



Cocking and Heyshott & Ambersham Common

Distance: 13 km=8 miles or two walks of 8 km= 5 miles easy walking

Region: West Sussex

Date written: 7-may-2017

Author: Hautboy

Last update: 17-aug-2020

Refreshments: Cocking, Heyshott

Map: Explorer 120, 121, 133 *but the maps in this guide will be sufficient!*

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Villages, woodland, heath, views

In Brief

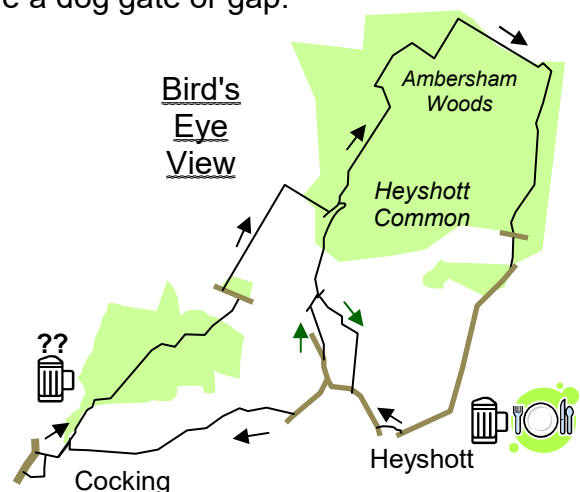
This walk is a perfect adventure for walkers who would like a stimulating hike without the need to ascend the steep South Downs on the other side of these two villages. (For walkers wanting more of a challenge, it makes an ideal companion for the *Heyshott, South Downs, East Dean* walk in this series.) Shorter options are available, as shown in the figure-of-eight map on this page: (1) starting in Heyshott and walking round Heyshott Common (2) walking between the two villages only, omitting Heyshott Common.

Heyshott offers excellent refreshments. (To enquire at the *Unicorn*, ring 01730-813486.) The *Bluebell Inn*, Cocking, was closed (May 2019) but there are rumours of a village buy-out: ring 01730-810200 for info.

There are no nettles or brambles to speak of on this walk, so there should be no problem with uncovered legs. When this walk was researched in the dry spring of 2017, the paths were bone dry, but it is clear that in wet conditions the forest routes could get churned up or claggy (although as the paths are unfenced you can normally bypass any problems). Whatever the conditions, this is a walk for boots. There seems no reason not to bring your dog on this walk as the stile generally have a dog gate or gap.



The walk begins in the villages of **Cocking** or **Heyshott**, West Sussex. The full walk begins in Cocking which lies on A286 road between Midhurst and Chichester, postcode **GU29 0HU**. Two shorter walks are shown here. For the **Cocking-Heyshott** walk, you can start in Cocking or in **Heyshott**, postcode **GU29 0DL**. For the **Heyshott Common** walk, begin in Heyshott. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

