



Wolstonbury Hill and Hurstpierpoint

Distance: 11 km=7½ miles moderate walking with long easy sections

Region: West Sussex

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Refreshments: Hurstpierpoint

Map: Explorer 122 (Steyning) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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Village, high hills, views, meadows, small country town

In Brief

The ascent of Wolstonbury Hill is a regular pastime of the people of the little town of Hurstpierpoint and they treat it as an revered feature of their own backyard. This walk shows you exactly why they enjoy it so much and enables you to share the wonderful views and the fresh air of the South Downs. For a wide choice of refreshments, there is so much available in the town, but there is also a celebrated inn in Clayton, the nominal starting point for this walk. (To enquire at the *Jack and Jill*, ring 01273-843595.)



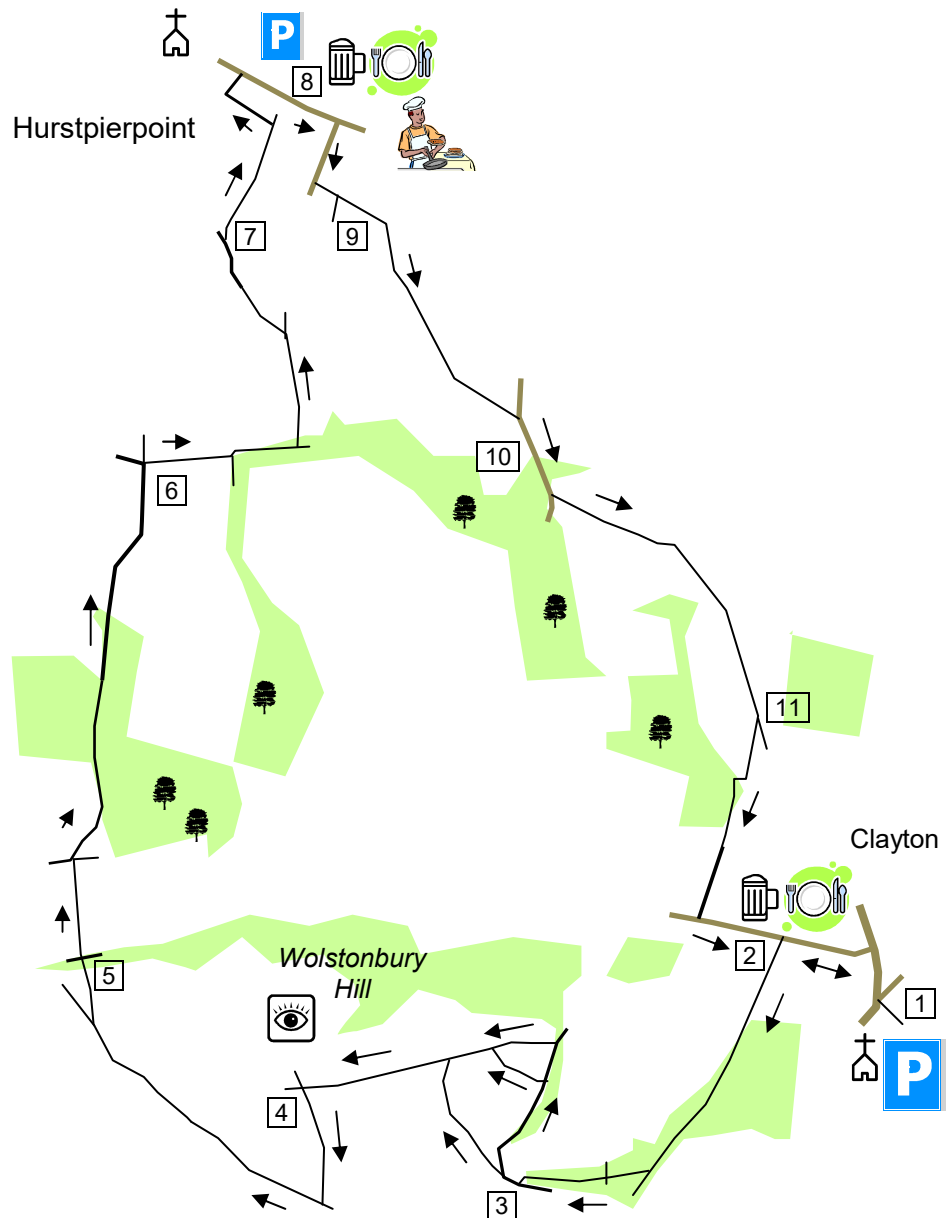
There are nettles on some of the paths, making shorts inadvisable. The paths are generally firm and no climbing is required (especially if you take the “lazy” choice of the three ascents). There is some spongy ground in the sections either side of Hurstpierpoint, so except after a prolonged dry spell, boots are preferable to walking shoes or trainers. Your dog can join you on this walk but *not* if you start in Clayton (because of the traffic and narrow footway).

