



St Leonard's Forest

Distance: 25 km=15½ miles

moderate-to-easy walking

Region: West Sussex

Date written: 3-may-2009

Author: Hautboy

Date revised: 24-jun-2014

Refreshments: Nuthurst

Last update: 17-jun-2024

Map: Explorer 134 (Crawley and Horsham)

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Woodland, lakes, heath

In Brief

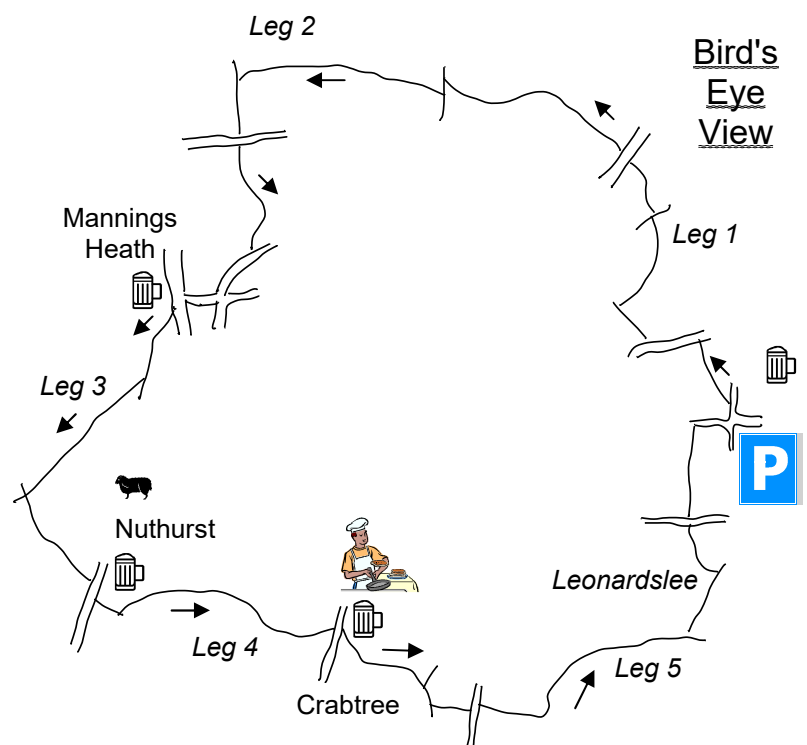
This walk is a huge adventure which has become a classic, beautiful and exhilarating, combining spectacular woodland, hidden lakes and green meadows. In late spring, the woods adjoining your route will be decked almost all the way by bluebells.



There is just one patch of nettles but in summer the undergrowth may make bare legs uncomfortable. There is some mud in the last section after Leonardslee, so boots are important. The walk is fine for a fit dog as the stiles generally have a gap. A lead is needed because of the sheep pastures

The walk starts at **Furnace Pond** near **Slaugham**, West Sussex, nearest postcode **RH17 6AE**, grid ref TQ 249 281, www.w3w.co/perch.cool.phones.

The lake is just west of Slaugham. Before you park, it is worth stopping briefly in Slaugham (see *history* below). For a detailed map, and a bus route, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk



