



Old Heathfield

Distance: 10 km=6½ miles or 4 km=2½ miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex

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Refreshments: Warbleton, Vines Cross, Old Heathfield

Map: Explorer 123 (Eastbourne) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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Green pastures, woodland, villages, pubs

In Brief

This is a walk in the quietest part of Southeast England, constantly changing from woodland to gentle green meadows, streams, bridges and the occasional village. Old Heathfield stands on a hill, the weathered remains of the High Weald and the steeple of its church shows over the tree-tops at many places on this walk.

For visitors who want only a short walk and a quiet time in the village, this walk can be shortened to a 4 km=2½ miles pub walk.

There are three good pubs along the route of the full walk. Booking may be necessary: for the *Black Duck*, ring 01435 830636; for the *Brewers Arms*, ring 01435 812435; for the *Star Inn*, ring 01435 863570.



Although all the paths are nice and clear, there are some nettles and brambles that might catch out people wearing shorts. During the not-very-dry summer of 2015 there was little mud. However, because of the moist wealden woodland, boots are always recommended for the longer version.

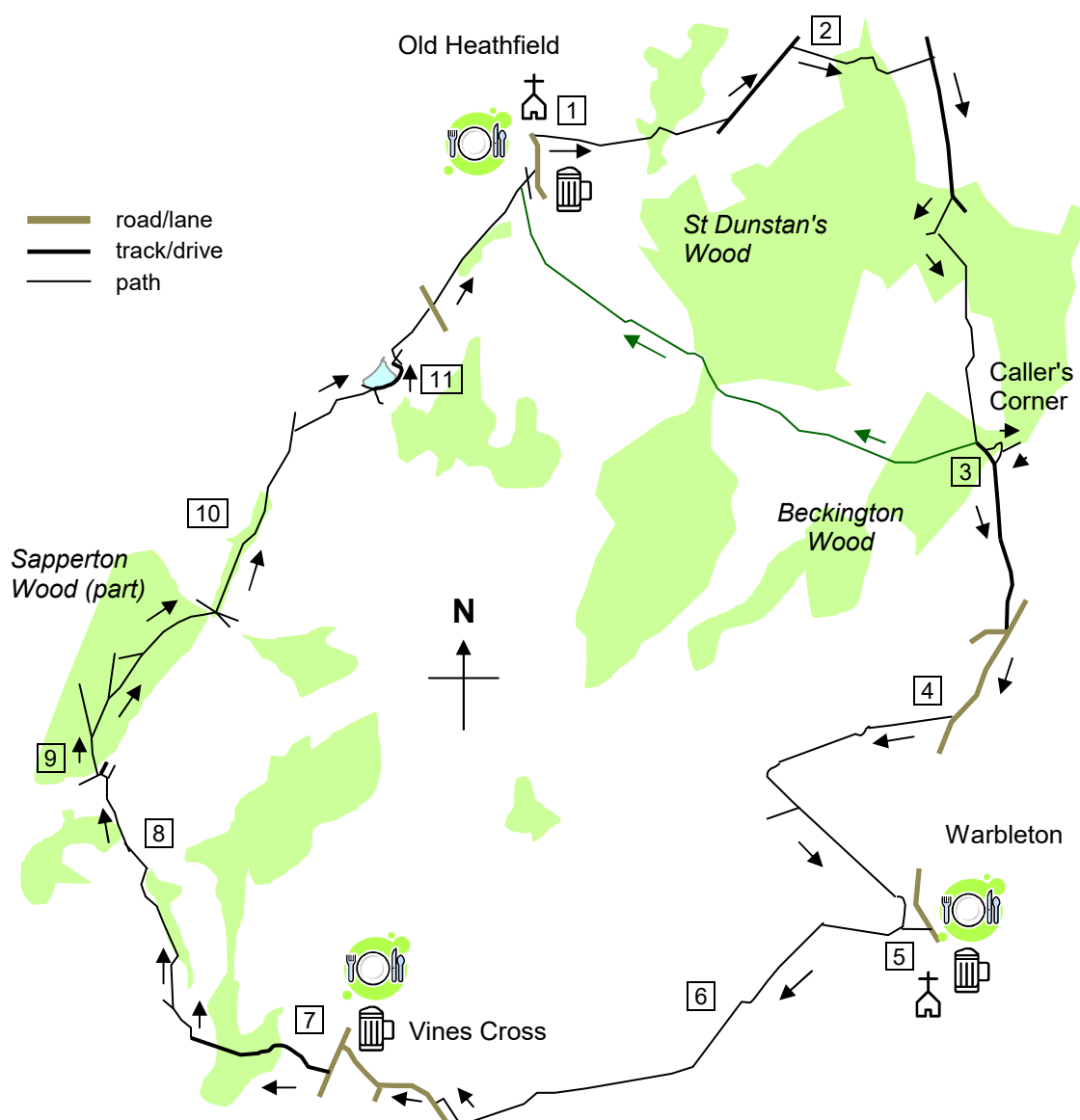


Except for two challenging stiles (see note below), your dog will also enjoy this walk.

