



Bixley and Beckley Woods Flatropers Wood, Blackland Wood

Distance: 9 km=5½ miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex

Date written: 5-sep-2022

Author: Stivaletti

Refreshments: picnic or nearby inns and restaurants

Map: Explorer 124 (Hastings) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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Forest, heath, long woodland trails, secret paths

In Brief

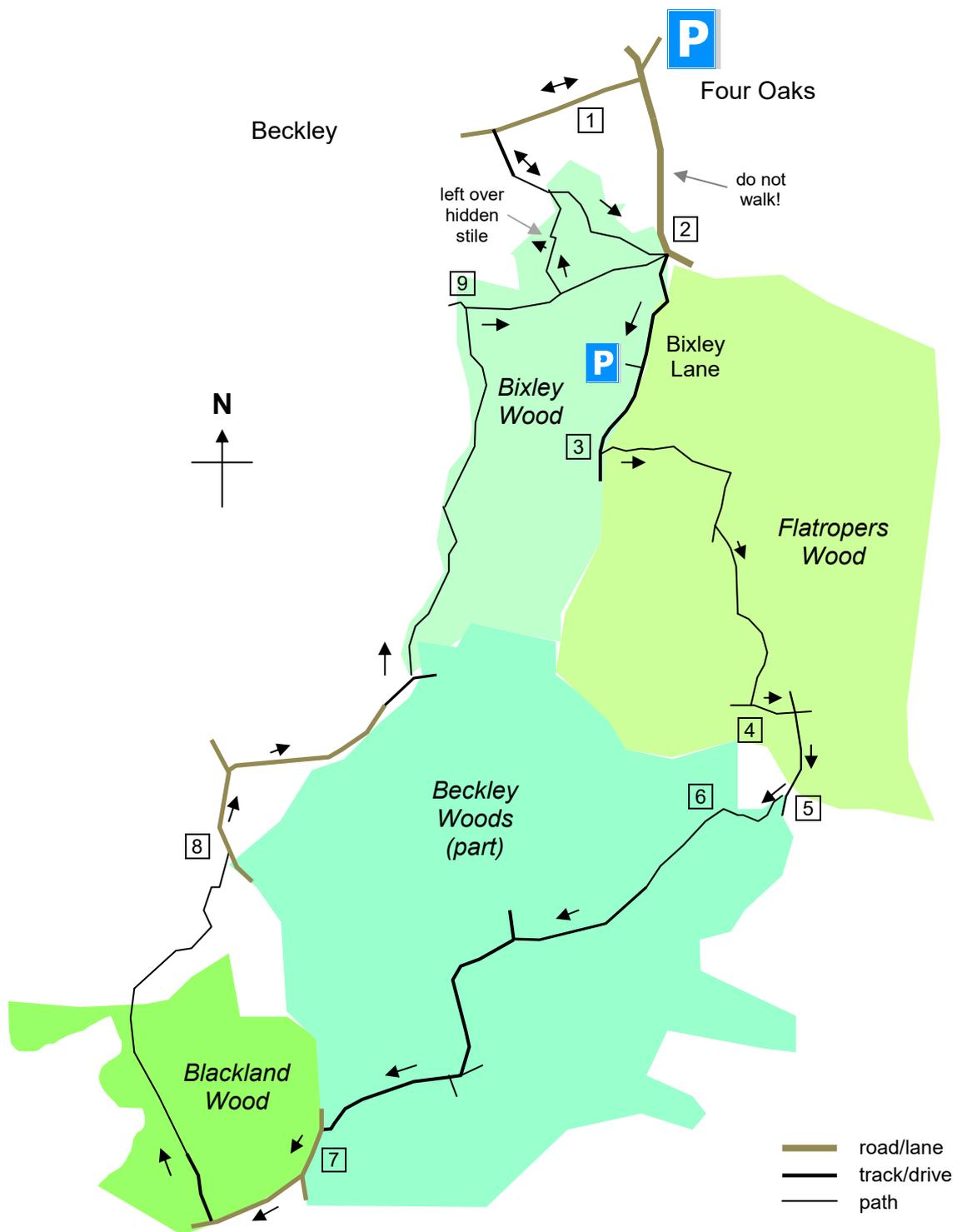
Starting this woodland walk is rather like going through a magic portal, from an ordinary street of houses into a kind of remote paradise. The four woods on this outing will captivate you in different ways: dense woods with winding paths, secret ways over streams and bridges, wide avenues of broadleaf and wild open heath. Three of the woods are run by the Woodland Trust but *all* are well maintained with clear paths. Yet the entire area has an atmosphere of a lost world. The author passed only *three* people on a sunny summer weekend and *one* car on the quiet lanes.