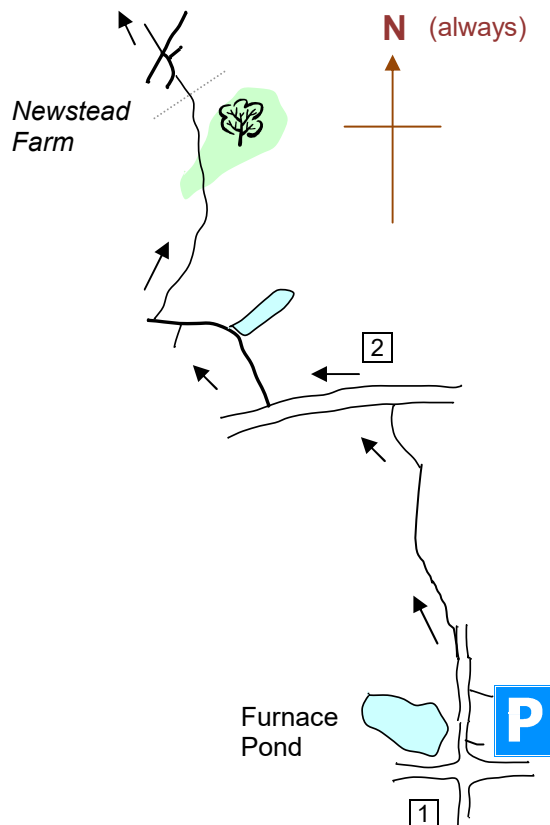
Slaugham (pronounced "Slaffham") is a small village around an attractive green. The Norman Church has a 13th century tower with a Victorian clock set in its north side. Nearby is the ruin of Slaugham Place, the former home of Sir Walter Covert, designed by John Thorpe and built by 1579, but pulled down some 200 years later. The lake is one of the sources of the River Ouse.

Leg 1: Furnace Pond to Newstead Farm 4 km=2½ miles

- 1 With the lake on your left, follow the road Coos Lane past a large house on the left, *Lower Ashfold*, till, 100m after *Inholms Cottage*, take a footpath **left** opposite *Poyninghurst*, as directed by a fingerpost. The footpath leads through a swing gate into a field. Cross it diagonally keeping the same direction, aiming for a corner of the wood ahead. At the corner of the wood, the official path continues along the right-hand edge of the field beside the wood. (However, it is pleasant to take a parallel path through the wood. After 250m through rhododendrons, 20m before the path bends right, go **left** down a bank, over a stream and straight up to the brow of a hill towards a 2-way fingerpost and a large house.) The official footpath turns left at the field corner and then regains direction over the brow of the hill at a 2-way fingerpost. Go through a small wooden gate, with a large house, *Ashfold Farm House*, on your left, and cross a stile beside a gate. Now go over a meadow and finally through a swing gate just to the right of some copper beeches to reach a main road (the B2110 Horsham Road). Turn **left** on the road.

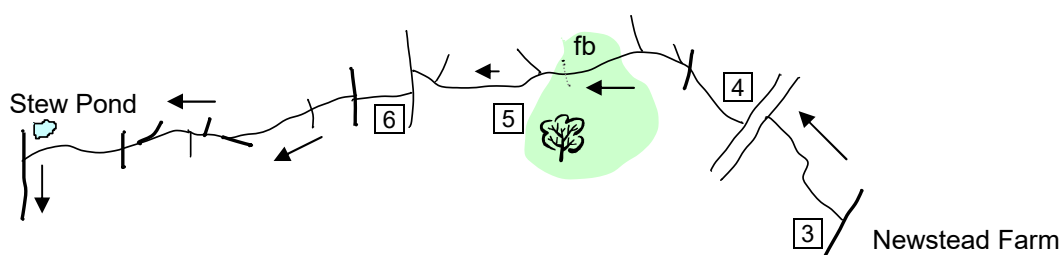
Notice that you have been walking part of the High Weald Landscape Trail. The HWLT is a 140 km=90 mile walking route between Horsham and Rye on the East Sussex coast passing through the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It passes through some spectacular scenery and lovely towns such as Tenterden, Benenden and Rolvenden (see the walk "The Dens of Kent" in this series).

- 2 After about 300m, you pass the welcome sign for Plummers Plain and reach a forest by a wide track called *Cartersledge Lane*. Turn **right** here, onto a tarmac lane, marked as both a Public Bridleway and the HWLT. Follow this quiet forest lane, passing the large Cartersledge Pond on your right until you pass a bungalow on the left. Ignoring a footpath sign on your left, pass a large field on your right as the track enters woodland. On your left is a dusty driveway to a house. About 30m after it, nearly 1 km since you turned off the main road, take a footpath **right** as directed by a fingerpost. Go through an open metal gate into a charming narrow meadow. Your path keeps to the right at first and gradually drifts to the left side. Avoid a small wooden gate about half way along and follow the meadow to its far end. Here, the footpath leaves the meadow **left** over a stile, crosses a stream by a



