



Ditchling Common

Distance: 11½ km=7½ miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex

Date written: 3-apr-2017

Author: Stivaletti

Last update: 28-mar-2020

Refreshments: Plumpton Green, Wivelsfield Green

Map: Explorer 122 (Brighton) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Heath, long woodland trails, views, bluebells in spring

In Brief

This is an unusual walk, starting in a popular nature park close to the populated areas north of Brighton, but leading into solitary and secret places where you might not meet a single soul. As usual for this site, the route finds some unmarked forest paths where in late spring bluebells proliferate unseen. Along much of the way, your progress is made easier by the excellent stiles built by the Monday Group. As you return to the start you have the chance to rest and admire the views that so many come to enjoy. There are two good pubs along the route, both serving food

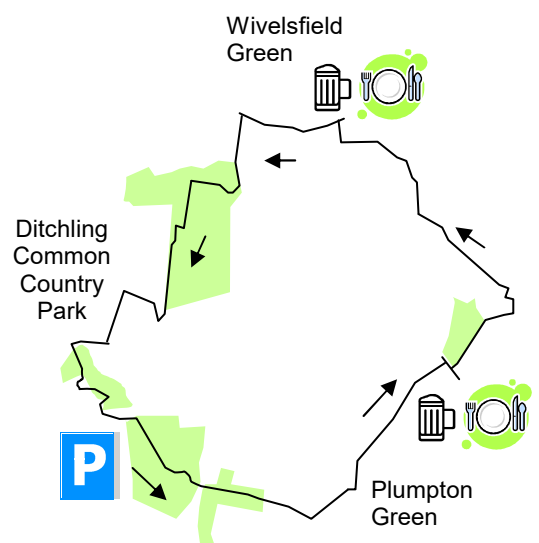


There are no nettles or brambles to worry bare legs. The terrain is woodland and pure fresh grass with no ploughed fields to cross. Boots are recommended because of the wealden forest.

There is no reason why your dog could not come on this walk too, with a lead of course.

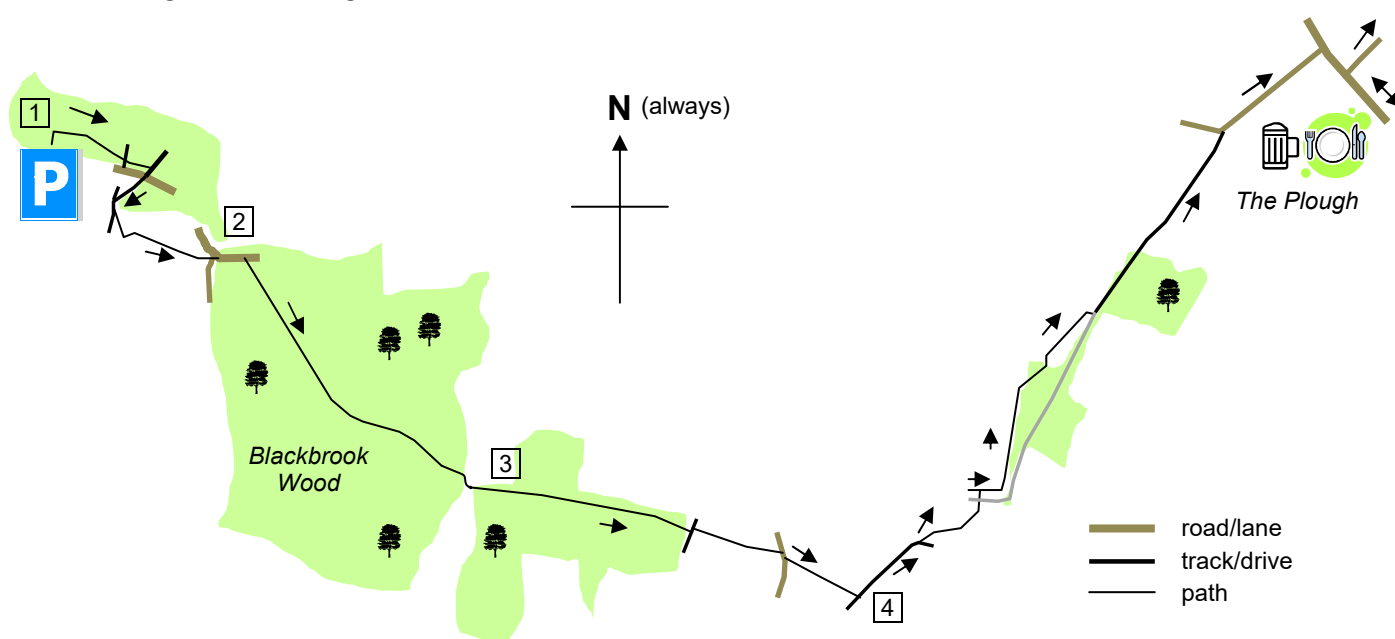
The walk begins at the **Ditchling Common** car park, East Sussex, nearest postcode **BN6 8SE**. (This postcode is for the big depot next door, so if you are coming from the direction of Burgess Hill, you need to turn **left** off Folder Lane East into the car park, just *before* the destination (or turn **right** just *after* it if coming from the east). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Bird's Eye View



