



Ashurst Circular walk

A walk via Pooh Bridge to the attractive Wealden village of Hartfield, with a longer option over the elevated heathland of Ashdown Forest.

Length	<p>Main Walk: 19¼ km (12.0 miles). Four hours 50 minutes walking time. For the whole excursion including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 9½ hours.</p> <p>Long Circular Walk: 24¼ km (15.1 miles). Six hours 15 minutes walking time.</p> <p>Short Circular Walk: 14¾ km (9.2 miles). Three hours 35 minutes walking time.</p>
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OS Map	Explorer 135. Ashurst, map reference TQ507388, is on the East Sussex/Kent border, between East Grinstead and Tunbridge Wells.
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Toughness	5 out of 10 (7 for the Long Walk, 3 for the Short Walk).
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Features	<p>This walk has the same start along the Medway valley as the Ashurst to Forest Row walk (#110), but then veers off to the small village of Withyham with its notable parish church. After an early pub lunch there is a choice of three routes to the neighbouring village of Hartfield, associated with the author AA Milne and his most famous creation: coachloads of tourists regularly descend on Pooh Corner to buy all manner of Winnie-the-Pooh memorabilia.</p> <p>The Short Walk heads directly for Hartfield, while the other variations continue through the extensive Buckhurst Estate into Five Hundred Acre Wood. This is the furthest point for the Main Walk, which crosses the famous Pooh Bridge on its way round to Hartfield.</p> <p>The Long Walk climbs steadily through the wood and continues around the rim of a valley in Ashdown Forest, the largest area of elevated heathland in south-east England. It goes past some recognisable features from the children's stories and a memorial commemorating AA Milne and his illustrator, EF Shepard. From this viewpoint the Long Walk descends to Hartfield, also crossing Pooh Bridge.</p> <p>After a tea stop in this attractive Wealden village the circular options go back along the Medway valley to Ashurst station.</p>
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As with any walk in the High Weald, you will need to be prepared for muddy or waterlogged paths at almost any time of the year.

