



Henfield

Distance: 11 km=7 miles

easy walking

Region: West Sussex

Date written: 31-may-2021

Author: Sackboot

Last update: 6-jan-2025

Refreshments: Henfield

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

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

Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

Country village, green meadows, views, woodland, common

In Brief

Here is a brisk and revitalising walk in a rural lowland area of West Sussex, beginning and ending in the beguiling small town of Henfield. After visiting the verdant outskirts of the town, this walk takes you beside a long series of green pastures, hayfields, and later some woodland, ending at Henfield Common, where suddenly you will be joined by the people of the town with their families and pets.



There was very little undergrowth on this walk when it was researched in May, and no nettly sections. However, as summer progresses, the grass will be higher and the brambles closer, making this walk best in springtime or late autumn. Most walkers will have their legs covered. Boots are recommended in winter or in damp conditions, but good walking shoes or trainers should be fine at other times. There are a number of stiles on this walk (one rather high but thankfully unfenced), but this should not be a challenge for a small or medium-sized dog. Not all the stiles are in a good condition, especially in Sections [5](#) and [6](#), so you need to be careful when crossing them.

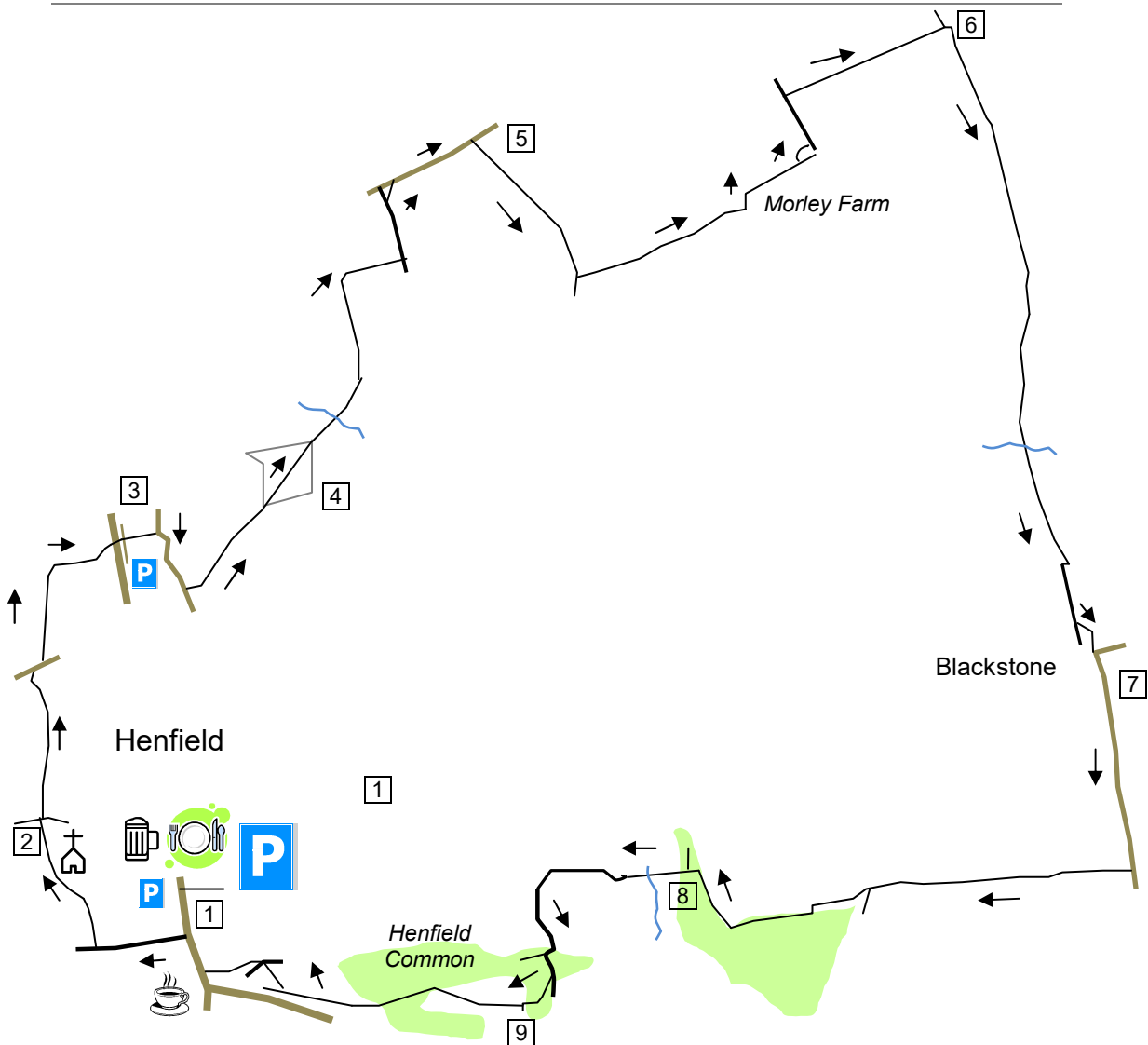
The walk begins in the main car park in **Henfield**, West Sussex, postcode **BN5 9FE**, www.w3w.co/purified.cabbages.inviting. There is a smaller car park opposite that on the west side of the High Street. Parking is free all day on Sundays but there is a time limit on other (chargeable) days. Free parking is available in the modern village just north of the town, which this walk passes through, postcode **BN5 9LG**. (There is a residential road parallel to the main road on the left as you enter Henfield from the north.) For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The “Hen” of “Henfield” is really “Ham” i.e. a homestead. A large village in Saxon times, it is now a town, famous for a series of “firsts”. Henfield may have had the oldest cricket clubs in the world, dating back to 1771. Officially, the town has the oldest Scout group in the country, dating from 1907. The first Postmaster General lived in Henfield and invented the first postmark. Henfield was the first place in Sussex to ban plastic bags in 2008. In 1907, an American woman Elizabeth Robins and other owners of the Violet Nursery founded a refuge for suffragettes. They are commemorated in the Henfield Museum and on the road leading to the car park.

