



Ifield

Distance: 10 km=6½ miles

easy walking

Region: West Sussex

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Author: Hautboy

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Refreshments: Ifield

Map: Explorer 134 (Crawley) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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Village pubs, woodland, green meadows, long trails of bluebells in season

In Brief

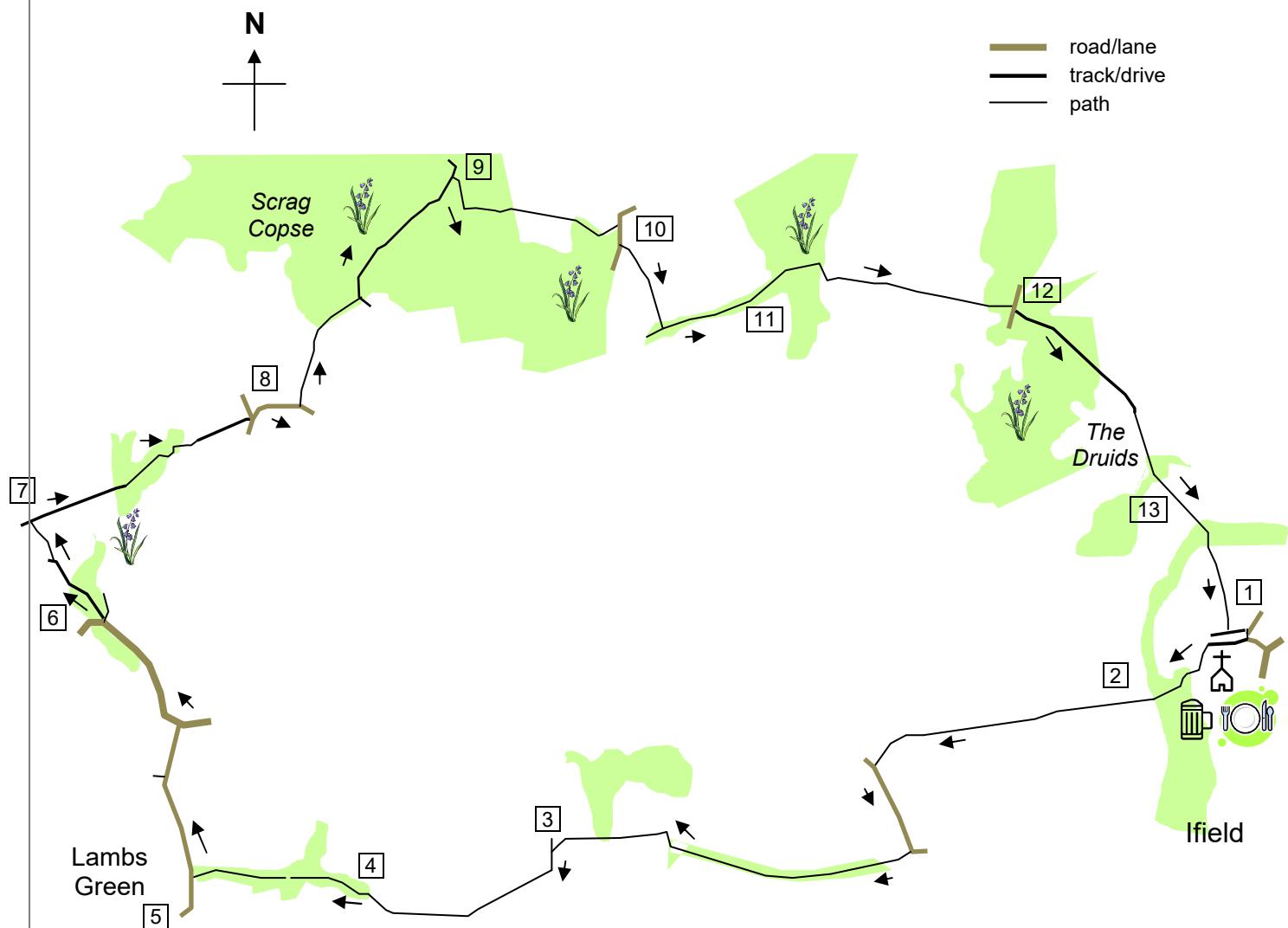
This walk begins in the quietest country village with its medieval church and old inn, a reminder of how Crawley was before it became a new town. The *Plough Inn* at the start is a charming old country inn which serves good food. (To enquire at the *Plough*, ring 01293-524292.)