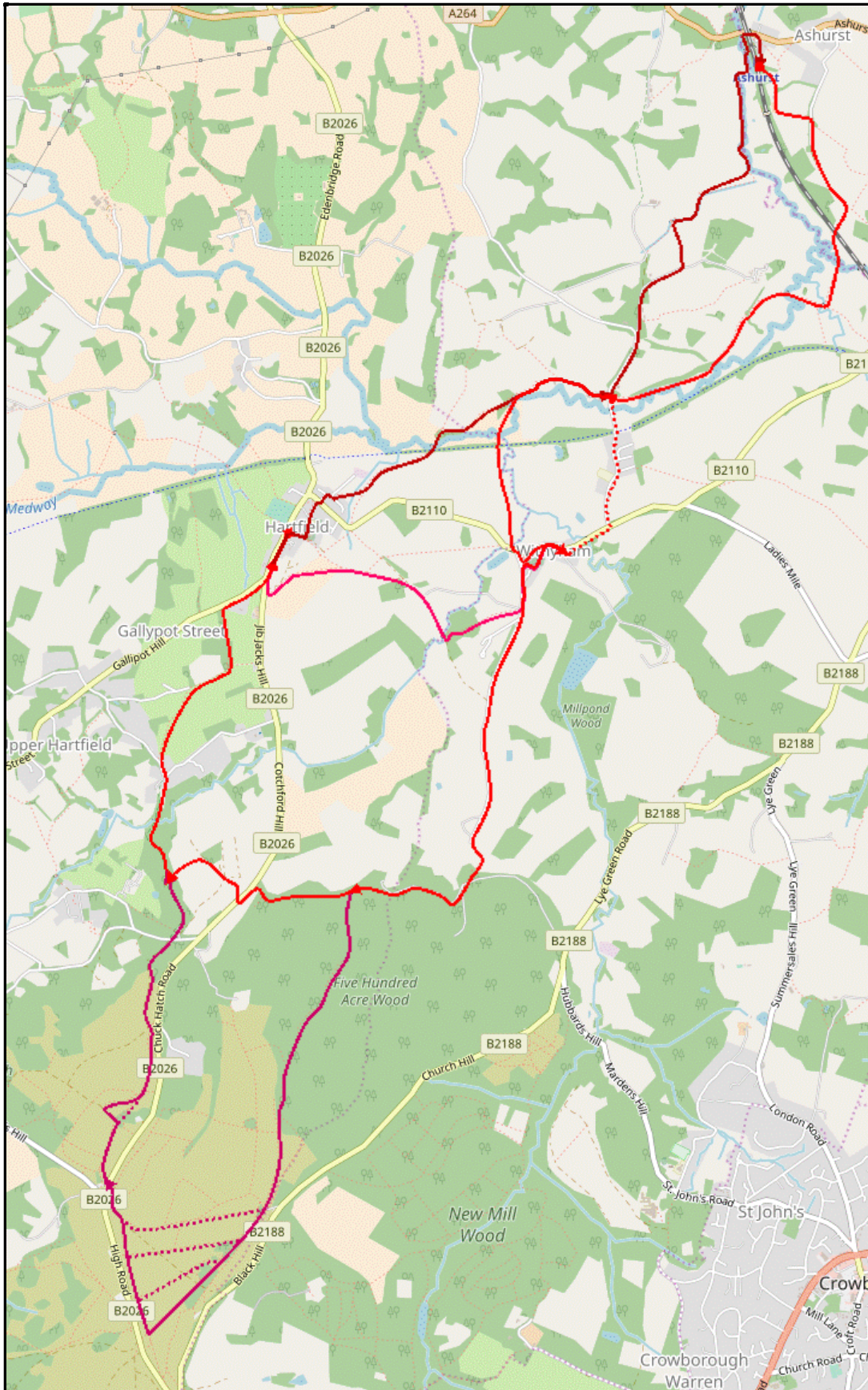
Walk Options	<p>You could finish any of the variations at Hartfield and take Metrobus 291 to East Grinstead (details below). Conversely, you could start at Withyham by initially travelling to East Grinstead and then taking the same service to this village.</p> <p>If you want to shorten the walk after lunch at the Dorset Arms, you could switch to one of the shorter options or simply catch the 291 bus from outside the pub. On the Long Walk you can take various short cuts across Ashdown Forest.</p>
Transport	<p>There is an hourly service from London Bridge to Ashurst (Kent), taking 50 minutes (longer on Sundays, when you have to change at East Croydon and/or Oxted).</p> <p>For the variations which finish in Hartfield, Metrobus 291 goes to East Grinstead in one direction and Tunbridge Wells in the other (hourly Mon–Sat, two-hourly Sun & BH). A return ticket to Ashurst (Kent) is more likely to be accepted at East Grinstead since this route is also operated by Southern, with a half-hourly off-peak service to Victoria. At the time of writing the last bus to East Grinstead leaves Hartfield at 7.30pm (5.15pm Sun & BH); about 1 hour earlier than these times to Tunbridge Wells.</p> <p>If driving, Ashurst station has a small free car park. There is no public transport from Hartfield to Ashurst, so you would have to complete a circular walk.</p>
Suggested Train	<p>Take the train nearest to 10:00 from London Bridge to Ashurst (Kent).</p>
Lunch	<p>The suggested lunch stop is the Dorset Arms (01892-770278) in Withyham, after 5¾ km. In 2014 this attractive old pub was bought by the Buckhurst Estate and fully refurbished; it has plenty of outdoor seating (including a new back garden) and serves very good home-cooked food until 2.30pm (4pm Sun).</p> <p>There are no further pubs on any of the walk options until you reach Hartfield, where the Anchor Inn (01892-770424) would be a reasonable alternative for lunch on the Short Walk.</p>
Tea	<p>There are no refreshment places near Ashurst station so you would need to stop for tea in Hartfield, 6 km before the end of the Circular Walks. If you arrive before 4.30pm you can take some of Kanga's 'Strengthening Medicines' at Piglet's Tearoom (01892-770595); if not, the Anchor Inn (see above) is open all day.</p> <p>If you return via East Grinstead you might find the station café open but you will have more choice if you get off the bus a little earlier, in the High Street. There are plenty of refreshment places in Tunbridge Wells if you take the bus there.</p>
Help Us!	<p>After the walk, we would love to get your feedback</p>
Photos	<p>Upload your photos to the SWC Group on Flickr, and videos to Youtube. This walk's tags are:</p>



