



Arlington and Abbot's Wood

Distance: 14 km=9 miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex

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Refreshments: Upper Dicker, *Old Oak*, Arlington

Map: Explorer 123 (Eastbourne) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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Lake, villages, woodland, river, surprises, pubs, bluebells in spring

In Brief

This is an unforgettable walk full of surprises and variety. There are two remarkable woods along the route, one unknown, intimate and unexpected, the other popular, vast and full of secrets. Arlington Reservoir at the start and end, is a large nature reserve where you can view waterfowl and other wildlife. In springtime, this walk includes the famous Arlington Bluebell Walk as an option, with those flowers - and white wood anemones - garlanding the whole walk. In summer, autumn and winter the colours are memorable.

There are three absolutely top-notch country pubs along the route (plus at least one village café). In the high season you may need to ring for a reservation (for the *Plough*, Upper Dicker, 01323-844859, the *Old Oak* 01323-482072 or the *Yew Tree*, Arlington 01323-870590.)

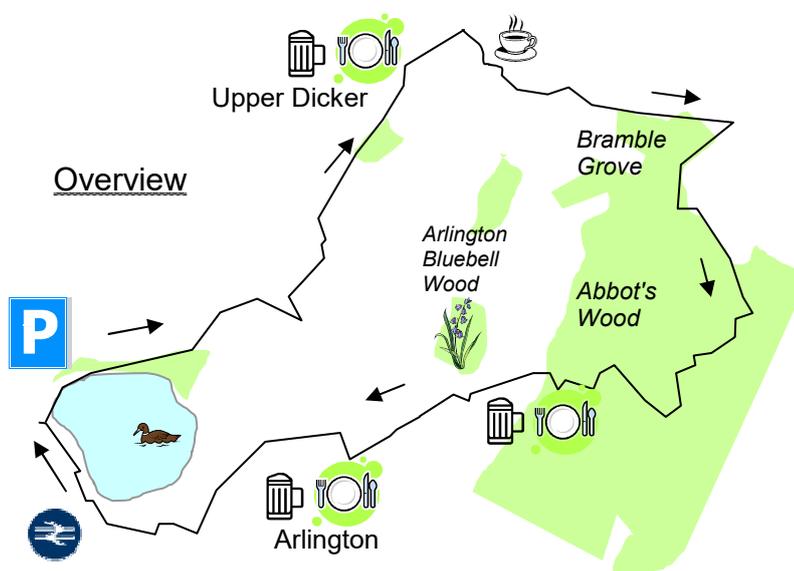


There are some nettles around the stiles, so shorts may be risky. Underfoot the ground is mostly firm, so boots are not essential except in the wetter months. Some stiles are rickety but they all have a gap or a lifting gate for your dog.

The walk begins at the **Arlington Reservoir car park**, East Sussex, postcode **BN26 6TB**,

www.w3w.co/request.riders.bins,

near Hailsham. Please see the notice as to when the car park closes. You can instead park (early!) in the layby on the other side of the road, almost opposite the entrance. (This saves you the £2.50 fee.) You can also start from **Berwick Station**, only 700m from the walk. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