The walk begins in the village of **Old Heathfield**, postcode **TN21 9AH**, which is about 1½ miles from the town of Heathfield. Park in the road near the cricket club *before* you reach the church and walk to the church, forking left on the narrow lane. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Welcome to this “remote old-world district which seems to have been wrapped in slumber ever since the furnaces of the old Sussex ironmasters were extinguished”. So wrote Lady Dorothy Nevill, an aristocratic newcomer, in the 1870s. Your route is through these slumbering woods and valleys, over drowsy meadows and streams. The old iron industry that dominated every corner is long gone but it survives in the millponds and the local names. Lady Dorothy belonged to the other class, as seen in the vastness of Heathfield Park which you may have passed. Before the industry was lost to the north, you would have seen here everything that can be made of iron “scythes, hooks, sickles, nails, plates, hammers, anvils, grates, forge tackle, pig-iron” and more precise tools such as “chisels, tongs and compasses”. Old Heathfield was here first, of course, and its remarkable church and pub (of which more at the end) and its few scattered houses speak eloquently of its past.



- 1 Start the walk in Old Heathfield, by the church. The west “entrance” (normally the ceremonial entrance to a church) is bricked up. Walk round the church, pass the side entrance, and continue to the next corner. Now go down the grass through the cemetery, keeping to the right-hand side, and go out through a kissing-gate into a meadow. Take a path straight

ahead across the centre and follow it as it goes down into a band of trees. The path takes you over a stream using a footbridge, then up over a stile, continuing upwards across the centre of another meadow. At the top, go through a large metal gate (or over a stile) and keep ahead on a farm track. In 250m, where the tall trees on your right end, turn **right** through a gap, on an unsigned path, over a stile (or through the large metal gate on its right). (If you have a large dog, note that there are two stiles in the next section without a gap. Also, occasionally there is a small group of fine pedigree cattle in the second field which the author found no need to bypass despite the ample room to do so. If either of these issues affect you, simply keep straight on instead of turning right until you go through a metal gate next to a house to the main road; turn **right**, walk just 70m and turn **right** again on a bridleway through a small wooden gate passing next to Pinewood Farm and rejoining the route at point (*) in the next section.)

2



Go along the left-hand side of a meadow with good views on your right and, at the other side, go over a stile into woodland, part of St Dunstan's Wood, a notable bluebell wood as you will notice if you come in late spring. Follow the path, first through ancient coppices, then beneath more mature trees. The path leads over a footbridge and veers right. Come out of the wood over a stile into a pasture, keep ahead along the short left-hand side, go over another stile and turn **right** on a bridleway. (*) The bridleway runs along a beautiful route under oak trees and enters St Dunstan's Wood again. Immediately keep straight ahead, ignoring a track on your left. After 100m, take the **left** fork (the right fork being private). A metal gate leads on to a path between fences with open fields on your right. After a second metal gate you are walking along the right-hand side of a rough meadow. A third metal gate takes you on a path between hedges and a fourth metal gate places you on a track coming from St Dunstan's Farm at a spot known as Caller's Corner.

Decision point. If you are doing the **short** (4 km=2½ mile) walk, skip to the end of this text and do the **Beckington Wood Traverse**.

3

Keep straight ahead on the cinder track which quickly curves left. Before it curves right again, keep ahead on a grass path which goes right over a robust footbridge. Avoid a small tempting metal gate and bridge on the left and keep ahead, re-joining the track and keeping left uphill between ferny banks. You pass the entrance to a red tile-hung house which is actually an old oast, followed by *Threeways Farm*. Avoid a swing-gate and footpath on the left and continue on the track to a junction of tarmac lanes. Ignore Furnace Lane on your right and continue ahead on Church Hill. Ignore a bridleway on your left but, 40m further, look on your **right** for a small finger-post. (You can stay on the lane: the route chosen here gives you better views.) Go carefully up steps here and over a 3-step stile into a fenced pasture.

