



Ardingly Lake, Ouse Valley, Borde Hill

Distance: 14 km=9 miles or 12½ km=8 miles

easy walking

Region: West Sussex

Date written: 2-feb-2014

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Last update: 28-mar-2026

Refreshments: Borde Hill

Map: Explorer 135 (Ashdown Forest) and 134 (Crawley)
but the map in this guide should be sufficient

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

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Lake, heritage site, green meadows, streams, woodland, garden

In Brief

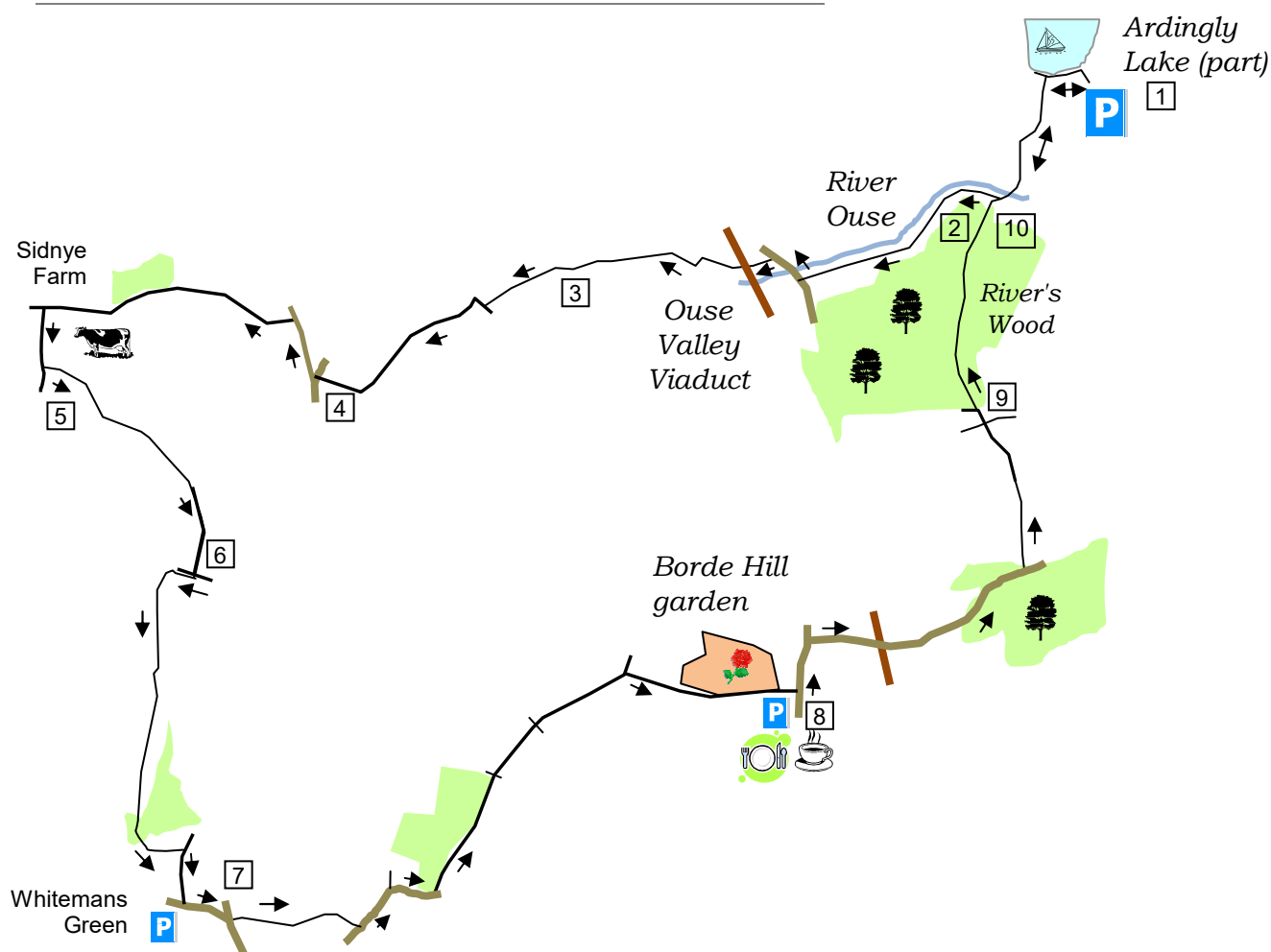
This is a gentle walk through green meadows of West Sussex, with some woodland, a garden (with entrance fee) and an impressive piece of industrial heritage.