By Car	Start TN3 9TL
Help	National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Travelline SE (bus times): 0871 200 2233 (12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234
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Walk Directions

Walk Map



All maps © OpenStreetMap contributors

Walk Options

- M. Main Walk (19¼ km)
 - i. Main Walk, finishing in Hartfield (13½ km)
 - a. Long Circular Walk (24¼ km)

- ai. [Long Walk, finishing in Hartfield](#) (18½ km)
- b. [Short Circular Walk](#) (14¾ km)

Walk Directions

1. Ashurst Station to Summerford Farm (3½ km)

From the station's small car park do not go out along its access road to the A264, but **take the private road in the opposite direction**, heading **S** and joining the **Sussex Border Path**¹ (SBP). This lane winds uphill and curves to the right where a footpath joins from the left. After 200m along a level stretch, **turn left** to go up a grassy track between hedges.

At the top, turn right onto a track. This soon starts to go back downhill through trees, and later with fields sloping down to your right. After 500m you pass some derelict brick outbuildings on your left. In a further 150m, after going through a belt of trees, **fork right** at a footpath sign to go down a broad grassy path, joining the **Wealdway**² (WW).

At the bottom of the field go through a gate and under the railway. On the other side turn left into a meadow, with a loop of the River Medway ahead on your right. Follow a faint path curving gently to the right through the meadow. Cross the River Grom on a footbridge and bear right to go across the next field, aiming for a metal gate on the far side if there is no path visible.

Turn right by this gate (leaving the SBP) to cross another of the River Medway's tributaries, the River Eridge, on a concrete bridge. Go straight on across the meadow, following the overhead power cables. At the end of the meadow, cross the River Medway on another concrete bridge and **turn half-left** to go across a field.

On the far side, ignore a wooden bridge across a ditch and instead **turn left** along the field edge, heading **SW** with the ditch on your right. In 100m cross the ditch on a footbridge and continue with a hedge on your right for 350m to reach a loop of the River Medway. Keep ahead through a copse and across more ditches, then go along the right-hand edge of water meadows for 700m. The river meanders away on your left and eventually you come to a lane opposite Summerford Farm.

2. Summerford Farm to Withyham (2¼ km)

If you are in a hurry you can save 1 km by taking a short cut along roads to the pub in Withyham. To do this, turn left onto the lane and follow it for just under 1 km, through the village of Balls Green. Turn right at the T-junction with the B2110; the Dorset Arms is 300m along this road.

For the recommended route, go straight across the lane and take the driveway opposite (slightly to the right) past the cottages and attractive oast-house conversions of Summerford Farm. In 350m, at the end of the long drive, go through a metal fieldgate. Ignore a footpath marker on a stile and **bear left** onto a broad grassy track. In 100m **turn left** at a partly-concealed footpath signpost to go down through the hedge onto a narrow path between fences.

In 175m **fork left** down a slope, still on the WW. The path levels out and in 250m you cross the River Medway on a new footbridge. Go up to and straight across the **Forest Way**³ (Cycle Route 21) via a pair of stiles. Follow a faint grassy path **S** across a large meadow for 400m. In the next meadow continue in much the same direction to meet the B2110 just to the right of Hewkins bridge.

Turn left onto the road, **taking care as there is no pavement**. On the other side of the narrow bridge, cross over and **fork right** up a lane signposted to the church of St Michael and All Angels. In 75m you come to a junction of lanes, with the church up a small hill on your left.

The route now loops out to the Dorset Arms and returns via the churchyard, so you could visit the church immediately after lunch. If you are not stopping at this pub, however, you could simply head directly up the slope to visit the church and then resume the directions at [•] in §3 (or in §8 for the Short Walk).