The Walk

Leg 1: Ditchling Common to Plumpton 4 km=2½ miles



- 1 With your back to the road, go out of the car park at the far right-hand corner, onto the grassy heath and immediately turn **right** on a clear path that shortly goes between two wooden posts. At a T-junction under trees, turn **right**, heading back towards the road. The path crosses a private drive for *the Hole* (a hobbitophile?). You reach a wide tarmac drive coming from an industrial site. Turn **right** to the road and cross it carefully to a sign-posted track opposite. Where the track bends left towards a cottage, shift **right** to merge with a wider track. But, about 15m before a large metal gate, fork away **left** on a grassy path, passing a fingerpost and ignoring a step stile on your right. Go ahead over another step stile into a meadow and keep to the left-hand edge, passing a stone seat (and a stern notice) on your left. Go over a robust stile leading onto a narrow fenced path. A plank bridge takes you to a road junction.
- 2 Cross over the road and go straight ahead on the major road, Middleton Common Lane. Ignore a bridleway on your left and, just after that, go **right** by a dirt patch through a wooden barrier into woods. Take the path straight ahead, ignoring a minor path on your right. This is Blackbrook Wood, a noted area for bluebells and wood anemones. The path runs straight for 400m and then merges with another path coming in from your right. At a crossing path with stumps and yellow arrows, keep straight on. Your path narrows as it winds through shrubs in a short muddy section. Suddenly on your right you have an extensive view to the South Downs and Ditchling Beacon (*see the walk "Ditchling and Clayton Windmills" in this series*). You come over a 2-plank bridge and between wooden gates into another stretch of woodland, known locally as *The Plantation*.
- 3 Your path runs just inside the left-hand edge of the wood. *The little clock tower on the other side of the field on your left (not seen by everyone) chimes every quarter hour. If the path is muddy, you can find a narrow path through trees for some of the way.* After 500m in the wood, a redundant stile takes you to a T-junction with a wide bridleway. Turn **left** through a small wooden gate

and immediately **right** over a plank bridge with a stile on each side. *Most stiles on this walk were built by the Monday Group, an organisation of volunteers in Sussex who build and maintain stiles and bridges. Remember, the top bar on these well-made stiles is normally raisable.* Go straight ahead in this pleasant grassy meadow, keeping about 20m from the right-hand edge. At the other side, go over a stile to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane for 20m, then go **left** over a stile into a sheep meadow. Cross the meadow diagonally on a faint path. On the other side, a stile and 2-plank bridge lead to a surfaced drive.

