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## Mayfield

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Distance: 14 km=9 miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex

Date written: 4-sep-2017

Author: Stivaletti

Refreshments: Mayfield

Map: Explorer 136 (The Weald) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*Village, woodland, streams, wildflower meadows, views*

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### In Brief

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"I met an American who asked *where can I see the best of the old English countryside?* I right away thought of this one: it has so many small delights, no big ploughed fields, just meadows of wild flowers alternating with woodland." So says the author of this walk. "Another American who was staying near Mayfield called the villagers *The Folks Who Live on the Hill* (after Jerome Kern)." One poet called Mayfield *the sweetest village in England*. It's true: Mayfield is a gem. You can see the church on the hill from afar, and you arrive to find that the church is in the centre of the village with a charming High Street. And, yes, there are no big eye-openers on this walk but when you finish it and put all the remembered images together, you say "that was just perfect!"

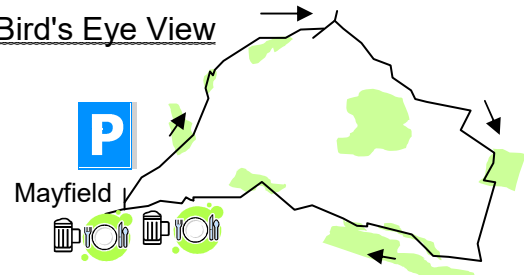
There are a fair number of stiles on this walk, since E.Sussex C.C. hasn't got round to replacing stiles with gates yet: however, some are a cinch to step over, one or two a bit wobbly, but none caused any great difficulty. Bear in mind too, you'll need to keep a close eye on the instructions in this guide because there's a lack of waymarkers on some of the paths, also one diversion, and at least one manoeuvre where you could sail ahead and miss the turn.



There are some nettles along the paths, so you need your legs covered; but there's no waist-high undergrowth. Boots are recommended for this walk because of the deep country terrain. It would be fine for a medium-to-small dog.

The walk begins at the free **Recreation Ground car park in Mayfield, East Sussex**, postcode **TN20 6TA**. You could also start in the free main car park (down a narrow lane beside *Mace*) or at the roadside. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Bird's Eye View

