



St Leonard's Forest

Distance 25 km (15½ miles), easy walking

Region: West Sussex

Author: Hautboy *comments please to feedback@fancyfreewalks.org*

Refreshments: Mannings Heath, Nuthurst

Map: Explorer 134 (Crawley and Horsham)

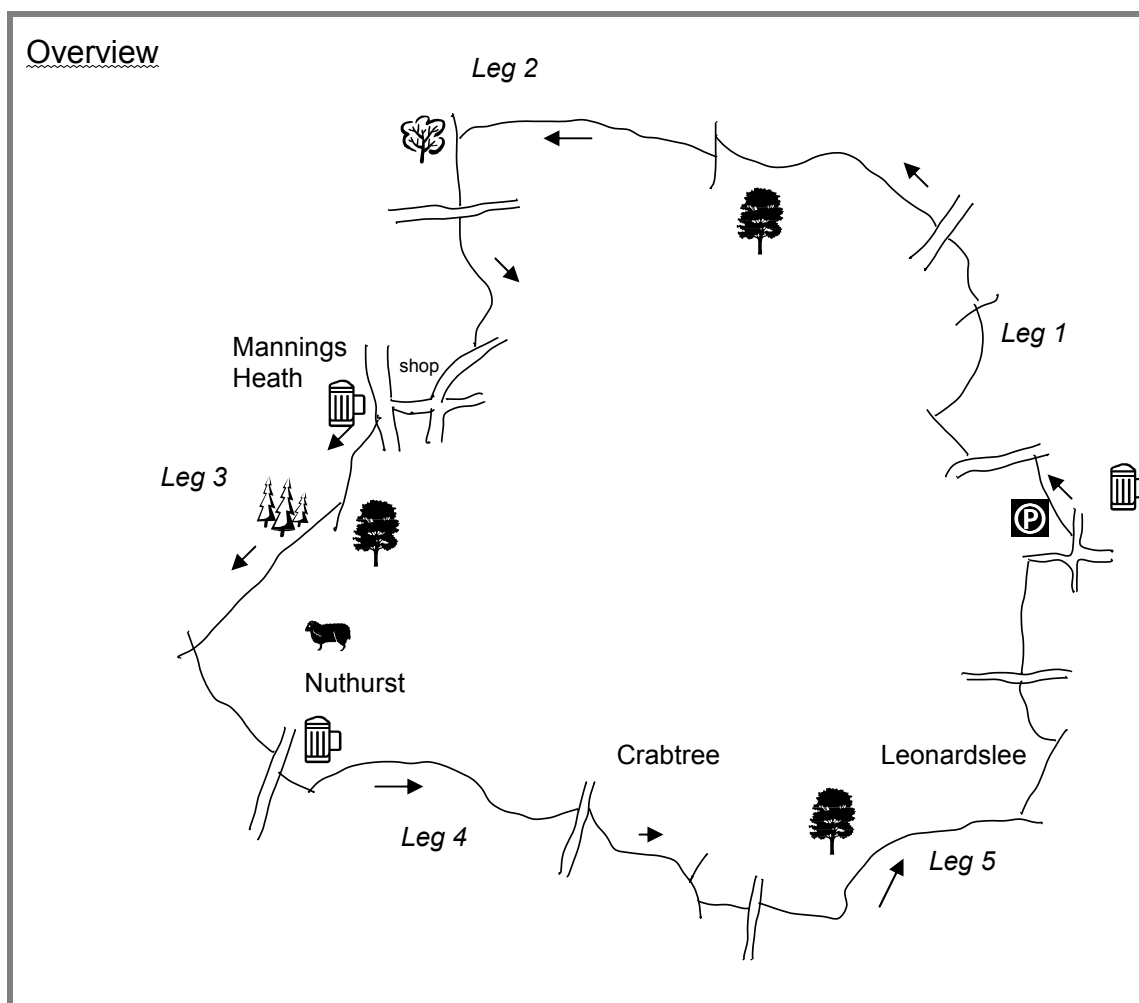
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Woodland, lakes, heath

In Brief



This is a beautiful and exhilarating walk mixing spectacular woodland, hidden lakes and green meadows. This is a Wealden walk, so there are a few muddy patches, easily bypassed, making the walk best during a dry spell but fine at any time if you have boots. In late spring, the woods adjoining your route will be decked almost all the way by bluebells. It is mainly fine for dogs and there is just one tiny patch of nettles.

