



Brightling, Dudwell Valley, Bateman's Forests and Follies

Distance: 15 km=9½ miles

moderate walking

Region: East Sussex

Date written: 12-aug-2012

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Refreshments: Woods Corner, Burwash Weald

Map: Explorer 124 (Hastings) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Long woodland trails, hills, views, famous follies

In Brief

This walk is a great adventure in the wildest country you will find anywhere in the far South East, with long woodland trails, sudden views and unexpected encounters. It has been graded as "moderate" because of the long twisting trails where you need to be watchful. However, the paths are all well marked with arrows on posts or on trees, so there is no likelihood of going astray, unless you decide to explore these fascinating woods further. Several of the celebrated follies built by that eccentric landowner "Mad Jack" Fuller will also make an appearance as you pass south of the village of Brightling.

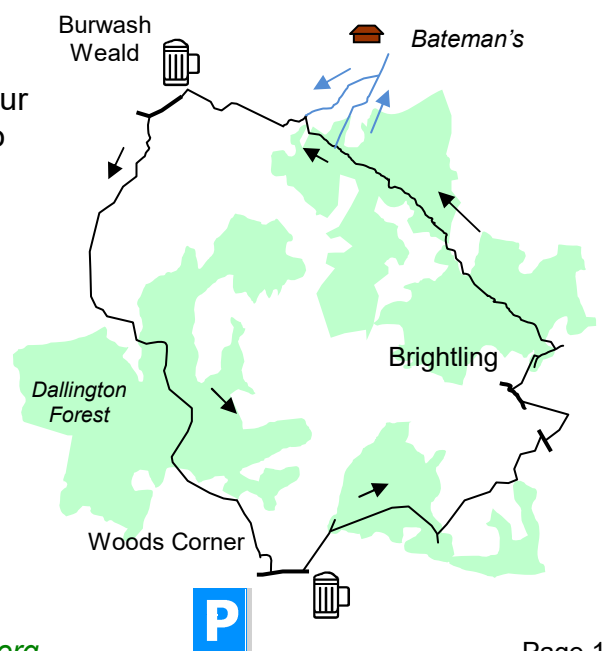
This walk provides a short optional excursion to a famous country house, *Bateman's*, former home of Rudyard Kipling.



There are sections with nettles and other scratchy undergrowth so you absolutely must cover your legs and, preferably, your arms too. Because of one rutted section and the long undulating paths, boots are recommended. Your dog could certainly come too and will be able to run free for much of this walk.

The walk begins at **Woods Corner**, East Sussex, **postcode TN21 9LB**. There is a car park near the *Swan Inn*. Other possible starts are: **Burwash Weald**, **postcode TN19 7LA**, where there is a parking strip just east of the *Wheel* pub and **Brightling**, **postcode TN32 5HH**, where there is parking beside the road. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Overview