The walk begins at the car park in **Clayton Recreation Ground**, West Sussex, near Brighton, approximate postcode **BN6 9PJ**. This gives you a vigorous start and a comfortable sojourn for refreshments in Hurstpierpoint. You can also start in that little town, postcode **BN6 9TR**, (begin section 8) where there is roadside parking but note that the car park in Trinity Road has a limit of 3 hours on free parking. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



It is also possible to start the walk in **Hassocks station**, by walking south along the footpath beside the railway, less than a mile each way.

The Walk



Clayton village is famous for the “Jack and Jill” windmills and also for its church of St John the Baptist, built in the early 1100s, Grade I listed and a treasure house not to be missed. Its most famous feature is the wall paintings, as old as the church, showing the Day of Judgement, the Keys of Heaven and the Procession to the Heavenly Jerusalem. They were painted by monks from Lewes Priory.

- 1 From the car park in Clayton, cross the left-hand corner of the recreation ground, passing a children's play area on your left, to go through a small (avoidable) wooden swing-gate on the other side. Cross straight over a side road and take the footway ahead, along the right-hand side of the main road. (*Careful ! - the footway is rather narrow.*) The road crosses the railway, the main London-Brighton line. If you look left, you can see the entrance to the Clayton Tunnel.

The North Portal of the Clayton Tunnel (the longest on the line at over 2 km) is famously “turretted” and “castellated” like a fairytale castle. It seems this was a

condition set by the farmer whose land it was. The structure, built in 1841, is Grade II listed and was almost certainly designed by David Mocatta who also created the Ouse Valley Viaduct (see the “Ardingly Lake, Ouse Valley, Borde Hill” walk in this series). The little red-brick cottage perched on top was built a few years later as a home for the lamp-lighter – the man whose job it was to re-light the lamps in the tunnel after they were blown out by the passing trains (see also the “Merstham” walk in the Surrey series).

Continue till you are opposite a side road, New Way Lane, and cross the road carefully. (Do not try to cross this busy road any earlier because of the bend; if possible go a little further till you are opposite the Jack and Jill pub.) Walk along New Way Lane for 250m and turn **left** between posts on a signed bridleway.

- 2 The path goes through bushes and then rises through mature woodland. After 400m, you pass a National Trust sign for Wolstonbury Hill and the path becomes rather steep. Just after the path levels out, you meet a wooden gate and a 3-way fingerpost. Turn **right** here through the gate and follow the path at first downhill, then level. This spellbinding path cut along a steep slope through a rich area of ferns and moist shade-loving plants is known as Wellcombe Bottom. In 150m, you go straight over a crossing path. Another 200m brings you to a T-junction by a wooden gate on your left, with the slope of the hill looming up in front of you, magnificent and daunting. Turn **right** on this wide path for only 50m to approach a small wooden gate beside a large gate.
- 3 There are **three** alternative ways now to ascend Wolstonbury Hill:
 1. Quick and slick. Avoid the wooden gate ahead and instead go **left** over a small stile. Follow a faint path round to the right past an enclosure containing a circular dew pond. When you are half way round the enclosure, veer off to the left on a faint path up the steep slope. You should be heading for a point lower down from the top of the hill, about 300m to the right of it. As you progress, you can make out a wire fence and you soon reach the corner of it. Veer right past the corner and continue with the wire fence on your right. In 70m, go over a stile and turn **left** on a wide path leading to the top.
 2. Over the mounds. Go ahead through the wooden gate and follow the main chalky path for 300m to meet a fingerpost and stile. Go **left** over the stile. Go straight ahead on the green hillside towards the hilltop but shortly veer a little to the right through wild flower grass towards a chalky quarry. (This is probably part of an ancient burial site and you can see several other mounds to your right.) Your path seems to head into the quarry but it soon forks right on a high path up along the rim. A final short scramble brings you out onto the open hillside. Turn **left** on a wide path leading to the top. Go over a stile beside a large metal gate and ignore a stile on your left.
 3. Plain lazy. Go ahead through the wooden gate and follow the main chalky path, ignoring a fingerpost and stile on your left after 300m. In another 100m you come to a 3-way junction and a fingerpost. Turn **left** through a small wooden gate beside a large gate. Immediately ignore a path on your right and follow a wide path straight ahead leading to the top. Go over a stile beside a large metal gate and ignore a stile on your left.



