



Danehill

Distance: 9 km=5½ miles or 5 km=3 miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex, West Sussex

Date written: 28-aug-2016

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Last update: 8-may-2023

Refreshments: Chelwood Common

Map: Explorer 135 (Ashdown Forest) *but the map in this guide should suffice*

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

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Woodland, streams, lakes, bridges, secrets, wild flowers, bluebells, pub

In Brief

This is a gentle, mainly woodland, walk on the border of East and West Sussex, on the fringes of Ashdown Forest, full of secrets and unexpected delights. Along the way you will see bluebells in spring, wild flowers in summer, forest colours in autumn and views in winter across Ashdown Forest. You will meet little woodland memorials, completely unknown outside the area, many small lakes and every kind of tree. Even the golf course is a pleasure to cross because of the quick crossing and admirable signage (although at the time of writing the whole course had been taken over by a huge flock of pheasants).



For a break and refreshments, you have an excellent country pub on the route, with an adventurous menu and a hillside garden. (To enquire at the *Coach and Horses*, ring 01825 740369.)

The walk can be shortened to 5 km=3 miles, making it more of a “pub walk”, but missing some of the best forest trails. One walker has *lengthened* this walk to 11 miles by starting at Horsted Keynes station. GPS trace available.

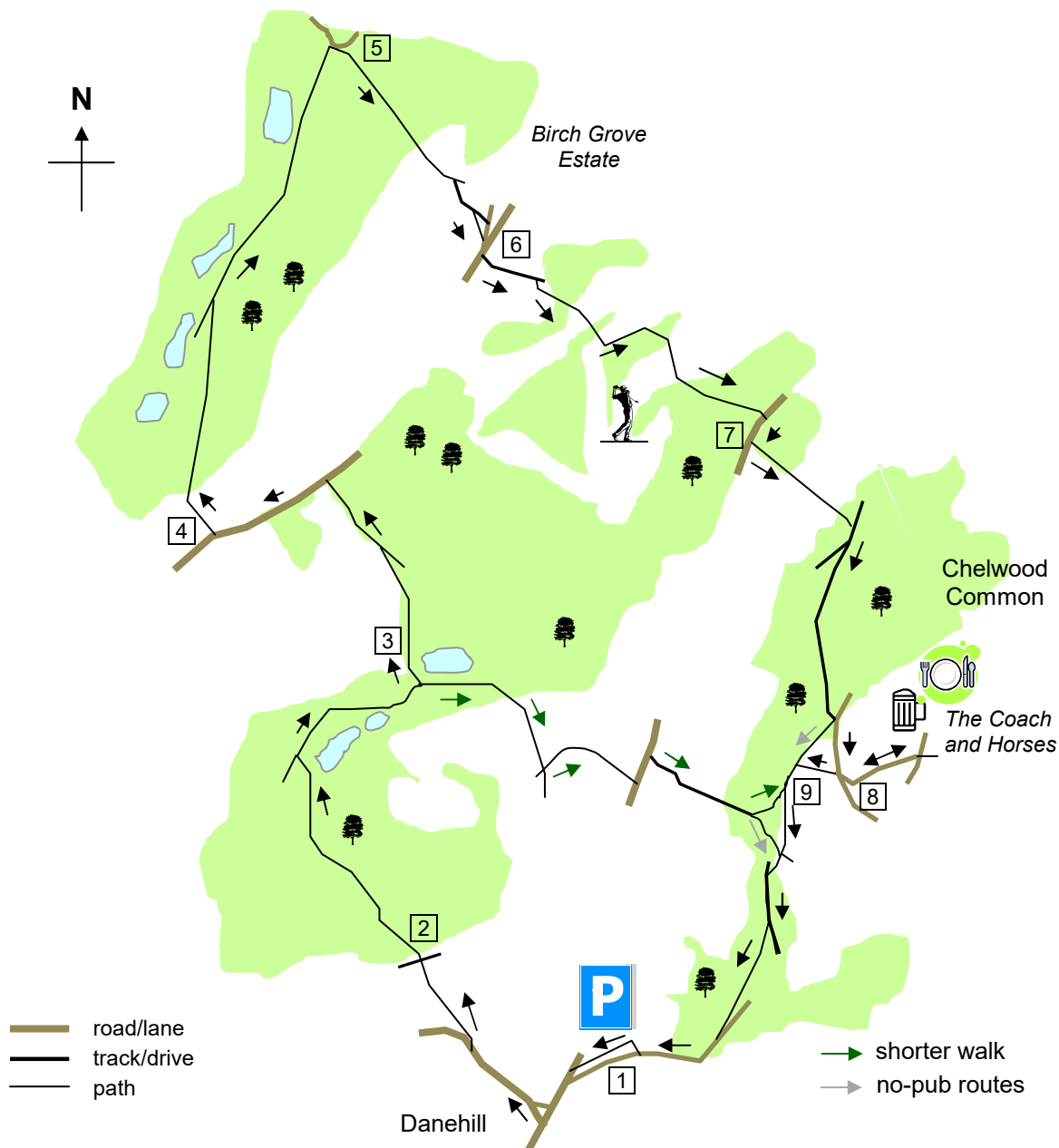


The paths on this walk are almost all wide and uncongested, so shorts should be wearable. In August the route was completely dry, but because of the woodland, no doubt there will be wet patches in other months, making boots highly advisable. Four out of the *five* stiles have a dog gate or a gap but the fifth one was a bit dodgy for a large four-legged friend – and a lead is needed in the pheasant runs. There is *no livestock* on this walk.


The walk begins at the village car park in **Danehill**, near East Grinstead, East Sussex, postcode **RH17 7HS**, www.w3w.co/marked.vitamins.unpacked. The car park is clearly marked from the main road in the village with a blue "**P 180 yds**" and it is signed *Recycling Centre* (NB). On turning in the direction *Chelwood Common*, the car park is 150m on your left. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Danehill was an important stopping point for travellers between London and Lewes, when there was a pub here, "the Crocodile", frequented by the Bee Gees, among others. The name has nothing to do with Danes but is related to the word "dene" meaning a deep wooded valley. The prime (Greenwich) meridian runs through the village.



