



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

Date revised: 21-aug-2018

Refreshments: Compton, Hooksway

Last update: 15-may-2022

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

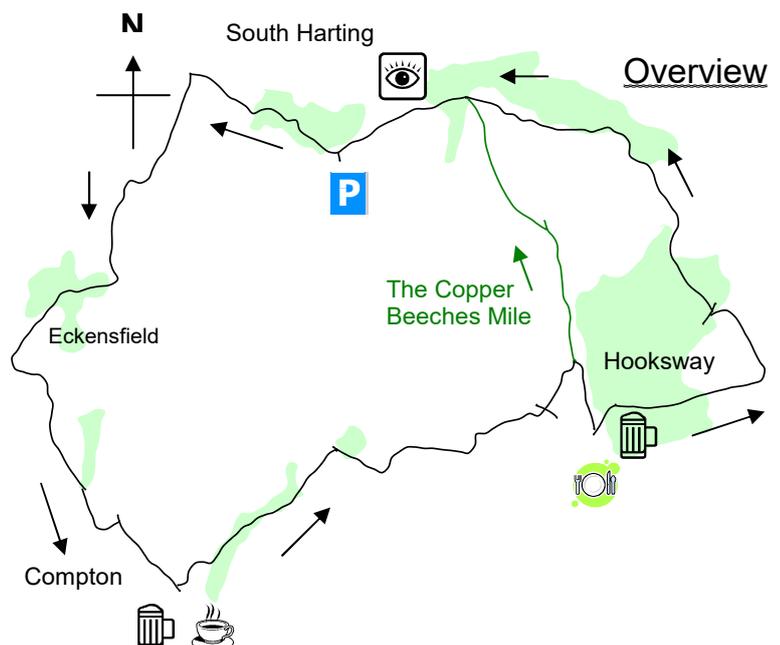
This is an exhilarating walk over part of the South Downs with views in all directions. Despite that, this is mainly an easy walk with just one steep part at Beacon Hill near the end. An optional shortcut, the **Copper Beeches Mile**, reduces the length of this walk to 16 km=10 miles and avoids Beacon 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.

