



Piltdown, Fletching, Maresfield

Distance: 12 km=7½ miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex

Date written: 21-may-2018

Author: Stivaletti

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Refreshments: Fletching, Maresfield, Piltdown

Map: Explorer 135 (Ashdown Forest) *but the map below should be sufficient*

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

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Villages, fields, green meadows, churches, lakes, parkland, woodland

In Brief

This is a varied walk through fields, flowery meadows, forest and villages in East Sussex. There is a great deal of historical interest in two attractive villages, including two medieval churches. One location, Piltdown, was the site of a famous scientific scandal.

There are several excellent places to eat and drink along the route. To enquire at the *Griffin Inn* in Fletching, ring 01825-722890. For the *Chequers* in Maresfield, ring 01825- 749970.

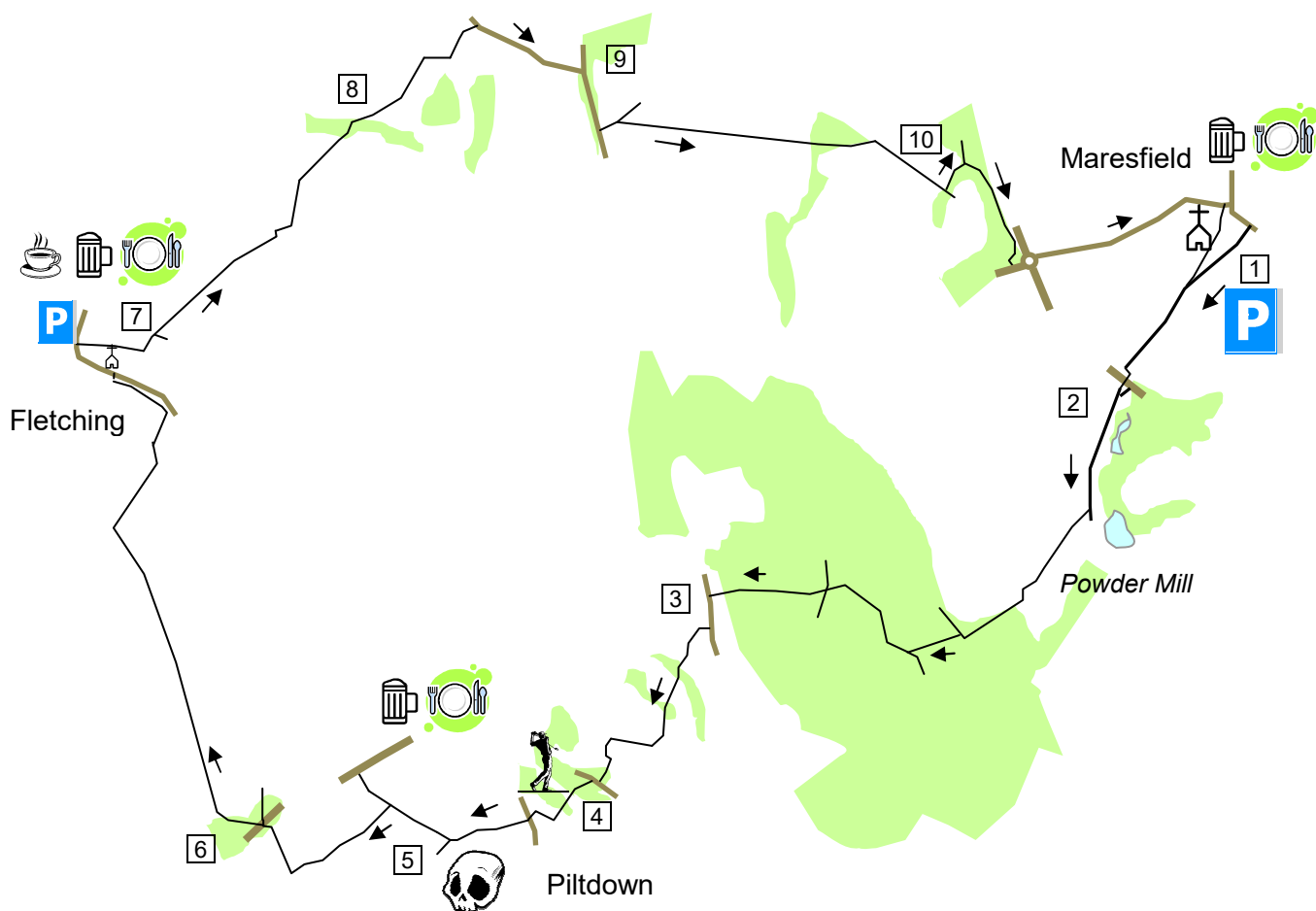


There are a few nettles on some short stretches of the narrower paths so shorts are not advisable. Boots are better than trainers on this walk because of the long paths across fields and because in a wetter climate there might be some mud in the woods. Your dog can certainly come on this walk (with a lead) but only if he is not too big, because of the stiles. The author did not see any livestock but there were some old cattle footprints.

The walk begins in the village of **Maresfield**, just off the A22 trunk road, in East Sussex. There is plenty of room alongside the Recreation Ground, postcode **TN22 2EH**, www.w3w.co/manage.purse.clouds. Another good starting point is the village of Fletching, postcode **TN22 3SY**, where there is a free car park. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Maresfield probably gets its name not from horses but as a corruption of "mere" i.e. "pool". Historically, it gained its living from the iron industry, as you will see from the string of ponds along your route shortly. St Bartholomew's church dates from the 1100s, as you see in the south wall where a hidden window was found, originating from Norman times. The tower dates from 1412 having been built by Lord Pelham who was manorial lord at the time and wanted a strong defensive construction since enemy invasions were a constant worry. In the south transept there is a painting on the glass by Blanche Shelley, the only child of the Shelley family which dominated life here from their home in nearby Maresfield Park Manor.



- 1 Beginning in the Recreation Ground in Maresfield, walk along a track away from the road with the Recreation Ground on your left. The track becomes a narrow drive and runs beside a small sports hut and a line of poplars with a grassy meadow on your left. After 250m you pass a kissing-gate on your right. **This is where the path from the church joins the walk.** Follow the drive past houses on your right and stay on it to the end. Go **left** between posts and **right** through an underpass beneath the main A22 road. Go over a stile and keep straight ahead along a beautiful avenue, part of the *Powder Mill*.

