



Rotherfield and a Woodland Journey

Distance: 11½ km=7½ miles

moderate walking

Region: East Sussex

Date written: 26-aug-2023

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Last update 3-oct-2023

Refreshments: Rotherfield, Mark Cross

Map: Explorer 135 (Ashdown Forest) *hopefully not needed*

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

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Long woodland trails, villages, views, pubs

In Brief

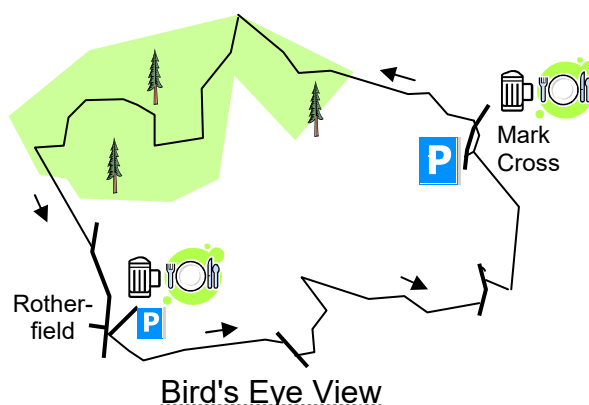
This stirring walk is in two parts: a mesmerising long trek through shady uninterrupted woodland, and a contrasting open walk back to the starting village. The central point is the village of Rotherfield. with its great church, its pubs, eccentric shops and historic houses. The woodland walk needs some careful navigation, because waymarkers are absent for much of the way, but the route has been written up in detail to make sure you will not get lost. The author walked this in late summer, but in spring there will be bluebells and primroses.

Both Rotherfield and the starting hamlet of Mark Cross have excellent pubs serving high-end dishes in a typical Sussex interior or garden. (To enquire at the *Catts Inn*, ring 01892-852577, or for the *Kings Arms* 01892-853441; for the *Lazy Fox* it's 01323-690050.)



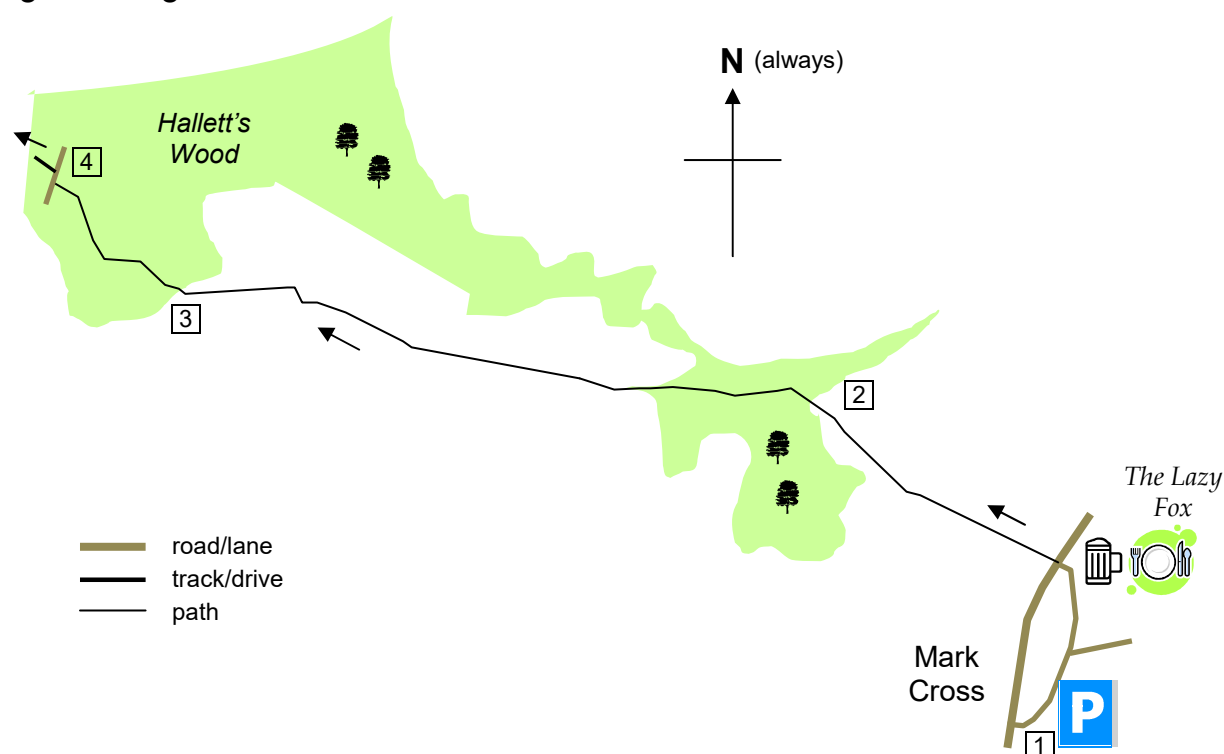
The woodland route is along clear and well-marked paths with no obstructions, making shorts wearable. The second leg, the “village meander”, has one or two short brambly sections, making leg and arm coverings essential. Underfoot was entirely dry, but this could change in winter, when boots would be preferable. The woodland route is heaven for dogs - there is even a dog shrine!