4

Turn **left** along the edge, go over a stile and on a faint path diagonally across the centre of the next pasture. *You have great views now of Old and "New" Heathfield with the church prominent as so often on this walk.* In the far corner, go over a stile and go **right** along the edge of the next field. Follow the path round the perimeter and, after about 250m, keep **left** again round the far corner. In 80m, where the field edge turns right, keep straight ahead across the centre of the field, heading for an electricity pole beyond which Warbleton church tower can be seen. [This path may be rather obscure or claggy after reaping, in which case simply stay on the field edge, turning **left** in the corner to the church.] When you reach the churchyard, your path veers left



round the fence. Turn **right** to cross a drive into the churchyard of St Mary, Warbleton. Your route is across the west end of the church into the far cemetery, but first you will want to walk round the church, out through the lichgate, to the village and the pub.



Warbleton is tiny. You have already seen it all. The villagers are called the "warblers" and if you wait patiently you may hear a passable rendering of "Nessun Dorma" from one of the cottages. The "Black Duck" is visited from afar for its good menu which includes some quite reasonable more-than-nibbles. A fine back beer garden gives great views over the land. The inn is open all the year but closed on Mondays (except bank holidays). The old Church is interesting but you need to ask in the "Black Duck" for a key.

5 Cross the west side of the church (past the main back door) and walk into the adjoining cemetery. (If coming back from the village, that means a **left** turn at the far corner). Go diagonally across the cemetery following the yellow arrow and through a gap in the hedge. Go down the centre of the field down to the bracken hedge at the bottom and turn **left** on a grassy path along the edge of the field. After 300m, look for a marker post [2015: with no marker on your side], turn **right** through a gap in the hedge and **left** again, keeping the same direction. *Don't miss this turn: it is not obvious!*

6 After about 200m, near the far corner of the field, your path veers **right** under power lines, cutting the corner, and takes you over a long bridge and down steps. Take a path, a bit to the right, across the centre of the next field. At the other side, the path goes through a wide gap and continues straight ahead up the next field, keeping straight on past a clump of elderberries. Your path goes through a band of trees by a stagnant pond and continues along the left-hand side of the next field. At the top, as you approach a road of Vines Cross, bear **right** along the edge and in 80m, go **left** over a stile (or through a large metal gate) and **right** on the road. Follow the road through the village, ignoring a footpath on your right and keep straight on by the pond, avoiding Ballsocks Lane on your left. Continue up to a T-junction by the *Brewers Arms*, a regular less pretentious pub which is open all day.



Vines Cross was famous in past times for cannon manufacture - and later for its vines! But the name may be a tribute to a 16th-century vintner who happened to be called "Vyne". The "Brewers Arms" has a wide menu and some good brews and its attendance is boosted by the campsite on the Hidden Spring Vineyard.

7 Turn **left** at the T-junction and, in 80m, turn **right** on a tarmac drive with a sign for Hook Farm. Ignore a track on your left and follow the winding track downhill. It passes *Hook Cottage* and snakes down into woods, through a stream gully. Just before a cottage and its outhouses, go **right** through a gap into a meadow and **left** along the edge. After a gap into the next wild meadow, immediately take a path that runs diagonally **right** across the centre. (The path is very clear once you see it.) At the other side, go over a step-over and a stile in the hedge and continue in the same direction across the next meadow. At the other side, veer **left** along the right-hand edge so that you stay in the meadow, past a big oak tree. The strip of woodland on your right thickens to a dense dell concealing several ponds. Hop over the fence ahead of you (there are some bits of tree trunk to use as steps).

