



Winchelsea

Distance: 11 km=7 miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex

Date written: 12-aug-2016

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Last update: 16-may-2018

Refreshments: Cock Marling, Winchelsea, Icklesham

Map: Explorer 124 (Hastings) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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River valley, views, sheep meadows, historic town, rolling hills

In Brief

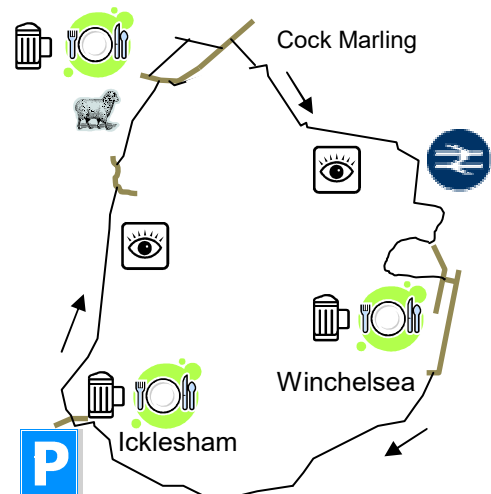
The town of Winchelsea is unique and makes an unforgettable centrepiece to this scenic walk, worth a day's travel to visit and be quite captivated. This walk takes you over the Brede valley to a small village and country inn (to enquire at the *Plough*, ring 01797-223381). It then takes you gently into the town, like a home-grown caller rather than as a tourist. For enquiries at the *New Inn* in Winchelsea, ring 01797-226252.



There are just a few nettles on the last sections of this walk, probably not enough to make long trousers necessary. Walking shoes or trainers are fine, except after rain or in a more muddy winter season. With only two crossings of the not-too-busy main road, this walk should be fine with a fairly fit four-legged companion – but with a lead because of the sheep fields crossed during the walk.

The walk begins in the village of **Icklesham, East Sussex**. There is plenty of roadside parking but it is best to start on the **east** side, so if you are near the *Robin Hood* pub, you need to go nearly ½ mile round a bend in the road and park nearer the old town. The nearest postcode is **TN36 4BS**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

