

Morning last checked	Afternoon last checked	East Grinstead ending check	
3 March 2024	3 March 2024	2 December 2021	
	Document last updated: 7 March 2024		
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## Forest Row Circular

### The high heathlands of Ashdown Forest

<b>Length:</b>	<b>Forest Row Circular</b>	17.7km (11 miles)
	<b>Morning only</b>	7.7km (4.8 miles)
	<b>Afternoon only</b>	10km (6.2 miles)
	<b>Extension to East Grinstead</b>	adds 5.5km (3.4 miles)

**Toughness:** 4 out of 10: mainly level, but with some gentle hills

**Maps:** OS Landranger 187 & 188; Explorer 135.

### Features

This walk explores the interesting high heathlands of Ashdown Forest, with extensive views both south and north (there is for example a distant view of the South Downs in the early stages of this walk).

The heaths are particularly beautiful from August to mid September, when the purple heather is at its best, and from March to May when there is plenty of gorse in bloom. In the afternoon the walk passes the Ashdown Forest Visitor Centre, which has lots of interesting displays about this unique habitat.

The walk is not all heathland, however. Interspersed with it are sections across some pleasant green valleys, as well as some woodland. For lunch there is a pub with a fine garden.

**Special note:** these directions aim to be comprehensive, but need careful following on the heath sections, where once you are lost it is very hard to re-discover the route.

### Walk options

The **270 bus** (see *Transport over*) carries on from Forest Row to pass the Red Lion in Chelwood Gate, the recommended lunch pub, enabling you to do just the **morning** (7.7km/4.8 miles) or **afternoon** (10km/6.2 miles) of this walk. Last buses back are at roughly 8pm Monday to Friday. 7.40pm on Saturdays and 6pm on Sundays, but the timetable changes regularly, so do check.

On a spring or summer evening it is possible to **extend the walk to East Grinstead** (5.5km/3.4 miles) in just over an hour on the path along the old railway line. See paragraph 110 of the walk directions on page 7

The **Horsted Keynes Circular** walk on this website shares the same lunch pub as this walk (see paragraph 54 of the walk directions on page 5), so you could combine the morning of one walk and the afternoon of the other to make a linear walk. **Forest Row to Horsted Keynes** is 16.2km (10.6 miles) while **Horsted Keynes to Forest Row** (probably the better of the two combinations) is 18.9km (11.7 miles)

## Transport

Unlike most other walks on this website, this one requires a **bus ride** as well as a train to reach the start. But the bus leaves from right outside the station and only takes 13 minutes. The fare is currently £2.60 one way or £3.40 return. If there are four or five of you, it may be not much more expensive to squeeze into a taxi.

First you need to take a train from **Victoria** to East Grinstead. These leave every 30 minutes, and the train at **9.25** is a good one to take in order to reach the lunch pub in good time.

Coming out of East Grinstead station, turn half left to find the bus stop just outside the station. Here take the **291** or **270 buses** to **Forest Row** (*the ultimate destination of the buses being Tunbridge Wells for the 291 or Brighton for the 270*). Both buses are hourly Monday to Saturday, with the 270 currently at 5 past the hour and the 291 at 41 past the hour. On Sunday the buses run every two hours, the only convenient buses being the 9.25 and 11.25 for the 270 and the 9.41 and 11.41 for the 291.

Get off the bus in at the 'Brambletye' stop in Forest Row, which is the first one after you enter the village, with the Chequers Inn on your left.

The **return bus** leaves from the opposite side of the road, just outside the Brambletye Hotel. The last bus is late in the evening Monday to Saturday, but at only around 6pm on Sundays. **If you miss the bus** it is a 5.5km (3.4 mile) walk to East Grinstead up the old railway line - see paragraph 110 of the walk directions on page 7.

## Lunch

**The Red Lion** (01825 740836) in Chelwood Gate (7.7km/4.8 miles into the walk) is a modernised country pub, which has an extensive garden, and serves food all afternoon (until 8pm Sunday, 8.30pm Monday to Thursday and 9pm Friday and Saturday).

## Tea

It is possible to get a cup of tea or coffee mid afternoon, as well as cakes or other snacks, in the **Ashdown Forest Centre** (paragraph 79 on page 6), which is open till 4pm daily

Otherwise, independent cafes in Forest Row come and go, but a reliable backstop is **Java and Jazz** (01342 826699) just downhill from the Chequers Inn, which has a good selection of cakes as well as serving pizzas and the like. It is open till 8pm Monday to Thursday, 9pm Friday and Saturday and 5pm on Sunday.