- 8 There are two large metal gates ahead, not counting one more on the left. Go through the **left**-hand of the two and continue straight ahead into the next field. Turn **left** in this field. Your official path veers slightly right away from the edge to cut the corner, meeting a farm track on the other side. (Sometimes the planted crops may keep you along the edge.) Turn right on the farm track, heading for the brick houses and other buildings of Grantleys Farm. The track leads through a small wooden gate beside a large one and becomes a tarmac drive. Follow the drive as it bends **left**, ignoring a stile and yellow arrow straight ahead. Immediately take the **second** track on your **right**, going past a *welcome* sign for Sapperton Wood and a large new metal gate.
- 9 *Sapperton Wood seems to be almost unknown, except to locals, part of a wider site of biological interest.* In 50m, take the **right** fork, really straight on. In another 150m, you come to a fingerpost where a path joins from the left. Take the **right** fork here, staying close to the wire fence on your right. In another 100m, avoid another left fork, still staying close to the fence. As you reach the end of the wood, 200m further on, you need to hop over, or weave round, a succession of fallen tree trunks which present no real problem. You quickly pass another sign for Sapperton Wood and go through a small metal gate to a 5-way fingerpost. Avoid a stile on your left and two paths on your right and take a good clear path straight ahead running through a beautiful strip of beechwoods.
- 10 In nearly 200m (too soon!), the path leads over a stile in a fence and out into a meadow. Keep along the left-hand side, passing a 4-way fingerpost, keeping ahead over a stile. Keep to the bank on your left to find the next feature: a small bridge leading into a meadow. Go up the left-hand side and through a large wooden gate, leading to a little wooden hut and a house. Just before the house, go **right** through a large metal gate and take a path diagonally down the meadow. On the hill ahead is Old Heathfield church spire again and your direction is a fraction to the right of it. After a rather bumpy crossing on a very faint path, look for two stiles in the far hedge, and go over the one on the right [Nov 2020: care! broken on other side]. Bear **right** in the next small meadow which, at the time of writing, has been cleared of bracken for haymaking, and go over a stile in the right-hand corner. Turn **left** here on a wide track leading immediately to a pond. Turn **right** beside the Old Mill Pond, as it is called, and follow the edge of the pond on your left.
- 11 The track is now pleasant and grassy, with is a rather steep bank down to your right. *Thanks to the microclimate here, this place yields the first blackberries of the summer.* The track curves left towards a gate leading into a dusty yard. Just before this gate, take a **right** fork by a yellow arrow into bushes and keep **left** on a rather overgrown path. (In fact it is easier to go through the yard, fork right and turn left where the path intersects.) This path crosses a dusty track coming from the yard and continues on the other side on another narrow path which bends right. Follow this path along a strip of woodland, partly along the course of a dry stream. In 150m it leads to a road. Cross the road and go over a stile, up the right-hand side of a meadow, heading for the church. Go over a stile [Nov 2020: broken] into the next meadow, after which your path veers a fraction left up the centre of the meadow, heading for the group of elegant trees near the church. Go through a very old kissing-gate, cross straight over a tarmac drive, take a diagonal path opposite and go over a wide see-saw stile (careful!). Veer **left** on the lane to the *Star Inn* and the church where the walk began.





The Star Inn fits perfectly into the old world of the village, with its dusty exterior and creepers almost obliterating the signboard. This is a gem of a pub, but of the kind you might see in Brittany rather than Sussex. There is even a big family table outside in the Provençale style. The interior is more English with a restaurant-standard menu. Ales include the local Gun, plus two others from the neighbouring counties. The large lawn and lovely garden have enviable views across the countryside. Highly recommended by walkers.

Beckington Wood Traverse

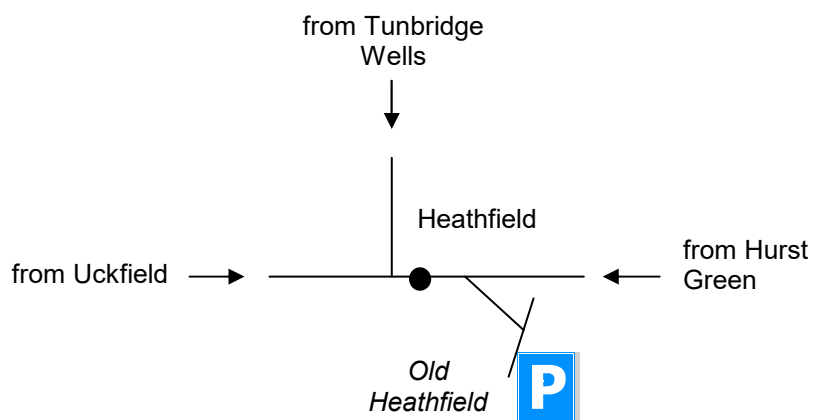
Take this route if you are doing the much shorter 4 km=2½ mile walk.



At Caller's Corner, go **right** over a stile into woods and follow this beautiful wide woodland path. *In late spring, bluebells abound.* [2015: you need to step over some fallen chestnut branches.] The path leads over a (manageable) broken stile into a hayfield. Go straight across the centre and, at the far side, go over a stile into a wild meadow. Keep straight on, under tall oaks, on a wide path over a heath of bracken and straight down to meet a track. Veer **right** on the track, down through a belt of trees. This shingle track goes over a stream with the church now in view. The track turns left round the edge of some thorn bushes. Before it bends right again, go **right** through a small gap in the hedge. *Don't miss this turn!* Go up the left-hand side of a rough meadow and, at the top, go left-right over a stile and up the right-hand side of the next meadow. At the end, where a path meets you from the left, go through a small wooden gate, along a fenced path and through a large metal gate. In 80m, go right through a very old kissing-gate, cross straight over a tarmac drive, take a diagonal path opposite and go over a wide see-saw stile (careful!). Veer **left** on the lane to the *Star Inn* and the church where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Heathfield is situated somewhere between Uckfield on the A22 and Hurst Green on the A21. But if you use the A21 it may be best to come through Tunbridge Wells (or bypass it on the A264) and then go south on the A267. This part of the country is so quiet, Heathfield could be said to be "in the middle of nowhere". Old Heathfield is clearly marked just east of the town.



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