



Holtye and Colemans Hatch

Distance: 19½ km=12 miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex, Kent

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Refreshments: Colemans Hatch, Forest Row

Map: Explorer 135 (Ashdown Forest) *but the maps in this guide should suffice*

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

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Views

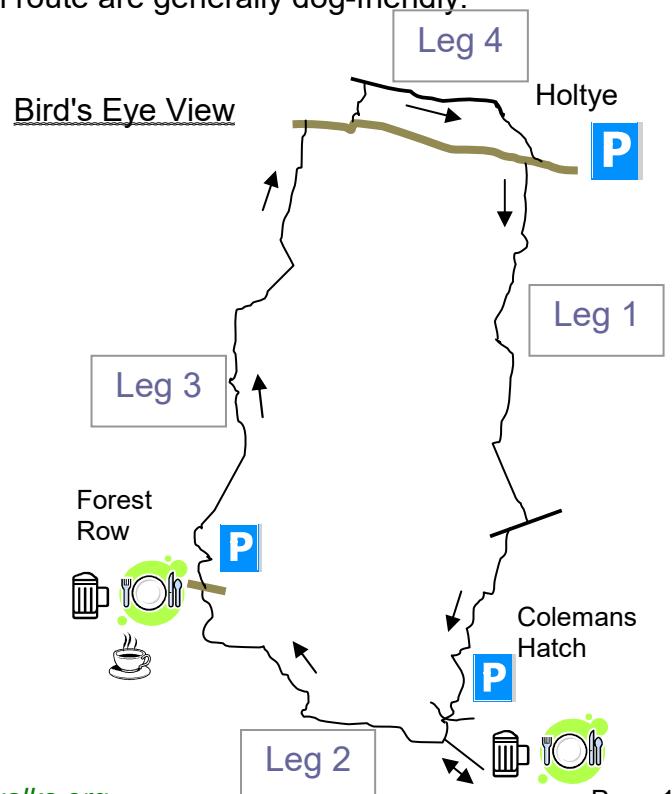
In Brief

This walk is a terrific adventure taking you from the Kent border into the fringes of Ashdown Forest. In the small village at the southern edge there is an excellent pub with good food. (To reserve a table at the *Hatch Inn*, ring 01342 822363.) There is a second chance for nourishment in the small town of Forest Row. At the end of the walk, you make a short excursion into Kent.



There are no nettles or brambles on this walk to worry bare legs but the undergrowth may be high in summer. There are four very limited muddy sections, so except in a dry summer you will find boots preferable. The stile count is low and the few stiles there are en route are generally dog-friendly.

The walk begins in the parking area beside the A264 near the *White House*, a large house (previously the *White Horse* pub) in Holtye, East Sussex, **postcode TN8 7ED**. The parking area is a layby 100m **east** of the house, i.e. to the left when facing the house. Alternative starting points are (2) the layby at the entrance to Hammerwood Park, (3) Colemans Hatch and (4) Forest Row where there are two car parks and plenty of roadside parking. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