The walk begins at the car park in Mark Cross, East Sussex, postcode **TN6 3NP**, www.w3w.co/hikes.guru.happier. There is also a free car park in Rotherfield, www.w3w.co/dramatic.chair.treetop. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

Leg 1: a long woodland trail 4 miles = 6½ km

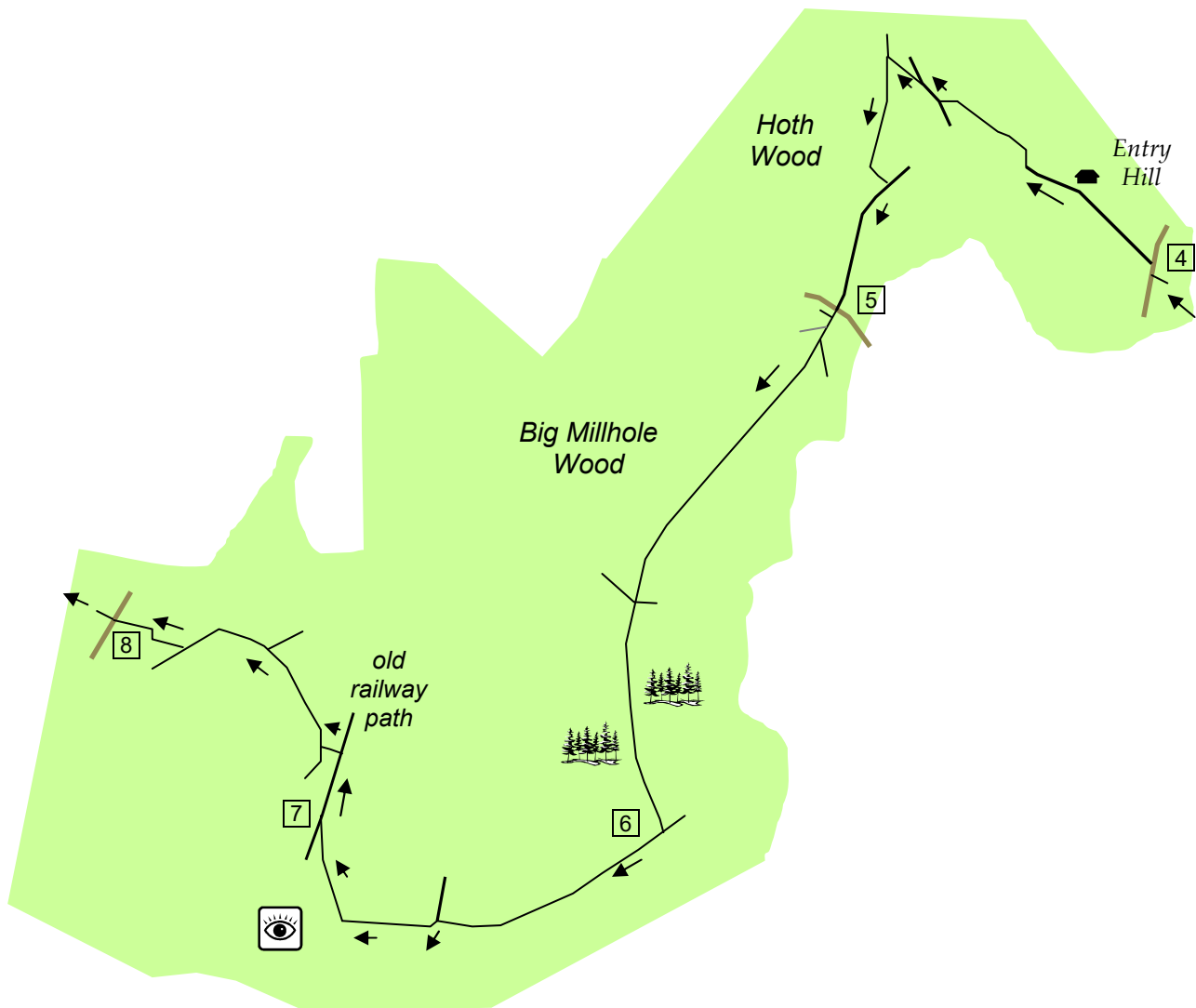


- 1

 The walk begins in the car park in Mark Cross, as described in *Getting There*. You may be starting nearby, outside the *Lazy Fox*, or by the fork in the road. Turn **left** out of the car park and walk along the village road, avoiding a junction on the right and passing the *Lazy Fox*. At the junction with the main road, cross straight over to a small fingerpost above some steps. It is immediately next to the big Garden Centre (which has a café). Follow a narrow path beside the metal fence of the Centre, over a stile. A second stile leads into a large meadow. Your path passes under wires and curves right, then left, along the edge of a wooded gulch on your right.
- 2

 A rustic stile leads into woods. You come over a new wooden bridge-with-rails, followed by a smaller wooden bridge leading into the open. The path runs through a bracken area, past hawthorns, under hazels, and finally through a metal swing-gate into a crop field, currently fallow with tall grass. Take a clear path across the field, and a second field similarly, heading for a post visible in the hedge. *The triple oasts of Greenhouse Farm can be seen to your left*. Go through a metal swing-gate and follow the bracken edge of a rough meadow. You come down through