



Balcombe to East Grinstead walk

Gentle wooded hills, Wakehurst Place Gardens (NT) and a reservoir

Wakehurst Place, Priest House & Weir Wood

Length 17.2km (10.7 miles), 5 hours. For the whole outing, including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 9 hours.

Toughness 6 out of 10.

OS Maps Explorer 135 or Landranger 187. Balcombe, map reference TQ 306 302, is in **West Sussex**, 7km south-east of Crawley.

Features This walk has a fair number of relatively gentle uphill and downhill, but is well worth the effort.

It starts in the old village of Balcombe, passes Balcombe House, and then goes through the woods and by the lake of Balcombe Estate (which you can swim in), up to a farm that can be extremely muddy in wet weather, to reach the National Trust gardens and Tudor mansion at Wakehurst Place around mid-morning. Wakehurst has a manor house and large landscaped gardens. Free entry for NT and RBS members, the flowers are best in spring.

From there the route passes through further woods to the Priest House Museum, Norman church and the lunchtime pub in West Hoathly, the second highest point in Sussex.

After lunch, the route is through Giffards Wood then past the Stone Farm climbing rocks (sandstone rocks formed from the bodies of plants and invertebrates, and used as shelters in mesolithic and neolithic times), leading to the shoreline of the Weir Wood Reservoir (which you cannot swim in - enforced) and nature reserve (home to the great crested grebe, heron and osprey) – the very energetic could at this point detour to the National Trust estate at Standen – finally reaching the station via a walk along a stream and through potentially very muddy fields that mark the outer edges of East Grinstead.

Walk Options There is a bus service (not Sundays) about every two hours from the shelter outside the Cat Inn in West Hoathly to East Grinstead and (in the other direction) to Three Bridges station, which is on the same line as Balcombe.

History The poet **Shelley** lived for a time in Balcombe's Highley Manor. The present queen was a bridesmaid at a wedding in Balcombe Church before the war. **Balcombe House**, privately owned, was part-gutted by fire in 1995.

Wakehurst Place (tel [01444 894 066](tel:01444894066)) dates from Norman times, but the Tudor manor house with its sandstone walls was built in 1590 by Sir Edward Culpeper, a distant relative of Nicholas Culpeper who published the famous herbal compendium in 1651. Wakehurst is leased from the National Trust by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. The gardens are divided into geographical themes, such as Himalayan, Chinese and North American. Wakehurst is the World's largest seed conservation project and by 2010 it had conserved seeds from 10 % of the World's known plant species. Admission (2019) is £12.95. National Trust members have free admission to the gardens, but pay for car parking. Opening hours are March to October 10am to 6pm daily, November to February 10am to 4.30pm daily (but closed December 24th & 25th).

The timber-framed [Priest House Museum](#) in West Hoathly is managed by the Sussex Archaeological Trust. Admission (2019) is £5.00. The house and garden are open from March to October, 10.30am to 5.30pm Tuesday to Saturday (also Mondays in August and Bank Holidays), noon to 5.30pm Sunday.

[St Margaret's Church](#) in West Hoathly has a magnificent coffin-shaped chest, probably thirteenth-century, which was used to collect money for the crusades; it also has a brass memorial to Ann Tree, the last woman to be burned at the stake in England. There are fine views from the terraced churchyard which is worth visiting.

The **Cat Inn** (see below) once had a tunnel under it, which a past murderer is said to have used to reach the pub for refuge. There is a well under one of the rooms, which can be seen through a circular glass panel in the floor.

Travel

Take the train nearest to **9.40am** from **London Bridge** Station to **Balcombe**; journey time 40 minutes. On Sundays the service is from **Victoria** ; journey time 50 minutes. Trains back from **East Grinstead** go to **Victoria** and are half hourly; journey time 50 minutes. **Rail ticket** : remains tricky: as of October 2017, the cheapest option is probably a Thameslink single from London Bridge to Balcombe, with railcard, then a separate off peak single from East Grinstead to London Victoria. Alternatively, and the more technically correct, is buy a day return to Balcombe plus a single from East Grinstead to East Croydon. You can try to get away with a Balcombe return (any route permitted), by showing your ticket to the station staff at East Grinstead and asking them to let you through - you might be lucky - but if you have your ticket rejected at the station barriers, in all probability you will be required to buy a single ticket to East Croydon.