The most obvious pub stop is the **Chequers Inn**, but there is a more contemporary option in the **Hop Yard Brewery**, which serves craft beers and also tea. **The Brambletye Hotel**, a pub situated conveniently just behind the bus stop for East Grinstead (in summer you can sit at an outside table with a pint as you wait for the bus), also serves tea and coffee, and the **Tesco Metro** in the petrol station in the centre of the village sells cakes.

If you follow the extension to **East Grinstead**, there are various refreshment options clustered around the old centre of the town, including pleasant pubs such as the **Dorset Arms** or the **Crown**, independent cafes, and branches of **Caffe Nero** and **Costa Coffee**.

## WALK DIRECTIONS

### Forest Row to the Wych Cross heaths (4.9km/3 miles)

1. From the **Chequers Inn** in Forest Row, cross the road and take a signposted footpath that passes under the buildings of Ashdown Court.
2. Keep on through a courtyard and on down steps into a parking area.
3. On the far side of the parking area keep on up a gravel footpath, which in 40 metres turns left, passing new houses to the left.
4. In 100 metres follow the path to the right across a footbridge and uphill through an area of scrub.
5. In 150 metres cross a stile and keep on along a fenced path on the right-hand edge of a field.
6. In 100 metres, in the corner of the field, cross a stile to the right of rusted metal fieldgate (hidden by a hedge), and then cross another stile to the right of a black wooden barn in 10 metres more.
7. In 30 metres, just beyond the barn, go left over a stile and then in 5 metres right downhill on a grassy track.
8. In 80 metres cross a stile to the right of a fieldgate and in 20 metres pass into a field (a fieldgate missing here). Veer slightly left, diagonally across the field, heading for stile 120 metres away in the field corner.
9. Cross the stile and carry on down a path, with a fence and a strip with young trees to your left and tall shrubs to your right.
10. In 250 metres pass through a kissing gate to the right of a fieldgate, cross a broad path (leading to a stone bridge to the right) and pass round the left-hand side of another fieldgate, to carry on down another strip planted with young trees.
11. In 350 metres go over a concrete footbridge over a stream. Beyond this veer left uphill, with a hedge to your right.
12. In 250 metres go through a squeeze gate and down a bank to cross a tarmac lane.
13. On the far side go straight on up a path into a wood, turning right, and then left with a wooden fence in 25 metres (*bluebells here in season*).
14. In 40 metres, where the fence ends, keep on along the path, following it to the left in 25 metres when it passes under mini-pylons.
15. In 120 metres turn right onto a concrete lane.
16. In 300 metres pass a side turning to South Park Farm and The Old Barn and curve left with the lane.
17. In 150 metres fork left to bypass a house to the right.
18. In another 200 metres fork right to bypass a house to the left.
19. In 180 metres more ignore a turning to Springhill Orchard left. 70 metres later you enter a farm complex.
20. In another 70 metres, just past an open barn to the right, **fork right up a gravel track**, passing a new wooden building to the right.
21. In 150 metres opposite barns converted into houses to your left, **turn right across a stile** into a field, and head uphill, aiming to the left of a tree midfield in 70 metres.
22. Past the tree, veer slightly left with the path towards the hedge at the crest of the hill 150 metres away. (*About halfway to the hedge, note the view of **Weir Wood Reservoir** to the right and **East Grinstead** on the hill beyond*).
23. When you get to the hedge pass through a somewhat hidden (but signposted) kissing gate at the crest of the hill and turn half left, downhill (ignoring any path straight ahead along the top of the ridge).
24. In 150 metres pass through a kissing gate to the left of an oak tree in the field corner and keep straight on uphill across the next field, initially with a fenced-in wooded pond to your right.
25. In 80 metres pass through a footpath gate to the left of a fieldgate and carry on downhill across the next field.
26. In 100 metres cross a stile in a hedge and veer slightly right, downhill.
27. In a further 100 metres cross a ditch between two ponds on an earth bridge, passing a redundant stile. In 25 metres more cross a plank bridge and

carry on up a path through scattered trees.