To head for the pub, **turn sharp left** at the junction of lanes, almost doubling back. The path curves round to the right past a few cottages and then goes down between trees to return to the B2110. Continue along the pavement, crossing the road carefully where it continues on the other side. The path nips behind a hedge and goes past the village hall; where it emerges the **Dorset Arms** is ahead of you on the other side of the road.

If you are doing the Short Walk, go to §8.

3. Withyham to Five Hundred Acre Wood (3½ km)

From the pub, return to the B2110 and turn left, joining the **High Weald Landscape Trail**⁴ (HWLT). As before, you have to cross over carefully to the pavement on the other side, then back again after going past the village hall. Instead of continuing on the pavement, **go through a metal kissing gate in the hedge** and follow the grassy path up a slope to a wooden kissing gate at the top. Enter the churchyard and follow the path round to the far side of the church of **St Michael and All Angels**⁵ to find its entrance.

[•] After visiting the church, turn right onto the path. Ignore a private path on the left leading to the Rectory (the handsome building with a Georgian façade) but veer left down the next path. Go down its driveway to the junction of lanes and **turn sharp left** onto the Private Drive heading **S**, with route markers for both the WW and HWLT. You pass some interesting old houses on the left, the first one (with the curious 'sawn-off' corner) being **Monk's House**⁶.

Stay on this lane (soon leaving the HWLT), ignoring all ways off. After 1½ km go past a cattle grid. 200m later, where the way ahead to Fisher's Gate is blocked by a gate, go over a stile to the left of another gated driveway. Continue along the edge of a field, with the drive behind a fence on your right.

Follow the path downhill, round to the right and over a stile as it goes into Five Hundred Acre Wood⁷. After the path joins the driveway, keep ahead at a crossing. Keep right at a series of junctions to stay on a surfaced lane as it bends right and later goes downhill, ignoring several forestry tracks off to the left.

At the bottom go past Kovacs Lodge and continue uphill on a rough track, heading **W**. In 250m the path curves to the left at the top of the slope. 25m later the path forks, with the WW signposted to the left.

If you are doing the Long Walk, go to §5.

4. Five Hundred Acre Wood to Posingford Wood (1½ km)

For the **Main Walk fork right** at the path junction, leaving the WW and heading **W**. In 500m the path goes across a stream on a wooden footbridge and then curves up to the right, merging with a potentially muddy sunken track. Follow this up a slope to the B2026 and turn left onto the road, heading **SW**.

In 150m, having passed a sign for Chuck Hatch, **turn right** at a footpath sign. After going over a stile old OS maps show the right of way as continuing straight ahead, but you will have to skirt around a horse training ground if the path has been diverted. Either way, make your way to the far side.

Go over another stile and bear right onto a wide track heading **NW**, with a large field on your left. In 200m, at the end of the field, **turn left** onto an enclosed grassy path. In a further 200m go over a stile into Posingford Wood. The path soon comes to a broad track and you **turn sharp right** onto it.

Continue the directions at §7.

5. Five Hundred Acre Wood to Gills Lap car park (4¼ km)

For the **Long Walk fork left** at the path junction, staying on the WW and heading **S**. Keep to the main path as indicated by footpath markers, climbing steadily through the large wood. In 450m you fork right, then in another 200m go over a path crossing and past a wooden gate to enter the Access Land of **Ashdown Forest**⁸.

Continue climbing on the main path through the wood, now heading **SW**. In 600m, **fork right** to emerge onto open heathland, with fine views over to your right.

You will be following the WW for a further 2 km, with the white-painted notches on the top of the short signposts helpfully indicating the direction. After a while you should be able to see Gills Lap car park ahead on your right, across a valley; there are several possible short cuts to it but the recommended route stays on the high ground for the best views.

Continue to follow the WW signposts on a broad ride across Ashdown Forest, initially **S** and later curving gently to the right above a valley⁹. At one point the route briefly becomes a narrow path through the edge of a clump of trees and then merges with a ride from the left. 100m after this, fork right in front of another large clump of trees and take the left fork (virtually straight on) 100m later.

