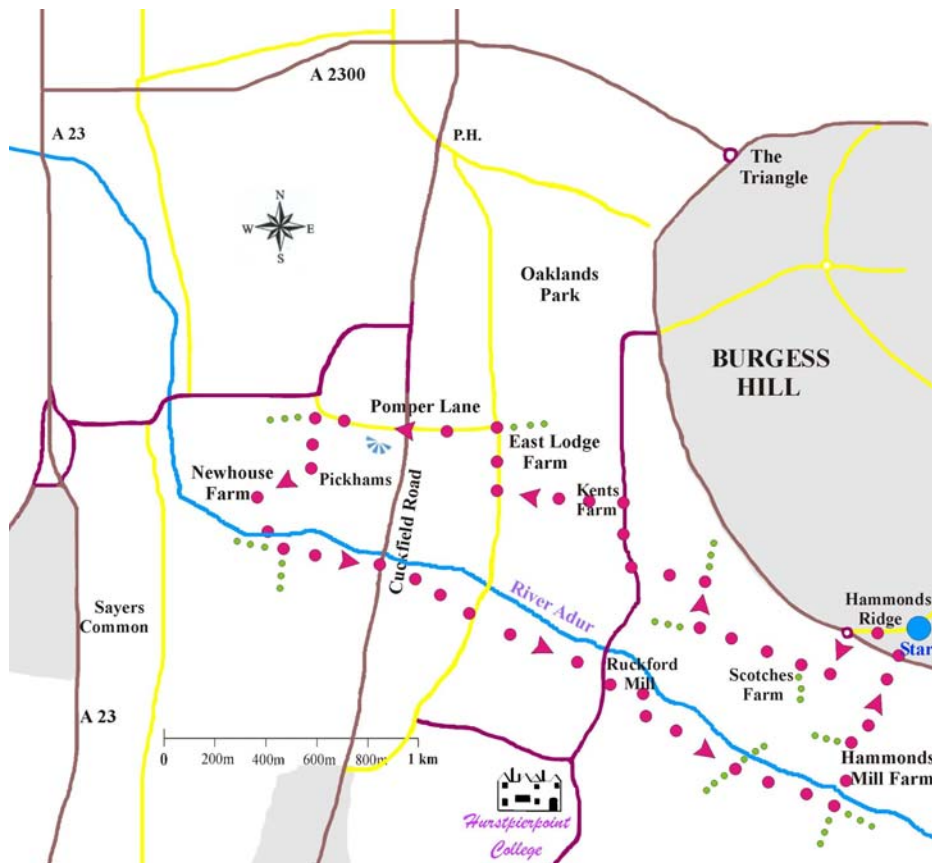


Burgess Hill

- Start:** Quiet residential road parking in Hammonds Ridge. (Please respect private drives & entrances). Grid Ref: TQ 302.182
- Distance:** 4 ½ miles (7 km). Allow 2 ½ hours.
- Terrain:** Pretty lowland river valley and several attractive old farmhouses. Generally good paths becoming muddy by the riverside.
- Stile Count:** Six, plus several 'pinch points'.
- Toilets:** Olympos Burgess Hill Leisure Centre (The Triangle) (A2300 roundabout) or see below.
- Refreshments:** The 'Sportsman on the Cuckfield Road, or Olympos Burgess Hill Leisure Centre, open all day.



From Hammonds Ridge walk back towards the by-pass roundabout, keeping to the left hand side of the road. Swing left to follow the bypass south and immediately cross the road using the central reservation at this point. Pass through the wooden gate opposite onto a gravel track.

It is hard to imagine Burgess Hill as a hamlet of farms clustered around a small hill. But 600 years ago John Burgey owned the big farm at the top of the hill and gave the hamlet its name. As late as 1849 the village still had just one shop, a sub post office and one pub called the Kings Head on Fairplace Hill. How times have changed!

Do not follow the obvious track left or right, but continue straight ahead towards the tall trees. On reaching the tree line, in the far right hand corner of the field, turn right following the way-marked footpath besides a wooden fence. Walk past the entrance to Scotches Farm and continue heading west along their tarmac drive. Views of the downs soon open up.

The large building to your half-left is Hurstpierpoint College Chapel. Founded in 1853, this is one of three Sussex schools founded by Nathaniel Woodard – the other two being Ardingly and Lancing Colleges.

