



Harting Down

Distance: 20 km=12½ miles or 16 km=10 miles moderate-to-easy walking

Region: West Sussex

date written: 15-may-2011

Author: Hautboy

last update: 11-oct-2017

Refreshments: Compton, Hooksway

Map: Explorer 120 (Chichester) *but maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Hills, views, villages, woodland

In Brief

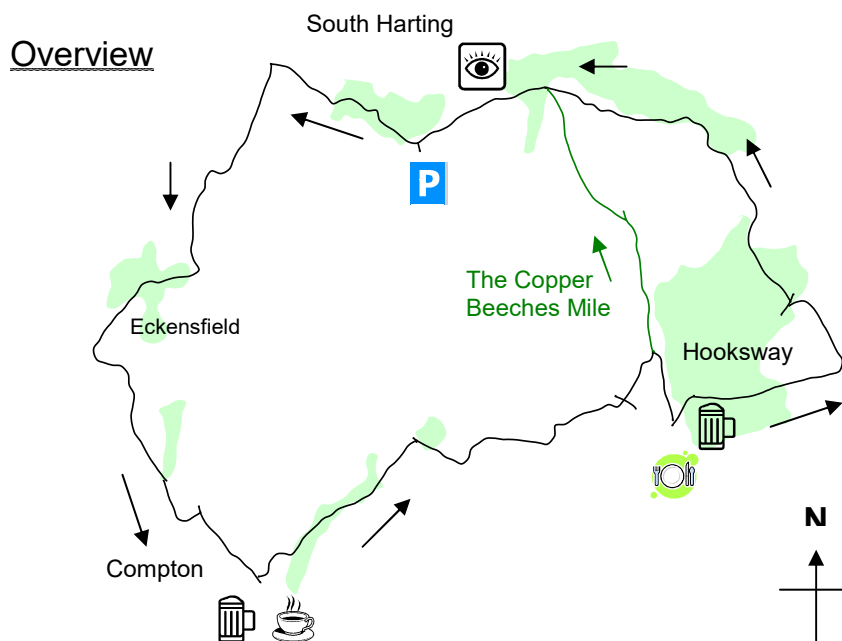
This is an exhilarating walk over part of the South Downs with views in all directions. Despite that, this is mainly an easy walk with just one steep part at Beacon Hill near the end. An optional shortcut, the **Copper Beeches Mile**, reduces the length of this walk to 16 km=10 miles and avoids Beacon Hill but omits the attractive pub stop at Hooksway. Note that the *Royal Oak* at Hooksway closes at 2.30pm and all day Monday.



There are some small patches of nettles, so shorts are inadvisable. Good shoes or trainers are adequate although boots are best if you have them. The walk seems fine for your dog too.



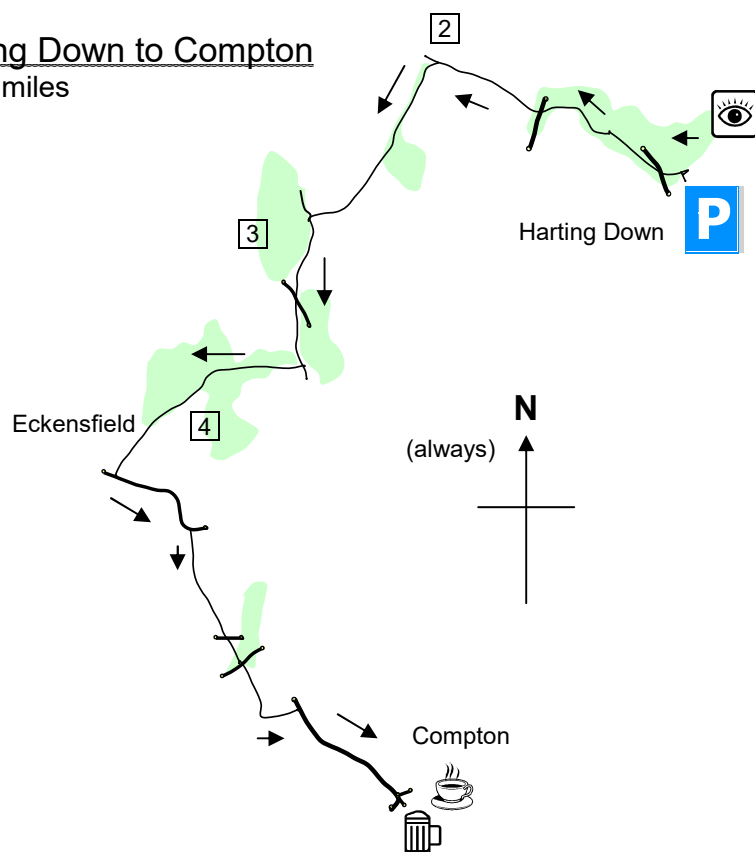
The walk begins at the National Trust **Harting Down** car park (postcode **GU31 5QT** grid ref 790 181), near South Harting, West Sussex. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