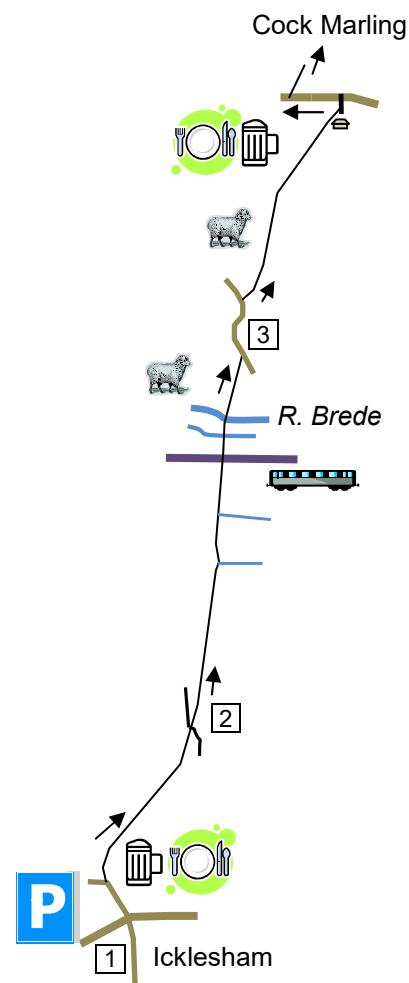
Bird's Eye View



The Walk

Leg 1: Icklesham to Cock Marling 3 km=2 miles

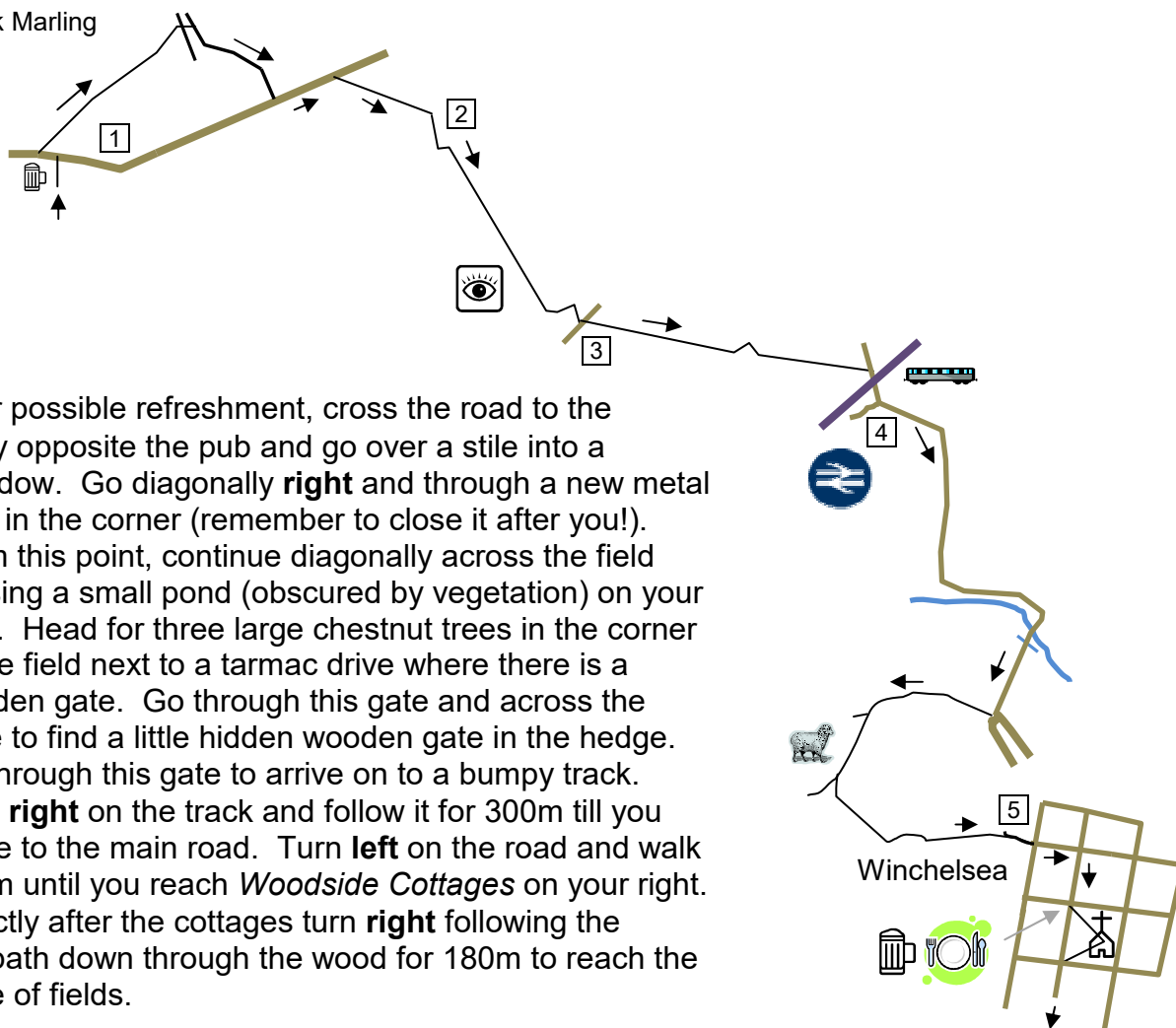
- 1 Walk east along the main road, passing some whiteboard houses on your left, and school playing grounds on your right, until you reach a crossing of two narrow lanes. Turn **left** on Parsonage Lane, passing a sign for the *Queens Head*. In 100m, where the lane bends left, keep ahead into a yard where, unexpectedly, you will find the *Queens Head* inn, a perfect place to call in again at the end of the walk. Go past the pub and through its car park. At the far end, go over a stile and take a path diagonally to your right down the hillside, passing some large stones on your left, with great views ahead across the Brede Valley, including Rye over to your right.
- 2 At the bottom, cross straight over to go through a large metal gate and follow the left-hand side of a large meadow. A ditch separates you from a cattle pasture on your left. Continue the same way, going over two reedy canals until, after 700m, your path goes over a stile to the one-track railway. Cross the track carefully, go over a step stile and across a bridge, a little to your left. After a small sheep pasture, a long bridge takes you over the River Brede. After a wide concrete bridge and a large metal gate, continue straight across a hay field and over a stile [2018: wobbly – take care!] to a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane.
- 3 Follow the lane uphill, past *Float Farm Oast*. Just after the lane bends left again, turn **right** at a signpost on a footpath. This path runs along a shallow grass gully, through a large metal gate and along a similar gully. Looking back you have great views of Icklesham Windmill (to be passed later) and as far as the church at Fairlight. At the top, surrounded by more sheep, as you pass close to a clump of trees on your right, continue over a chunky stile or through a large metal gate. Cross the pasture to a large metal gate just on the **left** of a house and go out to the road in the small village of Cock Marling. Turn **left** on the road to reach to the *Plough Inn* in 50m on the same side.



