



Fairlight and Guestling Wood

Distance: 11 km=7 miles

moderate walking

Region: East Sussex

Date written: 12-aug-2016

Author: Stivaletti

Last update: 25-sep-2020

Refreshments: Pett

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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Woodland, meadows, views, clifftop trails

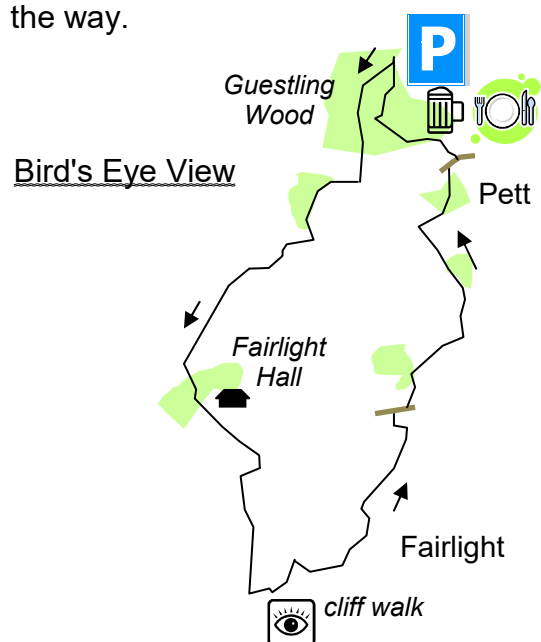
In Brief

Fairlight is famed for its thrilling cliff-top walks where the sea is so near, yet so far, beneath those unscalable cliffs. But this walk begins and ends in one of the shadiest forests, taking you from darkness into blazing light. In between, the country is of matchless beauty with wooded gullies and green pastures. Along the way, there is an excellent country inn (for the *Two Sawyers*, ring 01424-812255).



There is at least one short stretch where nettles and brambles grow thick in summer (unless you divert), making shorts uncomfortable. All the paths are well-defined and the surfaces are good, so trainers or walking shoes would be fine, in the dry seasons at least. A small dog can come on this adventure but there are a number of stiles along the way.

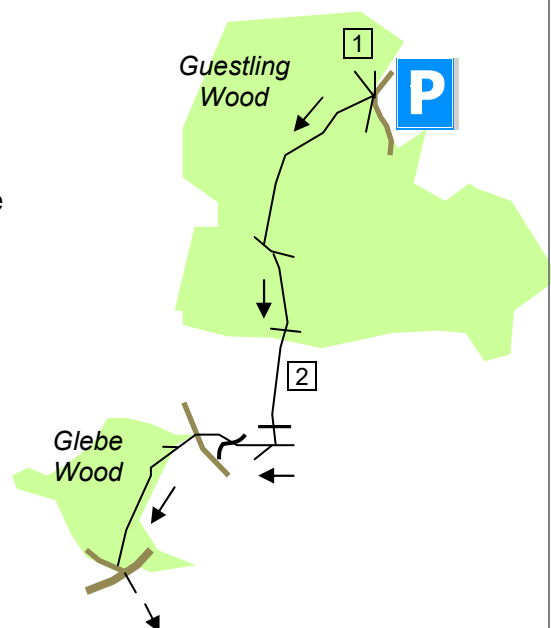
The walk begins at the **Guestling Wood** car park, near the village of **Pett**, East Sussex, in Watermill Lane, www.w3w.co/ledge.verbs.seabirds, nearest postcode **TN35 4HY**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

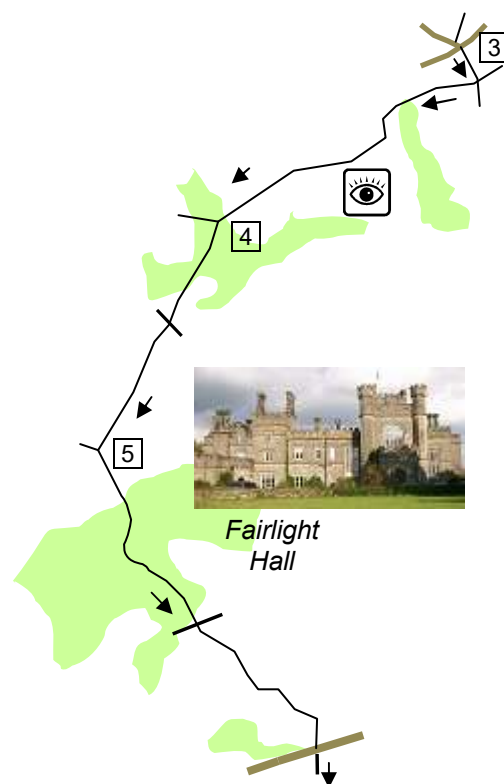
Leg 1: Guestling Wood to Fairlight 4 km=2½ miles