The walk was done in the very dry summer of 2022 when ordinary footwear was fine. With little by way of undergrowth, shorts were wearable. But in damper conditions it is easy to see that waterproof boots would be essential. It is a good idea to take a map with you because the Forestry people sometimes close sections of the wood for maintenance, requiring an easy diversion. With no main roads (apart from crossing at the start), this walk would be ideal for your dog.

The walk begins at the small village of **Four Oaks**, just east of **Beckley**, near Rye, East Sussex, postcode **TN31 6RG**. The main street (the B2086) has few parking opportunities and the best place to park is in Hobbs Lane, postcode **TN31 6TN**, www.w3w.co/dreamer.shatters.slice, where everyone parks in a line along the right-hand side. From here you have a short walk, back, **left** and **right** on the straight main street (*not* the busy A268 which has no footway) for just 400m where there is a signpost. This modest corner is your starting and ending point. Another obvious starting point is the Bixley Wood car park, which you pass on this walk (www.w3w.co/eradicate.grandest.maps). It is on quiet Bixley Lane which is at a junction with the A268 just south of the village. On a quiet day this is a good option, but at weekends, because the car park only takes about six cars, it could be full. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



1 Beginning on the straight main street (the B2088) between Four Oaks and Beckley, walk along the pavement until you see a side road serving a group of houses, called Buddens Green. Next to it is a track signed as a footpath. Walk along this track as far as a large metal gate and turn **left** before the gate, on a narrow path. In 100m, at a marker post, avoid a field-side path on the right and keep ahead into the woods, as indicated. On your left is a logging centre. Continue on this winding path uphill through woods to a T-junction. Turn **right** here as directed and follow the path as it zigzags right-left into an open ferny space. Immediately, opposite a little fingerpost, turn **left**. You pass a back garden on your left with a Nissen hut. At the end, veer **left** over a stile beside a large metal gate, arriving at a junction of a quiet driveway just short of a main road.

2 Turn **right** on the quiet winding tarmac driveway, known as Bixley Lane. It only serves a handful of houses, deep in the woods, almost hidden behind their entrance gates. After 300m or so, you meet on your right a small car park with a Forestry Commission sign for Bixley Wood (alternative start).

P *Bixley Wood covers 37 ha and is managed by the Woodland Trust. Keep straight ahead on the drive which has changed to gravel. 250m after the car park, you will see on your right some large wooden gates at the entrance to a house called *Boxwood*. Turn **left** at this point into Flatropers Wood, a delightful surprise, with a map board showing the maze of paths ready to be explored. This walk takes one of the paths that traverse the wood to meet the footpath and bridge at the southeast corner. **Although it is one of the main paths, it is narrow in places and quite twisty, and you may need to keep alert for the next mile to stay on course.***

Flatropers Wood is a nature reserve, one of the quietest woods in Sussex, covering 37 ha, with bluebells in late spring, rare butterflies and other insects. Flat rope was used in past times to enclose parts of the wood, as it doesn't kink. The map on the board may be a useful addition of these notes (copied here).