The “Plough” must have one of the best views in the area but they hope to distract you with the very interesting menu which includes moules+frites, calves liver, smoked haddock risotto with a poached egg (a kind of deconstructed kedgeree) plus several specials written on the board. Starters are in fact “tapas” and calves liver or fishcakes at £4 won’t set you back too far. They take fresh fish landed at Hastings to make their Portuguese fish stew. You can of course just have a drink. Note that this pub closes in the afternoons, except Fri and Sat.

Leg 2: Cock Marling to Winchelsea 4 km=2½ miles

Cock Marling



- 1** After possible refreshment, cross the road to the layby opposite the pub and go over a stile into a meadow. Go diagonally **right** and through a new metal gate in the corner (remember to close it after you!). From this point, continue diagonally across the field passing a small pond (obscured by vegetation) on your right. Head for three large chestnut trees in the corner of the field next to a tarmac drive where there is a wooden gate. Go through this gate and across the drive to find a little hidden wooden gate in the hedge. Go through this gate to arrive on to a bumpy track. Turn **right** on the track and follow it for 300m till you come to the main road. Turn **left** on the road and walk 200m until you reach *Woodside Cottages* on your right. Directly after the cottages turn **right** following the footpath down through the wood for 180m to reach the edge of fields.
- 2** Strictly, the footpath goes diagonally across the field here, then over a wobbly stile into the adjoining narrow field, but this walk keeps you away from the crops which is surely better. Keep **left** along the edge for 60m (you may need to step over a string fence) and go **right** round the corner, going down the far side of the narrow field. In 50m, go **left** through a gap in the hedge over a large stone. Follow a route down the field in the direction of Winchelsea which is now visible in the distance. (The author found a path marked by a farm tractor, either for rambler's convenience or by sheer accident. But if the route is not clear, it's easiest to aim for the **third of five** electricity poles and head directly down from there.) At the bottom, in nearly 400m, you will probably need to go **left** a short distance down into a dip. Here you will find a signpost and a stile. Go **right** over the stile, through a large metal gate to a tarmac lane.
- 3** Go **left** 10m along the lane and **right** over a very overgrown bridge. *Note the touching love message printed in bold letters on the crosspiece.* Take a diagonal path across the cereal field; the path should be well marked. In 300m, at the end of the field, your path veers a little to the left into the far corner. Now take a path diagonally across the next field in exactly the same direction as before. You should be heading well to the left of a cell phone tower. Exit the field to a tarmac road and turn **right** on it to reach a level crossing by Winchelsea railway station.