The Walk

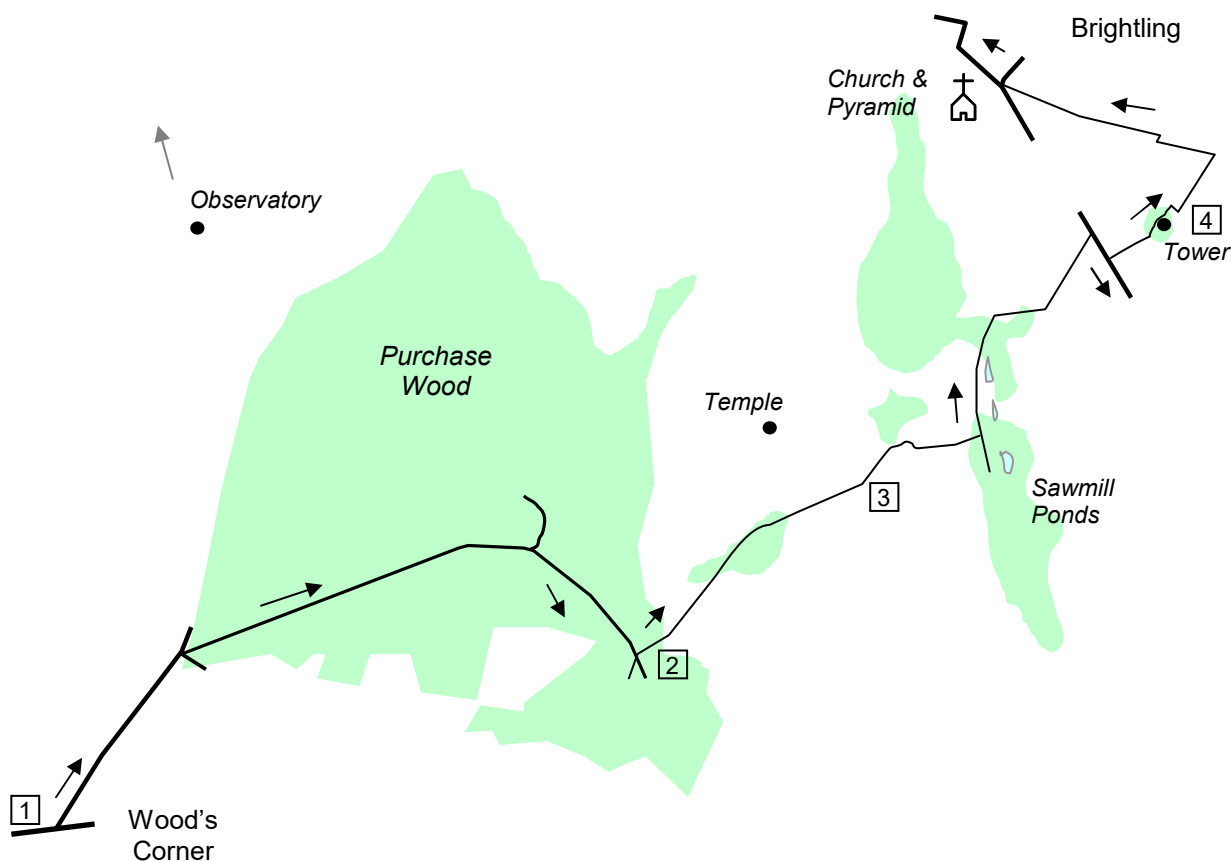
Summary: This leg takes you by the “back door” through Purchase and Mansbrook Woods and past several of Mad Jack’s follies to Brightling village with great views all around. At the start, the wood is very heavily rutted by forestry vehicles and you may find that part rather uncomfortable. However, *it does rapidly improve* and there will be no other paths like that for the rest of the walk.

Leg 1: Woods Corner to Brightling 4 km=2½ miles

- 1 Opposite the *Swan Inn*, take the minor road signposted *Brightling*. Soon the Brightling Observatory can be seen on the hill ahead.

John “Mad Jack” Fuller, one from the family that lived for centuries in Brightling, was a famous eccentric, addicted to building “follies”. He was perhaps not the most likable character (he made a fortune from slavery) but one great beneficial act of his was to save Bodiam Castle (see the “Bodiam Castle” walk in this series). The Observatory was one of the few of his creations to be put to real use, although it is now a private house.

After 400m on the road, you reach a driveway on the right leading to a salvage site. Just after this, turn **right** by an old fingerpost whose left-hand finger points into the wood with the words *woodland access* just legible. Go past a wooden barrier by a small pond into the wood on a forestry path signposted *The Tower*. This part is *initially* badly rutted and you may need to keep to the right-hand edge where there is some greenery. *Please beware of tree felling or other forestry operations that may be in progress.* Your path bends a little to the right and leads to a junction in an open area usually full of timber stacks. Veer **right** here on a straight descending path, avoiding the wide curving path to your left.



- 2 **After 300m**, look out for a (now disappeared*) post with blue arrows. (This post could be damaged by the heavy vehicles that ply this area.) [* 2016: the post vanished at least a year ago; the crossing path is about 50m after the track begins to curve right – don't miss it!] You will notice a narrow diagonal crossing path on both sides. This is the official footpath. Turn **left**, going over a stream with an old wall on your left. The path rises a little and veers left by a wire fence. Go through a large wooden gate and straight across a meadow to go through a similar wooden gate. Follow a grassy path over a stile and along the left-hand side of a large meadow. Soon, at a gate on the left, you have a good view of the Temple.

Mad Jack's temple is much closer to the classic "folly", being built in the family grounds (Brightling Park) and visible from the house. For this reason, it's not accessible to visitors.

- 3 Keep ahead through an open metal gate on a farm track, through another open gate and past a farmyard (*note the giant cricket bales*), between barns and straight ahead to a T-junction with another track. *Ahead is a string of ponds where a historic sawmill once stood.* Turn **left** on this track in the direction of a signpost to *The Tower*, passing more ponds on your right. The track bends right, wheels left and rises to a lane next to the farmyard of *Ox Lodge*. Turn **right** on the lane with great views right across the Weald. In 50m, go **left** over a stile or through a large metal gate. Go up towards a round copse which is entered near the left side. Here, concealed in the copse, is the Tower.

