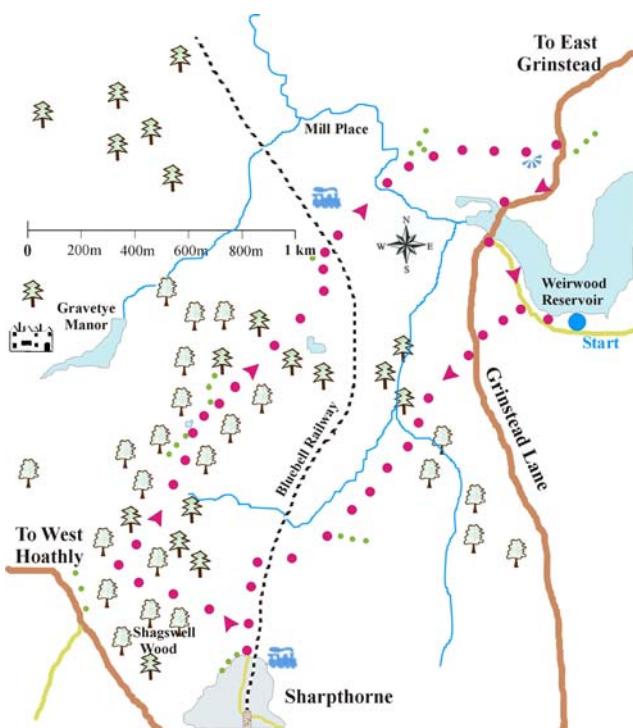


## Weirwood

- Start & Finish:** Car Park on south side of Weirwood Reservoir,  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile along Legsheath Lane.  
Grid Ref. TQ 384.341
- Distance:** 4½ miles (7 kms). Allow 2 ¾ hours with stops.
- Terrain:** Typical High Weald with short, steep climbs and lots of woodland.
- Stile Count:** 8
- Toilets:** North Lane in West Hoathly or East Grinstead town centre.
- Refreshments:** The Intrepid Fox or The Cat Inn, West Hoathly.



From the car park return to the road and turn right. In 250m, where there is a gap in the trees to the right, a fingerpost on your left indicates a footpath heading uphill towards farm buildings. As you follow this path keep the tall hedge line on your right to climb the hill and pass to the left of a newly converted barn and reach a small car park. Continue up the tarmac drive and then go straight ahead up a rough track to reach the public road besides Neylands Farm Cottages. Turn left and in just 20m look for a stile on your right where a fingerpost indicates this is the Sussex Border Path. Follow this sunken, leafy path between the trees.

**The Sussex Border Path was created in 1980 and runs 150 miles from Chichester Harbour to Rye following the remote inland boundary of the ancient County of Sussex. At one point it rather dramatically passes through the middle of Gatwick Airport! The full route is shown on O.S. Explorer Maps.**

You will soon pass between two wooden buildings labelled 'Larks' and 'Chiffchaff', part of the Blackland Farm Summer Camp, and at the end of the open fields the path crosses a broad track and

begins to descend. Keep half left, following the broader track, and at the bottom of the dip turn half right to cross Coombe Brook on Tigger Bridge and climb out of the woods. At the top of the rise cross a stile into an enclosed path across large fields sloping from left to right. On reaching the concrete farm track go straight ahead to pass New Coombe Farm. Follow the track down to a stile besides the metal gate and go left under the railway bridge. After passing a couple of farmhouses the track becomes a tarmac road and here you can see on your left the remains of West Hoathly Station. The level crossing is a good place to take a break and wait for one of the steam trains to come whistling along.

**The Bluebell Railway follows the course of the old East Grinstead to Lewes line, which was closed in 1958. A section between Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes was saved to become 'The Bluebell' and the line has since been extended to Kingscote Station. It has the UK's largest and most comprehensive collection of ex-Southern Railway locomotives including the tiny Brighton Terriers -'Stepney' and 'Fenchurch' built in the 1870s, There is a recorded timetable on: 01825 - 720825**

The first large building on the right of the tarmac road is the old Bluebell Inn – sadly no longer. Just before this there is a fingerpost to your right indicating a public bridleway. In a matter of a few metres this splits into a 'public bridleway' going left and a 'permissive bridleway' going right into Forestry Commission land. Take the latter to pass a sign indicating that you are welcome to walk here! This broad track almost doubles back on the previous direction as you enter Gravetye Woods. This pretty route sweeps down and around through the woods where the most majestic conifers is the Corsican Pine.

**It was most likely introduced here by that celebrated Sussex gardener William Robinson in the 1880's. More recently it was extensively planted in the south east as a fast growing source of good pinewood. Sadly, a blight has recently been found in the needles which will restrict any further planting whilst research is carried out.**

After half an hour or so strolling through the woods you will meet a signed, grassy footpath joining from the left. Continue ahead on the gravelled 'permissive bridleway' but take care at this point; in another 100m as the broad track begins to swing left look carefully for a fingerpost on your right pointing to a narrow, grassy path which forks away to the right. As a double check there is a second fingerpost a further 10m into the wood. Follow this narrower path as it heads slightly downhill and, after some muddy patches, reaches a stile into an open field.

**This landscape is ideal for bird life and over 100 species have been identified in the course of a year. All three woodpeckers are here with the colourful finches and tits. You may hear the whistling of a Nuthatch or the rippling song of a Willow Warbler, and if you stay late, spot Woodcock or hear the Tawny Owls.**

After initially keeping to the left side of the field, the path swings right across the field to emerge onto a tarmac drive. Turn left and in 125m at the bottom of the hill look for a sign showing the High Weald Landscape Trail turning right into the woods. A wooden railing leads to a stile and a steep bank up to the railway line. Cross carefully, descend the other side to a stile and on emerging from the small copse head just right of the pylon in the field ahead. To the right of this there is a solid footbridge over the pretty stream. Immediately after crossing the bridge turn left to follow the HWLT up the grassy slope. At the top of the hill there is a stile besides a gate, which leads onto a sandy path above Stone Farm Rocks.

**These rocks are part of a long, narrow geological feature running across East & West Sussex. The rock is 'Ardingly Sandstone', formed 135 million years ago, and here it makes an excellent climbing centre with 31 different courses ranging from 'moderately difficult' to 'severe'. You will see the belay bolts for some of the climbs. Because of the most unusual sedimentary structures it is now a Site of Special Scientific Interest**

As you pass the last and tallest of the rocks turn right to a wooden fence, besides a stile, where there is a splendid view of Weirwood Reservoir.

**The reservoir was formed in 1954 by damming the River Medway. It covers just over four square miles to a depth of 35 feet and holds 1 ¼ million gallons of water – much of which goes to Crawley New Town. This western end is a Nature Reserve and you will surely see the ever-present mallard, coot and moorhen and perhaps the visiting cormorants coming up from the coast. In springtime you should be lucky enough to see the delightful Great Crested Grebe, which happily breeds here.**

The right of way continues past the rocks to the public road; however there is no objection to you using the private path leading down from the stile. So cross the stile and head down across the field, beneath the power lines, towards the tree line in the bottom corner. Here a narrow path leads steeply down to the left and joins the main road just above Whillet's Bridge. Turn right and after a further 100m turn left into Legsheath Lane, which is signed as a 'narrow road'. This will lead you back to the car park, where a visit to the bird hide makes a fitting end to the day.

**This walk was researched and written for Mid Sussex District Council by Footprints of Sussex who lead local guided walks throughout the year. [www.footprintsofsussex.co.uk](http://www.footprintsofsussex.co.uk)**

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