Leg 1: Harting Down to Compton

7½ km=5 miles



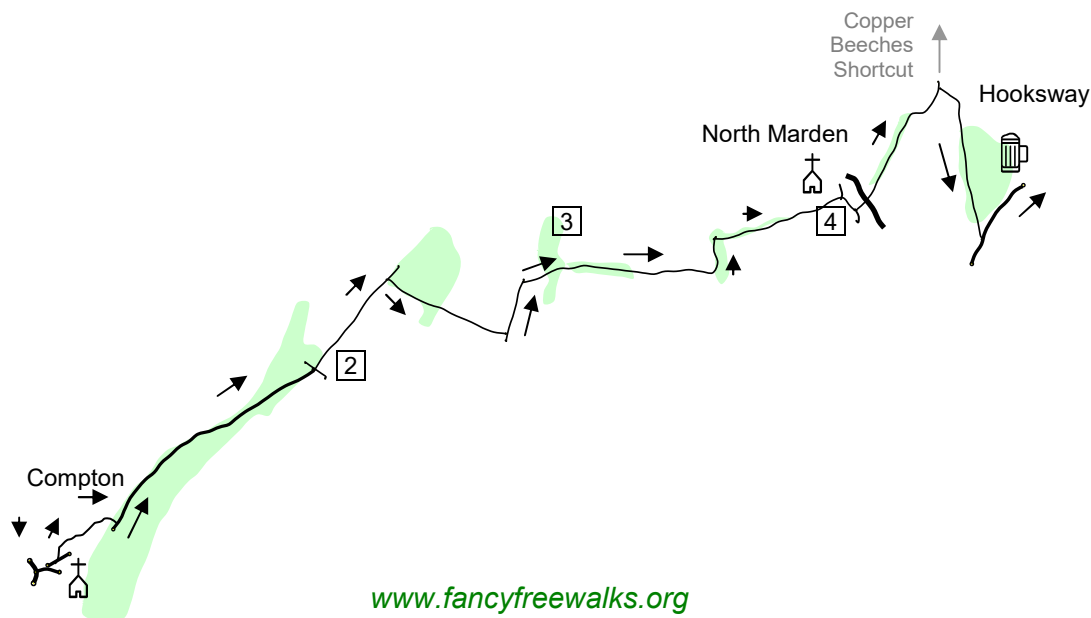
- 1 From the car park, go forward across the grass to the near the edge of the hill where you are immediately greeted by a magnificent view down to South Harting with its distinctive central copper-green spire and beyond westwards into Hampshire. On a good day, Chichester is visible to your left. At a fingerpost, turn **left** on a good path, with a sign indicating that you are on the South Downs Way (SDW). *The SDW is a 160 kilometer-long national trail through this newest of our National Parks, running from Eastbourne to Winchester. It is usable by bike or on horseback as well as on foot.* The path enters woods and crosses a road to a path on the other side. This path veers right and runs high above the road for some distance before veering away left. It crosses another main road to another track on the other side. (On the right here is space for one or two cars.) Immediately turn **left** on the track, ignoring a yellow arrow and a footpath going straight ahead. The track goes past another footpath on the right and begins to descend. Soon after, at a post with yellow arrows, turn **left** on a footpath.
- 2 The path zigzags right-left and runs in a strip of woodland between fields (a common feature of this walk), on a path which in early summer is thick with wild garlic. Soon the woodland widens. At the corner of a new field on your left, keep ahead, staying in the wood. Later the path comes out of the wood and runs beside the field on your left. It then crosses a farm track at a boundary of several fields. Here, ignore a minor path that forks left and keep straight ahead, on the right-hand side of a field, bordered by a line of small trees and shrubs. You pass a small pond on your left and an old walled enclosure. [Careful: a walker reports these may be hidden in undergrowth: look for the yellow arrow.] In the top corner, continue a few metres to a 3-way fingerpost and turn **left** on a narrow path which joins a wide bridleway coming from the right.