Mad Jack's Tower was a kind of tribute to the work he undertook at Bodiam Castle. It has a viewing platform but it doesn't seem to have any purpose. Strangely neglected by visitors and hidden in the trees, it stands there as an eternal mystery.

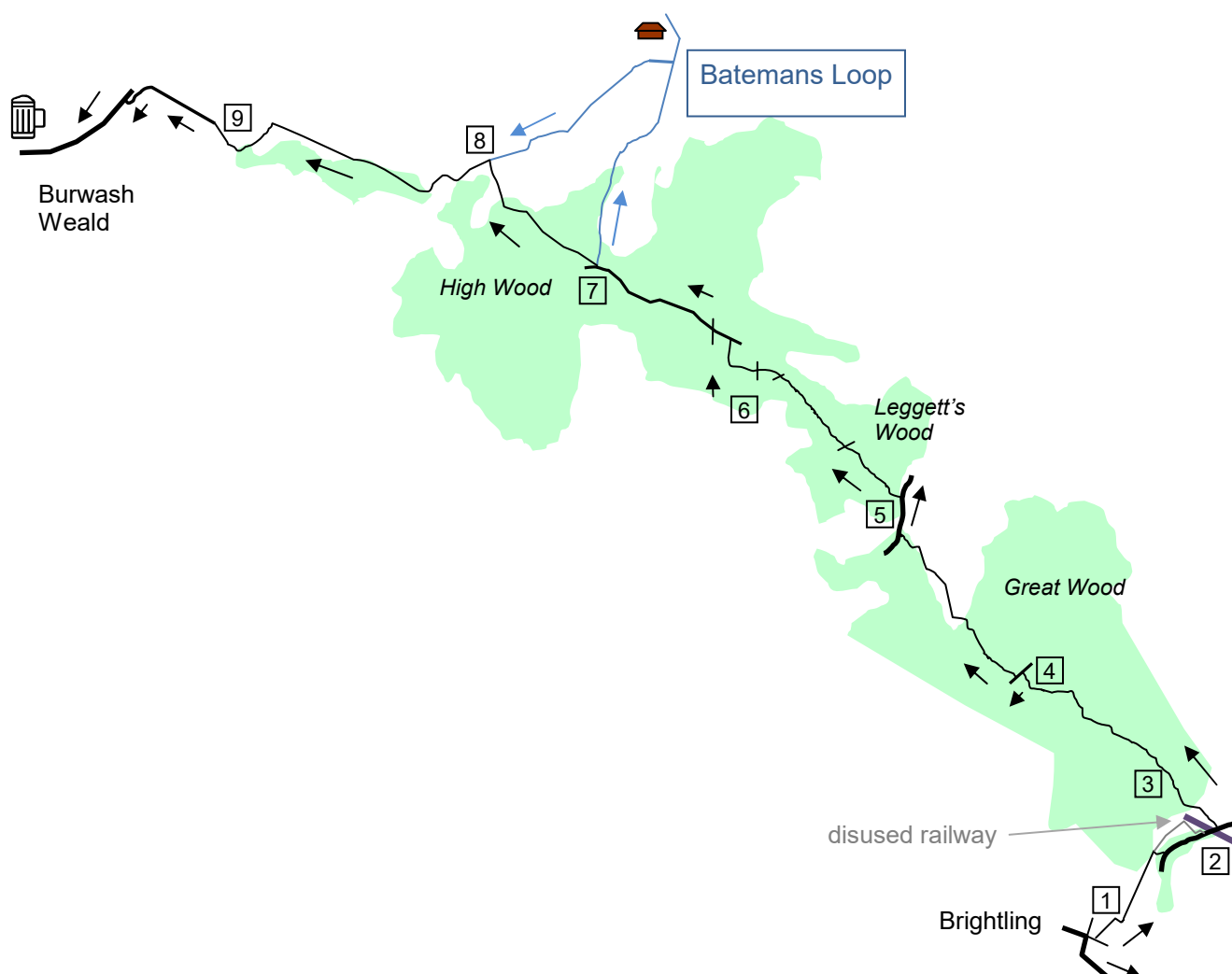
- 4 Continue in the same direction to emerge from this little round wood and go immediately **right** over a stile or through a metal gate and **left** along the left-hand side of a horse pasture. You have fabulous views here down to the Darwell Reservoir and across to Darwell Wood. On the far side, go over a stile, **left**, along a footpath and through a metal swing-gate. (Should this path become overgrown again, you can use the wide grassy path on your left.) From here, your route is through a wooden swing-gate into a meadow, straight across to a swing-gate on the other side, along the right-hand side of a small meadow to a swing-gate and out to the road in the village of Brightling. Keep straight ahead towards the church.

