

## Following in the Sailor's Footsteps

Imagine walking along this path at the time of our 'unknown sailor' alongside a more leisurely type of transport. Although the A3 between Kingston and Petersfield had become a turnpike in 1758, many people still travelled by foot. The distant conversations of these travellers would have been accompanied only by the occasional trundle of a horse drawn coach, the clapping of hooves or the bleat of a sheep. Walkers familiar with the exploits of Nicholas Nickleby for example might recall his journey with Smike. Whilst on the way to Godalming the two characters are found on the very path you walk now on their way to the memorial at Gibbet Hill.

The desolation of the spot must have added to the eeriness of the scene and if Nickleby and Smike had arrived here 50 years earlier in 1788, they would have come face to face with the gibbet itself. With the wheel creaking and the bodies swinging in the wind, the scene would have appeared set for one of Turner's paintings. Positioned on the highest and most exposed site on the Portsmouth road, the gibbet would almost certainly have served as a deterrent to others from committing such a crime as that described on the Sailor's Stone Information Board. It was not unusual for highwaymen to roam this area at the time of the murder and throughout Europe it was common practice in the 18th century to leave bodies in hanging cages in order to deter others. Their bodies might even have been covered in tar, thus prolonging the sight still further.

For the families of the criminals however, this was a hated practice and attempts were often made to remove bodies from the gibbets in order that they might rest in peace. As a result it became common for the authorities to stud the gibbet posts with nails, not only to prevent people from taking pieces of the wooden post as protection from ailments but also to stop relatives from climbing the structure. (A piece of the Hindhead gibbet can now be seen in Haslemere Educational Museum).

As for the murderers of the unknown sailor, a young girl named Mary Tilman, who lived at the time at Pierrepont, recalled seeing their execution. On a suitably windy day, the three men were taken to the hilltop on carts drawn by horses. These carts, known as tumbrels, were the type used during the French Revolution to carry condemned prisoners to their place of execution, on arrival tilting backwards in order to 'dump' their load. On the day in question, our murderers were secured with ropes to the gibbet and the horses whipped away. As the animals fled the three men dropped... Once dead, their bodies were secured in iron cages (adjusted to fit each man). The cages were then hung on the gibbet and the bodies left to the elements. It was not until 3 years later that two of the bodies were brought tumbling to the ground during a great storm.

No longer will the creak of the wheel be heard as the body cages swing in the wind but this spot will always serve as a reminder to others of what happened to the unknown sailor on the night of the 24th September 1786.

## Hindhead and Haslemere Area

The Hindhead and Haslemere area became popular with authors and artists in the late 19th century, when the railway opened up this part of Surrey. Haslemere is an attractive old market town nestling near the point where three counties meet. It was described in an early visitor guide as the 'fashionable capital of the beautiful Surrey highlands' and now lies within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Much of the lovely countryside around this area is now owned by The National Trust.

### Hindhead Common

Hindhead Common, with over 566ha of heath and woodland, was one of the first countryside areas acquired by The National Trust and is an exceptional site for heathland restoration. Heather is recovering and heathland birds such as the Nightjar and Stonechat are thriving.

### Heathland Restoration

Heathland was created by early Man who cleared the forest to graze animals which provided food and clothing. Without fertilisers this constantly "stripped" the soil of nutrients so that nothing but hardy heathers and grasses grew. The Heath has dramatically changed over the past 60 years as few folk who used the commons were left. Without grazing, invasive trees and plants quickly overtook the heathers by shading them from sunlight, threatening the wildlife that depends on the heath to survive. To return more areas to open heathland, which is of greater nature conservation value than the newer woodlands, selected felling and management, including the year-round grazing of highland cattle and Exmoor ponies, has been introduced.

### Gibbet Hill

This is Surrey's second highest point (272m), with spectacular views to the north and east. On a clear day Canary Wharf and the London Eye can be seen.

### The Greensand Way

This scenic long distance walking route follows the Greensand ridge through Surrey and Kent. It runs for 108 miles from Haslemere to Hamsstreet on the northern edge of Romney Marsh.

### Devil's Punch Bowl

There are fine views of the Devil's Punch Bowl (a remarkable natural basin) from the viewpoint 50m beyond the café on an obvious path.

### Travel & Local Information

For information on Haslemere and the local area and other walks contact: Visit Haslemere (Visitor Information Centre) at Haslemere Museum, 78 High Street, Haslemere, Surrey, GU27 2LA  
Tel: 01428 645425 / [www.haslemere.com/vic](http://www.haslemere.com/vic)  
For local train and bus information call Travel Line South East on 08706 082608 or visit their website: [www.travelline.org.uk](http://www.travelline.org.uk)

Refreshments and accommodation are available in Haslemere and surrounding villages.

### Please follow the Countryside Code

- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Consider other people.