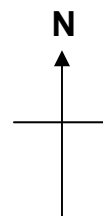


The walk starts at **Furnace Pond** near **Slaugham**, West Sussex. The lake is just west of Slaugham. To get there by car, take the M23 until, past the sign for Nymans Garden and just past Pease Pottage services, the motorway ends and becomes a four-lane affair with an S-bend in a forest. Here look out for an exit left to Slaugham. Follow signs to Slaugham and continue straight on through this attractive village to a cross-roads with a major road where there is a lake, popular with anglers. There are parking areas beside the road on the right, ahead by the lakeside, and, failing that, straight ahead on the right. For a detailed map, and a bus route, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**). Before you park, it is worth stopping briefly in Slaugham.



Slaugham (pronounced "Slaffham") is a small village around an attractive green. The Norman Church has a 13th century tower with a Victorian clock set in its north side. Nearby is the ruin of Slaugham Place, the former home of Sir Walter Covert, designed by John Thorpe and built by 1579, but pulled down some 200 years later. The lake is one of the sources of the River Ouse.

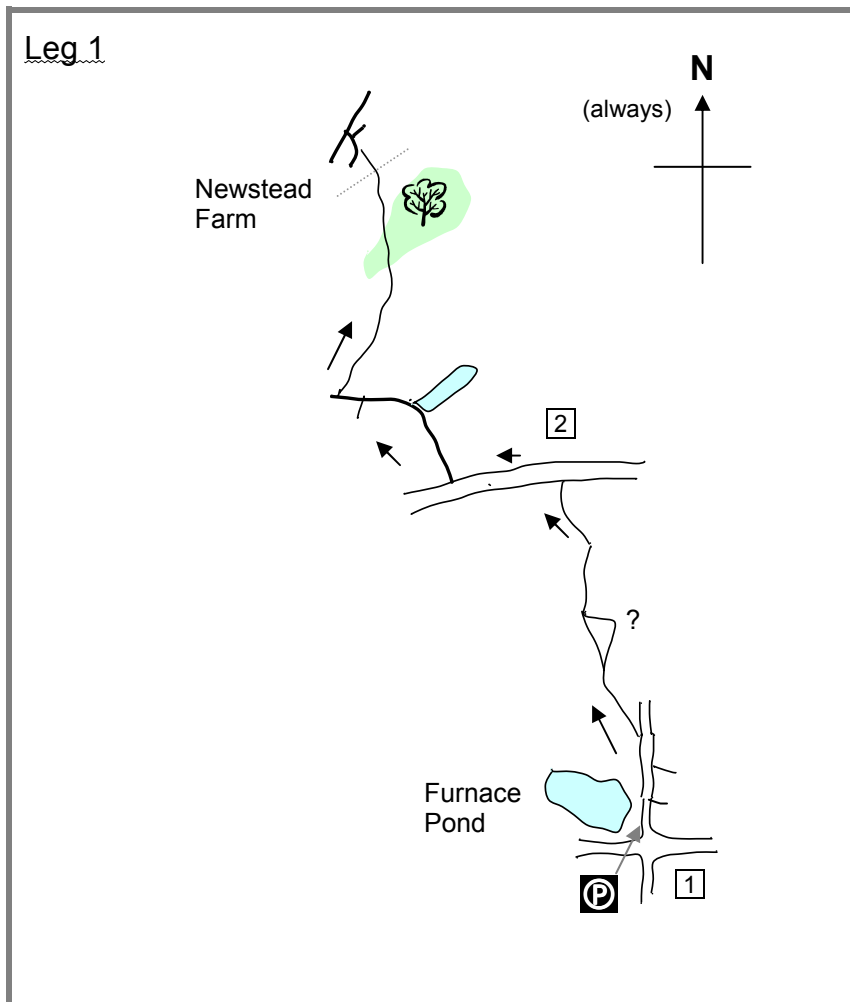
Note on the maps. Each section map below is **accurate but not all the maps are to the same scale.** North is **always up**.