28. In 100 metres, at the top of the hill, you come to a fence and the edge of a wood. Pass through a **metal gate** (**ignoring** an initially more obvious wooden one away to the right) and carry on uphill on a path into the wood.
29. **In 20 metres turn right** at a path T-junction marked with a footpath sign.
30. In 70 metres **turn left uphill** at a signposted path junction.
31. In 200 metres keep straight on at a major crosspaths into denser woodland with lots of holly, where the path curves left and right a bit.
32. In 120 metres ignore a fork right, to keep straight on. *This path is currently (February 2024) a bit obscured by fallen tree trunks, but you can weave your way through them.*
33. In another 50 metres you come to a track. Go right on this.
34. Follow this track uphill for 600 metres. About 30 metres before it reaches a lane turn left onto a broad grassy path, a permissive horse ride.
35. In 100 metres ignore a path off to the left and follow the ride through trees to a road, with a car park on the left and a crossroads on the right.
36. Cross the road carefully and take the path opposite into trees, slightly to the left of your previous direction.
37. In 100 metres the path emerges into a more open area and curves gently round to the right. In 50 metres more it merges with a broader path from the left and in a further 40 metres comes out onto a road. **Cross the road with care** (traffic is quite fast) and continue on the horse ride opposite.
38. In 80 metres turn left on a broad path with gorse bushes to your right and an area recently (in February 2024) cleared of gorse to your left, parallel to the road you have just left.
39. In 150 metres a gap in the trees to the right gives you a fine view of the South Downs on clear days, and there is a bench where you can sit down and enjoy it.

### **Wych Cross heaths to the Red Lion pub (2.8km/1.8 mi)**

40. Keep straight on along the broad path, ignoring ways off, and soon with a wood edge to your right.
41. The path curves gently left and right and descends or ascends slightly. But in 400 metres it curves decisively left and starts to climb more steadily.
42. In 100 metres the path comes to a small clearing, with a car park up ahead. **Fork right** and then immediately **fork right again** onto a broad grassy path going back downhill into a wooded area. There is a minor road just out of sight beyond the trees on your left, which the path gradually approaches.
43. In 250 metres veer left onto a broad grassy path which comes straight out onto the road.
44. Cross the road towards a bridleway signpost just off to the left and **turn sharp right** onto this bridleway.
45. In 130 metres pass through a metal gate and carry on downhill on a fenced-in path between fields.
46. In 120 metres pass through two gates and carry on downhill between the fields as before.
47. In 300 metres, at the bottom of the hill, cross a footbridge and carry on up a path through the woods.
48. This path gradually broadens into a track. Stay on this, ignoring ways off, as it winds gently through the wood (recently logged in at least two places), sometimes level and sometimes climbing.
49. Finally in 1km at the top of the hill, you come up to three-way track junction, with a metal car blocking barrier ahead, another to the left, and a field visible through the trees to the right. Go straight on past (or under) the barrier ahead.
50. In 40 metres cross a track, with a field (a cricket pitch) to your left. Keep straight on along the track beyond, with a road parallel to the right (you may not be aware of this unless a car passes). *When the wind is northerly you may also get noise from the main road away to your left.*
51. In 200 metres emerge onto the heath and carry straight on uphill.

- 52. In 130 metres ignore a track to the left and keep straight on, passing a clump of evergreen trees dedicated to former British prime minister Harold Macmillan on your left.
- 53. In 70 metres more, just beyond the climp, veer right at a T-junction onto a grassy track. (***If you do not wish to stop for lunch at the Red Lion, turn left at this T-junction, and continue with paragraph 57 below.***)
- 54. In 130 metres you emerge onto a road, with the **Red Lion** pub opposite. *Just to the left here is the bus stop if you want to take the 270 back to Forest Row.* Otherwise **cross the road with care** to the pub.