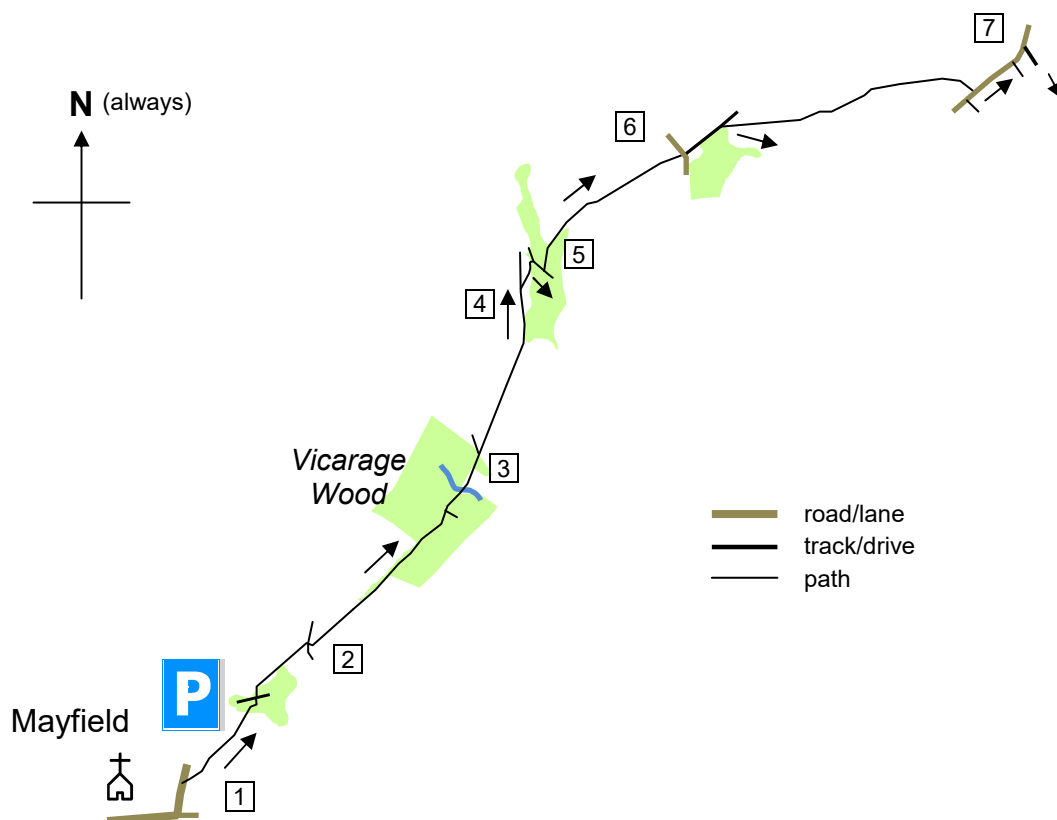


## The Walk

Mayfield is named either after the mayweed or May or Mary (the village sign depicts a maid). To locate the village, you have to know how the medieval boundaries work. So it is in the East Grinstead **division** of Sussex, the **hundred** of Loxfield Pelham, the **rape** of Pevensey, the **rural deanery** of Dallington, the **archdeaconry** of Hastings and the **diocese** of Chichester. During the early 1700s, Mayfield became a centre for "owling". This is a code for smuggling wool for brandy and silk. The leader of the local gang was Gabriel Tomkins. His gang had a reputation for not using much violence and also feeding back their profits into local community (in contrast to the notorious Hawkhurst and Groombridge gangs). In 1830 the village saw the Swing Riots and destruction of threshing machines, so bad that the army was called in. The local railway line was built in 1880 and in 1897 it suffered a fatal crash.

The legend of St Dunstan (dedicatee of the church) made Mayfield famous. The saint was a blacksmith and was working at his forge when the Devil dropped in, disguised as a beautiful woman. Dunstan spotted cloven hooves beneath the dress and grabbed the devil by the nose with his red-hot pincers (still on view to visitors). The old Saxon church was largely rebuilt in 1389 after a village fire. The present church has tomb slabs made of the Sussex iron that made the village prosperous. In 1970 some cracks appeared in the tower and it was forbidden for all the bells to be rung at once, till the tower was repaired and the bells returned at Whitechapel. Dunstan became Archbishop of Canterbury from 960 onwards and is credited with founding the Archbishops Palace which you see at the east end. It is now a Catholic school. The prosperity of the village can be seen from the splendid houses, especially the Middle House in the High Street, now an oak-beamed inn. If you arrive in late September, you may witness the annual carnival in memory of the Protestant martyrs of 1556.

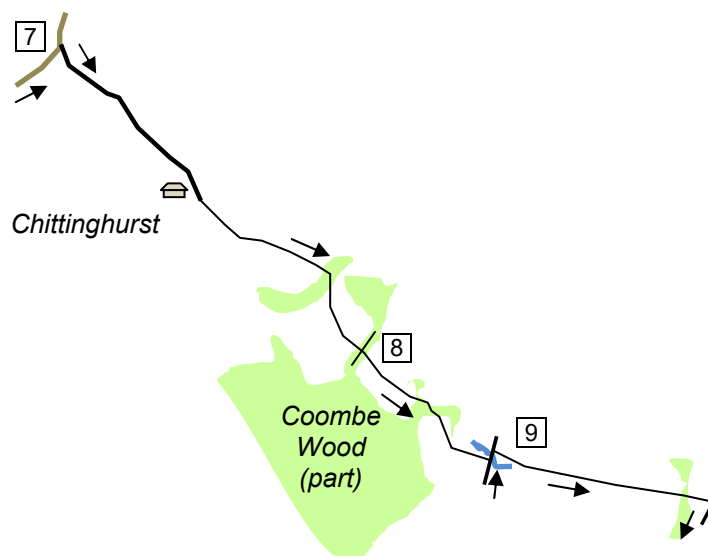
**WC** For visitors, the Mace store never closes. There is a WC down steps in the *London House*, next to the church.



