

Haywards Heath to Balcombe via the Ouse valley walk

The rolling tree clad High Weald

Length 10.4 km (6.4 mi) 2-3 hours walking

Maps Explorer series 135 Landranger series 187 and 198

Toughness 3 out of 10. Muddy after heavy rain.

Features Forget Beachy Head and the South Downs, The [High Weald](#) is the best place for walking in Sussex. This walk, which is easy to get to from many parts of the south east, introduces you to the some joys of the High Weald and also to one of the threats to it.

The rolling, tree clad High Weald is one of the reasons Sussex is one of the most tree clad counties in England. The terrain means that prairie-style agriculture is largely a stranger to these parts. It is an area of great variety and beautiful scenery, perhaps the most conventionally beautiful of any area near to London. But it is threatened by further development, by the possibility of more noise from Gatwick Airport expansion and now from oil drilling ("fracking" – ed). Enjoy it now!

The Weald is famous for its mud, but only one section, just north of Haywards Heath Golf Club, is likely to cause significant problems. In all but the very worst conditions this can be by-passed on the side of the path.

Public toilets: On the station in Haywards Heath

Date researched: August 2013

Transport Trains run to Haywards Heath from Lewes, Hastings, Brighton, Worthing, Littlehampton, Portsmouth, London, Luton and Bedford.

Trains run from Balcombe to Haywards Heath, Brighton, London, Luton and Bedford.

Nearly all the trains that stop at Balcombe are run by First Capital Connect, so you will not be able to use cheap tickets that are only valid on Southern Trains.

For bus and train times see [Traveline South East](#)

Lunch and tea Shops, pub and café on or near Haywards Heath Station. Pub, shops and tea room in Balcombe

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This is one of a number of walks created for the Ramblers by Chris Smith of Travellog Lewes (www.travelloglewes.co.uk). You can find more about the area around Lewes by visiting.

To join the Ramblers, [click here](#), or to become involved in helping them to protect rights of way follow, [click here](#)

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** RH16 1DJ **Finish** RH17 6JQ

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

1. Leave Haywards Heath station by the main exit. Turn right along the footpath which runs alongside the forecourt. Turn right at the end. You come immediately to a roundabout. There are shops here and a pub. Turn north, next to the pub. Walk for 340 metres to the end of the road. To your left the road runs in a tunnel under the railway, but your route turns right here.
2. Then take the first left along Wickham Way, walking slightly uphill past suburban houses. The houses and the road run out. In 430 metres turn right at a junction, walking on a lane with the large wall of a rather impressive estate on your right. Come to the entrance to the estate on your right. Turn left here, at a right of way sign. Your way is now straight ahead. You come to Haywards Heath Golf Club. Continue straight ahead.
3. A golf club sign tells you that you cannot stop or eat while on the path. Of course this is wrong. You have the right to rest and take refreshment.
4. After about 1.2 km of straight walking you meet a footpath junction. You can no longer go straight ahead. Turn left here, into the wood.
5. *This is the first High Weald Wood on the route. Once the whole of the High Weald was woodland. There is still a large amount of very beautiful woodland.*
6. You have now joined the [Sussex Ouse Valley Way](#). This is a 42 mile route from the source of the Ouse near Lower Beeding and the sea between Newhaven and Seaford, running through Lewes. The part of the walk to the west of here runs through some lovely High Weald Scenery.
7. The route is now well waymarked and fairly easy to follow. Cross Copyhold Lane and keep straight ahead.
8. You are now not just on the Ouse Valley Way but also on the [High Weald Landscape Trail](#). This 90 mile trail starts on Horsham Station and finishes at Rye. It is one of the most beautiful and undiscovered walking trails in south east England.
9. Pass River's Farm and cross the railway line that conveys goods from Ardingly to Haywards Heath. Enter the attractive River's Wood.
10. At the end of the wood the High Weald Trail goes straight on, aiming for Rye, but your route goes left up the Ouse Valley, following the Ouse Valley Way. Come to a road at Upper Ryelands Bridge. Do not let the view distract you from paying attention to the road, which can be very busy. Turn right at the junction, cross the river, and find a stile on your left after about 100 metres.
11. Before you is the [Ouse Valley Viaduct](#), built in 1841 and a candidate for the most handsome viaduct in England. It carries the main London-Brighton line. Ironically, the river Ouse was navigable up to Upper Ryelands Bridge and boats were used to bring the bricks to the site to build the viaduct. The coming of the railway destroyed the Ouse Navigation. The railway was so much faster and the river could not compete. You will either travel over the viaduct later on your return journey or will already have travelled over it to get to Haywards Heath.
12. The path from the stile runs west to pass under the northern end of the viaduct. It then crosses a further field to emerge at a farm track. Turn left and reach the yard of Ryelands Farm. Turn right through the farmyard.
13. Navigation can now become a little difficult. You want walk westwards, diagonally across two fields until you come to a bridge over the Ouse. From here continue west/south west towards Great Bentley Farm. From the farm follow the farm drive westwards to meet the main road.
14. Turn left and then immediately right up a small lane on the opposite side of the road. Head north up this. At the first farm track on the left the Ouse Valley Way turns left. Do not follow it but keep straight ahead up the road. The road descends through trees cross the infant river Ouse.
15. Immediately after this crossing the road bears right. On your left you will see a large gap in the hedge. There is no footpath sign, but if you walk through this gap you should see the traces of the path. The route travels north on the right hand side of a hedgerow, climbing gently.
16. The path re-joins the road. Turn left here and then right again after about 10 metres, heading north again. The path continues to climb and head in the same general direction for a further 600 metres. It then starts to descend and enters Pilstye Wood.
17. You come to a track which crosses the route. Signposts show that you should continue straight ahead and then down to the right. You emerge at the other side of the route at a field.