- 1 From the Guestling Wood car park, go back to the road and immediately turn **right** by a large wooden gate between posts into the wood. You have a choice of four paths ahead: take the **second** path from your **left**, going deep into Guestling Wood. In 250m, at a junction by a bench seat, keep **left**. In another 200m, you come out of the dark wood onto a wide footpath. Go **left** 10m and fork **right** at a post with a yellow arrow. *This way is also marked as part of the 1066 Country Walk, a long-distance walk from Pevensey to Rye.* In 200m or so, you meet a crossing path by a bench seat. Keep straight on, through a swing-gate and out into a grassy meadow.



- 2 Keep to the right of the meadow and, at the other side, go through a small wooden gate to pass, on your right, a stone-and-tile house, followed by another wooden gate. Cross the gravel path and go up through a wooden gate ahead onto a verdant hillside. Turn **right**, still on the 1066 walk, staying on the right-hand edge of the hillside. A swing-gate under ash trees leads to a tarmac drive. Bear **left** and right on the drive and, as it bends left again, keep straight ahead as the sign says. Follow this path beside a wire fence and down steps to a tarmac lane. Cross straight over, a fraction right, going through a swing-gate by a large metal gate. In 30m, at a fork, keep **left**, still on the 1066 walk. Your path follows the left-hand edge of Glebe Wood, with a field just visible on your left. Soon you are walking beside a wire fence. Finally, you come down a bank with steps onto Chapel Lane (*care! sudden traffic*). Turn **left** to the major Pett Road.

- 3 Cross straight over onto a narrow footpath, going over a stile and down the right-hand side of a meadow. A bridge with stiles leads into a sloping field with great views ahead, including Fairlight Church tower. Continue straight ahead for 100m along the left-hand side of the meadow until you reach a stile on your left. Do *not* cross the stile but turn **right** on a path across the meadow and continue over a stile through a band of trees. When you emerge from the trees, over a stile, you now have even wider views, including the massive castellated *Fairlight Hall* slightly to your left ahead. Keep straight ahead along the left-hand side of a pasture till you reach a small metal gate in the far corner of the fence. From here, follow a fairly level path across the hillside. Go through a small metal gate into another meadow and follow a faint path, directly in line with a tall transmitter mast, to go through a modern kissing-gate on the other side.