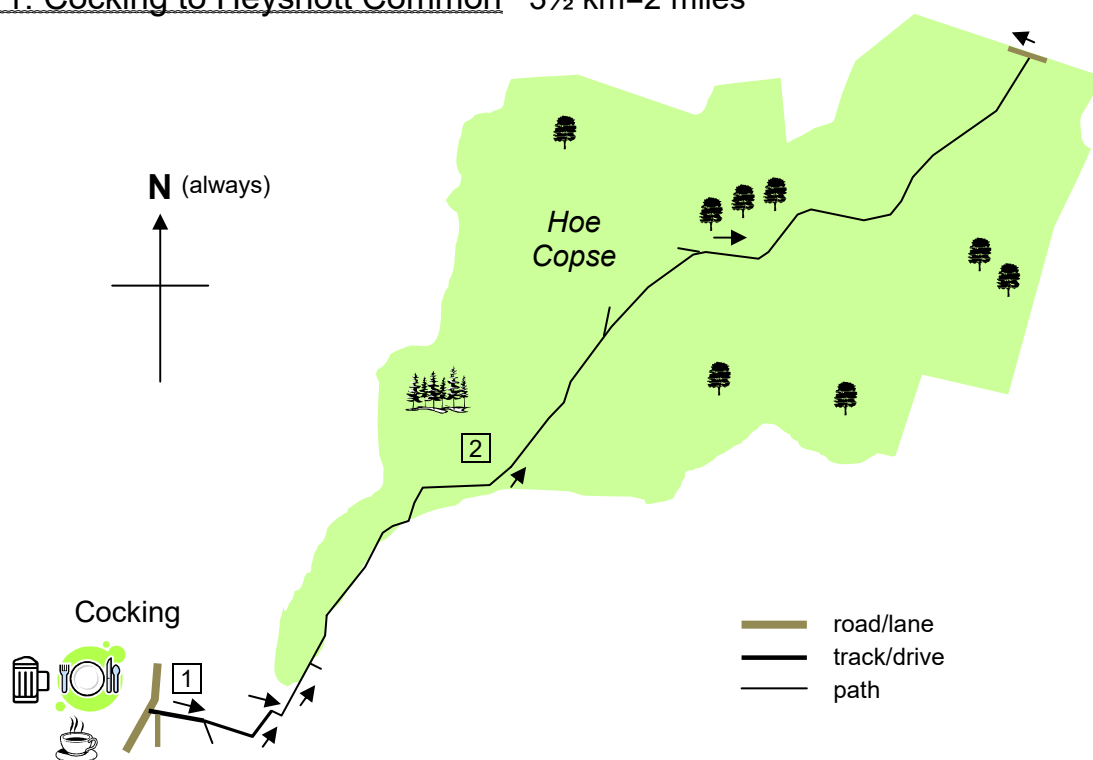


The Walk

If you are doing the shorter **Heyshott-Heyshott Common Walk**, starting in Heyshott and omitting Cocking, skip to near the end of this text and start with the **High Heyshott Start**.

The name "Cocking" may mean "people on the hillock" or more likely simply the people of a Saxon chief called "Cocc(a)". The Domesday Book of 1086 records the village as "Cochinges" and describes it as having "a church and five mills". The history of Cocking is remarkably well told in the **History Column**, a tall sculpted spiral. You can find it just south of the Moonlight Cottage Tea Rooms, on the other side, where there is a signpost. As well as great national events, it records in charming detail "1632 Oak felled by ungodly man" and "1859 Village Cross blown up by a small boy".

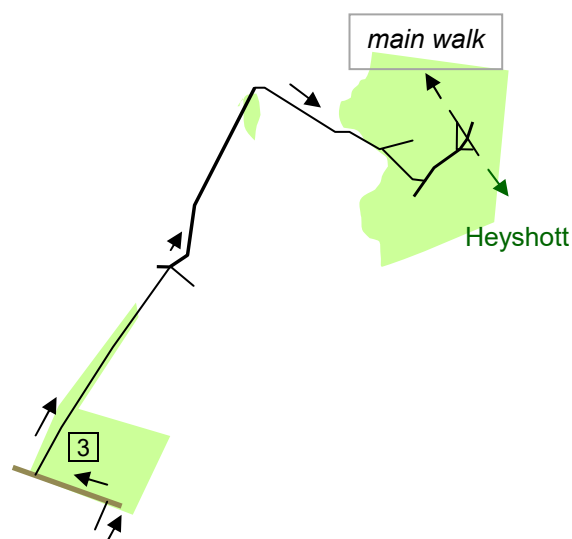
Leg 1: Cocking to Heyshott Common 3½ km=2 miles



- 1 Take the lane almost opposite the pub, next to a little shop, avoiding a lane downhill on the right which leads to the church. At a junction of tracks, keep straight ahead on a shingle track downhill, signed as a footpath. You shortly pass on your right the millpond, with its willows, sluice, Chinese bridge and gaunt sculptured figures. The track bends left and leads towards a house at the end. Here, take a footpath to the right of the house, between fences, zigzagging right-left around another garden. At a 3-way fingerpost, ignore steps on your right and keep straight on. The path leads up into a crop field and runs along the left-hand edge.
- 2 In 250m, at a fingerpost, your path suddenly turns **left** down steps, deep into the woodland of Hoe Copse. You cross a stream as the path bends right and veers left uphill. You come out into a lighter oak plantation where you may need to skip around the winter mud. At a marker post, the path continues through pines and curves right beside a new plantation. At a fingerpost, turn **left** with path. It curves right uphill under tall oaks and snakes its way up into an open area. You are now surrounded by new oak plantations, reminiscent of past centuries when oak was harvested in huge

quantities to supply the Portsmouth shipbuilders. Follow the track, round a metal barrier, to a road and turn **left** on it.