Mad Jack Fuller's home was Brightling Park, just before the church, not open to visitors however. It is now a venue for horse racing, as well as for weddings etc. Apart from what you saw in passing, he also constructed the Obelisk and the Sugar Loaf (looking like a spire). For his own mausoleum, he designed a Pyramid which you can see in the churchyard. There was a local legend that he had been entombed in full dress and top hat, seated at a dining table. Unfortunately later renovation proved this legend to be false. The Church dates from the 1200s and is well worth a look inside.

Leg 2: Brightling to Burwash Weald 5½ km=3½ miles

Summary: This leg is a long and complex woodland walk but you will *not* get lost ! Near the start there is a short tricky section with dense undergrowth, especially in summer, and hidden steps. *Do not worry:* it instantly clears and the remaining parts are open and exhilarating. Near the end, you have the opportunity for a small diversion to *Bateman's*, Rudyard Kipling's House (entrance fee payable). At the end of this leg, there is a friendly pub, *The Wheel* (re-opened in 2015).

- 1 Continue on the road through the village, between the *Old School House* and the *Old Post Office*, and, where the road bends left, turn **right** on a shingle track alongside *Becket House*, marked with a yellow arrow. After only 20m, go **left** through a small wooden gate and diagonally across a small field with a kitchen garden. In the corner, the path winds through trees, over a long-vanished stile, into a meadow of long grass. Your route follows the left-hand edge which becomes a wide grassy strip under wires. About 20m before a band of trees across the strip, ignore a metal gate on your left and go **right** through a hidden gap in the chestnuts, down through trees and over a new stile to a road. Turn **left** on the road.



- 2 Shortly, the road goes over the old railway, indicated by a low wall each side of the road. *Do not miss the next turning.* Immediately after the railway, go **left** over a stile which may be very overgrown with nettles, indicating the rare and adventurous nature of this section. *Please see the introduction to this leg which tells you not to be put off by the start of this leg. There now comes a tricky 100m, followed by lovely open easy woodland.* Keep **left** in a grassy strip which becomes a narrow path. The path goes by an unneeded stile down into woodland. *Careful!* There are steps underfoot which may be slippery and almost invisible in the brushy dense undergrowth. You come down into the open forest of the Great Wood.
- 3 Ignore a minor left fork shortly and stay on the main easy path, going by an unnecessary stile at a 2-way fingerpost. Avoid two forester's tracks and any other crossing paths as your main path now descends some shallow steps (avoidable if you use the forester's path). Eventually you go over a bridge across a stream. Your path rises to a plantation of tall pines. Cross straight under wires and continue into the wonderful dark wood. After the pines, you pass a huge (but stunted) beech tree on your left. After the beech, ignore a minor path straight ahead as your path curves a fraction right. You come to a T junction. Turn **left** here on a broad bridleway. (If you stand tiptoe, just 100m ahead – *not* on your route – you will see in the distance a bridge over the conveyor belt for the Brightling Gypsum mine.)
- 4 In only 5m, turn **right** on a narrow path into the wood. After you go under wires, at a fork, keep to the dry level path. It takes you over a pair of stiles, the first of which is redundant, followed by a fingerpost pointing you up over a stream into a large upward-sloping grassy meadow. Your route is up the **left**-hand side of the meadow. However, the path ahead seems to want you to go up to the right; so you need to switch to the **left** once you reach the smooth grass. There is no marked path, so you need to keep going upwards, within reach of the left-hand edge. When you reach the top, just before a hedgerow across your path, go **left** over a stile in the corner and turn **right**. Follow the path between a fence and the meadow you were in, shortly reaching a road. Turn **right** on the road, with fine views on your right.
- 5 In 100m, look for a small fingerpost on the left, easily missed. Turn **left** here past an old wooden barrier on a footpath into Leggett's Wood. In only 10m, at a post with a yellow arrow, turn **left**. Your path immediately veers right and goes down under tall pines on what is probably an old foresters' track. Go over a crossing path on a narrow path between bracken, then through two wooden barriers either side of a crossing path, confirmed by yellow arrows. Your route is now downhill on a dirt path to another pair of barriers, either side of a sandy horse path, and down steps. Your path descends between firs, under tall pines and over a 2-plank bridge. It then goes through more pines and over the sandy horse track again to a fingerpost, then down through more pines.
- 6 Go over a little bridge and straight ahead at a post with yellow arrows. Your path veers a fraction left, as indicated by yellow waymarkers. It then turns **right** down to a wooden bridge with a rail. After crossing this bridge, your path goes over another bridge, this time with two rails. Continue straight ahead to a wooden barrier and fingerpost. Turn **left** in the direction of the pointer on a wide forestry path. At a 2-way fingerpost [\[2016: with both fingers](#)