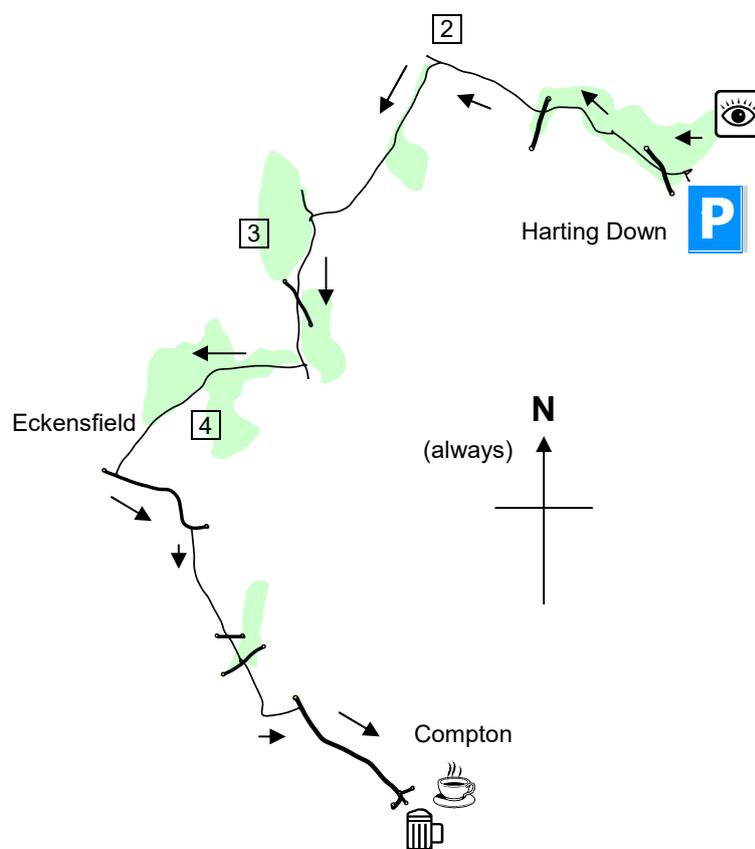


The walk begins at the National Trust **Harting Down** car park (nearest postcode **GU31 5PN** grid ref SU790181), near South Harting, West Sussex. There is a small charge of £3 for the whole day, free to NT members, *by phone or internet*. There are many alternative parking places around the route. 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 wide gap in the trees, 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 church spire and beyond westwards into Hampshire. On a good day, Chichester is visible to your left. At a signpost, turn **left** on a good path, with a sign indicating that you are on the South Downs Way (SDW). *The SDW is a 160 km-long national trail through this newest of our National Parks, running from Eastbourne to Winchester.* 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. Immediately turn **left** on the track, ignoring a yellow arrow and a footpath leading straight ahead. In about 400m, the track goes past another footpath on the right and begins to descend. 150m later, at a post with yellow arrows, turn **left** on a footpath, thus leaving the SDW.
- 2** The path turns **right** and immediately **left** through 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. Your path goes over a crossing path, curves left and begins to meander. Where you glimpse a 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. Keep dead straight on

the wide path, ignoring branches off, passing on your left a flint wall which conceals a pond. Keep to the right-hand side of a field, with the border of small trees and shrubs on your right. In the top corner, continue into trees on a short path which elbows right and comes to a T-junction and a 3-way signpost. Turn sharp **left** here on a wide bridleway.

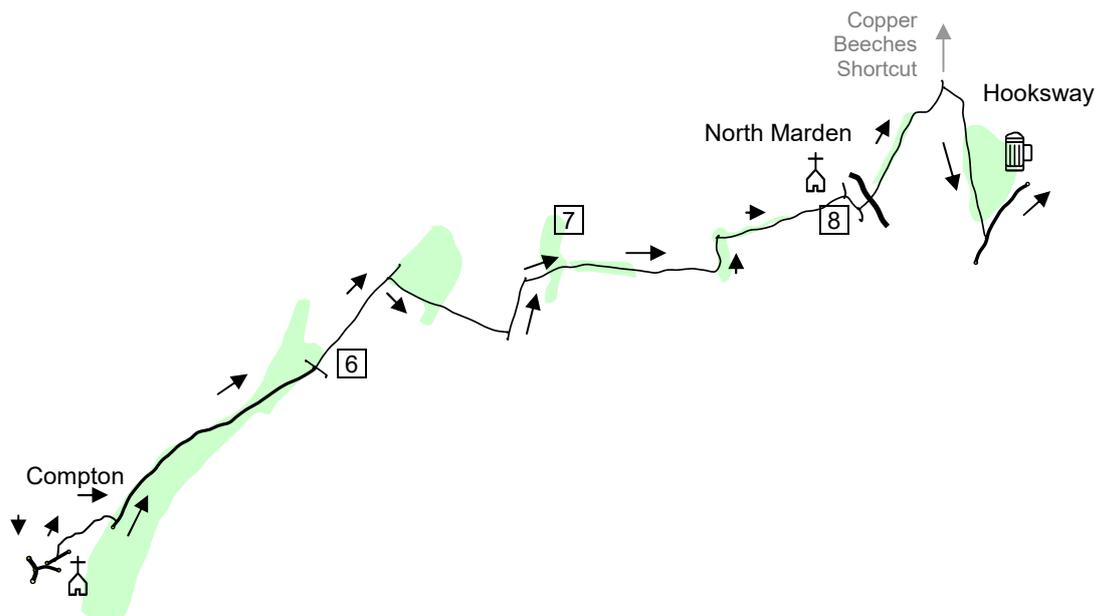
3 After 450m, the path goes past a metal gate and crosses a driveway diagonally at a signpost, running past another metal gate, becoming much narrower. 400m after crossing the drive, your path merges with a farm track coming from the right. It runs under trees for 20m and meets a 4-way signpost at a crossing path, 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 and at the end, turn **left** on a semi-tarmac lane.