The Walk

Leg 1: Furnace Pond to Newstead Farm, 4 km (2½ miles)

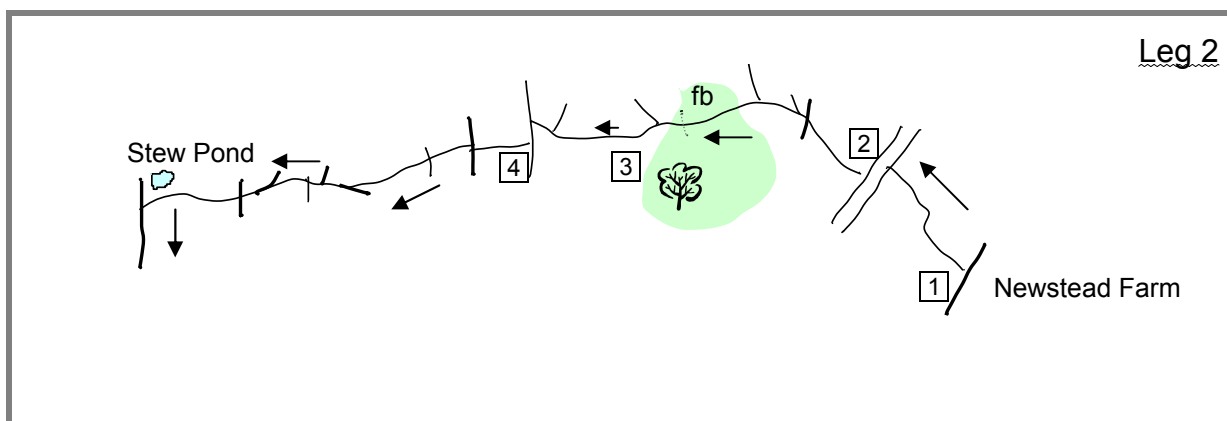
- 1 See map overleaf.** With the lake on your left, follow the road Coos Lane (N) past a large house on the left (Lower Ashfold) till there's a footpath forking off **left**. The footpath leads over a stile into a field where you need to keep the same direction aiming for the corner of the wood ahead. Occasionally the field is ploughed up or planted, in which case it is better to turn right and then left along two sides of the field. (Be reassured: this is almost the *only* ploughed field on the walk). [Apr 2011: it has reverted to grass.] At the corner of the wood, the official path continues along the right-hand edge of the field beside the wood, but it may be pleasanter to take the parallel path through the rhododendron wood. Just keep the field visible on your left. The official path turns left at the field corner and then regains direction over the brow of the hill, so if you are in the wood you need to leave the path where it bends right, cross a stream on the **left** and climb up to the brow of the hill. Keep to the right of a large house, cross a stile beside a gate, cross another meadow and finally cross a stile to reach a busy road and turn **left** (W) on it.



Notice that you have been walking part of the High Weald Landscape Trail. The HWLT is a 140km=90 mile walking route between Horsham and Rye on the East Sussex coast passing through the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It passes through some spectacular scenery and lovely towns such as the “Dens” of Kent (Tenterden, Benenden, Rolvenden etc.).

