



# High Weald Landscape Trail

THE COMPLETE GUIDE



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Last updated 14 June 2026

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# Overview

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## High Weald Landscape Trail: A Practical Hiking Guide

The High Weald Landscape Trail is a 145 km (90 mile), waymarked point-to-point walk across the High Weald National Landscape in south-east [England](#), from Horsham to Rye. Usually walked in 7 days, it is a moderate lowland thru-hike: no mountains, but around 2,676 m of cumulative ascent, long stages and muddy woodland or clay paths after rain. It suits walkers who want historic villages, ancient woods, pasture, sandstone outcrops, gardens and easy rail access rather than wilderness or high altitude.

## Route Overview

The usual direction is west to east, starting at Horsham railway station in West Sussex and finishing at Strand Quay in Rye, East Sussex. The trail is waymarked both ways with green named signs and tree-and-church discs, so it can also be walked east to west. The official seven sections run via Cuckfield, East Grinstead, Groombridge, Matfield, Rolvenden and Flackley Ash, with Tenterden and Rye key eastern anchors. It is a regional trail, not a statutory National Trail. Rail access is strong for section-walking, with many points within about 60 minutes of London. For wider UK planning, compare [Beacons Way](#), [Anglesey Coastal Path](#) and [Amber Valley Route](#).

## High Weald history and iron heritage

The trail was created to show the main landscape types of the High Weald, one of England's best-preserved medieval countrysides. Its pattern of small irregular fields, ancient woodland, sunken lanes, scattered farmsteads and ridge-top villages has changed little since medieval times. The route also crosses old iron-working country: Wealden oak and water power supported a major iron industry until the 16th century, and hammer ponds still mark the valleys where forges once worked.

## Notable highlights

- **Standen House and Garden:** An Arts and Crafts country house near East Grinstead, designed by Philip Webb with William Morris interiors. The trail passes close by; admission applies for the National Trust property.
- **Harrison's Rocks and High Rocks:** Ardingly sandstone outcrops in woodland near Groombridge. They are well-known climbing crags and give this part of the route its distinctive sandstone-ridge character.
- **Historic gardens — Wakehurst, Borde Hill and Groombridge:** The route threads a notably garden-rich part of the High Weald, including Kew's wild botanic garden at Wakehurst, Borde Hill near Haywards Heath and Groombridge Place.
- **Smallhythe Place and Chapel Down vineyard:** Near Tenterden, the trail passes Smallhythe Place, the half-timbered former home of Victorian actress Ellen Terry, and skirts Chapel Down vineyard.
- **Tenterden and the Kent & East Sussex Railway:** Tenterden is a Wealden market town with weatherboarded houses and the terminus of a heritage steam railway running through the countryside to Bodiam.

- **Rye:** The walk finishes at Strand Quay in Rye, a cobbled medieval hill town above Romney Marsh and a former Cinque Port, with views over the Rother and surrounding levels.

## Challenges to expect

The difficulty is mostly cumulative rather than technical. Expect long day stages, especially the 27.4 km and 30.6 km sections, plus constant small climbs over the ridged High Weald. Woodland and clay paths can be muddy after rain, and winter days are short. Waymarking is good, but carry OS Explorer maps 134, 135, 136 and 125 or a reliable route file. Book accommodation ahead in smaller villages.

# Key Data

|                       |                                                   |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Country               | United Kingdom, England                           |
| Distance              | 145 km                                            |
| Duration              | 7 days                                            |
| Difficulty            | Moderate                                          |
| Trail type            | Point to point                                    |
| Elevation gain/loss   | 2676 m                                            |
| Highest point         | 183 m                                             |
| Terrain & landscape   | Forest, Grassland                                 |
| Trail surface         | Dirt, Grass                                       |
| Accommodation         | Hotels, Guesthouses, Campsites                    |
| Average daytime temp. | 17°C                                              |
| Chance of rainfall    | Medium                                            |
| Estimated cost        | \$\$                                              |
| Optimal season        | Spring, Summer, Autumn                            |
| Accessibility         | Family Friendly, Pet Friendly                     |
| Facilities            | Restrooms, Water Sources, Campsites, Picnic Areas |
| Permits & fees        | No permits or fees                                |



# Introduction

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The High Weald Landscape Trail is a 145 km point-to-point walk across south-east England, running from Horsham railway station to Strand Quay below Rye. It suits reasonably fit walkers who want a signed lowland journey through historic Wealden country rather than a remote mountain route.

The route crosses the High Weald National Landscape through ancient woodland, gill valleys, sunken lanes, small fields and ridge-top villages. Its character changes gradually from the wooded western High Weald around St Leonard's Forest and West Hoathly to the hop gardens, orchards and oast houses of Kent before the finish above the River Rother and Romney Marsh.

This is a trail of cumulative detail: sandstone outcrops near Groombridge, gardens and estates close to the line, Wealden iron heritage in the valleys, and the medieval hill town of Rye at the end. Rail access at Horsham, East Grinstead and Rye makes it unusually practical for section-walking as well as a week-long thru-hike.

The walking is moderate rather than technical, but it should not be underestimated. Long official day sections, repeated small climbs over the ridged High Weald and muddy clay or woodland paths after rain can make progress slower than the map suggests.

This guide covers stages, days, accommodation, food, transport, terrain and the common planning mistakes to avoid.

## Stage-by-Stage Guide

The stage distances below follow the official seven-day breakdown, rounded to the nearest kilometre. The route is waymarked with green named signs and tree-and-church discs, but OS Explorer mapping or a reliable GPX is still important, especially where woodland paths, field edges and lanes meet.