**The Red Lion to Ashdown Forest Centre (4.5km/2.8 mi)**

- 55. After lunch, emerge from the pub and turn half right to cross the road and walk back onto the heath the way you came.
- 56. In 130 metres fork right on a broad track.
- 57. In 220 metres cross over a tarmac drive leading to houses left and carry straight on.
- 58. In 300 metres, at a five-way track junction, fork right (ie taking the rightmost of the three options), your direction 80 degrees, towards a road.
- 59. In 100 metres cross the busy road with care and keep on up a track on the far side across the heath. In 70 metres the track curves to the left.
- 60. In 220 metres, at a track T-junction, **turn sharp right** (ie **almost doubling back on yourself**), your direction south.
- 61. In 180 metres follow the track as it turns left downhill into a more wooded area. A field starts to your right in 80 metres.
- 62. In 70 metres the field ends and you start to climb a hill. In 70 metres more you are on open heath again, still on a broad track.
- 63. In 300 metres you come to a five-way track junction, with a stand of trees just ahead. Veer slightly right here (that is ignoring a track sharp right), your direction 100 degrees.
- 64. In another 150 metres, at a track T-junction, go left, your direction north, heading for a line of trees.
- 65. In 80 metres, at a crossroads with a broad grassy track and with a car park visible ahead, turn right, your direction 120 degrees, parallel with an unseen road to the left.  
*(If confused by the directions in the next three paragraphs, you can simply walk through the car park to the road and turn right along its far side to find the driveway mentioned in the paragraph 68.)*
- 66. In 150 metres, with the end of the car park to the left (not always visible due to vegetation), ignore a track to the right and keep straight on.
- 67. **[!]** In another 150 metres there is another track to the right. **Just before this turn left** on a minor path through the wooded strip to the road. *(If no path is evident, just cross through by any route that looks passable.)*
- 68. **Cross the road with care** and turn left along its far side for about 20 metres, then right down a driveway to Lewes Park Cottages.
- 69. In 100 metres, at the end of the driveway, carry on down a path into the woods. In 30 metres curve left with the path with a ditch to your right.
- 70. In 300 metres pass a redundant stile and carry on along a broad grassy path across a rough field. You can see the Ashdown Park Hotel on the hill to your right which is where the path eventually ends up, but your onward way is straight ahead across the field with a ditch to your left.
- 71. In 170 metres, after a field boundary, the path starts to curve right.
- 72. In 300 metres leave the field at its far end. Here veer slightly left down an avenue of trees, with a field to your left, ignoring a path to the right into the bushes.
- 73. In 150 metres the path curves right a bit and descends more steeply, and in 250 metres comes to a gravel track which then immediately becomes tarmac. Turn left on this and carry on gently uphill.
- 74. In 500 metres you pass the main building of the **Ashdown Park Hotel**

on your right and veer left with the tarmac drive.

75. **[!]** In 40 metres more, at the end of a high hedge to your right, turn sharp right at a tarmac drive junction, following a yellow arrow on a post. *(Though signposted this turning is a bit unexpected and easy to miss).*
76. In 50 metres go left uphill on a tarmac drive and in 40 metres more keep straight on up a grassy path on the left-hand edge of car park.
77. At the top of the car park pass to the right of a stone building and continue up across the grass following a footpath arrow. In 50 metres continue on up path enclosed by over-arching vegetation.
78. In 100 metres you emerge onto a road. Cross this and turn right along the road's far verge, ignoring a track forking left in 10 metres.
79. In 120 metres turn left into the car park of the **Ashdown Forest Centre**. The visitor's centre to the left has interesting exhibits on the ecology and history of the forest (though sadly no tea kiosk!). It is open 11am to 5pm (or dusk) at weekends and on bank holidays year round, and 2pm to 5pm Monday to Friday from 1 April to 30 September.

### **Ashdown Forest Centre to Forest Row (5.5km/3.4 miles)**

80. **If not stopping at the visitor's centre**, slant right across the car park to exit it in its far right-hand corner. **If coming out of the visitor's centre**, simply walk straight ahead.
81. As you leave the car park there is an information board on your left. Take the path that forks *slightly* left here, your direction 70 degrees.
82. The path takes you along the crest of the ridge, with fine views to the left. *This path goes very gently downhill, but if you are on a path that is descending more decisively from the ridge you have gone wrong, and should retrace your steps to the car park.*
83. In 200 metres you come to a slanted T-junction, where you go right, slightly uphill.
84. In about 300 metres ignore a broad path downhill to the left and carry on up a slight rise.
85. In another 300 metres there is a car park uphill to the right (which will only be visible if there is a car in it) and the path starts to descend again. In 150 metres more the track enters the trees.
86. In another 300 metres, at a T-junction with a car-wide grass track (and with a car-blocking barrier visible to the right), **go left**.
87. In 70 metres you emerge onto the escarpment with a fine view ahead. **Turn right** along the path along the escarpment with the treeline to the right and the view to the left.
88. In 150 metres the path goes into the trees once more. In another 150 metres go straight across a crosspaths with a brick and gravel track, with a road 30 metres to the right.
89. 40 metres beyond this crosspaths **turn left directly downhill** on a wide grassy strip.
90. In 400 metres, at the bottom of the hill, the path narrows and veers left into a dip. Beyond this you emerge onto the edge of a golf course. Keep down the right-hand side of this with the wood edge to your right.
91. Initially the path is a bit indistinct, but it gets more well-defined. In 250 metres you are once more back on a broad grassy strip with trees both sides.
92. Keep on this path, ignoring ways off. In 300 metres you pass a house to the right and the path starts a long gentle descent.
93. In 300 metres more, at the bottom of the hill, you emerge fully from the trees with golf greens left and right. Here keep straight on alongside a track to cross a footbridge over a stream in 70 metres.
94. In another 45 metres cross a tarmac driveway and keep on up the edge of the golf course with the treeline to your right.
95. In 170 metres the path crosses a gravel path, levels out, and carries straight on across open ground with golf greens and scattered trees either side.