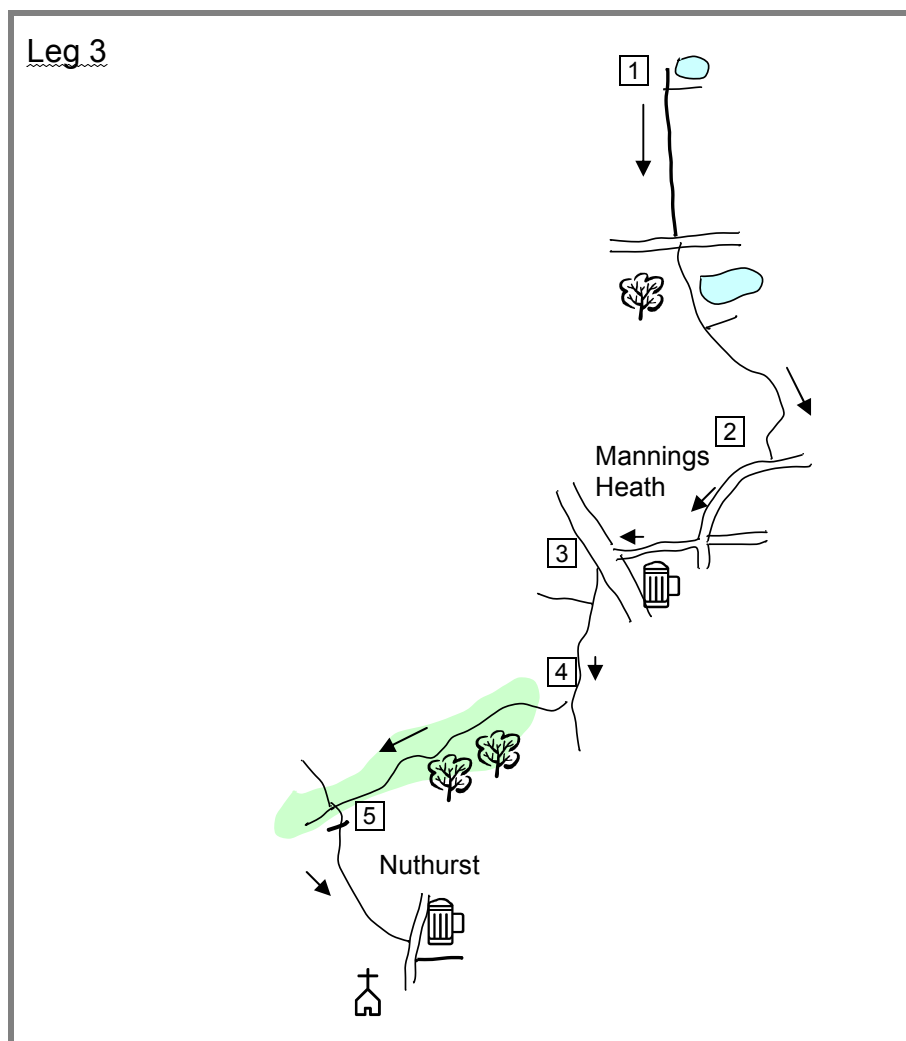
- 2** After about 300m, you pass the welcome sign for Plummers Plain and reach a forest with a wide track called Cartersledge Lane. Turn **right** here. Follow this quiet forest lane past a lake on the right until you pass a bungalow on the left. Ignore a footpath sign left and pass two large fields on the right and enter woodland. About 30m after a dusty driveway to a house on the left, take a footpath **right** (N) over a stile into a charming narrow meadow and, keeping to the right at first, follow it to its end. Here the footpath leaves the meadow **left** over a stile, crosses a stream by a bridge in a strip of woodland and leads up to a field. Do *not* cross the stile leading into the field but instead turn **right** here on a woodland path, later ignoring a path on the right over a bridge, and eventually enter the meadow via another stile. (This route cuts out two stiles on the official path.) *If you are walking in late spring, you will see an abundance of bluebells. They will be a constant enchanting feature of this walk.* Cross the meadow diagonally passing close to a pylon, crossing a low fence, and keep straight on to reach a track leading to a metal gate into Newstead Farm. (Again be reassured: this is practically the *only* farmyard you need to negotiate on this walk.)

