

Balcombe & The High Weald



Welcome to the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty a medieval landscape.

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.

Grateful acknowledgement to Travel Log Lewes (Chris Smith) for the loan of this walk

Distance and duration	6 miles / 10 kilometres - 2 - 3 hours
Difficulty	Leisurely - <i>recommend use of OS map to follow route</i>
Start point	Start Hayward's Heath Railway Station Finish Balcombe Railway Station
Map reference	Not applicable. Map OS Explore 135
Other information	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.

I-Spy - Things to look out for in the landscape

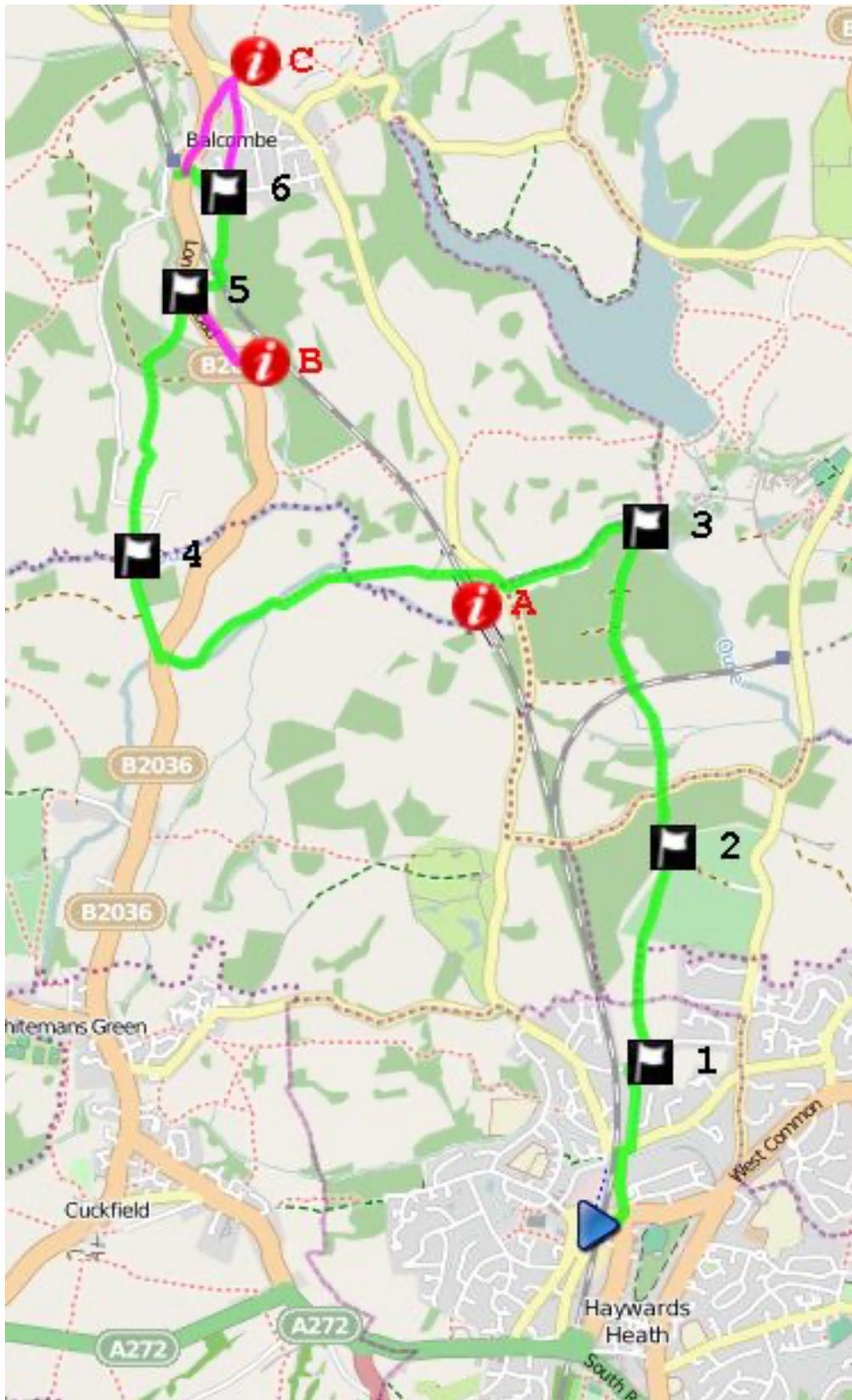
The rolling, tree clad High Weald is one of the reasons Sussex is one of the most tree clad counties in England. The terrain means that prairie-style agriculture is largely a stranger to the these parts. It is an area of great variety and beautiful scenery, perhaps the most conventionally beautiful of any area near to London. But it is always threatened by further development, so 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.

A) 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 Rylands Bridge and boats were used to bring the bricks to the sit 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.

B) Potential oil drilling site

C) Balcombe Village



The High Weald: An outstandingly beautiful medieval landscape...

Route Directions

Leave Hayward's 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 about 300 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

1) Then take the first left along Whickham Way, walking slightly uphill past suburban houses. The houses and the road run out. 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 (*now either missing or covered in undergrowth*). Your way is now straight ahead. You come to Haywards Heath Golf Club. Continue straight ahead.

2) After about 900 metres of straight walking you meet a footpath junction. You can no longer go straight ahead. Turn left here, into the wood.

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.

Bear right after you enter the wood there is a further junction. Take the path at the waymark. Do not take the path to the right that leads gently downhill.

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.

The route is now well waymarked and fairly easy to follow. Cross Copyhold Lane and keep straight ahead.

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.

Pass River's Farm and cross the railway line that conveys goods from Ardingly to Haywards Heath. Enter the attractive Rivers Wood.

3) At the end of the wood the High Weald Trail goes straight on, but your route goes left up the Ouse Valley, following the Ouse Valley Way. The legal right of way exits the wood and carries straight on. Just before the bridge there is a signpost. The route turns left here. But it is easier to turn left immediately you leave the wood and walk along the side of the wood. You quickly join the right of way.

Come to a road at Upper Ryland's 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. (A).

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 Great Bentley Farm. Turn right through the farmyard.

Now walk westwards, diagonally across two fields until you come to a bridge over the Ouse. From here continue west/south west towards Lower Bentley Farm. From the farm follow the farm drive westwards to meet the main road.

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.

4) Immediately after this crossing the road bears right. On your left you will see a large gap in the hedge. There is a footpath sign, and 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.

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.

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.

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. *Note report of no path through crops which have been fenced in. Walk along left edge of field to the other side.*

5) 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 the road. Cross the road carefully. *Note Report that stile has no steps and is difficult to climb over.*

(B) 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. 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.

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 you come to a footbridge over the railway.

After the bridge the path turns left and then runs along the right-hand field boundary, emerging at a road.

6) The main route assumes that you want to go straight to the station. Turn left along the road, which curves round to the right. Take sloped path on left, which leads 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.

C) 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. 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.