- 1 From the Danehill car park, take a tarmac path towards the village, going past a children's play area and past the Memorial Hall to the main road. Turn **left** on the main road and shortly turn **right** on a road signposted *Horsted Keynes 1¼*. (You can take a small road just before the junction as a short cut.) Follow the road downhill for nearly 200m, to just before a left bend and here fork **right** onto a footpath marked with the *Greenwich Meridian* badge, going over a stile. Your path goes along the left-hand edge of a field and then straight across it. At the bottom, your path rises, passing a fingerpost, to cross over a track. You are now in West Sussex!



2 Follow the path ahead, as directed by another fingerpost, into Withy Wood, named after its willows, but with much more, as you will see. *Notice that you are on part of the Greenwich Meridian Trail (GMT), a 439 km=273 mile walk from Tunstall in East Yorkshire to Peacehaven in Sussex. In late spring you will see a vast carpet of bluebells, undisturbed thanks to the wire fence. This is also clearly pheasant country and you will find them in every part of this walk.* After 300m in the wood, you cross a farm track. In another 250m, you go over a robust bridge with handrails across the Enholms Brook. Your path runs above a lake, the first of a series you will meet on this walk. It leads you into a narrow sloping meadow. Turn **right** here, as directed by a fingerpost, onto a surfaced track known as *Dr Hay's Drive*. *Dr Jim Hay is a Scottish billionaire racehorse owner who bought the surrounding Birch Grove Estate for roughly £25M. The meadow on your left has a long section kept unmown in which wild flowers are encouraged, making a dazzling display in summer.* Up on your left is a bench seat (not on the route) offering a rest to enjoy the scene. At a 3-way fingerpost, turn **right**. (A small path shortly on your right here leads to the head of the lake, a natural vantage point.) In 50m, your path takes you over a bridge across a stream. Winding your way under oaks, continue on the path, known as *Wardy's Drive*. *Ray Ward ("Wardy") was a clay pigeon champion; you may have noticed in passing his memorial plaque.* You arrive at a T-junction by another lake and a signpost. *Much work is in progress on the Estate in enlarging and making lakes, presumably to make a fishery to complement the pheasant shooting and golf course leisure / business activities.*

Decision point. If you are doing the short 5 km=3 mile walk, skip to the end of this guide and do section called **Coach and Horses Direct**.

3 Turn **left** at the lakeside. The path runs between wooden railings at the head of the lake. Cross straight over a cinder track, following a blue arrow on a post, still on the GMT. Follow this rough wide path uphill under trees. In 100m or so, your path goes over a farm track and continues on a narrow grassy path through Sedge Wood. After the path widens, passing a small house, you join a wide drive coming from *Newnham's Wood*. You next pass a large white house, *Newnham's Rough*, finally coming out to a road. [Apr 2023: work in progress; you have to skirt round a wooden fence and come out to the road slightly further down.] Turn **left** on the road.