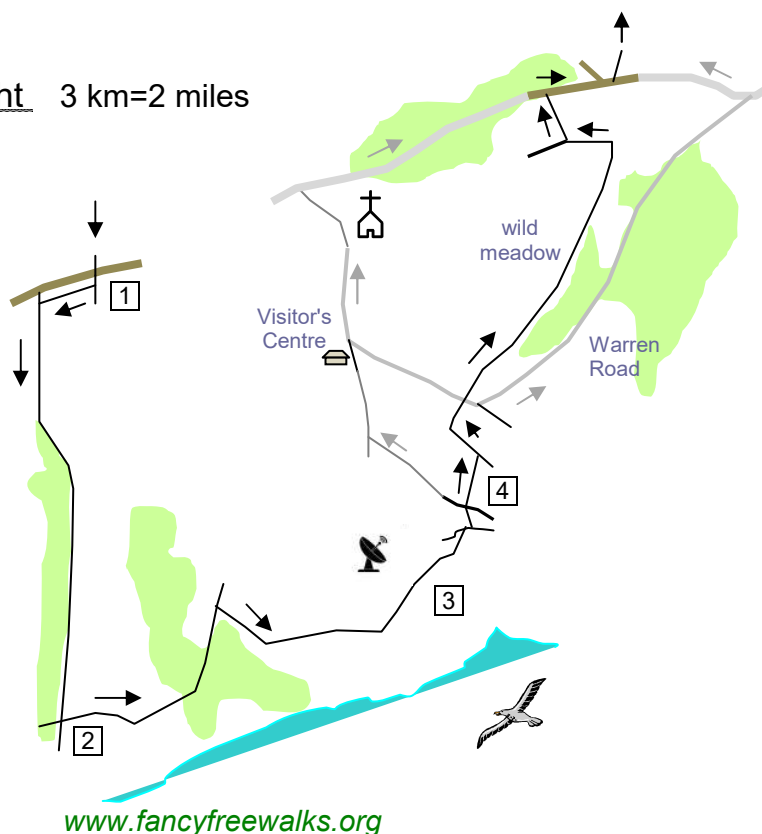


- 4 [Oct 2016: the farmer had ploughed the fields in this section; the paths should soon be clear again.] Cross a track onto a path through shrubbery. In 5m the path forks. Take the **left** fork. This path leads down into dense woodland, going down steps and over two bridges with handrails in a rather dramatic ravine. You climb out of the woods into a crop field. Your path crosses under some overhead wires, veers right and immediately crosses a farm track, going up the left-hand side of the field. In just 30m, your path zigzags left-right through the dividing hedge and continues up the right-hand side of the adjoining field, soon giving you a full profile of *Fairlight Hall* on your left.

William Drew Lucas Shadwell, son of a wealthy Hastings banker and owner of huge tracts of land here, was a fervent admirer of William the Conqueror and decided to create a massive version of nearby medieval Battle Abbey, with its towers, great gatehouse and crenellations, here in a wood in Fairlight. In 1843 he engaged John Crake, an architect with a record of work in Hyde Park and Kensington, to build what, on completion in 1855, came to be known as "Shadwell's Folly". He placed Biblical quotations in nooks and recesses and forbade alcohol from the estate. In this century the house was rescued from decline and is a now venue for concerts, performances, lectures and garden visits. Only tea and coffee are served!

- 5 After 300m along this grassy strip, the path abruptly ends. Turn **left** here on a path across the crop field. At the other side, go over a stile into woods. Follow this winding path beside a fence on your left. Cross straight over a drive with a *Riding for the Disabled* centre on your left. Ignore a gate straight ahead and veer **left** to a woodland path. Your path goes over a shaky stile and runs high above the riding centre. (**Caution! balsam.**) Your path runs above a meadow with great views to your left. A stile takes you past a pond on your left in a garden with some violent sculpture featuring a winged German helmet supported by Kalashnikovs. After another stile, your path takes you up through woodland, then on a grassy path through bracken. You pass some cedars as you veer right gently uphill beside a meadow on your left. You emerge on the Fairlight Road by the entrance to *Hysted*.

Leg 2: Around Fairlight 3 km=2 miles



1 Cross the road, a fraction left, to a farm track but turn immediately **right** on a permissive footpath parallel to the road. At the next field corner, before a gap in the hedge, go **left** through a swing-gate on a footpath. You now have a wide view of the sea. Go down the right-hand side of a sheep meadow. In the corner, go **right** through a wooden swing-gate and **left** down steps. Your path runs beside thick woodland on your right, known as Brakey Bank, and, in 150m, you pass a bench for a well-earned rest, followed by another. Finally, as the sea gets nearer, you reach a T-junction. [This is the coastal path, part of the Saxon Shore Way long-distance path. The wooded Fairlight Glen is on your right.](#) *Note that there is no safe path down to the sea from this walk, except via Hastings Country Park on your right.*

2 Turn **left** through a swing-gate onto the coastal path, with a great view of your path ahead. After a bench, your path goes steeply down. You pass another bench before the path rises again. The path winds uphill in partial shade and leads to the bottom of a flight of steps. Ignore a path on your left and ascend the steps. At the top, there is a bench with more views and a division in the path. Turn sharp **right** on a path that winds up the side of the cliff. You have occasional steps to assist you as you pass through a landscape of furze, bracken and ragwort. Your path veers left by a fence up more steps and the best all-round views are now to be enjoyed from a seat at the top. A swing-gate leads onto a wide space by a radar station and a mast, with coastguard cottages further on your left.



Until two centuries ago the village was known as Farleigh or Farley but the new radiant name sounded better to the Victorians. The newer village, called "Fairlight Cove" is further east, near the sea. If you had lived there in earlier times, your peace might have been shattered by the sound of cannon test firing, a practice which may have given rise to names such as "Firehills" and "Battery Hill". You might also have heard boats arriving in the night loaded with smuggled goods, possibly disappearing through a tunnel. The coast here has been continually eroded, resulting in the loss of several houses. Much of the wild terrain here is owned by the National Trust and several good chunks, including the Firehills and Fairlight Glen, are owned by the Town of Hastings.