4 The lane bends right and then left. 20m after this, turn **right** at a signpost onto a footpath across the fields. *In high summer you may hear a chirruping in stereo from the skylarks that nest in each field.* [May 2022: now clear of crops: report any recurrence to W.Sussex C.C.] At the end, go 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). Cross a tarmac lane with an unneeded V-stile on either side and cross another field, through a band of trees, to another lane. Go through a new metal kissing gate opposite into a lovely green meadow dotted with ash trees. Continue ahead down the slope, veering a little to the right, towards a wire fence 200m away which separates the two sheep fields. Keep **right** beside the wire fence along a path under beeches. On approaching a rusty metal gate ahead, turn **left** through a kissing gate and walk along the right-hand side of a sheep meadow to another kissing gate. Turn **right** on the road, soon reaching the first houses of the village of Compton, passing a road on your left signed to the *Mardens*. Continue uphill, passing the half timbered *Farndens*, *Compton House* and the Vicarage to reach the centre of the village at a 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. It is open on Sundays.

Leg 2: Compton to Hooksway 6 km=3½ miles



- 5 Turn **left** on the side road by the pub and immediately take the tarmac lane that forks **left**, Church Lane. In 30m, your route forks shortly **left** at a sign on a rough track. 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 rough track, continue ahead through a kissing gate. *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 go through a kissing gate to cross a rather untidy concrete farmyard, passing a redundant kissing gate at the other end. As soon as you enter a field, fork **right** across the field on a faint path that cuts the right-hand corner. At the far side, go through a gap in the hedge and turn **left** on a wide bridleway through lovely woodland running beside a hanging wood on your right. After 800m, the wood on the right gives way to a field and reaches a lane. *Before you cross the lane, nearby on the right you will see a small ancient tumulus mound called Bevis' Thumb, believed to be bronze age.* Cross the lane to a track opposite.

- 6 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. *Don't miss this turn!* Follow a wide grassy path beside a large sheep meadow on your right and, in the far corner, go straight ahead on a narrow path. The footpath leads straight ahead over a stile, along the left-hand side of a sheep pasture for 250m, on a path fenced on one side, and over a stile at the far end. At the far end, turn **left**.

Your path continues along the left-hand side of another meadow. Near a border of the field on your left, look out for a signpost. Turn diagonally **right** across the crop field, as directed, on a clear path.

- 7 On the other side, at a 4-way signpost, keep **right** to follow a path through a strip of woodland with fields visible through the trees on each side. (In two places the path exits to run briefly beside the field to avoid a fallen tree.) The wood is interrupted at a field boundary where the path continues similarly. It finally ends at another field boundary. Here, keep ahead through a band of trees and along the right-hand side of a field. In the far corner, go straight ahead into woodland. Your path turns immediately **left**. 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.

- 8 Continue on the track past flint farm buildings until shortly you reach a tarmac 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. In nearly 500m, at the end, you reach a junction with a 3-way signpost.

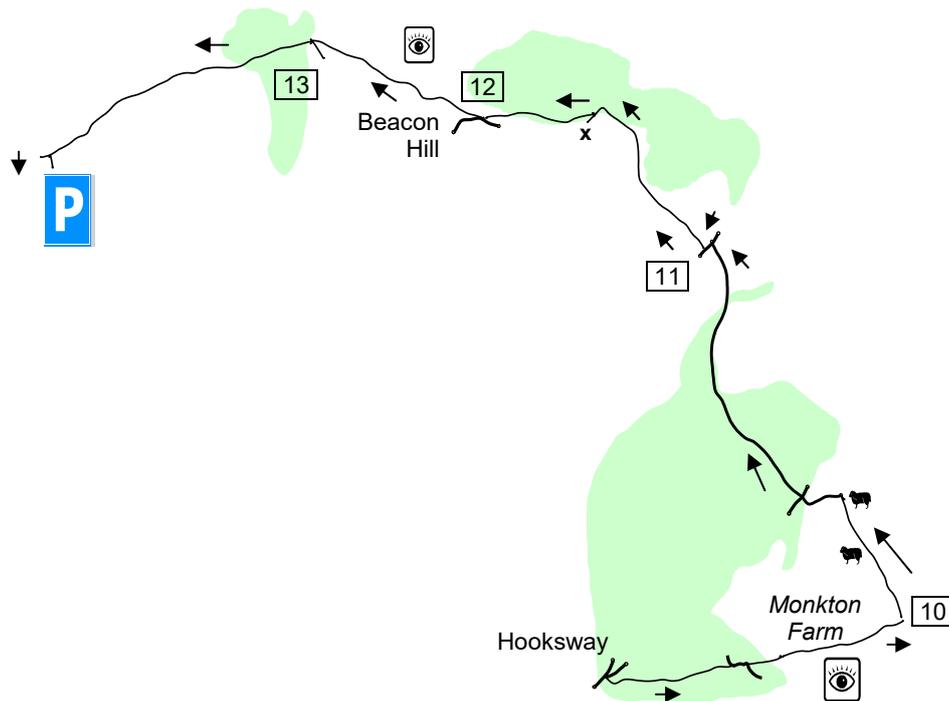
Decision point. For the shorter walk, avoiding Hooksway and the next pub and steep-sided Beacon Hill, skip to near the end of this text and do the **Copper Beeches Mile**.