Leg 2: Newstead Farm to the Stew Pond, 5 km (3 miles)



- 1 At the farm cross straight over a bridleway, via a metal gate on each side, and follow a footpath ahead. This descends on the right of a field to a small metal gate and crosses a stream by a wooden bridge, zigzags through attractive woodland, and continues over a stile on an enclosed path alongside another field to Grouse Road.
- 2 Turn **left** (SW) on this quiet road. After about 250m take a footpath **right** (NW) over a stile across meadows. The footpath runs on the right hand side of a field, goes through a metal gate, becomes a wide enclosed path, crosses a drive and passes close to Spring Farm. Here avoid the driveway on the right leading into the farm and soon after ignore a signposted right turn. After some distance through lovely woods you pass over a merry stream into a meadow with gorse. At a signposted junction take the **left** fork over a stile.
- 3 The path crosses two more stiles close together by a house on the right with a haha onto a narrow enclosed path ending in a tiny wooden bridge where it maintains direction on a wide grassy path. Ignore another right turn to go ahead through a swing-gate by a metal gate. Eventually you come to a wide forestry track. Turn sharp **left** (S). (If you are looking at Map 134, note that the left-turn short cut does not exist.)
- 4 After a few paces take a footpath **right** (W) up some steps. You are now truly entering St Leonards Forest and families and other walkers will probably become evident. The footpath leads upwards and levels out on the expansive heath of Greenbroom Hill, crossing a forestry track. You are now back on the High Weald Landscape Trail. Follow the trail (W) and footpath signs, always straight on, ignoring all paths leading off, and later joining a wide sandy track coming in from the left. Soon there is a field on the left and the path is gradually joined from the right by a stony path. Just after an unmapped pond on the left, the path goes over a stile by a gate, crosses a wider track and continues along a grassy enclosed path with fields on the left and eventually reaches a T-junction at a wide track via an unneeded stile by the so-called Stew-Pond which can be seen by going right through an unneeded gate but is somewhat gloomy. However, your route is **left** (S) at the T-junction on the straight wide track.

Leg 3: Stew Pond to Nuthurst, 6½ km (4 miles)



- 1 Follow the track till eventually you reach a road. Cross the road and continue straight on past a barrier on a much narrower footpath. This path runs for some time between fields and woodland, passes a lake on the left and enters a meadow over a stile, avoiding a stile on the left. The path curves right around a field and reaches a road via a stile near a stream. Turn **right** on the road.
- 2 The road leads upwards into Mannings Heath and eventually leads to a signposted crossroads. *In keeping with the immaculate nature of this small community, the village store here (closed from 1pm Sundays and Bank Holidays) is in fact a classy deli next to a billiard-table perfect patch of grass. (There is a Mace grocery in the filling station shortly though.)* Turn **right** at the crossroads (signposted Horsham) and eventually cross the A281 main road by the *Dun Horse* (Fullers with tapas) to a narrow footpath (S) opposite.
- 3 Soon after joining the footpath, ignore a signposted footpath right and continue south through trees. The path goes through a wooden swing-gate, over a footbridge, later over a stile on a wooden gate, over another stile, through a meadow and over two stiles close together at a signposted junction. Here turn **right** (SW) on a bridleway, immediately crossing a wooden bridge, and continue ahead on a wide path.

4 The bridleway passes through deciduous forest and then the pine forests of Bushy Copse and Finche's Wood with fine views left across the valley. Where there is an apparent fork, take the **right** hand path, ignoring the lower one that only leads into fields. Eventually you pass Finches Wood Cottage and shortly, at a four-way signed junction, take a footpath **left** (S).