a gap into the corner of a field: keep **right** to leave the field immediately over a stile onto a path which goes alongside a wire fence between two meadows. *On your right is Stonehouse Farm*. The path leads to a stile. **Your long woodland journey has begun!**
- 3

 Go over the stile into deep dark Hallett's Wood. **Navigation is now harder as there are so many chances to go astray and you may need to pause and check the ground under your feet frequently.** Your route sets off a fraction left on a path which threads its way through birches but soon becomes much clearer. In 50m it bends a fraction left downhill. After 200m in the wood, your path turns abruptly **left** to go over a wooden bridge, up a steep bank, leading to a tarmac lane.




- 4 Turn **right** on the lane for just 10m, then **left** on a drive for *Entry Hill*. In 100m or so, fork **left** just before the house, go directly across a yard, and take a path on the other side, arriving at some small wooden gates. Keep **left** here, as directed by a yellow arrow, on a woodland path with wooden fencing on your right. In 100m or so, the path ends at a wooden barrier adjoining a wide stony byway with two fingerposts. *Care! do not stray*. Turn **right** (NB!) on the byway. In only 15m, at another fingerpost, turn **left** up two steps. In 10m, at another fingerpost, turn **sharp left** on a rising path through Hoth Wood. After 130m, this path finally bends left to end at a fingerpost with a wooden barrier adjoining a wide stony byway. Turn **right** here. After 150m the byway ends at a tarmac lane.