Shorts should be fine because there are no nettles. In high summer there may be a few brambles along the way when you may be glad of a hiking pole. There is always a fair amount of mud in the woodland areas, so boots are recommended. There is one stile that would be a problem for your dog but that one is avoidable (see below).

The walk begins at the car park of **Ardingly Reservoir**, nearest **postcode RH17 6SQ**, grid ref TQ 334288, [costly.increment.watches](#). (It's called *Ardingly Lake* from here on because that's more poetic.) There was a small charge for parking in 2017, but none in 2020. Alternatively, you can park in Whiteman's Green near Cuckfield, postcode **RH17 5BY**, or in Borde Hill, postcode **RH16 1XP**, both reducing the length by 1 mile=1½ km but missing the beautiful view of the lake. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 From the car park below Ardingly Lake, walk up to the top of the wall and enjoy the view of the inverted “Y” shape, often with colourful yachts carving the water.

Ardingly Lake is a massive centre for outdoor activities, not to mention its vital use as a source of fresh water. It covers over 80 hectares and was created during 1976-79 by damming the River Ouse.

Turn **left** along the top, crossing a concrete track in the corner near the windsurfing centre. Go up a grassy slope to a 4-way fingerpost. Turn **left** (not sharp left) on a level path that quickly leads to a wooden gate. Go through a kissing gate to the left of the wooden gate and keep ahead along the left-hand side of the meadow. At the end, the path veers right to go through a gap in the hedgerow. Turn **left** and continue down the left-hand side of the next meadow. *The Ouse Valley Railway Viaduct, your next destination, can now be seen on your right.* At the bottom, go over a sturdy footbridge, straight across a small meadow, across an even longer bridge with a swing-gate at each end, into another meadow. *The wooden hut on your left is part of a waterworks.* Turn sharp **right** following the river, avoiding a path leading ahead into the wood via a kissing gate (your return route).

- 2 Follow a wide path that runs beside the River Ouse on your right, heading for the viaduct. *You will be following the Sussex Ouse Valley Path for some of the way. This is a 68 km=42 mile walk from East Beeding near here to the sea at Seaford Bay.* An open metal gate leads into another long meadow: keep to the right-hand side, now with a clear view of the viaduct. Eventually your path takes you through a metal kissing-gate to a road. Turn **right** on the road, crossing the river by a bridge and passing some cottages. Opposite a new metal gate, cross the road and go **left** over through a metal kissing-gate and across a meadow on a path which goes under the second arch.

The Ouse Valley Railway Viaduct was built in 1841 to carry the London-Brighton line. With its great line of open arches and its wonderful vistas from all directions, it has become an irresistible tourist attraction and even has a page on TripAdvisor! For those interested in statistics, it is 29m high, is built from 11 million bricks and has 37 semi-circular arches. It is also grade II listed.

The path leads into bushes and through two metal kissing-gates into a meadow. The path crosses the centre of the meadow and goes through a metal kissing-gate to join a track that veers right past a cottage and farm buildings. Go through a metal gate on the left and along a fenced path above a field. At the end, go through a metal kissing-gate, followed by another, then diagonally down the centre of a meadow, heading for a metal gate in the corner.

