

# HACKHURST & WHITE DOWNS



Visitor Guide and Self-guided Trails



**SURREY**  
COUNTY COUNCIL

# Hackhurst and White Downs

## including West Hanger and Netley Plantation

*This area of the North Downs has a mixed land ownership comprising private land with access agreements, SWTCS managed land, National Trust and Surrey County Council owned land and commercial forestry land. The scarp slope of the downs consists mainly of open grassland areas with associated scrub areas and some mature woodland. The top of the downs and the dip slope include beech woodland and forestry plantations. These unique landscape features have a varied flora and fauna and parts of the area have been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest by English Nature. Work to restore the open grassland areas and to halt the spread of scrub and woodland is taking place to safeguard this threatened habitat, which you are free to explore using the paths marked on the map.*

*To help you to further enjoy this lovely area, a series of self-guided walks has been devised. The first and shortest is the White Downs trail, second is Gomshall and The Downs and finally the longest is the Drove Road which incorporates some of the other two trails.*

## Self-guided Circular Trails

Be prepared for grazing livestock on some sections of the walks

### **The White Downs**

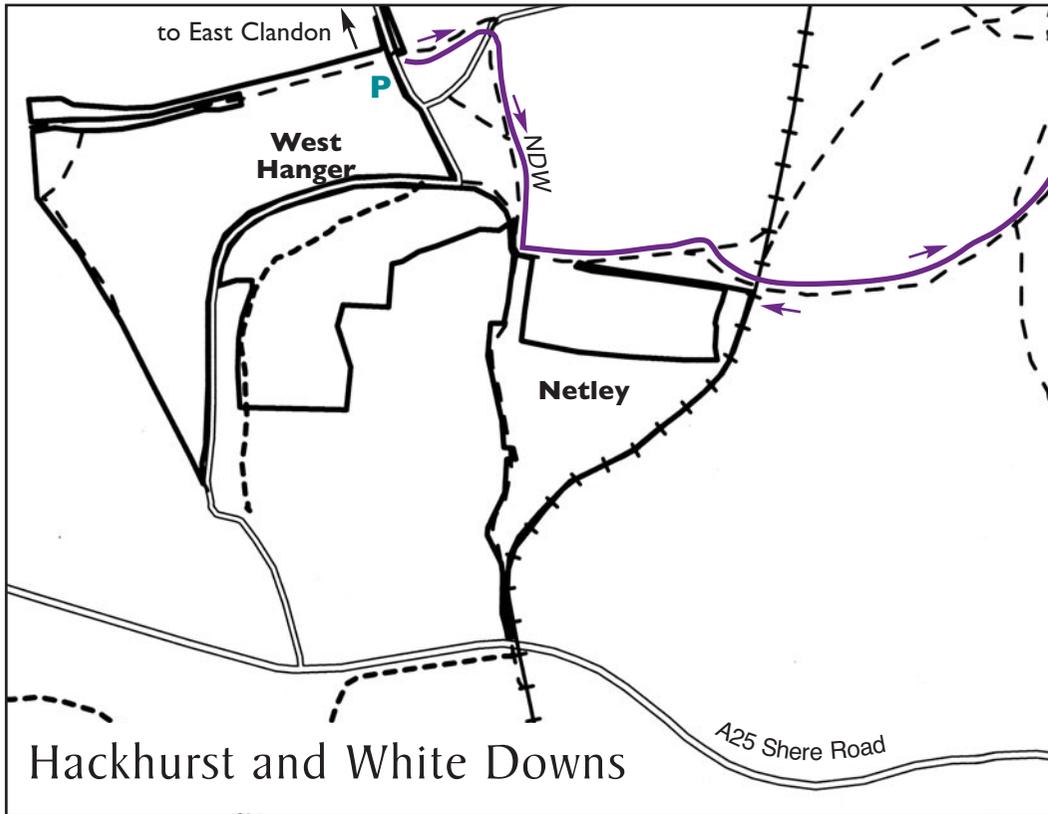
Trail starts at White Downs car park (height restriction at entrance), White Downs Lane, between Abinger and Effingham. 3.5 km in length, an easy walking route taking about 1½ hours to complete; includes kissing gates and a mild climb.