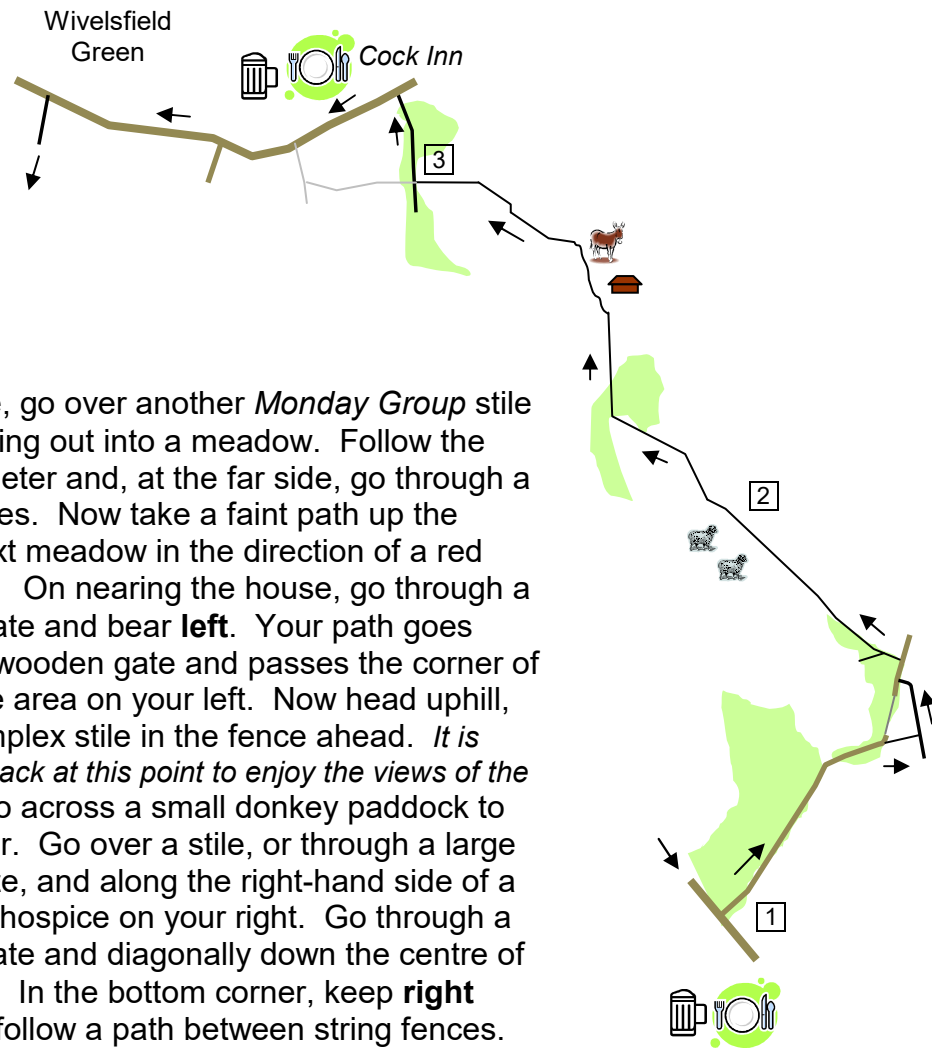
- 4 Turn **left** on the drive and follow it for 200m where it bends right towards a farm. **Leave** the drive here by keeping straight on through a small wooden gate into a pasture with the farm on your right, keeping near the left-hand side. Ignore a farm gate on your left but go **left** through a smaller metal gate, to meet a 3-way fingerpost. *You can now turn **right** on a bridleway, through a muddy patch, elbowing **left** onto an excellent wide raised path, as far as point (*) below. The following text takes the alternative footpath.* Go straight ahead over a little bridge and a stile and turn **right** along the edge of a field. In the corner, turn sharp **left**, still along the field edge. *(Another chance to slip through a gap on your right and join the bridleway.)* In the top corner, go **right** at a fingerpost over a 3-plank bridge into woodland. When you emerge into a meadow, go straight ahead, gradually getting closer to the line of trees on your right, till you see a fingerpost. Go **right** here over a stile and turn **left** on a track. (*) Stay on the track, past bungalows, to reach a road, St Helena Lane, at a bend. Turn **right** on the road and follow it, ignoring footpaths left and right, as far as a T-junction with a major road, South Road. Turn **right** on the road using the narrow grass verge. In 70m, your route is **left** on Beresford Lane. But first you may wish to continue a little further along the road to the *Plough at Plumpton* pub/restaurant.