The route of this walk is not far from Gatwick Airport and there is one short section which gives you a grandstand view of planes taking off, if Westerly Operations, or coming in to land, if Easterly Operations. (You can check by the direction of the wind: aircraft always take off and land into the wind.) Only one grassy meadow has this really close view and, if you know the badges of the various airlines, it is worth sitting awhile to enjoy the show. (Other walkers will quickly scurry into the wood away from the sound - it is not too obtrusive in other parts.)

The walk was researched just after the endless grey soggy weather of March and the first half of April. So naturally there was quite a lot of mud, especially around the gates in the narrower sections between fields. The author wore ankle boots, with a hiking pole as a crutch, and had no problems at all. The imminent arrival of spring seems to promise a radical dry-out, but maybe not in time for the **two miles of bluebells** that people come to see around 1 May. The walk would be fine a small-to-medium dog, not too heavy to lift over several stiles.

The walk begins in the village of **Ifield**, part of Crawley New Town, West Sussex, postcode **RH11 0NN**, www.w3w.co/wink.woke.races, near the *Plough Inn*. The pub is popular with the folk of Crawley and has two car parks; but aside from the fact that they are not open 24hrs, this is not a pub walk and you should park on the roadside, e.g. in Rectory Lane. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



Leg 1: Ifield to Lamb's Green 3.70 km= 2.30 miles

Ifield is the quiet end of the new town of Crawley, of which it is now a part. Its name means "Yew field" (Crawley's comes from "crows") and you can see the reason in the churchyard of St Margarets. Ifield has at least two famous sons. Denzil Holles (1598-1680) was one of the "Five Members" of Parliament whom King Charles I tried to arrest in 1642, resulting in the First English Civil War. But Holles hated Oliver Cromwell whom he considered a dangerous radical and helped arrange the Restoration under Charles II, the "merry monarch". (No doubt the puritan Holles would have regarded the new king as a wanton adulterer.) Mark Lemon (1809-1870) was a playwright and first co-editor in 1841 of the satirical magazine *Punch* (the name was his idea). *Punch* was on the newsstands for 161 years. The village is also forever associated with the Quakers. There is a meeting house in Langley Lane and prison reformer Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845) held meetings in the village (see the plaque beside the inn).

The "Plough Inn" is one of the great pubs of the area, rural and charming with really good food, an oasis on the border of the new town.



- 1** Walk past the *Plough Inn*, through the lichgate into St Margaret's church-yard. Follow the flagstone path to the entrance to the church which is definitely worth visiting.

St Margarets goes back to Saxon times, with the first rough-hewn stone walls appearing in the 1200s. The church is rather austere, since after the Civil War the vicar Robert Goddin was a puritan who got rid of all decorations and vestiges of "Catholic-style" worship.

Keep **left** round the corner of the church and fork a fraction **right** across the grass to go through an old metal kissing-gate just inside the corner of the wall, passing a waymarker arrow. Your path runs across a green meadow, passing a fingerpost. Keep **right** on a dirt path through trees which leads you over a long wooden bridge. Keep straight ahead on a wide grass path. At the end, veer **right** and **left** over a steel bridge across the Ifield Brook.