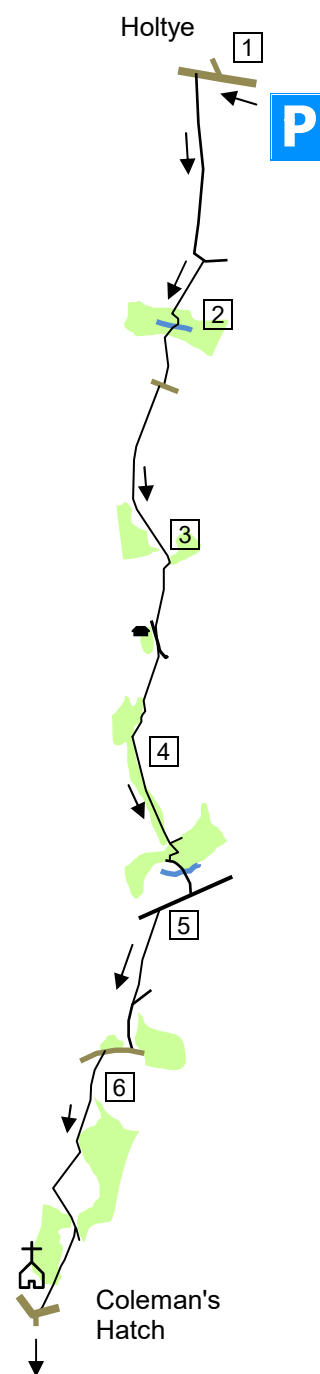
Leg 1: Holtye to Hatch 6½ km=4 miles

1 From the parking area, walk past the pub and, 100m after the pub, opposite a tiny fingerpost, turn **left** on a tarmac drive, soon passing a house. After 150m, avoid a stile on the right, staying on the now rough drive, passing more houses, admiring the great views over the countryside to your right. After nearly 1 km in total, the drive bends left. Just after the beginning of the bend, cross a small plank bridge over a ditch to the **right** and then take the clear path across the field marked by a fingerpost (possibly leaning against a tree). The path may be unmarked but your direction is squarely across, in the direction of a house you can see on a hill ahead. As you near the other side, head for a gap in the bushes.

2 The gap takes you onto a narrow path which winds your way over a possibly muddy section then over a long footbridge. Bear right into a field and go up the left-hand side. At the top, continue on a rough track between fields, coming out next to a metal gate onto a lane. Turn **right** and immediately **left** at a fingerpost to cross another field. Again, your route is straight across on a fairly clear path. At the far side you may need to sidle 10-20m to the right to find the path through a narrow strip of woodland. Go straight across the next field, setting your course by the left-hand side of a high line of dark evergreens visible ahead. The path gets clearer as you proceed. When you reach the trees on the other side, go over another bridge with rails, through a small metal gate and straight up the right-hand side of a sloping horse pasture.

3 Keep to the main grassy path, staying about 20m from the woodland on your right, going under power lines. Where the field narrows almost to a point, go through a big old wooden gate and along the left-hand side of a field. A small wooden gate leads into another meadow. Here veer **right** on a diagonal path heading for a house ahead. Go through a small wooden gate beside a pond on your right and keep ahead on a stony drive beside the house, *North Clays*. Keep ahead beside a barn and go through a small wooden gate into a meadow. The footpath sign indicates a path across the field to the bottom corner, but the path is no longer in evidence due to ploughing – so instead turn **right** along the crossing path and **left** at the field corner, heading down with trees on your right, to the bottom corner. After passing the wood, which conceals a pond, head for a marker post and veer **right** on a farm track. Just before a double metal gate, turn **left** down the right-hand side of a green field.