The Powder Mill is named after a water-powered gunpowder mill which stood here, a major product of the original village of Maresfield.

2 The path passes a string of ponds with a wide range of tree species and woods on the far side. You reach the entrance to *Powder Mill House*, with a view of the lake beyond. Turn **right** and **left** here, as indicated, on a narrow path. The path runs behind the house's garden and then passes through an old coppice. It takes you over a long bridge across a stream and along a narrow woodland path. The field on your right gives way to woodland and you come over a covered stream. *Note the "chair" carved out of a tree trunk.* Just 3m after that, you reach a cross paths by a *Fire Safety* sign. Turn **right** and immediately **left**, ignoring a narrow path on your right. Follow the path through the depths of the great Park Wood. In nearly 200m, you come to a 3-way junction: keep **right** here. Stay on the main path, avoiding all minor paths off. In 400m you reach a 4-way junction. Veer **left** here, avoid a forestry track hard on your left and continue straight over on another path through the woods. In 400m you finally come out to a lane in the scattered village of Piltdown, opposite *Parkwood* with its magnificent garden of spring blossoms.

3 Turn **left** on the lane, approaching the golf clubhouse on your left. (*Just ahead on your right, you may like to admire the fine topiary that runs along the frontage of Piltdown Cottage, though in 2022 badly affected by box blight.*) In 100m, turn **right** on a footpath, by a signpost, on a wide sandy track leading onto the golf course. Turn **left** round the back of the garden and follow the ledge until your path veers right a little oppose the last house. The path now continues straight ahead over the open fairway. If you stand with your back to the houses, you will see the next waymarker at about "11o'clock", standing in the heather. Watching out for flying balls (a general precaution for the next half hour), cross straight over the grass, heading for that marker post. You pass a large bunker on your left which at the time of writing was derelict. Cross another fairway to a marker post under a nearby oak tree. Veer a fraction right here and continue across rough grass to another marker post under an oak. Turn abruptly **right** here, as indicated, and head for a long bench seat under some trees, about 150m away, just beyond a golf tee. *Here you can watch the players teeing off which is quite relaxing and amusing.* Turn **left** behind the tee to a 3-way signpost. Go **left** here for just 10m to find a refreshing drinking fountain by a bench seat and a waste bin. Turn **right** past the bench and the bin, between tees, to another marker post leading into bushes and thence to a road.