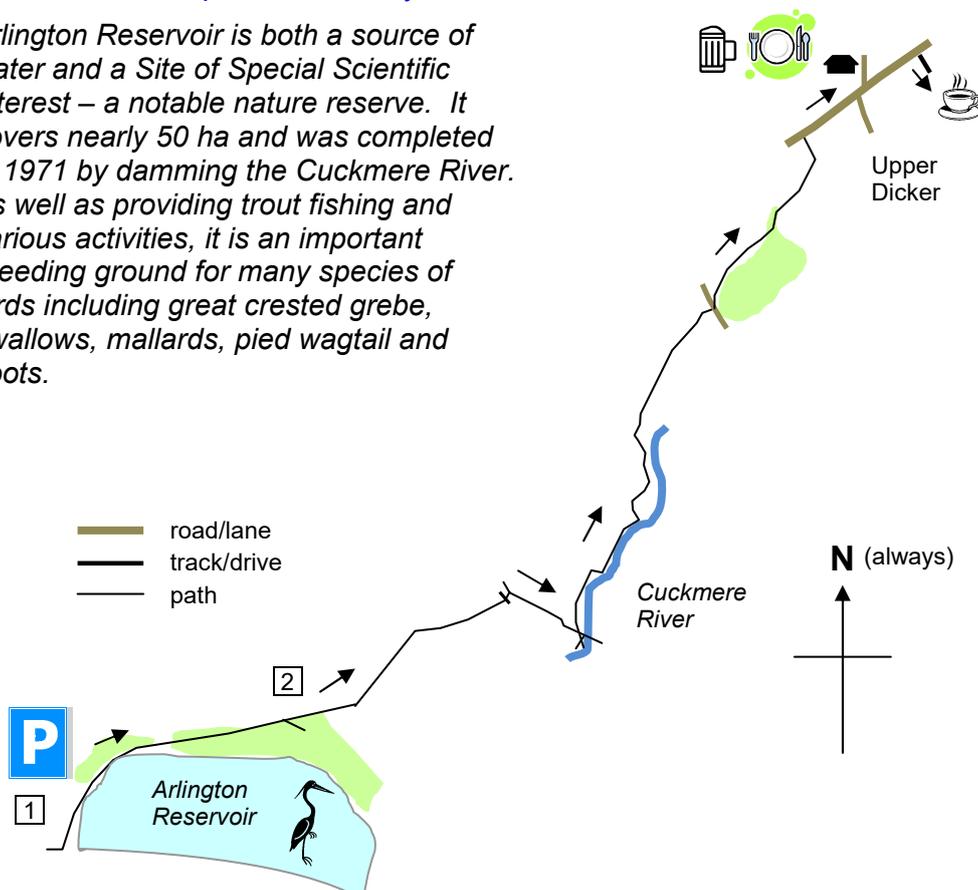
Leg 1: To The Dicker 4 km=2½ miles

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The Reservoir car park has a loo and a snack bar (open from 10.30). This is a Nature Reserve run by South East Water and you will meet families and casual strollers, come for a peaceful time by the water.

Arlington Reservoir is both a source of water and a Site of Special Scientific Interest – a notable nature reserve. It covers nearly 50 ha and was completed in 1971 by damming the Cuckmere River. As well as providing trout fishing and various activities, it is an important breeding ground for many species of birds including great crested grebe, swallows, mallards, pied wagtail and coots.



- 1 From the Arlington Reservoir car park, go down to the water's edge and turn **left** on the smooth green grass, passing several benches. At a fingerpost, stay next to the water, continuing on a gravel path. *From here you have a good view of the South Downs around Alciston, Alfriston, Eastbourne and Lewes (see those other walks in this series).* Your path rises through a woodland of flowering cherries and a bridleway joins you from the left at a fingerpost. As you come up to an information tablet, avoid the main footpath right. Take the **left-hand** track, which then goes through a small wooden gate and continues along the left-hand side of a field.
- 2 The path curves left under power lines and continues alongside another field, under more power lines. In the corner, turn **right** with the path, as clearly indicated by the sign, ignoring a blue-on-yellow arrow as you go, shortly going over a bridge. *You can see the spire of Arlington church on your right, an encounter at the end of the walk.* Your path goes over a track coming from Sessingham Farm, goes over a bridge into woods and ends at a T-junction. Turn **right** on a good path that runs inside a woodland strip, fringed with wild flowers. The path surface gets more rugged as you come to a large bridge across the Cuckmere River. After a pause to view the stream below, *don't* cross the bridge but turn **left** over a bridge and stile. *You are on part of the Wealdway (WW), a long-distance national trail running from Gravesend on the Thames Estuary to the coast near Eastbourne.*

