



Ashdown Forest, Sheffield Forest *Turnstile and Windmill*

Distance: 16 km=10 miles

moderate walking

Region: East Sussex

Date written: 9-may-2008

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Date revised: 24-apr-2017

Refreshments: Nutley

Last update: 18-jul-2022

Map: Explorer 135 (Ashdown Forest)

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

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Extensive heath, forest, views

In Brief

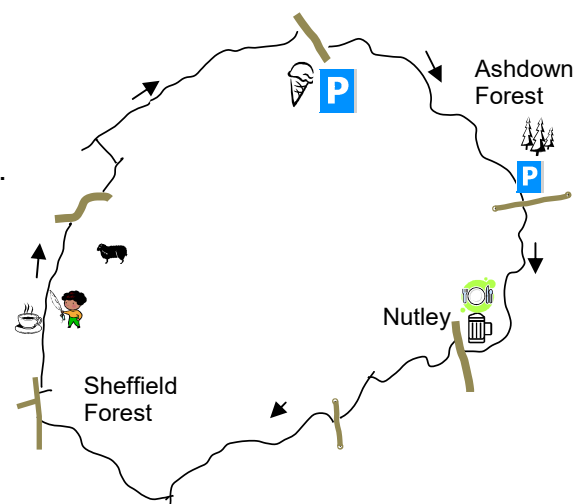
Ashdown Forest in East Sussex is in fact a huge area of undulating moorland, planted in places with pines that give it an unforgettable atmosphere. It is also the setting for the *Winnie the Pooh* stories. This circular walk also goes through a different forest, this time dark and brooding.



The going underfoot is fairly firm. There is one muddy patch around Holly-bush Wood and the winter wet may linger, so boots are recommended. There are no nettles. Ashdown Forest is ideal for dogs and your dog is welcome on this walk.

The only places to eat en route are at the *Nutley Arms*, which is about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way round, the Tanyard Fisheries, which is usually open for tea, and the icecream/hotdog vendors in the car park. You can also take refreshment afterwards in a nearby town or country pub.

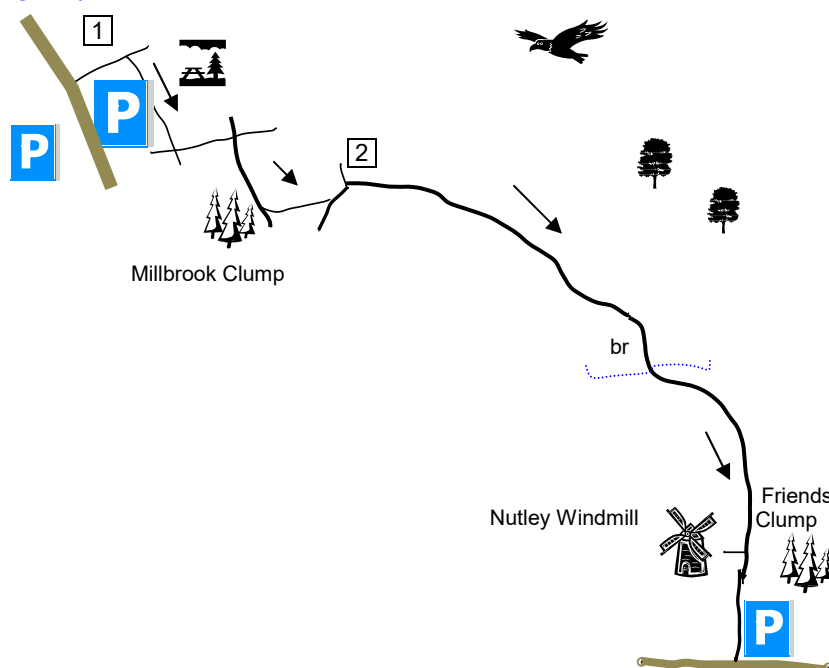
The walk begins at the **Millbrook East** car park on the A22, 2 km north of Nutley, grid ref TQ438297, approximate **postcode TN22 3HW**, www.w3w.co/surface.legwork.chum. Other possible starting points are the Friends Clump car park and Portmansford, **postcode TN22 3RJ**, for a mid-way stop at *Giggles* in Nutley. For full details see **Getting There** at the end of this document.