You are now walking parallel to a road¹⁰ a little way off to your left (mostly shielded by trees). As you reach the highest point in this part of Ashdown Forest there are fine views ahead of the South Downs. Eventually you come to a T-junction with a broad ride, 50m before reaching another road. **Turn right** onto this ride, leaving the WW and joining the **Vanguard Way**¹¹ (VGW), to walk parallel to the road towards Gills Lap car park.

There are even better views from the other side of the road, but no convenient paths.

After a while the ride goes downhill; bear left as it levels out to stay fairly near the road. In 50m fork right in front of some gorse bushes and continue up to the B2026. Cross the road to enter Gills Lap car park.

6. Gills Lap car park to Posingford Wood (2¼ km)

From an information board to the right of some trees at the back of the car park, head **N** across a grassy area and bear right onto a broad ride along the ridge, with fine views to the north-west. In 400m you come to Gills Lap Clump¹² and a trig point on your right.

The recommended route now takes a short detour off to the left, but if you simply continue ahead on the ride for 200m you will find the Memorial through a gap in the trees on your left, shortly after passing a large sandpit on the right.

Instead of continuing on the broad ride, **turn left** on a grassy path heading **NW**. About 20m before reaching a pine tree growing in a hollow¹³, **turn right** (leaving the VGW) onto a narrow path which winds through gorse bushes. In 200m you emerge at a viewpoint with a bronze memorial plaque to AA Milne and EF Shepard, the author and illustrator of the Winnie-the-Pooh stories.

Leave the viewpoint through the gap in the trees to the right of the memorial and turn left onto the broad ride (the direct route from Gills Lap Clump), going quite steeply downhill in places. In 500m, where a path ahead leads to Wren's Warren car park, bear left to veer around it. In a further 350m, fork left into a lightly wooded area. Later the path swings right and a straight stretch through the trees brings you to a minor road (Chuck Hatch Lane).

Cross over the road onto a broad track, which goes past Pooh car park and down through Posingford Wood. 250m from the car park there is a footpath crossing where the Main Walk route joins from the right.

7. Posingford Wood to Hartfield (2½ or 2¾ km)

Go downhill on the broad track, heading **N**. In 250m it curves left to cross a stream on a wooden footbridge, then comes to a junction with the original bridleway. Turn right and follow the main track for another 150m to reach **Pooh Bridge**, where it is of course obligatory to play a few games of Pooh Sticks¹⁴.

Cross the bridge and continue on the bridleway, which in 250m joins a farm track and comes to a lane. Bear left onto the lane, then 100m later **go over a stile on the right**. Go across a field (slightly to the right) on a grassy path and over another stile into the next field. Go up to its top right-hand corner (with fine views behind you) and leave via another stile.

Bear right across a junction of driveways to go through a kissing gate. Head **E** on an enclosed path, with the grounds of a new estate on your left. In 250m **turn left** at a three-way footpath signpost onto a path alongside a high wooden fence. Follow the path gently downhill through some trees, later with a field on your right.

In 300m go past a wooden fieldgate onto a driveway and out to the B2110. Turn right and walk along the pavement, keeping left at a road junction to go up Hartfield's High Street. **Piglet's Tearoom** at the Pooh Corner shop is on the left in 125m.

To complete a Circular Walk back to Ashurst, go to §9.



- **Finishing in Hartfield (+¼ km)**

Continue up the High Street into the centre of the village. The bus stop for East Grinstead is opposite the village stores; the stop for Tunbridge Wells is just past the junction with Church Street, where the **Anchor Inn** can provide further refreshment.

8. Withyham to Hartfield (3 km)

From the pub, return to the B2110 and turn left, joining the **High Weald Landscape Trail**⁴ (HWLT). As before, you have to cross over carefully to the pavement on the other side, then back again after going past the village hall. Instead of continuing on the pavement, *go through a metal kissing gate in the hedge* and follow the grassy path up a slope to a wooden kissing gate at the top. Enter the churchyard and follow the path round to the far side of the church of **St Michael and All Angels**⁵ to find its entrance.