- 3 The path runs along the right-hand side of a meadow near the river, takes you over a stile and along the right-hand side of the next field. It bends right-left round the corner of the field, passing a weir in the river. At the next corner, the path takes you left, right, then left again, following a tributary of the river. (Strictly speaking, the footpath runs straight across the field but everyone keeps to the edge.) As you come round the top of the field, on your right you will see a smart new bridge. Cross the bridge and veer a fraction left to cross a meadow and go over a stile (squeezable past) in the hedge. Now head straight over the next meadow on a faint path, heading for a two-storey red-brick house, second from the left. At the other side, go over a stile and straight ahead on a faint path towards that house, leaving the chalky farmer's track to the right. Go over a stile just to the right of the house and turn **left** on a tarmac lane.
- 4 In 10m, turn **right** on a track into a meadow, passing a pond on your right and follow the right-hand edge. *In spring, the bluebells of Park Wood on your right seem to spill out onto the fringes of the path.* At the top, go over a low stile onto a practice sports field with the sports hall of Bede's School visible below. *The top of Hailsham parish church is visible diagonally right.* Keep to the left, parallel to the hedge, veering slightly left through the golf course towards the left-hand corner, where there is a rather elaborate golf tee. Go through a gap, passing to the left of a new plantation on your right. Just before the next meadow, keep **left** and follow a fenced path over another stile to a road. Turn **right** on the road, quickly reaching *The Plough* in Upper Dicker.



The Plough is a Shepherd Neame pub which has had terrific reviews for its food. This 17th-century inn has a good patio and dining area and a large garden. Perfect for lunch if you started late, but bear in mind there are two more good pubs en route! (There is also a tea shop soon.)

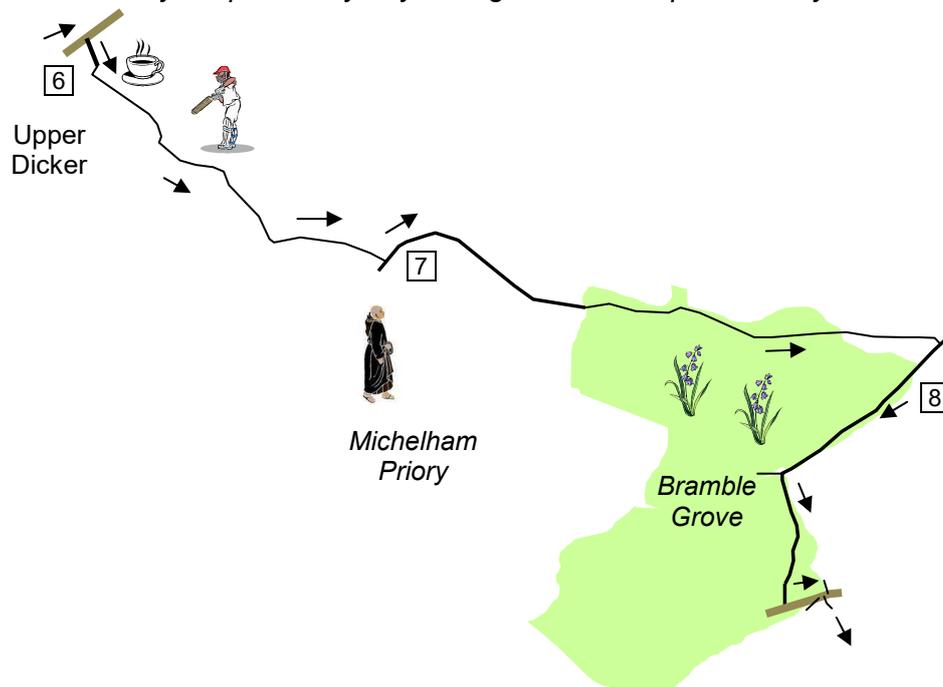
- 5 Continue on the road through the village. *The large redbrick house at the junction is The Dicker, an estate home of Horatio Bottomley (1860-1933), notorious financier, newspaperman, MP and swindler, now part of the Bede's School.* Go straight over the junction, crossing the road, passing on your right more buildings of Bede's School. *Bede's is a very expensive three-level private mixed school, founded in 1895, attracting students from home and abroad, including rich Chinese. Eddie Izzard went to the prep school.* You pass on your right Holy Trinity Church. *This church is worth a look, unusual for its flint walls and its altar window showing Christ as King.* Continue along the road, avoiding a footpath signpost and going a little further to a sign for the *Village Shop and Café*. Turn **right** to reach this little cottage at the end of the driveway, a charming café which also sells groceries.



