

ARDINGLY

- Start & Finish:** Street Lane Car Park at the rear of Hapstead Hall, opposite the Ardingly Inn.
Grid Ref: TQ 347.295
- Distance:** 3 ¼ miles (5 ¼ kms). Allow 2 hours with stops.
- Terrain:** Good footpaths and tracks, perhaps one muddy bit. Steady climb from the reservoir for 10 mins.
- Stile Count:** Eight easy ones.
- Toilets:** By the recreation ground at the north end of the High Street or see below.
- Refreshments:** Ardingly Inn & The Oak in Street Lane.



Leaving the car park, cross the road to the Ardingly Inn and turn left. In just 25m, at the end of Street Lane, cross straight over College Road to a bench beside the village sign.

The Parish of Ardingly covers 50 square miles with a population of less than 2,000. Mesolithic flints found nearby suggest that this area was inhabited over 6,000 years ago. The correct pronunciation of the name is important – it is Arding LYE – the last syllable meaning a place where cattle are kept.

Walk past the village sign and turn right following the main road towards Lindfield & Haywards Heath. Now follow the pavement on the right hand side of the road as you descend the hill and 25m before the speed de-restriction sign, beneath a large oak tree, look carefully for a fingerpost on your right. Turn right to follow the sign past 'Chinook' and continue ahead as it narrows towards Stable Cottage.

As you reach the last house in this lane the view opens up to the south and a fingerpost indicates that you should go left.

A narrow grassy track leads to a stile into an open field and you must follow the hedgerow on the left hand side. Crossing a second stile walk now across the middle of the next field (ignoring a crossing concrete track about half way down) and continue ahead to a metal gate. Cross the stile to the right of this gate and continue heading in the same direction across the middle of the next field. Waymark discs indicate that you are following the High Weald Landscape Trail.

At the bottom of this field cross a stile besides a metal gate. In a further 50 metres you will reach a four-armed finger post. Turn right to cross the field towards the woodland. At the far side of the field cross a stile and enter the wood.

This is pleasant mixed woodland with oak, ash and beech gradually giving way to pine, as the soil turns sandier.

It can often be muddy underfoot here and there are one or two minor deviations in and out of the trees!

Ignoring paths to either side will bring you into the car park besides the college tennis courts. Facing you shortly is the grand entrance to Ardingly College. Follow the drive into the college with the cricket grounds on your right and walk past the splendid main buildings to your left.

Ardingly College is an independent school, which was founded in Shoreham in 1858 by Canon Nathaniel Woodard. It came here in 1870 and is one of several schools in the Woodard Corporation. It is built in the shape of an H and is dominated by the chapel and its tower. It is now fully co-educational with students ranging from pre-prep to university entrance level.

The drive shortly swings left following the bridleway signs. Where the drive forks facing a triangular-roofed building, keep to the right past the boiler house and head more steeply downhill to reach a small lake on your right.

There is a low wall besides the far corner of the lake where you can relax for a moment and watch the fish and the ducks playing around the lily pads.

Now turn left in front of the house and follow the narrowing drive into woodland. At the end of the drive, before reaching 'Little Saucelands', follow the footpath fingerpost left down a narrow path between brambles and maturing oak trees to emerge over a stile into the car park for Ardingly Reservoir. At the pebble path ahead turn right to walk up past the picnic tables to the northern end of the dam. A sign indicates the Kingfisher Trail heading around the edge of the reservoir. Following this clear path leads, in a few metres, to a side path running down to a bird hide beside the water – an ideal spot for those who enjoy lakeland birds. Continuing along the trail we pass some interesting wood sculptures.

The rather scary giant stag beetle was created from a dead ash tree by South East Water's conservation ranger – Richard Dyer who explained that since beetles like to live in dead wood it seemed appropriate to make one from it!

Now the path opens out besides the reservoir. Follow this very pleasant trail as it winds along besides the water's edge.

The reservoir was formed in 1979 by damming Ardingly and Shell Brooks and, when full, holds an amazing 5,000 million litres of water. The area is now designated as a Local Nature Reserve. The main leisure activities are sailing, canoeing and windsurfing, mainly for educational purposes.

In 500 metres (10 minutes walking) you will see a fingerpost indicating a right turn uphill across a stile away from the reservoir. There is a concrete footpath sign in the ground to the right of this stile to confirm you are at the right point. Climb the grassy bank to the stile visible ahead and on crossing this keep to the left hedge line of the large field as you climb towards the top left hand corner. Pausing to look at the views to your right will give you chance to catch your breath!

At the top of the field turn left into a sometimes muddy broad track, which swings right and left to the buildings of Townhouse Farm. As the walk levels out besides the large barn you now take the second track going half left.

You will soon pass 'Old Knowles Cottage' along this private tarmaced road. At a crossing footpath continue straight ahead and soon enter St. Peter's churchyard through the kissing gate to the left of a magnificent yew tree.

Although there was a church here in the 12th century, much of the present building dates from about 1330, when this was the centre of the village. The west tower – the only tower, as opposed to steeple, in the district – was added some 100 years later. The church boasts five old bells from the 17th & 18th centuries and a 'modern' treble added in 1911. Within the sanctuary there is an altar tomb and brass of Richard Wakehurst who died here in 1454. His daughter married Richard Culpeper and it was the Culpeper family who, in 1590, built the house we now know as Wakehurst Place.

Leave the church via the lychgate and turn right along the main road. In just 30m, opposite 'Jordan's Cottage' on your right, turn left to following a fingerpost along a broad gravel track which leads through a gate onto the main drive to the South of England Showground.

The South of England Agricultural Society was formed in 1967 when they purchased this site from Sir Henry Price of Wakehurst Place. The first ever show was held that year over three days in June. The South of England Show now attracts over 90,000 visitors to Ardingly each year!

Turn right and, as the broad drive sweeps away to your left, continue straight ahead along a track besides the hedge on your right. In 200 metres look for a kissing gate on your right and walk through this onto a narrow tarmac path and turn left. This very pleasant path leads back past tennis courts and a children's playground to the High Street where we turn right.

As you walk along the High Street notice all the delightful house names, some dating back to 1593. There's Grumps and Smiles, Kizzy and Flute, Michaelmas, Red & White. Several of the names make it clear that this is actually the hamlet of 'Hapstead', which has now become the centre of the larger village of Ardingly.

At the end of the High Street fork right towards the Ardingly Inn and the car park where we began. There is a choice now of two excellent hostelrys for some well-earned refreshment.

This walk was researched and written for Mid Sussex District Council by Footprints of Sussex who lead local guided walks throughout the year. Details are on their website: www.footprintsofsussex.co.uk

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