About 100m short of the summit, your path goes over a crossing path, in fact a circular path which goes round the hill. At the top you find a triangulation pillar and great views all round.

Wolstonbury Hill, 225m high, is part of the chalk South Downs but it projects northwards into the Weald, giving it a special prominence in modern leisure and in past folklore. From here you can see the Devil's Dyke, the sea and Brighton, and much of the South Downs, and northwards across the Weald to the North Downs. Burial sites, an Iron Age fort, and many Saxon artefacts have been found here. It's held in huge affection by the local townsfolk and all the pupils of Hurstpierpoint College make an annual ascent where the whole school holds a ceremony.

- 4 At the triangulation pillar, turn sharp **left** on a path in the direction of the sea and Brighton (which you can hopefully see on a clear day). In 300m, you reach a T-junction with a fingerpost. Go over a (bypassable) V-stile here and turn **right** on a wide track. You soon come through a wooden gate and continue through thorn bushes on a chalky path. After a total of 400m, you will see a tall round hillock up on your right (in fact an ancient hill fort) as the path forks three ways. Keep straight ahead, on the clearer path, avoiding both the left fork (which heads into bushes) and the right fork (which curls round the hill). In 200m, ignore a grassy crossing path and continue ahead, more steeply down. *Note! The chalk may be slippery during this section: you can use a bypass route on the left or, as a last resort, find a path down the grassy hillside on your right.* When you reach the corner of a wire fence, avoid a path forking off to the right and continue straight down through trees. This brambly path leads through a small wooden gate to meet a crossing bridleway.
- 5 Cross straight over the bridleway, a fraction right, on a wide path running between crop fields. In 250m, you reach a T-junction with a tarmac drive. Veer **right** onto the drive, avoiding a shingle track sharp right. After passing a large cottage, continue on a dirt track through woodland. After about 600m on this track, you come through a small wooden gate and soon pass the buildings of Randolph's Farm on your right. Go through a small wooden gate to cross their forecourt and exit on the driveway, passing the historic farmhouse on your right. You pass more buildings and reach a junction of drives.
- 6 Leaving the main drive, which bends left, and ignoring a dirt track straight ahead, instead turn **right** on a gravel driveway. Keep right shortly to avoid a private entrance as you pass through the hamlet of Bedlam Street. The drive degrades to a narrow woodland path. You meet a junction with a footpath on the right and a fingerpost. Go **left** here over a V-stile and **right** to resume your direction along the right-hand side of a sheep field. At the other side, go over a stile and turn **left** on a path between pastures. You now negotiate a stile (or open metal gate) under an oak tree to reach a fork. Take the **left** fork* through a wooden swing-gate, a very knobbly path running under a dense strip of trees. (**Locals in-the-know avoid this muddy path by taking a path further to the left, looping through the woods and re-joining the intended path at the next sentence.*) The thick bole of an oak tree presents an obstacle, after which the path continues beside a sheep field on your left. A stile typical of the Monday group* leads to a small meadow and a more conventional stile taking you onto a gravel drive. (**An organisation of volunteer rights-of-way workers.*)

- 7 Follow the drive for 100m or so, till it curves left under a tall oak. Now look for a marker post and turn **right** over a narrow steel bridge. Cross straight over a patch of grass past another marker post and go over a long 2-plank bridge and up steps on a path between grassy meadows. Continue beside a wall on your left and go up steps into the town. The village green where the annual St Lawrence Fair is held, is on your right. One possible route is to turn **left** at the corner of the green on a narrow path which leads to a driveway, leading past the *Folly Tower* and several historic houses. Stay on the drive as it curves right to meet the High Street. Your route is **right** along the High Street but it is worth making a short excursion left to visit the church.