Henfield earned much of its income from leather tanning (hence names like “Tanyard” which you pass on this walk) and the smell must have wafted eternally over the village. Especially in one small green, which is still named “Pinchnose Green” (although today you can keep yours open to enjoy the scent of wallflowers).

Henfield excels in places of refreshment. The “Plough” is a freehouse. Henfield Tea Gardens, at the south end of the High Street, serve much more than tea and are licensed. There is also the Post Horn Café.

The Walk



- 1 Beginning in the main car park in Henfield, walk to the High Street, either by the approach road, or through a pedestrian passageway to the left of *Budgens*. Turn **left** on the High Street. Opposite the *George Hotel*, turn right on Cagefoot Lane, passing *Stokes Icecream Parlour* on your left. In 250m, after some attractive houses, you pass on your right *The Tanyard*, a small park with a pond. *Just in front of you the tree is a kind of shrine for kids' toys*. Turn **right** immediately *after* the park on a wide straight tarmac path. Follow the path round curves as it becomes a driveway, soon reaching St Peter's church. Entry is by the west door.



There was a wooden Saxon church here as early as the 700s. The first Caen stone construction dates from the 1200s. In 1607 one of St Peter's church-wardens appeared a court case: he had "stolen" a bell from the church in nearby Aldrington which was derelict. He admitted helping to steal the bell (not by subterfuge since it weighed 650 pounds!). The metal was used to cast a new bell at a recompense of £16.5s. In the 1800s Henfield's famous son, the botanist William Borrer paid for a repair to the south aisle. The church is well worth visiting, for its monuments, history and fine stained glass.


- 2 Continue, passing *Apple Tree Cottage* and its admirable topiary to reach Upper Station Road (a reminder of the lost railway). **Although not on your route, if you walk 150m right along the road, you will find a driveway on the right leading to Pinchnose Green (see the intro) and the Cat House. Retrace your steps afterwards.**

The Cat House was owned in the mid-1800s by a resident who owned a canary. The bird was unfortunately caught and eaten by a cat belonging to the Anglo-Catholic canon and educationalist, Nathaniel Woodard. So incensed was the owner that he painted an image of a cat holding a bird on the walls of the cottage to cock a snook at the canon whenever he passed. He also strung a line of rattling sea shells. One small window was called the Zulu Hole and a black figure would appear there whenever the canon approached. Nowadays a frieze of smaller cats has replaced the original image.

Cross straight over Upper Station Road to a driveway, Sobell Court, passing a terrace of colourfully-adorned houses, continuing on wide tarmac path. As you come out into the open, between bollards, take the right fork and turn **right** on a residential road. Immediately before a kids' adventure playground, turn **left** on a wide tarmac path. Cross straight over another residential road, still on a tarmac path. This path promptly turns **right** alongside a crop field. Ignore a small footbridge on your right and follow the path straight across a grassy space, ending at a section of concrete and a large metal gate, leading out to the main A281 road.

