



Bough Beech and Weald Village

Distance: 11½ km=7½ miles

easy walking

Region: Kent

Date written: 10-jun-2013

Author: Malinovka

Last update: 5-jan-2017

Refreshments: Weald Village, Bough Beech visitor centre

Map: Explorer 147 (Sevenoaks) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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

Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

Village, lake, views, grassy meadows

In Brief

This is a gentle circular walk from a pristine village just below the Greensand hills to Bough Beech lake. On the way you enjoy endless grassy meadows and, on the return leg, several unexpected delights.

There is a good pub, the *Windmill*, in the village. Booking may be necessary as it is very popular (ring 01732-463330).



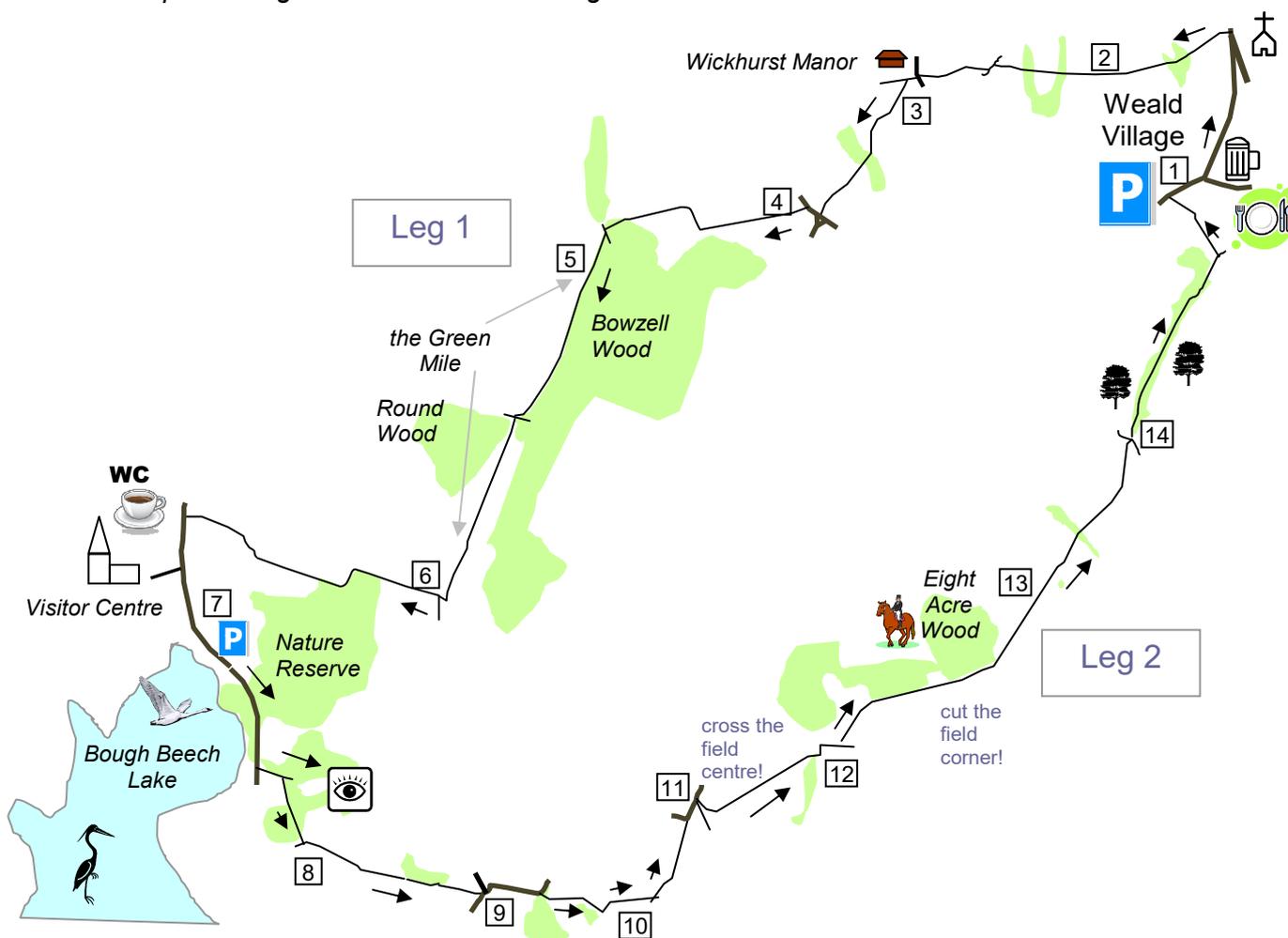
There is just one narrow path with nettles, so shorts *may* be inadvisable. In the drier seasons there is little mud on this walk so good walking shoes are ok, but in winter or wet conditions, as with any Wealden walk, you will find boots essential. A large dog will have trouble with some of the stiles; a lead will be needed much of the time since you pass near all types of livestock along the way.