The Walk

Leg 1: Millbrook East to Friends Clump 2½ km=1½ miles

With your back to the road, look half right to the top of the hill in the distance to find, hopefully if the weather is clear, the distinctive Friends Clump of pines which is your first destination (and an alternative starting point). Down and to its right is Nutley Windmill, a dark wooden structure on the edge of a field. (This is usually a very prominent landmark but sometimes it is harder to see, especially when the sails have been taken off.) Below the windmill you can see a band of trees and, just below and to the left of that, a steep rough sandy track. This track is your target on the first stretch, in case you should stray or take a different route from the text here. This is absolutely glorious country and it will give you a true flavour of Ashdown Forest.



- 1 With your back to the road, go over the grass and through a small wooden gate beside a large one. Turn **right** on a wide grassy strip and continue down the slope. In 100m you pass the end corner of a little birch wood. 50m further on, turn **left** on a clear grassy path between gorse bushes. In 300m, where you reach a very wide crossing track, wheel **right** onto it. You pass a conifer copse on your right named on a sign as *Millbrook Clump*. Just 20m after it, turn **left** on another track. *Your future route can now be seen half right, a sandy path ascending towards the windmill.* In 150m, on meeting a track coming in from the right, turn **left** and immediately **right** on a broad green slope.
- 2 On finally reaching the bottom, cross a stream via a heavy-duty wooden bridge. Keep to the track as it wheels right and then left uphill and becomes a pleasant wide grassy path through the forest. Near the top of the hill, just as you emerge from the trees and that Friends Clump comes into view, there is a path on the right shortly leading to Nutley Windmill. *Nutley Windmill is an open-trestle post mill, the last in Sussex. It is open on the last Sunday of each month from March to September from 2.30 to 5.30.* Retrace your steps back to the broad path and continue uphill to Friends Clump and turn **right** into its car park.

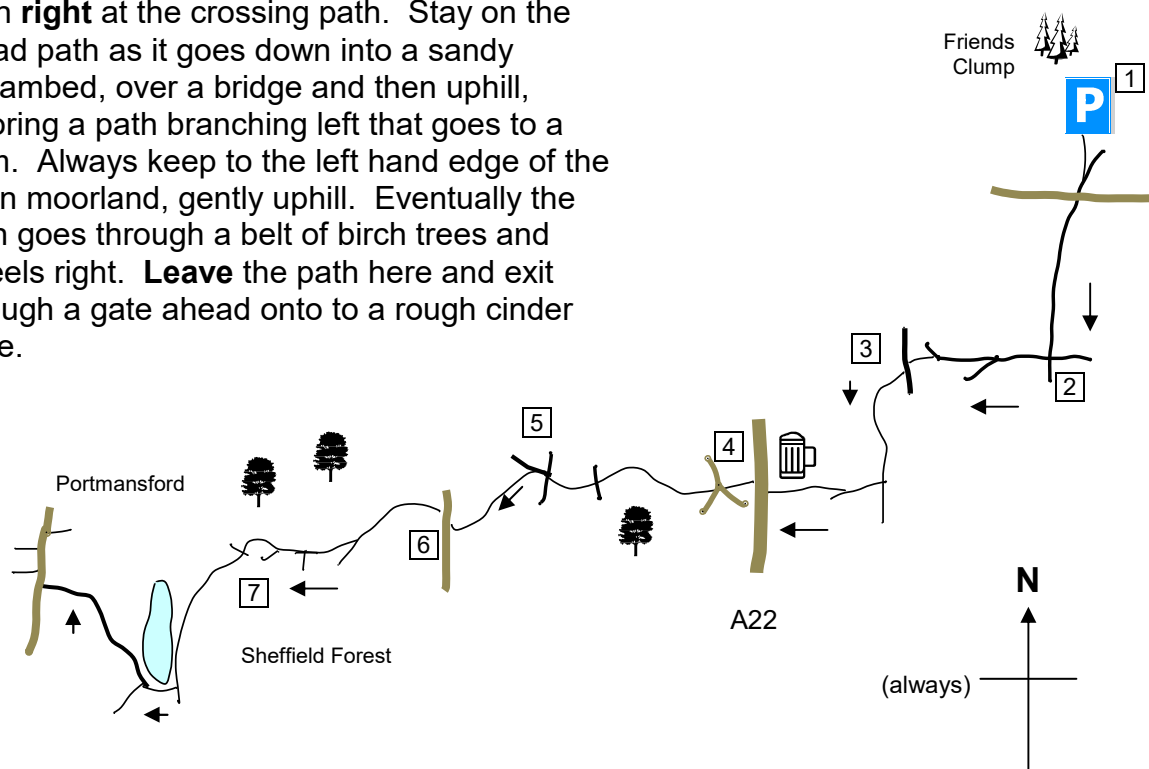
Leg 2: Friends Clump to Portmansford 7½ km=5 miles