From the top of the car park pass the barway and follow the white marker posts.

On the first part of the walk, note the old beech hedges, boundary banks and ditches which represent methods of providing stock-proof enclosures in this part of Surrey. The majority date from the 1700s when it became necessary to enclose parcels of land for timber production, separated from the large areas of sheep walk and old drove roads. Normally a ditch was dug and the earth thrown up into a bank on top of which beech trees were planted. The trees were sometimes layered and woven together. Coppicing and pollarding were also used to provide a steady supply of stakes and firewood. Note the massive old stools and twisted root systems.

During the Tudor period the woollen industry expanded and, as a result, large areas of the Downs were enclosed to provide sheep pasture. It was during this period that the complex network of drove roads, which still criss-cross the Downs, was fully developed.

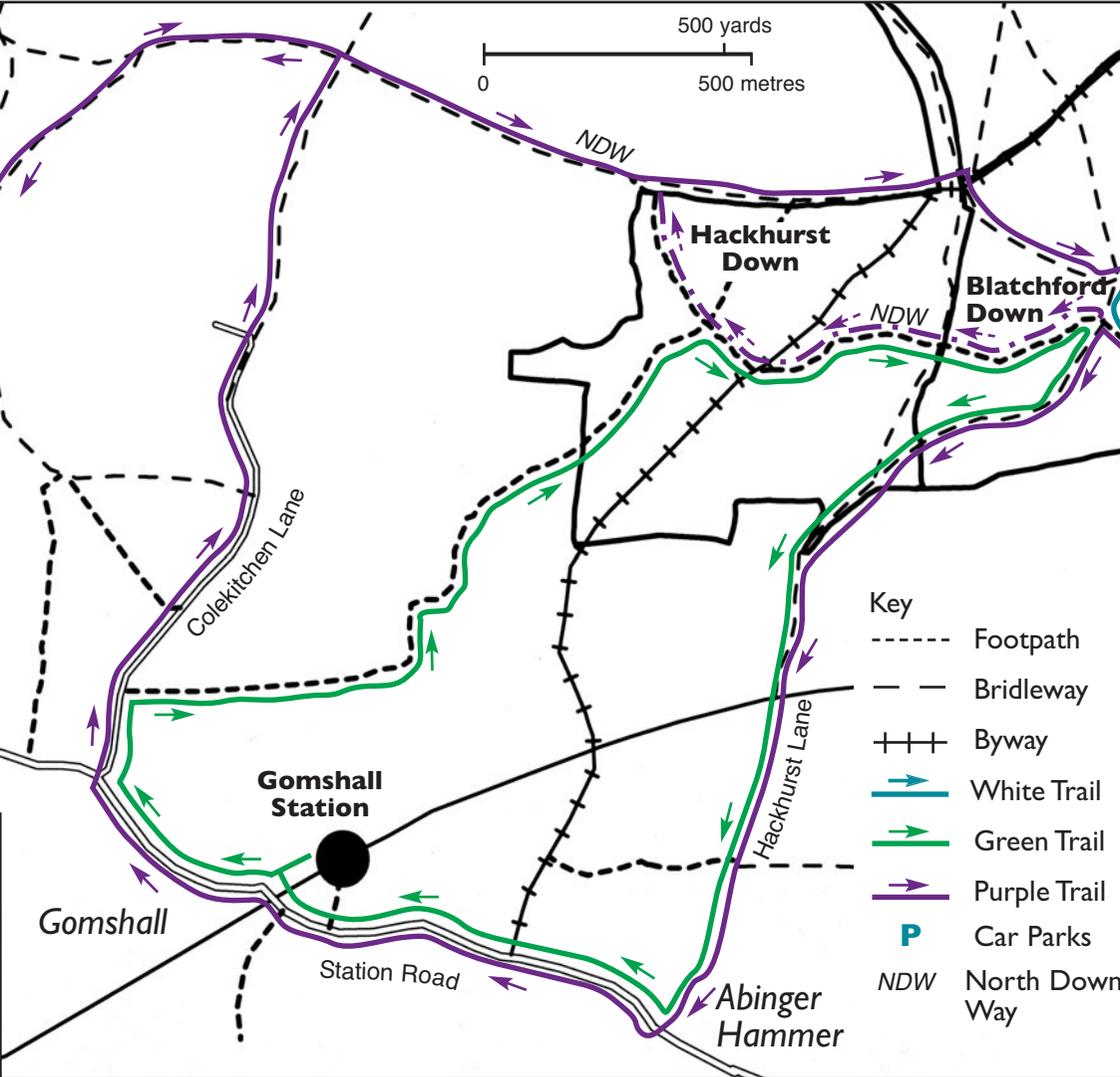
Large flocks of sheep were also moved along the downlands from daytime pasture to be folded on arable land at night and then on to local markets. Drove roads are normally bound on both sides by banks and hedges and often have small ponds and cattle compounds called stances every few miles along their length.