- 4 You will be following this quiet bendy road for nearly 1 km. Soon the River Brede is on your right and the road crosses the river, followed by another channel. Finally, your road reaches the main A259 road at a hairpin. **It might seem that the only way into town is a hideous slog up the main road, but there is a better way.** Immediately, go **right** by a small signpost indicating the *1066 Country Walk* (sometimes overgrown), going over a stile. Follow a concrete path, then a woodland path along a boardwalk. The path goes through another small wooden gate under a willow and along another boardwalk, through a gate into a sheep meadow. Turn **left** along the edge and, at a 3-way fingerpost, keep straight on along the edge. The path rises to a small wooden gate and a fingerpost. Keep **left** through the gate and up a shallow grassy gully. *Suddenly you have ever-widening views ahead to the sea!* At another (unneeded) wooden gate turn **left**, with a beacon brazier on your right. Follow the main path through a wooden gate beside some large gates, then on a tarmac drive to the main road in Winchelsea.

*Welcome to the **new** town of Winchelsea! Rescued from the sea, re-constructed in ultra-modern chessboard style. The date: 1300 or thereabouts, after Edward I ("hammer of the Scots") ordered the building of a new town. The old town went back to Saxon times. The "chelsea" in the name is the same as "chesil" meaning a "shingle beach" (think of Dorset and London!). Winchelsea's importance was that it was one of the "Cinque Ports", providing men and ships in times of war. In this, it rivalled London and Southampton. In 1250 there came a "great tempest of wind", the worst of many, the coast was breached, the land awash and the city ruined.*

The new Winchelsea was built three miles inland, on a hill above the River Brede. It was the first "planned town" in English history. There were more "quarters" than you see today (as you will glean soon from the ancient walls), some reserved for the king. Under each house a barrel-vaulted cellar was first built, producing a kind of underground wine city. After 1350, the town declined, from the collapse of the wine trade, the Black Death and the Hundred Years War. In 1652, the diarist John Evelyn reported "a few despicable hovels". The only industry to prosper was smuggling. The town began to rise again through patronage. (It became a "rotten borough", returning two MPs from an electorate of only a dozen or so.) It became a garrison for soldiers and a staging post on the new Royal Military Canal. In the peaceful 1800s Winchelsea became an artists' colony. The famous partnership of actors Sir Henry Irving and Ellen Terry was domiciled here. Painters Turner, Millais and Rossetti lived or stayed here and the town still seems to bear their stamp in 2016. For a wonderful account of the town's history, see www.winchelsea.net.

- 5 **Walking through Winchelsea is simple heaven and you will find your own way through the grid of weather-board and tile-hung houses; this route is just one proposal.** Cross straight over the main road onto a minor road, Mill Road, giving you an instant flavour of the town. Turn **right** at the first crossroads onto a road, Hiham Green ("Hiham" or "Iham" was the old name for the village before it became "new" Winchelsea). At the next crossroads, you have the *New Inn* on your right and the church ahead in the centre of the green. (Your way out of the town will be straight on along the road, continuing in the same direction.) *The "New Inn" is a typical large 18th-century ex-coaching inn with an interesting menu, three ales on tap and a garden; it is also a hotel.* Go diagonally left through a swing-gate and across the Green to visit the church which is a must-see.



The church of St Thomas the Martyr was planned as a vast structure to replace the drowned church. As you saw from the outside, a chunk is missing. In fact the missing piece is the entire nave which was never completed (some say due

to harassment from the French). The cavernous space inside the present church is only the chancel and two side chapels. The stained glass is a mixture of old and new in glorious colours.

On coming out of the church, by going dead straight for 30m, you reach comedian Spike Milligan's tomb with its inscriptions in Irish and English. The famous epitaph "I told you I was ill" is no longer there.