18. The route here runs north/northeast, slightly to the left, across the field. In the past this route has been ploughed up or obstructed by crops. If this is a problem when you walk the route please report it to West Sussex Rights of Way. The grid reference is TQ307295 and the path number is 17Ba
19. On reaching the far side of the field turn left along the field edge. Come to a field gate with a stile to the right of it. Cross the stile and walk along a narrow path to a road. Cross the road carefully.
20. If you turn right here on the roadside verge you will reach the sight of the proposed oil extraction site. It is marked by a track on the left. A company called Cuadrilla wants to extract oil here. It may use a process that involves fracturing rock by using a mixture of lots of water and chemicals - fracking . In August 2013 there was an anti-fracking protest outside the site, but the protesters' aims and tactics may change. If they are still there they will certainly welcome a visit. The safety of the technology is unproven and the use of chemicals so near Ardingly reservoir, which supplies water to Lewes and other towns in the area is, at least, alarming. Balcombe is only the first site that oil companies want to exploit. There are a large number of other sites in the weald that they have their eye on. You can get a lot more information by doing an internet search for "Balcombe fracking".
21. To follow the main route turn left and then immediately right up a drive. Follow this drive through a gate into the grounds of a large and rather wonderful house, which you pass on your left. Immediately after the house turn right and see a footpath sign pointing you into the woods. Almost immediately the path crosses the railway on the level. This is the main London to Brighton main line. Use your eyes and ears. Trains normally sound their horns when approaching this crossing.
22. After the crossing the path turns left and then runs along a field boundary, emerging at a road.
23. The main route assumes that you want to go straight to the station. Trains from Balcombe only run one every hour. Turn left along the road, which curves round to the right. Come to steps, with a handrail, which lead through a gap in the houses down to a main road. At the road you can see the entrance to **Balcombe station** on your left.
24. If you have spare time and would like to explore the village or take refreshment then you can walk straight ahead. Walk along the road ahead for about 100 metres. Then take a path ahead on the right hand side. Pass the recreation ground, keeping straight ahead. The way turns into a road. Turn right at the end of this to find the village centre.)
25. To return to the station retrace your steps down Bramble Hill (do not turn off to the left). You reach the main London Road. Bear left here to reach the station.

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