Old Simm's Copse is called the 'Bluebell Woods' by local inhabitants. Who or what Old Simms was remains a mystery. The area is essentially a crop of oak standards with an understorey of coppiced hazel and ash trees, although little regular coppicing now takes place. The beech trees have in some places regenerated naturally, whilst the more elderly are the remnants of old hedges and boundary markers. Also, look for banks of flint. Man has lived in Surrey for

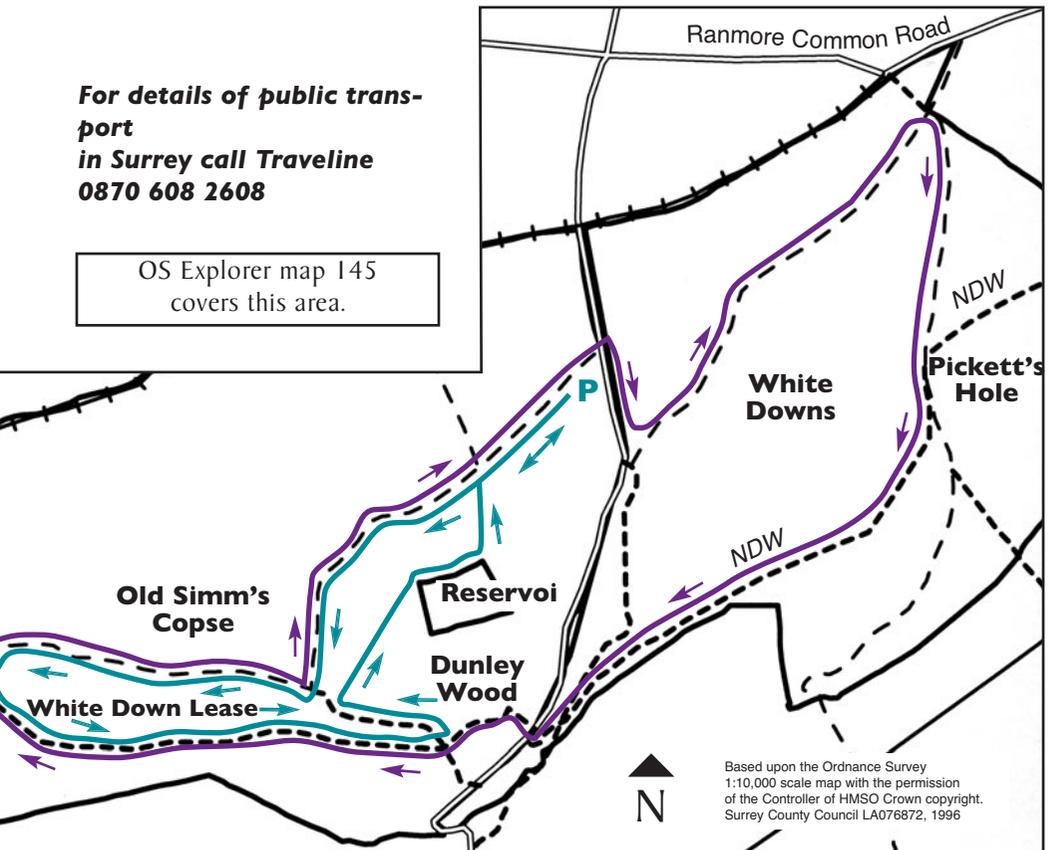
at least 10,000 years and would have gathered flint from these outcrops to make tools, a practice that continued into the Iron Age. Flint is still used by stonemasons to create the typical brick and flint walls of downland houses.