Leg 3: Winchelsea to Icklesham 4 km=2½ miles



- 1** Go diagonally **left** from the church door to reach the next corner of the road you arrived on. Follow this road (German Street, then Monk's Walk), passing more of the town's buildings, and public toilets, until you are in open country. In 300m, the road turns right. **WC** **Straight ahead is Wickham Rock Lane which leads to Icklesham; the route of this walk meets and criss-crosses it several times; so, in dire circumstances, you could follow the lane, although the footpath used on this walk is much more interesting.** Follow the road round to the **right** for about 20m and turn **left** over a stone stile by an information board.

This was one of four "hospitals" in medieval Winchelsea, in the sense of a "place of hospitality" for persons of a religious order. As you see, the gable end is still standing. The parkland here, now known as Pewis Marsh was the site of the town's marketplace.

- 2** Go down the grassy slope, a fraction right, heading for half-way down the right-hand edge. Your path dips more steeply and you will see a stile beside a large wooden gate in the line of trees. Go through the gate or over the stile and immediately negotiate another gate or stile, leading into a sheep pasture. Turn **left** in the pasture and walk along it but, as you proceed, shift across to the right-hand edge. After 200m, you will see on your right a large willow tree shading a wooden gate and a 3-way fingerpost, leading you into the adjoining meadow. Immediately, your path forks. The left fork may be more obvious and leads to the lane near the *New Gate* arch, an ancient gate in the city walls, but your route is the **right** fork. This path may be unclear but it is easy to follow simply by keeping uphill, aiming to gain the **right**-hand edge where you can see some buildings ahead. Where the edge veers off right near the buildings, keep straight ahead past a solitary tree, cutting corners. Head for an old farm building with a staircase on one side. Go over a stile in a new wire fence to cross a stony track coming from the building which happens to be *Wickham Manor*. *This great house dates from the 1500s and offers one of the best B&B stays in the county.*



- 3 Your path now goes straight ahead, slightly left, heading in the direction of the centre of some woods visible on the horizon. As you near the left-hand edge of the meadow, ignore a path which veers left to a large wooden gate and stay in the meadow as far as the corner. Go over a stile here and go along the rather overgrown left-hand side of a crop field. After 100m, your path veers **left** over a stile onto the lane. Turn **right** on the lane. In 20m, go **left** through a small wooden gate and take a diagonal path across a crop field. In 150m, you reach a line of trees with a wire fence and here there are two benches offering a quick respite. Follow the grassy path beside the trees on your right to meet a long-fingered signpost. Ignore a permissive path here and continue straight ahead on the grassy perimeter path. In 100m, your path leads you over two stiles and between two meadows with flowery borders. At the other side, go over a stile and keep **left** on the lane. You pass *Windmill Cottage* which is a clue to what follows. Up on your right, on Hogg Hill, is the Icklesham Windmill.

The Icklesham Windmill was built in 1781 in Pett and moved to Hogg Hill in 1790. It was a working mill up until 1920. It is a post mill with a two-storey rounded mill house on one side. The four spring sails and a cast iron shaft drove two pairs of millstones. Unusually, the fantail is mounted on the roof. But the most unusual feature of the mill is that it houses the recording studios of Sir Paul McCartney. Probably for this reason, the mill does not receive casual visitors.

- 4 Just after the cottage, go **right** through a new metal gate (a welcome change!) and take a diagonal path up to the right of the mill, giving you great views, of the country as well as the mill itself. Go over a stile to the lane and bear **right** on it. In 30m, opposite a signpost, go **right** through a gap. Your path goes left beside a wire fence, with a meadow on your right. A metal kissing-gate leads to another meadowside path where the oasts of Manor Farm (another good B&B) come into view. Another kissing-gate leads onto a tarmac drive. Turn **right** on the drive and, in 20m, keep **left** on a pleasant path, parallel to the drive, with more views of the oasts. At the end, bear **left** on a quite excellent grassy path, under an ash tree. This path runs beside a sheep pasture to reach a 3-way junction. Keep **right** at this junction to reach Icklesham Church of St Nicholas. *Icklesham Church is Norman with Victorian "improvements" but showing several relics of its original history; the hexagonal porch and the squat tower (hashed up in 1850 and remodelled later) are very unusual; the church is normally open until 5pm.*