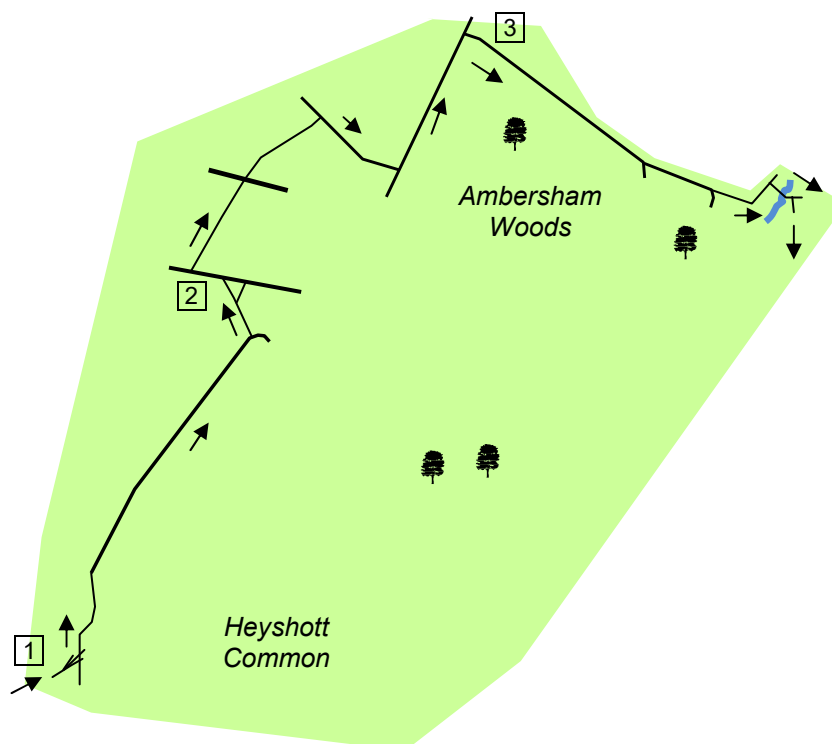
- 3 In 120m, turn **right** on a woodland path signed as a bridleway. This attractive sunken path, decked with ferns and, in late spring, bluebells, takes you under a high fallen tree trunk, leading finally across a sturdy bridge to a 4-way fingerpost. Go straight over, up a tarmac lane, marked as a bridleway. As you see, it is also part of the *Serpent Trail (ST)*, a sinuous long-distance path taking in the best heathland and woodland between Haslemere and Petersfield. Your path passes the large stone house of the appropriately named Walkers Farm. Continue on a grassy track to reach a large metal gate with great views north to Bexley Hill. Turn **right** before the gate, as directed by a fingerpost, on a path through trees, between banks. At a marker post, keep **right** following the snaky ST symbol. The path rises to a T-junction with a wider bridleway in the middle of a hilly area of pines and heathland of Heyshott Common. Turn **left** on the bridleway for 100m to reach a 2-way fingerpost where three paths fan out.



Decision point. If you are doing the shorter **Cocking-Heyshott Walk**, skip to near the end of this text and do the **High Heyshott Common Return**.

Keep to the **middle** path, in the direction of the fingerpost, but only for 20m. Here, you meet a crossing path with a 4-way fingerpost just to your left (and another one further away to your right). Turn **left** on this crossing path.