On leaving Old Simm's Copse you come to an old coach road, now a bridleway, which ran from Abinger to Effingham. At this point, because of the steep descent, the horses would have been unhitched and put behind the coach when going downhill, which would have prevented the coach running over the horses. Turn left and go through the kissing gate into The White Down Lease, an area managed by the National Trust.



**For details of public transport  
in Surrey call Traveline  
0870 608 2608**

OS Explorer map 145  
covers this area.



At the start of World War II a real threat of German invasion caused the refortification of the Downs by a series of pillboxes. However when Churchill came to power he felt that any plan that abandoned Kent and Sussex to the enemy was ill conceived. The North Downs then became a secondary barrier, should the effort to stop the invaders fail 'on the beaches'. Most of these pillboxes still remain in various states of repair and are now important bat hibernaculum. On leaving The White Down Lease, turn left and continue to follow the white markerpost until you come to the water reservoirs which belong to the East Surrey Water Company and are still in use.

Dunley Woods make up a large block of woodland on either side of White Downs Lane. Part of the privately-owned Wotton Estate, these woods comprise a variety of trees, including oak, ash, cherry, beech, larch and pine. All the areas have or are being worked as commercial woodland. Periodic thinning, felling and replanting operations occur throughout the woodlands.

*(Public access on foot to Wotton Estate woodland and downland has been made possible through a voluntary Public Access Agreement).*

## Gomshall and the Downs

This trail starts from Gomshall Railway Station, is about 4km in length and includes some hills, narrow paths, kissing gates and stiles and will take about 2 hours to complete. Follow the green marker posts.

On leaving Station Parade turn right along the main road (Station Road) and follow the map in this leaflet. The green marker posts start on a public footpath fingerpost 200 metres up Colekitchen Lane.

The unusual name Gomshall pronounced locally 'Gumshall', is derived from Saxon English meaning a raised shelf or terrace of land belonging to a man named Guma → Guma's shelf → Gomshall.

During the mediaeval period Gomshall was an important corn-milling village, utilising the water power of the Tillingbourne. Gomshall Mill which dates from the 17th century still contains some milling machinery and a water wheel.

The village became known as a centre for spinning, weaving and fulling of wool as well as for tanning leather.

On following the public footpath fingerpost and green marker post, you cross farmland and climb gradually through woodland until you go through a kissing gate; you are now on Hackhurst Downs.

Hackhurst Downs is a Local Nature Reserve owned by SCC and managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust Countryside Services. Fencing has been erected by volunteers to allow sheep grazing. This will restore the short chalk sward which is so necessary to the survival of many plants and animals dependent on this habitat. Magnificent views can be seen from the middle of the reserve.

On reaching the top you are now on the North Downs Way which is a 141 mile National Trail running from Farnham to Dover, mostly along the North Downs ridge. Waymarked by white acorns on short posts, it follows in parts the 'Old Drove Road' popularly known as the Pilgrims Way.