missing, although the yellow marker on the other side confirms your direction], go straight over a wide track, in an area which shows signs of extensive forestry work, and continue up a wide path opposite. Near the top, a forestry track joins from the right and you pass a cleared space on the left and meet a 4-way fingerpost on the right.

Decision point. You now have an option to visit *Bateman's*, Rudyard Kipling's wonderful historic house and garden. If you would like to do this, or at least to view the house from the outside, go to the end of this text and do the **Bateman's Loop**. Otherwise, continue with the next section.

- 7 Avoid the wide path on the right and, just 5m further on, leave the forestry track by forking **right** on a narrow path into the woodland of High Wood. **Care: do not stray!** This path may be very overgrown with gorse, brambles and thistles but it is quite short (200m), after which the route is clear. Later, the path runs under trees and wheels **right** to a swing-gate and thence out onto the open hillside. Head straight down the steepest part of the hill on a path through bracken. You pass a painted yellow post and take a clear path between thick bracken, getting steeper as it goes through trees. Finally at the bottom, go through a small wooden gate to meet a path in the valley by a fingerpost. Turn **left** on this path.

The **Bateman's Loop** rejoins the walk here.

- 8 Keep ahead along the left-hand side of the meadow. Just before an oak tree in the centre of the meadow, go **right** through a large metal gate, over the Dudwell, and **left** up a grassy slope beside a meadow on your right. Your path goes through a wooden swing-gate into the high beeches of Bog Wood. After 300m in this wood, your path emerges through a wooden swing-gate into a meadow. Continue up the right-hand side of this long meadow and, at the top, turn **left** along the far side beside a fence. At the next corner, go through a wooden swing-gate and diagonally **right** across a small sheep meadow. Go through a swing-gate beside a metal gate and veer **right** towards a house with an oast.

- 9 Go through a large metal gate by the *Old Dairy* and keep straight ahead on a tarmac drive past gardens, houses and cottages, ignoring a junction on the right. Keep on the drive to just before the main road. Here, by a line of concrete bollards, veer **left** on a tarmac drive past houses. The drive bends right to the main road. Cross the road and turn **left** on the sidewalk. Very soon, you reach the village of Burwash Weald and *The Wheel*, now re-opened after a long refurbishment. *(The following comments may now be out-of-date after the refurbishment which probably brought the pub "up-market". It now offers an extensive menu at reasonable prices.) This is a jovial no-nonsense pub where walkers can feel comfortable. The pub provides Harvey's Sussex with two guests (normally Youngs and the all-pervasive Doom Bar).*



