



Pub Walk: The Royal Oak, Flimwell Bedgebury Forest and the Pinetum

Distance: 8¼ km=5 miles

easy walking

Region: Kent

Date written: 17-jan-2012

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Refreshments: Flimwell

Map: Explorer 136 (The Weald) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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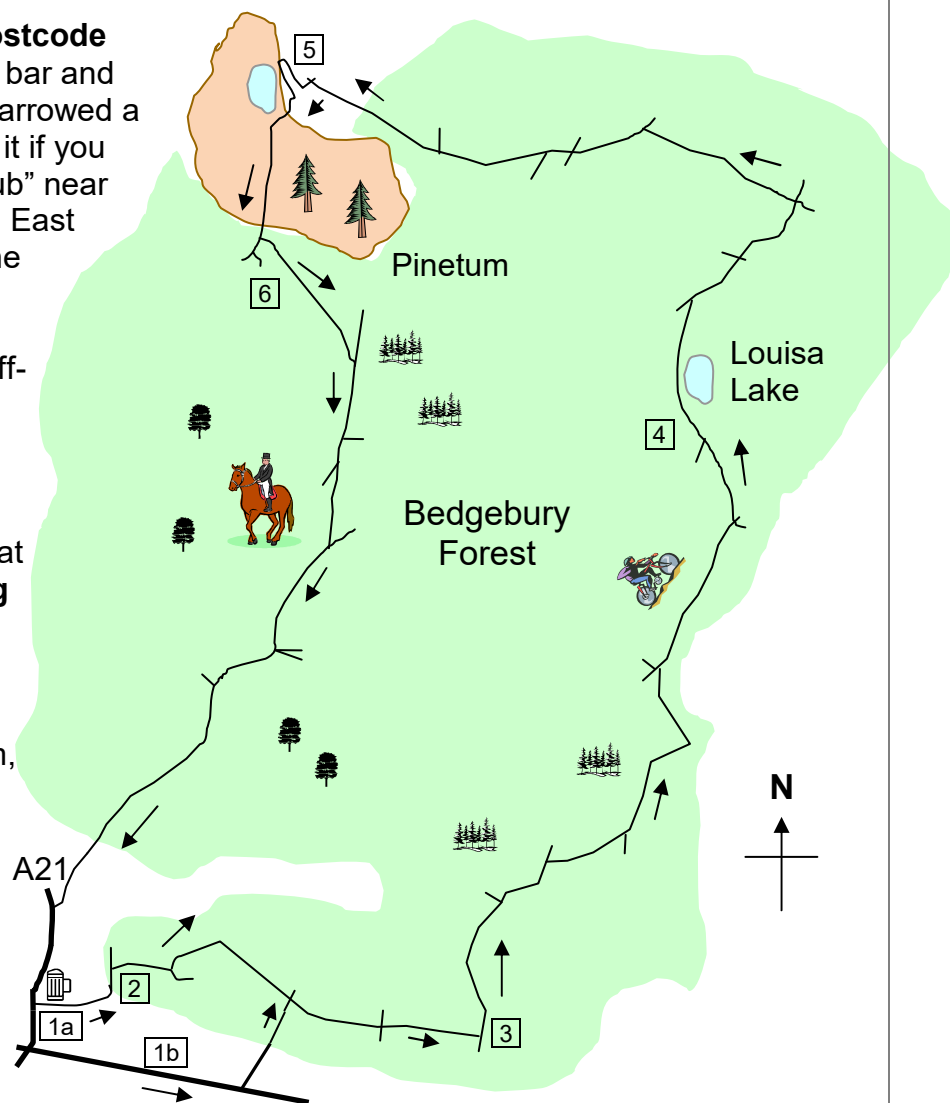
Woodland, lake, famous pinetum

In Brief

The *Royal Oak* in Flimwell, **postcode TN5 7PJ**, is now mainly a fish bar and the options at the start have narrowed a little (see over). You will know it if you use the A21, as it's the big "pub" near the traffic lights. The pub is in East Sussex but this walk is over the border in Kent. There is a car park but, since the site is in flux, it may be better to park off-road. There is parking in the layby just north of the pub, or you could park down the High Street (turning west at the lights). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



This is a walk through the magic Bedgebury Forest, including a visit to the Pinetum, entry to which is free.

Any kind of clothing and footwear are fine and it is perfect for your dog too.



The Walk

The big lorry depot, Mick Gould Commercials Ltd., was an obstruction at the start of this route until East Sussex C.C. in 2019 “*liaised with the various land-owners with a view to re-routing the right of way officially*.”) The Royal Oak’s back gate (option [1a](#) below) seems to have been made the official footpath, but as there is still some serious doubt, you will find a second option [1b](#) below.

