Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Chiddingly

Distance: 8½ km=5½ miles — easy walking

Region: East Sussex — Date written: 18-aug-2015

Author: Stivaletti — Last update: 6-feb-2022

Refreshments: Chiddingly

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

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

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Village, church, green pastures, woodland, pubs, views, cottages

In Brief

This walk is a gentle delight through green meadows and little woods, with very few ploughed fields or livestock, some surprising views (but without steep inclines) and some charming farmhouses and cottages. It begins in the utterly beguiling little village of Chiddingly which has a church whose steeple can be seen for miles, as well as the best pub in the region. (To enquire at the *Six Bells*, ring 01825-872227.)

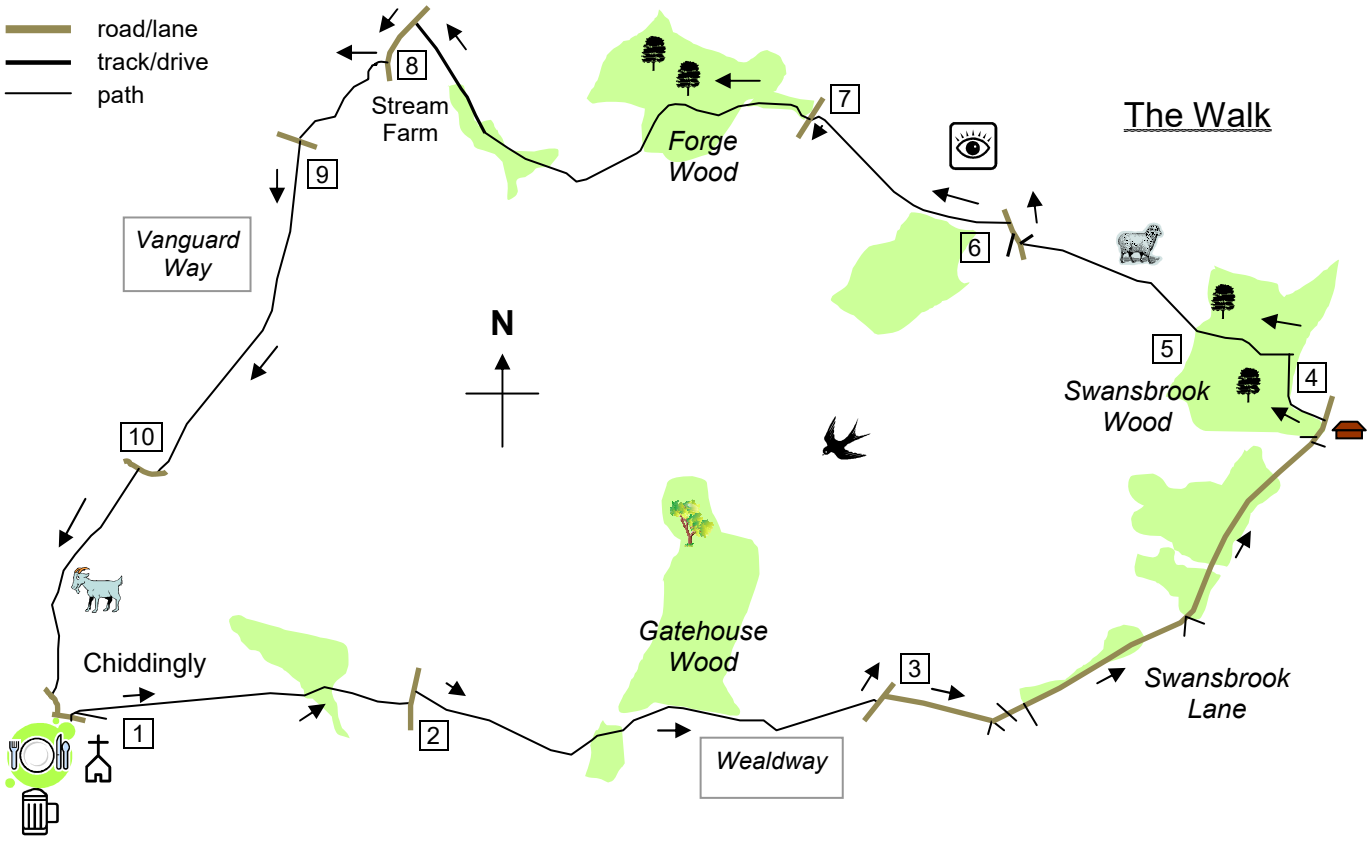
Although all the paths are nice and clear, there are some nettles and brambles that might catch out people wearing shorts. During the summer the ground is dry, except for some springs near the end, although boots are always recommended in the wetter seasons. Your dog will also enjoy this walk.