The walk begins at the village green in Sevenoaks Weald, **postcode TN14 6PY**. The *Windmill* pub, a shop (the *Old Bakery*) and a school are in the village, so you could find a spot where you won't compete too much with customers or parents. There is also a large parking area next to St George's Church just north of the village centre. You can also start the walk at the Bough Beech Visitor's Centre where there is a large car park, **postcode TN14 6LD**, placing the village and the pub for a lunchtime half-way stop. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Leg 1: Village to Lake 5½ km=3½ miles

Sevenoaks Weald is never so called. To the people here it's the **Weald Village** and totally different in character from its big brother. The village is an eclectic mix of architectural styles and periods from 15th-century houses to ragstone cottages and tasteful modern houses. It's difficult to imagine a more decent portrait of middle England. A place where the postman can leave parcels on the doorstep; where if someone clipped your wing mirror they'd leave a note. Two buildings stand out: St Georges Church which you will pass shortly and Long Barn. This latter is a little way along the road north-west of the green, on the left. It is here that, it is believed, William Caxton, who brought printing to England, was born. It was also home to Vita Sackville-West (see the "Knole", "Sissinghurst" and "Withyham" walks in this series) and was later bought by the pioneering aviator Charles Lindbergh.



- 1 Go down the lane Church Road opposite the *Windmill* pub, passing *Hurst Farm House* and *Romany Cottage* with its gypsy caravan. Continue over a stream and fairly steeply up to St George's church. 60m later, just after joining a major road, go **left** through a gate beside a bus shelter on a signed footpath. You have joined the Greensand Way (GW), a long-distance path running from Haslemere into east Kent. Go down the left-hand side of this large meadow [2014: round a huge fallen tree] under oak trees, then down past a redundant stile, under wires and over a footbridge with railings. Keep straight on steeply up a grass slope, with wires on your

left, heading for an oasthouse. At the top, go through a small gate, onto a concrete drive, and turn right.

- 2 You will see a large chicken pen in front of you and a large farm shed ahead your right. Follow the concrete drive to the **right** and then immediately **left** walking behind the metal shed and through a small metal gate. Go straight across the centre of a field. *You have views left to the South Downs and right to the Kentish Greensand Hills (see the “Brasted” walk in this series).* Your path crosses a stream by a bridge with a metal gate in a narrow band of oak trees. It now leads you through a field and over a stile in a narrow band of ash and hawthorn. Continue straight ahead aiming for trees just to the right of some farm buildings. Here, go through a metal gate (or over a stile) and veer **right** past a metal cowshed. After this, you have a choice of small or large metal gates and your path goes diagonally **left** across a small pasture, then through a small metal gate. Go through metal gates and down a sheep pasture, then over a stile beside a large metal gate. Turn **left** on a tarmac drive and immediately **right** on a concrete track. Your next turning is in 20m, **left** through a large wooden gate, thus leaving the GW. However, as a small diversion, by continuing a bit further along the track, you should get a good view of *Wickhurst Manor*.