Leg 2: Round The Priory 3 km=2 miles

- 6 **See map overleaf.** Turn **right** and **left** round the wall of the cottage, re-joining the WW, and straight ahead through a meadow. Your path goes over a cinder track and over a small bridge as directed by the WW arrow. If there are no games being played, carry on straight across the sports ground until you meet the hedge at an oblique angle and then follow it to the corner; **otherwise**, turn **right** and then **left** by the hard sports area and then cross over to the hedge afterwards. In the far corner, go **left** over a stile and follow a path diagonally across a pasture, heading just to the left of a long grey barn. You reach an untidy farmyard. *Immediately on your right, though not accessible through the farm, is Michelham Priory, definitely worth an extended visit on another day.*

Most of today's walk is through what was the vast dominion by this priory in its heyday before the Dissolution. It dates back to 1229 and is surrounded by England's longest water-filled moat. In Tudor times it became a country dwelling. Visitors can see the house, together with a working watermill and forge. The Priory is open every day during the warmer part of the year.



- 7** Turn **left** on a track through the farmyard, over a concrete bridge and straight ahead on a rough track. After another bridge, your path veers **right** and then curves left. You will see a WW sign on a low (*easily missed!*) post on your right, set back from the path. (It's immediately before a large gap in the hedge ahead.) Turn **right** here and go along the left-hand edge of a pasture. *You may need to lift an insulated hook to enter it.* Your path goes over a stile [2023: *care! very rocky and tricky*] beside a cubist metal gate into a sloping meadow. Go straight ahead up the grass towards a wood, thus leaving the WW which turns left here. Avoid the farm track which curves away to your right. Your destination is a wooden bridge and stile which are a fraction to your left as you near the wood, to the left of a large metal gate. Go over the stile into the delights of Bramble Grove. *This woodland is one of several big surprises of this walk, a large unforgettable bluebell wood, hardly known compared to Arlington and Abbot's woods, and you may be enjoying it entirely alone.* Keep to the path through this private wood, going over a 2-plank bridge at the half-way point. Finally a small wooden gate takes you into a meadow. Keep ahead, following a path to the right of the meadow, down to the left-hand section of the meadow, to a stile next to a gate.
- 8** Go over the stile and turn **right** on a wide horse path. You have a further chance to enjoy Bramble Grove on your right. *On your left, more prosaically, is the Knockhatch Dry Ski and Snowboarding Centre.* At the top of the rise, stay on the main track as it curves left, avoiding a smaller path on your right. Your path descends through oak woods, under power lines, down to a metal barrier and a main road. Carefully cross and turn **left** on the road. In under 100m, just before a field, there is a dirt strip on the right with two paths leading off (which may have "lost" their signs). **Ignore** the first path, a bridleway, very sharp right. Instead take the **second**, a woodland path, more squarely **right**, between uprights in a fence (possibly hidden behind parked vehicles).