[•] After visiting the church, turn right onto the path. Ignore a private path on the left leading to the Rectory (the handsome building with a Georgian façade) but veer left down the next path. Go down its driveway to the junction of lanes and *turn sharp left* onto the Private Drive heading **S**, with route markers for both the WW and HWLT. You pass some interesting old houses on the left, the first one (with the curious 'sawn-off' corner) being **Monk's House**⁶.

In 300m, just after the driveway to Forstal Cottage, *go over a stile on the right* with an HWLT marker (leaving the WW). Follow the grassy path across the field towards a large oak tree, with a tall stone tower¹⁵ up ahead on the left. On the far side the path goes into a small wood where you may have to negotiate some muddy patches. Keep to the main path as it heads **W**, then turns left at the edge of the wood. You soon come to an earth track where you *turn sharp right* to cross a stone bridge over a stream.

Go along the right-hand field edge towards Forstal Farm, heading **NW**. After passing the farmhouse continue through a small grassy area into the bottom corner of a large field. Do not continue up its right-hand edge but *turn half-left* to head **W** on a faint grassy path, climbing gently towards a line of tall trees 250m away. Aim for a footpath post in a gap between two of the trees and continue past it in the same direction.

On the far side of the field go over a stile and *turn half-left* to go diagonally across the next field. In the opposite corner go through a gap in the trees into another field and continue along a grassy track down its right-hand edge. In 175m follow the track round to the right to come out onto the B2026.

Turn right onto the road, *taking care as there is no pavement* for 60m, where it meets the B2110. Keep right at this junction to go up Hartfield's High Street. **Piglet's Tearoom** at the Pooh Corner shop is on the left in 125m.



9. Hartfield to Summerford Farm (2¾ km)

Continue up the High Street into the centre of the village. Shortly after passing the village stores on the left, *turn right* into Church Street, passing the **Anchor Inn** on your left and several picturesque cottages.

At the top of this short street *turn left* under part of Lych Gate Cottage¹⁶ into the churchyard of **St Mary the Virgin**¹⁷. Follow the path along its left-hand side, passing a magnificent tulip tree. Exit down steps onto a tarmac path past a school and continue on a driveway leading to a small green. Keep ahead through a gate and go across the green on a tarmac path to reach the B2110.

Cross the main road carefully and continue along a side street just off to the right, Castlefields. At a T-junction at the end of this residential street, turn right into Mottefield. Ignore a cul-de-sac on the left, but 20m later **turn left** onto a tarmac footpath towards a stile. Go over this into a field and turn right to head **E** on a grassy path, away from a ¹⁸. In 100m cross a ditch and go up to a gap in the hedge ahead.

Cross a stile here and follow the left-hand field edge, initially heading **NE** and slowly curving round to the right. 100m after entering a second field, **veer left** through a gap in the hedge and head diagonally across another field. In the far corner go through a fieldgate, up a bank and straight across the Forest Way via two stiles.

Cross a footbridge over the River Medway and continue with a wire fence on your left. At the top of a slope ignore a footpath into the field ahead and **go over a stile on your right** onto a broad grassy strip, then through some trees. The path leads into the corner of a large field and you continue along its top left-hand edge. At the far corner go through a wooden gate and down into a wood. The path soon merges with a footpath coming up from the right.

For the next 600m you retrace your outward route through Summerford Farm.

Keep ahead on the path, soon with a fence on your right. At the end veer left through a gap in the hedge to emerge on a broad grassy track. Turn right to go gently downhill, keeping right at the bottom to join a tarmac driveway. Follow this out past the converted buildings of Summerford Farm and then **turn left** onto a lane, leaving your outward route.

10. Summerford Farm to Ashurst Station (3¼ km)

Head **NE** along the lane, climbing steadily for about 300m. Where it levels out and turns left at Summerford Cottage, **keep ahead** on the driveway to Hale Court Farm, signposted as a bridleway.

In 300m ignore a rough track going straight on and stay on the driveway as it curves right, soon passing a house on the left and going gently downhill. **The next turning is not signposted**. 200m past the house, where the field on the left ends at a hedge, **turn left** off the track to head **N** alongside the hedge.