- 1 Cross the road and continue due south on a path away from the road, through Stonehill car park, across the moor, passing a seat, a little bridge and some notices. Stay on the grassy path heading through the trees, soon crossing a wide diagonal crossing path. Stay on this path on a high prominence for about 700m, with views over the valley to your left and ahead to the South Downs. You reach a wide crossing path just as the path meets a line of birch trees.



This part of the **Ashdown Forest Monster** ends here, turning **left**.

- 2 Turn **right** at the crossing path. Stay on the broad path as it goes down into a sandy streambed, over a bridge and then uphill, ignoring a path branching left that goes to a farm. Always keep to the left hand edge of the open moorland, gently uphill. Eventually the path goes through a belt of birch trees and wheels right. **Leave** the path here and exit through a gate ahead onto to a rough cinder drive.



- 3 Cross the drive and continue on a path opposite. Stay on this path as it wheels left through birches, ignoring all minor paths off. You are now going south again. Stay on this main path as it enters a small meadow and exits left. Soon you pass a marker post with a yellow arrow and find yourself walking alongside a hedge with pastures on the left. At a junction 200m further on, opposite two metal gates (one large, one small), turn **right** into woods on a wide path. As you approach a cottage, avoid a wide left fork and stay on the narrower main grassy footpath. The path later becomes a track and passes other small houses, eventually winding uphill, up a bank, to the main road (A22) by a pub the newly-named *Giggles* (a free house). *Giggles is a country pub serving traditional pub food but "with a Caribbean twist". They also serve coffee, etc. There is a large patio on one side.*



- 4 Cross the main road, **right** and then **left**, to a residential road with playing fields of Fords Green on your left. After the playing fields, another track joins from the left and your route continue across a road to another footpath, 20m to the right, which approaches a large house called *Pricket(t)s Hatch* (the oast is available for holiday rent). After

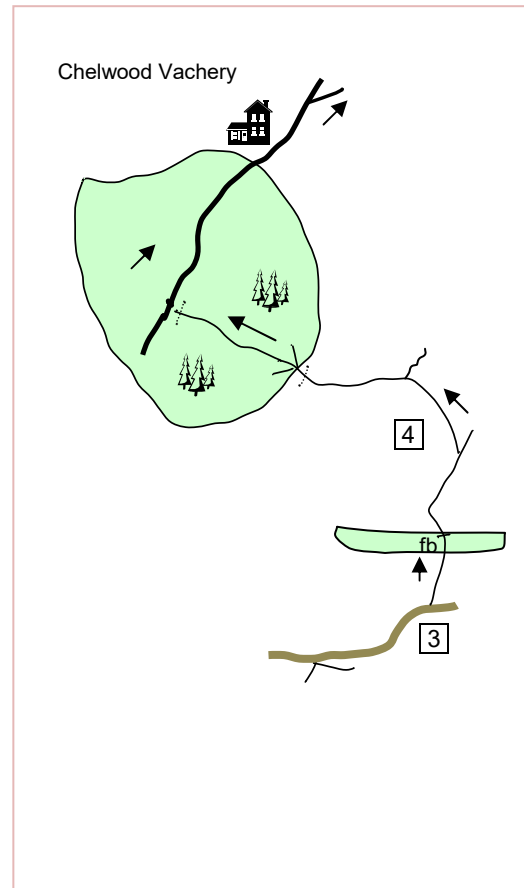
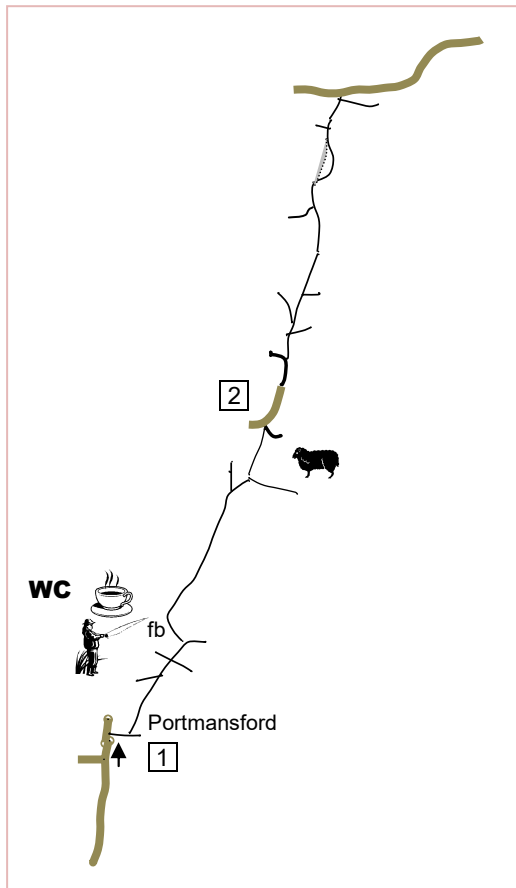
passing the main entrance on the left, fork **left** here, as directed by a yellow arrow on a marker post into the farm yard. You pass a duck pond and continue on a grassy route between fields. (This is the **one** place on this walk that you may find muddy. Local people are known to use the clean private drive running parallel on the right. There is a gap in the fence shortly before your path enters the wood.) Stay close to the hedge as you enter Hollybush Wood. The path shortly kinks left to enter it. The path crosses a forestry track [2015: deeply rutted by forestry – hop over!], passes through a light plantation of young oaks and then winds downhill through hollies. It crosses a stream by a long wooden bridge. You are now at the head of a T-junction of wide sandy forestry tracks.