- 3 After 450m, the path goes by a metal gate and crosses straight over a driveway at a fingerpost, running past another metal gate, now much narrower. The path widens where it meets a farm track coming from the right and goes under trees for a few metres to a crossing path at a 4-way fingerpost just before a field on your left. Turn smartly **right** here. *Don't miss this turn!* The path runs gently downhill through woodland, rises again, bends left, runs near a field on your left and reaches a group of houses that make up the tiny hamlet of Eckensfield, one of the "lost villages" of the Downs, consisting of just two houses and a converted barn. *The Adventurous Walks book tells us that the land beyond used to belong to Lady Holt Park where Galley, an excise officer, was brutally murdered by the notorious Hawkhurst Gang in 1747.* Go through the hamlet (at the time of writing the track is bypassed because of building work) and at the end, turn **left** on a tarmac lane.
- 4 The lane bends right and then left. 20m after this, turn **right** at a fingerpost onto a footpath across the fields. *In high summer you may hear a chirruping in stereo from the skylarks that nest in each field.* At the end, go by an unneeded V-stile, through a strip of woodland and, veering slightly to the left of your previous direction, across another field. Ahead is the distinctive shape of Compton Down (see a pub walk in this series centred on Compton). Go by two more unneeded V-stiles either side of a lane and across another field to another lane. Go through a new metal kissing gate opposite into a lovely green meadow dotted with ash trees. Continue down a slope and along a path under beeches beside a sheep meadow on your left. On reaching a metal gate ahead, turn **left** through a kissing gate and walk along the right-hand side of the sheep meadow to another gate. After that, turn **right** on the road, soon reaching the first houses of the village of Compton. Pass the half timbered *Farndens*, *Compton House* and the Vicarage and reach the junction with the *Coach and Horses* on the left.

The name Compton comes from the Celtic word 'cumb' or 'combe' meaning 'valley' and the Saxon 'tun' or 'ton' meaning a settlement. The village was first mentioned in the will of King Alfred the Great in the 800s. It nestles between Telegraph Hill and Compton Down. The 'Coach and Horses' is a regular local that provides good food as well as several real ales. Opposite the pub, the Village Shop doubles as a popular tea room with outside tables which also serves hot snacks.



Leg 2: Compton to Hooksway 6 km=3½ miles



1 Turn **left** on the side road by the pub and immediately take the tarmac lane that forks **left**, Church Lane. The route continues shortly **left** at a sign on a footpath. However, it is worth first visiting the little church which is reached by turning right a little further along the lane. *Compton church has a tiny wooden spire and, inside, a small organ and an unusual ornate pendant from 1925 over the ancient font.* Resuming the walk at the footpath, you pass a field on the right which is used by the nearby *Falco West Sussex Falconry* to give demonstrations with birds of prey. Keep to the right-hand side of the meadow and cross a rather untidy concrete farmyard. [2013: now with gates as well as stiles.] Go over a stile and turn **right** across a field on a faint path that cuts the right-hand corner. Go through a gap in the hedge and turn **left** on a wide bridleway that runs beside a sloping wood on your right. After some time, the wood on the right gives way to a field and reaches a lane. *Before you cross the lane, on the right you will see an ancient tumulus mound called Bevis' Thumb, possibly bronze age.* Cross the lane to a track opposite.

2 The track runs along the right-hand side of a large field. The National Trust's Uppark is visible on the hill on your left.

Uppark was built around 1690 and was furnished from the Grand Tour made by the Fetherstonhaugh (pronounced "Fanshaw") family and landscaped by Humphry Repton. It was inherited by the dairy maid and the bright clean dairy is on view. Author H.G. Wells's mother was housekeeper there. Uppark suffered a major fire in 1989 and all the skills of the British conservators were marshalled to restoring it to its former glory. The house is located near the start of this walk and is open during the warmer months, daily except Fri and Sat.