4 Turn right on the road and, in 15m, go **left** on a signposted footpath. Cross a rough patch to a post with a yellow arrow and carry straight on between pines trees. Cross another golf fairway heading for a tall white post with a white disc on top at the other side. Turn **right** here for 50m, passing trees on your left, to find a marker post almost hidden in a patch of nettles. Turn **left** here on a narrow path, going over a flat bridge to a lane. If your navigation was correct, you should be at the head of a T-junction. Go straight over on Barkham Lane opposite. In 250m the lane reaches the wrought iron gates and avenue leading to Barkham Manor.

It was near this point that the "Piltdown Man" hoax was perpetrated. Charles Dawson (1864-1916) was an amateur archaeologist and self-publicist. Lacking academic qualifications, he longed to join the scientific elite in pursuit of the "missing link" between ape and man. With devilish cunning, he planted a whole series of "artefacts" and "fossils" on various sites near his home in Hastings, of which the most ingenious was a set of skull fragments made from the jaw of an orangutan and the cranium of a small adult human, which he allegedly planted in 1912 in a gravel pit near here. Other big names were implicated, including

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of Sherlock Holmes. The shame of the whole episode was that it took till 1953 to expose it definitely as an elaborate fraud, to say nothing of the increase in public cynicism on scientific matters.

- 5 Veer **right** in front of the gates on a tarmac drive marked *No Through Traffic*. After a chalet-bungalow the drive becomes a narrow dirt path. In another 150m or so, look for a waymarker indicating a gap and some steps on your left. (*Don't miss!*)



*[The Lamb inn is now closed – not sure if permanently.] If you would like refreshment now, the “Lamb Inn” is a short distance away. This is a bright and friendly pub, previously called the “Piltdown Man”. Harveys and St Austell are on tap as well as a comprehensive menu. The pub has a rare bar billiards table. Just ignore the left turn, continue on the path and turn **right** for a short distance on the main road. Afterwards go back along the main road for 500m to re-join the walk. Otherwise ...*

Go **left** at the junction up the steps to join a path which runs along the right-hand side of several green meadows. It ends after 400m at a group of oaks by a line of poplars. Go over a bridge and turn **right** at a fingerpost. This narrow path takes you past a new fingerpost to the main road.

- 6 Cross the busy main road carefully, a fraction left, to find two driveways on the other side. Take the tarmac drive on the **left**. It leads past houses and becomes gravel. Keep dead straight between sheds and huts, soon crossing the Piltdown grass airstrip. (*If you are lucky enough to arrive during a rally, you may have a spectacular sight of dozens of light aircraft.*) Fletching church and the path ahead over the fields should now be visible. Cross the centre of a crop field and, after a narrow band of trees, go up the centre of the next large crop field on what should be a nice clear path. At the other side, after a ditch, turn **right**, following electricity wires. Go over metal stile (an atrocious design), across a meadow slightly left and over a stile into a sports field. Keep to the right and turn **left** in the corner. Keep going to the far corner, passing a kids' playground and continue along the road into the delightful village of Fletching.



You know at once that Fletching is a high-status village because it has at least one flourishing pub and an awesome large church. By sheer coincidence, the name seem to recall the word “fletcher” or “arrow-maker” and this village was a major supplier of bows and arrows, some of which may have helped Simon de Montfort when he camped here before the Battle of Lewes leading to a setback for Henry III's forces. Legend has it that some of de Montfort's warriors were carried back to Fletching and buried here in full armour. Fletching borders Sheffield Park and one of the gates is at the road corner. The Griffin Inn is a delight with high-end food and a fine patio and lawn at the back. The Rose and Crown closed recently and has been “brought back to life” (2018) by the locals, probably as a cheaper watering hole than its neighbour; it offers reasonably priced meals and snacks. There is also the village store/café/deli which closes 1.30 Sun, 3.30 other days [2019: shut due to illness]. Fletching church of St Andrew and St Mary the Virgin dates from the 1100s. Its spire, dating from 1340, is visible all around (only Chiddingfold's is taller in the county – see that walk). The interior contains brasses and monumental figures of knights and ladies and several coats of arms known as “hatchments”. A crowning feature: the church has a loo!