- 5 Cross straight over the lane to a small car park and go through a small wooden gate into the especially handsome Big Millhole Wood, fringed with tall conifers.

Big Millhole is a privately-owned wood with hundreds of winding trails. It covers 8½ ha=21 acres. 36 species of mammal have been found here, including (it's said) the rare red squirrel and six species of bat. The adjoining Little Millhole Wood is of similar size and importance.

Your path is a sandy one straight ahead, running downhill into the distance, **avoiding** a left fork that winds uphill after 40m. After 300m your path does a slight left wheel and you reach a diagonal crossing path with a bench seat on your left. Keep straight on here. Soon your path begins to rise quite


steeply under more spectacular conifers. 250m after that junction with the bench seat you reach a T-junction.

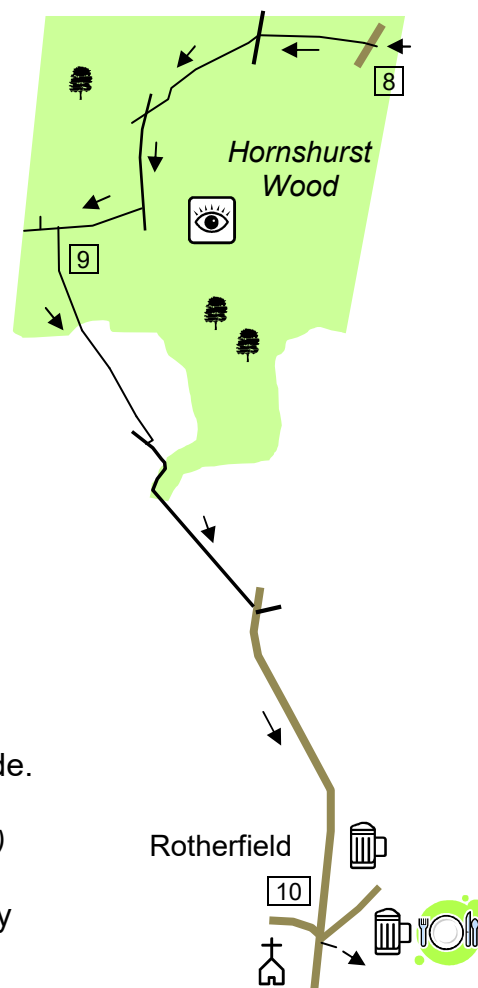
-  **6** Turn **right** on a very scenic woodland path. Almost at once, note the “dog shrine” - an upturned tree trunk covered in dozens of doggie name tags, a testament to the huge popularity of these woods amongst our tail-wagging friends. Your path runs along high ground, then dips. After 270m, this path ends at a junction of paths with open views (summer foliage permitting).

 Turn **left** for only 10m to find a low bench seat. Turn **right** before the seat on a narrow path steeply downhill. The path takes you down into woods. Follow the twisty course, passing various old gate posts, soon going downhill over roots. The path ends at a T-junction with a straight wide level path. *This is the course of the old railway which use to run south to Mayfield until 1965.*

- 7** Turn **right** on this historic path. In 100m fork **left** uphill on a twisty narrow path. (As a guide there is a silver birch trunk lying across the path, hopefully as a permanent marker.) **This unscheduled path avoids a huge fallen tree which completely blocks the old railway path; it also shortcuts the official way-marked route.** In only 50m the narrow path ends at a T-junction with a wide woodland path. Turn **right** on it. In 80m, keep straight on at a 2-way fingerpost (re-joining the official route, made unusable by that fallen tree). After a further 100m, on a gradual left curve, look for a yellow arrow on a post. *Don't miss this vital turn! Don't take an unsigned path 30m before this one!* Turn **right** here, going up under huge pine trees, to reach a road.