The Plough at Plumpton was once in the village but it was moved here during WW2, having been dismantled because it stood at the end of a temporary airfield. (One of the so-called Advanced Landing Grounds, built for the D-Day invasions.) The pub is often jam-packed with families, especially on a sunny weekend, because of its grand open-air facilities. Attendance is plumped up (excuse the pun) during race meetings at the Racecourse. Beer is Harveys from nearby Lewes. The standard pub menu is best eaten in the generous outdoor seating space. Next to the pub entrance is the RAF Chailey memorial to Polish airmen.

Leg 2: Plumpton to Wivelsfield 3¾ km=2½ miles

- 1 **See mini-map overleaf.** Having turned left on Beresford Lane (or right if coming back from the pub), follow this much quieter lane for 400m and stay on it as it bends right. Just after it bends left, immediately after the entrance to *The Firs*, go **right** on a dark and very narrow path between laurels. *(Some walkers simply stay on the road if there is no traffic.)* At a T-junction, turn **left** on a bridleway and follow it through bushes to the road. Turn **right** on the road for 50m and, just before the start of an open meadow, go **left** over a step stile on a path into woods. In just 10m, at a fork, take the **right** fork. Go over a two-plank stile and follow the path between hawthorn bushes. After a gap in a large fallen tree trunk, continue along the right-hand side of this area of grass and young trees. A stile takes you into a large open sheep meadow. *Looking right, you get a nice view of Chailey Windmill.*



- 2 At the other side, go over another *Monday Group* stile and bridge, leading out into a meadow. Follow the right-hand perimeter and, at the far side, go through a wide band of trees. Now take a faint path up the centre of the next meadow in the direction of a red tile-hung house. On nearing the house, go through a small wooden gate and bear **left**. Your path goes through a large wooden gate and passes the corner of a horse-exercise area on your left. Now head uphill, to go over a complex stile in the fence ahead. *It is pleasant to look back at this point to enjoy the views of the South Downs.* Go across a small donkey paddock to the far left corner. Go over a stile, or through a large new wooden gate, and along the right-hand side of a meadow, with a hospice on your right. Go through a small wooden gate and diagonally down the centre of a horse pasture. In the bottom corner, keep **right** over a stile and follow a path between string fences. Opposite a large modern white house, bear slightly left on a grassy path between more string fences. You come over a stile and along a boardwalk to meet a wide crossing path.



The footpath runs straight ahead into the village but, at the time of writing (2017), a new housing development is in progress. It is possible to go left, forking right over a bank after 100m or so and following the boundary fence round. But the next section begins with a more acceptable alternative, to last a year or two.

