



Cowfold and Crabtree

Distance: 11 km=6½ miles

easy walking

Region: West Sussex

Date written: 25-jan-2014

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Refreshments: Crabtree

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Map: Explorer 134 (Horsham) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Village, woodland, grassy meadows, gastropub, bluebells in spring

In Brief

This is a gentle country walk through woodland and meadows in central Sussex. It could be treated as a pub walk for the *Crabtree* pub / restaurant. The *Crabtree* is run by Simon Hope who once ran the *Food for Thought* restaurant in Covent Garden and is a cookery writer. The 3-course lunch menu at £20 (as 2018) is outstanding value. (To reserve, ring 01403 892666.)

This walk shows you every imaginable kind of Sussex landscape and terrain, with bluebells in spring, blackberries and sloes in late summer, a heron or two by the pondside, the paths alive with pheasant chicks.



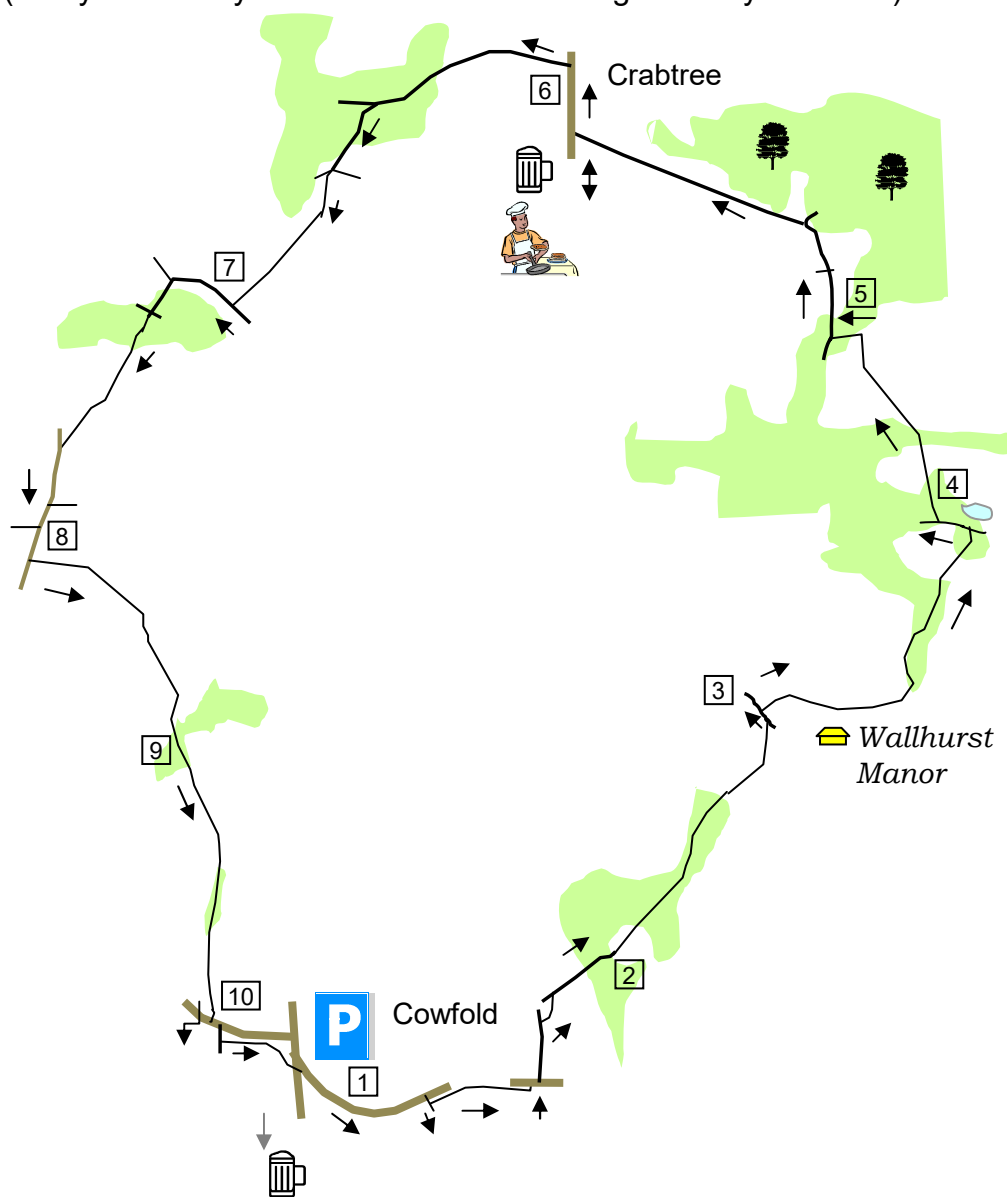
No nettles or brambles were encountered when this walk was researched in January but in summer they may grow prolifically up to shoulder height. The paths are generally easy to walk but, as this is a wealden walk, you will need good boots in the winter months. In summer and autumn too, although it will be much drier underfoot, you will still find boots a comfort. Most stiles have a gap for a dog but one or two will be a challenge for a large dog.