- 8** Cross straight over the road to a signed footpath opposite, passing a *Welcome!* sign. After 200m you arrive at a junction with a very wide sandy crossing path. Cross straight over on a narrow path, gradually uphill through the mixed woodland of Hornshurst Wood. In 200m you pass a yellow arrow on a marker post. In a further 70m, your path meets a 2-way fingerpost and a wider diagonal crossing path. Veer **left** onto this crossing path, thus temporarily leaving the official footpath. In 170m you reach an open space with a bench seat and great views to your left (the reason for this “scenic diversion”). 15m after the view point, turn **right** on a glorious woodland path. In 120m you pass a 2-way fingerpost with yellow arrows. Go 50m further to find a path leading off squarely left. This path is your final goodbye to the woodland. As a guide, this turn is 5m *before* a yellow arrow pointing diagonally right.

-  **9** Turn **left** on this side path. After nearly 200m of picturesque woodland your path ends at a sign for Hornshurst Wood and a patch of hollies. Turn **right** and immediately **left** on a footpath running between pristine green pastures. Go over a stile and continue across a pasture, a fraction right., to go over a stile on the other side. Continue along the left-hand side of a sheep pasture. In 50m, go over a stile in the fence on your **right** (*don't miss!*) and **left** on a wide track. You are joined by another wide track from the right. Follow this tree-lined drive all the way (nearly 300m) to meet the main road. Turn **right** on the road, quickly reaching the centre of Rotherfield.



The word “Rother” in the name of a Saxon village usually means “cattle”, but this has been disputed in this case and it may mean simply “Hrother’s Field” after a Saxon chief. Rotherfield parish is huge and includes all the surrounding villages and the area of this walk. It once included nearby Crowborough, now a much larger new town. The River Rother has its source just near the village, from where it flows by Mayfield and Bodiam Castle (see those walks in this series). (If you saw the River Rother in West Sussex and were amazed to see how far it reaches - that is a **different** River Rother.)



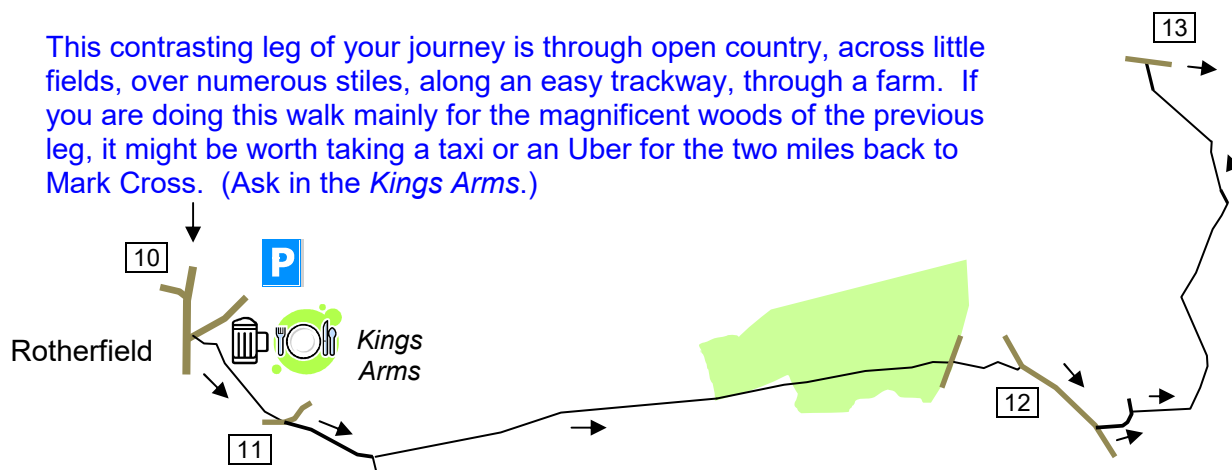
The church got its name “St Denys” from the Abbey of St Denys in Paris, to whom the Saxon lord Berhtwald in 790 gifted his estate of “Ridrefeld”. The oldest part of the building is sandstone, dating from just before the Norman Conquest. The tower and porch appeared in the 1400s but in the great storm of 1987 the spire was destroyed and subsequently rebuilt. The Yew Tree, propped up by poles, is said to be over 1500 years old. The interior is a historical treasure house and must be seen using the local guidebook. Most remarkable features are the medieval wall paintings and the stained glass.