Wickhurst Manor is a historic house, some parts going back to the 1300s, with much Elizabethan panelling, modernised in Victorian times. For centuries, it was home to the Isley family, who held various lofty ranks as sheriff in the 1400s. Sir John plotted against Richard III but kept his head. His grandsons were less lucky, after taking part in the Wyatt Rebellion of 1554, opposing “Bloody” Queen Mary’s marriage to the expansionist foreigner Philip II of Spain.

- 3 Having turned left through that wooden gate, go diagonally across the meadow, through a chain stile and round the curving left-hand side of a horse pasture. Go through two small metal gates either side of a farmer’s path, then along the short side of a large meadow and through a small metal gate. Continue up the left-hand side of another pasture and, where the edge curves away left, keep ahead uphill towards a couple of houses. At the top, enjoying wide views, go through a small metal gate to a road near Bowzell Farm and turn **right** on it.
- 4 In 40m, go **left** through a kissing-gate, across a narrow meadow and through a belt of trees. Veer slightly right and follow a faint path across the field aiming downhill to a gap in the trees. At the other side, go through a line of trees and turn **right** beside another large grassy meadow. In about 50m, turn **left** at the first corner. Where the edge of the field shortly curves away right, keep ahead across the field towards the far right corner. On reaching the corner, go **right** over a bridge with a gate across a stream [2016: some walkers missed the bridge and had to scramble over – but it is definitely there!] and turn **left** along the edge of the next meadow. In 50m, go over a bridge to a farm track. Avoid some gates on your right and go over a stile in a fence ahead into a long grassy meadow.
- 5 **The green mile.** You are in a wonderful line of narrow meadows where the grass is always fresh. Go straight ahead along the length of the meadow but veering towards the left-hand edge next to Bowzell Wood where the official footpath runs. *Behind you up to your right you can see the pointed steeple of Ide Hill church.* When, in about 400m, you reach the jutting corner, keep straight ahead, avoiding footpaths left and right, and go through a small metal gate. Continue straight down the centre of the next crop field. [2015: the footpath may be unclear because of the crops: in this case,

go round the edge (either side) to the far end where you will find the metal swing-gate.] In the centre of the far side, navigate a combination of metal swing-gate, 2-plank bridge and stile and proceed along the right-hand side of the next grassy meadow. In 200m, about half way down, locate a metal gate on your right. Go **right** through this gate, or over the adjoining stile.

- 6 Avoid a track on the left and go straight ahead on a wide track, gently uphill between hedges. In 300m or so, at the top, go ahead by an unneeded stile into a large field. Turn **left** along the edge of the field and turn **right** in the corner. Keep straight on beside a hedge that separates two fields. *You should have a first glimpse here of Bough Beech lake on your left.* Your path zigzags right-left round the edge. (Ignore a hidden stile here on your left: it leads nowhere.) At the bottom, go **left** on a path which crosses a strong bridge over the Bough Beech stream. Continue up the left-hand side of the next field and exit, next to metal gates to a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane to reach, in 150m on the right, a drive with a sign for the *Bough Beech Visitor Centre*.

WC



Bough Beech Visitor Centre is housed in an Oast House. The top part has a display of implements that were used for spreading, drying and roasting the hops. Before the invention of the hop press (in 1850 by the suitably named Ellis Hopgood of Barming), hops were pressed by a man in boots, usually with a sack of grain around his neck to add weight. The lower part has a shop and a café. The Centre is open every Sunday and, from end-March to end-Oct, Wed and Sat too. There is a look-out for watching wildlife, an apple orchard and a small pond by the car park which is an arm of the main lake. The car park closes out of hours so, if this is your starting point, it is better to park on the road overlooking the lake.

P

After possible refreshment, return to the tarmac lane and continue along it, soon reaching the causeway with an open view at the head of the lake.

Bough Beech lake (officially it's a reservoir, but "lake" is more poetic) was formed in 1968 by damming several streams and by pumping water from the River Eden. It is about 2 km long north-to-south and provides east Surrey with water. A medieval farmhouse, Bayleaf, was rescued from the flooded valley and re-assembled in the Weald and Downland Museum in Singleton, W.Sussex (see the "Singleton" walk in this series). On all sides there are nature reserves which are not open to the public. The lake is an important conservation area, run by Kent Wildlife Trust, for many species of birds, including egrets, terns, nightingales and ringed plovers, many insects and mammals, some of them very rare.