3 Keep ahead to enter an open space with a seat and a sea view. Fork **left** behind the seat, passing close to the radar station. You arrive at a flat high grassy space, popular with kite flyers, with seats and an information board. Fork **left** behind the seats and join a track coming from the radar station. In only 10m, turn **left** on a path through hawthorns. This leads to a huge open space, often crowded with groups and families enjoying a holiday, a good place for a short break.

There are **three** ways of reaching your next junction, Peter James Lane:

- (1) The wild meadow. This is an unorthodox route, quick and with good views. It is used by dog walkers and local residents, but it is not an official footpath. A typical FFW special. It's given in standard text below. Simply follow section [4](#).
- (2) Warren Road. Also unorthodox, starting the same way as the wild meadow, but using a minor road past houses. Follow section [4](#) as far as the **Y-junction**. Instead of taking the narrow path ahead, turn **right** on the lane and immediately take the **left** fork, Warren Road. Follow this country lane for nearly 1 km, passing various attractive houses, to the main road. Turn **left** for 300m and go **right** over a stile just before a road junction. Continue with Leg 3.

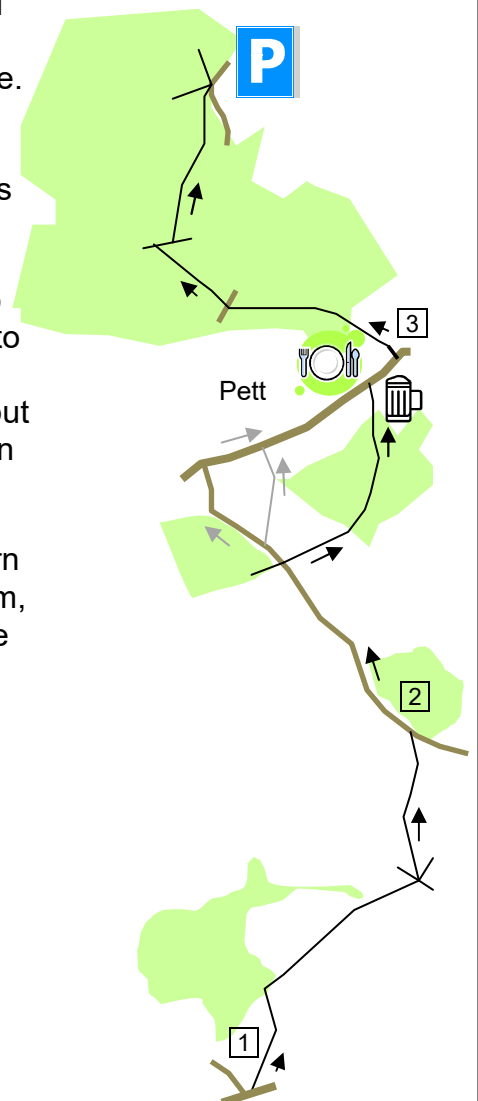
WC

(3) The Visitor's Centre. This orthodox route is used by **every** standard guide. It is longer and requires a drab road walk. Turn **left** on a wide surfaced path to the car park visible ahead. Go through the car park and fork **right** by the Visitor's Centre (2020: under reconstruction for 2021, with tea rooms) on a tarmac path, joining a tarmac lane (WC on your left), going by the Church (worth seeing) to the main road. Turn **right** and follow the road for ½ km using the footway on the far side. Just after Peter James Lane, turn **left** over a stile. Continue with Leg 3.

- 4 **The wild meadow.** Cross straight ahead down the grass, passing to the left or to the right of some clumps of trees, until you reach a fence at the bottom. Turn **left** alongside the fence and turn **right** at the corner of the fence. From here, you can already see your next narrow path ascending the long meadow on the other side. Your path goes downhill through a gap in the trees and down steps to an unsurfaced lane at a **Y-junction**. Your route is a faint narrow path straight ahead in a wild meadow. This path winds its way through the rugged meadow for ½ km and, at the end, curves up left and turns **left** by a fence onto a path by back gardens. At the corner of the first garden on your right, turn **right** down a track to the main road. Turn **right** on the main road for 100m or so. Just after a junction with Peter James Lane, go **left** over a stile on a signposted footpath.