- 3 Cross the road very carefully, a fraction left, to find a hidden narrow path through the trees, leading to a residential lane. Cross straight over the lane, beside *Foxfield Cottages*. At a T-junction turn **right** on a concrete residential drive. Just after No. 80, at a signpost, turn **left** on a signed footpath, leading out into open fields. Veer **left** on a path across the meadow, as directed by a fingerpost. Your path runs across the centre of a pair of hay meadows. In the corner, at a marker post, it enters another field. Continue straight ahead on a clear path to the far right-hand corner. Turn **left** here and continue along the field edge for nearly 200m until, just after the edge curves left, you meet a marker post [Jul 2024: possibly lost or hidden]. Turn sharp **right** here straight across the centre of the field. (The path across the field has been clear recently but in case the field is ploughed up,

simply continue along the edge, turning **right** twice in corners to find the exit nearly 150m along the far edge.) [Aug 2021: there were temporary fences across the sheep meadows in this section – probably double strings between plastic “polyposts”; these are easy to overcome – see the paragraph “temporary fences under Hazards on this website.] On meeting the far edge, go through a metal kissing-gate.

- 4 After the kissing-gate you meet a fingerpost. Veer **left** across the grassy meadow as indicated. A footbridge with a stile [Aug 2024: care! broken] at each end takes you over one of the Henfield Brooks. Keep the same direction across the next, rather marshy, meadow and, at the end, go **left** over a stile. Keep to the right-hand side of this meadow, going over a stile, and continuing along a narrower section which soon bends squarely right. At the end, go over a stile and turn **left** on a cinder track. As you near a road, fork **right** across the grass to go over a stile (or stay on the track). Turn **right** on the road, making use of the grass verge while it lasts.
- 5 After 250m beside the road, just after the *Design Lab*, turn **right** on a tarmac drive signed to *Holliger*. In 350m you pass a row of cottages. In a further 100m, look for a 3-way fingerpost. Turn **left** here on a footpath and, after a short concrete space, keep ahead on a grass path which runs along the right-hand side of a large meadow. At the other side, your path leads you through a small wood, over a 3-plank bridge, into a landscaped water garden with willows, part of Morley Farm. The path goes left and right round the edge and finally approaches some large wooden gates before the farm. Turn **left** over a stile before the gates, over a 1-plank bridge, along the right-hand side of a crop field and **right** over a stile into a yard. Turn **left** on a tarmac drive. In more than 100m, just after a large ranch-style house, go **right** at a fingerpost, over a high stile [Dec 2024: broken and slippery in the wet: be very careful!] and along the right-hand side of a large crop field. At the end of the path, keep **right** through a gap, passing two fingerposts, to come out into a meadow on the other side of the dense brambly hedge. Turn **right** along the edge of the meadow.
- 6 This section could be described as “straight ahead for one mile”. Enter bushes beside a redundant stile and keep straight on along a narrow section between fences and hedges [Aug 2024: care! overgrown with a fallen tree to scramble over]. At the end, go over a rather high stile*, over a 2-plank bridge, across a tarmac drive and over a (more practical) stile. (*Dogs and kids – and maybe assisted thin adults – can get between the horizontals.)
 Your path now follows the right-hand edge of two cereal fields separated by a stile-and-bridge. *You have a good view now of the South Downs ahead.* In the next corner, go straight over a stile and across a bridge over the Henfield Brook with a small metal gate at each end. Your path now follows the right-hand edge of a pleasant green meadow and takes you over a (partly broken) stile into a crop field. As always, follow the right-hand edge, continuing similarly into the next large cereal field. At the end, your path goes **right** and **left** to join a sandy track leading to a farmyard. About 20m before the farm, look for a marker post and fork **left** onto a narrow path leading out, via a small wooden gate, into a yard. Keep ahead past cottages to meet tarmac lane at a bend in the historic hamlet of Blackstone, known for its half-timbered cottages.
- 7 Avoid the lane on the left and keep **straight ahead** on the tarmac. In 100m, ignore footpaths on each side. After another 200m, you pass the dark drey barns of Blackstone Farm. Go another 250m and, just before a