### Stage 1: Horsham to Cuckfield — approx. 23 km

The trail starts at Horsham railway station and quickly becomes a lowland High Weald walk rather than an urban route. The main character of the day is the move east into the western Weald, with St Leonard's Forest giving an early taste of the wooded ridges and enclosed paths that define much of the trail.

Underfoot, expect a mix of woodland tracks, field paths and quiet lanes. After wet weather, the clay and forest sections can be slow, slippery and waterlogged, so this is not a stage to underestimate just because the gradients are modest.

St Leonard's Forest is the key landscape feature of the day. Further east, the route enters the garden-rich western High Weald, with Borde Hill near the trail corridor before Cuckfield.

Food and water planning should be simple at the start in Horsham and at the end around Cuckfield, but do not assume regular refreshment stops once the route has left town. Carry enough water and food for the day unless current opening times have been checked in advance.

Cuckfield and the nearby Haywards Heath area are the practical overnight focus for this stage. Accommodation exists in the wider area, but beds should be booked ahead and checked against the exact stage break, as the trail does not always pass neatly through the most convenient accommodation points.

Transport is strongest at the start, with Horsham railway station directly on the route. For Cuckfield and the surrounding area, onward travel is more dependent on local buses, taxis or connecting transport; this should be checked before travelling, especially on Sundays.

Navigation is generally straightforward where waymarks are present, but the first day sets the pattern for the whole trail: field exits, woodland junctions and short lane links need attention. In St Leonard's Forest, keep checking that waymarks and map line agree rather than following the most obvious track by habit.

### Stage 2: Cuckfield to East Grinstead — approx. 27 km

This is one of the longer and more demanding stages, crossing the central High Weald ridge country between Cuckfield and East Grinstead. The walking is not technical, but the repeated small climbs and descents add up over the day.

The route passes through a particularly rich part of the High Weald, with Wakehurst close to the trail corridor and West Hoathly lying near the route's highest ground at about 183 m. Standen House and Garden is also close to the trail near East Grinstead; admission applies if visiting rather than simply walking past the area.

Terrain is typical ridged Wealden country: ancient woodland, small fields, sunken lanes and short road links. Woodland and clay sections can be heavy after rain, and a 27 km day over this ground can take longer than the map distance suggests.

Cuckfield and East Grinstead are the main planning points for food, water and supplies. Do not rely on gardens, visitor attractions or intermediate villages for refreshments without checking current opening times and whether a detour is needed.

East Grinstead is one of the best end-of-day stops on the trail, with stronger accommodation options than the smaller villages. It is also a railway town, making this stage particularly useful for section walkers.

For navigation, take care around garden estates, woodland boundaries and lane crossings, where paths can be close together. The trail is waymarked, but this is a stage where an OS map or GPX helps avoid small, time-consuming errors.

### **Stage 3: East Grinstead to Groombridge — approx. 21 km**

This stage leaves East Grinstead and continues through wooded, rolling High Weald country towards Groombridge on the Sussex–Kent border. It is shorter than the previous day, but still has the constant undulation that makes the trail more tiring than a flat lowland walk.

The route passes near Forest Row and moves towards the sandstone-ridge landscape around Groombridge. By the end of the stage, the character is increasingly defined by woodland, enclosed valleys and the Ardingly-sandstone outcrops for which this part of the Weald is known.

Paths are mostly field and woodland paths, with quiet lanes used to link settlements and valleys. Mud remains the main underfoot issue, particularly in shaded woodland and on clay-based paths after rain.

East Grinstead and Groombridge should be treated as the main food and water points. If planning to use facilities near Forest Row or elsewhere en route, check the exact line of the trail, opening times and whether a detour is required.

Accommodation around Groombridge is more limited than in East Grinstead, so book before committing to this stage break. Groombridge also has road access and local public transport options, but timetables should be checked before travelling.

Navigation needs care where the trail moves between woodland, lanes and village edges. Around the sandstone outcrop country near Groombridge, paths and access tracks can feel intricate, so keep an eye on waymarks rather than following informal-looking paths.

### **Stage 4: Groombridge to Matfield — approx. 23 km**

This stage begins in one of the most distinctive parts of the route, with Groombridge Place nearby and the sandstone outcrops of Harrison's Rocks, High Rocks and Eridge Rocks close to the trail corridor. It is a good day for walkers interested in the geology and wooded ridge character of the High Weald.

The walking then continues east through a mix of woodland, pasture, small fields and lanes towards Matfield. The trail remains low-level, but the rhythm of short climbs out of valleys and descents back into them continues throughout the day.



Path conditions are highly weather-dependent. In dry spells this is generally pleasant lowland walking; after rain, woodland tracks and field paths can become slow and muddy, especially where livestock or repeated foot traffic has churned the surface.

Groombridge and Matfield are the key stage-end planning points for food and water. Between them, do not assume guaranteed services on the line of the trail; carry a full day's supplies unless current options have been checked.

Matfield is a smaller end point, so accommodation should be arranged in advance. If staying away from the exact trail line, allow for the extra distance or organise a transfer rather than leaving it to the end of the day.

Public transport at this stage is more dependent on local services than the rail-linked sections at Horsham, East Grinstead and Rye. Bus times, taxi availability and Sunday services should be checked before travelling.

Navigation is mainly about discipline rather than difficulty. The waymarking is helpful, but repeated changes between field paths, woodland, estate edges and short lane sections mean it is easy to miss a turn if walking on autopilot.

## **Stage 5: Matfield to Rolvenden — approx. 31 km**

This is the longest official stage and the hardest day for many walkers. It crosses the Kent High Weald between Matfield and Rolvenden, passing near Brenchley, Cranbrook and Benenden, with hop gardens, orchards and traditional oast houses giving the day a strongly Kentish character.

