



West Hoathly Circuit

Distance: 4½ km=2¾ miles

easy walking

Region: West Sussex

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Author: Moussehaine

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Refreshments: West Hoathly, Chiddinglye

Map: Explorer 135 (Ashdown Forest) *but the map in this guide should suffice*

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Historic village, pub, woodland, meadows, easy paths, micro-brewery

In Brief

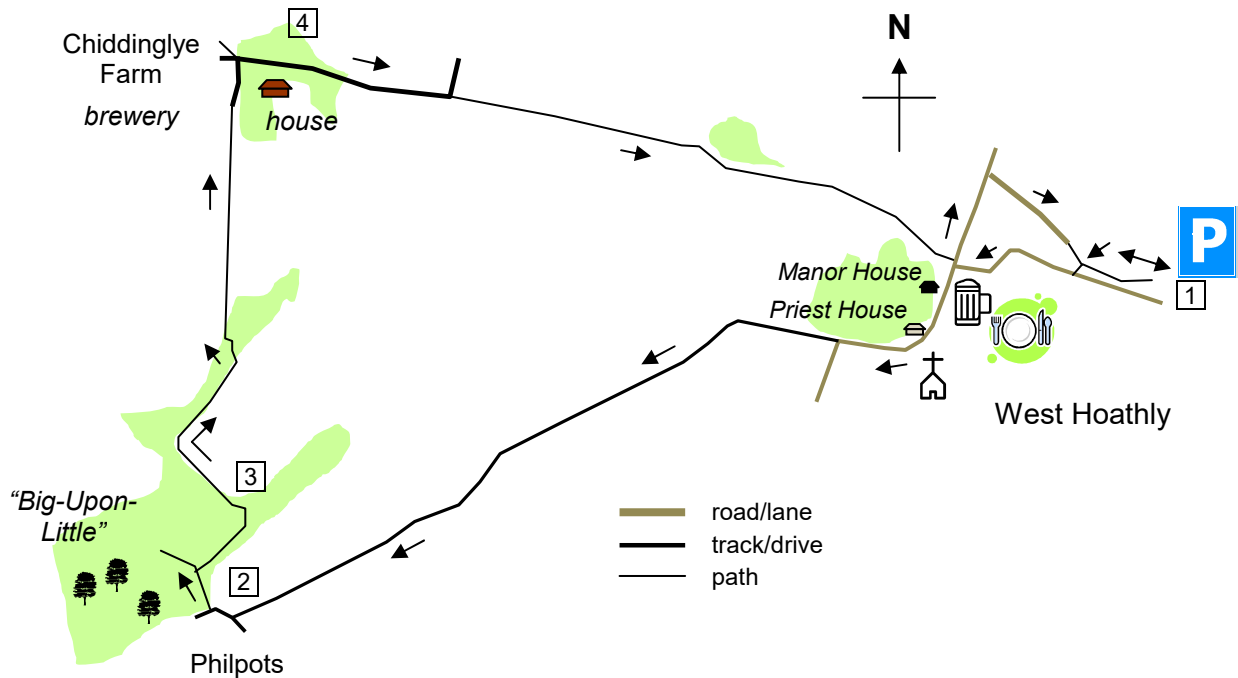
A favourite excursion for the people of the historic village of West Hoathly is a stroll across the fields to the hamlet of Chiddinglye for the little shop and micro-brewery. Others are content with the wonderful *Cat Inn* Pub and Restaurant perfectly placed in the centre of the village. This knock-out little walk uses a left hook rather than a straight sally-out by taking in the neighbouring hamlet of Philpots, skirting a deep natural landscape and two green meadows.



The paths on this walk are either wide tracks or grass meadows. That makes the going very easy, except for a flurry of stiles in the central section around the fields which require some agility (or a helping hand). With no main roads or livestock, this is a good walk for your dog too.

The walk begins at the **Finches Field** car park in West Hoathly, nearest postcode **RH19 4SJ**, **what3words: ///thud.trouser.charge**, grid ref TQ 366 326. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 Beginning in the Finches Field car park in West Hoathly, take a tarmac path leading away from the entrance, passing a picnic table and seats, keeping straight on past a round toposcope. In the far corner, go **left** down steep steps to the main road and turn **right** on it. You come round a curve in the road and soon the church is on your left, with the *Cat Inn* on your right. Turn **left** at the road junction, passing the *Manor House* and the timbered *Priest House*.