This walk is not recommended for car drivers unless you are prepared to take a taxi back to your car, as there is no convenient public transport link (train or bus) from East Grinstead back to Balcombe.

Lunch

On days when it is open, you could have brunch at the **Balcombe Tea Rooms** (open from 10.30am Tuesday to Saturday) near the start.

You could stop at **Wakehurst Place**, about 5km (3 miles) from the start: the Seed Café is in the Visitor Centre while visitors to the gardens also have the choice of lunch in the Stables restaurant.

The suggested lunchtime stop is the [Cat Inn](#) (tel [01342 810 369](tel:01342810369)) in West Hoathly, halfway through the walk, which serves very good but fairly expensive food from an extensive menu plus daily specials from midday to 2pm Monday to Thursday (2.30pm Friday and weekends). This is a very popular pub and walker friendly and 'phoning ahead with numbers is essential, particularly on Sundays.

Tea

The suggested tea stop is **The Old Dunnings Mill pub** (tel [01342 821 080](tel:01342821080)), about 2km before the end of the walk. Allow 30 minutes from here to reach the station.

Near the station is the **Starbucks** at East Grinstead Sainsbury's (tel [01342 303 167](tel:01342303167)).

There is a pub in the town centre, about 300m beyond the station - go right on Station Approach at the roundabout just before the station.

Updates

General update and re-write June 2017.

Help Us!

After the walk, we would love to get your [feedback](#)

You can upload photos to the [SWC Group on Flickr](#), and [videos to Youtube](#). This walk's tags are:



By Car

Start RH17 6JQ **Finish** RH19 1EB

It is not easy to return to the start by car, as the stations are on different rail lines.

Help

National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Travelline SE (bus times): 0871 200 2233 (12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234

Version

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Walk Directions

The [numbers] and sketch map they refer to, is only in the book.