The terrain is still non-technical, but the distance is substantial and the cumulative ascent matters. Expect field paths, enclosed lanes, woodland sections and agricultural edges, with the usual High Weald pattern of small climbs and descents rather than one major hill.

Because the route passes near several villages rather than necessarily through their centres, food and water require planning. Do not assume that Brenchley, Cranbrook or Benenden will provide easy on-trail refreshments without checking the exact route and any detour needed.

Start with enough food and water to cover a long day. In warm weather, or after rain when mud slows progress, this stage can take significantly longer than a simple 31 km distance estimate suggests.

Accommodation planning is especially important here. Stage breaks around the Cranbrook, Benenden, Tenterden and Rolvenden area vary between guides and itineraries, so beds must be lined up with the route before booking the rest of the walk.

Rolvenden and the surrounding area are smaller than the main rail towns, so options may be limited. Local buses and road access may help section walkers, but timetables and Sunday availability should be checked before travelling.

Navigation is not technically difficult, but fatigue is a genuine issue late in the day. Keep checking waymarks at field corners, lane junctions and orchard or hop-garden edges, where a missed turn can add unwelcome distance to an already long stage.

## Stage 6: Rolvenden to Flackley Ash — approx. 20 km

This stage continues through the eastern Kent High Weald towards Flackley Ash near Northiam. It is shorter than the Matfield to Rolvenden stage, but still needs proper planning because the end point is not a large town.

The route skirts the Tenterden area and passes close to late-route highlights including Smallhythe Place and the Chapel Down vineyard area. Tenterden itself, with its weatherboarded houses and the Kent & East Sussex Railway terminus, is near the trail corridor rather than a guaranteed on-line stop for every itinerary.

The walking remains a mix of field paths, quiet lanes, orchards, hop country and wooded sections. Mud can still be a problem after rain, particularly where paths cross clay ground or shaded woodland.

Food and water should be planned from Rolvenden, with any use of Tenterden-area services checked against the exact route. Smallhythe Place and Chapel Down are attractions close to the trail corridor, but opening times, admission and refreshment availability should be checked before relying on them.

Accommodation at or near Flackley Ash and Northiam must be arranged in advance. This is one of the stage breaks where walkers should be particularly careful that the booked bed, evening meal and next morning's transport or onward route all fit together.

Public transport is local rather than rail-based here. Check bus times before travelling, and be especially cautious about Sunday or bank holiday services.

Navigation is generally waymarked, but the eastern stages have many agricultural edges, lanes and small settlements. Keep using the map or GPX to confirm the intended line, especially if detouring towards Tenterden or other nearby services.

## Stage 7: Flackley Ash to Rye — approx. 7 km

The final official stage is short, running from Flackley Ash to Rye and the finish at Strand Quay. It can feel very different from the earlier long ridge days, with the reward of finishing below Rye's medieval hill town beside the River Rother and the edge of Romney Marsh.

The route passes through the final eastern High Weald countryside, with Wittersham in the route sequence before Rye. Although the distance is modest, paths and field edges can still be muddy after rain, so it is not automatically a trainer-friendly stroll.

Food and water needs are minimal compared with earlier stages, but carry enough for the morning rather than assuming an immediate stop before Rye. Rye is the clear finish-point for refreshments, accommodation and onward travel.

Rye is one of the most practical overnight stops on the whole trail, with more visitor accommodation than the smaller villages. It also has a railway station, making the end of the walk straightforward for most walkers.

The finish is at Strand Quay, below the hill town, rather than simply "somewhere in Rye". Keep following the waymarked route and map line through to the official endpoint if completing the full trail.

Some walkers may choose to combine this short final stage with the previous day, but only if accommodation, daylight, transport and energy levels make that sensible. The safer planning approach

is to treat Flackley Ash accommodation and the final approach to Rye as details to arrange before setting out, not decisions to solve at the end of Stage 6.

# Recommended Itinerary

## Standard 7-day itinerary

The official seven-section structure is the cleanest way to plan the High Weald Landscape Trail. It keeps most days in the low-to-mid 20 km range, with one noticeably longer stage between Matfield and Rolvenden and a short final approach into Rye.

Accommodation should be arranged before fixing the itinerary, especially around the smaller intermediate villages and the eastern stages where breaks around Tenterden, Cranbrook and Flackley Ash can vary between guides.

| Day | From           | To             | Approx. distance | Why this stage makes sense                                                                                                                                                      | Services/accommodation notes                                                                                                                                           |
|-----|----------------|----------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Horsham        | Cuckfield      | 23 km            | A practical first day from Horsham railway station, heading east through the western High Weald and St Leonard's Forest before reaching a village-sized overnight stop.         | Horsham is the easiest start point for rail access. Cuckfield has better planning potential than smaller rural points, but accommodation should still be booked ahead. |
| 2   | Cuckfield      | East Grinstead | 27 km            | One of the longer days, crossing the central High Weald ridge country near Borde Hill, Wakehurst, West Hoathly and Standen before reaching a major rail town.                   | East Grinstead is one of the strongest overnight and transport points on the route. This is a long stage with repeated small climbs, so an early start is sensible.    |
| 3   | East Grinstead | Groombridge    | 21 km            | A more moderate day after the long second stage, passing into the sandstone-ridge character of the Sussex-Kent border country near Forest Row and the rocks around Groombridge. | Groombridge is a logical stage break, but accommodation is more limited than in East Grinstead. Book before relying on it as an overnight stop.                        |
| 4   | Groombridge    | Matfield       | 23 km            | A balanced day through wooded, undulating Wealden country, with sandstone outcrops and quiet lanes giving way towards the Kentish side of the trail.                            | Matfield is a small village stage end. Check accommodation and evening food options before committing to this break.                                                   |