Leg 3: Lost in the Woods 3 km=2 miles



- 9** You are about to discover the lesser-known parts of Abbot's Wood, a large FC wood, well attended by weekend crowds unaware of its secrets. There are some clever twists that avoid the long arduous tracks and reveal some sudden surprises, and you need to stay alert. The path quickly widens and you may encounter some mud. If the path is claggy, there is a pleasant dry path about 15m away in the trees on the right parallel to it, at least until the main path goes over a ditch. *Arlington Stadium is to your left (and you may have heard it), Eastbourne's speedway stadium for 50 years; possibly its time is up.* After ½ km, the wire fence on your left curves away and the main path bends to the right into a long straight stretch. This is where you **leave** the main path. Fork **left** up a bank onto a side path. Immediately there is a fork by a small drain cover. Avoid the left fork and keep straight ahead, to the **right** of the drain cover. Follow this very narrow winding path gently uphill through trees for about 200m. Suddenly you come out in the open at the top of a long slope with a magnificent view. *This is a space where the trees were felled some years back, resulting in an unbroken view to the west, with occasional pines. The South Downs are to your left and the hills around Lewes and beyond are straight ahead. No buildings are visible, giving the impression of a lush green land stretching as far as the eye can see. In spring the whole slope is an ocean of bluebells. There is a bench from which to enjoy a rest or a picnic.*



10 After enjoying the view, turn **right** on a path down the open hillside. This path goes a little to the left and between some scots pines to reach a wide track. Turn **left** on the track and walk *exactly* 80m to find a narrow path on your right. (As a guide, this path is *immediately* after the first pine tree on your right and before the track begins to curve left. The path is narrow but quite distinctive.) Turn **right** onto this path, down into the woods. Follow this enchanting woodland path through its many twists and turns, taking care to avoid any lesser paths. After about 200m your path comes close to a bank on your left on the other side of which you can probably make out another path going parallel to yours. You will join this path shortly, but first your path curves away to the right back into the woods before curving left again to join the path you saw. (This path is probably an old forester's track, now grassy; it has a narrow path running along its centre.) In only 50m* or so, your path comes down to a T-junction with a wide track. Turn **left** on this track. This track leads to another surprise – *the Abbot's Wood Pond!* [*2023 The old forester's track now seems to take you rather further than the 50m indicated - more like 150m, to meet the wider track which is now to the left of the path to the bridge across the bottom of the pond. Probably the intended exit point has become overgrown and the track now discharges you at a different point.]

11 Your path goes over a bridge across the bottom of the pond giving you a good view of the whole extent of the pond on your left. At a T-junction, turn **left** on a wide track. The track curves right. About 300m after you joined this wide path, at a junction on the right, turn **right** on a wide path, just before a fingerpost on the main track. (As a guide, this junction is 10m after you pass three lines of very straight narrow scots pines on your left.) In nearly ½ km, you come down to a crossing with a wide stony track. Turn **left** on this stony track. In 100m you will see a post with a black arrow pointing right. Turn **right** here on a path and keep **left** on the main path by the next marker post. You are on a popular waymarked path known as the *Abbot's Amble* and the going is easy because you simply follow the arrows. Keep to this wide but tortuous path. In 300m, it takes you up to a very wide crossing track. Turn sharp **right** here, thus leaving the *Abbot's Amble*.

This track soon emerges via a metal barrier onto a road. Turn **left** immediately reaching the *Old Oak*.



The Old Oak Inn is another iconic country freehouse and a huge favourite. It was built in 1733 as an almshouse for four families and became an ale-and-cider house for agricultural workers, charcoal burners and brickmakers. The restaurant-standard food is very satisfying and beautifully presented to look appetising. This pub is also known for its cream teas, available all year. The lovely little garden and patio has a view at the back over the green meadows and there is one secluded table in the far corner.

Leg 4: Farm and Village 4 km=2½ miles

12 **See map overleaf.** Turn **right** just before the *Old Oak*, going through the car park. Go over a stile which is just behind one of the tables into a green meadow. Veer **left** in the meadow and head down to the far right-hand corner, following overhead wires. In the corner is an unusual double stile, almost hidden in the corner. Go over the left-hand stile into a meadow and along the right-hand edge to go over another stile into the next meadow. Go over the next stile and turn immediately **left** along a signed footpath by a fence, with a newbuild house on your right. At the next corner, turn **right** over an almost hidden stile onto a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane. In