- 5 Cross straight over the crossing track and continue on the track opposite [2015-2022: keeping to the left to avoid the churned-up soil]. In 25m, at a little 3-way fingerpost, **ignore** a footpath right and keep straight on. In another 20m, opposite another little 3-way fingerpost [Mar 2022: gone], fork away **left** on a wide path that rises into the woods. *Do not miss this turning!* [Jul 2022: many trees down; take care in this section!] In 30m, your path veers left across a ditch and goes up a bank. It now runs along a high bank under trees with the ditch on your right and, shortly, a meadow on your left. The path emerges by a small unused gate into an open field, where it continues on the left side. The path becomes a pleasant wide enclosed path which eventually goes through a large metal gate and arrives at farm sheds, and thence onto a road.
- 6 Cross the road, a fraction right, onto a gravel track, as directed by a fingerpost. The track wheels left and passes Stephens Farm on your right. After the house, keep ahead on a grass path, entering Sheffield Forest. You soon pass a wood and metal barrier. In about 200m fork **right**, going downhill, deeper into the forest. In 400m, at a major junction of forestry paths, go straight on uphill ignoring the right turn. In 150m your path levels out. Just 80m later, **leave** the main path which curves away left, and take a path leading off down to the **right**, as directed by a marker post. *Be careful not to miss this turning!*
- 7 Follow this wide woodland path, ignoring all minor paths off. Your path wheels round left and then right again under some majestic conifers. After some time a large mill pond comes into view. On reaching the end of the pond, turn **right**, passing on your left the much restored but picturesque old mill house and passing through an old turnstile. Stay on the tarmac lane ahead, ignoring a footpath on the left, passing a duckpond and a meadow on the left which is sometimes full of deer, and, in about ½ km, meeting a minor road at a T-junction. Turn **right** on the road. The road passes a side road on the left and immediately reaches on the right a group of cottages called Portmansford.

Leg 3: Portmansford to Millbrook East 6½ km=4 miles

Portmansford seems unchanged from two centuries ago. The 1597 records show that “Richard Michelborne, in the right of Anne his wife, holds by deed land called Potmanford [sic], 8 acres, and other lands called Potmanford, 22 acres; Rent 5s. 4d., 1 hen, 5 eggs, and one day’s work in Harvest”. In 1841, the Brownings, Brookers, Slarks, Kenwards and Cheesemans had taken over.