- 1 *Village outskirts.* From the Recreation Ground car park just off the Tunbridge Wells Road, turn **left** but keep to the **right** of the Memorial Hall. Go straight ahead on a tarmac path, avoiding minor paths left, past two benches. As you near a skateboarding park, keep straight on across the grass. Follow the left-hand end of a football pitch and go down steps to meet a track. Cross straight over the track, going over a step stile, and bear **right** along the edge of the meadow. A stile takes you into another similar meadow similarly, followed by another. In this third meadow, avoid a narrow path that forks left and keep ahead to meet a 4-way fingerpost. You now have a wonderful foretaste of the hilly country which you will be traversing. *The figure on the vane of Glebe Farm Oast ahead to your left is a little cat with a curly tail.*
- 2 *First woodland stream encounter.* Cross straight over a cinder track and take a path down the grass, following a wire fence on your right. At the bottom, go over a stile onto a path along a band of trees. A simple stile takes you into a sloping meadow. Keep straight on along the bottom. The path enters trees and another stile leads into Vicarage Wood. Follow the main path, always slightly downhill, veering a fraction right as you go, ignoring a waymarked footpath on the right. Your path goes over a long bridge across a stream – the first of a vast number of bridges you will cross during this walk. After the bridge, ignore a woodland path on your left and instead veer **right** to a stile leading you into a lighter area.
- 3 *A chain of hillsides.* Keep left uphill in this rather wild landscape, arriving in 100m on an open hillside. Keep exactly the same direction, with a yellow arrow to guide you next to a bush ahead. After 230m you come through a band of hazel onto a similar hillside dotted with recently planted oaks. In 200m, a gap in the trees leads you onto a third hillside, now with woodland close by on your right. In 100m, your path forks. The left fork stays on the open grass but your route is the **right** fork staying close to the trees and going over a stile.
- 4 *Second woodland stream encounter.* This unnamed little wood is a maze of streams and zigzagging paths and you need to concentrate for a while. *The first tree here was festooned at the time of writing with coloured ribbons.* A short knobbly twisty path leads in 20m or so down into the wood to a T-junction where you will see yellow arrows pointing left and right. Turn sharp **right** here on a wider path, almost reversing your direction. (But by going up a bank ahead *before* turning right, you can avoid a patch of mud here.) Go over a bridge with railings and immediately turn sharp **left**, passing a 3-way fingerpost. Keep straight ahead, keeping a yellow arrow well to your left, going over another similar bridge.
- 5 *The tree garden.* The path leads up into a sloping meadow. This path is quite clear but you may need to look down at your feet, so as not to lose it as it winds round the brambly bushes. Your path runs close to some lime trees on your right and enters the dark wood, meeting a deep stream bed on your right. Hop down and up over a stony ford, through a small wooden gate and into an open meadow. Your path leads straight up into a tree garden, a tended lawn with various trees, as though placed there for the sheer pleasure of ascending to a bench seat at the top and looking back to admire the view. Go over a stile here to a tarmac lane.
- 6 *An elegant drive to Tidebrook.* Cross straight over the lane and a grass triangle, between pillars, and follow a shingle drive which becomes a peaty



woodland path. After 150m, as a field comes into view, your path forks. Take the **right** fork, over a (broken) stile, a wide sheltered path. Soon you have fields on both sides, visible through the thin shroud of trees. The scene on the left changes to another fine tree garden with lawns and fruit trees, as you pass a small pond and a bench seat, between clipped hedges. After a total of 700m on this path, you reach the rear entrance to the big house, *Tidebrook*. Keep straight ahead, between the redbrick house with its stained-glass windows and its various sheds, and follow its driveway out to a road where you can confirm that you were indeed on a public footpath. Turn **left** on the road and follow it for over 200m, passing an irrelevant footpath, a bus stop (do they really *use* buses here?) and *Stream House*. The road bends left a fraction as it goes over a bridge across a stream.