3 Take the wide path straight ahead into woods of oak and chestnut. Keep to the wide, most obvious, path as it winds left-right several times. About 200m into the wood, you pass a brushwood fence on your left as the path curves right. Shortly after, you reach a fork. Take the **left** fork, the slightly wider and straighter option. [Sep 2022: you have to step over a fallen birch trunk.] 100m further, you come over a small flat bridge. Immediately after the bridge, stay with the path as it veers **right** through hollies. 150m further, your path veers **left** up a bank and continues through brackeny birchwoods, followed by chestnut. 150m further, avoid a junction on the right and continue, passing under power lines. You pass a patch of purple heather before going back into birch forest. There follows a marshy area (dry in summer) eased by a slatted boardwalk. You are now in dense woodland on a nice clear path. About 200m after the power lines, your path descends to cross a bridge over a gill (dry in summer), rising to meet an official footpath at a 3-way junction.



- 4 Turn **left** at the junction, going over a new footbridge. In 100m through dense woodland, you come through a wooden swing-gate to meet another official footpath at a 4-way fingerposted junction. Turn **right** here on the footpath, avoiding a path on the left, and keep straight ahead. This path goes under beeches and soon runs next to a wire fence on your right. About 200m after that 4-way junction the path leads you over a stile and suddenly you are out of the wood, in an open area with a sheep pasture on your left and a meadow of feathery grass on your right. Cross directly over a narrow gap between the two fields to go through a heavy metal swing-gate into the woods ahead. Welcome to Beckley Woods!

Beckley Woods, the largest in the area, covers 145 ha of mixed woodland. This is a notable habitat of butterflies and dragonflies. These woods are also managed by the Woodland Trust.

- 5 Here you will **leave** the official footpath (which forks left) and ahead of you is an amazing trek through Beckley Woods, on a path which begins almost hidden and slowly develops into an open wide nature trail. So, immediately keep **right**, passing a broken stile, on a narrow raised path which runs close to the meadow on your right, with a wire fence on each side. The path quickly gets wider and easier. After only 100m, the path zigzags left-right over a stile. Immediately, turn **right** over a 2-plank bridge. The path winds a great deal, keeping you literally on your toes. Soon a post on your right with arrows confirms your route.
- 6 The path has opened out into a wide avenue under mature trees, gradually wheeling left. It soon rises out of the woods onto an open heathland, passing under wires. This magnificent wide trail is remarkable for the fact that, thanks to the hidden entrance you used, you may be the only person enjoying this lonely landscape. After 500m in the open, ignore a major junction on your right. The "path" is now a wide track which winds gently uphill, between pines and mixed leaf, showing flowery verges. 400m from that last junction, you reach another, where a lesser track joins from the left. Turn **right** here, staying on the main track, avoiding paths on the left. In 400m the track ends at a metal barrier on a tarmac lane, Horseshoe Lane, by a Forestry Commission sign for Beckley Woods.
- 7 Turn **left** on the lane and, in 100m or so, turn **right** at a signposted junction on Moores Lane, a very quiet deeply sheltered road. After 250m you meet a very wide forestry access. Turn **right** here, past a metal barrier with a sign for Blackland Wood. Follow this wide forestry path, passing timber stacks, into dense woodland. After 500m the path becomes more grassy and rises into the open, passing under power lines. Directly under the power lines, turn **right** at a marker post on a level footpath. This woodland path has small meadows visible on the right. Avoid any paths leading off and stay close to the meadows, soon going through an opening in the wire fence. Just before a gate into a woodcutter's yard, by a yellow arrow on a post, turn **left**. Your path wheels right and turns left beside a pasture on your left, finally coming down to a tarmac lane.
- 8 Turn **left** on the lane. In 200m you come to a 3-way junction with a triangle of grass. Turn **right** here on a reincarnation of that very quiet Bixley Lane. Ignore a footpath on the right and stay on the lane, passing *Birds Farm House* and later *Little Birds Farm*, where the tarmac changes to gravel and enters the sudden deep shade of Bixley Wood. Immediately, at a finger-post, turn **left** over a stile. This footpath runs along the edge of Bixley

Wood, always within sight of pastures on your left, over a bridge-with-rails, under wires. Avoid all paths leading off right. Soon there is an impenetrable natural pine forest on your right and the path runs in an open strip. At a junction under some extremely tall pines, keep straight ahead, as the yellow arrow directs. Soon a little 2-way fingerpost directs you on a good path between brambles, followed by more dense woodland. As you near the end of the wood, you meet a 3-way fingerpost.