In 75m go over a stile into the next field and continue down its right-hand edge. In the bottom corner cross a stile and a plank bridge to go through a small plantation. In 100m keep ahead at a path crossing. Go through some trees and cross a stream on a wooden footbridge to emerge in the corner of a large field.

Turn right and follow the field edge round a long curve to the left. In the far corner go through a wooden gate and turn right to go through a gap in the trees into a large field. Keep ahead across this field, aiming for a point about 100m to the left of the far right-hand corner if there is no clear path.

On the far side make your way through a belt of trees into the corner of a long field bordering the River Medway. **Bear left** and go alongside the meandering river for 800m, initially heading **N**.

At the end of this long stretch you can see Ashurst station across the river and **veer right** onto a path which crosses it a weir. Follow this dank path under the railway to the A264 and turn right onto the main road. Ignore a cul-de-sac on the right, then turn right into the access road to the station. Cross the footbridge to Platform 1 for trains to London.

Walk Notes

1. The **Sussex Border Path** runs for 240 km along the length of West & East Sussex, from Thorney Island on the Hampshire border to Rye.
2. The **Wealdway** runs for 130 km through the Kent and Sussex Weald, from Gravesend on the Thames estuary to the outskirts of Eastbourne.

3. The **Forest Way Country Park** is the rather grand name for part of an old railway line which ran from Three Bridges to Tunbridge Wells via East Grinstead. This branch line was closed by Beeching in 1966 and these 15 km (from East Grinstead to Groombridge) are now a popular cycle route.
4. The **High Weald Landscape Trail** runs for 145 km across the length of the High Weald, mostly near its northern edge, from Horsham in West Sussex to Rye.
5. Most of the medieval **St Michael and All Angels, Withyham** was rebuilt after it was struck by lightning in 1663. Near the entrance hang full-size photographic reproductions of four 14thC paintings of scenes from Christ's Passion by the Florentine artist, Niccolo Gerini. In the **Sackville Chapel**, the central monument of Thomas Sackville and his parents by Caius Gabriel Cibber was described by Pevsner as having "a directness of feeling and expression unprecedented in England".
6. The curious 'sawn-off' aspect of the north-west corner of **Monk's House** is attributed to one 19thC Rector who wanted to see Old Buckhurst, the home of his ancestors, from the **Rectory**.
7. **Hundred Aker Wood** in the Winnie-the-Pooh stories.
8. **Ashdown Forest** did not impress William Cobbett. A diary entry from January 1822 recorded in his *Rural Rides* vividly describes it as "verily the most villainously ugly spot I saw in England... getting, if possible, uglier and uglier all the way".
9. **Eeyore's Sad and Gloomy Place** in the stories.
10. On this section you are following the line of the **Roman road** from London to Lewes. Traces of it can be seen at the Roman Road car park near Camp Hill, about 1½ km off the walk route.
11. The **Vanguard Way** runs for 105 km "from the suburbs to the sea", from Croydon in south London to Newhaven in East Sussex.
12. In the stories, Christopher Robin called **Gills Lap Clump** "The Enchanted Place" because nobody had ever been able to count whether there were sixty-three or sixty-four trees in the circle.
13. Take care as you approach this pine tree, as it is evidently the site of Pooh's **Heffalump Trap**.
14. At **Pooh Bridge** you might have to queue with tourists to play the deceptively simple game of **Pooh Sticks** (the Pooh Corner shop in Hartfield will sell you the Official Rules). Contestants are requested to bring their own sticks, although the *cognoscenti* know that Pooh invented the game with fir-cones.
15. The stone gatehouse of **Old Buckhurst** is all that remains of the Sackville's original family seat. In its time it was one of the largest houses in England, similar in size to the one later granted to them by Elizabeth I (Knole).
16. **Lych Gate Cottage** does indeed incorporate the gate into the churchyard, an unusual arrangement.
17. **St Mary the Virgin, Hartfield** is a mixture of styles dating from the 13th-15thC, but was heavily restored in Victorian times.
18. The mound is all that remains of an old **Motte and Bailey** fortification, as indicated by the nearby street names Mottefield and Castlefields.

» *Last updated: August 15, 2018*

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