Leg 2: Heyshott Common to Ambersham Woods 3 km=2 miles



- 1 Shortly a minor path merges from your left. Your path runs under some beeches and a large oak tree. You can now see your straight sandy route ahead, with a large plantation of fir on your right and general woodland on your left. Keep to this path for about 500m where it suddenly curves sharp right. **Leave** the forestry path here by turning **left**, as directed by a small fingerpost. Follow this rather moist grassy path for over 100m, ignoring a signed junction on the right, to meet a very wide sandy track running under wires and a 2-way fingerpost.
- 2 Go straight across at the fingerpost to reach a T-junction. Turn **left** and then immediately **right**, taking the path either side of the pine tree (you can take the narrower left path if it is drier, as it quickly joins up again.) You soon reach a very wide track where the many log stacks reveal its use as a highway for forestry. *This is the dismantled railway, once part of the Billingshurst-Midhurst-Chichester branch of the London Brighton & South Coast Railway.* Cross straight over the wide track on a track opposite. In 200m, you reach a T-junction with a 3-way fingerpost. Turn **right** here on a wide sandy path, marked as a bridleway. *You are on part of the New Lipchis Way, a 39-mile=62½-km walk from Liphook to Chichester Harbour.* In 200m, you reach a T-junction and a 3-way fingerpost. Turn **left** here on another forestry track. In 300m, you reach another fingerpost. Turn **right** here on a wide path.
- 3 The woodland is now more mixed and attractive, soon with tall oaks, followed by larch and thin birch. In 250m, at a marker post, take the **left** fork, a narrower path, quite close to the large green fields visible on your left, a popular route for horse riders. In 300m, you reach a marker post, where the main horse path bends right. **Leave** the horse path here by keeping straight ahead, on a much narrower path. In 80m, your path bends abruptly **left** at a marker post. In only 50m, look for another 3-way fingerpost. Turn sharp **right** here on a narrow path leading down into the forest. (You can turn right just before the post down a slope, but the marked path is easier.) Your path goes over a stout bridge across a stream (a tributary of the River Rother) leading to a dramatic landscape with high banks and majestic oak trees.

Leg 3: Ambersham Woods to Heyshott 3½ km=2 miles

- 1 **See mini-map overleaf.** Go **only 10m** up the slope ahead and, at a marker post, just before a steep bank, turn **right** on a narrow path. Your path rises quite steeply and then runs level, and you need to keep alert to stay on the woodland path. After 200m, you pass through an arch of the dismantled railway and descend into the forgotten hamlet of Little London, passing its historic wooden and stone cottage, sheds and main house. As you reach a junction of drives, go straight over them and up steps by a fingerpost onto a forest path. Soon you reach a group of wooden electricity pylons at the start of Heyshott and Ambersham Common. *These commons are owned by the nearby Cowdray Trust. They exhibit an extraordinary range of at least 260 species of rare plants, as well as birds such as the Dartford warbler and nightjar, plus sand lizards and other reptiles.* Your path begins as a long straight undulating route under a line wires, but only for **30m**. (Continuing to the end would take you to the Heyshott and Ambersham Common car park.)



2 Look to your right for a fingerpost, set off the main path [Aug 2020: fallen over], and fork **right** here, leaving the wide path and the wires. Follow the narrow path across this wonderful glowing heath, keeping to the left of the wood on your right, through meadow foxtail, cocksfoot and heather, and birch trees. After 250m on this path, you cross a bridleway at a marker post. In another 70m, your path forks about 20m before a lone silver birch. The left fork *seems* the more prominent one, the right fork being more obscure and grassy. But this **right** fork is the correct path, passing to the right of that lone birch. This very grassy smooth path crosses a minor path and heads for a large clump of mixed woodland. Follow this path for another 250m entering the trees. Just as the trees thicken into dense woodland, you reach another fork. Here the right fork, which curves away to the right, *seems* more prominent but the correct path is the **left** fork. This path leads, in 150m, to a fingerpost and a tarmac lane.