Rotherfield has two legendary inns. The Catts Inn, dating from 1741 has great reviews for its menu much of which is hand-written on a blackboard (but note: it does not serve lunch every day). Nearly opposite is the friendly Courtyard Café which had a good sandwich and light lunch menu. The Kings Arms is known for its real ales and its chef-led cosmopolitan menu served in summer under parasols on its huge lawn.

Leg 2: a village meander 3.2 miles = 5.2 km

This contrasting leg of your journey is through open country, across little fields, over numerous stiles, along an easy trackway, through a farm. If you are doing this walk mainly for the magnificent woods of the previous leg, it might be worth taking a taxi or an Uber for the two miles back to Mark Cross. (Ask in the Kings Arms.)



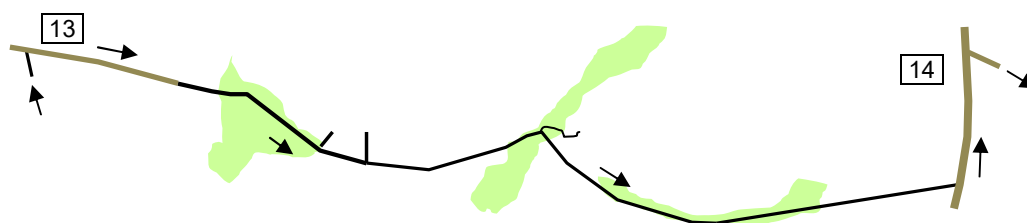
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10 Rotherfield village hall is on your left as you enter, soon followed by the main junction with its pretty pavement and St Denys Church on your right, opposite the *Catt Inn*. Continuing straight ahead you pass the Model Railway Shop and reach a junction with the *Kings Arms*. The free car park (alternative start) is sharp left here, a short distance on your right. Immediately after and next to the *Kings Arms*, go **left** down a passage leading to the big garden of the pub with its forest of parasols. But keep **right** by a fence and go between brick pillars and along a pathway with the pub’s garden on your left. Go ahead through a small wooden gate to continue on a tarmac path to meet a residential road.
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11 Cross the road to Horsegrove Lane opposite, an unmade driveway. At the end, go over a stile and keep **left** on a narrow footpath which runs along the left-hand side of a fenced meadow, with views right to Argos Hill (its windmill just hidden in trees). In late summer there is a jumbo blackberry crop here for the picking. A stile (care! wobbly) leads into a similar field and a field gate on the left gives you a view of the country to the north. Your path deviates a little

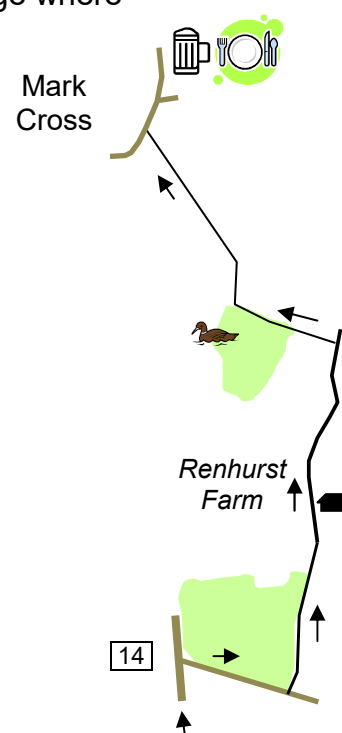
from the edge, heading for a stile under an oak. The stile turns out to be redundant but it is immediately followed by another. A narrow path runs beside an old tree plantation, an uneven surface taking you over a stream, over a stile (or through a large metal gate) to a lane. Cross the lane to a stile opposite. Go up, over a stile and across an open area (where the old railway used to run), through a small wooden gate and over a stile to a tarmac lane.