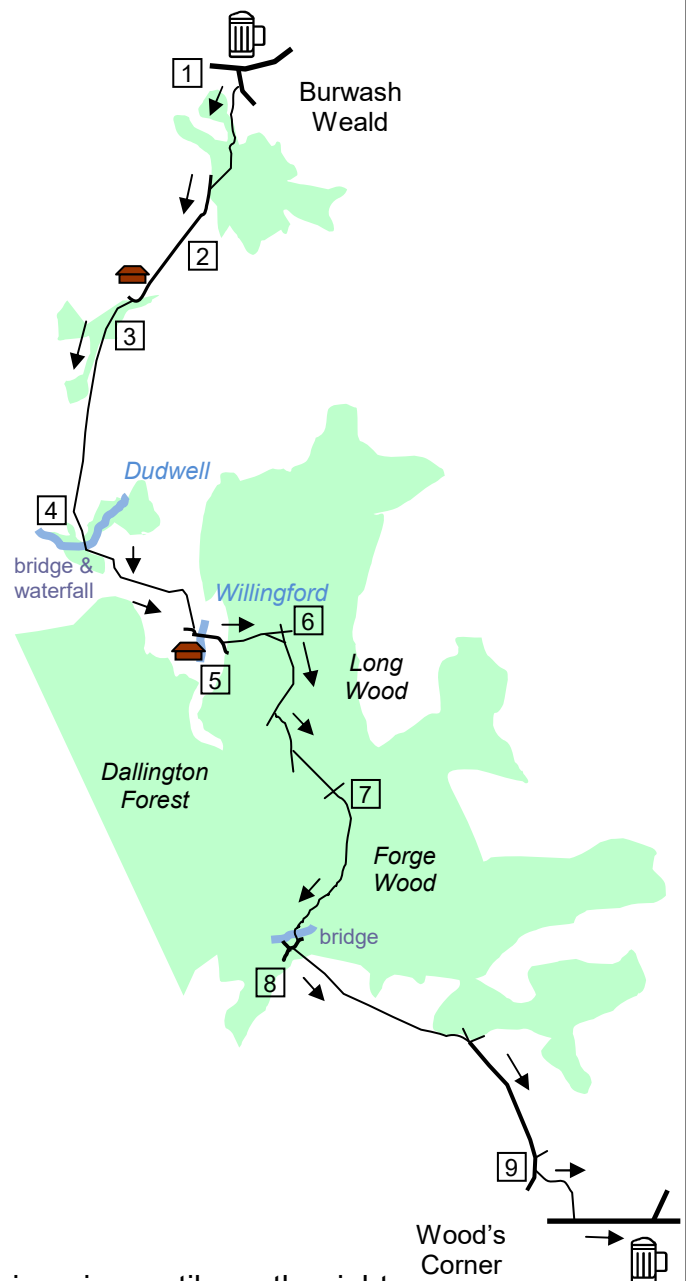
Leg 3: Burwash Weald to Woods Corner 5½ km=3½ miles

Summary: This leg starts from this large village, down through lovely open fields towards the dark looming Dallington Forest. You then have an amazing long and tricky woodland walk ending at an idyllic bridge over the Willingford stream. There are plentiful signs so you won't get lost, but you need to keep alert. The *Swan Inn* provides a warm welcome at the end of this leg.

1 Cross the main road from the *Wheel* (ex-)pub and go down the lane opposite, Willingford Lane. In 40m, turn **right** on a signposted footpath. Your path goes down through shrubs and woodland and takes you through a small wooden gate, turning immediately right and left over a stream. You now climb through hollies and beeches and go over a stile into a sheep pasture. Keep going up along the left-hand side and, at the top, go over a stile or through a metal gate and bear **left** on a tarmac drive.

2 As you pass some barns, Mad Jack's obelisk and sugar loaf come into view on the hills to your left. Ignore a footpath on the right before passing two large metal gates. Suddenly, on your right, is *Henhurst*, an exquisite timbered Jacobean farm house. *(On your left is a Defra notice with a map showing a "conservation walk". If you're a first-time visitor, ignore it: it's rather gloomy and doesn't live up to its promise.)* [2017-18: there is now a diversion notice directing you to the **right** of the house; it leads through four gates with a fence on your right to the far end of the lawn where you regain your direction on the original path.] Continue on a wide path through woodland, with a yellow arrow to confirm your route. *(Dog owners beware: there is a new low-level electric fence adjoining the gate!)* At the end, go over a stile into a meadow with sudden great open views ahead.

3 Go down the right-hand side of the meadow, ignoring a stile on the right and go over a stile in the bottom corner. Go straight across the centre of the next field keeping parallel to the right-hand edge and go through a gap in the hedgerow on the far side, about 20m from the right-hand corner, confirmed by a little fingerpost. Go straight down the centre of the next field, still keeping parallel to the right-hand edge, heading for the looming crest of Dallington Forest ahead. Keep ahead down into the far corner and here go over a long bridge across the Dudwell stream which has a metal gate on each side by a small waterfall.