Leg 2: Lake to Village 6 km=4 miles

- 7 Continue along the road passing various nature reserves. Soon you have woodland on both sides with only occasional views of the lake. About 400m after the causeway at the head of the lake, and just before the road leaves the wooded lakeside, look to your left for a sign *Commonwork Field Trail*. **Easily missed! the sign and the stile may be hidden in the overgrown vegetation.** Turn **left** over a stile here, go through a wood, through a metal gate and up a small flowery meadow. At the top, turn **right** along the top of the meadow on an unsigned path with some of the best views of the lake. At the corner, go over a stile into beautiful Batfold Wood which is dominated by tall ash trees. On the other side, go over a stile and turn **left** in a large meadow beside the edge of the wood.

- 8 In 20m, on reaching the corner of the wood, strike out across the centre of the meadow, slightly right, aiming just to the right of a clump of pines visible on the other side. When you reach the pines, go over a stile in the hedge about 15m to the right of the clump. Now go straight across the pasture, a fraction left, aiming for a stile and a wide track visible ahead on the edge of a wood. Go over the sturdy stile and keep ahead on the track. Where the track ends, go over a stile and along a narrow nettle-fringed path. Once over the next stile [2014: now not needed as there is no gate], you are in a delightful little meadow with rowan and silver birch trees, with the *Old Forge* on your left. A stile and footbridge in the corner take you out to a tarmac lane.
- 9 Turn **left** on the lane, Bayleys Hill Road, and immediately keep **right**, avoiding a drive to *Bore Place*. (*Bore Place is the home base of Commonwork, an organic farm and study centre, who planned that woodland trail.*) Follow this quiet lane, immediately ignoring a wooden swing-gate on your left, until, in 200m, it curves left by a house. On your **right** are two signed rights-of-way. Ignore the wider path but take the **left**-hand narrower footpath. It leads up to a stile and takes you diagonally across a flowery meadow. In the corner, go over a stile in a new fence and left-right into a field, following the edge. At the top, ignore a wooden gate on your right and turn **left** along the top edge. In just 30m, go **right** through a hedge into the next field.
- 10 Your path veers diagonally **left** across the centre of this field on a rather faint path. (You may need to ahead and go round two sides of the field edge to avoid trampling the crops.) Aim for a gap in the trees with a metal gate visible ahead. *Note: the gate may be off its hinges, lying prone and hidden in vegetation.* When you reach them, avoid a stile straight ahead leading to Hales Farm and instead turn **left** on a grassy path along the edge of the field. At the corner, go through a modern kissing-gate [2016: ducking, in 5m or so, under a pair of *insulated electric fence wires*]. Continue in the same direction towards a stile beside a large metal gate to the left of the oast house. Cross the stile keep ahead on a grassy path. This path is delightful with its tall oaks and planted trees, next to *Sharp's Place Oast* on your right. A sturdy stile finally pops you onto a lane, Bayleys Hill Road again.
- 11 Keep ahead on the lane and, in 50m, turn **right** at a fingerpost on a foot-path. Veer **right** past a brick shed and go through (or round) a large metal gate. Your track curves left and right around a large barn. [2014: a walker reports it is easier to go in front of the open-fronted barn through the gap between it and the other farm building on the left; from there the path through the crops can be clearly seen.] From the near left corner of the barn, you now need to take a diagonal path across the large field to the far left-hand corner, gradually downhill, passing under wires. *This path may be very clear or rather obscure, depending on the season and the state of the crop. There are three large trees in the field, the nearest two being about 100m apart. As a guide, you will bisect the line between them. If the crop is wet or impassable, it is possible to go along the right-hand side of the field and turn left in the corner to the far corner.* As you near the far corner, look for some steps in the treeline. (*If not visible at first, aim for a gap in the far hedge.*) These will take you over a bridge with railings and through a small metal gate into another field.