- 1** Turn **right** just after the duck pond and pass the first two houses (which are joined together). Just before the neighbouring house, turn **left** and go through a small wooden gate. This path, which used to be overgrown but has now been much improved, shortly turns **right** up some steps and **left**, running above the stream. Soon there are plenteous bluebells in the spring. You go over a small wooden bridge and in around 150m you go through a small metal gate and pass a footpath on the left. Continue on a dirt track soon reaching a large anglers’ pond, part of Tanyard Fisheries. (NB: they used to welcome walkers into their café, but alas no more.)



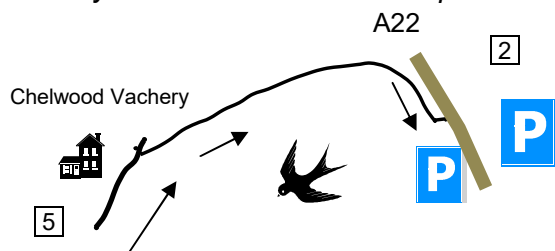
Continue straight on over a bridge. In 100m ignore a path leading up right, veer **left** over a stream and **right** uphill to go over a stile and into a field corner. Continue along the right side of the meadow, ignoring a footpath sign left, with good views, to the left, until you finally cross a stile in the corner (or go through a large wooden gate). Turn **right** here to cross a track on a narrow footpath towards a stile visible ahead. Cross the stile into a meadow, ignoring a footpath sign right. Continue



along the left edge, cross a stile or (easier) go through a large wooden gate (close it!) in the far corner and keep straight ahead on a private lane coming from the right.

- 2 The lane soon becomes tarmac. After some distance, go through the smaller of two wooden gates and continue on the lane, now somewhat rougher, until it bends left. Leave the lane here by continuing **straight on** into a field, ignoring a path on the right. You are now in a wonderful meadow with extensive views all around, especially behind you to the South Downs. The path meets the edge of the meadow and follows a track, later concrete, past a farm and scattered houses. At a big new extension to farm buildings, your route is now diverted off the track to the **right** along the side of the meadow on an attractive green path, finally going **left** down steps and **right** to re-join the track. *Where you see a footpath on the left by a small wooden house, there are often deer in the field beyond, but this footpath is not on the route.* Follow the tarmac drive, ignoring a footpath on the right, out to a main road and turn **right** on it. Continue on the road for a total of 500m as it bends left and then right. *(It may be best here to defy the usual rule and keep to the **left-hand side of the road at a blind bend.**)* About 70m after a driveway on your left to *Fairplace Farm*, look left for a narrow signed footpath with a railing. *Don't miss this turn!* Turn **left** on this footpath.
- 3 The path takes you down steep steps, over a stile, through a gate, along the right-hand side of a sheep meadow and down some steps. It now leads over a wide stream by a long bridge-with-rails in a picturesque wooded valley with Ashdown Forest now enticingly visible ahead. The path veers left after the footbridge. In 70m it comes out of the trees and begins to rise up over moorland. Carefully follow this rather tortuous path through bracken, heading for the wood straight ahead. On the edge of the wood you meet a post with a yellow arrow. Continue into the wood and measure 25m from the post – about 40 paces. On your left is a shallow bank and you can see a narrow path leading away through the trees. *Don't miss this turning!* Turn **left**, thus leaving the official footpath, and follow this path until, in 60m, it comes out through a patch of bracken onto the open heath. Immediately turn **left** on a narrow path. This path runs along the edge of the beautiful open space of purple heather, curving right and left.
- 4 In 70m, your path reaches a large area of woodland and immediately turns left and right to run through the centre of the wood. After 200m of fine woodland, you come up to a boundary bank with a path on the right and a notice (which often falls off) saying *No Horses*. You are entering the magical Woodland Garden of Chelwood Vachery which is now managed by the Ashdown Forest Conservators. Go straight ahead through the gap to find three widely divergent paths leading away. Fork **right** and immediately **left** so as to take the **middle** path. This path leads for a total of 400m though austere conifer woodland, under wires, over a stony stream, always continuing straight on. Finally you come to a wide crossing path with a large wooden gate on the other side which has a sign saying *No Horses*. Turn **right** here on a very broad dirt path, resisting the temptation to continue ahead through the wooden gate *(but see another walk in this series [Hindleap and Vachery](#) which takes you into this wondrous landscape)*. This path climbs and passes on your left the walls of Chelwood Vachery.