The walk begins in the village of **Cowfold**, postcode **RH13 8BW**. There is a free car park just after the start of the A272 road, signposted *Haywards Heath*. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

- 1 See map overleaf.** From the crossroads in Cowfold, walk along the main A272 road, signposted *Haywards Heath*, with playing fields on your left. Go past a side road (Oakfield Road) and avoid a footpath on the right. 100m further, at the entrance to *Eastlands House*, turn **right** on their driveway. Immediately go **left** over a stile into a horse pasture and walk along the left-hand side, parallel to the road. After 250m or so, just before a jutting pond, go **left** through a large metal gate (easier than the overgrown stile). Cross the main road and take a footpath opposite, a fraction right, next to *Averys*. Follow this wide track for 150m till just before a bend. Look for a 3-way fingerpost and turn **right** here past an unnecessary stile on a narrow path.

Your path follows a fence on the right for 30m and then curves **left** away from the fence, taking you across a wide stream by means of a sturdy wooden bridge. The path leads in 50m to a T-junction with a wide semi-tarmac track. Turn **right** on the track, going under grid lines. In 100m, at a junction of paths, keep straight ahead past a cottage on your left to enter a yard. (The yard usually contains one or two vintage military vehicles.)



-  **2** Go quickly **left** and **right** and take a path diagonally across the centre of a plantation of young oaks as directed by a shabby fingerpost. At the other side, your path crosses a track and enters Ashurst Wood, with a fine show of bluebells in spring, as for much of this walk. Keep to the main path which veers left at a junction over a flat bridge and follows a wire fence on your right. The path becomes a surfaced chalky track and comes out into an open field, next to a fingerpost (hidden in shrubbery on your left). Your route is straight ahead across the centre of the field, passing just to the left of a large oak, to a rather droopy fingerpost and stile visible in the fence. [2014-18: crops obscured the footpath; the author shifted a bit to the left and found a tractor track which led almost to the stile; difficult to avoid stepping through a short width of crops (which you can legally do).] Cross the stile and turn **left** beside the fence. In the corner go through an old metal kissing-gate onto a lane. Turn **left** on the lane.

3 In 20m, turn **right** on a narrow path running along the edge of a band of trees. On your right soon are the grounds of Wallhurst Manor. *This ancient Manor goes back to Robert of Wallhurst in the 1200s but the house was rebuilt in yellow sandstone in 1890. Soon you can see the building behind you where the trees clear.* After 200m on this footpath, you encounter a small section of pristine grass on your right, followed by a fenced section, a fingerpost, and a wild open space with the long redbrick of *Stable Court* on your right. Keep straight ahead, aiming for the far left-hand corner, keeping to the left of a laurel tree. Here you will find a very narrow path through the bracken and brambles. (Prolific summer growth makes the path hard to see, but it turns out to be perfectly walkable.) The path leads under trees to a wooden fence, taking you over a stile. Veer **left** across the centre of the meadow, to go over an avoidable stile in the corner and then along the right-hand side of a large field. In the first corner, your path enters Harbour Wood. In 200m, you come out through a large metal gate into a pleasant sloping meadow fringed with large oaks. Go dead straight, keeping to the right side of the slope, with the trees on your right, heading for a house *Long House* at the top. Just to the left of the house you come to a fingerpost at the edge of a large pond. Turn **left** beside the pond, away from the house.