1. Note: There is a circuitous route at the outset to avoid walking along a main road, but this involves going down some steps, which are very slippery in wet weather. If you would rather avoid these steps, leave the station by the main exit and turn left on to the main road, heading north; in 350 metres turn right into Bramble Hill and continue the directions at [*] below.
2. For the main route: **[1]** Coming off the train from London at **Balcombe Station**, go over the footbridge and down the platform on the other side. Exit to the right just before the tunnel, then go through the car park, due south. In 100 metres, where this approach road meets the B2036 road, take the signposted footpath *to the right*, downhill and heading south-west. In 15 metres cross a stile and in 20 metres cross another, to go down a flight of steps (which are very slippery in wet weather, so make use of the handrail on your left), to come out on to a lane at the bottom.
3. *Turn right* on to this tarmac lane (Rocks Lane), due north initially. Continue along it for 600 metres, back past the station on your right-hand side, under the railway line and steeply up to the main road.
4. Cross diagonally over the B2036 London Road and [*] continue straight on up Bramble Hill, as indicated by a prominent white finger signpost for Balcombe Village, Tea Rooms, Pub and Shops, your direction 40°.
5. Go up into the village, past the **Balcombe Tea Rooms** on your left, to the crossroads. Take the second turning *on the left*, passing first the Half Moon Inn, then The Balcombe Stores on your left-hand side. In 30 metres, at the end of this road, you come to the gateway with white gateposts to Balcombe House.
6. **[2]** Here *turn right* along a signed footpath, down a tarmac drive, your direction 60°. In 100 metres, as the drive swings to the right, by a three-armed footpath sign, *go through* the rusty metal kissing gate on your left-hand side and take the path ahead, your direction initially 10°, with Balcombe House to your left. Go down the field (which can be soggy or waterlogged in winter), staying close to the left-hand field edge, in 70 metres passing either side of a large oak tree in the middle of the field and later following the grassy way down into an overgrown (and often muddy) area (if you stray to the right here, you will eventually come to a corner of the field with no exit).
7. At the end of the field, by a two-armed footpath sign, go through a wooden kissing gate and continue ahead into the woods. After 100 metres, you come to a path junction marked by a three-armed footpath sign and *turn right*, your direction 120°. Follow the footpath signs, ignoring other turn-offs. You are walking parallel to a stream below you and in quick succession you cross three bridges and one two plank bridge over a small stream or muddy areas. Follow the well-worn path through woodland, muddy in places, with **Balcombe Lake** glimpsed below through the trees. Soon you are walking near the edge of this lake (which connects with Ardingly Reservoir). The path swings round to the right to head due south.
8. Leave the edge of the lake by passing through a metal kissing gate, a two-armed footpath post on its left, to come out into a field. Follow its left-hand edge with the tree-line on your left-hand side and an open field on your right. In 100 metres, by a three-armed footpath sign, *turn half-left*, over a stream on planks then through a metal kissing gate, with a metal fieldgate to your left, into a field, your direction 70°. In 90 metres at the far side of the field, by a four-armed footpath sign, go through a metal kissing gate, a metal fieldgate to its right, and *bear left* on to the tarmac lane, to immediately cross a bridge with brick headwalls, with the lake on your left-hand side and a stepped waterfall on your right, your direction 60°. The lake, which belongs to the Balcombe Estate, is said to be good for fishing: pike and bream in winter; carp, bream, tench and roach in summer.
9. Carry on along this farm lane, steadily uphill. 400 metres beyond the lake, just after the lane has swung to the left, you come to a two-armed footpath sign on your left-hand side (which may be part hidden in the hedge). *Turn right* to cross over a stile, with a metal fieldgate to its left, and head down the left-hand side of a field, with a hedge on your left, your direction 100° (for what can be an extremely cow-churned muddy stretch in wet weather).
10. In 200 metres in the bottom left-hand corner of the field you come to a metal fieldgate and a stile, by a two-armed footpath sign. Go over the stile, your direction due north, and head straight ahead up and over the middle of a grassy field, to go past cow barns on your left-hand side. At the end of the field, and some 40 metres to the right of the farm buildings, keep ahead, slightly right, to go through an open metal fieldgate, with two-armed footpath signs to your left and right, to go along a farm track, with a field hedge on your right-hand side, and an open field on your left, your direction 50°. In 260 metres at the top of this track, by a three-armed footpath sign, you go past a metal fieldgate to rejoin the farm lane (now gravel).
11. Take the lane straight on, your direction 60°. After a bend to the right you come to a T-junction. *Turn right* on to the road and in 10 metres *turn left* over a stile, to head down the right-hand edge of a large, open field with treeline on your right, your direction due east, with a fine view over the valley. On the hills beyond you can see a huddle of buildings marking the outskirts of Wakehurst Place.
12. Keep the fence and a large house on your right-hand side. In 400 metres, **[3]** at the bottom of the field, *veer left*, with the edge of the woods now on your right-hand side and your direction 25°.