4 In 300m, in a loose Z-bend, turn **right** by a rather hidden marker post on a path down between fields, still on the GMT. Your path veers right down onto a beautiful path in Birchgrove Wood, dominated by chestnuts. *If you hear a "toot-toot!" as you walk these paths, it comes from the steam Bluebell Railway, about 2 km to the west.* After 400m in the wood, you join a wide sandy path coming from the left. As the path descends, you will catch a glimpse of a fish pond, one of a series of lakes which are strung along a tributary of the River Ouse. After another 800m in fine woodland with intermittent views of the lakes, you approach a large metal gate leading onto a tarmac lane.

5 Immediately *after* the metal gate, without crossing the lane, look for a low stone marker post at the bottom of some steps: turn **right** here on a path, up the steps, into trees (you can instead turn **right** immediately *before* the gate.) Follow the path uphill through the middle of a tree plantation. The path then runs by more planted trees and under large beeches to take you past an old wooden gate [Apr 2023: fallen apart]. It then runs beside a field on your right, leading to the buildings of Birch Grove Farm. Keep straight on, ignoring a footpath sharp left, past cottages of the hamlet. After the last

cottage, leave the driveway by forking **right** on a grassy path along the right-hand edge of the little green (or stay on the driveway), leading to a tarmac lane. Turn **right**, quickly reaching a road junction. Turn **left** to cross the major road to a fingerpost on the other side. *Birch Grove, 1 km left along the road, was the family mansion of prime minister Harold Macmillan, Earl of Stockton, site of his meeting with President Kennedy in 1963. Much of the land either side is part of the Estate, now owned by Dr Jim Hay.*

- 6 Follow this footpath, a wide cinder track, for 150m, where you pass a house on your right. Keep **right** on a little flagstone path [May 2023: being relaid] next to the house and then quickly veer off **left** over a stile. After a few paces, go through a small wooden gate and down the left-hand side of a cropfield. At the corner, keep straight on, over a 2-plank bridge with handrail and over a stile. Your path goes up under beeches and yews [Apr 2023: hopping over a fallen tree] and crosses straight over a golf link. Continue into woods, avoiding a track on your left, keeping straight ahead. This cinder track leads up to a marker post. Avoiding a bridge down on your right, instead turn **left** as indicated. Keep along the grassy right-hand verge of a golf link, as far as a fingerpost with a nice clear “footpath” sign. (The signs on this golf course, in contrast to some others, are quite exemplary.) The path leads over the Danehill Brook, back into East Sussex. Continue up the middle of a grassy slope, straight over a golfer's path by a tee, veering a fraction **left** into the woods past a fingerpost. The path goes up through more woods and over a stile beside a wooden gate to the main A275 road.

- 7 Turn **right** along the road. In 70m, at the start of a field on your left, go **left** over a (bypassable) stile (or under a 1-bar fence) and down the left-hand side of the field. Keep going for 250m, all the way down to the bottom, and take a narrow path into woods. The path runs deep in a cleft and in 50m comes to a T-junction with a very clear forest trail. Turn **right** and immediately take the **left** fork downhill (ignoring the right fork uphill). You now have an enchanting ½ km walk through this botanically rich wooded area, with dense bluebells in spring. Finally your path takes you over a stream and over a (bypassable) stile to a shingle drive with a tarmac lane on your left.



Decision point. If you do *not* want to take refreshments at the *Coach and Horses*, cross straight over the shingle drive onto a narrow footpath, between garden hedges, along a boardwalk, keeping straight on at a 3-way fingerpost and re-join the walk at section 9.

Turn **left** on the drive and immediately **right** on the tarmac lane. In 150m, you pass a footpath on your right (used on your return).

- 8 At a road junction, turn **left**. In 150m, the *Coach and Horses* is on your left.



If the weather is clement, there's nothing better than sitting on the big lawn beside the “Coach and Horses” in Chelwood Common, amidst the flower beds, looking out at the views towards Ashdown Forest. All the beer is local, if you count Lewes (Harveys), Arundel (Hammerpot) and Partridge Green (Darkstar). But for food they shop in all the surrounding villages, duck eggs for the Scotch eggs in nearby Fletching, green veg from Sheffield Park, pork from Uckfield, fish from Haywards Heath, lamb from, well, Chelwood Common. For casual callers who can forego the calves liver, treacle cured salmon with fennel pickle or the coach burger, there are lighter bites and coffee. The “Coach and Horses” is open all day Sat, Sun, closed in the afternoon Mon-Fri.