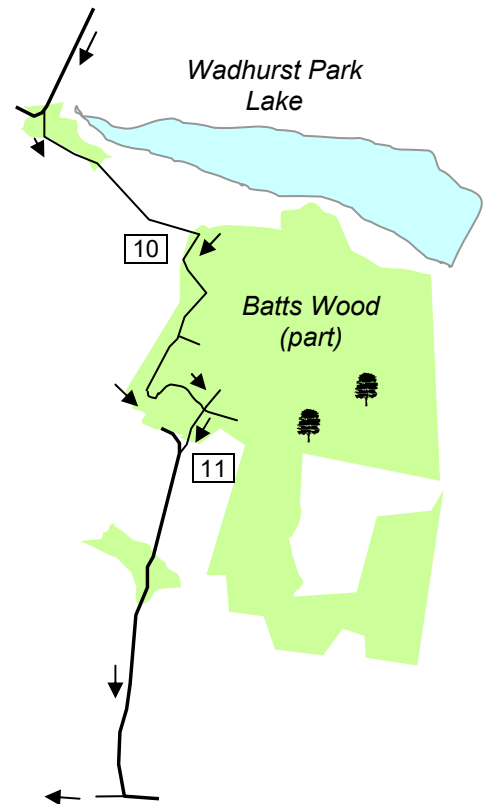
- [7] *Chittinghurst junction.* Immediately after the bridge, turn sharp **right** on a driveway which is also a public footpath (although in 2017 the marker has been temporarily mislaid). In 500m, you pass a house *Chittinghurst* on your right. *Note: the Private sign applies to the house and garden, not to the path which is most definitely a public footpath!* The track has become a mostly grassy path. You come over a large bridge over a (usually dry) stream and through a large metal gate. *(Note the yellow arrows pointing the way you have come, confirming that you were indeed on a footpath.)* Your route is up the slope of the meadow, a fraction right. *The great forested hilltop of Combe Hill looms on your right.* Another large metal gate leads to a 4-way junction with a fingerpost.
- [8] *Flat bridges and Tide Brook.* Ignore the tempting woodland paths left and right and continue ahead into a meadow, through a large wooden gate. *At the time of writing, this gate – and the one at the other end – was standing on its own as if waiting for a perimeter fence to be built which may be complete when you do this walk.* Follow a path along the middle. A band of tall oaks heralds another grassy meadow. Veer immediately **right** through a similar large wooden gate. Your wide path goes over a flat bridge, through a ragged meadow, and reaches a 3-way fingerpost by another flat bridge. Keep straight on, ignoring a blue arrow pointing right (which is for local horse riders). At the other side, turn **left** on a concrete drive, going over the Tide Brook (a tributary of the River Rother and feeder for Wadhurst Park Lake).

9 *To the lake.* 15m after the bridge, just *before* a fingerpost, go **right** on a narrow extremely muddy (but thankfully short) path into a meadow. In a brief distance, go over a stile on a faint path across a much larger meadow. In 250m, another stile takes you into a further meadow, this time with a wire fence on your right to confirm your direction. In nearly 200m, at the far side, go through a tall swing-gate and continue up the crest of a hill where you meet a stony track. Turn sharp **right** on the track in the direction of several waymarkers. In 200m, the track comes over a flat bridge under trees and here you meet another fingerpost. Avoiding the swampy trees on your left (an arm of the lake), turn **left** on a wide path. In 100m, the path leads you through a band of oak and hawthorn and it now veers slightly right up the slope of the meadow. You now gain your first sight of Wadhurst Park Lake on your left. The path goes down through a band of various trees and up to a high point with a good view of the lake and the house beyond.

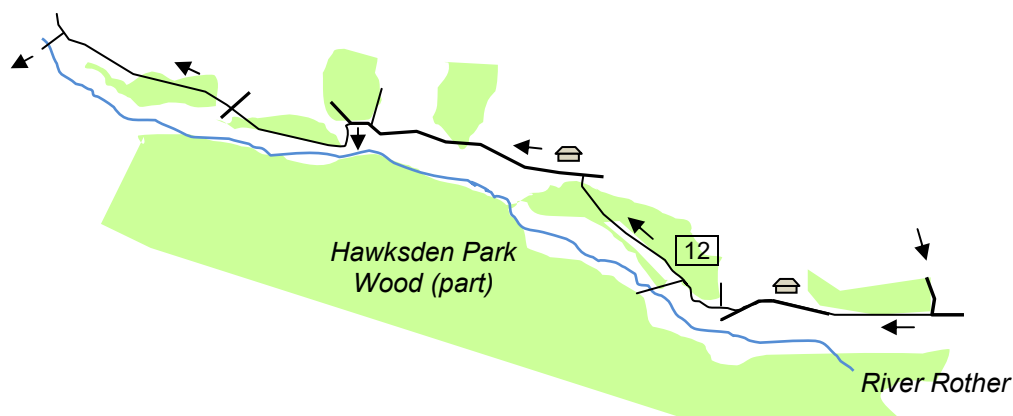
*Wadhurst Park is a Victorian gothic mansion, now rather overshadowed by the modern buildings of the estate. It is owned by Hans Rausing, the richest man in England (although he is in fact Swedish). He inherited his father's Tetra Pak business (familiar if you've ever shopped for soup in a square cardboard carton). The name popped up in the news when his wife died from crack abuse in 2012 and he hid her body.*