The walk begins at **Chiddingly**, E.Sussex, w3w:refilled.spoon.shadow, **BN8 6HE**. The village is signposted off the A22 road, just south of Uckfield. Go past the *Six Bells* pub towards the church and there is a large car park on your **left**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Chiddingly was the clearing ("Ly" – still pronounced as "lye") of Citta's people ("Chidding") from a Saxon family. Sitting on a bed of low-grade iron ore, the area made its living from the iron industry, recalled in place names such a Forge Wood and Gun Hill. Chiddingly parish, which extends to several villages, is situated on seven hills, like Rome. During the Elizabethan age, the village was dominated by the Jefferay (or Jeffrey) family of Chiddingly Place, a manor house now marked by a few remaining bricks. John Jeffrey (1524-1578) was a judge and sergeant to Queen Elizabeth I. The family was said to be so proud that they could not walk on normal earth and had to have cheeses to step on, as shown by the "cheeses" under their feet in the church effigies (see below).

Chiddingly church, whose steeple so lovingly embellishes the skyline, will surprise you on the interior too. You are instantly struck by its high square construction and by the monument to the Jefferays, 400 years old and recently renovated. Beside it is the old "third bell" of 1633.



1 From the *Six Bells* or from the car park, walk down the lane to the church, a visit to which is on no account to be missed. Follow the lane round to the left of the church. *You are on part of the Wealdway, a long-distance national trail running from Gravesend on the Thames Estuary to the coast near Eastbourne. You will be following it for nearly 3 km.* Immediately go **left** through a small wooden gate into a large meadow. Leading off to your right are two paths across the grass. Avoid the one on the right that runs near the edge but take the one just to its left which runs across the centre. In 200m or so, go over a stile in the fence and keep on in the same direction, passing a redundant stile. At the far side, go over a new stile into an elongated band of woodland. Follow this attractive raised path, going over a stream and up to a stile into a rough meadow. *As you go, it's worth a glance back at the church steeple which will also beckon you on your return route.* At the other side, ignore a stile on your right, continue through a swing-gate and turn **left** on a road.

2 In 30m, turn **right** through a small wooden gate, or an open metal gate, on a track. Continue ahead, passing Hale Farm Camping on your left, continuing down the left-hand side of the meadow and, after a gap, similarly down the next meadow. In the far corner, go over a bridge across a stream, straight across a small wild meadow and uphill through woods. On the other side, a wooden barrier takes you into a crop field which has a wide grassy border on your side. Keep ahead, a fraction left, across the grass, heading for the trees of Gatehouse Wood and follow the edge of the field beside the wood on your left. Continue till the wood ends and the edge of the field suddenly bends right. Here, leave the field by keeping straight ahead through a gap in the hedge and go straight across the centre of the next crop field. At the far side, the path leads you over a stile to a road next to the lovely historic Gatehouse Farm. Turn **left** on the road.

3 Almost immediately, turn **right** at a junction in the direction Coggers Cross and follow the lane. In 250m, at a junction of tracks by *Gun Hill Croft*, bear **left**, staying on the tarmac and leaving the Wealdway. You will be following this quiet lane for another km as far as the delectable *Swansbrook Farmhouse*. Ignore a crossing footpath at a fingerpost and, after the houses of Prices Farm, ignore a footpath on the right. The lane now runs under a leaning canopy of tall trees. On your left soon is Gun Farm, followed by a kennels. Ignore two footpaths on your right and continue through more thick woods, between steep banks. Out in the open again, you pass more houses. Ignore a footpath on the right and ignore a footpath on the left just after a white house and a long shed. In another 60m you reach, on your right, *Swansbrook Farmhouse*, a Grade II listed timbered cottage, good enough to eat.

4 Immediately before the cottage, turn **left** by a signpost on a footpath through a small wooden gate (it opens forwards). The path leads between woods on your left and the large lawn of a house. It curves right, around the far side of the lawn, and enters the woods. Immediately turn **left**, going over a wide plank bridge. You are now in Swansbrook Wood, a lonely bluebell wood with a variety of trees. Keep to the main winding path, avoiding several tempting paths leading off. After about 200m in the wood, the main path seems to veer left, but your route is straight on, shortly coming through a new metal gate and out into a meadow which in spring is hopping with newborn lambs.

5 Your path is straight across the centre of the pasture, a fraction right. Aim for a point about 20m to the left of a corrugated sheep shed. Here, go **left** over a stile, or through a large metal gate, into the next pasture where you may see horses grazing. Cross the pasture, going uphill, aiming for some electricity poles. At the top, go through a new metal gate into another sheep field and head onwards dead straight across the centre *(a good vantage point to view the South Downs near Lewes where there are several other walks in the series)*. At the other side, go through a metal gate to a road. Turn **right** on the road, ignoring both a track right and a track sharp left.