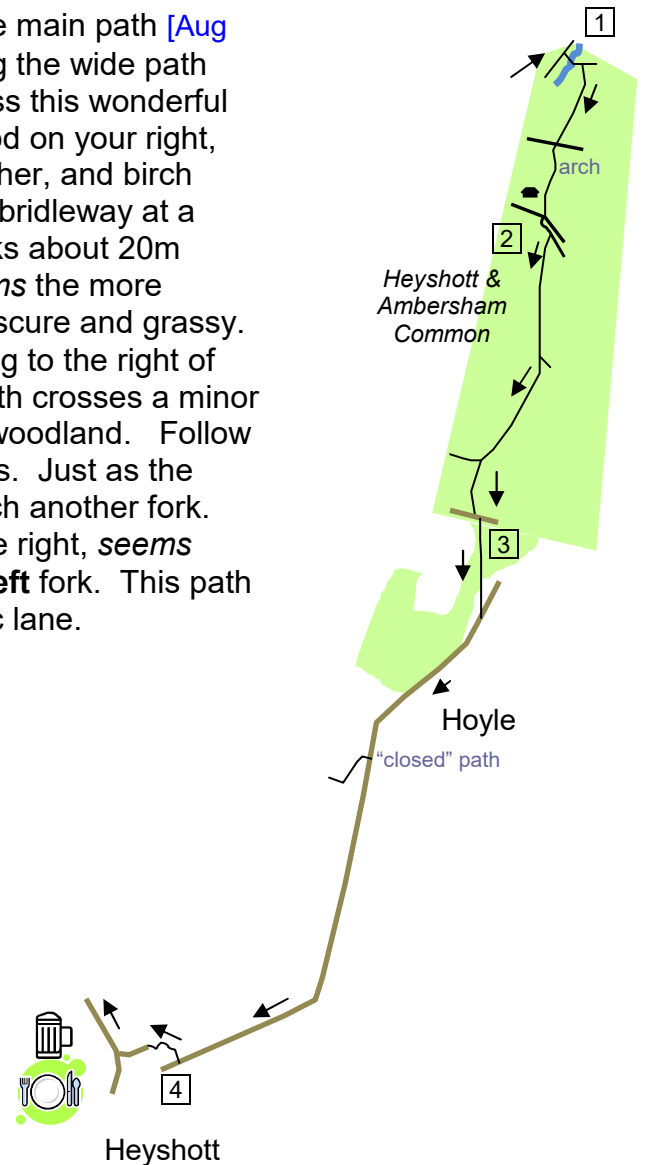
3 Cross straight over the lane, a fraction left, onto a signed woodland path. In 150m, go straight over a tarmac drive, soon reaching a road. Turn **right** on the road using the generous flowery grass verge, leading through the exclusive residential hamlet of Hoyle. A footpath joins from your left as you pass *Little Hoyle*, *Down Farm* and *Hoyle Farm Cottage*. (In 40m, on your right is



a footpath leading to Heyshott which was closed due to a broken bridge, but has reopened (W.Ssx CC Jul 2019) with some "closure" notices awaiting removal. The path is difficult at first as one has to walk round a small field of growing maize to get to the first bridge at SU 494185 and few people seem to have done so since the path was reopened. The next field alongside the New Lipchis Way into Heyshott is planted with maize which is now above head height. Fortunately wide footpaths have been made through it so one can follow the paths shown on the map. Until this route is fully researched, this walk uses the very quiet tarmac lane which is an excellent alternative to the footpath.) Continue on this quiet lane, out of the hamlet, with great view ahead of the South Downs. In 500m the lane elbows right. In another 200m you pass the first houses of Heyshott.

4 After four houses or semis there is a little green on your right. Turn **right** across the green, very briefly along the left-hand edge of a field, **left** through a swing-gate into a yard, through a short residential road and **right** on the main road. (This short cut avoids a long "kink" in the road.) In 200m, you pass cute *Laurel Cottage*, followed by the *Unicorn Inn*.

The shorter Cocking-Heyshott walk re-joins the main walk here.

