



Round Weir Wood

Distance: 14 km=8½ miles or 9½ km=6 miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex, West Sussex

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Refreshments: Forest Row

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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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Lake, woodland, hills, rocks, country town

In Brief

This is an easy walk round Weir Wood Lake in East and West Sussex, visiting the picturesque small town of Forest Row.

The walk begins at the 24-hour car park in **Forest Row**, postcode **RH18 5DY**. An alternative start is the **Weir Wood Nature Reserve** car park on the south shore, approximate postcode **RH19 4JW**, grid ref TQ 382 342. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



This is an easy walk with long dry stretches. However, other parts may suffer unpredictably from waterlogging on certain days (this area is a catchment for the reservoir) so it is advisable to take into account recent weather conditions and to wear good ankle boots. This walk is not nettle free, so bare legs are a no-no. One or two of the stiles are not dog-friendly and will cause a problem for a large dog if he cannot be picked up. *There is a 1½ km section on a narrow road which might be hazardous for a dog or small children.*

A shorter version omitting Forest Row is available, using only the *Western Section* in the map overleaf.

The Walk

Forest Row gets its name from its nearness to Ashdown Forest. It has grown considerably from a small hamlet, due to the railway and its position on the old turnpike road. Forest Row has a colourful history involving smuggling and a notorious mail coach robbery. The church of Our Lady of the Forest that dominates the junction was visited by US President J.F. Kennedy in the 1960s. One notable former resident of this swish area for homes was Ben Elton the writer and comedian.

Weir Wood Reservoir, or “Weir Wood Lake” as it is called more poetically in this account, was created in 1954 by damming the River Medway. It attracts so much wildlife that it is now listed as a Site of Special Scientific interest. Around the shores are several nature reserves and facilities for boating, canoeing and angling.



- 1 Near the Co-op, between Hartfield Road and Station Road, go diagonally across the grass in the direction of the sign *Forester's Link*, passing a skatepark, and join a wide stony path. The main path bends left in front of a sculpted tree trunk and crosses a bridge over the infant River Medway. At a T-junction, turn **left** onto the disused railway known as Forest Way. Immediately take the **right** fork, a narrow rising shingle path which leads up to a tarmac driveway. *Sharp right is the Farm Shop and Café, closed Sundays.* Veer **left** onto the driveway, still the Forest Way. In 80m, ignore a footpath left. In another 350m, the Forest Way meets the main road. Cross over using the pedestrian crossing and continue on the other side on a wide surfaced pathway through woodland, passing an occasional seat, one with views. After 700m, the path comes to a level crossing through a wooden

gate, marked *Brambletye Crossing*. Leave the Forest Way by turning **left** on a tarmac lane.

- 2 Follow the lane as it bends right and comes in 350m to a remarkable ruin.

Brambletye Castle or House was built in 1631 in typical Jacobean style by Sir Henry Compton but fell into decay 50 years later. A new owner Sir James Richards had apparently stored a cache of arms there, a legacy of the Civil War. When officers of the law came to search the house, Sir Henry was away hunting. When he heard of the raid, he fled to Spain, marrying a Spanish lady and starting a new family line many of whom became officers in the Spanish army. The history of the house has been confabulated by a fictional novel by Horace Smith called 'Brambletye House'.

After the ruin, keep right, ignoring a bridleway on your left. The track zig-zags round several properties and their pretty gardens, passing an egg farm, a large barn and a fruit farm on your right. Just after the end of the fence on the left, where the path enters woodland, turn sharp **left** on a clearly signposted woodland path. The path crosses the Medway by a long bridge. Turn **right** along the edge of a large meadow to arrive at a 3-way fingerpost and a junction of paths. Turn **right** and cross the River Medway by a long bridge.

[The Shortcut joins the main route here.](#)

- 3 The path runs beside a wire fence along the left-hand side of a meadow. [There is a short unavoidable patch of mud here.](#) The path leads over a stile and under grid wires. It then goes on an enclosed path between fences. When you emerge into a sheep pasture by a fingerpost, keep **left**. *The great church of St Swithun in East Grinstead is visible up on the right.* Ignore a right turn at a fingerpost. [You now have a clear view of the lake and if you want to see the dam you can go through a gate on the left, although you can't walk along the top.](#) Through the next small wooden gate, you are on a fine pleasant level path through the woods.

- 4 From here the route is obvious all the way to the Admiral's Bridge Lane, by simply avoiding all paths on the right, through woodland and open areas. At a 3-way fingerpost [[2017: the finger pointing in the direction of the walk is missing](#)], you join the Sussex Border Path (SBP). *This is the North-South section that goes down to the sea, separating the two Sussexes.* You pass a picnic site on your left and some more fine woodland, after which the path bends left and passes through more wooden gates. *Note how some of the tree trunks have grown into the wire fence.* There is an unneeded stile into more woodland and, from this point, several more open areas, a bridge and several junctions with paths on the right. These paths lead by the "back door" to *Standen* (see below), although not part of this route which stays beside the lake. Soon there are paths on your right up to Standen Rocks, one of many rocky outcrops in this area of the High Weald. Finally, after 2 km along the lakeside, you meet a semi-tarmac drive at a T-junction with a large metal gate on the left, a slipway for canoes. Turn **right** on the drive and follow it for 500m to West Hoathly Road. Turn **right** on the road and, in just 30m, turn **left** on a track to continue on the SBP.

The road straight ahead leads to Standen, a late Victorian house belonging to the National Trust, designed by Phillip Webb, and overflowing with Arts and Crafts furniture and coverings, with a fine garden, open daily, an unmissable treasure.

