

Weekend Walk: Midhurst, Stedham and Iping Commons (5.5 miles)

1. From the back left-hand side of the Iping and Stedham Commons car park, near a noticeboard, take a wide path marked as a bridleway. As the sign indicates, this is also part of the Serpent Trail (ST), a sinuous long-distance path which you will meet several times today. In 10m, avoid a right fork, staying on the main path. Shortly after, ignore a minor path that forks off left (part of the Heathland Trail, worth exploring another time). Keep following this sandy path across a gleaming landscape of gorse, heather and birch, avoiding all minor paths off, however tempting. In 300m or so, you pass a post with blue arrows and a sign confirming that you are still on the ST. 100m later, your path becomes grassy and you reach a definite fork in the path. Take the left fork, thus leaving the ST.

2. You are now on Fitzhall Heath and the outlook is more open with extensive sweeps of heather. In 300m, your path runs under a cover of pine trees. As you come out of the pines, you will see a concrete post on your right and a marker post on your left. Turn left here. In 150m, you reach a tarmac road. Cross straight over and take a footpath opposite, through dark laurels. This is the Fitzhall Plantation, part of a large estate from early Elizabethan times. Ignore several paths off and keep straight on, uphill through rhododendrons. In 200m or so, you reach an oblique T-junction. Turn left here on a wide dusky path. In 100m, it takes you past a large wooden gate to meet the driveway of Fitzhall. Cross straight over onto a track opposite and, in 15m, keep right to avoid a bridleway on your left. The track leads through a deep cutting in the sandstone and, after 150m, passes the entrance to a house. Keep left here, passing the garden of the house on your right.

Just after the end of the garden you meet a three-way fingerpost.

3. Keep left at the fingerpost on a path curving uphill. This is a lovely spot and at the top there are views across the green horse pastures to the South Downs. Your path leads between two posts into a pinewood. At a 3-way fingerpost, keep straight ahead, ignoring the left turn. Your path is lined by rhododendrons (now regarded as an invasive species) and any mud in the path can usually be avoided through the trees on your right. This is followed by an area of light birch and you may glimpse on your left the large sandpit formed from Minsted Quarry. At the end of the first field on your right, you meet a 3-way fingerpost. Turn right here. Follow this wide track, bearing left past a small piggery and farm cottages, to reach the Minsted Road. Turn right on the road.

4. In 70m, turn left on a wide track marked as a footpath. The track zigzags to a small farmstead. Keep left past a cottage to reach two metal gates. Go through the right-hand gate and straight on along the left-hand side of a crop field. You now have great views right to the South Downs. Behind you, to the right, is Minsted House. After a kissing-gate, your route is across a grassy patch to a strong metal gate. Go through the gate (being careful to open forwards) and over a sturdy bridge into the pinewoods of The Warren. In 100m or so, just before a hillock and a marker post, take the left fork, a long straight path between tall ranks of pine and birch. Soon the path becomes raised and brick-lined, suggesting its historical usage. You reach a tarmac drive by the well-named Oakwood House. Turn left to a tarmac road and cross straight over into a small parking area.

5. Avoid the path straight ahead by a large metal gate and instead take a path on the left, between two wooden posts into Midhurst Common. Just 10m later, take the more prominent right fork, a winding woodland path. In 100m, as your path goes under power lines, go straight across a path that runs beside

the power lines. Your path immediately curves left and gets much wider and clearer, running not far from those power lines on your left. The path rises gently to give you views of the open heath on your left and the forest on your right. As the path rises more steeply, you pass under a pair of overhead wires and your path forks at a marker post. Choose the left-hand option – a steep narrow sandy path. In 70m, avoid a level path on your left and keep climbing! In another 70m, you reach the top and the reason for this choice is clear.