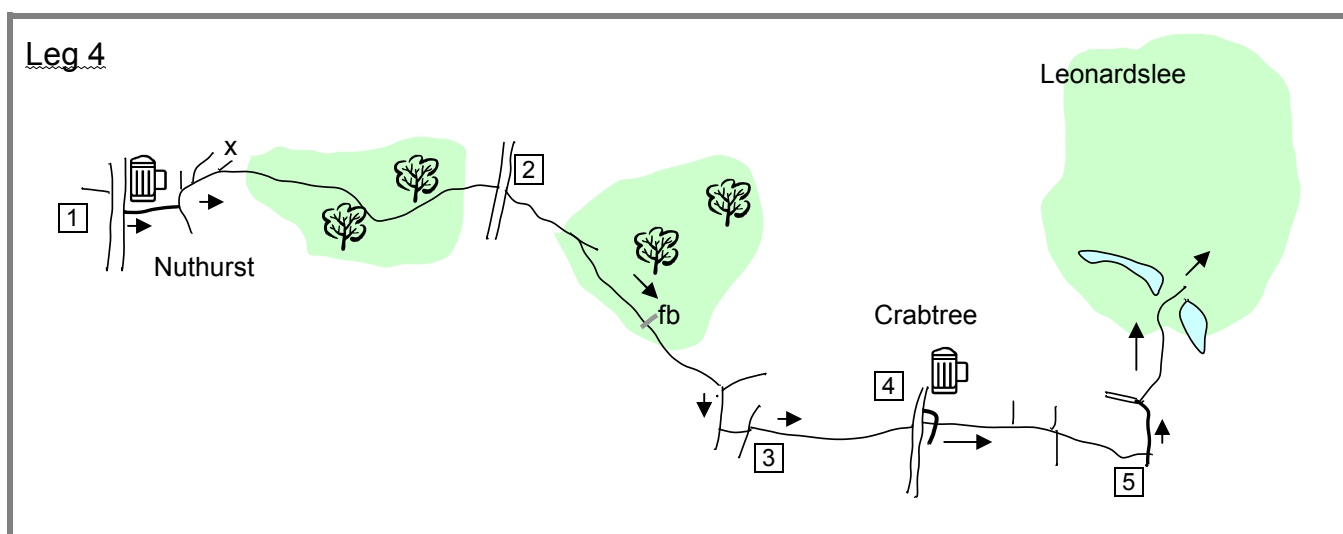
5 Follow the footpath down through pasture as it goes over a crossing track, zigzags through a strip of woodland, goes through a metal gate into a large field and along the right side of fields through two more gates. After the last of these gates, the path veers diagonally **left** across the cow pasture following wires towards the distant corner where there is a gate into the lane about 20m right of the last electricity pole. Turn **left** along the lane into Nuthurst and turn **right** along the road. The *Black Horse* here is a small slightly upmarket free house that holds occasional jazz sessions.



A little further on the right is St Andrew's Church, dating from 1130, and much altered at various times since. The graceful wooden shingled spire replaced the old squat tower in 1857. Inside, the east window is a stunning depiction of St Andrew flanked by a sower and fisherman. The beautiful rood screen, though modern, invokes ages past with its delicate pastels, and depicts eight Sussex saints, including St Leonard.

Leg 4: Nuthurst to Leonardslee New Pond, 5 km (3½ miles)

1 Soon take the tarmac lane **left** (E) marked as a bridleway past a quite superb garden centre. At a T-junction turn **left**, take a **right** fork to avoid a linen shop and follow the bridleway as it curves right (E) through restored farm buildings. **Ignore** the footpath sign visible on the left leading round a farm shed and instead keep straight ahead on the broad track. Soon, fork **right** on a narrower bridleway as indicated by the sign, thus avoiding an isolated cottage. The bridleway passes through the thick Lodgesale Wood, with tall pines, then a mixture of tree species. If the way is muddy or rutted, there are many opportunities to bypass it on a parallel path. Eventually the bridleway reaches a road after wheeling right by a cottage.