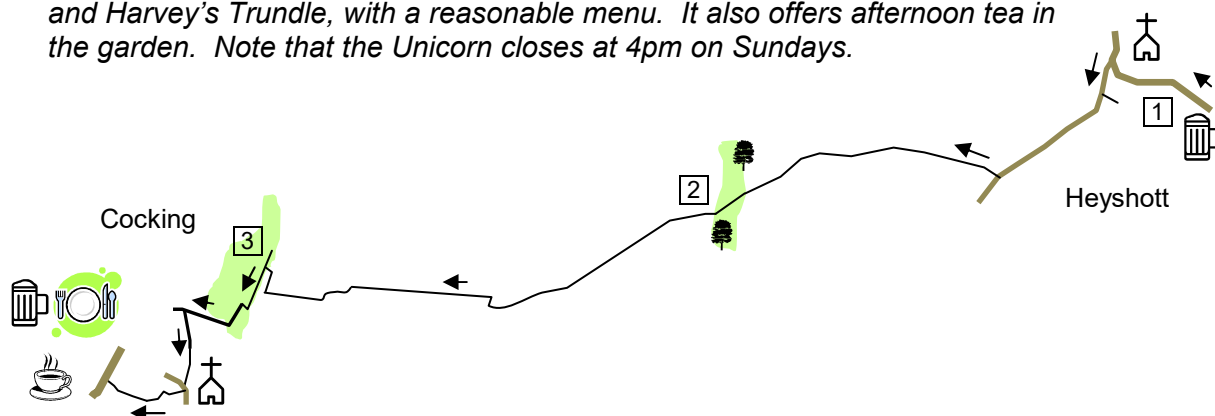


Leg 4: Heyshott to Cocking 3 km=2 miles

The name "Heyshott" comes from the heather that you see all around (old English "haeth") and that common ending "shott" from old English "sceat" meaning a "corner of land". Now this "heather corner" is rather sprawling. But the villagers all gather together for two festivals: Harvesting the Old Fashioned Way and the annual bonfire night which is famous across the county. The most famous son of the village was the 19th-century liberal MP Richard Cobden, born nearby in 1804, who campaigned against the Corn Laws and for free trade with the French (and much needed at this time of Brexit). He has a plaque in the Church of St James the Great.



The Unicorn is a very friendly freehouse offering the excellent Otter Amber ale and Harvey's Trundle, with a reasonable menu. It also offers afternoon tea in the garden. Note that the Unicorn closes at 4pm on Sundays.



- 1 Follow the road for another 250m, as it curves right to the church. After possibly visiting this ancient church, turn very sharp **left** opposite the church on a tarmac lane. Ignore a footpath on the left shortly, passing farm buildings on your left and a pretty timbered cottage. Shortly after the (unthatched) *Old Thatch*, turn **right** over a stile beside a large metal gate on a signed footpath. Go through the right-hand of two large metal gates and continue along the left-hand side of a narrow pasture. Your route now goes through a wooden gate, over a 2-plank bridge and straight ahead along the right-hand side of a crop field, with a hedge and oaks on your right. The path curves left down to the bottom corner of the field. Keep straight on, over a 2-plank bridge and go straight up the slope of the meadow towards a line of trees where you can see a marker post. Follow the path through Hampshire Copse.
- 2 When you emerge from the wood, continue on a path between two crop fields. At the start of the next field, take a path which runs slightly diagonally left. This path is not as clear as the others on this leg: your destination is a marker post at the other side and you can either head to the right of a lone tree or keep left around the edge. When you reach the post, your path veers **right** to run along the edge of the field, close to a hedge and a lane on your left. In the far corner, go down some steps to a track, turn **right** for 5m, then **left** up some more steps and straight across the centre of the next crop field. At the end, your path runs close to a building on your left called *Sages Barn*. Go round the property, with the field just on your right, and continue your direction down the left-hand side of the field. In the bottom corner, turn **right** and, in 30m, at a marker post, go **left**, steeply down steps.
- 3 You immediately land on a T-junction with a fingerpost. Turn **left**, passing a garden and curving **right** around it and **left** onto a shingle drive. (If you began the walk in Cocking, this path will be familiar.) The drive turns right

before the millpond and leads uphill to a junction of tracks. Go **left** on a track, passing a large courtyard (the former Manor Farm). Go through a gate into the churchyard of Cocking Church, Grade-I listed, and one of the most important churches in the county.

Parts of Cocking Church date from the Norman Conquest but the rest was added two centuries later; and of course the Victorians made their contribution. The church had no dedication but in 2007 the parishioners observed that one of the 15th-century bells bore the inscription "Sancte Caterina Ora Pro Nobis" and so they chose to name the church after Catherine of Siena. Above the western arch (under the tower), a small window was found and restored in the 1800s; it shows a rare wall painting dating from 1220, showing part of the Christmas story. The oldest thing in the church is the font which some believe to belong to an even older Saxon church. For more information, see Peter Leicester's "Short History and Guide" published in 1975. Because of its treasures, the church may be locked; but a 'phone number 01730-817340 is available.

Go right-left through a kissing-gate, out to a lane where there's a pleasant spot with a bench and bank of the Costers Brook, popular with ducks and humans. Cross the lane and take a narrow path by a fingerpost up between field plots, turning left and right and continuing on a track. The track leads out to the main road, next to the *Moonlight Cottage* tea room where the walk began.