- 3 On reaching the metal gate, go over a stile, or through an open metal gate, and along the right-hand side of a field. In 50m, fork **left** on a path crossing the field to a wide bridge over the Ouse. Cross the meadow, bearing right, on a wide path along the left-hand side of a long meadow. At the end, avoid a metal gate on your left leading to Great Bentley farm house and go up steps (with a convenient wooden handrail) straight ahead, through a small metal gate, to a farm drive. Turn **right** on the drive which immediately bends left, and follow the easy semi-tarmac for 750m as far as the B2036 road. Turn **left** on the road.

- 4 Immediately turn sharp **right** on Cherry Lane. Follow the lane uphill and, at the top, turn **left** on a drive for Sidnye Farm. The drive runs between fields and meadows, passing some cottages, with good views. *The remains of the building ahead to your right is part of the lakeside memorial that Maurice Saatchi built for his wife, the writer Josephine Hart.* On reaching Sidnye Farm, walk past the first set of buildings and turn **left** on a major track between more buildings. You pass a horse exerciser and a wooden gate on your right. Only 100m from the last farm building, your wide track enters a shallow curve. At this point, go **left** through two wide metal gates (both usually open), by a fingerpost, on a footpath leading into a pasture.

- 5 Follow a faint diagonal path across the pasture, keeping near the left-hand side but cutting the first blunt corner. At the other side, next to a 2-arm fingerpost, go through two metal farm gates into the next field. Avoid a track that forks left towards trees and instead turn **right** along the right-hand edge. In 150m, go through a small gap on your right between two old gateposts and over a 2-plank bridge. Keep **left** along the left-hand side of the meadow. In another 150m or so, go **left** through a large metal gate over a piece of tarmac and keep **right** along the right-hand side of this meadow. Next is a large metal gate leading over a stream into another meadow. Keep ahead uphill staying near the left-hand side between lines of oaks. At the top, go over a stile, or through the large wooden gate, and

keep straight ahead past *Collin's Farm*. Another large wooden gate leads you along a cinder drive, passing a pond on your left.

- 6 You arrive at 4-way fingerpost at a junction of paths and driveways. Go **straight over**, just to the right of the fingerpost, over a 2-plank bridge and up two steps. The path immediately turns right on a narrow path between a fence and a hedge. *If this path is too overgrown, or if you have a dog – in view of one dog-proof stile later – you can instead turn **right** at the previous fingerpost on a wide path (known as Spark's Lane) and in 150m go **left** over a plank bridge on an unsigned rather obscure path that runs along the left-hand side of the golf course, joining the route at [a] below.* Your path takes you along a 2-plank walkway and **left** over a stile into a small grassy meadow. Bear **right** in the direction of a fingerpost with a tree-fringed pond on your left. Halfway up the hill, lift the wire fence using the hook at the far right end. At the top, go over a stile in the fence. Keep going down the right-hand side, over a stile in the fence after 100m, with *Lower Spark's Farm* on your left. Just before the corner, go **right** over a stile and **left** on a path [a] running along the left-hand side of the Cuckfield Golf Club. Continue uphill to the far end where a 3-arm fingerpost directs you past an old metal gate and into woods. The path winds its way over roots, over a 2-plank bridge and through a modern kissing-gate. Go up the slope into a sheep pasture and keep to the left-hand side. On reaching some bungalows, go through a metal kissing-gate, down steps, and turn **right** on a driveway. At the main road, turn **left** (you can cut the corner across the green) passing a filling station (open for coffee and snacks) and quickly reaching a junction at Whitemans Green on the outskirts of Cuckfield with a *Co-op* on your right.