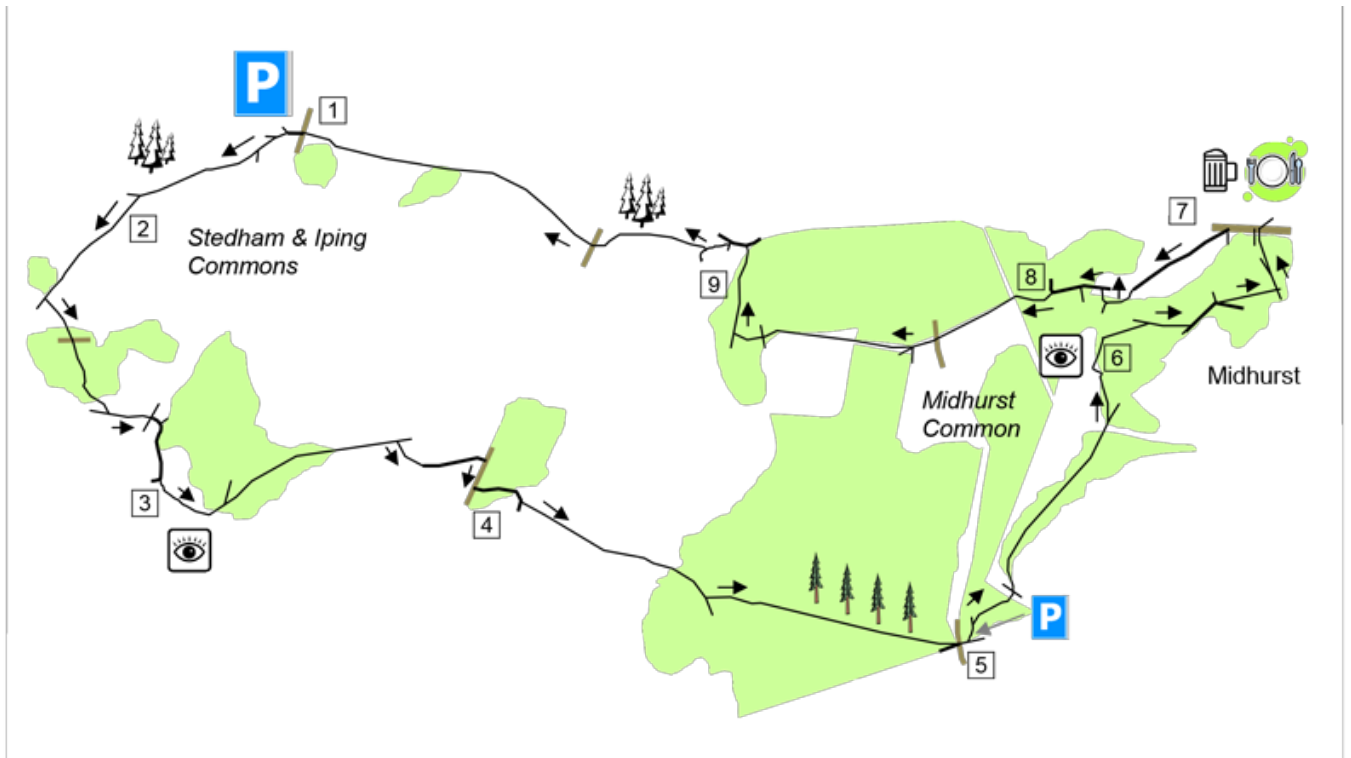
6. After a possible breather, continue straight ahead on the high path, still enjoying open views on your left. In 100m, you pass another seat. Bear right, as indicated by a marker post with a yellow arrow, on a wide path through woodland. In 100m, you are joined from the left by another path at a marker post. Continue straight on, avoiding all paths off. You come down to a garden hedge belonging to a house, Cherries, where you meet a path coming from the right. Bear left beside the hedge. In 80m, continue straight on by a marker post, ignoring a footpath on your left. Immediately your path forks. Take the left fork, the narrower option, actually straight ahead. In 150m, you reach a small clearing with another seat and a 4-way fingerpost. Turn left here on a path, signed as a bridleway. In 40m, the path splits: take the right fork, the footpath, marked by a (possibly hidden) yellow arrow. This path leads down to the main road opposite the Half Moon pub. For refreshments, first cross with care!

7. Without crossing the main road (except to visit the pub), turn left for 25m and fork left at a fingerpost on a tarmac drive marked as a footpath. Immediately ignore a blue arrow and bridleway on your left and stay on the drive as it gradually diverges from the main road. As you pass some cottages, immediately after the brown-coloured White House, ignore a footpath on your left. After the entrance to The Severals, your path suddenly becomes a narrow woodland path. In only 30m, you meet a 3-way fingerpost. Go right here up a

bank onto a path that runs beside the wire fence of The Severals. Your path, which may seem a little obscure in parts, veers right by a wooden shed and comes out onto the house's driveway. Veer left on the drive. In 50m, ignore a footpath on your left, re-joining the ST. In another 50m or so, where the drive curves away right, leave it by continuing straight ahead on a narrower path, as indicated by a yellow arrow.

8. You are in a wondrous pine forest, a particularly attractive part of this walk. In 100m or so on this curving path, you reach a 4-way fingerpost. Go straight over, passing under HT lines. After 200m on this straight trail, you reach the Severals Road. Cross straight over onto a permissive path. In 50m or so, you reach a multiple fork with three paths ahead. Take the rightmost path and follow this rough, sometimes grassy, course through bracken and firs, ignoring a path on the left at a fork. In 400m, at a marker post, keep straight on, thus re-joining the ST. The path goes down through a cleared space to a T-junction. Turn right on this path to reach a tarmac drive after 200m or so, audibly close to the main road again. Turn left on the drive, going over a bridge.

9. Just after the bridge, turn left on a track and immediately turn right on a woodland path. In only 50m, at a marker post with blue arrows, turn right on a narrower path uphill (don't miss this turn!), still on the ST. The path runs uphill under tall straight pines, leading to a heather-covered plateau. You soon reach the Minsted Road. Cross the road to go through a wooden gate and take a sandy path across Stedham Common. Keep straight ahead all the way across this landscape, crossing under wires, through a woodland of birch and pine, across the open heath, skirting groups of pines and finally through more woodland to a wooden gate and the road opposite the car park where the walk began.



DISTANCE: 5.5 miles

MAP: OS Explorer 133 (Haslemere)

START: The free Iping and Stedham Commons car park, on the Elsted Road, just off the A272 near Midhurst, West Sussex. There are no buildings nearby but nearest postcode is GU29 0PB.

Taken with permission from www.fancyfreewalks.org.uk