| Day | From         | To           | Approx. distance | Why this stage makes sense                                                                                                                                                           | Services/accommodation notes                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----|--------------|--------------|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5   | Matfield     | Rolvenden    | 31 km            | The hardest standard day on distance alone, crossing classic Kent High Weald countryside of hop gardens, orchards, oast houses and villages near Brenchley, Cranbrook and Benenden.  | This stage needs the most care. Beds may not line up neatly with the official section, and the trail passes near rather than necessarily through some service centres. Check accommodation before booking the whole route. |
| 6   | Rolvenden    | Flackley Ash | 20 km            | A shorter day after the long Matfield–Rolvenden stage, passing the eastern Weald around Tenterden, Smallhythe Place, Wittersham and vineyard country before the final approach area. | Flackley Ash is a practical official break near Northiam, but availability should be checked early. Some walkers may prefer to adjust this stage if accommodation is awkward.                                              |
| 7   | Flackley Ash | Rye          | 7 km             | A deliberately short final stage into Rye and Strand Quay, useful for onward travel or time in the medieval hill town after finishing.                                               | Rye has rail access and is the strongest finish-point base. If accommodation near Flackley Ash is difficult, combining Days 6 and 7 is the obvious faster option.                                                          |

## Slower variant: 8–9 days

A slower itinerary suits walkers who prefer shorter days, want time for gardens and historic properties close to the route, or are walking in muddy conditions when the clay and woodland paths can slow progress. The stages most worth shortening are Cuckfield to East Grinstead and Matfield to Rolvenden, because these are the longest days in the standard plan.

Possible slower adjustments include:

- Add an extra night between Cuckfield and East Grinstead to reduce the 27 km second day. The route passes close to places such as Borde Hill, Wakehurst, West Hoathly and Standen, but accommodation and transport links must be checked before booking.
- Split Matfield to Rolvenden if suitable accommodation can be found near the Cranbrook or Benenden part of the route corridor. The trail passes near these places rather than necessarily through their centres, so do not assume a bed or evening meal is directly on the line.
- Keep the short Flackley Ash to Rye final stage if using public transport from Rye or allowing time in the town after finishing.

Use this version if daily distance matters more than finishing in a week. Exact revised distances depend on the chosen overnight stops and should be checked against official mapping before booking.



## Faster variant: 6 days

A six-day walk is realistic for fit walkers who are comfortable with consecutive long lowland days and do not need much time for detours. The simplest acceleration is to combine the final two official stages, walking Rolvenden to Rye in one day of roughly 27 km instead of stopping at Flackley Ash.

That leaves the rest of the official structure intact:

| Day | From           | To             | Approx. distance | Why this stage makes sense                                                                   | Services/accommodation notes                                                                                                              |
|-----|----------------|----------------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Horsham        | Cuckfield      | 23 km            | Keeps the standard first day from the rail start.                                            | Book Cuckfield accommodation ahead.                                                                                                       |
| 2   | Cuckfield      | East Grinstead | 27 km            | Long but logical, ending at a strong rail and service point.                                 | East Grinstead is the best-supported overnight on the central route.                                                                      |
| 3   | East Grinstead | Groombridge    | 21 km            | A manageable middle day after the longer second stage.                                       | Confirm beds in Groombridge before relying on this break.                                                                                 |
| 4   | Groombridge    | Matfield       | 23 km            | Keeps the standard rhythm across the Sussex–Kent border country.                             | Matfield is small; check accommodation and food options.                                                                                  |
| 5   | Matfield       | Rolvenden      | 31 km            | Retains the longest official stage, so this remains the key test of the faster itinerary.    | This day needs early booking and an early start. Consider a slower plan if accommodation does not align.                                  |
| 6   | Rolvenden      | Rye            | 27 km            | Combines the official 20 km Rolvenden–Flackley Ash stage with the 7 km final stage into Rye. | Rye is the strongest finish base. This avoids the need for an overnight stop at Flackley Ash, but makes the final day a full walking day. |

A five-day itinerary is possible only for very strong walkers willing to create several long custom stages. Because accommodation spacing is uneven and the trail uses many small rural paths rather than a simple town-to-town corridor, exact five-day breaks should be planned from mapping and booked accommodation, not guessed from the headline distance.

# Planning the Route

## How many days to allow

The cleanest plan is the seven-day itinerary used for the official trail sections. That gives a series of full but manageable lowland walking days, with the main strain coming from repeated short climbs, clay underfoot and the need to reach pre-booked accommodation rather than from any technical terrain.

Fit walkers can compress parts of the route, especially the short final section into Rye, but this should be driven by accommodation and transport rather than by mileage alone. The longest official day is Matfield to Rolvenden at about 31 km, so adding extra distance to that part of the walk is rarely the easiest option.

A slower schedule suits walkers who want time for nearby gardens, historic houses and towns such as Standen, Wakehurst, Borde Hill, Groombridge Place, Smallhythe Place, Tenterden and Rye. Several of these are close to the trail rather than directly on it, and admission, opening hours and detour time should be checked before travelling.

## Stage breaks and accommodation

The route is not a wilderness trail, but accommodation is unevenly spaced. Horsham, the Cuckfield/Haywards Heath area, East Grinstead, Tenterden and Rye give the broadest range of services; smaller intermediate villages can be much thinner for beds, food and evening options.