bridge in a strip of woodland and leads up to a field. Do *not* cross the stile on the left leading into the field but instead keep **right** here on a woodland path, later ignoring a path on the right over a small bridge, and eventually entering the meadow via another stile. (This route cuts out two stiles on the official path.) If you are walking in late spring, you will see an abundance of bluebells. They will be a constant enchanting feature of this walk. Cross the meadow diagonally passing close to a pylon and crossing a low fence. Sometimes you may meet a quiet herd of Friesians, easy to bypass if you need to. Keep straight on in the direction of farm buildings to reach a chalky track leading to a metal gate into Newstead Farm (the only farmyard you pass on this walk.)

Leg 2: Newstead Farm to the Stew Pond 5 km=3 miles



- 3 At the farm keep ahead to go over a bridleway, via a metal gate on each side, and follow a footpath straight ahead downhill. This path goes down the right-hand side of a field by way of a liftable electric fence to end at a small metal gate by a fingerpost. Cross the stream via a wooden bridge. Immediately after the bridge, turn **right** on a path that starts parallel to the stream and then quickly veers away from it uphill. The path runs for 300m through attractive woodland, and continues over a 2-plank bridge and down the right-hand side of an enclosed, rather overgrown, path alongside another field to Grouse Road.
- 4 Turn **left** on this quiet lane. After about 250m, just before the entrance to *Elenge Plat*, take a footpath **right** through a small metal gate. The footpath runs along the right-hand side of a meadow, goes through a large metal gate, becomes a wide enclosed path, and crosses a tarmac drive by a fingerpost. Keep ahead on a path marked *Private - Spring Farm*. In around 100m avoid the driveway leading into Spring Farm on your right and continue on a much narrower path. 100m further, ignore a signposted right turn. After about ½ km through lovely woods you cross a merry stream by a bridge with a rail. Continue into a meadow of scattered gorse via a stile next to a fingerpost. At the other side of the gorsy meadow, under oaks, you arrive at a 3-way fingerpost. Take the **left** fork, go over two stiles and go along the right-hand side of a meadow in Combe Bottom, passing several child horse jumps.
- 5 The path crosses another stile by a large new house on your right. Just after the house, switch to the right-hand side of the hedge and onto an enclosed grassy path. At the bottom ignore a fingerposted right turn and instead continue ahead, uphill, past a collapsed metal gate and a bypassable stile. Eventually, at a 3-way fingerpost, you come to a wide forestry track. Turn sharp left on it. (If you are looking at Map 134, note that the left-turn short cut does not exist.)

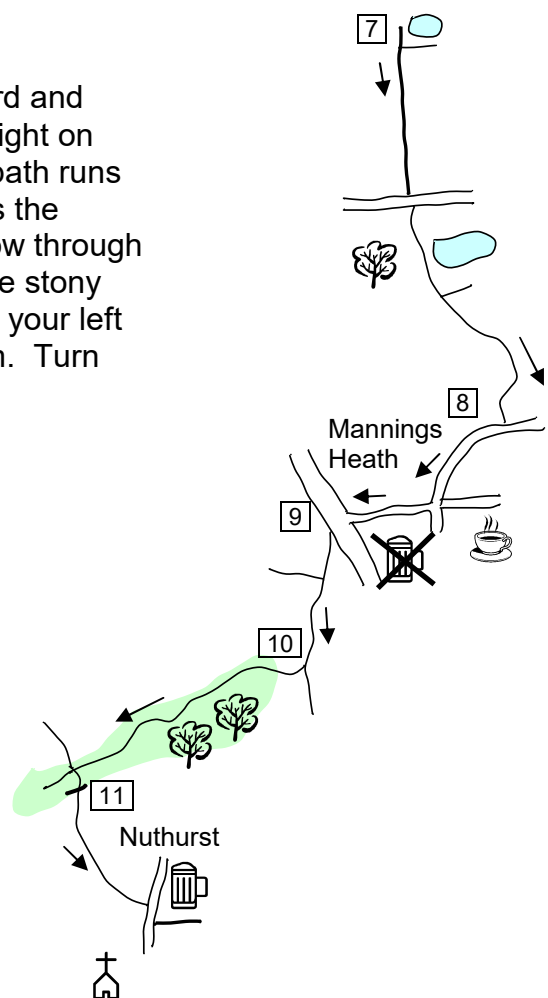
- 6 In 100m take a footpath **right** over a 2-plank bridge, up some steps. You are now truly entering St Leonards Forest and families and other walkers will probably become evident. The footpath leads upwards and levels out on the expansive heath of Greenbroom Hill, crossing a forestry track (see the other walk "St Leonards Forest: shorter walks"). You are now back on the High Weald Landscape Trail. Follow the trail and footpath signs, always straight on, ignoring all paths leading off, going over a diagonal crossing path and later joining a wide sandy track coming down from the left. Ignore a left turn at a 3-way fingerpost and continue uphill. Soon there is a field on the left and the path is gradually joined from the right by a stony path. Just after an unmapped pond on the left, the path goes through a modern kissing gate, crosses a wider track and continues along a grassy enclosed path with gorse, sparse woodland, then a field on the left. Bear **right** and follow the overhead wires on an enclosed path. It eventually reaches a T-junction at a wide track by an old gate and the remains of a stile. The rather gloomy Stew Pond can be glimpsed on your right. Your route is **left** at the T-junction on the straight wide track.