- 7 Cross straight over the main road and take a signed tarmac path just before *Greenview*. Keep to the left of houses, crossing a residential road by two small wooden gates and finally reaching a main road. Cross the main road and turn **left** on it, ignoring a footpath straight ahead. At a mini-roundabout bear **right**, staying on the main road. There is now a sheltered tarmac footpath on your side of the road. In 150m or so, just before a School road sign, look out for a gap in the hedge, cross the road and fork **left** on a bridleway indicating *Borde Hill Estate*. *Don't miss this turn!* You are on a tarmac drive with some fine woodland on your left and good views. Keep straight on at a junction of tracks, to go finally between stone lodge gates of Borde Hill. Follow the tarmac path through parkland, going over a cattle grid. When you reach a junction at a 4-arm fingerpost, fork right on a semi-tarmac path, affording you views to your right of Robertsmere Lake. Go through a small wooden gate next to a cattle grid. On the left soon is the wall of Borde Hill Garden, and soon you reach the entrance, the car park and a café and restaurant with other attractions.

Borde Hill is named after Sir Stephen Borde who built the house in 1598. It was the last owners, the Clarke family, who established the garden, beginning in the 1890s. They brought plants over from the Himalayas, China, Tasmania and the Americas, created woodland, a rose garden, an azalea ring and an Italian garden amongst many attractions. Lunch and snacks are available next door in Jeremy's Restaurant and the Café Elvira.



- 8 Go straight on to reach a main road and turn **left** on it. In 200m fork **right** on Copyhold Lane, a much quieter road. *You have joined the High Weald Landscape Trail and you will be following it from now on to the end of the walk.* The lane passes cottages and goes over the railway, passing *Copyhold Hollow* (B&B) on your right. The lane now enters woodland and, about



600m from the railway bridge, you see an open field on your left as you meet two fingerposts. Turn **left** here through a [2014-2026: broken] swing-gate on a narrow path through the wood. An unneeded swing-gate leads past a house on your right, over a bridge across a stream, through another swing-gate and out into a meadow. At the other side, go over a flat bridge and keep straight ahead on a wide path between oaks. Keep ahead, ignoring all side tracks, through a metal kissing-gate, past a timbered cottage, over a railway bridge, to a T-junction of tracks.

- 9 Go straight over the T-junction, through a new metal kissing-gate on the left of a wooden gate, onto a narrow path through the extensive River's Wood, always following the yellow arrows. After 400m or so, your wide path goes straight over a crossing track, now a little sunken. If you find a felled tree across the path, this is to keep out motorbikes - not you. Eventually the path narrows and runs downhill, through a metal kissing-gate, into a meadow.

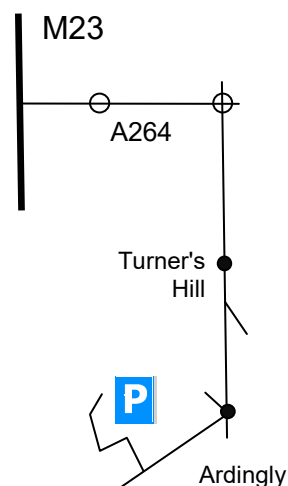
If you did *not* begin the walk at Ardingly Lake, and you do *not* wish to pay it a visit, turn **left** in the meadow and continue from section 2.

- 10 The last section is just the reverse of the outward section. Go diagonally **right** to cross a long bridge with swing-gates. Now keep to the right of a line of trees to go over another long bridge. Go up the right-hand side of a long sloping meadow and, half way up, at a fingerpost, go **right** through a gap. Keep to the right-hand side of the next meadow. *Ardingly College is visible on your right.* In the far corner, go through a metal gate and, at a junction of paths, keep **right**, descending to the head of the lake and the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: To get to Ardingly Reservoir from the London area, 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 **ignore** a left fork signposted *West Hoathly and Sharpthorne*. Continue past Wakehurst Place into the village of Ardingly. Just after the village, ignore a sharp right turn but fork **right** immediately after it on a road signposted *Ardingly College* and *Ardingly Reservoir*. After 1.6 km=1 mile, not long after the College, turn right at a brown tourist sign for the *Reservoir*. After ½ km, at a fence with a private car park, turn **left** with the main drive. In another 200m or so, the drive bends right and reaches the car park.

By bus/train: bus 37 runs from Crawley or Haywards Heath to Whitemans Green. Check the timetables.



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