After refreshment, return the way you came, **right** at the junction, as far as the footpath sign (now on your left) by the entrance to *Kilnwood*. Turn **left** on this path and follow it between low fences and sheep pastures, over a long bridge with handrails, to a T-junction by a 3-way fingerpost. Turn **left** here on a woodland path.

- 9 At the next 3-way signpost in 40m, keep straight ahead, ignoring the right fork uphill. Follow this level path under tall trees, under crossing wires, through a clearing (**caution! balsam**) and straight ahead at a 4-way signpost. (*) Shortly after, near a house on your left, keep straight on along a concrete path. In 80m, look for a signpost and turn **right** on a narrow path uphill, taking the **left** fork after 5m. This high path runs through woodland, falling away on your left. In nearly 200m, the path descends to go over a bridge. In another 100m or so, just before a road, the path veers right and runs above it. Bear **right** on joining the road and follow the road for 300m, using the footway on the other side, until, on your right, you see the entrance to the car park where the walk began.

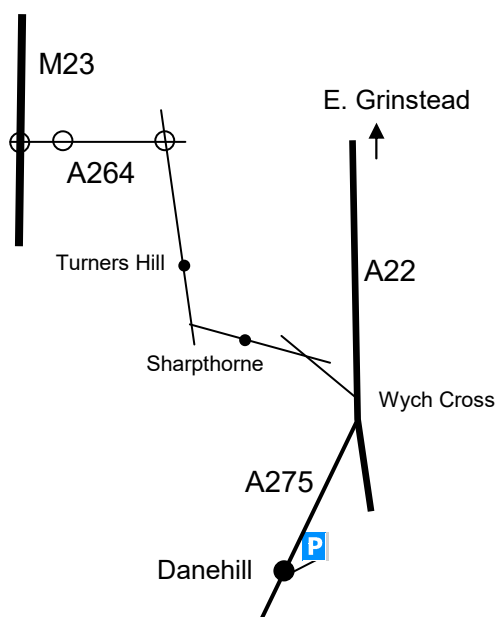
Coach and Horses Direct

Use this route if you want to do the much shorter 5 km=3 mile walk, with an early visit to the *Coach and Horses* as your main objective.

Turn **right** at the lakeside and immediately take the **right** fork, an uphill path. After woodland, the path takes you out into fields. Follow the path straight ahead beside a bank of trees and bracken for 150m where you meet a crossing track and a small signpost. Turn **left** here on a path between fields. After 100m, wheel **right** between fields, to come out to a road after 150m, opposite Cumnor House, a prep school, which recently diverted the footpath that used to go straight ahead. Turn **left** on the road and **right** after 50m through a metal kissing-gate into the school car park. Follow the waymarkers that lead you most efficiently through the premises. You pass a black boarded house on your left as you take a tarmac path downhill. Continue straight ahead at the corner, as directed by a yellow arrow on a markerpost, into bluebell woods. In 70m, as the path begins to descend, look for a marker post on your left. (If you do *not* want to visit the pub, keep straight on, alternating through bracken and under tall trees, down to a T-junction. Turn **right** and re-join the main walk at the point marked (*) in section 9.) Fork **left** through trees on a path which curves left downhill. At the bottom, veer **left** on a path coming from your right. In 40m, at a 3-way signpost, turn **right** over a bridge on a path between low fences and sheep pastures, to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** and join the main walk at the start of section 8.

Getting there

By car: Danehill is on the A275 Lewes road, going south from East Grinstead. At Wych Cross, leave the A22 by forking right as for *Lewes A275*. Danehill is in 2½ miles and the car park is sharp left as for *Chelwood Common*. If you like to avoid East Grinstead, you can do as follows: Take the M23 past Gatwick Airport and turn **left** at the next junction, the A264 (*East Grinstead*). At the second roundabout, turn **right**, signposted *Turner's Hill*. A mile after Turner's Hill the road forks. Take the **left** fork signposted *West Hoathly and Sharpthorne*. Pass through both these large villages, and another 2 miles=3 km after Sharpthorne, turn **right** at a crossroads signposted *Wych Cross*. At traffic lights, turn right on the A22 and immediately fork **right** as for *Lewes A275*.



By bus/train: bus 270 runs from Haywards Heath to Danehill, not Sun. Check the timetables.

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