4 About 20m after the pond, at a 3-way fingerpost, turn **right** over a stile, or through an open metal gate, and follow a path down the left-hand side of another sloping meadow with large oaks. After only 30m, fork **right** on a narrow grassy path, passing to the right of a large oak. Follow this faint path for 150m down to a stile and a fingerpost into Ashen Wood, with a striking change of atmosphere. Go over a footbridge over a (seasonally) lively stream and up over a stile into a large sheep pasture. Go diagonally **left** across the pasture and over a stile on the other side. Cross a track here and veer **left** onto a path into a crop field. Keep **right** along the edge of the field and, in the first corner, go over a stile into woods. Immediately turn **left** on a path that runs along the top edge of the wood. The path takes you down to a surfaced track by a bridge. Go **right** over the bridge which conceals a culvert from which a gushing cascade of water emerges.

5 Follow the track, passing a 4-way fingerpost and soon *Gorsedene* with its peacocks, both real [\[jun 2018: sadly gone\]](#) and clipped as topiary. At the top of the drive, keep ahead on the tarmac, ignoring a bridleway on the right (*which leads past Leonardslee – see another walk in this series “St Leonards Forest”*). Continue past a mixed collection of houses on Mill Lane. *The lady who owns the immaculate “Woodlands” does most of her own gardening.* You eventually reach the main road. Your route is **right** along the road, but first you may wish to turn left for 70m for refreshments at the *Crabtree* pub / restaurant.



The Crabtree dates back to 1576, its pub sign showing the harvesting of crabapples. It was recently nicely renovated as a pub / restaurant with a clean regency look, concealing a friendly welcome and service. The menu is not over long (five choices of starter and five of main) which is always a good sign. The lunch menu price at £20 (2018) for three courses is really good value.

6 After refreshment, go back to where you reached the main road and continue along it, passing the South Lodge Hotel on your left (which also does coffee and tea). Just after the curtain-shaped entrance pillars, turn **left** on a narrow bridleway into woods. The path soon joins a cinder track. After 600m or so, at a 3-way fingerpost, avoid a right fork into woods and stay on the wide track as it curves left. You reach a small group of houses. At a fingerpost, ignore a



footpath left into a field opposite the houses but, at a second fingerpost, fork **left** on a downhill path, shortly running between banks. Passing a large wooden gate and a house, continue on a driveway between wire fences. This pleasant driveway crosses a woodland stream and starts to run between a field and a meadow. Here you have a choice of paths: For the “scenic” *permissive path*, turn **right** through a wooden swing-gate, shortly another swing-gate; immediately after passing a walled garden on your left, turn **left** at the corner and follow the wall and a fence, ignoring a stile on your left, up to a wooden swing-gate at the top; skip to [7]. You reach a T-junction with *Old Woldringfold* on your right. Turn **right** at the T-junction towards the house, passing to the **right** of the house, going along a short narrow tarmac path between hedges and through a wooden swing-gate. At a bend in the track, avoid a stile ahead and turn **left** uphill with the main driveway. Go over a stile at the top.

[7]



At a junction, with excellent views behind, keep ahead on a curving driveway uphill. Just before a house, leave the drive by forking **left** over a stile on a path down a grassy meadow. Go over another new stile and keep ahead just to the left of a round clump of pines in a meadow dotted with large oaks, part of Trenchmore Beef and Cider Farm (see www.trenchmore.co.uk). (The cattle are separated by a rope fence.) Head for a small gatehouse visible ahead and, when you reach it, go over a stile onto a lane. Turn **left** on the lane.

