



Cousley Wood and Bewl Water: pub walk

Distance: 4½ km=2¾ miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex

Date written: 1-jul-2019

Author: Stivaletti

Last update: 9-jul-2024

Refreshments: The *Old Vine* Inn

Map: Explorer 136 (The Weald) *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.

Village, woodland, meadows, water, views

In Brief

The *Old Vine* is a traditional 16th-century English white-board country pub with a range of real ales, a delightful garden at the back and a cosy fire in the winter. The short menu (always a good sign!) includes various pub favourites and several vegetarian main dishes. The welcome is said to be lovely. Note that this establishment is **closed on Mondays**. Otherwise, food and drink is served *all day*, although closing time is 6pm on Sunday. For information or to book, ring 01892-782271.

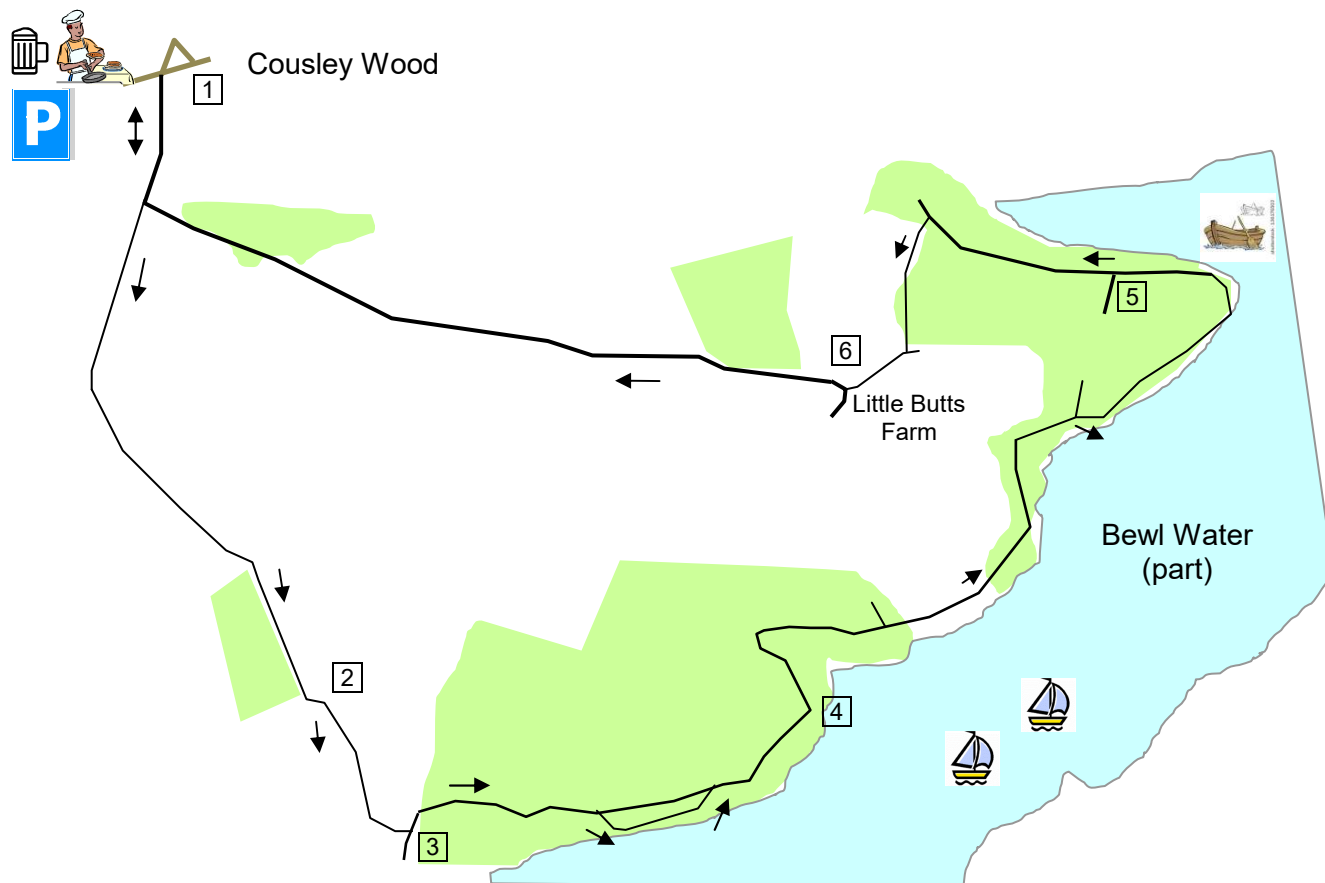
This piquant and intoxicating walk leads down to a large lake with a picturesque lakeshore, giving you sudden views of oasthouses, hills, woods, and even a vineyard (unusual in these parts).



There is just one patch of brambly undergrowth on the descent, not enough to rule out shorts. Boots were not needed when the walk was researched in June and the whole route should be fairly dry in summer. In winter or after a wet spell, you will need boots. Your dog will enjoy this walk and he can accompany you on the tables in front and in the garden at the back.