6 In 40m, just after a tarmac drive, go **left** up five steps and through a swing-gate into a high meadow with a spectacular view ahead. To the right are the rows of fruit at Stonehill Farm and to its left a perfect green meadow which you will shortly be crossing. Follow the path down the left-hand side of this thistledown meadow. At the bottom, your path goes down two steps, across a bridge over a stream in a strip of woodland and up into a large meadow [Oct 2016: now ploughed up]. Go straight across, heading for a jutting corner on the right, and keep ahead along the right-hand edge. At the far side, go over a stile beside a metal gate to a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane.

7 In only 10m, turn **right** on a bridleway down into the woods of Forge Wood. Keep straight on as the track goes deeper into the woods, ignoring gates and side paths leading off. Soon the track runs between fields heading for a house. A path joins from the left as you pass the house which turns out to be *Stream Mill* (although concealed by a high fence). Pass the house on your left and, where the fence ends, avoid a path on your left, keeping ahead over a bridge which crosses the mill stream, with the old bridge below. Continue on a woodland path, ignoring several small wooden gates on your right until the path veers left and comes out into the hamlet of Stream Farm, with its pond and houses. Your path does a circuit round to the right of two converted barns and turns left to join the semi-tarmac drive. The drive passes the converted *Twin Oasts* of Stream Farm and emerges onto a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane, immediately ignoring a footpath on your right.

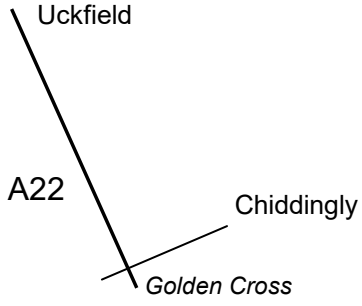
8 The lane curves left and crosses a stream with some white rails. Just 20m afterwards, look for a small fingerpost on your right (care! easily missed). Go **right** here on a good path into the woods [Apr 2020: negotiating a fallen tree]. In only 30m, your path veers **left** up a bank and steeply up into a meadow. *Don't miss this turn by staying in the overgrown gully!* Keep ahead along the right-hand side of the meadow. In 200m, just before the top, your path veers left to cut the corner and goes through a gap in the hedge [jul 2018: hidden in dense undergrowth - don't miss!], down to a tarmac lane.

9 Cross straight over the lane to a footpath opposite, past a redundant stile and into a crop field. *You have joined the Vanguard Way, a 100 km=66 mile national trail running from Croydon to Newhaven.* Chiddingly church steeple now beckons you home, but there are more obstacles to surmount before you arrive. In 200m, you pass a sheep pasture on your right. In another 200m, at the first (blunt) corner, go **right** through a metal gate, heading for the church, on a straight grassy path. The path narrows with the remains of wooden slats and then runs between hedges (hopping around any mud!). It ends over a stile onto a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane.

10 In 40m, almost opposite a driveway for *Hilders Court*, go **left** through an old kissing-gate with a yellow arrow into a meadow. Continue along the right-hand side, over a stile and through a field of wild flowers, still keeping to the right-hand side. (You may need to hop around to avoid the springs that well up here.) A metal gate leads you up a path beside a wire fence, then through another metal gate: nearly there! Go along the left-hand side of a wild meadow, over a stile, through a band of trees and over another stile. There are sheds in the garden on the right dedicated to a collection of goats and chickens. At the end of the path, suddenly you are back in the lane at Chiddingly, opposite the *Six Bells* where the walk began.

The "Six Bells" could easily become your favourite pub, unless perhaps you like a wide range of real ales. The character is appealing even from the outside tables, where locals often greet you. The inside seethes with atmosphere thanks to the many ordinary folk who use the pub. There may be an R&B group playing. Most striking is the vast array of early posters, railway billboards and adverts that are plastered over every wall in the warren of little rooms at the back, including the garden outside. Despite its unpretentiousness, the food is outstanding.

Chiddingly has one more attraction for visitors: the Farleys Barn Gallery in Muddles Green, 1 km south, home of English surrealist Roland Penrose and photographer Lee Miller. If you would like to visit, it is by guided tours only (ring 01825-872856).

Getting there

By car: Chiddingly is easy to reach on the A22 (London-Eastbourne) road. If coming from the north, you will see a sign for the village immediately opposite the *Golden Cross* pub next to a BP filling station on your left. (The *Golden Cross* is roughly 8 miles south of Uckfield.)