[8]

Ignore a footpath on the left just before *Burnt House*, soon passing *Little Burnt House* and then a driveway on your right. Just before *Northfield Barn*, turn sharp **left** on a signposted footpath, going through the smaller of two metal gates, up the right-hand side of a field and through a kissing-gate leading to a 4-way fingerpost. Fork **right**, going through a metal gate into a crop field. Your route is diagonally left across the centre of the field, to a metal kissing-gate $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way along the far edge. [In 2018 the path across the field was planted over at the start; the author turned **left** along the edge for 10m then **right** on a tractor track; in 15m abruptly **left** on a tractor track; in 100m, by a white stick, **right** on a narrow path which turned out to be the footpath.] On the other side, go through the kissing-gate, over a 2-plank bridge, then along the left-hand side of a field. After 30m your path turns **left** at a fingerpost between two ponds and through a metal kissing-gate to an opportune bench seat. Now walk diagonally **right** on an unclear path across the centre of the field to the far corner (or, if recently ploughed, **right** around two sides). In the corner, keep right through a large metal gate into the next field (or through a kissing-gate under a tree on its left).

[9]

Continue along the left-hand side of the field but, just after half way, fork **left** at a fingerpost on a wide farmer's path into trees. Quickly fork **right** off the wide path onto a clear path through the middle of the woods. In 150m, you come out into a large crop field. Keep straight ahead across the centre. At the other side, at a 4-way fingerpost, keep ahead over a foot-bridge and follow the path uphill along a bluebell woodland strip. As you approach a field, avoid a right fork and continue on an enclosed path with the field on your right. At the end, join a tarmac drive, leading out to a road.



[10]

Turn **left** on the road, cross by the lights and turn **right** on the other side. Immediately turn **left** into Potters Green. In the corner is a small public garden with a bench seat. Turn **left** beside the garden, on a paved path passing a line of charming cottages, some with seats outside. On entering the churchyard, fork **right** towards the church which is worth a visit. *St Peter's church was built in the 1200s. The roof has been renovated (2014).*

Leave the churchyard into the village centre and cross the road to the car park where the walk began.



For final refreshments, since the closure of the “Coach House”, the village has only one modest pub, the “Hare and Hounds”, which is 400m south on the A281 road. Cowfold has a Co-Op and a 13th-century Indian restaurant! It also boasts

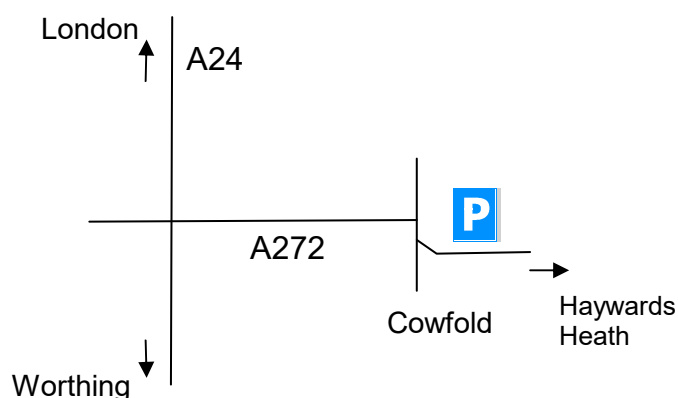


one of the smallest teashops, the Little Bean Café, with seating inside and out, serving tea, coffee and freshly made cakes, panini, sandwiches, cream teas etc.

Getting there

By car: Cowfold is easily accessed from the M23, via Pease Pottage or Bolney and from Horsham via Mannings Heath. If coming on the A24, the easiest way is to turn onto the A272 eastwards at the traffic lights, about 3 miles south of Southwater.

By bus/train: bus 17 runs from Horsham station to Cowfold and Crabtree, including Sundays. Check the timetables.



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