace. On reaching the lane turn left. Then stay on this lane until you reach a T junction.
7. Turn right and either follow the road around to the left (or use the small footbridge behind the stone wall). Continue now on Balchins Lane. A short way along on the left you'll see a house called Stowe Maries. This was once a home of Trevor Howard, a famous film actor. Continue on the lane around to your left. Pass the rather grand Mead House on your left and look for a footpath sign on the right immediately before the housing. (If you miss this footpath, continue to the next lane junction on your right, turn right and you will soon be back on the same route.) If you follow the footpath, join the lane turning right. Enjoy the wonderful views of the North Downs on your right. Continue on this lane into the woodland and when the lane emerges from the woodland, it gradually bears left. Follow this for a couple of hundred meters before taking the track angled off to your right. Keep going through trees, then past fields, on the roughly surfaced lane until you reach a house facing you and a big path T junction.
8. Turn left and take the right-hand option, passing various black barns/properties. Follow this footpath now with a field on your right and newly planted woodland behind the beech trees on your left. Many fly agaric mushrooms are on the side of this path in October. The path turns to the right and then left before rising to a lane. There are lots of fallen logs here very suitable for a lunch break.
9. Crossing the lane continue on the path the other side that enters National Trust land, known as 'Abinger, The Roughts'. We now follow this path for some time. You will pass a monument just to the left of the path on your way. Something to discuss as you walk. Soon after you may spot a path going sharply back up the hill on your left where there is a famous tree. This is the Witches Broom tree estimated at 2 to 300 years old with a strange mix of branches and root growth. It's only a short few steps and worth a visit. Re-joining the main path, it continues through the gateway and just head on in the same direction, you can follow the No 22 route signs. You will eventually

see a lone bench to sit on and then pass through a gate in the same direction onto a narrow footpath, along a field edge, to meet another lane.

10. From this lane ignore the 22 signs for now, cross straight over to the right of the driveway and go through the National Trust path gate. This leads into Piney Copse, once owned by E M Forster, the novelist. Follow the winding path through the copse, aiming in the very same general direction until you finally drop down to meet a byway. It's worth stopping to read the essay on the signboard in which he explores the motives of a person buying a wood.
11. On meeting this byway turn left and follow it down to the A25. Cross with care and turn left. (If you start from Gomshall station this is the place to join the walk – see map). Turn right onto the bridleway directly opposite Old Hatch Farm. Pass some houses and when you see the big brick gates on the drive, there are two paths to the left. Take the one sharpest left, a steep gully, full of fox and badger holes. Look carefully for the stile and footpath on your left amongst the trees. Turn left here and then turn right along the field edge. As you rise up the hill, you should see another footpath sign pointing left along the line of the trees in the field. Take this path. Follow this across the field then to the right alongside the garden fence and continue gently down the hill without diverting from your direction. You will soon be at a busy lane.
12. Cross straight over onto the narrow footpath opposite. A footbridge crosses over some pools and springs. You pass Oxmoor Copse a Woodland Trust site on the way up the hill. Continue to the top emerging onto the field and continue on the path through the crops to the brow of the hill. Gather your breath, go through the hedgerow and continue to the left along the path at the edge of the field. The path then diverts into the hedgerow and joins a bridleway, continue in the same direction. Follow this through a big hedgerow into a field and diagonally cross the field on the farm track/bridleway. Exit via the path to the right of the farm gates to the lane.
13. Cross the lane and turn right in front of the two garages and barns. Stay on the tarmac to the left of Raikes Farmhouse, then follow the track down and around to the left. At the next cross track keep going in the same direction towards distant houses, that will soon come into view. Follow the path around the house gardens and through the churchyard. The sight of the Abinger Hatch pub directly in front of you I found very welcome! You're within staggering distance of the end!
14. From the church turn right on the lane and very quickly turn left down the small lane following it all the way to the end. At the main road take care and turn right for about 100 m before turning left onto the bridleway track. Continue on this track in a straight line over the hill and down the other side until you meet another lane. At the lane, turn left and follow this back to the car park. (There is a rough path up on the bank on the right-hand side, to help you keep away from any traffic, but it's usually quiet). That's it, a good 10.5 miles and a great walk. I hope you enjoyed it!