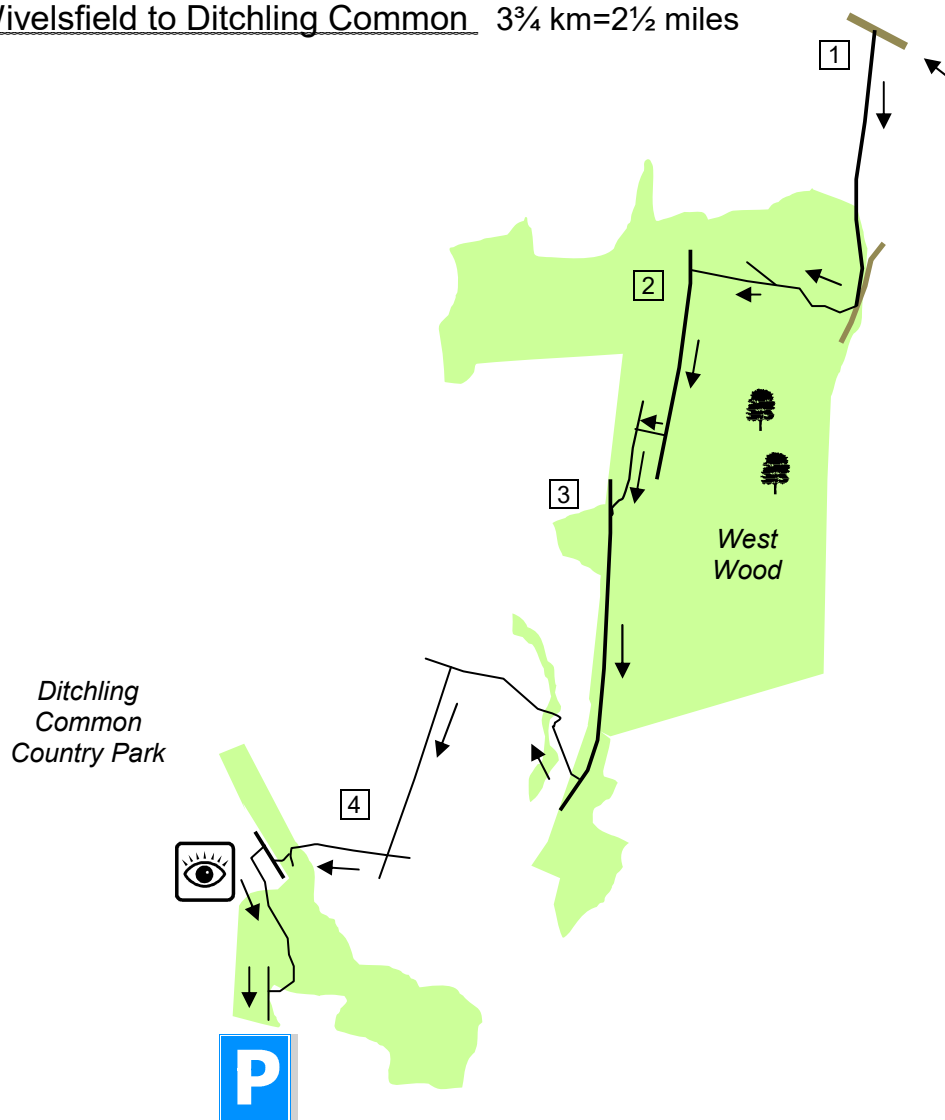
- 3 Turn **right** on the crossing path and follow it, soon passing new houses over on your left, to reach the main road in 250m, next to *Oaksides*. Turn **left** on the road, quickly gaining the footway. In 350m, you reach the *Cock Inn*, an unpretentious but surprisingly thoughtful town pub.



The "Cock" serves light snacks such as jacket potatoes, and lunches such as their "aromatic garden burger" all at reasonable prices. Note that they also serve coffee and home-made teas.

Continue along the road, passing a general store (closed on Sun) and ignoring a side road. Stay on this good wide footway for 400m, enjoying the views of the green hillside on your left, passing the entrances to some swanky properties. Just before *Field House*, turn **left** on a signposted public bridleway.