The small town of Hurstpierpoint is known simply as the "Hurst" by the inhabitants. The "Pierpoint" in the name came from the de Pierpoint family who came over with William the Conqueror in 1066. Hurstpierpoint may be the friendliest little town in Sussex. Everyone greets you and many ask about your intended walk and stay to offer suggestions. There's a good balance of old and young and everyone is well cared for, in education, culture, ethnic mix and activities. If you arrive on the first Saturday in July, you will be able to take part in the St Lawrence Fair, held on the green. The town boasts one of the best fish-and-chip shops in Sussex (although the modern packaging ends up as litter). Hurstpierpoint College, a mile out of town, is a noted fee-paying co-ed school. The late Barry Norman (film critic) and actor Michael York are ex-pupils.

- 8 From the main crossroads near the church, walk along the town High Street (direction: *Hassocks*). You pass historic *Wyckham House* and *Mansion House* opposite. The *New Inn* on your right and the *Poacher Inn* on your left offer a good refreshment break, but there are also a deli, a bakery and a classy restaurant providing different fare. *The Players Theatre*, housed in an old chapel, has an enviable record of productions for such a small town and are putting on (2017) an unbroken reading of every word of Shakespeare 24-hours to raise funds. Immediately after the theatre, turn **right** on South Avenue, passing the green on your right. Just before the road descends and narrows, turn **left** by a metal barrier on a footpath, running between fences.
- 9 Avoid a tempting kissing gate on your right and stay on the narrow path. Wolstonbury Hill, the main feature of this walk, shows prominently to your right. Go over a V-stile, keep **right** on a track, go over a stile (or through the large metal gate beside it) and negotiate a V-stile and a kissing gate (both with a metal gate alternative), ignoring a footpath on the right as you go. Once in a large sheep field, keep dead straight across the centre, then through a wooden swing-gate and straight ahead across a tufty meadow. Your path crosses a tarmac drive past a fingerpost and leads up a green slope to a stile with steps, recently installed by the Monday group. Here there is a bench seat for a welcome pause. Go over the stile and down steps to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane.
- 10 The lane leads past a house and under trees. Immediately after a house on the left, *Bearstokes*, go **left** at a signpost through a small wooden gate on a footpath. The path takes you over a stile and along the left-hand side of a green meadow. In 120m, you come over a stile (or through the open wooden gate) into another meadow. At the top, go over a stile, turn **right** through a wooden swing-gate and go diagonally across the next meadow, heading for the right-hand edge of the woods ahead. Clayton's Jack and Jill windmills are visible on the hill ahead. (See *the other walk in this series, "Ditchling and Clayton Windmills"*.) A wooden swing-gate leads you along

the right-hand side of a sheep pasture. The next wooden swing-gate gives you a choice of paths: take the **right**-hand path, avoiding the left fork which heads directly for the windmills.

- 11 At the other side, go over a V-stile and a 2-plank bridge and immediately turn **right** with the path through bushes. At a fork, you can take either path as they quickly re-join. After a V-stile (provided by the Monday Group), turn **left** on a wide path, under a variety of tall trees. Keep straight ahead to join a drive which runs beside the buildings of Coldharbour Farm on your left. Ignore a step stile on your left and stay on the drive to a T-junction with a tarmac lane, New Way Lane. Turn **left** on the lane. In 200m, there is a signed bridleway with posts on your right but the excellent *Jack and Jill* pub is only another 250m along the lane. *If you did not start this walk in Clayton, and do not wish to visit the village, the pub or the historic church, turn **right** on this track and resume the walk from section 2.* Otherwise ... Continue on the lane as far as the main road. The *Jack and Jill* pub is on your left. After possible refreshment, cross the road carefully, turn **right** over the railway bridge, cross over a side road to a wooden swing-gate and cross the recreation area to the car park where the walk began.



Getting there

By car: **Clayton** lies on the A273 road, just south of Hassocks and Burgess Hill.

For those arriving from the London area, the easiest way is to take the M23/A23 as far as the exit for "A273 Hassocks". Turn **right** on the slip road and continue through Pycombe village till you meet the A273 at a T-junction.

Turn **left** to reach a signpost for Clayton in about 1 mile. Take the little lane into Clayton, go past the church and the car park is under bar on the left.

Hurstpierpoint is signposted from the A23 road.

By bus/train: bus 273 runs from Brighton to Hurstpierpoint. Bus 33 joins Hurstpierpoint to Hassocks and Burgess Hill stations. Not Sundays. Check the timetables.

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