In 400 metres, at the first tarmac road junction, turn right following a sign to the Maltings Farm Livery & Workshop. Just before a large tile-hung house on your left, turn left to follow the footpath down a broad track, which immediately passes the entrance to Locks Farmhouse and soon becomes a tarmac drive.

This pleasant drive is bordered by large oak trees with pine trees beyond, which suggests there is a sandy, acidic soil hereabouts. The appearance of rhododendrons amongst the pines soon confirms this.

On reaching the minor public road turn right and walk up the verge on the right hand side to Kent's Farm. Just before the farm entrance a fingerpost on the left leads over a stile into the farm buildings. The main house on your right is in a delightful setting with its duck pond and well-tended garden. Continue straight ahead past this to the far hedgeline.

On reaching the hedge the path makes a right turn and then in a further 100 metres exits left onto the public road over a stile. Turn right to follow the road northwards. At the next road junction, just after Carman's Farm, turn left into Pomper lane. In a further 400 m, cross carefully the busy Cuckfield Road, and continue straight ahead.

The views again now open out to the left and Chanctonbury Ring is clearly visible on top of the downs. Charles Goring planted this ring of beech trees in 1760. It became one of the most famous landmarks in Sussex before the great storm of 1987 uprooted and destroyed many of the trees. The 'ring' is growing again but, since these trees take over 60 years to reach maturity, only the youngest amongst us will ever see it again in its full crowning glory.

When this straight lane begins to swing right look for the fingerpost between a wooden and a metal gate on your left. The post offers a choice of directions – take the left hand drive heading straight towards the house. On reaching the house called 'Pickhams' we turn right to follow the tarmac drive.

Firstly however take a few minutes to relax at this halfway point and look more carefully at this beautiful medieval building and outhouses. The timber-framed house was built around 1620 by a wealthy local family. In the Victorian era it was divided into three farm labourers' cottages and has only recently been restored to a splendid house. The medieval barn you see to the left of the main building was not built on this site but was brought here from elsewhere – possibly from Rodmell.

Resume the walk to your right along the drive heading west to reach a house called Farthings. Ahead of you the drive becomes a gravel track between two hedges.

Do not follow this but instead turn left across a little used footpath towards the clearly visible footbridge. Cross the bridge carefully and turn immediately left through a gate to cross a second bridge with metal railings. The path now follows the stream on the left along this narrow field to eventually exit through a pinch point onto the public road.

The 'stream' is in fact the southern arm of the River Adur, which flows west from here to meet its other half coming from Cuckfield. The river eventually passes through the downs at Bramber to the coastal port of Shoreham-by-Sea.

Turn right and then immediately left through a second pinch point. Follow the clear path to the next field and walk between the houses to steps down onto the lane. Again turn right and then immediately left. Walk to the far left corner of the field ahead, cross a wooden bridge and follow the hedgeline on your left to cross a stile into a small copse. The obvious (and muddy) path soon emerges onto the next road. Turn right and then in 50 metres turn left up the drive towards Ruckford Barn, passing the 'Private Property' sign along this public right of way. The drive passes between several attractive houses, most noticeably Ruckford Mill beside the river on your left.

In 1820 William Cobbett rode on horseback through this Mid Sussex countryside recording all he saw and his words seem very appropriate to recall just here: - " I have seen no wretchedness here, but saw a pig at every labourers' house. The houses are good and warm and the gardens some of the very best I have seen in England. The Sussex women are very nice in their dress and their houses. The men and boys wear smock frocks ". Apart from the frocks maybe Sussex hasn't changed too much after all!

At the end of this drive the path swings right between two wire fences and then turns left along the side of the college playing fields. It may again become a little muddy as it reaches the point where the millrace separates from the main stream by this ingeniously simple method of controlling the water level. Soon after this there are crossing paths, which are ignored as we continue straight ahead with the stream on our left. Just before reaching the tall hedgeline, with barns over to the left, our route goes left following a footpath sign over a metal bridge across the stream.

Walk uphill now with the 16th. Century Hammond's Mill Farm on your right to pass through pinch points to the top of the rise. As the modern houses come into view pass to the right of a metal gate and keep to the hedgeline on your right. Cross straight over the gravel path and exit onto the main A273 through a kissing gate. Cross carefully and follow the footpath directly opposite between the houses. This short path will lead you back onto Hammonds Ridge.

This walk was researched and written for Mid Sussex District Council by Footprints of Sussex who lead local guided walks throughout the year.
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