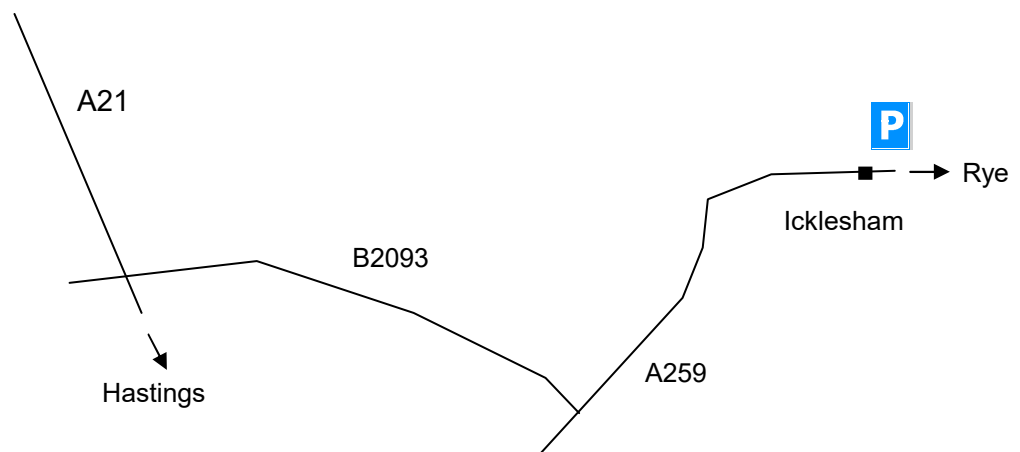
- 5 By the west door of the church (with its hexagonal porch), turn **left** to go through a gap in the hedge into a small car park. Go straight ahead through the car park, passing a sign for the *Old Vicarage*. You pass very close to the house on your left, coming out to a lane. Keep straight on to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** to reach the main road where the walk began.



For end-of-walk refreshments, return to Parsonage Lane and the Queen's Head pub, one of the best eccentric inns in the area. The pub name on the outside wall, almost completely shrouded in ivy, makes you think you have stumbled upon yet another has-been ... until you step inside where the atmosphere assails you. Bicycles, hops and old gadgets dangle from the ceiling. Oakham, St Austell Trelawny, American Pale, Gandhi-Bot are typically on offer at the pumps. Food portions are generous and, as well as the all-pleasing menu, daily special are written on the chalk board. The "Queen" in the name, by the way, is the late Queen Mother.

Getting there

By car: if you are coming from the London or Tunbridge Wells area and relying on satnav, you will probably be directed off the A21 at Hurst Green onto the A229, direction *Hawkhurst*, which is fine but involves some narrow lanes. *Possibly* better is to take the A21 until just before Hastings, where the A21 goes **under** a high road bridge. *After* passing under the bridge, turn **right three times** to go **over** the bridge, in the direction *Folkestone A259*. (It is also possible to fork **left** just *before* the road bridge, cross straight over Westfield Lane onto a minor road (Maplehurst Road) uphill past 2-up-2-downs and turn **left** at the top beside the *Harrow* pub.) At a mini-roundabout, keep left on the B2093 as for *Ore, Folkestone*. Follow this road for 2½ miles to a T-junction where the Old London Road and the Rye Road meet. Filter left and turn **left** here onto the *A259 as for Folkestone Rye*. This road, the A259, runs through Icklesham. Park at the far end of the village.



By train: train to Winchelsea station, various routes.

By bus: bus 100 from Hastings, not Sunday; check the timetable.

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