- [1a](#) **The Royal Oak’s back gate.** Since the pub’s opening is sporadic and it has been largely downgraded to a fish bar, the “back gate” may be locked and the key only available during business hours (from midday). So this *permissive* footpath may not be viable. The original text is retained here in case the route becomes clearer in the future (Feedback please!). Walk to the **right** of the pub into its car park. At the back, go to the **left** through a small wooden gate*, immediately followed by a larger wooden gate. (* This gate may be locked but the bar staff have the key and will open it. **Alternatively**, go back to the road, turn **left** (towards the traffic lights) for another 10m and go **left** through a gap in the hedge [confirmed again by a walker in 2020].) Bear **left** outside the fence of the depot and, at the far corner, go **left** again, outside the back fence of the depot. In just 20m, turn **right** on a wide path into the woods [2017: now opposite the last fence post] [2018: now rather rutted and brambly].
- [1b](#) **The side track.** This is now the only reliable (as 2023) starting option. It adds ½ mile to length of the walk, but it has compensations of its own. With the pub on your left, walk along the road to the traffic lights and turn **left** on the Hawkhurst Road. In 250m, on your left, you pass *The Smokery*; this is a fine food establishment with its own Brasserie; it has a great selection of top-end groceries and coffee/snacks. To avoid the worst of the overhanging hedges, it is best to cross, temporarily, to the other side of the road. In another 400m, after passing several cottages, only 20m before a big used-car outlet, turn **left** on a tarmac drive marked with a yellow arrow. After the tarmac, continue on a dusty track, over a shaky (but avoidable) stile beside a large metal gate. You shortly enter woods. Ignore a narrow path on your left and a diagonal path on your right and continue on the path for 150m to a major junction of paths. Turn smartly **right** here and resume the walk at point (*) in section [2](#) below.
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 [2](#) Keep dead straight into the woodland under a tall oak, ignoring any side paths, staying on a good wide path with conifers on your right, which incidentally follows the Kent-E.Sussex border. In just over 150m into the forest, you come to a junction with a wide track leading off on your left. Turn **left** here. You can see a meadow on your left as your path curves right, becoming very straight and sandy. In 250m, keep straight ahead over a junction. (*) You pass another junction whilst your path gets even wider. Finally you reach a major crossing track with a little fingerpost. Ahead is only a turning area for forestry vehicles. Turn **left** on a wide heavy-surfaced track. The track descends and rises up again through tall scots pines and you will notice several marked trails for mountain bikes. This is a major bridleway and you will be following the blue arrows for some time.

3 In 350m, you pass a junction on your left and, 170m later, you reach a junction on your right with a white-on-blue arrow marked *Frith Wood Trail*. Turn **right** here. In 250m, you reach a diagonal crossing path with a post with a blue arrow and a fingerpost. Veer **left** here as indicated. In nearly 200m, at a bend, keep **right** (unless you want to brave the hazards of the Kick Start Bike Trail). In 100m, turn sharp **left** as indicated by the blue arrow and the fingerpost. In 200m, where a sturdy track crosses your way, turn **right** on it as indicated. There is a bench on your right where you can admire the gentle surrounding countryside. In nearly 350m, there is a junction on the left to be avoided, after which your path descends and reaches a 3-way fingerpost. Ignore the path on the right and the 1-bar gate and veer left. Soon you pass the alarming sounding Cardiac Bike Trail on the right, followed by the much calmer Louisa Lake. This is a picturesque spot, popular with families and worth granting a few minutes' rest.

4 [\[Care! It is easy to go wrong in this section if you miss one of the many turnings.\]](#) Continue onwards from the lake for nearly 400m. Here, your path bends right as it is joined by a grassy path coming in from the left and in 50m sweeps left again. In 100m, cross straight over a junction with a track on your left and a wide grassy path on your right. 200m further, at a 1-bar metal gate, turn **left** on a wide track, ignoring another 1-bar gate and grassy path ahead. In 450m, you reach a junction with a track joining from the right. Veer **left** here, staying on the main track. In 300m, ignore a left fork at a one-bar metal gate and continue ahead. In nearly 500m you reach some buildings that serve as offices of the forest management. There is a visitor's centre down sharp left. Keep straight ahead past the buildings. As you pass a track on your left, the track becomes tarmac. Just 15m after this, turn **left** through a small wooden gate that bears the message *Welcome to the National Pinetum*. There are toilets here in the wooden hut. (To see more of the lake, you can also stay on the tarmac lane downhill and go sharp left through a larger wooden gate at the bottom.)

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5 Turn **right** in front of the wooden toilet hut, downhill on a path, concrete at first, which descends towards a triangular bridge over the lake. Near the bottom, turn **left** down a bank and **left** again, doubling back, on the main path running beside the lake. This is a delightful spot with wood carvings beside the path. Very soon there are some wooden railings, after which the path forks. Take the **left** fork, the more level option, staying on the main path.

Bedgebury's National Pinetum was created in 1925 using trees moved from Kew that was thought to be too near the pollution of London. It is the most complete collection of conifers anywhere in the world, with over 7,000 trees of 2,300 different types over 127 hectares, including rare, endangered and historically important specimens, such as yew, juniper, thuja and various other cypresses, some no longer found anywhere in the world. The Pinetum is a masterpiece of design, using science to combine different trees and art to produce a visually stunning result. The Pinetum contained the "Old Man of Kent", a grand fir planted in 1840, now (2016) felled but being replaced. A string of lakes and, in the wider forest, adventure grounds and challenging bike trails make Bedgebury a huge attraction.

After an exhilarating walk, you reach the exit by a wooden gate by a welcome sign. Here turn immediately **left** on a track.

6 Your path bends round to the right. After 400m, at the top of a gentle rise, keep **right** to join a bridleway coming from your left, indicated by a blue arrow. You will be following these blue arrows all the way back to the pub. In 300m, at a fork, keep to the **left** path, the higher route, as indicated by the blue arrow. In 200m, join a very wide path joining you from the left. In another 300m, your track curves **right**. In nearly 200m, at a junction with a rather dilapidated hut, fork **left**. Keep on now for some distance till eventually you reach a 1-bar metal gate. Your track now becomes a lane leading up to the main road by a white pillared lodge. Turn **left** on the road, quickly reaching the pub where the walk began.

For a longer walk in this area, try the Bewl Water and Bedgebury Forest walk in this series.

Getting there

By car: The *Royal Oak* is on the A21 London-Hastings Road in Flimwell, just *before* the traffic lights (if coming from the London area) or just *after* the traffic lights (if coming from the Hastings area).

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