Book accommodation before fixing the itinerary, particularly between Matfield, Rolvenden, Flackley Ash and Rye. Stage breaks around Tenterden, Cranbrook and Flackley Ash vary between guides, so do not assume that a named place on the route will have a suitable bed available on the night needed.

| Official section                           | Planning note                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Horsham to Cuckfield, about 23 km          | A straightforward first full day from Horsham railway station into the western High Weald. Check where the overnight stop is actually located around Cuckfield or the wider Haywards Heath area.  |
| Cuckfield to East Grinstead, about 27 km   | A longer day across the central ridges, passing close to places such as Wakehurst, West Hoathly and Standen. East Grinstead is a useful rail-access point and a natural major break.              |
| East Grinstead to Groombridge, about 21 km | A more moderate distance, useful if linking public transport at East Grinstead with an overnight stop near Groombridge.                                                                           |
| Groombridge to Matfield, about 23 km       | Plan time for the sandstone-outcrop country around Harrison's Rocks, High Rocks and Eridge Rocks if making short detours. Overnight options around Matfield should be arranged in advance.        |
| Matfield to Rolvenden, about 31 km         | The key stage to plan carefully. This is the longest official day, through the Kent High Weald where breaks near Cranbrook, Benenden and Tenterden vary by itinerary and available accommodation. |

| Official section                       | Planning note                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rolvenden to Flackley Ash, about 20 km | A shorter day after the longest stage. Check accommodation at or near Flackley Ash/Northiam before committing to this break.                                              |
| Flackley Ash to Rye, about 7 km        | A short finishing section into Rye and Strand Quay. Strong walkers may combine it with the previous day, but only if onward travel and the longer day are both practical. |

## Shortening, extending and section walking

Section walking is one of the route's strengths. Horsham, East Grinstead and Rye are railway stations, and local buses and connecting trains make many other access points possible, although timetables are much less forgiving in smaller villages and on Sundays.

For a weekend-style approach, East Grinstead is the most obvious major dividing point because it is both on the trail corridor and on the rail network. Other starts and finishes can work, but should be planned around actual bus times, taxi availability or a lift rather than assumed from the map.

The route is waymarked both ways, so it can be walked east-to-west as well as Horsham-to-Rye. However, most itineraries and stage descriptions are framed west-to-east, and the finish at Strand Quay in Rye makes a practical end point with rail access.

Extending the walk is best done by adding time, not necessarily distance. Nearby gardens, houses, sandstone outcrops, Tenterden and Rye can all justify a slower schedule, but opening days, admission and any side-route logistics should be checked before travelling.

## Navigation and mapping

The trail is waymarked with green named signs and discs showing a stylised tree and church, but it is a regional long-distance route rather than a statutory National Trail. Waymarks are useful, not a substitute for navigation, especially through woodland, field edges and around village approaches.

Carry the relevant Ordnance Survey Explorer mapping: 134, 135, 136 and 125. A reliable GPX track is also sensible, particularly because printed guidance is now limited mainly to leaflet material and the older High Weald Forum guidebook is out of print.

Check for path diversions before setting off. Woodland work, wet ground, field-edge changes and local closures can matter on a lowland route with many small rights of way.

## Food, water and daily supplies

Do not plan this as a continuous shop-to-shop walk. Larger towns and market towns provide better resupply opportunities, but the smaller villages and rural sections may have limited or no convenient daytime food options.

Carry lunch and enough water for each day, especially on the longer Cuckfield to East Grinstead and Matfield to Rolvenden stages. Pub, café and shop opening times should be checked before travelling, particularly on Sundays and outside summer.

Accommodation should also be treated as the main resupply anchor. If staying in a small village, check whether an evening meal, breakfast and next-day packed lunch are available before booking.

## Weather, ground conditions and kit

The most important ground-condition issue is mud. The High Weald has heavy clay and many woodland paths, so rain can turn otherwise easy lowland walking into slow, sticky going.

Waterproof footwear with good grip is a better choice than lightweight shoes in wet periods. Gaiters are useful after prolonged rain, and poles can help on repeated short climbs and slippery descents through woods and sunken lanes.

Spring, summer and autumn are the most practical seasons. Winter is possible for experienced lowland walkers, but the combination of short daylight, muddy clay paths and reduced rural services makes the seven-day itinerary less forgiving.

## The main planning priorities

The route is logistically straightforward if the big decisions are made early: accommodation first, then transport, then daily food and navigation. The walking itself is moderate, but missed buses, unavailable beds or closed food stops can turn a manageable stage into a difficult day.

Before committing to dates, check:

- accommodation at every intended overnight stop, especially Matfield, Rolvenden and Flackley Ash;
- rail and bus times for the start, finish and any section-walk exits, with extra care on Sundays;
- current opening times for any gardens, houses, pubs, cafés or shops being relied on;
- OS maps or GPX coverage for the full route;
- recent weather, as clay and woodland sections can be very muddy after rain;
- any local path diversions affecting the chosen dates.

## Towns, Villages and Overnight Stops

Accommodation is straightforward at the two rail-linked ends of the trail and in the larger towns, but it becomes more constrained through the smaller High Weald villages. The most important planning rule is to book the intermediate nights before committing to daily distances, especially around Matfield, Rolvenden, Tenterden, Cranbrook and Flackley Ash.

The official seven-day itinerary uses Cuckfield, East Grinstead, Groombridge, Matfield, Rolvenden and Flackley Ash as overnight breaks before finishing at Rye. Fit walkers often adjust these, but the route's constant small climbs, muddy clay after rain and occasional gaps in services make accommodation-led planning more reliable than distance-led planning.

### Horsham

Horsham is the western start of the High Weald Landscape Trail, with the route beginning at Horsham railway station before heading east towards St Leonard's Forest. It is one of the easiest places on the trail for a pre-walk overnight, with the strongest combination of accommodation, food and transport at the start.