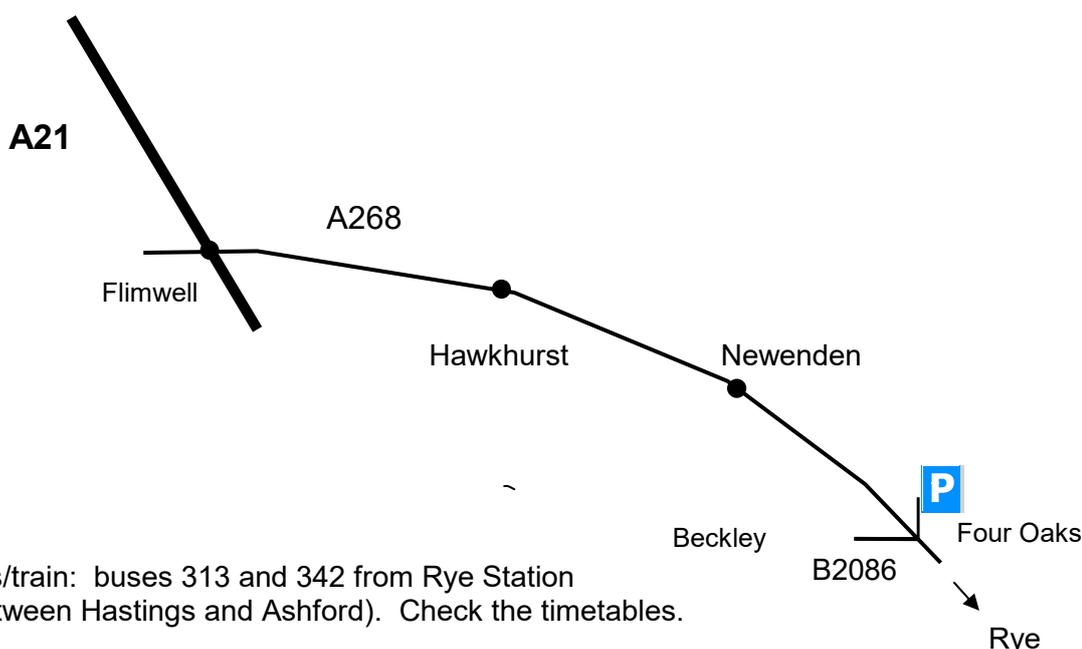
- 9 Turn **right** at the fingerpost. Soon you are following a wattle fence on your left. After 250m, your path goes between uprights in the wattle fence. Immediately **leave** the footpath here, by turning smartly **left** on a wide unsigned path. (Or, if you parked in the Bixley Wood car park, continue straight on to meet the start of Bixley Lane at Section 2.) This path leads slightly uphill along the edge of this section of the wood. Your path enters dark hollies and silver birch terrain, zigzagging left-right under beeches. Keep tightly to the left-hand edge where suddenly your path takes you **left** down a gnarled bank, past an avoidable stile, and **right** on a path beside a wire fence and a bank on your right. The path soon veers left as it joins a footpath from the right, familiar from your outward journey. Continue to a track and turn **right**, quickly reaching the main street, near where the walk began.



For refreshments after the walk, you are only 5 miles from the wonderful historic town of Rye, with so many places to eat and drink and relax, or simply walk about. Or, going back inland, there are the *White Hart* in Newenden and the *Eight Bells* in Hawkhurst.

Getting there

By car: Four Oaks is on the main A268 road which runs through Flimwell, Hawkhurst, Newenden and Rye. If coming from the London area, the easiest route is via the A21. Turn onto the A268 eastwards at Flimwell. When you get to **Four Oaks**, the easiest parking is **sharp left** on a quiet road called Hobbs Lane. If you prefer to try the small **Bixley Wood** car park, continue on the A268 for 500 yds and, at the start of a left bend, fork **right** onto narrow Bixley Lane. The car park is 400 yds on the right.



By bus/train: buses 313 and 342 from Rye Station (between Hastings and Ashford). Check the timetables.

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