solitary large dark barn, at a fingerpost, turn **right** through a small wooden gate and follow the right-hand side of a large crop field, continuing along the left-hand side of the next even larger crop field. After about 700m beside the fields, as the edge curves slightly left, **ignore** a left turn at a 3-way fingerpost and instead keep straight on, staying on the field edge. In a further 200m or so, look to your left for a marker post and go **left** and **right** on a path that runs next to a wire fence and woodland, just outside the field boundary. *(Don't miss this change in the path!)* [Jul 2024: some walkers did not see the marker post (gone?); it's important to slip left-right somewhere onto this footpath running just inside the wood.] Soon your path runs just inside this bluebell wood. Soon, at a T-junction with a 3-way fingerpost, turn **right** on a path which promptly follows the left-hand edge of the crop field. In 150m or so, your path suddenly turns **left** away from the field beside a felled tree trunk.



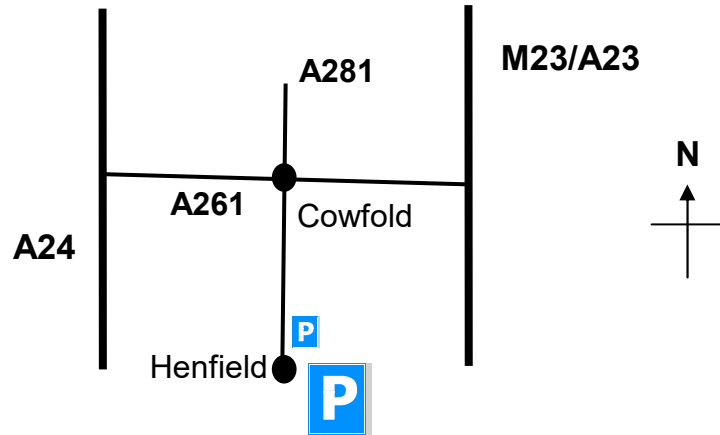
8 Ignore a path on the right and keep straight ahead into the wood. You pass on your left a pond with a small cascade and go over a 2-plank bridge-with-rail. Next, your path runs along the left-hand side of a small meadow and you pass under power lines. Continue ahead on what is now a broad sandy track. The track bends right and left and runs between horse and sheep pastures. Stay on the track as it curves its way left uphill through a graveyard of agricultural equipment, arriving at a cluster of buildings of Swains Farm. Veer **right** on the main track past cottages. Shortly after, there is a junction in the track with the main wide track veering left and with a lesser track on the right. Avoid the track on the right and keep **left**, staying on the main track. In 50m, you encounter a 3-way fingerpost. Fork **right** here, leaving the track and entering trees. Keep direction through the trees on a narrow rather unclear path for 70m. You will now see the green space of some playing fields just ahead. Keep ahead, going over a crossing path [Jun 2021: hopping over a tree branch] and step out onto the green of Henfield Common.

9 Avoid a playing field on the left (usually dedicated to cricket) and walk the length of the two football pitches (avoiding any matches that may be in progress in the winter), ending at the far **right** corner. Avoid a 4-plank bridge on your right and keep straight on along a woodland path. The path twists for over 150m and brings you out onto the main Henfield Common. Keep **right** and stick to the main path, heading for the houses of Henfield. After 250m, you meet a junction of paths under an oak tree, with a wooden barrier on your right. Turn **right** here through the barrier. In 50m there is a junction on the right with a 3-plank bridge. Keep straight on here. *(However, by turning **right** over the little bridge, you will find a short cut to the main car park: cross over a tarmac drive and take a path between houses, turn **left** on a residential road staying on it as it bends right. Otherwise ...)* Go through a wooden barrier at the end, turn **left** on a tarmac drive but immediately fork **right** on a shingle drive beside garden hedges. *(Note the humorous dog warning.)* Continue on a passageway and turn **right** on the High Street. *Across the road are the licenced Henfield Tea Gardens. On your right soon is the George Hotel.* In around 50m, turn **right** next to the crossing lights into the car park, where the walk began.



Getting there

By car: Henfield lies on the A281 trunk road between Horsham and Brighton. Probably the easiest route, coming from London or the M25, is via the A24 or M23/A23. Turn off onto the A261 (westwards from the M23, eastwards from the A24) to **Cowfold** and go south from there.



By bus/train: bus 17 runs regularly between Horsham station and Brighton, stopping at Henfield.. Check the timetables.

fancy more free walks? www.fancyfreewalks.org