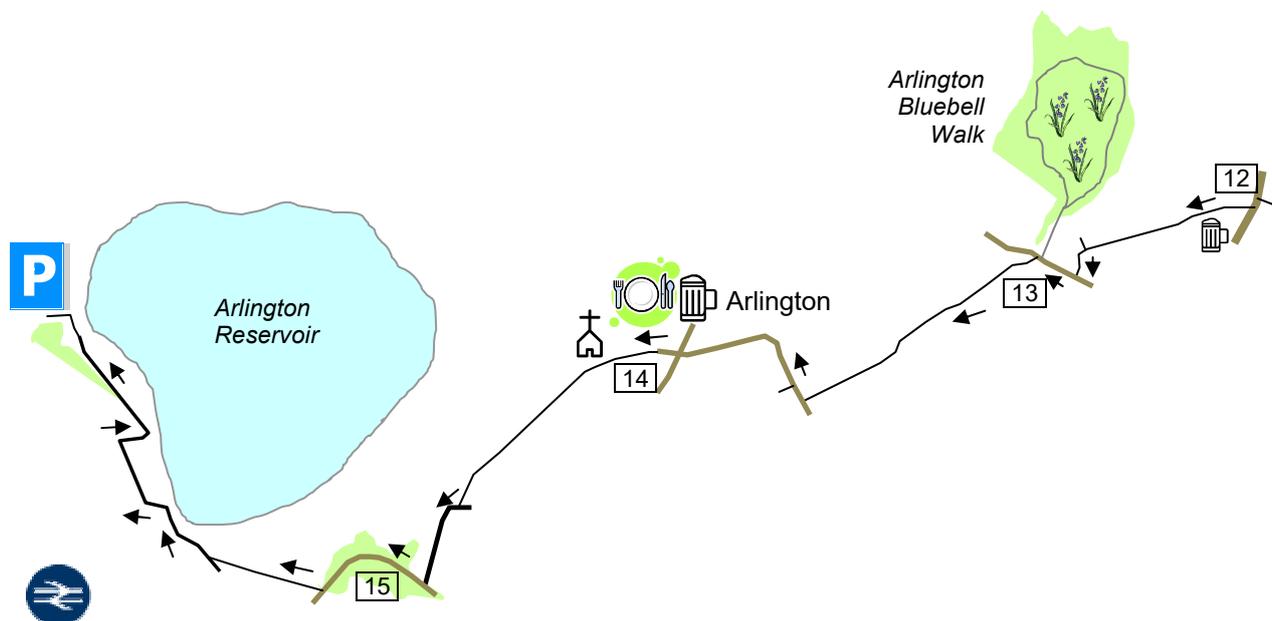


100m, on your right, is the entrance to Bates Green Farm and, in spring, to the famous Arlington Bluebell Walk.



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Bates Green Farm has café, loos, a shop and a little zoo. Between mid-April and early May its number of visitors vastly increases when the Arlington Bluebell Walk opens. If you arrive at this time, a visit is a true delight with the well-made paths, the information boards and the spectacular displays, priced £5 or £4.50, with an “honesty box” after 5pm.



- 13 Continue for another 30m along the lane and go **left** at a yellow arrow. Before a gate, fork **right** through a large metal gate and keep along the left-hand side of a meadow. In the corner, go through a small metal gate [May 2023: lying on the ground to the right of the gap] to continue as before. After another small metal double gate, resume your direction along the left-hand side of a field, making use of a narrow grassy strip, ignoring a stile on the left as you go. At the far end, turn **right** and go over a stile down to a lane. Turn **right** on the lane and follow it round a left bend into the village of Arlington after 350m total. At the centre is the *Yew Tree Inn* another characterful village pub.