Use Horsham for the first proper shop, breakfast and last-minute supplies before leaving town. Once the route enters the wooded High Weald, services become less predictable, so do not assume frequent food stops on the first day to Cuckfield.

Transport is simple by trail standards because the walk starts at the station. If arriving on the morning of day one, allow enough time for a full first stage rather than treating the forested opening miles as a short warm-up.

### St Leonard's Forest

St Leonard's Forest is an early landscape section rather than an overnight base. The trail passes through this western High Weald woodland after leaving Horsham, and it is best treated as a carry-through section between Horsham and Cuckfield.

Plan food and water before entering the day's more rural stretches. Accommodation should be sought in Horsham before the walk or around Cuckfield and the wider Haywards Heath area at the end of the first stage.

### Cuckfield

Cuckfield is the official end of the first stage from Horsham, making it a logical first overnight stop. The wider Cuckfield/Haywards Heath area is one of the better accommodation zones on the western half of the route, but beds should still be booked ahead during busy walking and garden-visiting periods.

It is a useful place to reset after the first 23 km section and before the longer second day towards East Grinstead. Food and evening meal options should be checked when booking accommodation, particularly if arriving late or walking on a Sunday.

Local onward transport for section-walkers uses the wider public transport network rather than the trail itself. Timetables and any required connections should be checked before travelling.

## **Borde Hill area**

The trail passes near Borde Hill, one of the noted gardens in the western High Weald. It is not a standard overnight stop in its own right, but it can influence timing if adding a garden visit to the Cuckfield or Haywards Heath-area stage.

Do not rely on Borde Hill as a resupply point for the walking day unless opening times and facilities have been checked in advance. Most walkers will use Cuckfield, the wider Haywards Heath area or the next booked overnight stop for accommodation and meals.

## **Wakehurst area**

Wakehurst sits in the trail corridor near Ardingly and West Hoathly. It is a worthwhile nearby point of interest, but it should be planned as a visit rather than as a core overnight stop.

Adding Wakehurst can make an already undulating day longer, so build in time for paths, entry arrangements and onward walking. Opening times, admission arrangements and any food availability should be checked before relying on it during a stage.

## **West Hoathly**

West Hoathly lies on the central High Weald ridge, close to the route's highest ground near 183 m. This is not a mountain high point, but it is a useful reminder that the middle of the trail gains height repeatedly over wooded ridges and short valleys.

For most walkers, West Hoathly is a daytime point between Cuckfield and East Grinstead rather than a main overnight stop. Accommodation in smaller villages can be thin, so any plan to break the long second stage here or nearby needs to be arranged before setting out.

Food and pub opening times in smaller villages should not be assumed. Carry enough provisions to continue to East Grinstead if a planned stop is closed.

## **Standen House area**

Standen House and Garden is close to the route near East Grinstead. It is a National Trust Arts and Crafts house with admission applying, so it is best treated as an optional visit rather than part of the core walking logistics.

East Grinstead is the practical overnight base for this part of the trail. If visiting Standen, check opening times and allow for the extra time before reaching accommodation or transport.

## **East Grinstead**

East Grinstead is one of the strongest logistical anchors on the High Weald Landscape Trail. It is the official end of stage two and start of stage three, has a railway station, and is one of the larger places with a better spread of accommodation than the smaller villages.

This is a sensible resupply and laundry-reset point for a week-long walk, and a good place to join or leave the trail for a section walk. Food options are more reliable here than in the smaller settlements, although opening times should still be checked if arriving late.



Because the previous official stage from Cuckfield is long at around 27 km, booking accommodation in East Grinstead is usually preferable to trying to improvise at the end of the day. It also gives a clean start for the next section towards Groombridge.

## **Forest Row area**

The route passes near Forest Row after East Grinstead. It can be useful for walkers adjusting the East Grinstead to Groombridge section, but it is not one of the official overnight breaks in the standard seven-day schedule.

Accommodation and food arrangements near Forest Row should be checked before making it a planned stop. For section-walkers, local transport may be possible, but bus and connection times should be verified, especially on Sundays.

## **Groombridge**

Groombridge is the official end of stage three and start of stage four, sitting on the Sussex–Kent border. It is a key overnight point if following the standard itinerary, particularly because the surrounding section includes the distinctive sandstone outcrops around Harrison’s Rocks, High Rocks and Eridge Rocks.

As a smaller village stop, Groombridge needs more careful booking than Horsham, East Grinstead or Rye. Confirm accommodation, evening food and breakfast arrangements before arrival, rather than assuming walk-in availability.

Groombridge Place is nearby, and the sandstone outcrops can slow the day if time is spent exploring. Treat these as timing considerations as well as highlights, especially if continuing on to a booked bed.

## **Harrison’s Rocks and High Rocks area**

Harrison’s Rocks and High Rocks are landscape features near the route rather than overnight bases. They are important for the character of the Groombridge section, with wooded Ardingly-sandstone outcrops and established climbing crags.

Do not plan these areas as service points. Carry what is needed between Groombridge and the next settlement, and check any intended detour or visit before relying on facilities.

## **Matfield**

Matfield is the official end of stage four and start of the long fifth stage to Rolvenden. It is one of the more important places to secure before the walk, because the next official section is around 31 km and accommodation choices in smaller intermediate villages are limited.

Book Matfield accommodation early, and confirm food arrangements directly. If no suitable bed is available, adjust the itinerary before starting the trail rather than hoping to solve the problem on arrival.

For resupply, treat Matfield as a small-village stop and carry enough food for the following day. The Kent High Weald section east of here passes through hop gardens, orchards and small settlements, but services do not line up as reliably as in the larger towns.