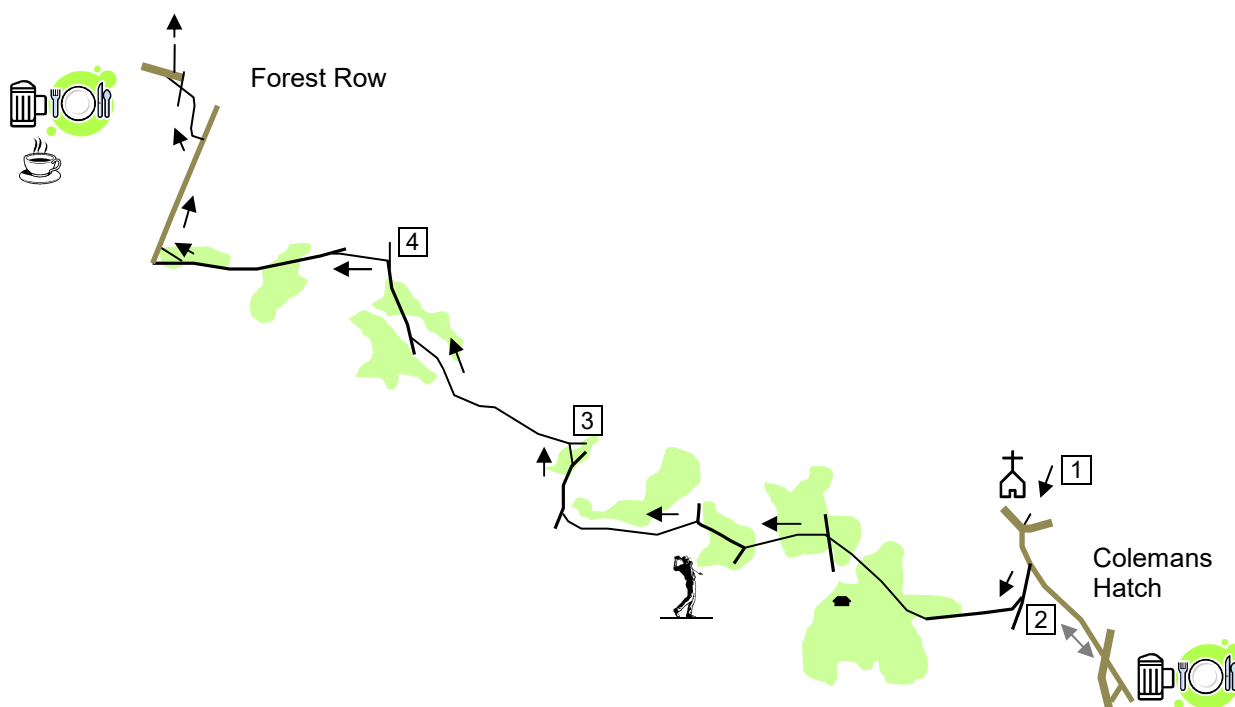
4 As you go, the spire of Hartfield church is visible to your left (see the walk *Poohsticks and Sandpits* in this series). **On your right, the woodland is full of bluebells in late spring.** Continue down the field and, in the bottom right-corner, go down a track by a house *Lower Parrock*, and keep to the right of a tree plantation. In 30m, go **right** through a tall swing-gate over a flat bridge, up a bank to a drive and **left** on the drive, over another flat bridge



across a wide stream, the infant River Medway. Continue between poplars on the main drive. You reach a wide straight crossing path. This is the Forest Way, once a railway line linking East Grinstead and Tunbridge Wells. Turn **right** on the Forest Way.

- 5 In 150m, by a convenient picnic table, turn **left** through a small metal gate. Your path follows the left-hand side of a beautiful large grassy meadow and, at the other side, takes you through a small metal gate beside a larger one. Turn **right** on a tarmac track, ignoring a permissive footpath straight ahead. You pass a house *Little Parrock* on your left and reach a tarmac lane, Parrock Lane. Turn **right** on the lane passing various other houses with *Parrock* in their name. (A "parrock" by the way is an old word for a small field.) Just after crossing a stream, indicated by the white rails, turn **left** up a shallow bank.
- 6 Follow a narrow path beside a pond on your right and veer **right** by an unused metal gate into a small meadow. Walk between a wood and wire fences on the left-hand side of the paddock and then continue diagonally **right** uphill, still between fences. In the top corner, cross a stile and a track and continue on a path which bears left then right, once again between fences, with a large meadow on the left and woodland on the right (Jul 2020: with pigs). Continue between the fences to go through a small wooden gate. It leads you through a bluebell wood and out into a meadow. Immediately turn **left** and follow a faint path that runs the length of the meadow, to go through a gap and a small metal gate into another horse pasture. Take the **right** fork heading for the far corner. [2016: Casablanca Nursery, to your left, is undergoing some endless untidy reconstruction.] Go over a stile into woods and follow the woodland path over a plank bridge and a proper footbridge, leading to a road in Colemans Hatch. Welcome to Ashdown Forest!