Leg 3: Stew Pond to Nuthurst 6½ km=4 miles

- 7 Follow the track for 850m, eventually passing a yard and reaching a road. Cross the road and continue straight on past a barrier on a much narrower footpath. This path runs for 400m between fields and woodland and passes the Roosthole Pond on the left. As you enter a meadow through a modern kissing gate, avoid a stile on the left. The stony path curves right around a field with a crop field on your left and reaches a road at a kissing gate near a stream. Turn **right** on the road.

- 8 The road leads upwards into Mannings Heath and eventually reaches a signposted crossroads. *In keeping with the immaculate nature of this small community, the village store, a once classy deli next to a billiard-table perfect patch of grass, has now closed unfortunately. (There is a Spar grocery in the filling station shortly though.)* Turn **right** at the crossroads down Pound Lane (signposted Horsham) and eventually reach the A281 main road by the site of the old *Dun Horse* pub, which sadly closed but has now been tastefully converted into flats. Cross the road, a fraction left, to a narrow footpath opposite.

- 9 100m after joining the footpath, ignore a signposted footpath right and continue through trees via a wooden swing-gate. The path goes over a footbridge, later through a modern metal gate, over another stile, along the right-hand side of a meadow and over two stiles close together at a signposted junction. Here, turn **right** on a bridleway, immediately crossing a wooden bridge, and continue ahead on a wide path.



10 The bridleway runs through deciduous forest and then the pine forests of Bushy Copse and Finche's Wood with fine views left across the valley. Where the path intersects a broad crossing track, go straight across. In another 600m you pass *Finches Wood Cottage*. In 100m, at a four-way signed junction, take a footpath **left**.