- 2** Keep ahead along the left-hand side of a crop field. [Planes to and from Gatwick may be seen and heard as you go.](#) Your path goes over a stream and continues between two crop fields. Go through a kissing-gate beside a large metal gate (or through a gap to the right of the metal gate) to continue past a terrace of houses to a road. Turn **left** on the road. In 250m, where the road bends left, **leave** it by going **right** over a 3-plank bridge-with-rail. The path goes left over a similar bridge and runs beside a garden. Keep straight on past a 3-way fingerpost, through a strip of woodland. You now have the links of the Ifield Golf and Country Club on your left, and soon a sheep pasture on your right. Your path goes over a crossing track and several plank bridges, finally taking you through a kissing-gate into a sheep pasture. Turn immediately **right**. In the corner, by a 3-way fingerpost, turn **left** along the edge, staying in the sheep pasture. In the next corner, go through a large metal gate [\[Jul 2023: locked? you may need to climb over\]](#) and straight ahead into a Stumbleholm farmyard.
- 3** Turn **left** in front of an open barn and follow a concrete drive, leading past a pond on your left and an old barn. Opposite the pond, turn **right**, guided by a fingerpost [\[Jul 2023: gone\]](#), and through a kissing-gate. Take a diagonal course across the next grassy field, passing the corner of a large raised slurry pit. After that, keep the same direction into the far corner where there is a fingerpost and a metal gate. Here, go through a kissing-gate and cross straight over a wide track to continue along the right-hand side of a large meadow lined on all sides by swathes of oakwoods. In the corner, go through a large (usually open?) metal gate [\[Jul 2023: locked? you may need to climb over\]](#) and keep to the right in the next meadow. Towards the corner, some helpful planks keep you dryshod. Ahead is a large metal gate and another pasture - but this is *not* your route!
- 4** Avoid the gate straight ahead and instead turn **left** to go through a large metal gate into another meadow. Keep to the right-hand side. (Strictly, the path is probably the shady one under the trees.) Near the end, keep to the left of a bank with a line of thorn trees to meet a kissing-gate and a 2-plank bridge leading into a wood. [In late spring, this may be the first sighting of those carpets of bluebells which will dominate the later sections of this walk.](#) This long lazy woodland path leads past banks of ramsons. It ends after an all-too-short 300m between two steel pillars, out to the Lambs Green Road.



Leg 2: Lamb's Green to Lower Prestwood 3.62 km= 2.25 miles

- 5** Turn **right** on the Lambs Green Road. After *Chowles Lodge*, **ignore** a footpath on your left (as used by the sister walk from Rusper). At a road junction, turn **left** on East Street, signed to *Rusper*. Ignore a footpath and bridge on your right. *You may see open horse-drawn carriages on this road, sometimes several in a line, as this is a popular pastime in this area.* After 350m on this road, **leave** it where it bends away left to meet a choice of routes on a fingerpost. **You can take the shorter right fork, leading past rusty Venters Farm over stiles and past horse paddocks, but the left fork is more interesting.**
- 6** Take the **left** fork, actually straight ahead, on a tarmac drive, immediately passing timbered *Beaumont Place* and its little well. A tumbling stream (to be revisited) crosses under the drive. You pass the entrance to grade-II listed *Venters*, which goes back to the 1400s, now with its statued pillars and its Robinsonian garden. As the drive bends left towards the house, your route is straight ahead over the lawn, heading for a marker post in the corner of a hedge 50m away. Go over a stile here and follow a narrow path between hedges. (**There's no escaping the mud here, except by straddling, but this path has the virtue of being short at only 50m and improving slightly towards the end.**) You come out through a small wooden gate to meet a crossing track by a fingerpost. Turn **right**.
- 7** Follow this wide grassy path between two crop fields. Rusty *Venters Farm* is on your right. Keep always straight on to reach woodland. Veer **left** as indicated by a fingerpost and follow the path down into this bluebell wood. You come over a 2-plank bridge-with-rail and your path winds its way through the wood, with a stream valley down on your right. The path descends over a 2-plank bridge and rises to a stile. Turn **left** here in a horse paddock, going over a stile [Jul 2023: broken] in the corner. The path rises, passes some horse stalls, crosses a track and takes you over a stile into a meadow. A faint path leads straight across the centre towards a large metal gate. Go over a 2-plank bridge-with-rail here, leading out to a road junction.
- 8** Take the lane straight ahead (The Mount), passing a pond and *Hills Barn*. Only 150m from the junction, under an electricity pole, go **left** over a new 2-plank bridge-with-rail (*don't miss this turn!*). You go through a small wooden gate onto a narrow fenced path beside a meadow on your left. The path leads down into the vast woodland of Scrag Copse where, in season, almost 1km of bluebells lie ahead. The path zigzags right-left over a 3-plank bridge-with-rail and runs beside a channel on your left. **Deer run free in this wood and you may see plenty today.** At a T-junction with a wide forester's track, turn **left** and stay on the track as it bends **right**. You now have a long easy trail of nearly ½ km through this wood, showing that familiar mauve shimmer in late spring. This section ends at a sign on your right which is easily missed. The tree which held another waymarker was chopped down recently and the only indication now is a small fingerpost with the arm pointing sharp right. **As a guide, there is another small side path on your left; also if you miss the turn and reach a left bend in the main track opposite a slatted gate, you have come 30m too far.**
- 9** Turn sharp **right** at the fingerpost on a narrow path through the wood. You come over a 2-plank bridge-with-rail. The path turns **left** at a marker post and leads you across an open space before entering more woodland. **Patches of mud here can be cunningly circumvented.** You negotiate a stile and traverse the right-hand side of a horse pasture, heading for Lower Prest-