## **Brenchley area**

The trail passes near Brenchley on the Kent side of the route. It can be relevant when splitting or adjusting the long Matfield to Rolvenden stage, but it should not be assumed to be a full-service stop without checking.

Accommodation, food and local transport should all be arranged in advance if using Brenchley or nearby lanes as a break point. This should be checked before travelling.

## **Cranbrook area**

Cranbrook is near the trail rather than necessarily on the main walking line through its centre. It can be useful as an accommodation or services option when reworking the eastern stages, especially where the standard breaks around Tenterden, Cranbrook and Flackley Ash vary between guides.

Any plan to overnight in or near Cranbrook needs careful route planning, because an off-route bed can add distance at the end or start of a long day. Confirm accommodation, meals, transport links and the walking route back to the trail before booking.

## **Benenden area**

The route passes near Benenden in the eastern High Weald. Like Cranbrook, it is most relevant as a possible adjustment point rather than a fixed overnight stop in the official seven-day schedule.

Use Benenden only if accommodation and access back to the trail are clear. Food, pubs, buses and opening times should be checked before travelling, particularly outside peak season or on Sundays.

## **Rolvenden**

Rolvenden is the official end of the long fifth stage from Matfield and the start of stage six. After a 31 km day, it is a highly practical overnight stop if beds are available.

Book ahead and confirm evening food, because arriving tired after the longest official stage leaves little margin for improvisation. This is also the point where many walkers begin thinking carefully about the final logistics around Tenterden, Smallhythe, Flackley Ash and Rye.

The surrounding country has the classic Kent High Weald mix of orchards, hop gardens and oast houses. It is attractive walking, but still rural, so plan supplies rather than relying on frequent shops.

## **Tenterden area**

The trail passes near Tenterden rather than necessarily through the town centre. It is still one of the more useful accommodation and services areas in the eastern part of the route, and can be a practical alternative when standard breaks around Rolvenden, Flackley Ash or Rye do not fit available beds.

Tenterden is also associated with the Kent & East Sussex Railway and sits near Chapel Down vineyard, which the route skirts on the eastern stages. These are optional additions, not essential trail logistics, and they can add time if included.

If using Tenterden as an overnight base, check the exact walking distance from the trail, the route back in the morning, meal options and onward transport. This should be checked before travelling.

## **Smallhythe Place**

Smallhythe Place is passed towards the end of the walk near Tenterden. It is a National Trust property and a point of interest rather than a standard overnight stop.

If visiting, check opening times and allow enough time to continue to the booked accommodation. Do not treat it as a guaranteed food or resupply point unless current facilities have been checked.

## **Wittersham**

Wittersham comes late in the route before Rye. It is a smaller settlement and is best treated as a possible timing point or local stop rather than a guaranteed overnight base.

Accommodation and food should be checked in advance if planning to stop here or nearby. Many walkers will either use Flackley Ash as the final overnight on the official itinerary or continue to Rye, depending on beds and walking distance.

## **Flackley Ash, near Northiam**

Flackley Ash is the official end of stage six and start of the short final stage to Rye. It is a useful place to stop if following the seven-day schedule exactly, because the last day is only around 7 km.

This is also one of the places where itinerary planning needs care. Breaks around Tenterden, Cranbrook and Flackley Ash vary between guides, and accommodation should be secured before committing to the final two days.

If beds are unavailable, some walkers may prefer to rework the itinerary and continue to Rye from earlier in the eastern section, but that changes the balance of the final stages. Check accommodation, meals and any local transport before travelling.

## **Rye and Strand Quay**

The trail finishes at Strand Quay below the medieval hill town of Rye, above the River Rother and Romney Marsh. Rye has a railway station and is one of the easiest places on the route for a post-walk overnight, onward travel and a final meal.

Because the official final stage from Flackley Ash is short, Rye can be reached with time to spare if the previous night's accommodation is close to the route. If combining stages to finish in Rye on a longer day, make sure the extra distance is realistic after the cumulative ascent and muddy going of the previous sections.

Rye is the practical end-of-walk base for transport and accommodation. Book ahead in busy periods, and check train times before fixing return travel, especially for Sunday finishes.

# Getting to the Start

## By train

Horsham railway station is the official start of the High Weald Landscape Trail, so arriving by train is the simplest option. The route leaves directly from Horsham and heads east towards St Leonard's Forest, avoiding the need for a transfer to a separate trailhead.

Horsham has strong rail access for a lowland long-distance route, and many points on the wider trail corridor are within roughly an hour of London. Exact train times, engineering works and Sunday services should be checked before travelling.

If walking the trail end-to-end, rail access also helps at the far end: Rye, the finish town, has a railway station. This makes a train-in, train-out itinerary more practical than leaving a car at one end.

## By bus

Bus access is useful for local approaches to Horsham or for section-walkers joining from nearby villages, but the railway station is the key start point. Local bus timetables can be less frequent in smaller villages and on Sundays, so this should be checked before travelling.

For a full thru-hike, do not rely on turning up and making ad hoc bus connections at the start or during the first stage. If a bus connection is needed, build in spare time and have a taxi fallback.

## By car

Driving to the start is possible, but the trail is a point-to-point walk from Horsham to Rye, so car logistics need planning. Most walkers will find it easier to travel to Horsham by train and return from Rye by rail after finishing.

If leaving a vehicle in Horsham, check current long-stay parking options, overnight rules and charges before committing. Do not assume that station or town-centre parking is suitable for a week-long walk.

An alternative is to arrange parking near the finish and travel to Horsham before starting, but this adds a transfer at the beginning of the trip. Current rail times between Rye and Horsham should be checked before travelling.