After 200m, you reach a gap in the hedge on your right with a redundant stile. Turn **right** here and follow a wide grassy path beside a large field. In the far corner, go straight ahead on a narrow path and over a stile. The footpath now takes you along the left-hand side of a grassy meadow. [2013: there may be some fencing here confining you to the side: some walkers use the parallel track on your left. There is also some new fencing in the next field but it caters for walkers.] At the end, go over a stile and turn **left** on a track. In 10m, go over another stile in the corner and continue along the left-hand side of another meadow. Near a border of the field on your left, look out for a fingerpost. This directs you diagonally **right** across the meadow.

3 On the other side of the meadow, at a 4-way fingerpost, go over a stile and keep right to follow a path through a strip of woodland with fields visible through the trees on each side. The wood is interrupted at a field boundary where you continue similarly. It finally ends at another field boundary. Here, keep ahead along the right-hand side of a field. In the far corner, go straight ahead into woodland. Your path turns immediately left and becomes a little overgrown with yarrow. At the next corner, the path turns right again and rises up a steep slope along the left-hand side of a field. In the corner, take a narrow path which quickly leads out to a track with North Marden Church of St Mary on your left.

North Marden is one of four parishes with the Marden suffix, all of them small and isolated. North Marden with its small cluster of dwellings and tiny church is surely a gem. The ancient church of St Mary, sitting alone on top of the South Downs, is rare because of its 'aspidal' chancel, that is, a semi-circular round end. It was probably founded by Geoffrey, son of Azo, in the late 1100s and has hardly been altered since then. The walls are of thick flint rubble and the south doorway is Norman, of Caen stone (shipped in from Chichester), as is the smaller round window above the west wall window. The tiny bell-cote holds a single bell. The sandstone font is thought to date from the early 1100s,

although its stem and base are from the 1300s. Outside there are just ten gravestones.

- 4 Continue on the track past flint farm buildings until shortly you reach a lane. Turn **right** on the lane. In only 100m, at a bend, leave the lane by continuing straight ahead but immediately turn **left** on a path that runs by the gardens of some houses and reaches the main road. Cross the road to a footpath opposite running along a belt of trees. At the end, you reach a junction with a 3-way fingerpost.

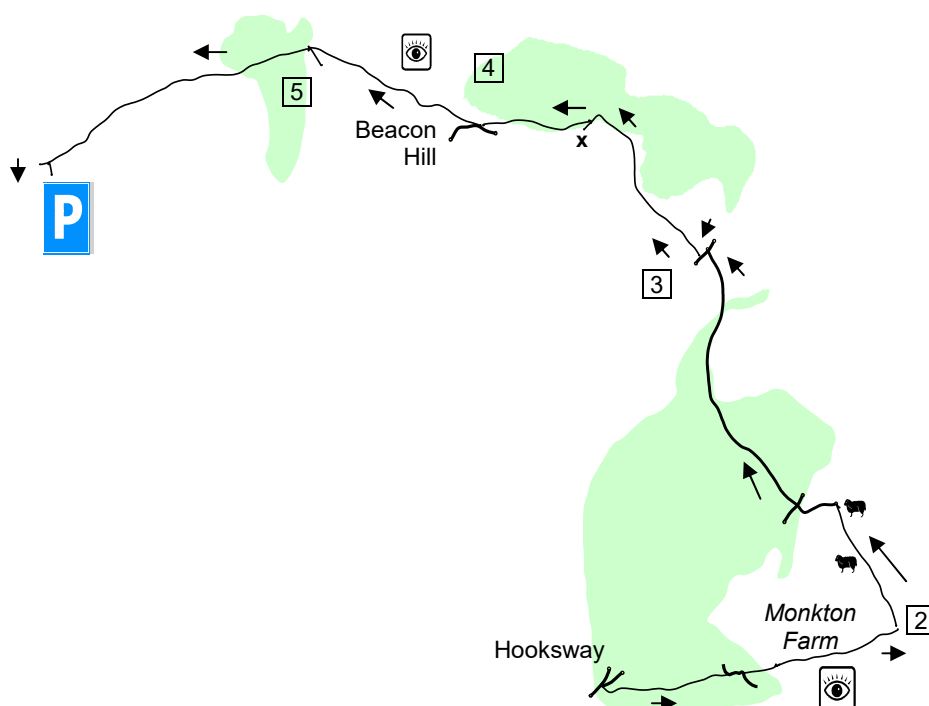
Decision point. For the shorter walk, avoiding Hooksway and the next pub and steep-sided Beacon Hill, skip to near the end of this text and do the **Copper Beeches Mile**.