12 Turn **left** in the field and, in just 30m, go **right** on a grassy tree-lined path that runs between two fields. In 80m, you will see a gap on your left by an electricity pole. Go **left** here into a grassy meadow and then diagonally **right**, gradually nearing the hedgerow and trees on the right-hand side of the meadow. *The picturesque Hale Oak farmhouse and oast will be visible over to your right.* When you reach a jutting corner under a broad oak tree roughly half way along the side, go **right** on a narrow path, at first between hedges, then along the left-hand side of a meadow. A stile in the corner takes you into another crop field. Keep dead straight ahead across the crop field, short-cutting the smaller three-sided section on your left and aiming for the next corner of the woods on the left. *The path may be unclear if the farmer is conveniently unaware of this footpath [2014: now clear – thank you farmer if you read this!].* Keep ahead with Eight Acre Wood on your left. As the edge of the field begins to curve right, go **left** over a bridge and stile, through a chain stile into the next field.

13 [Oct 2016: Some of the fields in this section were recently ploughed and you may need to forge a route across or detour round the edges.] Take a path straight ahead across the field, aiming well to the left of a copse in the centre. The path gets clearer as you go. At the far side, go over a stile, cross a track and another stile and go straight ahead down the next field, aiming for a small dip under the trees on the other side. Here, go over a bridge across a stream and straight ahead in a ragged meadow, always keeping the same direction. The path comes down to a refreshing strip of woodland with a high stile leading to a long bridge over a stream. It then takes you over a stile and uphill across the centre of a field with New House Farm and its oast on your left. At the other side of this first field, go over a stile or through a metal gate (both bypassable) and keep ahead along the left-hand side of the next field. At the other side, go over a stile to meet a tarmac lane.

14 Cross straight over the lane and take a wide track opposite, under large oak trees. This wide shady byway makes a memorable end to the walk. It leads over a stream and through more mature woodland. Ignore several footpaths to the left and, just before the first house of the Weald Village, turn **left** between posts on a footpath. When you reach a sports centre, keep ahead and reach the Green where the walk began.



The Windmill pub is an excellent location, recently saved by a campaign by the villagers. As well as Harveys ales and food it offers some imaginative musical entertainment in the evenings. It serves an interesting menu lunchtimes, extending to 4pm on a Sunday. There is also Giacomo's Italian Restaurant, on the eastern side of the village.

Other walks referred to in text:

Brasted: <http://www.fancyfreewalks.org/Kent/Brasted.pdf>

Knole and Ightham: <http://www.fancyfreewalks.org/Kent/Knole-Ightham.pdf>

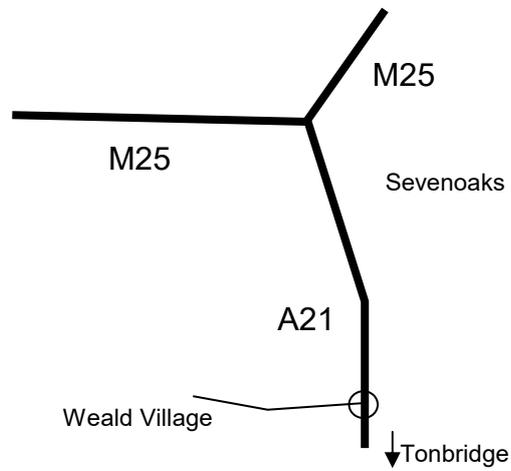
Singleton: <http://www.fancyfreewalks.org/W.Sussex/Singleton.pdf>

Withyham: <http://www.fancyfreewalks.org/E.Sussex/Withyham-AshdownForest.pdf>

fancy more free walks? www.fancyfreewalks.org

Getting there

By car: Sevenoaks Weald is signposted from the A21 between Sevenoaks and Tonbridge. Follow signs to the village and park near the Green.



By bus/train: bus 401 from Tonbridge station. Check the timetables.