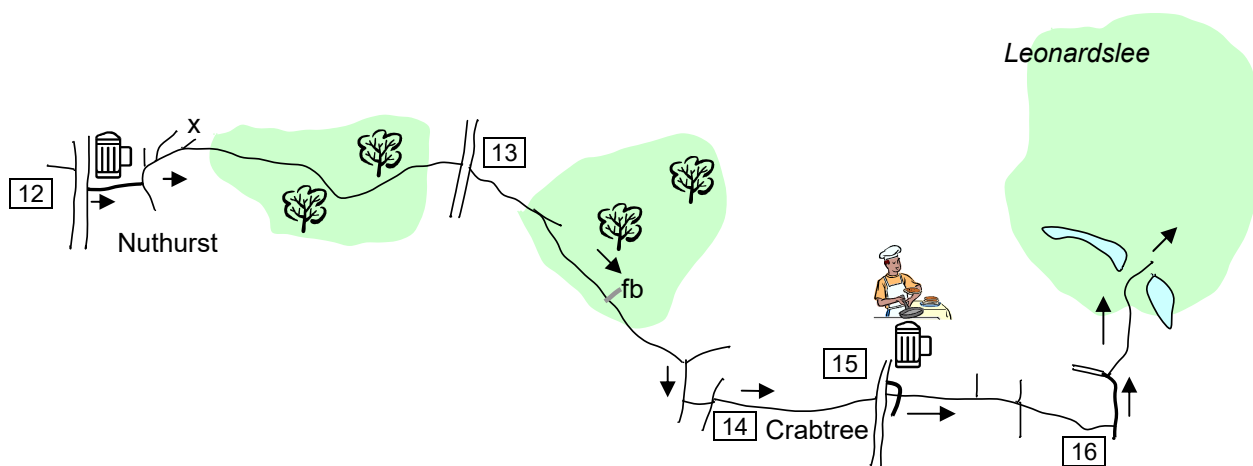
11 Follow the footpath down steps and through pasture as it goes over a crossing track, through woodland and down by a fence beside a meadow on your left. It then goes through a wooden swing-gate and across a farm track, passes a fingerpost, and enters a large flowery meadow via a metal gate. It descends the right-hand side until it reaches about half-way down. The path now veers diagonally left across the meadow following wires towards the distant corner where there is a wooden swing gate into the lane about 30m right of the last electricity pole. Turn **left** along the lane into Nuthurst and turn **right** along the road. A charming gem, the *Black Horse Inn* here is a small, slightly upmarket, free house that holds occasional jazz sessions.



A little further on the right is St Andrew's Church, dating from 1130, and much altered at various times since. The graceful wooden shingled spire replaced the old squat tower in 1857. Inside, the east window is a stunning depiction of St Andrew flanked by a sower and fisherman. The beautiful rood screen, though modern, invokes ages past with its delicate pastels, and depicts eight Sussex saints, including St Leonard. The first window on the right as you enter is the "jigsaw window", the solution to the puzzle having been lost in 1660.

Leg 4: Nuthurst to Leonardslee New Pond 5 km=3½ miles

12 Soon, take the tarmac lane **left**, marked as a bridleway, passing a large space on your left which is a plant nursery. At a T-junction turn **left**, take a **right** fork and follow the bridleway as it curves right through restored farm buildings. Ignore a footpath sign visible on the left leading round a farm shed and instead keep straight ahead on the broad track. In 140m, fork **right** on a narrower bridleway as indicated by the sign, thus avoiding an isolated cottage. The bridleway passes through the thick Lodgesale Wood, with tall pines, then a mixture of tree species. If the way is muddy or rutted, there are many opportunities to bypass it on a parallel path. After 1 km in the wood, the bridleway wheels right by a cottage and reaches a lane.