Turn **right** on a track which shortly bends right and follows a tunnel-like trajectory through low trees. Finally you reach a narrow lane. Turn sharp **left** here downhill, avoiding the occasional car heading for the car park, and soon reach the tiny settlement of Hooksway with the *Royal Oak* pub.



*The Royal Oak is a freehouse in a 16th-century cottage serving three permanent ales and a rota of guest ales, plus a full menu of meaty hot dishes. It is a favourite destination for get-out-of-towners because of its isolation and situation in one of the best walking areas. However, it is **not** open all day, not even at weekends, so you need to arrive before 2 o'clock for lunch-time service.*

Leg 3: Hooksway to Harting Down 7 km=4½ miles



- 1 With your back to the pub, continue **left**, going past the car park. Shortly you reach a junction with three possible routes ahead. Avoid the left fork and the track straight ahead and instead turn **right** to a wooden gate and turn **left** over a stile on a signed footpath. Follow the path uphill through beeches, then go over a grassy crossing path, continuing between rowans whose leaves and berries contrast delightfully with the dark woodland earlier. Go over another grassy crossing path, then another at an angle. Finally you meet a path coming in from the right and the path veers left to a T-junction. Turn **right** on this rough track. In only 50m, fork **left** at a fingerpost on another grassy path, gently uphill. The path goes through a

swing-gate, crosses a chalky track and continues ahead along the left-hand side of a field on a grassy path. On your right, you now have a fine view to the South Downs nearer the sea, around Chichester. In the far corner, go over a stile and descend quite steeply towards a brick cabin at Monkton Farm. Turn sharp **left** up a flinty track in the long green valley.

Monkton Farm was once a flourishing crofters' village until the 1400s. The name recalls its connection with a monastic order. You can still make out some of the banks made for housing or cultivation. No one is sure why the village was deserted. Disease or the result of enclosures were the most prominent reasons at that time. Certainly, there has only been one farm here for at least 500 years. Now the area is a nature reserve and especially a centre for bird watching since hawfinches, chaffinches, bramblings and firecrests are observed here.

- 2 Continue along the valley, gently rising through the sheep pasture. At the top, go through a large metal gate, usually open. The track has now mainly disappeared and you are in another, even larger, pasture. Keep to the left and, at the first corner, turn **left** around the edge. In the far corner, go over a stile beside a large wooden gate. Continue a few metres to a crossing of tracks at a 4-way fingerpost. Keep straight ahead over the crossing. Soon you pass a memorial to a German pilot. The woodland is mixed at first, then more open where you have views north west across the Weald to the Greensand Hills. A track joins from the left and the path comes out into the open and finally reaches a T-junction. Turn **left** on the track.
- 3 In 30m, turn **right** at a fingerpost onto a fenced footpath between fields. Soon the path dips into trees. Here, ignore a bridleway on the right. The path rises again into the open and you have fine views north and west, including to Blackdown, the highest hill in Sussex. The path curves around a field and crosses straight over a signposted byway under some trees. Shortly, the path curves left to a 3-way fingerpost. Turn **left**. In 20m, about 10m **before** you reach the edge of a field, turn **right** on a slightly narrower path [2015: but now fenced off at the end, to protect the orchids? you may have to stick to the SDW after all]. (The SDW runs another 10m up to the very edge of the field before it turns right, but this path is more attractive.) The path runs about 400m through light forest and descends steeply across the chalk and grass to a saddle point where several paths meet. The track curving away left is in fact the SDW – an easier route because the SDW is also a rider's route. However, your route is straight ahead up the steep incline of Beacon Hill.
- 4 The way is steep but short. Near the top, fork **left** on a path that takes you across the grass to the cairn and triangulation pillar. Beacon Hill, by the way, is 242m high. The coast is clearly visible from here, including Hayling Island and part of the Isle of Wight. Westwards, you can now see South Harting and, far beyond it, Butser Hill with its aerial. The path goes through a small wooden gate and steeply down. At the bottom, you reach a 5-way fingerpost mounted on a cairn. Keep straight ahead to a wide gap next to a small metal gate, ignoring the small wooden gate about 50m up to the left.