## HASLEMERE WALKS

# SAILOR'S STONE & GIBBET HILL

WALK

5

Distance: 1.4 miles / 2.2 kms

An attractive and diverse short circular walk from Hindhead, through heath and wood, with magnificent views and historical interest

WALK TYPE

EASY

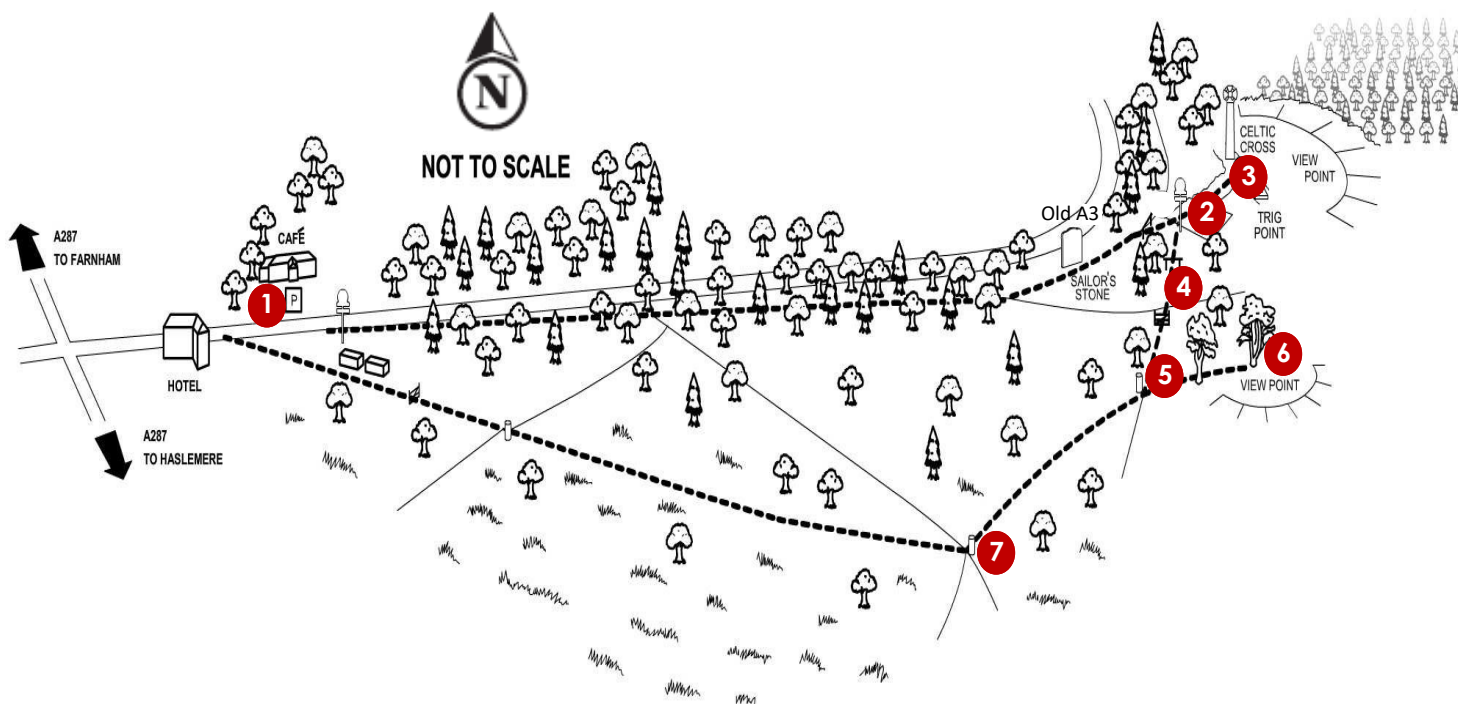




# SAILOR'S STONE & GIBBET HILL WALK

## ABOUT THIS WALK

This attractive short circular walk is 2.2km (1.4 miles) long and takes approximately 3/4 - 1 hour. It starts from the National Trust Devil's Punch Bowl Café where you can park for a small charge and get refreshments (parking is free to NT members). The route takes you through heathland and woodland and is covered by OS Explorer map 133. There are very fine views of the North Downs and Sussex Weald and to the South Downs and towards London. Exmoor ponies and Highland cattle graze the area throughout the year.



Much of the first part of the walk to the Stone, Celtic Cross and viewpoint is level and suitable for everyone. However, further parts of the walk go over uneven ground in places and there are a few gates to negotiate. This part is therefore not recommended for pushchairs, wheelchairs or anyone with walking difficulties. Please wear appropriate footwear. During and/or after wet weather some areas can become particularly muddy.

— — — MAIN ROUTE

## ROUTE

- 1** Start at the car park in front of the Devil's Punch bowl café. Bear left and take the paved path that leads round to the right of the old A3 route. Follow this path for some distance to the Sailor's Stone (on your left), ignoring any tracks to the right.
  - 2** Continue on the paved path and take the next track on your right at a wooden 5-bar gate into what was an old car park.
  - 3** Bear left past the NT acorn signpost and to the brow of Gibbet Hill and the white triangulation point. (NB Trig point is as on the map). Ahead is a spectacular view looking north-east towards London, the North Downs and the Weald. On your left is the Celtic Cross. Return the same way back to the 5-bar gate (2).
- (For the shorter, level path back to the Devil's Punch Bowl Café and car park, go past the Celtic Cross and then left back along the tarmac track). Otherwise go straight ahead, bearing slightly left to a metal barrier. Follow the Greensand Way marker posts.
- 4** At a multi-way-junction cross ahead and go through the wooden gates where there is a cattle grid. Continue on the track for a short distance.
  - 5** Continue until you reach a fork in the path. Here you will take a right, but .....
  - 6** ... for another magnificent view, this time looking south towards the South Downs, take the track on your left which bears slightly backwards and pass a tall Scots Pine tree to another distinctly shaped Scots Pine overlooking Coombeswell. Return the same way to your original track (5) (where you would have forked right) this time though the route is straight ahead, crossing the track. Continue on this track ignoring any side paths.
  - 7** At a multi-way-junction, by a seat, go slightly right ahead, still following Greensand Way markers. At another junction continue ahead on the main track. Follow this path to a wooden gate, ignoring any side paths. Continue, passing through the NT Estate Yard, and return to the road where the Devil's Punchbowl car park will be visible ahead of you.