The walk begins beside the *Old Vine* Inn/Restaurant in the hamlet of **Cousley Wood**, East Sussex, between Lamberhurst and Wadhurst, postcode **TN5 6ER**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 With the pub/restaurant on your right, walk just 30m along the main road and turn **right** on a tarmac drive, marked with a small signpost as a public footpath. Where the drive bends left, **leave** it by keeping straight ahead on a rough track. At the top of the rise look left for your first view of the lake. Straight ahead are two fields sloping downhill, soon separated by a ditch. Head for the ditch and walk along it, on its right-hand side, down the hill. You come through a wide gap at a marker post and into another crop field. Avoid the path ahead down the left side and instead turn **right** on a path along the right-hand side of the field with woodland on your right.
- 1 At the bottom of the field, where the field edge curves away left, go **right** over a stile (*don't miss!*) and follow a narrow path through the long grass, veering **right** into a long meadow. In the bottom right corner, go over a stile and turn **left** as indicated by a yellow arrow. You reach a T-junction with a wide path by a 3-way fingerpost. Turn **left** on the wide path. This is the Bawl Water Route, a 17-mile route around the lake which you will be following for a short way.

Bawl Water is a reservoir but the word "lake" is deservedly more poetic. It is the largest body of water in Southeast England, formed in 1973 by damming the valley of the Bewl and Teise rivers. It also draws some water from the Medway. It provides fresh water to much of Kent and East Sussex. It is connected by a pipe to the Darwell reservoir and can transfer 35 million litres of water a day. It is also a major leisure centre, especially for sailing, bird watching and, of course, walking.

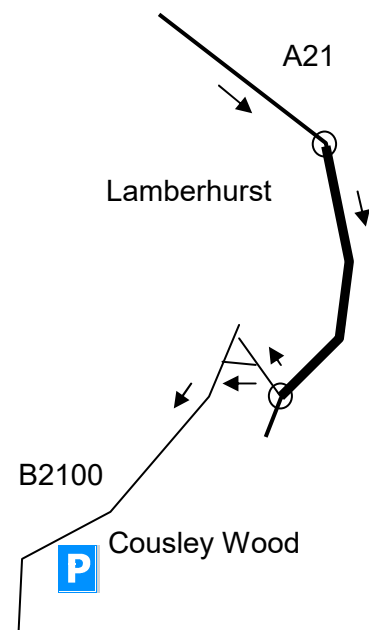
- 3 The path becomes sandy, winding through trees, and suddenly after 250m there is a wide gap on your right with a view of the lake. Go **right** through the gap and **left** through grass near the water's edge. After a band of shrubbery you are in an area full of wild mint. Keep to the left-hand side to take advantage of a bench seat. After possibly pausing to admire, keep **left** on a narrow path in the corner and turn **right**, back on the main path. Keep following the many twists in the path as you skirt numerous inlets, avoiding all paths leading off. Great oaks shield the route, allowing occasional glimpses of the water. After three flat bridges, suddenly you are out in the open. Ignore a footpath on the left here and continue, now with clear view of the water. Another bench seat gives you a view across the lake to *Newborn House* and a group of oasts.
- 4 There is a vineyard on your left as your path hairpins round another creek. *A new bench seat at this point gives a view of the end of the lake.* After about 500m of mainly woodland walking, you reach a major fork in the path. Take the **right** fork, the slightly narrower option, leading down to the water's edge. You are now so close to the shoreline that the water almost laps against your feet. Soon, if the water is high, you have to take a left fork through trees before regaining the shoreline. Your path now bends left along the side of a large inlet, passing a landing jetty. Join a gravel path coming from the platform. In 150m, you reach a 3-way junction. Ignore the wide track on the left here and keep straight on.
- 5 Follow this easy wide woodland path for 200m or so and look for a stile along the fence on the left-hand side, just before some overhead electrical wires. Turn **left** here over the stile onto a footpath which runs up the left-hand edge of a field, heading for the trio of oasts of Little Butts Farm. As you near the top, turn **left** at an electricity pole through a gap. Immediately turn **right** at a 3-way finger post onto a stony path which runs beside a tall wooden fence. At the end, go through a wooden swing-gate onto a tarmac drive. Turn **right** on the drive, glancing behind you for the best view of the oasts.
- 6 You now have an easy stroll on this tarmacked Butts Lane, very gently uphill, between ancient hedges and with a deep valley on your right. After 700m, the drive runs under trees and bends right, passing a track on your left, familiar from your outward journey. You are quickly back at the main road by the *Old Vine Inn* where the walk began.



Getting there

By car: The hamlet of Cousley Wood is easily reached from the A21 and Lamberhurst. If coming from the north on the A21, after the narrow section, at a roundabout, ignore the right turn for Lamberhurst and continue on the A21 dual-carriageway and under the "land bridge". Now turn **right** at the roundabout signposted *Wadhurst* and continue to follow signs to *Wadhurst*, involving a left fork and a left turn onto the B2100. This road will take you to Cousley Wood in just over 2 miles, with the *Old Vine* pub/restaurant on the left. The pub has only a small car park, so it is best to park on the side of this wide road.

By bus/train: bus 256 runs from Tunbridge Wells station to Cousley Wood, not Saturday or Sunday. Check the timetable.



fancy more free walks? www.fancyfreewalks.org