10 *Batts Wood.* Walk up to the edge of the wood ahead and go **right** through a tall swing-gate. Immediately ignore a black arrow pointing left into the wood and stay on a path beside the wire fence just outside the wood. Soon your path runs through a fringe of the wood and widens. This is Batts Wood, one of the great lonely places in the southeast. About 300m after that tall gate, there is an info tablet on your left. *The wood is 1½ km wide and an important nature reserve.* Ignore a left junction here and continue straight on. As you near a garden and a house, the footpath is diverted (2017, but it looks permanent). So turn **left** and **left** again, following the direction arrows. Your path runs beside a large pit on your right and in 100m you come to a marker post. Keep straight ahead for 10m to a second marker post and turn **right** here on a wide path downhill. At the bottom, go over a stile beside a large wooden gate and keep straight ahead on a narrow path through shrubs. You come out to a chalky track.

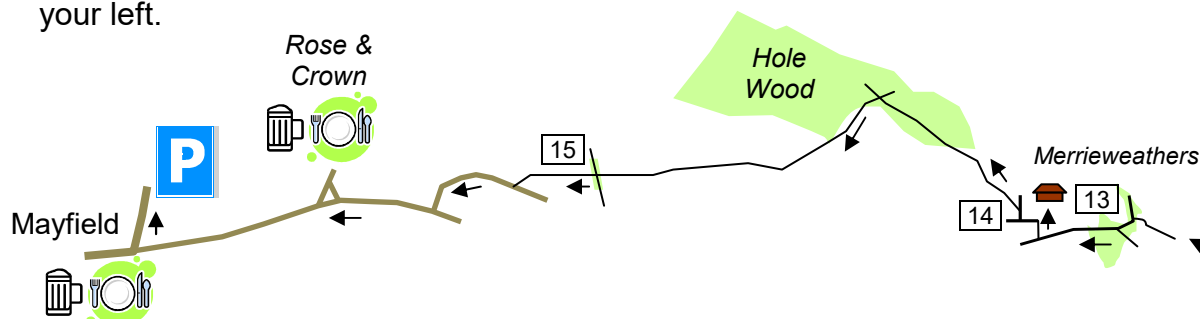
11 *An avenue to Hare Holt.* Veer **left** to join the track. In 200m or so you come through a gate into woods and emerge on an avenue of mature oaks. In a further 450m, your track suddenly bends left. **Leave** the track here by turning **right** through a wooden barrier onto a woodland path. In 150m, a small wooden gate leads out into a manicured meadow. Keep to the right along a raised section, passing disused garages, and follow a shingle path past *Hare Holt*, with its unspoilt oast on your left. Leave the property along a tarmac drive and where, after 100m or so, the tarmac suddenly becomes concrete, fork **right** on a narrow waymarked path into woods. In only 50m, you meet a fingerpost indicating a junction on the right. Ignore the junction and continue straight on. In another 100m, you reach a waymarked 3-way junction.



If you have the OS map you will see there's a two-way choice here, north or south of the River Rother, re-joining after a mile (1½ km). The south route through Hawksden Park Wood is quite fabulous, but it can be muddy and the endless forest is a little monotonous. This walk chooses the lighter option which is a delight, full of interest.