Leg 2: Hatch to Forest Row 3½ km=2 miles



- 1 *The Victorian Holy Trinity Church is immediately on your right and is worth visiting if it is not locked. Colemans Hatch is a sleepy rather spread-out village. The other building of note is the Hatch Inn which you will meet shortly. Cross straight over the main road to a minor road, Shepherds Gate. As you pass a 'phone box*

in 100m, your route will be a right fork here on a driveway. First, however, you will wish to visit the pub which is only 400m away. Follow the road, passing *Forest House*, to a junction with a major road. Cross diagonally over to a minor road leading immediately to the *Hatch Inn*, a free house dating from 1430.



The Hatch serves several ales, including Harveys and Larkins and is a Camra local. There is a pretty beer garden in the rear and it's useful to note that you can take cream teas here. The menu, prepared by a noted chef, is a little over priced with ploughman's at £8.50 and fish and chips, by another name, at £13.50. So discard the British reserve and insist on perfection! To reserve a table, ring 01342 822363.

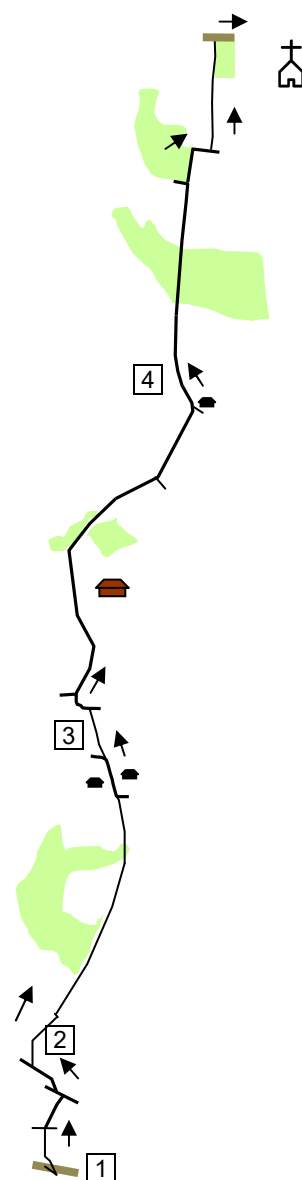
After possible refreshment, return the way you came and take that right fork by the 'phone box (i.e. if coming back from the pub, turn very sharp **left**).

- 2 The route described in this section is a public footpath but all the waymarkers have been lost, so you need to concentrate. In 100m, take a **right** fork downhill on a lane marked *Little Shepherds Farm*. Where the tarmac ends, follow the path down into woodland and immediately take the **right** fork, the major path which veers right through an open area and runs down beside a wooden rail over a rather muddy patch, then up again. After another 150m through trees, your path crosses a wide hardcore drive coming from a row of cottages on your left and continues straight ahead between birches. After another crossing path, your path comes up to meet, on your left, the end of a fairway belonging to the huge Royal Ashdown Forest Golf Club. Cross straight over to join a sandy path, which has most of the woodland on its left and a single pine on its right. Almost immediately, you come to a 3-way junction of golfers' paths. Turn sharp **right** here on another level sandy path. In 100m, where the path bends right, leave it by forking **left** on a grassy path. As you near a teeing off point, look ahead down the valley: you will see an expanse of mown grass, a nice wide bridge and a sandy path. Head down the slope to cross the bridge (watching out for golf balls) and, where the sandy path ends, go up a grassy slope, keeping to the right-hand side. About 100m from the top of the slope, where there is a golf green, turn **right** on a shingle drive which shortly joins another path coming from your left.
- 3 In a wooded section, you pass the gates of *Yew Tree Hall* as you emerge into the open again. Your route is 40m straight on and then sharp **left** on a wide cinder path, but you can take a narrow path through trees diagonally **left** before turning **left** on the cinder path. *Your route is approximately straight on, veering slightly right up a valley into Forest Row; however, the golfers' paths are very twisty, so the following route is used by most of the local people.* Follow this wide cinder path until it suddenly turns away right after 200m. Leave it here to go straight ahead for 10m or so across the grass to join another sandy path. Where this path ends abruptly in 100m, veer **right** to head along the green valley with the nearby woods on your left and more woods further away on your right. At the end, merge with a tarmac drive coming from your left. In just 30m or so, take a driveway forking away **left**.
- 4 There are various ways to go through Forest Row, which is a decent-sized town. You can vary the route given here if you wish to see more of the town. In 130m, keep ahead on another tarmac drive, Shalesbrook Lane, which joins you from the right. Follow this main tarmac lane as it winds right and left past various houses. Nearly 500m after you joined this lane, you are joined by a drive coming from your left. Fork **right** here on a signed footpath which runs through trees for just 80m to meet a residential road, Chapel Lane. (If

