

# COMMONS WALK B

## TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMON

This walk is in two parts, both of which are short and begin and end at the Pantiles Car Park off Major York's Road. Each part is about a mile long and if time is short could be taken separately.

The first part is over areas of dry sandy soil where bracken grows in profusion and other areas which are densely wooded being on richer moist ground. The second section runs mainly through light woodland.

- 1** Find the noticeboard at the north western end of the car park not far from the entrance. This gives information about Tunbridge Wells Common. Take the asphalt path left until you reach a High Weald Link signpost and take the gravel track right. The ground rises and we come to a curving glade, part of the old race track which we cross, and after about 80 paces take a small track on the left entering woodland.
- 3** You will see that new trees (oaks) have been planted on the left, and then the path reaches an area which has been cleared to encourage the re-generation of heather and also to encourage more butterflies which like sunny areas for their caterpillars.
- 4** The track divides near a more mature oak tree. Take the track on your left through the bracken filled open area re-crossing the race track, until it meets up with the asphalt High Weald Link.
- 5** There is a seat by the path at this point. You should take the path right. This meets up with a road at Hungershall Park. Turn left and walk downhill for some yards along the edge of the Common. Just before the path plunges steeply downhill you will see a heavily tiled house known as The Cottage, and on the left there are two paths. The first is the old road to and from High Rocks, but we take the second marked Link Path Route. This takes us through an area which has been cleared back a few yards along the line of the path. The rare coral-root bitter cress can be found here in early summer.

The path curves slightly downhill and as it flattens out, just before a tall birch tree, find a track off to the right which winds down through thick scrub and trees to a grassy strip along the Eridge Road. Walk left along the grass to Brighton Lake. This was excavated in 1858 at the instigation of the vicar of King Charles the Martyr Church, the Reverend William Pope as a means of not only adding to the amenities of the Common but giving employment to labourers when work was scarce. To this day it is still popularly known as Pope's Puddle. The proper

name results from its proximity to the old West or Brighton Railway Station (the line ran along the embankment behind the houses over the road - and enthusiasts have re-opened a section of the line to steam trains at weekends and holidays). The lake is fed by a chalybeate spring which stains the surrounding earth a red-brown colour with its iron content. Walk along the stone banked side of the pond right by the water's edge, passing steps by the spring and take a second, wider set of stone steps and ascend the path ahead through the trees to the broad grass path which we take to the right. This path was also constructed by Pope's unemployed workers, whose wages were met by public subscription. It was described then as a 'greensward terrace walk' and now passes through woodland until it returns to the lower end of the car park from which we started.

- 8**
- 9**
- 10** To begin the second leg of the walk return to the entrance of the car park and cross Major York's Road. (Please take care crossing this busy road.) Facing down towards the Pantiles take the asphalt path that cuts across the grass bearing left to Castle Road at the point where there is a zebra crossing over London Road to the Pantiles. Ignore this crossing but take the asphalt path that runs between London Road and Castle Road. Soon you will see two spreading chestnut trees and on their right two railed enclosures. These contain archaeological remains of structures connected with the earliest years of the development of Tunbridge Wells as a spa. They were discovered a few years ago when the road was widened. By using the steps provided you can get down and by reading the plaques obtain a fair idea of the remains without venturing onto the road. Returning up the steps you are confronted by a more recent construction - Fonthill Pavilion built in 1939. Over the years it has had many uses but is now mainly used as a nightclub.
- 11**

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Looking out from the steps of the pavilion we can see the church of King Charles the Martyr across the road. Starting as a mere chapel of ease in the early 17th century, it grew bit by bit with the town and boasts a notable ceiling by Henry Doogood, Christopher Wren's master plasterer. Many famous people have worshipped there including Evelyn and Pepys and too many kings and queens to mention. Princess Victoria before her accession to the throne was a regular worshipper when she stayed in the town in the early 19th century.

- 12** Turning back to our walk, look left and take another asphalt path off to the left and then join another asphalt track turning right. This rises gently through pleasant light woodland to a place criss-crossed with paths. Take the second asphalt track on the right. This curves easily away to the left and soon you will glimpse through the trees the red brick old Post Office over the London Road. However, another asphalt path crosses our way and we take this turning left.

- 14**
- 15**
- 16** About 100m along you will see down on your right an old oak tree surrounded by iron railings. Until recent shrub clearance revealed the old railings the oak had been virtually lost from sight and has now been re-discovered as Princess Anne's Oak planted at about 1700 to commemorate Princess (later to be Queen) Anne's connection with the town. It is one of the oldest trees on the Common and it may be worth deviating from the path to read the small plaque on the railings.

Approximate length of walk – 1¾ miles  
Allow about 1 hour

- 17** On returning to the path continue down to the London Road. There is no pavement here so carefully keep to the left for a few paces until you turn left up Mt. Edgcumbe Road (better known by its old name of Donkey Drive). You can walk along the grassy verge below the cherry trees, or if it is wet underfoot use the road (it is one-way and you will face any oncoming traffic). At the T-junction you will see a number of paths ahead leading into the higher parts of the Common. Ignore the path straight ahead and take the gravel path to the left (it begins under the spread of an oak tree by the traffic sign). Walk up until you come to a seat at the start of an open area. Continue straight on, noting a fine stand of trees on the left of the clearing. This is part of Victoria Grove and we stay faithful to our track until it converges with the far end of the Grove.

- 18**
- 19** At this point we will take the asphalt track that runs across our way, down left. Before doing so look back and you will see the cricket ground and the outcrop of rocks known as Wellington Rocks with Wellington Hotel visible across the road behind. Descending down our asphalt path between shrubs and trees, crossing the old race track, and emerging from the trees close to the entrance of the Major York's Road car park - we are virtually back to where we started the walk.



# Tunbridge Wells Common