- 4 Bear **left** after the bridge and go up the right-hand side of the next pasture. At the top of the slope, bear **right** by a large ash tree into the adjacent meadow and keep ahead, passing a yellow arrow on your left. Your route goes through a marshy patch and a small gap in the trees. Bear a fraction left and follow the yellow arrow into and across the next meadow, turning right and left and heading just to the left of a small dilapidated farm building you can see ahead. You meet the fence at a corner near the building. Go **right** here over a stile, walk past the building and keep ahead on a grassy path, heading towards a large house in a dip ahead. At the end, turn **left** on a driveway, immediately reaching *Willingford House*, part of a tiny cluster of cottages called Glazier's Forge.
- 5 Keep **left** over a bridge across the Willingford stream and continue up the track. Stay with the track as it bends right. In just a few more paces, at a small fingerpost, **ignore** the first left level path, but take the **second** path **left** uphill between two sets of fences, admiring as you go the host of foxgloves in season. After nearly 150m, turn **right** at a 4-way fingerpost.
- 6 Your path shortly winds its way past an open area of Long Wood that has recently been cleared and re-planted with trees. *You need to be alert from here since the paths in this forest are complex.* Immediately after this open area, you meet a wide path or forestry track coming down from the left. Follow the path which is now clearly marked with new fencing and yellow arrows, until you reach a large tree by a marker post [[Mar 2019: the tree has shed a large limb and you need to scramble around it](#)]. Turn smartly **left** here on this path uphill, avoiding the descending path straight ahead. The path quickly narrows and becomes a beautiful woodland path running high above the valley on your right. As you enter tall dark pines, the path forks. Take the **left** fork, a level path, avoiding the right-hand option which descends. This takes you to meet a major crossing path. Go straight over the crossing path, past a wooden barrier.
- 7 [This section is a traverse of Forge Wood, which is quite an adventure as the path is narrow and twisty for some distance. There are sufficient yellow markers to guide you all the way but you just need to be more vigilant than usual so as not to lose your way.](#) At first you are led along a narrow path through pines by yellow arrows on marker posts. Your path now descends and goes **right** over a (dry ditch) footbridge, then **left** through a wood of oak and birch. Next, you bridge another stream, your path winds a lot through a slightly marshy area and you go over a 2-plank bridge. The woodland now is lighter and quite luminous. Another stream appears down on your left. The next obstacle is a picturesque sight: down steps to a very long wooden bridge across a stream where another stream joins it on your left. Up steps, you come to a 3-way fingerpost and you are out of the woods. ([A walker suggested an insertion here: arriving at a T-junction, turn first right, then left.](#))
- 8 Continue about 20m, ignoring an overgrown bridleway on your right, and turn **left** and **left** again to go between two thick posts on a straight wide dirt path in the direction of a blue arrow. The path gradually ascends with a series of heavy wooden beams acting as shallow steps. The path widens and there is some mud for a short distance before you emerge by a 4-way fingerpost at a road junction by the entrance to *Highland Rose Farm* at the start of a cul-de-sac lane. Follow the lane straight ahead. *Note the vast colony of cats in the second house, Half Moon Cottage.*

9

Just before some houses on your left, ignore a (somewhat hidden) stile in the hedgerow but, just after *Stacey's House*, go **left** over a stile. Take the **right** fork at once, veering away from the hedge. Your path leads past a pretty little pond and up into beechwoods. Once out into an open meadow, with great views, turn immediately **right** on a narrow path, which veers slightly left, and proceed to a stile in the hedge directly ahead of you. The path leads between hedges and walls to a road with the old (but still working) Post Office on your right. Turn **left** on the little service lane, followed by a sidewalk, leading to the *Swan* at Woods Corner where, unless you chose a different start, the walk began.



The "Swan Inn" is remarkable for its huge menu written on several chalk boards near the bar. You can order up to 15 starters, steaks, fresh fish, not to mention snacks galore and eat them either down some stairs in the side garden or in a light and airy dining room that with good views. Beer is less wide-ranging with Wadworth and Harveys on offer. The interior is unspoilt and bar staff are very friendly too.

The Bateman's Loop 2 km=1½ miles

Take this short and interesting diversion if you would like to visit *Bateman's*, the house of Rudyard Kipling, Nobel-prize-winning author of the *Jungle Book*.

Immediately after the 4-way fingerpost turn sharp **right** on a good path that goes shortly through a small metal gate into a meadow. Keep down the left-hand side of the meadow and, very soon, by a large beech, go through a large old metal gate down through woodland. After the wood, keep ahead through the buildings of Park Farm. Go over a bridge, past an oast, ignoring a gate with arrows on your right and staying on the drive. The drive goes through a large wooden gate by a house and continues on tarmac with the weatherboarded *Oast House* on your left. It then goes across a bridge over the Dudwell. Soon the stone façade of Bateman's is on your left.