you miss this footpath, simply turn sharp **right** at the next junction.) Follow this straight road for over 300m and, just before a house called *Blue Cedar*, turn left on a waymarked narrow path between fences. This path bends right and ends at a green. Cross straight over a private road, crossing the green to the main Hartfield Road.

Leg 3: Forest Row to Hammerwood 5½ km=3½ miles

- 1 Your route is straight over the road, using the zebra crossing. However, if you would like refreshments, turn **left** along the road into the main part of the town. The *Carpenters Arms* which you pass shortly was up for sale in 2013-14. Most facilities are in London Road, veering right by the church, including cafés and the *Chequers Inn*. You can then pick up the route by going 350m down London Road to the pedestrian crossing and turning sharp **right** on the Forest Path, the old railway (also signed to *Tablehurst Farm*), then sharp **left** in 300m after the water treatment plant. Go straight across the grass by a playground on your left. Go through a gap and keep ahead beside a wire fence on your right. Cross a plank bridge and keep straight ahead on a wide sandy path, avoiding a footpath across the grass on your right. You pass on your left a large timber yard, cross the Medway via a wide bridge and are welcomed to the Forest Way country park. You reach a T-junction with noticeboards giving information on the Forest Way (the dismantled East Grinstead-Groombridge railway). Turn **left** and take the **right** fork uphill, to the right of a scout hut. You join a tarmac lane coming from the right. Just before a water treatment plant and a veterinary centre, turn **right** on a narrow path. This is the **Vanguard Way (VW)**, a long-distance path from Croydon to the coast, and you will be following it for most of the rest of the walk.
- 2 Follow the left-hand edge of the field, ignoring a little bridge on the left. At the other side, your path goes through a small metal gate on a narrow path between a bank and a hedge on your right. On this section you may encounter some mud: be reassured - it is only for a limited stretch. Your path continues into a woodland strip and runs on a high bank, over a 2-plank bridge. It rises through a more extensive wood and runs first between banks, then level between pastures. You reach a wide drive, Cansiron Lane. Bear **left** on this drive, passing a house on each side and ignoring a footpath on your right. (These houses, by the way, are in West Sussex.)
- 3 Only 20m after the houses, leave the drive, which has turned to tarmac and bends left, by turning **right** on a wide rough track. Where another tarmac drive joins from the right, veer **left**. At a T-junction turn **right** on a concrete drive. The magnificent property on your right is *Thornhill*. Continue onwards ignoring a stile on each side. The path slowly curves right, passing a house on your right. Ignore a footpath on your left here. The path becomes briefly tarmac and reverts to gravel as you pass the entrance to *Harelands* (who sell goose eggs). After more agricultural land, you reach



a delightfully picturesque cottage *Dog Gate Lodge*. Turn **left** here on a track down into woodland, still following the VW. *Hammerwood church, your next destination, is visible on the hill ahead.*

- 4 Your path descends between attractive meadows of gorse and hawthorn and takes you over a bridge across a wide stream where wild garlic is in profusion. The broad path rises through woodland and leads through a metal gate and uphill beside a pasture on your right. At the end of the field on your left, just before the woodland begins again, ignore a left turn, thus leaving the VW. Turn **right** round the edge of the field and, in 30m, look **left** for a narrow path leading you through a small wooden gate. A narrow path now leads between tall hedgerows, soon with a tree plantation on your right. You come out through a wooden gate carefully onto the main A264 road. Turn **right** on the road.