13. At a footpath sign in 150 metres, go through a wooden swing gate and *bear right* to go down a gully into **Tilgate Wood**. Soon it is steeply downhill with a stream visible below you.
14. At the bottom of the slope cross two planks over a stream, then a wooden bridge with one handrail and follow the footpath sign up the other side, over more planks with railings over waterlogged areas and eventually you pass through a wire-mesh kissing gate (a deer protection gate) into **Wakehurst Place** gardens. The public footpath, which is clearly signed, crosses an earth and gravel path and heads up through light woodland. In 140 metres at the top of the slope the path crosses a track (with a footpath sign No 45 on your left) to go up two steps and in 10 metres you go through a wooden swing gate into a large field which once was a deer farm (the deer protection fencing and mesh gates have long gone). Follow the direction of a black arrow on a footpath post up along the middle of this field, steadily uphill, along a clear grassy way, your direction 65°
15. In 385 metres you go through a wooden swing gate to go along a gravel drive which in 30 metres joins a Wakehurst Place surfaced estate road. On your right you have the signed access road to Wakehurst Farm. Keep ahead on the estate road, gently uphill, with a high brick wall on your right. You pass the new Botanical Gardens Seed Bank building on your left and some 160 metres along this road [4] the road swings to the left and you follow the footpath signs. For those not visiting the gardens or café, the route is straight along the road (North Drive) for 200 metres, then over a cattle grid and, in another 200 metres, reaching the main road (the B2028) by 1 Yew Tree Cottage, where you *turn left*.
16. Many walkers with time to spare, however, will be tempted to visit **Wakehurst Place** or the **Seed Café** in its Visitor Centre. To do this, continue ahead on the path signposted 'carpark and exit' up to the Visitor Centre, which contains the ticket office and café. Afterwards, rejoin the main walk by going down the car exit road to the B2028 T-junction and *turning left*, coming in 300 metres to the main walk's exit by 1 Yew Tree Cottage.
17. Carry on along a grassy embankment to the left of the busy B2028. In 225 metres cross the road carefully just past Beech Cottage and *turn right* down a clearly signposted bridleway between cottages, your direction 135°, and so into the woods.
18. In 100 metres, with a metal fieldgate and a two-armed footpath sign over to your right, the path turns *sharply to the left* steeply downhill, now a mud track, and in 60 metres you come down to a T-junction with a broad track where you *turn right* by another bridleway sign, your direction 125°.
19. In 75 metres, just before entrance gates with "Private - no public right of way" signs on both gateposts, and by a three-armed footpath sign *take the bridleway on the left* between ponds, your direction due east. In 250 metres, a stream tumbles noisily under the path, after which it can be treacherously muddy uphill.
20. In 400 metres [5], *bear right* with the bridleway, where the path to the left is a footpath. You pass several houses and come out, slightly left, on to a car-wide lane signposted as a public bridleway, your direction 105°.
21. In 40 metres you *fork left* (following another bridleway sign), your direction now 65°. Follow this lane in roughly the same direction for 1km, passing Lambs Philpots Quarry on your left-hand side, to meet Hook Lane at a bend.
22. Continue straight ahead on Hook Lane to go into the village of **West Hoathly**. After a bend to the left you pass the **Priest House Museum**, then several other interesting old houses on your left. The suggested lunch stop, the **Cat Inn**, is ahead of you, just past **St Margaret's Church** (which is worth a visit).
23. After lunch, *turn right* out of the pub and *right again* by the bus shelter. Carry on up this tarmac road (North Lane) for 400 metres, your direction 20°, past the village school on your right-hand side and ignoring a public footpath off to the left.
24. When you come to the main road, *cross straight over* into the entrance to West Hoathly Garage (with its collection of vintage cars). *Go immediately left*, following a public footpath sign down a narrow, asphalted lane, with the garage on your right-hand side, heading north.
25. In 200 metres, the asphalt ends by a garage on your left. Pass through a gravel car turning area and enter a wood on an earth path, gently downhill. In 75 metres ignore a fork to the left and in a further 15 metres go through a metal kissing gate to the left of a wooden gate and keep ahead, now in a cutting, downhill. In 70 metres, with a three-armed footpath sign on your left, ignore the fork left to a stile and keep ahead (slightly right). In another 40 metres, at another fork, by a three-armed footpath sign, *take the right fork*, downhill, with a sign for Gravetye Estate on your left, your direction now 40°.
26. You now continue downhill on this public footpath through Giffard's Wood for over 1km, heading north-east. In more detail:
27. In 500 metres, having ignored any ways off, your path comes to a T-junction with a car-wide earth track, and you *turn left*.
28. [!] 100 metres further on, as this track curves away to the left, *bear right* on to a footpath to resume your original direction, 45°, now back in woodland. In 300 metres go across a car-wide grass track and continue downhill.
29. In 200 metres leave the wood and cross a stile and across an open field, keeping more or less in the same direction, but now 30°, with a line of trees and a stream on your left-hand side and a couple of houses off to the right. Your way bears a quarter right as new houses come into view.