The Manor House was built in 1627 as a Dower House for nearby Gravetye Manor (see that walk in this series). The much older Priest House is an early 15th-century timber-framed hall-house in a traditional cottage garden. West Hoathly was administered from the Priory in Lewes and the Priest House was built as a kind of local estate office but in 1524 it became a family home. When Henry VIII seized Lewes Priory's property, the estate was given to Thomas Cromwell and, after his fall, to Anne of Cleves (ironically, as she was the reason for his fall). The Priest House was originally an open hall, with a few small rooms off, an open hearth and a thatched roof. In 1560 the Priest House and the estate were sold to new owners who virtually rebuilt the house in the 1600s. After centuries of neglect, it was bought in 1905 by John Godwin King of nearby Stonelands who restored the building and opened it to the public. In 1935 he presented the house to the Sussex Archaeological Society. The House still contains a wonderfully varied collection of 17th- and 18th-century rustic furniture, together with ironwork, embroidery and ornaments displayed in furnished rooms. The garden has a small formal herb garden containing over 170 types of herb. The house is open to the public most days outside the winter months.



Where in 400m the road bends left, keep straight ahead on a semi-tarmac drive, passing a stone sign for *Philpots*. The drive bends left, passes a house after 400m, then a large quarry, mainly hidden from view. *You have terrific view ahead to your left across the Weald of Sussex*. Eventually you reach the first house of the hamlet which is Philpots Manor School. *This school began as a Rudolf Steiner School in 1959 and is now a boarding school for children with special needs*.

- 2 Stay on the drive, veering **right** at a fingerpost, passing another house. Just before some converted stables and a farm courtyard, fork **right** on a concrete track at a *bridleway* sign. (*Don't miss this turn!*) The track leads to a narrow path, suddenly going deep down into the woods. In only 30m, at a 3-way fingerpost, turn **right** up a shallow bank, going over a 2-plank bridge-with-handrail. Deep below on your left is a remarkable landscape.

Much of Sussex and West Kent sits on a vast wedge of sandstone which protrudes in certain spots as an outcrop (see e.g. "A Way Through the Rocks" in this series). This deep ravine has a number of outcrops including "Big-Upon-Little" a huge boulder which forms a natural roof over a much smaller piece. Some of the sandstone also forms caves. The area is also a dense habitat for flora, all existing in a kind of "micro-climate" of their own.

Your path hovers above the ravine, going down natural steps, then three wooden steps, over a sturdy bridge-with-rails and across a gulch strewn with boulders. Next, the path rises steeply, curving left and right at a fingerpost, over a stile into a grassy meadow.

- 3 Turn **left** along the edge of the meadow. In the corner turn **right**, staying in the meadow. In the next corner, avoid the wide gap ahead into another meadow and instead turn **left** over a stile. The path runs through a band of trees, over a 2-plank bridge and over another stile into a meadow. Head straight across the centre on a faint path, passing a solitary tall cedar on your left. The path leads over a stile in the fence, across a smaller meadow and over a stile into the precincts of Chiddinglye Farm. Keep straight on along a rough farm track. You reach a junction with a concrete drive. On your left is the Missing Link Brewery and shop.



Chiddinglye (the end is pronounced as "lie") is a large private house which opens its garden on certain days. The Missing Link Brewery is in the adjoining farm. The shop sells its various brews and other refreshments. There are also pizzas and Indian street food to be had on popular days. The large field to one side is used as a refreshment space.

- 4 After your pause, turn **right** on the concrete drive (that is, straight ahead if you are coming out from the shop). (The wooden gate on the right leads past rock formations to the house and garden which is only open to the public on certain "open" days.) The drive leads past houses and cottages and through open country. After 350m, where the drive bends left, keep straight on on a rough track, running between a huge solar farm and a crop field, with occasional sheep. Entering the next meadow, keep to the path along the left-hand edge. At the top (with one final about-turn to take in the view), go over a stile into woods, leading to a wide grassy path between hedgerows. Suddenly the spire of St Margaret's Church comes into view. A gravel drive leads out to the road, North Lane, with the *Cat Inn* directly opposite.

The Cat Inn is a 16th-century freehouse (and small hotel) with several real ales on tap. For lunch in the spacious out-door area, there are light bites as well as an inventive menu of main courses.

- 5 After your final sojourn in the village, go back along North Lane, with the *Cat Inn* on your right. In 150m, turn right on Sandy Lane. At the cul-de-sac, a little to the right, go out on a track leading to a tarmac footpath taking you back to the hillside. Keep straight on all the way to the Finches Field car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: If you are coming from the **west** side of the M25, use the following route. Take the M23 past Gatwick Airport and turn **left** at the next junction, the A264 (*East Grinstead*). At the third roundabout, turn **right**, signposted *Turner's Hill*. A mile after Turner's Hill the road forks. Take the **left** fork signposted *West Hoathly and Sharpthorne*. Ignore a left turn shortly (*) (*Vowels Lane*). When you reach a junction opposite West Hoathly Garage, stay on the main road until you see the *Fox Inn*. Turn **right** and **right again** here on Church Lane. The entrance to the Finches Field car park is 100 yds or so on the right.

By bus: No. 84 from East Grinstead or Crawley to West Hoathly, except Sun. Check the timetables.

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