- 96.** In 250 metres, the path once again converges with the wood edge to your right, passing a small pond. Here ignore a gravel path slanting left and instead keep along the wood edge, ignoring paths off into the woods.
- 97.** In another 200 metres you come to a tarmac driveway, where you **go right**, downhill.
- 98.** Ignore side paths. In 170 metres veer right at a three-way road junction.
- 99.** In 40 metres more you are on a residential road. Follow this for 300 metres to the main road.
- 100.** **Cross the main road with care**, and keep straight on down a gravel path between house gardens
- 101.** In 100 metres, at a T-junction, turn left onto a track (the course of the former Tunbridge Wells to Three Bridges railway line, closed in 1967).
- 102.** Keep on along this track, ignoring ways off. In 300 metres, ignore wooden steps with handrails down to the left and right, the left-hand ones leading to a footbridge.
- 103.** However, in another 100 metres turn left down earth and wood steps. *(If you can't find this turning, any exit from the track to the left will do: follow whatever exit you take to the main road and turn right to find the centre of Forest Row.)*
- 104.** At the bottom of the steps, turn right down the length of a field on a faint grass path.
- 105.** In 200 metres exit the field in its far left-hand corner and carry straight on down a car-wide earth and gravel path.
- 106.** In 150 metres you come to an open space. Cross this diagonally to reach the main road.
- 107.** Turn right on the road into the centre of **Forest Row**, with shops left and right.
- 108.** In 80 metres the **Hop Yard Brewery** is on your left. In 90 metres more, you come to a mini-roundabout. Here, go right down a side road running parallel to the main road, with shops to the right and an old building – Freshfield Hall – to the left.
- 109.** In 150 metres this merges with the main road by the **Chequers Inn. Java and Jazz**, another possible tea stop is just beyond it, and the **bus stop** for services back to East Grinstead is on the opposite side of the road to Java and Jazz, just outside the **Brambletye Hotel**.
- Forest Row to East Grinstead (5.5km/3.4 miles)**
- 110.** Coming out of the Chequers Inn or Java and Jazz cafe, **cross the main road with care** and turn right along it.
- 111.** In 150 metres the road crosses a river. In another 100 metres (just after a second river), fork left up a signposted bridleway. This takes you up once more onto the track of the former Tunbridge Wells to Three Bridges railway line, which you follow gently uphill all the way to East Grinstead.
- 112.** After a long gentle climb of 3.5km (2.2 miles) you come to a suburban road: cross this and carry on up the now tarmac track beyond.
- 113.** In 100 metres the track forks at the bottom of a hill. Take the left fork to come in 170 metres to the main road at a large roundabout. Turn left on this.
- 114.** In 250 metres you pass a mini roundabout and keep straight on, passing **Sackville College**, an old almshouse, to your right.
- 115.** Beyond this you are in the old centre of East Grinstead. In another 200 metres the road widens out into the old marketplace of the town.
- 116.** In 120 metres more, at the end of the marketplace, turn right at a mini roundabout into London Street, the town's main shopping street.
- 117.** In 250 metres keep straight on at a set of traffic lights.
- 118.** In 120 metres more, at a mini roundabout, turn left into Railway Approach.
- 119.** In 300 metres you come to the large roundabout. Pass to the right of this to cross three main roads with care and go up the edge of the station car park to get to **East Grinstead station** in another 120 metres.