The shorter walk, the **Copper Beeches Mile**, rejoins the walk at this point.

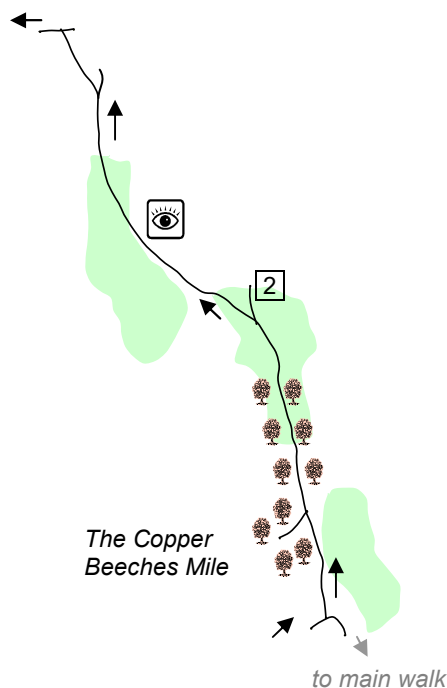
- 5 Follow the wide chalky path uphill, still part of the SDW. The path levels out and you have another fine view of South Harting. Staying by the hillside, you have just one modest slope to ascend before the finish. At the top, the view opens out again. Ahead, a fraction right, on the hill is the ruined tower of Tower Hill. At last, the path takes you through a small

wooden gate and shortly the car park appears on your left and you are back at the place where the walk began.

The Copper Beeches Mile 2½ km=1¾ miles

Take this short cut if you want to shorten the walk by omitting Hooksway and Beacon Hill. This section is interesting in its own right because of the remarkable avenue of copper beeches on Telegraph Hill.

1 At the 3-way fingerpost, turn **left** on a track. In 250m, fork **left** at a fingerpost on a bridleway. In 100m, your path joins a lane at a bend. This is the great mile lined with copper beeches that runs all the way from the B2141 road to Telegraph House. To your left, the lane is unfortunately private, but straight ahead it is a public footpath and this gives you a chance to marvel at the austere and beautiful double line of trees, so perfectly planted to chaperone visitors to the House. Keep ahead along the lane until it comes to a fence where the copper beeches continue across the grass towards the house. Veer **right** here, still on a tarmac drive. Where the tarmac curves left into a house and grounds, keep straight ahead on a track, gently uphill. At the top, go through a small gate beside a larger gate.



2 You have rejoined the SDW at a bend. Avoid the track that veers off right and keep straight ahead on a broad chalky track running between a field on the right and a hedge, soon going through another gate. Suddenly you are out in a cleared area with views ahead. Ignore a clear footpath to the left by a small redundant metal gate (signposted *National Trust Harting Trail*) and continue ahead on a splendid grassy path as the valley opens out on your left. After a gentle descent, and just before a solitary tree, take the **left** fork upwards across the grass to cut the corner, aiming for a metal gate visible ahead. Ignore a small wooden gate on your left. Continue to a wide gap by a small metal gate and turn **left** through it.



Now continue from section 5 of leg 3 above.

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Getting there

By car: Harting Down car park is off the B2141 between South Harting (near Petersfield) and Chichester. If coming from the north on the A3, take the A272, signposted *Midhurst*, and simply follow the brown tourist signs for *Uppark* (with the oak leaves symbol), round the outskirts of Petersfield and eventually through South Harting. About ½ km=350 yards after South Harting, take the **left** fork, the B2141 (thus leaving the route to Uppark). The car park is about 1km further, on the **left**, just after a side road. If coming from Chichester, take the A286 Lavant Road and, 1 km=700 yards after Mid Lavant, fork left on the B2141. After a sign to the right for Hooksway and the *Royal Oak*, you have exactly 2 miles=3.3 km to go before you find the car park on the right.

By bus/train: bus 54 between Petersfield to Chichester via South Harting, not Sunday. Check the timetables.