30. At the end of the field (but to the right of its lower, left-hand corner) cross a stile on to a car lane, with a hand written sign "Private Driveway to Birch farm" on your right. *Turn left* down this lane and in 90 metres, just after the lane has swung to the left and begins to go gently uphill, with a three-armed footpath sign on your right, *turn right* down a path between wooden close boarded fences, your direction 40°. In 70 metres cross a two plank bridge with a wooden handrail and in a further 15 metres cross a stile and head up the embankment of the **Bluebell Railway**, to cross over the single track and go down the other side. Go over a stile into the woods and follow the path, your direction 35°, parallel to the stream below you to your right.
31. In 90 metres exit the wood through a metal swing gate and keep ahead over a grassy field, heading towards an electricity pylon 140 metres away. Just before you reach this pylon. cross a two plank bridge with a wooden handrail. Pass the pylon over to your left and by a two-armed footpath sign *turn right* over a narrow steel bridge with wooden handrails over a stream with stiles at either end. Go into the next field and follow the grassy path *half-left* , heading north-east.
32. In 35 metres go through a gap in the field boundary and continue ahead, uphill on your grassy way. Having passed a three-armed footpath post over to your left on your way up this field, in 250 metres, at the edge of a wood at the top of the hill, you come to a three-armed footpath sign. [6]. Go through a metal swing gate and *turn right* onto a bridleway, a car-wide earth track, into woods, uphill, your direction 80°.
33. About 300 metres along this bridleway, you come to **Stone Farm Rocks**: soft sandstone used for rock climbing. They are covered with a profusion of climbers' bolts and are lined with rope marks, and provide platforms for fine views of the valley below, including **Weir Wood Reservoir** away to your left.
34. From the end of the rocks the bridleway starts to go downhill and in 210 metres you come down to a car road, with Stonehill House opposite. Cross over this road and *turn right* downhill, taking care on this busy road. In 35 metres, as the road swings to the right, *turn left* on a surfaced lane, which leads down to the reservoir.
35. 350 metres along this lane, you pass under pylons. Ignore a turning on the left leading into a car park, but where you come to a large pair of gates blocking the lane, *follow the footpath sign left*. You will now be more or less following the side of the reservoir on the **Sussex Border Path** for the next 1.5km, until your turn-off to the left at [7]. Note: in summer some of the paths can be overgrown. In more detail:
36. In 110 metres the path turns sharply to the right. In 50 metres turn right to go over three planks over a stream and in a further 10 metres go through a metal swing gate. In 60 metres, by a three-armed footpath sign, you come to a Countryside Commission information panel describing Standen Rocks and Weir Wood. The footpath off to the left takes you to **Standen House**, but the main walk route continues straight on, going under pylons, with the lake over to your right.
37. In 80 metres the path turns sharply to the left. In a further 150 metres pass a broken stile to your left, by a three-armed footpath sign and in 5 metres go through a metal swing gate. The path swings to the right and in 35 metres you cross a two plank wooden bridge with handrail to come out into an open field, with treeline to your right. Keep ahead along the right-hand edge of this field, now back on the Sussex Border Path.
38. In 300 metres, in the corner of the field, you cross a stile and head back into woodland. Continue along the path (a muddy section), in the next 80 metres ignoring two metal gates on the left leading into fields, going over a two plank footbridge between the gates.
39. 150 metres from the second gate, your path bends left to run parallel to the reservoir shore again and passes a wooden bench. In 40 metres by a three-armed footpath sign ignore a stile on your left. In 80 metres pass to the right of a redundant stile and come out into a large field. Keep along its right-hand edge with hedge and treeline on your right, your direction 40°
40. In 270 metres [7], at the end of the field, by a three-armed footpath post, leave the Sussex Border Path ahead by *turning left* with the treeline now on your right, up the right-hand edge of the field. You are now heading away from the reservoir, and 1.75km in this direction (roughly northwards) will bring you to the outskirts of East Grinstead at [8]. In more detail:
41. In 40 metres go through a gap in the hedge boundary and in 20 metres exit the boundary woodland strip and head up a grassy field, aiming to the right of an electricity pylon, your direction 310°. In 100 metres pass the pylon and keep ahead, slightly right, now along the left-hand edge of a field, with treeline to your left. In 150 metres, at the top left corner of the field, go through a metal kissing gate between metal fieldgates, with a two-armed footpath sign on your right.
42. In 5 metres, with a three-armed footpath sign on your right, ignore a stile into the wood on your left and keep ahead over the next field, gradually heading towards its left-hand field edge. In 50 metres you pass under overhead wires and in a further 100 metres, now at the field edge, you pass a pond on your left behind the treeline. In another 100 metres, pass through a propped open rusty metal fieldgate (or climb over it when closed) and enter a strip of woodland, with a broken two-armed footpath sign on your right.
43. In 40 metres exit this wood by going through a metal kissing gate to the left of a metal fieldgate and head north across the field, gently downhill, towards another metal kissing gate 140 metres away leading into another wood.
44. Enter the wood, following the footpath sign. In 20 metres ignore a footpath off to the left, then in a further 80 metres keep ahead (slightly right) at a faint junction take the right fork. In 100 metres, go down earthen steps to a two plank bridge to cross a stream