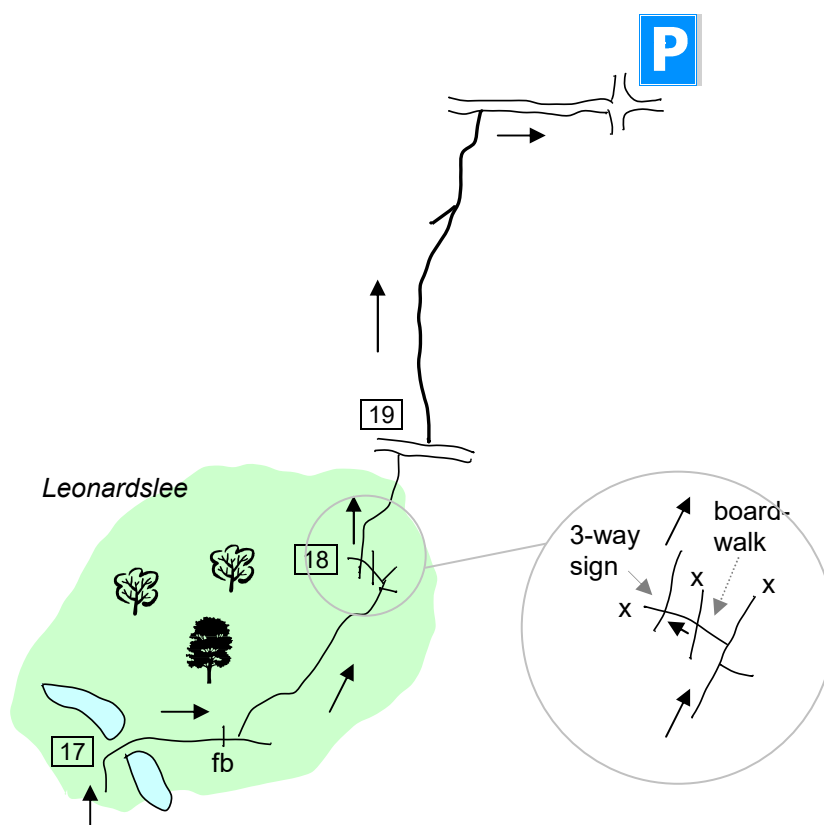


- 13 Turn **left** on the lane for 20m and take another bridleway **right**. In 180m, avoid the wider path which stops at a gate and instead obey a signpost by forking **right**. The bridleway passes several unmapped lakes on your right and, about 700m from the fork, runs over a wide bridge, rising steeply. 200m from the bridge, there is a signposted junction with another bridleway coming in from the left where the route curves right. After 130m, ignore a signed footpath right and, 30m later, take the next signposted footpath **left** uphill. *Be careful not to miss this turn!* On meeting a pair of cottages, ignore the first footpath that goes sharply right but take the **second** footpath **right**, 25m further on, in front of the cottages.
- 14 This footpath leads over a pleasant open meadow with a fenced-off vineyard on your left. The path crosses a stream and then runs across a second meadow with another fenced-off vineyard, again on your left. The path eventually ends at the main road at Crabtree. *Here you need to cross the road very carefully as the traffic is partly hidden by hedges. The "Crabtree" pub / restaurant, now run by established chef Simon Hope, is a few metres left and offers a really good lunch menu at £18 for three courses.* Take the path immediately opposite. [2014: some walkers found it too overgrown in summer. You can turn **left** on the road, past the pub, turn **right** on Mill Lane for 750m and **left** on the track mentioned in section 16 below.]
- 15 The footpath will be taking you almost dead straight for roughly 1km. It first crosses a residential road, then proceeds over a meadow with houses in view on your left. At a fork take the **right**-hand option, heading towards a marker post which directs you through a patch of woodland and soon past a residents' car park. Go through a wooden kissing-gate and continue ahead between meadows with a wire fence on your right and a paddock on your left. Go through another wooden kissing-gate, but avoid the second kissing-gate and a footpath on your left. The path now goes along the left side of the field and through a large open metal gate. Go over a wide track to a track opposite and, in 10m where the track bends right, **leave** it to go through a rusty metal gate. Continue straight across the centre of two meadows, eventually going through a wooden swing-gate and onto a wide track by a 4-way fingerpost, near an attractive house, *Copsedene*.
- 16 Turn **left** at the track past the house and follow it as it ascends and curves left. At the top, where it becomes a tarmac road, leave it by turning sharp **right** at a fingerpost. Go past a large metal gate and onto a track, keeping straight ahead for 400m or so. This track takes you through an outstanding area of forest. You reach New Pond which borders Leonardslee Gardens where you have to turn **right**, passing Furnace Pond, visible through foliage, on your right.

St Leonards Forest was one of the great royal forests. The estate was bought in 1852 by William Egerton Hubbard who built the mansion and developed the gardens. The gardens were closed in 2010 and sold in 2017 to the present owners who re-opened them in 2019 boasting "The Finest Woodland Gardens in England". They have become a huge attraction, offering lakes with rhododendrons and azaleas, a rock garden, a great playpark, wallabies, a vineyard, a huge dolls' house (more like a dolls' palace and village) and a collection of Victorian automobiles.