High Heyshott Common Start 1 km=0.8 miles

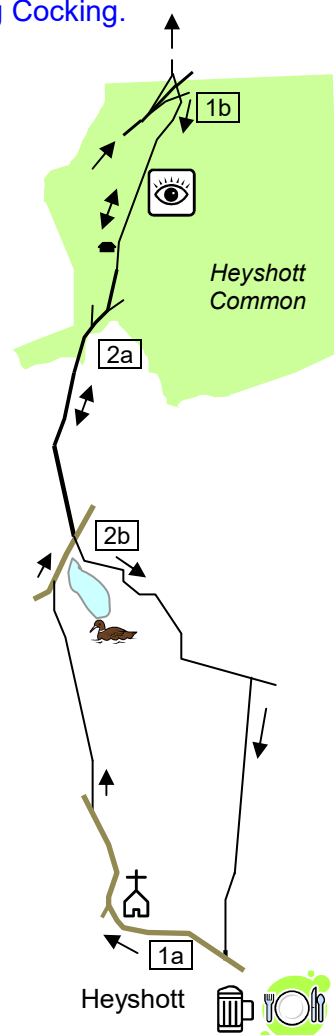
Do this section if you are starting the walk in **Heyshott**, omitting Cocking.

1a With the *Unicorn Inn* on your left, follow the road for 250m, as it curves right to the church. After possibly visiting this ancient church, continue along the major road. Just after pink-washed *Glebe Cottage*, fork **right** on a faint path across the grass. Your path crosses a drive and goes through a small wooden gate into a pasture. **The cattle that usually graze here are the mild-mannered belted Galloway breed.** You come over a 2-plank bridge and through a similar small wooden gate, reaching a road. Turn **right** on the road and, 80m later turn **left** on a wide driveway towards houses with a grassy space on each side.

2a The drive curves right past houses and leads into woodland. After another 100m or so, at a fingerpost, ignore a left fork and stay on the driveway. In another 80m, ignore a right fork and stay on the the driveway.



You pass the house and other rustic buildings of *Heather View*. After the corner of the building, go straight ahead, past a marker post, uphill on a path through the heather. You enjoy great views as you run along a high ridge. *The various tumuli here on your left are Celtic burial mounds.* Your path enters some tall pines and reaches a 2-way fingerpost. Go straight over a wide path here to reach another fingerpost. Avoid a bridleway on your right and go straight over, as indicated by a yellow arrow.



Now join the main walk from **Leg 2**.

High Heyshott Common Return 1½ km=1 mile

Do this section if you are doing the shorter Cocking-Heyshott walk, omitting the wide loop round Heyshott Common.

- 1b Use same mini-map as for Start section above. Ignore the fingerpost and fork **right** up a bank to another fingerpost. Turn sharp **right** here on a crossing path. You are on a beautiful high path which runs over a high point of Heyshott Common. After some tall pines, you suddenly enjoy great views as you run along the ridge. *The various tumuli here on your right are Celtic burial mounds.* Your path descends to the sheds and bungalows of *Heather View* and joins its shingle drive, passing the house on your right. At a marker post, stay on the drive, ignoring a path on your left. Later, at a fingerpost, keep straight on as a path joins from the right. You pass a line of houses on your right as the drive curves away to the left. You go over a crossing path and reach a tarmac lane.
- 2b Cross straight over the lane, a fraction right, onto a path, going past a bench with the Marsh Pond on your right. Your path curves right-left round the pond and winds its way up to a crop field. Turn **right** and **left** round the corner and continue beside the field to a 4-way fingerpost. Turn **right** here towards the houses of Heyshott, ending at a short driveway and reaching the road. Your route is **right** along the road, but you may first want to pause for refreshment at the *Unicorn Inn*, just on your left.

Now re-join the main walk at **Leg 4**.

Getting there

By car: Cocking lies directly on the A286 main Midhurst-Chichester road. There is room to park in the side road next to the *Bluebell* (ex-)pub and the lane on the other side; there is a tarmac apron a little further south in the village; but perhaps the most reliable place to park is at the start of the residential road, **The Croft**, just north of the village.

By bus/train: bus 60 runs between Chichester (for rail connections) and Midhurst, not weekends? You can also take bus 70 from Haslemere (or Guildford) station to Midhurst with a short hop on bus 60 (or taxi). Check the timetables.

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