According to tradition, Bateman's, built in 1634, was first owned by a Wealden ironmaster. This is quite possible because there were several forges in the area, supplied by iron embedded in the local sandstone. Rudyard Kipling, Nobel Prize-winning author of "Kim" and "The Jungle Book" moved there in 1902 and converted what had been a rather shabby farmhouse to what you see now. He lived here until his death in 1936. The house, now owned by the National Trust, is open mid-March to October Mon - Wed and weekends, the wonderful gardens most of the time.

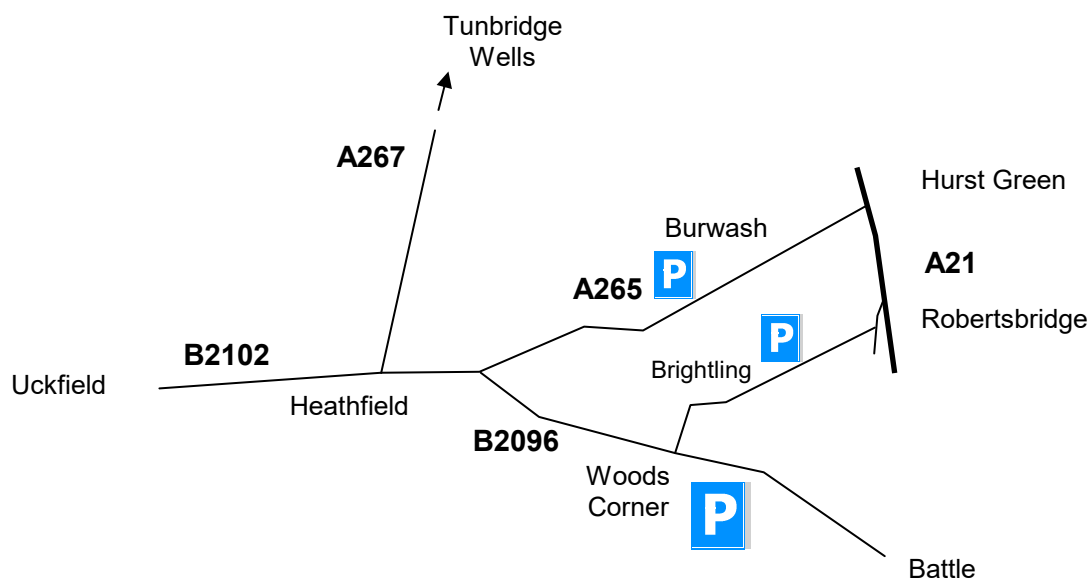
After possibly visiting the house and garden, retrace your steps back over the Dudwell bridge and alongside the wall of the estate. Immediately after the *Oast House* and the little adjoining house, turn **right** on a track. The track runs past the *Mill House* on the right to the mill pond. Keep **left** round the pond and take the wide path ahead alongside a water channel on your left. This takes you over a sluice and through a small wooden gate. At a fingerpost, avoid a footpath and bridge on the right and follow the woodland path, through a wooden swing-gate. This takes you out into an open meadow. Keep ahead along the left-hand side of the meadow with the Dudwell stream over on your right. Near the far end, you reach a large metal gate. Turn **left** through the gate and turn **right** in the adjoining meadow. Soon you pass a 3-way fingerpost. Keep straight ahead. [Apr 2019: work was in progress on the mill pond requiring a detour along newly laid

paths and a metal bridge with two gates either end; note that your route now crosses the stream into the next meadow, rather than directly ahead up into the woods, so this is more of a **right** turn.]

Now resume the main walk at Leg 2 Section 8.

Getting there

By car: Woods Corner is on the B2096, just east of Heathfield. Heathfield can be reached on the A267 from Tunbridge Wells or via the A22 at Uckfield, on the B2102. Go east on the A265 and, just outside Heathfield, fork **right** in the direction of *Punnetts Town, Battle*. If coming via the A21, go through Robertsbridge and turn **right** in the centre of the village, signposted *Brightling*. Start the walk there or continue, following the signpost for *Woods Corner*. The car park to the *Swan Inn* now displays a *Patrons Only* sign. There is alternative parking on the roadside strip directly opposite and again about 300m on the roadside by the bungalows to the eastern side of the *Swan*.



By bus/train: bus 318 from Etchingham railway station to Burwash Weald. Bus 254 from Tunbridge Wells similarly. Check the timetables.

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