- 12** *The lighter side.* Turn **right** at the 3-way junction into the little White's Wood. You come over a stile beside a large metal gate into a small meadow. Keep ahead and, at the other side, go over a stile (or through the large metal gate), back into woods. Your path runs uphill into a lighter area. Turn **left** at a T-junction towards a timbered house, *Hampden Lodge*. Walk past the house (there's another gem of a cottage on the drive to the left) and go over a stile beside a large metal gate. Follow a concrete-and-grass path, past a pond on your right, beside hayfields on your left. After about 400m, you come down to a grove of trees with a 3-way fingerpost where a concrete path comes down to meet you. Keep straight on, passing another pond on your right. In only 30m, as the track leads up in a hayfield, turn **left** over the grass, as directed by a waymarker. In 50m, at a fingerpost, bear **right** along the right-hand side of a long meadow. In 200m or so, at the end of the meadow, go through a small wooden gate to reach a driveway (leading to Rolf's Farm on your right). Cross the driveway diagonally right to a grassy path opposite, under a large oak tree. Ignore a little bridge on your left and continue ahead to go over a stile or through a metal gate (both unneeded thanks to a gap on your left). Walk the length of the meadow (about 100m), followed by a section under oaks with the River Rother on your left, and a second, even longer, meadow (about 200m). Finally, you come past a redundant stile to a major 3-way junction with a wide bridge on your left.



- 13** *Merrieweathers.* Go **left** over the bridge across the River Rother. In about 50m you come to a 3-way junction, where the forest path (the "south route" discussed above) meets you from the left. Bear **right** here on a wide woodland path. In 150m, look to your right for a wide grassy path leading to farm buildings. (There is no waymarker here as the original footpath has been

“lost”; the path is 80m *before* a modern white-walled cottage.) Turn **right** on this path to meet a tarmac farm drive in 50m. *Merrieweathers House and the Mill House are on your right, between dragon-topped pillars, a top-notch hotel / conference / wedding centre.* Turn **left** on the tarmac and, in 30m, turn **right** on a concrete drive, heading towards a concrete barn. But, in only 15m, just before a new high metal gate, go **left** up the grass following a yellow arrow.

- 14 *A final woodland encounter.* Keep to the **left**-hand side of a hedge to go through a wooden swing-gate. Continue uphill and keep on dead straight, under a tall oak on your right, on a faint path along a small ragged meadow between trees. The path curves left to run along the right-hand side of a larger meadow. In under 100m, the path curves **right** to lead you over a stile into Hole Wood. Keep to the main path through this old coppiced woodland. After 200m, you meet a 4-way fingerpost. Turn **left** here uphill. *Don't miss this turn!* This knobbly path leads uphill never far from the left-hand edge. After 150m, the path emerges into open ground and continues up the left-hand side. In 100m, the path veers slightly right in order to pass to the right of a bank of trees. *The tower on the hill on your right belongs to Mayfield College, a Catholic boys' school, which closed recently.* In the far corner, you meet a pair of stiles at a junction. Go over the **right**-hand stile, down through hollies and up into a meadow.

- 15 *The Rose and Crown!* Take a path across the centre, heading just to the right of some houses. On reaching them, keep to a narrow path between holly bushes leading to a residential road. Turn **right** on the road and, at a T-junction, turn **right** again. You quickly reach a little green, a pleasant little corner of Mayfield with the agreeable sight of the *Rose and Crown* pub on the other side of the green.



*The Rose and Crown is a charmer with real atmosphere. If you can nab the round table near the bay window, you have the afternoon made. But don't expect a host of real ales: the Rose and Crown is a wine specialist! To go with the tippie, you can sample a wild boar sandwich or a Mediterranean platter, or a Sunday roast. There's a pleasant patio and dining area but the tables at the front by the green are the real appeal.*

After possible refreshment, continue in your original direction, on the road which takes you uphill for 400m, past more weatherboard houses, till finally you reach the start of the High Street. After possibly having another look at the village, turn **right** on the Tunbridge Wells Road to where the walk began.

## Getting there

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By car: Mayfield lies on a side loop of the A267 Tunbridge Wells-Heathfield road. To get there from the London area, take the A21 to Tunbridge Wells. Follow the main A26 road beside the green on your right for 1 km ( $\frac{2}{3}$  mile) and, at a small roundabout in front of the white Barclays Bank, leave the A26 by forking **left**, away from the green on the A267. Follow the A267 through Frant and Mark Cross until, nearly 3 miles after Mark Cross, you see a tourist sign for *Mayfield* pointing left. The village is  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile further. Park on the left in the Recreation Ground car park, just before you reach the High Street.

By bus/train: bus 251 runs from Tunbridge Wells station to Mayfield, not Sun. Check the timetables.

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