Leg 3: Wivelsfield to Ditchling Common 3¾ km=2½ miles



- 1 Follow the wide path along an avenue of oaks, over a stream and up into woods. As your path levels out, it joins a tarmac lane coming from your left. Turn **right** on the lane for only 15m and turn **right** at a signpost through a wooden swing-gate on a footpath. Soon on your right is a broad deep hollow. [2020: care! some walkers went astray in this section.] Shift to your right a little to take a nice dry path that runs along the rim of the hollow on your left. Re-join the main path, passing on your right a marker post with a yellow arrow (and ignoring a path that forks right just before the post). At the second marker post, keep **left** on a wide path, ignoring the yellow arrow which points to the narrower right fork through trees. [This right fork is the public footpath which exits the wood to the north and rejoins the parish boundary footpath which runs down the west side (see the OS map). The editor has been asked to **warn** that this route in this text is *unofficial* and can be *dangerous* during the winter shooting months.] In late spring you will be overwhelmed by the mass of bluebells and wood anemones in this little-known part of this old forest coppice. In nearly 200m further, you come to a T-junction with a wide horse path. On the other side is a very large hollow.

- 2 Turn **left** on the horse path that runs high above the hollow through West Wood. You can avoid mud, if necessary, using a narrow path on your right. After 350m on this path, you meet a distinct and clear crossing path. Turn **right** here. (If the path ends up a bank to meet a narrow path at a T-junction, you

have gone too far and need to backtrack 150m.) In 50m you meet another wide horse path running parallel to the one you were on. Turn **left** on this path. After nearly 150m, this path turns **right** over a bank and follows a much narrower course through trees, heading for the corner of a green meadow. Here you meet the official bridleway, also the Sussex Border Path (SBP). Veer **left** to join the SBP, going over a bridge with handrails.

3 The path goes through a wide muddy section (wide enough to stay dry if you pick your route) and continues ahead with a meadow visible on your right. In 350, you become aware of a green meadow, this time on the **left** side, with a house visible at the end. In less than 100m, look sharp **right** for a narrow path leading to a stile. Go over this stile and take a diagonal path across the pasture, almost doubling back on your original direction. In the far corner, go through a gap and immediately **left** over a stile, or through a large open metal gate, and over a stream in a band of trees. Cross another stile-or-gate and go straight across the pasture. At the far side, cross a stile-or-gate and carry on towards farm buildings. Just past the first barn, you will see a small 3-way fingerpost. Go **left** here over a V-stile. Cross the pasture to another V-stile and 3-plank bridge and follow the path between fences to go through a small wooden gate to a crossing path by some tall hedges and fences.

4 Turn **right** on the crossing path between hedges, passing a duck pond on your left. In 200m, your path zigzags to meet a path in woodland. Go **left and immediately right** on a narrow path, then **right** at a T-junction. In 20m, go **left** through a large metal kissing-gate onto the open hillside of Ditchling Common Country Park. This is your last chance to sit on a bench (just to your right) and admire the view that many people come for.



Ditchling Common was originally part of the Saxon Manor and hence King's land. The Country Park is run by the Woodland Trust and its owner, East Sussex C.C. It covers 188 acres (=76 ha) of open hillside, heath, scrubland and undulating forest. Exmoor ponies graze in the smaller fields and the stud field during the winter and the park has two public angler's ponds.

Turn **left** along the edge of the common. Ignore a metal gate in the first corner but continue a little further to a wooden swing-gate with an arrow indicating a nature walk. Your path snakes its way past several picnic tables and swings right to meet another path. Turn **left** here, quickly back to the Ditchling Common car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: if coming from the M25 area, take the M23/A23 to the turnoff for **Burgess Hill**. At the roundabout at the start of the town, turn **left** as for Haywards Heath. Keep **left** at the next roundabout and turn **right** at the third roundabout. Follow signs for *Town Centre* or *Burgess Hill Station*. Immediately after the station veer a fraction **right** at a roundabout. Turn **left** when you see a sign for *Ditchling Common*. You will shortly see the first brown tourist sign for *Ditchling Common Country Park*.

By bus/train: bus **271** runs from Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill to Wivelsfield, including Sat and Sun. Several other buses run this route, but not at weekends or not on Sunday. Check the "Bus Times" webpages. Note that so-called Wivelsfield Station is at least 1½ miles from the village.

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