and then up earthen steps on the other side to exit the wood through a wooden swing gate.

45. Turn half-right to follow the field edge, with a hedge and later a fence on your right-hand side and an open field on your left. In 100 metres the path goes down into a dip and up the other side, then in another 150 metres you go through a wooden fieldgate on to a broad path through a strip of woodland.
46. In 30 metres as you leave this wood by another fieldgate, East Grinstead church is visible on the horizon up ahead, slightly to the left. Aim slightly to the right of the church to pick up a faint grassy path across the field. In 160 metres you pass a small pond on your right with a tree surround. In another 100 metres go through a wooden swing gate by a two-armed footpath sign and cross a ditch on planks. Keep on down the next field.
47. In 150 metres you pass under some power lines and go through a wooden swing gate [8]. [!] Do not continue down to the metal footbridge over a stream, but instead *turn left* on to a narrow path with a hedge on your left and woods on your right. In 25 metres go over a two plank bridge with wooden handrail, earthen steps either side, and in 60 metres the path swings to the left, with a mesh fence on your left and woodland strip on your right.
48. In 120 metres, with a two-armed footpath sign on your left, drop down to cross a stream, head through the woodland strip, with the stream on your right and in 20 metres *turn left* through metal barriers to come out on to a tarmac path, with a playground behind a wooden fence on your left.
49. In 160 metres the path comes out on to Dunnings Road opposite **The Old Dunnings Mill pub**, the suggested tea place. Coming out of the pub, *turn right* (Note: the building that used to be the Dunnings Mill Snooker and Social Club has been incorporated into the pub). Go past the path on your left which you came down on, and in 15 metres, with a green footpath sign on the pavement over to your left [!] *turn right* into Streatfield Place, a new residential development. The path heads up into this development and at its cul de sac end follow the footpath sign ahead along a path over rough ground, bearing right to pass the pub's car park over to your right. The path now swings to the left, with treeline and hedges on your left and fences to house back gardens on your right.
50. In 145 metres go through a metal kissing gate and the path now has a mesh fence with open fields beyond on your left and the treeline on your right. Continue along the right-hand field edge. In 140 metres pass to the right of a redundant metal kissing gate and in a further 150 metres go through a metal swing gate to cross a stream on a wooden bridge with handrails. Continue in the same direction, north-west, for another 400 metres, crossing more plank bridges and going through one metal kissing gate and one wooden swing gate, eventually passing a duck pond on your left (with some unusual species).
51. At the end of the duck pond pass to the right of a redundant stile and keep ahead, on a grassy path, with back gardens on your right. In 80 metres the path becomes a track but you *turn right* through a wooden swing gate and turn left onto a narrow fenced-in path, with hedges on both sides. [!] But if this path is overgrown, stay on the track for 80 metres up to the road and exit through the fieldgate when propped open or climb over it when locked).
52. The narrow path comes out onto a main road (Turners Hill Road) - the B2110 - where you *turn right*. In 35 metres, at the roundabout, *turn left*, following the direction of the road sign "London - B2110 (A22)". Keep uphill on this road (Brooklands Way), following it round to the right and all the way up the hill, ignoring turn-offs. **Starbucks**, in **Sainsbury's** supermarket on your left-hand side, is the easiest place to stop for refreshment at this point.
53. Coming out of Sainsbury's, *turn right* along the edge of the building. At the corner *turn right* to go along the supermarket's access road. **East Grinstead Station** is ahead of you, on your left.

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