2 Turn **left** on the road a few paces and take another bridleway **right** (SE). Soon, a signpost directs you to a **right** fork, where the main path stops at a gate. The bridleway runs for some distance, passing several unmapped lakes on your right, runs over a wide bridge and rises steeply. Eventually, there is a signposted junction with another bridleway coming in from the left

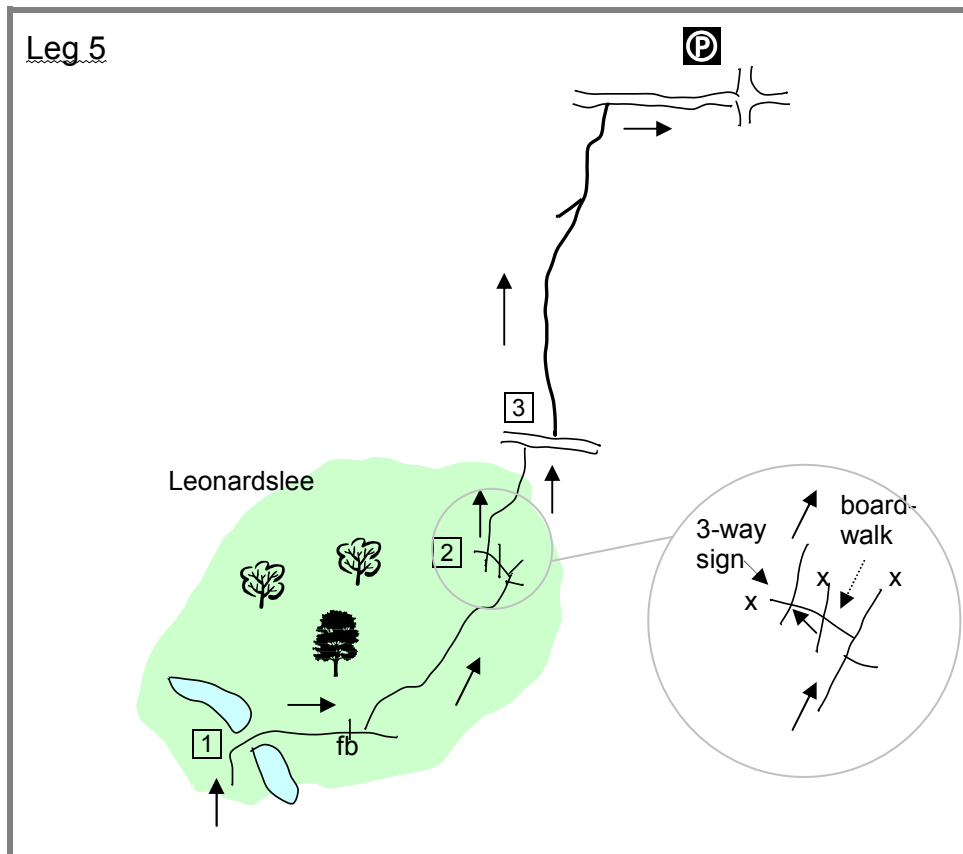
where your route curves **right**. Soon after, ignore a signed footpath right and, 30m later, take the next signposted footpath **left** (E). Be careful not to miss this turn. On meeting a pair of cottages, ignore the first footpath that bends sharply right and take the **second** footpath **right** (E) a few metres on.