wood Farm. A little plank bridge takes you over a bisecting stream. On your right is a donkey paddock, their names being written on the stables. **But the big attraction (for the dedicated few) is the grandstand view of the planes taking off or landing at near-by Gatwick, at a peak once ever 1½ minutes; hear the difference in the modern quieter planes such as the new A320 and the Boeing 737.** The rest of us scurry like rabbits to a stile on the far side and into the woods. Your path veers **left** a fingerpost. A dry path on a **right** fork avoids a wet section and, in season, takes you through the best of the bluebells. You come over a 2-plank bridge and come out to a road at a bend.

Leg 3: Lower Prestwood to Ifield 2.74 km= 1.70 miles

-  [10] Turn sharp **right** on the road. In only 50m, at a fingerpost, go **left** over a stile into a large fine-looking green pasture. Cross straight over to a fingerpost and a stile on the other side. You are on a path running between a line of trees and a wire fence. At the top, at a signposted T-junction, turn **left** on a narrow path which runs inside the wood, passing a redundant stile. You come through a small wooden gate onto a path which, in season, is perfect for enjoying the bluebells without having to look down at your feet. The path ends through a metal gate to meet a 3-way fingerpost.
-  [11] Keep straight ahead through a small wooden gate to continue your way through the wood. You come to a 2-way fingerpost at a 4-way crossing of narrow paths. Go straight over, curving a little to the right. At a fingerpost in front of a large meadow, turn **right** and in 50m follow the path **left** over a stile into a meadow. Your path runs under lines of trees. In 200m it continues along the right-hand side of a second meadow. At the other side, go over a stile [Apr 2023: care! partly broken and wobbly] and follow a dirt drive, leading out to a road.
- [12] Cross the road to a wide track opposite marked *The Druids*. You pass a swampy pond on your right. After 300m keep straight on past a house, still heading for *The Druids* which you pass next. *The house turns out to be quite newish and ordinary, not a Celtic temple as you might have expected, possibly named in tribute to archaeologist Stuart Piggott's book of that name.* Walk across their gravel to a kissing-gate and turn **right** on a track. If the next large metal gate is not open, there is an awkward swing-gate on your right. [Apr 2023: in either case the mud is very deep here; some walkers had to hold onto a wire connecting two posts; planks are needed !!] Both lead into an open pasture where St Margaret's church is visible ahead.
- [13] Your route is a faint and very unclear path squarely across the centre of the pasture. Your target is a slatted wooden fence at the far side, next to a fingerpost, with the church some way to its right. When you reach the fingerpost [Apr 2023: now grounded], go straight ahead, through a kissing-gate and over a bridge across the Ifield Brook. Turn **right** and keep to the **left** of a notice, to take a diagonal path across the grass, heading well to the left of the church tower. Go through either car park and turn left on a driveway to reach the *Plough Inn* where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Ifield is near Gatwick, so access is easy. From the M23, come off onto the A2011 ("Crawley"). At the third roundabout, go **right**, as for *Langley Green, Ifield*. In only 100 yds, go **left** on Ifield Drive. In $\frac{2}{3}$ mile, go **right** on Parham Road. In 300 yds, at a T-junction, turn **right** and quickly **left** to the inn and church.

Another way is via Dorking on the A24. After the second stretch of dual-carriageway, fork **left** to Ruper. In that village, turn **left** and follow signs. This is the "rural route". There are many other ways.

By train: the inn and church are only 0.7 mile from Ifield Station (regular service to London and stations in between). Come out on the **north** side. After $\frac{1}{2}$ mile along Ifield Drive, turn **left** on Parham Road. In 300 yds, at a T-junction, turn **right** and quickly **left** to the inn and church.

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