Leg 3: Fairlight via Pett to Guestling Wood 4 km=2½ miles

- 1 Your path runs down the hillside with the village of Pett and its church in full view below. After a steeper section, in the bottom right corner, you are in woods, via an unneeded stile. Another stile takes you out into a grassy meadow. Your path crosses the hillside diagonally right, going over a level crossing path. In the bottom right corner, your route is goes through an (open) metal gate into another meadow. Cross the meadow on a worn path, cutting the left-hand corner. Just before you reach the hedge on the far side, fork **left** to go down a few steps and out through a small metal gate into a large crop field. There are numerous footpaths from this point. Your official path is across the field diagonally **left**, but because of ploughing you may have to go left-right on a thin grassy verge round the edge. Aim for a gap in the hedge, about 100m down the left-hand side. Go through the gap where you will see the remains of an old wooden gate. Turn **right** along the right-hand side of a crop field. At the bottom, in 200m, go **right** through a small metal gate beside a large wooden gate to a tarmac lane.
- 2 Turn **left** on the lane and follow it for 200m, avoiding several paths off, till you pass a small thatched cottage. For the next 300m, you pass several more buildings belonging to Lower Farm. Just after the main farm entrance, you will see a path on your right, opposite another path on your left with a small signpost. Your route is **right** here, up some steps, over a stile onto a narrow path between fences. This path may be heavily overgrown with brambles and nettles, but the effort is repaid, so you are urged to persist and maybe do a little swishing if you have a stick. The alternative routes (stay on the lane or turn right at the



next footpath) are far less satisfying. The path crosses a farm track and goes over a stile and a small wooden bridge into Roughter's Wood. The path quickly veers a little to the left to a marker post, climbs steadily on a clear path through this large mixed wood. It leads through two new metal gates and finally emerges on the road in Pett. The *Two Sawyers* inn is to your right, almost opposite.



The "Two Sawyers" dates from the 1500s when the surrounding woods formed the villagers' livelihood. After renovation, it still keeps its appearance of a "cottage in the woods" and the patio and garden are a delight. Food consists of lunch "bites" and standard fare. As well as Harveys and Ringwood, it serves one local craft ale. This inn also offers excellent accommodation.

It was here that William Lucas Shadwell's wife Florentia began her life-long anti-alcohol campaign and her career writing "morally uplifting literature". Her nine-year old brother was riding here when the groom popped into the pub for a quick pint. The boy, left alone, fell from his horse and died.

3

With the pub on your left, walk along the road and take the next driveway **left**, signed *Village Hall*. Before the building, go **left** past an unneeded stile and take the **left** fork diagonally across a meadow towards the nearest woods. (You can also access this path from the back of the pub car park.)



The path veers left over a bridge into the dark woods which, in season, are thronged with bluebells. In 250m, the path runs by a wooden fence and comes out to a lane. Cross the lane, go through a kissing-gate and veer right on the main wide path which goes straight ahead, avoiding branching paths left and right. In 200m, the path enters a lighter area and meets a wide path coming from your right (you can take a short cut on your right to meet it squarely). Turn sharp **right** on this path and, in under 50m, at a marker post, turn **left**. This long straight path runs through more dark forest, slightly uphill. In 200m, you pass a bench seat for a final rest. In another 200m, you reach the Guestling Wood car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: if coming from the north, the easiest route to Pett village is by bypassing Hastings: take the A21 to the outskirts of Hastings where the A21 goes **under** a high road bridge. *After* passing under the bridge, turn **right three times** to go **over** the bridge, in the direction *Folkestone A259*. (It is also possible to fork **left** just *before* the road bridge, cross straight over Westfield Lane onto a minor road (Maplehurst Road) uphill past small houses and turn **left** at the top beside the *Harrow* pub.) At a mini-roundabout, keep left on the B2093 as for *Ore, Folkestone*. Follow this road for 2½ miles to a T-junction where the Old London Road and the Rye Road meet. Filter left and turn **left** here as for *A259 Folkestone Rye*. In 1¼ miles, opposite the *White Hart*, turn **right** as for *Pett, Fairlight*. In just over 1 mile, turn **left** on Watermill Lane. The car park is ½ mile on the left along this narrow lane. (If the lane seems too narrow, you will find a dirt strip on the left at a point where this walk crosses the lane.)

By bus/train: bus 347 runs from Hastings railway station to Pett, not Sundays. Check the timetables. Bus 101 runs from Hastings railway station to Fairlight, not Sundays.

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