*The “Yew Tree” looks like a huge flower basket, almost covered in greenery. Inside, the vegetation swirls into the traditional cottage space, cleanly brought up-to-date, showing the huge love and dedication put into it by the current long-standing owners. The “Yew Tree” is a 110-year old pub serving Harveys plus a guest ale. Meat is locally sourced, so you get “roast **Arlington** turkey”. Many main dishes are under £10. Try the three inventive vegetarian dishes too.*

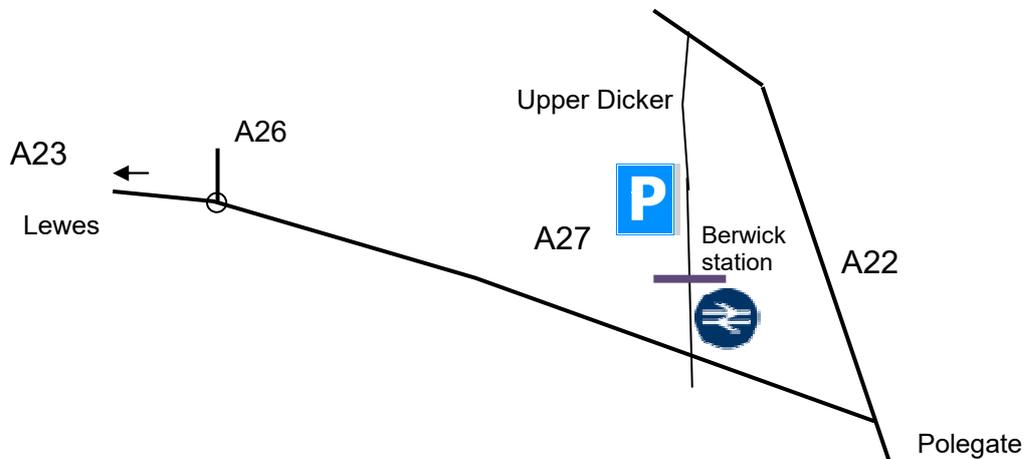
- 14 After a possible break, continue straight on past the crossroads on a rough lane, *The Street*, marked as a cul-de-sac and signed to the church, which you quickly reach. *The church of St Pancras has wall paintings, some high beneath the lofty roof.* Keep to the stony path with the church on your right, going over a stile, and take a path that veers slightly to the left away from the hedge. *The reason that the field’s surface is lumpy and uneven is because underneath the ground lie the remains of the once deserted hamlet of Older Arlington.* (If you visited the church and exited at the back of the churchyard, you need to cut across the grass to find the path.) **You are back on the Wealdway long-distance path.** The path goes over a bridge in the hedgerow. Keep straight on here, avoiding a footpath on your right. After a stile in a

fence, keep ahead, aiming for a house with a tall chimney. Your path curves slightly left, passing the house on your left, taking you over a stile onto a narrow tarmac drive. Turn **right** on the drive. (There is a concrete path with steps on your right, leading down to the old Weir. The lights and the absence of a “private” sign suggest a possible way over the Cuckmere River to the meadows and up to the water. But this was not researched.) Continue to a road and turn **right** on it, thus leaving the WW.

- 15 The road bends left. 80m after it straightens, go over a stile at a fingerpost on your **right**. Go along the left-hand side of a pasture, over a stile in the corner, through trees and over another stile into a meadow. Keep **left*** in this pasture to go up to a stile by a fingerpost, leading onto a lane. (* Don't go straight up to a small gate on the edge of the water: it is padlocked.) Turn **right** on the lane. (If you began at the station, a short cut is **left and right on a footpath, though not researched.**) At a 3-way fingerpost, (important!) go straight on. Before the private entrance to Lakeside Farm, turn **left** on a gravel path. Your path bends right beside between pastures, one with Shetland ponies. It bends right again, goes over a tarmac drive and a little bridge and is once again close to the lake. Continue on this wide path, ignoring a footpath on the left, soon reaching the grassy area and the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: if coming from the London area, the *quickest* way is via Lewes and the A27. About 7 miles east of Lewes, turn off **north** at a sign for **Arlington**, go over the rail crossing to reach the Reservoir within ½ mile.



Arlington Reservoir is also signed from the A22 road. Turn off about 10 miles north of Eastbourne, on a sign for *Upper Dicker*. Pass through that village and keep straight on as for *Berwick* for a further 2 miles.

By bus/train: **Berwick Station** has a regular train service from Lewes and other locations, including Sunday. Go 700m north on the road to begin the walk.

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