- [12] Turn **right** on the lane and in 150m, just after a converted oast, turn **left** on a tarmac drive. Walk 60m and, just as the drive bends left towards a house, **leave** it by keeping direction on a grass path which runs beside a lawn on your left, then a series of fenced fields. *Looking to your left you can see the spire of St Denys church.* Turn **right** in front of a tall wooden gate, going over a stile into a paddock. Keep **left** along the edge to go over a stile in the corner, followed by a short but rather overgrown path, another stile and straight ahead on a grass path. Your route is now a very narrow and overgrown (but surprisingly walkable) path along the right-hand side of a fenced meadow. You emerge at the end, over a stile, into a sloping meadow. Cross it diagonally to go over a stile in the far corner, then along a cinder drive, down to a lane.



- [13] Turn sharp **right** on the lane. After 200m the lane becomes a driveway through a dark wooded area. Where, in a further 250m, the driveway bends left into a property, keep straight ahead on a signposted byway. This ancient way bends right over a deep ravine. *A footpath here on the left, up steps and across a field leads to the same main road, nearer the junction, but the route is unclear.* Stay on the byway, soon going through a heavy metal barrier, passing some field gates. Finally the byway leads up to a main road. Cross the road and turn **left** on it, using the grass verge where possible. In 150m you reach a side road, *Lake Street*.

- [14] Turn **right** on Lake Street. In 200m, at the end of the woods on the left, turn **left** through a metal gate onto a signed footpath. (You may need to unhook the metal chain.) Go through a large metal gate and up past grazing sheep, through the smaller of two metal gates. On your right are free-range chickens and sprightly lambs. Keep straight on between the farmhouse and a butcher's shop, through this very lively Renhurst Farm. Keep to the left of a second farmhouse, coming out into open country. Immediately before a large metal gate, go **left** through a small wooden gate onto an overgrown woodland path. (Yes, the turn is *before* the metal gate: it seems impossibly narrow but this is right !) Your path instantly improves. You pass an angler's pond with some elegant resident ducks. A stile and a bridge lead into a sloping meadow. Go down the left-hand side with great views, and over a stile beside a large metal gate.





Go up the right-hand side of a sheep pasture. At the top, go over a stile and **right** on a local road - the same local road where you find the car park and the *Lazy Fox* pub where the walk began.

The Lazy Fox is not like any pub. As well as al fresco dining on seasonal and locally-sourced food, it has “adventure shacks” where your walking group can recount the day’s experience in its own dining spot. On-the-day specials are supplemented by a great range of sourdough pizzas, or you can pass around a plate or two of finger food. One big gap in this brief review is the all-important range of real ales on tap - nothing shows on the pub’s website and the author had no time to check the bar area. Feedback welcome!

Getting there

By car: Mark Cross is 5 miles directly south of Tunbridge Wells on the A267. To reach it from the London (or M25) area, take the A21, follow signs to Tunbridge Wells, pass through the town and, as you pass the Common, filter **left** onto the A267. As you come through Mark Cross from the north, take the left fork, past the *Lazy Fox*. The car park is 150 yds further on the right. There is space to park on the roadside, here or opposite the pub.

By bus/train: bus 51 runs from Tunbridge Wells (which has regular trains to Charing Cross) to Mark Cross (Garden Centre). It is important to check the timetable in advance.

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