- 5 In 100m, on your left are Stone Hill Rocks, a long and spectacular sandstone outcrop. (See another walk in this series "A Way Through the Rocks" based in

Groombridge.) Keep to a narrow path along the **left** edge of the rocks. Where the field visible on your left ends, you will see a small noticeboard and gate. [2020: this field was recently re-developed as a vineyard but the “permissive path” has been restored.] Take a very narrow path downhill here, go through a tall metal gate and follow an unmapped grassy “permissive path” along the right-hand side of the field. At the end, your path leads through trees and through another metal gate. **NB** The next descent is very uneven and steep, going over large tree roots: you need to take special care, especially after rain. More detailed feedback welcome as this path has changed. The path now leads through a short brambly patch and down to the West Hoathly Road. Turn **right** on the road, soon running over the shallows of the west arm of the lake, re-entering East Sussex in the process. At the next road junction, turn **left** on Legsheath Lane, taking care as the traffic sometimes zips past you at speed. In 500m you reach the Weir Wood Nature Reserve and its car park (an alternative start), accessed by a small path, an excellent vantage point for bird-watching.

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- 6 Continue along the road which is normally quiet but may be unexpectedly busy. (If you are starting at this car park, then turn **left** on the road.) In 550m, ignore a lane left marked *no access to Weirwood Reservoir* and follow the road, slightly uphill. In another 500m, the road passes the entrance to *Charwood*, curves right and steepens a little. In another 150m, where the road bends right, turn **left** immediately after a house, beside its drive, through a new metal swing gate. A second swing gate takes you into a meadow with a great view of the lake. Go straight down the long meadow aiming for the bottom right-hand corner. Go through a metal kissing gate and follow a wide path through woodland. **The main path shares its route part-way with a stream and it may be easier to take a very narrow parallel path on the left.** Soon the path runs beside a pond on the right and resumes uphill.
- 7 120m after the pond, turn **sharp right** at a fingerpost through a metal gate into another large meadow. Head across the centre, going through a wide gap after 100m into a larger meadow. Bear a fraction right and head up the grass to the crest of the hill where you will find a metal gate. Immediately past the metal gate, go through a metal swing gate. A homemade fingerpost here indicates a fork: take the **left** fork, keeping to your original direction across the next meadow. Your path cuts the left-hand corner, passing along the side of some woodland on your left. Now bear a tiny fraction left, towards the crest of the hill where you will find a new metal gate in a line of tall oaks. After the gate, your route is a fraction left again, heading for a single oak tree. Stay on the level over a hillock passing the oak tree on your left, descending towards the attractive grade-II listed house *Mudbrooks* with its prominent dovecote, converted barn and stables. Here, go over a stile and turn **left** on the drive. *Note that you are on the Greenwich Meridian Trail, a 467 km=290 mile long-distance trail from the sea new Lewes to the Humber Estuary.*
- 8 Follow the concrete drive through a small wooden gate, going by a highly modernised barn on the left called *Hen Barn* and some smart new fencing, and follow it for a good 500m, passing the first large farm and various other smaller buildings. Next, the drive forks its way around *South Park Farm Cottage* and, 150m further, passes the historic buildings of South Park Farm. 150m later, where the track curves right alongside woodland, turn

left on a narrow path into the wood indicated by a post with yellow arrows. The path soon goes round a fence to a lane.

At this point you have a choice if you started the walk other than in Forest Row and would like to shorten it. It means you will miss an attractive town and any chance for refreshments.

Shortcut. Turn **left** on the lane. Soon you reach the gates of the Weir Wood enclosure which includes a sailing club and other facilities. Take a narrow footpath here to the **right** of the gates. The path soon bends right into a grassy meadow. Keep to the **left** side, avoiding a path that forks right across the centre, passing by some houses over on your left. Your path is joined at a 3-way fingerposted junction by a path coming from the right. Cross the River Medway here by a long wooden bridge. Jump now to section **3** to resume the main walk.

- 9** Cross the lane, go through a split-gate opposite, along the left-hand side of a meadow, passing some seats, over a concrete bridge and through a large wooden gate. Continue ahead through a plantation of trees. *If this section is very muddy, you will find a path which forks **right** through the trees, snakes its way haphazardly and re-joins the main path later, entirely avoiding the mud. You are on East Sussex's Forest Row walk, one of the "Paths to Prosperity".* At a crossing bridleway, keep ahead over a stile, with the Medway on your left, through more plantation, over another stile, across the centre of a meadow, through a metal gate by a stile and up to a house. The path goes **left** opposite the house, in front of a barn, over a stile (or through a large metal gate). It then turns **right** and leads you over a stile, then over another stile hidden under a holly bush by a gate. Your route is now along the left-hand side of a meadow, over a stile and winding through undergrowth. You now join an elegant pebbly path adjoining a stylish modern group of houses, with a stream on your left. At the end of the path, keep ahead up some steps and through the passage in the middle of a building, which leads past a small patio and shops, out to the main (A22) road in Forest Row. *On the other side are the 'Chequers Inn' and a pizzeria.* Turn **right** towards *The Swan* and cross the road to take the **left** fork down the Hartfield Road. *There are several eateries, including a Taffels Restaurant, a Cantonese, Portuguese and Indian.* Finally, you come to the *Co-op* where the walk began.



Getting there

By car: Forest Row is on the A22, 3 miles (5km) south of East Grinstead. The car park just after the Co-op (previously the *Forester's Arms*) on the left is not 24 hours: you need to park in the next one, on the right, a little further down. Alternatively, park in a side street. An alternative start is the car park by the Nature Reserve (see map), although this gives you the option of omitting the town.

By train & bus: Metrobus 291 from Crawley, East Grinstead or Tunbridge Wells; check the timetables.