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- 7 After a sojourn in the village, take a footpath on the left of the church, signed *Piltdown, Mallingdown & Ruttingham*. Walk straight through the cemetery to the far end and turn **left**. Go **right** through an old kissing-gate into a field. Take a diagonal path (hopefully marked by tractor wheels),

heading for an electricity pole on the other side. (If the diagonal path is not clear, simply go round the left-hand side of the field and right in the corner.) In the corner, go over an atrocious metal stile into a pasture. Continue in the same direction, diagonally left, to go over a stile in the curve of a line of trees. Turn **right** on a wide track between hedges, a cattle drover's route. At the end, go through a large wooden gate by an unneeded stile into another pasture. Your route across the grass is slightly to the right. (If there's a ribbon fence separating the next field on the right, you should veer towards it.) Your target is a wooden 2-bar fence with a rudimentary stile leading into woods. Descend to go over a sturdy bridge across a stream.

- 8 Your path rises into a hay field. Turn **right** in the field but quickly veer away to the left away from the edge on a faint path heading for a gap in the hedge where you will find a stile [Jan 2019: broken]. Go straight ahead across the next meadow on a faint path. On a summer's day you can't help being struck by the lovely woodland all around from this high point. Head for a wide gap in the trees and take a path across the next meadow, a fraction right. At the far side of the meadow, veer right a little further to find, on your left, a robust bridge with a V-stile on each end. After the bridge, cross the next meadow, passing close to a grey shed. Continue in the meadow, beside a fence, to the corner and go through a new wooden gate which leads out to a lane. Ignoring a footpath ahead, turn **right** on the lane, immediately passing a fine 15th-century house, *Dale Hamme*.
- 9 Continue on the lane to a T-junction in 350m and turn **right** on another quiet road. In 200m, immediately after the garden of a house, go **left** past a large metal gate into a field. Go straight ahead for 50m to find a signpost at the corner of the garden where you have two choices. Take the **right** fork, a wide path between crops, marked by tractor wheels. At the other side of this very large field, go over a stile and a stream and across a narrow reedy water meadow. Go over a stile beside a field gate and up into a flowery meadow. Follow the left-hand edge with Little Brown's Wood on your left. At the top, veer **right** with the edge of the field. In the corner, go over a stile and keep straight ahead across the centre of another similar meadow. At the other side, go through the first of two metal gates either side of a wide woodland strip.
- 10 Don't go through the second metal gate (it leads across a meadow and through some modern housing to the same destination). Instead, turn **left** through a small wooden gate by a sign for *Normans Pond & Woodlands*. You are on a nature walk run by Maresfield Village. After only 100m or so, you reach a junction of paths. Turn **right** and keep right on a wide path, as though doubling back. This path leads past a garden fence on your right and passes the pond before veering right past a picnic area, taking you out through a small wooden gate. Turn **left** to the main road. Turn **left** on the main road to a roundabout. Staying on this side*, cross carefully over the A22 road and turn **right** to join the road into Maresfield. (*You can now cross over to the new Premier Inn and use the tarmacked footpath running alongside the fence.) Follow the road, making use of the tarmac footway on the left, all the way to the main junction in the village, near the church. If you did not start the walk in Maresfield, after visiting the village, take a footpath past the west door of the church, under a large ash tree, through a metal kissing-gate, between wild meadows, through a kissing-gate and turn **right** on a tarmac drive, joining the walk at the blue sentence in Section [1](#); otherwise ... Turn **right** past the

Chequers Inn on the road to the Recreation Ground where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Maresfield is on the A22 London-Eastbourne road, except that the road now bypasses it, taking all the traffic noise away from this peaceful village. Simply follow the sign into the village as you approach it.

Fletching is also approached from the A22. Follow a sign right to *Newick* until you see a sign for *Fletching*.

By bus/train: bus 31 from Uckfield or Haywards Heath stops on the A272 near the *Lamb Inn* in Piltdown, not Sun. Check the timetables.

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