Chelwood Vachery was originally called Trimmer's Pond and Kidbrooke Park, and is now a much altered and decorated house with gardens laid out by Humphry Repton, the last great English landscape designer of the eighteenth century. "Vachery" is an old term for a cow pen.

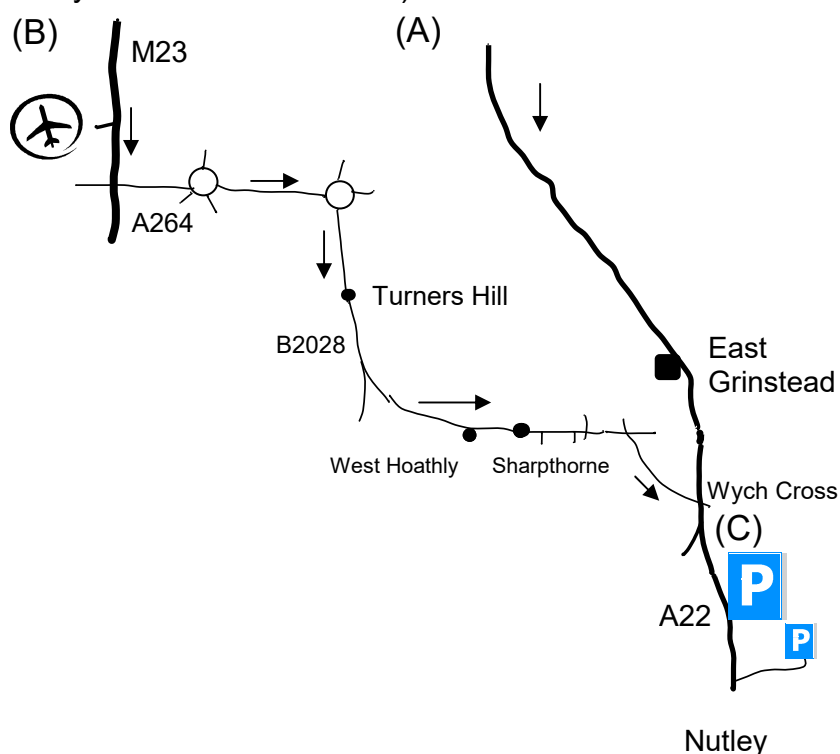


The **Ashdown Forest Monster** joins the walk here, wrapping round at the end, to Leg 1.

- 5 About 50m after the last shed, where the track forks, take the **right** fork, as directed by a fingerpost. This is the lesser, more attractive, path which leads down onto open moorland. The path approaches the main road, the A22, meets a path from the left and curves right parallel to the road. Stay on this wide sandy path which gradually gets close to the road until suddenly it bends left to meet it. Cross the A22 main road carefully and turn **right** into Millbrook East car park where icecream and drinks are usually available and where the walk began.

Getting there

- (A) If you are coming from the **east** side of the M25, take the A22 through East Grinstead and continue from paragraph (C) below. You can go this way wherever you are coming from although it's a bit dull and East Grinstead is sometimes rather congested. About 3 miles south of East Grinstead, you go through the Wych Cross traffic lights.
- (B) If you are coming from the **west** side of the M25, with easy access to the M23, the following route is recommended (see the Map) as it is more interesting and avoids East Grinstead. Take the M23 past Gatwick Airport and turn **left** at the next junction, the A264 (*East Grinstead*). At the second 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*. Pass through both these large villages, and another 2 miles (3km) after Sharpthorne, turn **right** at a crossroads signposted *Wych Cross*. You are now in a beautiful part of Ashdown Forest. The road eventually comes to traffic lights where you turn **right** onto the A22. The return route is similar.
- (C) Stay on the A22 for 1¾ miles where the road curves right and you enter the great open heath. The *Millbrook East* car park is the large car park on the left as soon as you come into the open. It is opposite another car park (presumably called *Millbrook West*).



If you prefer to start at the Friends car park, continue on the A22 and, after a welcome sign for Nutley and just after a 30mph sign, take a road sharp **left**, signposted *Crowborough and Tunbridge Wells (A26)*. This leads up onto the moors and a mile further, just after a cattle grid and an Ashdown Forest welcome sign, park in the first car park on the left known as *Friends*, being next to Friends Clump. Begin from Leg 2.

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