Turn **right** on a track which shortly bends right and follows a tunnel-like trajectory through low trees. In more than 500m, 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. The Royal Oak is closed all day on Mondays.*

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



- 9 With the pub on your left, continue onwards, ignoring a signpost that points left into 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 (bypassable) 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, passing a post with a yellow arrow. 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 signpost on another grassy path, gently uphill, immediately crossing a farm track. In 100m or so, the path goes through a swing-gate, crosses a farm 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.** Your path passes through a gap into a second field. In the far corner, go over a stile and descend quite steeply towards a brick cabin at Monkton Farm.



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.

- 10 Turn sharp **left** up a flinty track in the long green valley, shortly going through a (probably unneeded) metal kissing gate beside a large metal gate. Continue along the valley, gently rising through the pasture, following electricity wires. In 400m, at the top, go through a large (usually open) metal gate. 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 through a metal kissing gate beside a large wooden gate. Continue 30m to a crossing of tracks at a 4-way signpost. Keep straight ahead over the crossing. You are on the South Downs Way (SDW) again. Soon you pass on your right a small 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, about ½ km from the memorial, the path runs beside an open pasture, comes out into the open and, 1 km from the memorial, reaches a T-junction with a wide track. Turn **left** on this track.

11 In 30m, turn **right** opposite a signpost 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 Elsted church and across 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 junction with a signpost. Turn **left** and follow the main path as it curves right and runs between fields. In 400m, the path goes over a cattle grid, with a small gate on the side. The path now descends steeply 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. *Hence the name "A Sting in The Tail" for a similar walk in Raymond Hugh's book.*

12 The way is steep but short. Near the top, just after a signpost, 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 veers right, goes through a small wooden gate and steeply down. At the bottom, you reach a 5-way signpost mounted on a cairn. Keep straight ahead on the wide grassy path, passing a water trough, to a wide gap next to a small metal gate (unneeded because the old metal gates are always open).

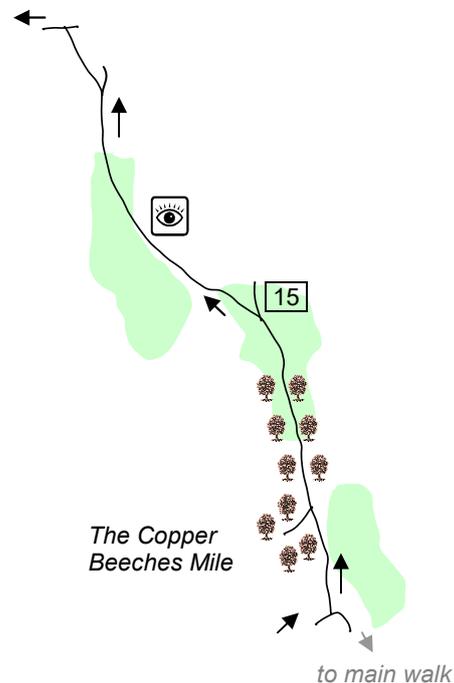
The shorter walk, the **Copper Beeches Mile**, rejoins the walk at this point.

13 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 Vandalian Tower folly. 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.

- 14 At the 3-way signpost, turn **left** on a track. In 250m, fork **left** at a signpost (almost hidden in bushes on your left) on a grassy bridleway. In 100m, your path joins a tarmac drive at a bend. This is the great mile, lined with copper beeches, which runs all the way from the B2141 road to *Telegraph House*. To your left, the drive 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 drive 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.



- 15 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 up on your left. Continue to a wide gap by a small metal gate (unnecessary because the old metal gates are always open) and turn **left** through it.



Now continue from section 13 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.