Follow the green markers on to Blatchford Down. These are old fields that have been leased to the National Trust by the Wotton Estate in an effort to arrest further invasion of scrub on the chalk grassland. The fields are being enclosed by sheep fencing and grazing reintroduced. The chalk grass sward is a wonderfully rich biological community with 30-40 species of plants to the square metre in some areas. Many rare orchids and butterflies make this area of particular interest. Notice the thriving hills of the yellow meadow ant. On leaving Blatchford Down - turn right and descend down the old sunken

path, formally an old coach route, taking care when crossing the railway line further on. Follow Hackhurst Lane to the end in Abinger Village.

The name Abinger appears to be derived from 'Abba', the name of a Saxon freeman and landholder, 'inga' meaning people of and 'worth' meaning farm → Aberingerworth → Abinger. The famous Edwardian clock at Abinger Hammer with the figure of a smith striking the hours with his hammer is a reminder of the iron industry that used to flourish here.

From here cross the road and return along the pavement back to Gomshall Station.

## **The Drove Road**

Trail starts from West Hanger car park, Staple Lane, between Shere and West Clandon (height restriction at entrance).

The route covers varied terrain and includes some hills, kissing gates and stiles.

The full length trail is 16km and will take about 6 hours to complete.

The short cut would save an hour. Follow the purple marker posts.

A 'Hanger' is a typical feature of downland and is either a planted or natural wood comprising mainly of beech trees growing or 'hanging' on the steep chalk sides of 'combes' or dry river valleys. The adjoining area known as Combe Bottom has been a wood for about 150 years and, like many coombs, was quarried for chalk. Take care when crossing the road and follow the North Downs Way and the purple marker post.

After passing Hollister Farm you come to a set of cross-tracks.

The track running north to south is a very old road, possibly Saxon in origin, and would have linked Shere and Albury with the wider world and thus in due course with London. It is occasionally used by motor vehicles as well as walkers and riders as it has been designated a BOAT (Byway Open to All Traffic), which are sometimes known as Green Lanes. The disused water reservoir is one of the many World War II installations that formed part of the fortifications of the North Downs. The surfaced track that you are now following eastwards was built by Canadian troops during the second world war.

Continue to follow the purple waymarkers, passing Gravell Hill Gate and Hackhurst Downs (where you temporarily part company with the NDW). You will then come to Blind Oak Gate, once an important crossroads, probably

then marked by a lone or stricken oak tree, today marked by a stout steel barway! There is a dew pond surrounded by some earthen banks which suggest a drover's stance. Every few miles along their length, Drove Roads had 'stances' comprising cattle compounds and small ponds.

Shortly you will turn to the right along a bridleway as you head to Old Simm's Copse and White Down car park.

After walking through White Down car park and crossing the road you enter an area of commercial forestry, some of the tracks in this area can become very muddy. At an area known as Pickett's Hole you rejoin the NDW but this time in a westward direction, eventually passing to the south of Dunley Wood and entering White Downs Lease, which is managed by The National Trust. After leaving the Lease via the kissing gate, you must decide whether to turn left down towards Gomshall and Abinger for the longer route and refreshments or take the direct route back to West Hanger car park, through Blatchford and Hackhurst Downs.

If you decide to visit Gomshall and Abinger - the purple waymarkers restart in Colekitchen Lane and lead you back to West Hanger car park.

*We hope you have enjoyed your visit. If you have any comments, the Countryside Ranger for this site can be contacted on 07990 582291.*

*Surrey Wildlife Trust's mission is to protect and regenerate Surrey's wildlife.*

*The Trust is a registered charity (No: 208123). In partnership with Surrey County Council we currently manage 80 sites covering over 4,000 hectares of land, for nature conservation and public enjoyment. This includes the Trust's own nature reserves, SCC's countryside estate and land managed under access agreements with private landowners. A further 3,200 hectares are managed under a grazing contract with the MOD, making Surrey Wildlife Trust, in terms of land managed, the largest Wildlife Trust in England.*

## **Surrey Wildlife Trust**

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Visit our website: [www.surreywildlifetrust.org](http://www.surreywildlifetrust.org)