Leg 5: Leonardslee New Pond to Furnace Pond 5 km=3 miles

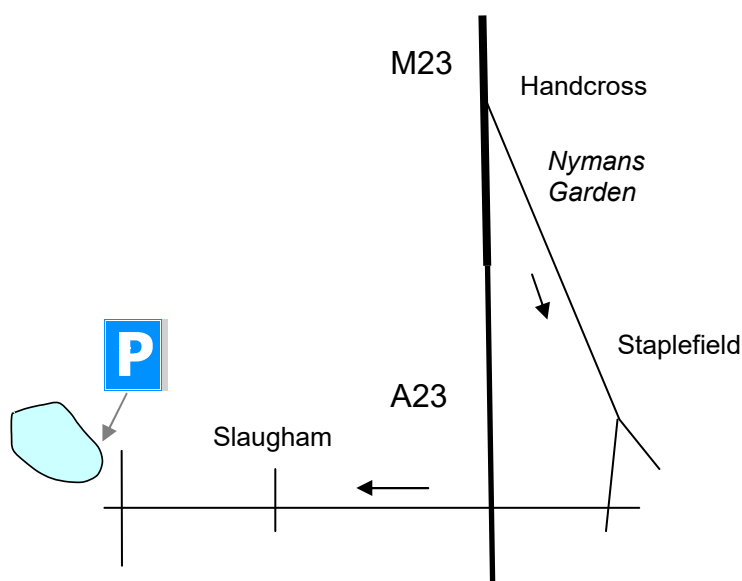
- 17 The track rises steeply and descends more gently. After crossing a wonderful verdant stream at the valley bottom via a wide bridge, take the **bridleway immediately left** following the stream. **You may find this section rather muddy in some seasons.** (You can instead go straight on at this junction, on a more challenging but very scenic footpath. It is described in detail in the little sister walk *Warninglid and the Furnace Pond*; except that at the “3-way fingerpost in the valley” you have to turn **left** instead of going straight on. You re-join the prescribed route at (*) below.) The track runs for 800m through a remarkable, sometimes spectacular, area of forest to pass a lake on your left. About 200m after the lake, ignore a signed footpath right. (*) 15m after that, take a signed footpath **left** which goes down and along a boardwalk (which only avoids some of the mud) and up a slope. Immediately cross another track diagonally.
- 18 In 60m, at a 3-way signpost, take the footpath **right** uphill, leading through more forest. After about 200m, at a junction, keep to the signposted route, slightly right, avoiding a grassy path on the left and a track curving away to the left. The path joins a tarmac driveway via a metal gate and comes out to a road by a timbered cottage at Harvey's Farm. *Note that you are on the Sussex Ouse Valley Way, a 68km route, opened in 2005, that follows the River Ouse from its source near Lower Beeding in the High Weald to the sea at Seaford Bay (see the walk “Ardingly Lake, Ouse Valley, Borde Hill” in this series).*



- 19 Turn **right** on the road for 120m and then take a bridleway **left** up a shingly path, now resurfaced for riders. This path levels out and becomes a very pleasant surfaced track leading past woodland and fields. At a house with a tall isolated chimney, it joins a tarmac lane, passes a perfect timbered cottage at Denmans Farm and goes over a stream via a brick bridge. It ends at a major road. Turn **right** soon to arrive back at the Furnace Pond where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: To get to the Furnace Pond by car, take the M23 and follow the sign for *Nymans Garden*. This takes you through the village of Handcross. Go past the entrance to the garden and continue on the road to the village of Staplefield. As you enter the village, fork **right** beside the green in the direction *Slaugham, Warninglid*. At a crossroads at the far side of the green, turn **right** on the Slaugham Road. The road goes beneath the A23 road to Slaugham. Continue straight on through this attractive village to a cross-roads with a major road where there is a lake, popular with anglers. There are parking areas beside the road on the right, ahead by the lakeside, and, failing that, straight ahead on the right.



By bus: No. 17 from Brighton or Horsham station to Mannings Heath; no. 89 from Horsham to Mannings Heath. Check the timetables.

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