- 3 This footpath leads over a pleasant open meadow, over a plank bridge, across the centre of another meadow to the main road at Crabtree. Here you need to cross the road very carefully as the traffic is partly hidden by hedges. (The *Crab Tree* pub, whose sign shows the harvesting of crab-apples, is a few metres left but up for redevelopment.) Take the path immediately opposite (E).
- 4 The footpath will be taking you almost dead straight for roughly 1km. It first crosses a residential road, proceeds over a meadow with houses in view on the left and skirts a residents' car park. It continues ahead between meadows with a wire fence on your right. It crosses two stiles close together, avoiding a footpath left. It then goes along the left side of the field where you can cross a stile or simply use the metal gate, if open. Go over a wide track to a track opposite and, in 10m where the track bends right, leave it to go over another stile and continue straight across the centre of the field until the field ends at a stile onto a wide track by a 4-way fingerpost near an attractive house.
- 5 Turn **left** (NNW) at the track, ignoring the large wooden gate and footpath ahead, and follow it as it ascends and curves left. At the top, where it becomes a tarmac road, leave it by turning sharp **right** (NE) on a track and keep straight on for some distance. This track leads into an outstanding area of forest. You reach a lake which borders Leonardslee Gardens where you have to turn **right** (E).

Leonardslee is a country house and the extensive Gardens are rightly celebrated, especially for their rhododendrons and azaleas around the lakes and rock garden. There are also (real) wallabies and a huge dolls' house (more like a dolls' palace and village) and a collection of Victorian automobiles. The gardens were recently sold to "an international businessman" and are currently not open to the public.

Leg 5: Leonardslee New Pond to Furnace Pond, 5 km (3 miles)

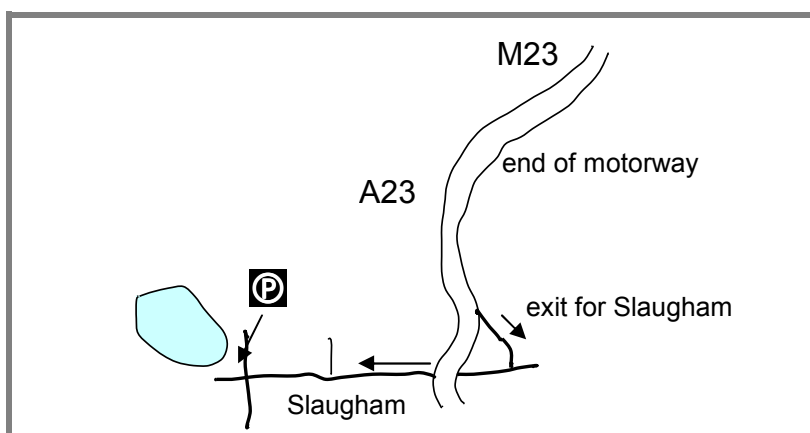
- 1 **See map overleaf.** The track rises steeply and descends more gently. After crossing a wonderful verdant stream at the valley bottom via a wide bridge, take the bridleway immediately **left** (NE) following the stream. This track runs for some distance through a remarkable, sometimes spectacular area of forest and passes a lake on your left. About 200m after the lake, ignore a signed footpath right and immediately after this take a signed footpath **left** (NNW) which goes down and along a boardwalk. Immediately cross another track diagonally.
- 2 At a 3-way signpost take the footpath **right** (N) uphill, leading through more forest [Apr 2010: now harvested on the right]. After about 200m, at a junction, keep to the signposted route, slightly right, avoiding a grassy path on the left and a track curving away to the left. The path joins a tarmac driveway via a metal gate and comes out to a road by a timbered cottage at Harvey's Farm. *Note that you are on the Sussex Ouse Valley Way, a 68km route, opened in 2005, that follows the River Ouse from its source near Lower Beeding in the High Weald to the sea at Seaford Bay.*



- 3 Turn **right** (E) on the road for a short distance and then take a bridleway **left** (N) up a shingly path, now resurfaced for riders. This path levels out and becomes a very pleasant surfaced track leading past woodland and fields. At a house with a tall isolated chimney, it joins a tarmac lane, passes a perfect timbered cottage at Denmans Farm and goes over a stream via a brick bridge. It ends at a major road. Turn **right** soon to arrive back at your starting point. The *Chequers* at Slaugham is a possible place for final refreshment.

Getting there

By car:



By bus: No. 17 from Brighton or Horsham to Mannings Heath.

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