Leg 4: Hammerwood to Holtye 3½ km=2 miles



- 1 Immediately ignore a signed footpath on your left. (Incidentally, it's a footpath in East Sussex but *not* in Kent.) You pass the entrance to Hammerwood Park.

Hammerwood Park is a huge grade-I listed country house, built in 1792 by the architect Benjamin Latrobe. He was the same man who went on to build the Capitol building in Washington DC and part of the White House. (After the British burned them down in 1812, he helped restore them.) The house fell on hard times in the 1960s and was purchased in the 1970s by the rock band Led Zeppelin. It is open to the public Wed, Sat and Bank Holidays, June through September, but only by way of a tour at 2 pm. (Ring 01342 850594 for details.)

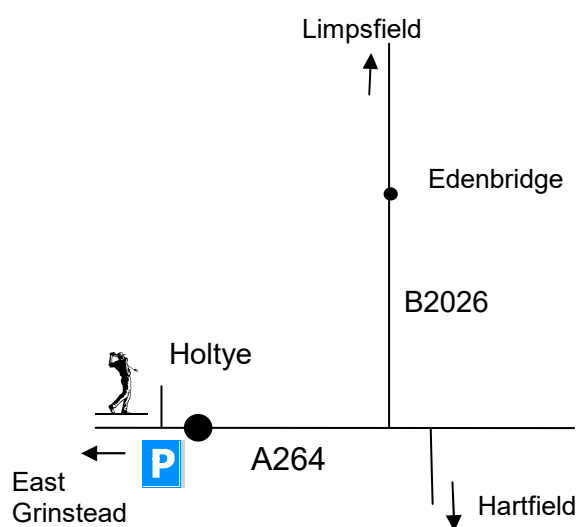
Continuing carefully along the road, you pass Hammerwood Church of St Stephen, an extraordinarily large church for such an isolated spot. Continue another 150m and, as the road bends left, cross it carefully and turn **left** on a tarmac drive. The track winds downhill by a house and past a metal gate. You pass an anglers' pond on your left and cross the Kent Water by a sluice, past another metal gate to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane. You soon pass *Scarletts* (or *Scarlets*), a gorgeous late-medieval timbered mansion and an old oast, reminding you that you are now in Kent. Continue along this very quiet lane, ignoring a footpath on your left, passing various interesting houses. The Kent Water here forms a long series of ponds, the largest being the Furnace Pond. You pass rocks characteristic of this part of Kent (see "A Way Through the Rocks" in this series).

- 2 At the end the lane bends right and you go over a sluice again, over the Kent Water and back into East Sussex. *Furnace Mill Cottage* is down on your left. Where the lane bends left again, **leave** it by taking an overgrown path into woods and immediately take the **left** fork, a narrow path uphill. At

the top, take a sunken path straight across a golf fairway and into woodland again by a marker post. The narrow woodland path soon rises to some golf tees. Keep to their right, crossing a tarmac lane by a marker post. Keep straight ahead beside woodland on your left and, where the path merges with a tarmac lane, veer **right** on it quickly reaching the main road opposite the *White Horse* where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Holtye is on the A264 road, 5 miles=8 km east of East Grinstead and 1 mile south of Cowden. A good scenic route avoiding big towns is via the B2026 road through Edenbridge (although the road surface is poor in parts).



By bus/train: Metrobus 291 runs from East Grinstead station to Forest Row, including Sundays. Check the timetable.

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