## From the nearest airport

For international arrivals, the practical approach is to connect into the south-east England rail network and travel onwards to Horsham railway station. The best airport will depend on flight choice, arrival time and onward rail connections.

Airport-to-Horsham routes, late-evening arrivals and Sunday services should be checked before booking accommodation or committing to a same-day start. If arriving late, staying in Horsham before beginning the trail is the safer option.

## **Where to stay before starting**

Horsham is the most straightforward place to stay before day one, as the trail starts at the railway station. The town has the best pre-walk logistics: accommodation, food shops and onward access without needing a taxi to the trailhead.

Book ahead if starting at a busy time of year or travelling at weekends. The first official stage to Cuckfield is a full walking day, so choose accommodation that allows an early breakfast or an easy self-catering start.

## Getting Home from the Finish

The High Weald Landscape Trail finishes at Strand Quay in Rye, below the medieval hill town and close to the River Rother. Rye is one of the easier finish points on the route because it has a railway station and accommodation, but onward travel still needs checking in advance, especially on Sundays or if you expect to arrive late.

### By train

Rye railway station is the key exit point from the finish. From Strand Quay, allow time to walk up through Rye to the station, particularly if arriving tired, in poor weather or after dark.

Rye has onward rail connections into the wider south-east rail network, with links towards London and other major towns by connecting services. Exact routes, journey times and last trains are timetable-dependent and should be checked before travelling.

If finishing the trail on the short final stage from Flackley Ash to Rye, it is usually realistic to plan an onward train the same day. If combining stages or arriving after a long wet day, avoid booking a tight train connection from Rye; muddy clay paths and slow going on the eastern stages can easily eat into planned margins.

### By bus

Local buses may be useful for short hops from Rye or for reaching nearby accommodation, but they should not be treated as a guaranteed late-day fallback. Services in smaller High Weald villages can be limited, and Sunday timetables need particular attention.

Check current bus times before relying on them, and have a rail or taxi backup if the planned bus is infrequent. This is especially important if leaving the route before Rye or finishing outside normal daytime hours.

### By car/taxi

For a point-to-point walk, driving logistics need planning before the hike starts. Leaving a car at the finish in Rye can work if parking arrangements are sorted in advance, but it still leaves the question of how to reach Horsham at the start or retrieve another vehicle afterwards.

Taxis are the most flexible option for short transfers around Rye, late arrivals, accommodation away from the station, or returning to a parked car nearby. Pre-booking is sensible for evenings, Sundays and busy periods; do not assume a taxi will be immediately available at Strand Quay.

If arranging a lift, Strand Quay is the symbolic finish, but Rye railway station or central Rye may be simpler meeting points. Agree the exact location beforehand, as the finish sits below the hill town rather than at the station itself.

### From the nearest airport

Most walkers will leave the trail by rail rather than by airport transfer. Rye's station gives access to the wider rail network, from which airport connections can be made via major south-east rail hubs.



The best airport route depends on the airline, time of day and current rail timetables, so this should be checked before travelling. If flying out the same day, build in a substantial buffer or stay in Rye the night before onward travel.

## **Where to stay at the finish**

Rye is a good place to stay at the end of the trail, especially if arriving late, walking in winter daylight, or wanting a less rushed final day. Accommodation is available in Rye, but booking ahead is still recommended because the town is a popular destination in its own right.

Staying overnight also reduces pressure on the final train connection and gives more flexibility if the last sections have been slow underfoot. This is particularly useful after wet weather, when woodland and clay paths on the High Weald can be muddy and tiring.

## Which Direction Should You Walk?

The High Weald Landscape Trail is normally planned **west to east, from Horsham railway station to Strand Quay in Rye**. That is the standard direction used by the official seven-day breakdown, and it gives the most straightforward planning framework for accommodation and daily distances.

The route is waymarked both ways, so walking east to west is entirely possible. However, unless accommodation or transport works significantly better in reverse, most walkers are better served by following the official Horsham-to-Rye direction.

### West to east: Horsham to Rye

This is the most natural direction for a full thru-hike. It starts directly at **Horsham railway station**, then builds across the wooded ridges of the western High Weald via places such as **St Leonard's Forest, Cuckfield, West Hoathly and East Grinstead** before reaching the sandstone country around **Groombridge** and the hop-and-orchard landscapes of Kent.

The scenery also progresses well in this direction. The walk moves from forest, gardens and ridge-top villages into the more open eastern High Weald, with the final approach ending at **Rye and Strand Quay** below the medieval hill town and near the River Rother and Romney Marsh.

The finish at Rye is a strong psychological endpoint. It feels more conclusive than ending at a railway station in a large inland town, and it gives a clear sense of having crossed the High Weald from west to east.

### East to west: Rye to Horsham

Walking in reverse is practical because the trail is waymarked both ways and **Rye has rail access**. It can make sense for section-walkers, or for anyone who finds better accommodation availability by reversing the order of stages.

The main drawback is stage flow. In the official west-to-east itinerary, the final day from **Flackley Ash to Rye** is only about 7 km, giving an easy closing stage into the finish. In reverse, that short section becomes the opening day, which can feel awkward unless it fits travel plans particularly well.

The reverse direction also ends at **Horsham railway station**. That is convenient for onward travel, but less satisfying as a finale than arriving at Rye and Strand Quay.

### Climbs, weather and mud

There is no major ascent advantage either way. The trail does not cross high mountains or a single sustained pass; its difficulty comes from repeated short climbs over wooded ridges and gill valleys, with about 2,676 m of cumulative ascent across the full route.

Direction also matters less than ground conditions. After rain, the woodland and clay paths can be muddy or waterlogged whichever way you walk, so footwear and timing are more important than choosing eastbound or westbound.

Wind direction is not usually a deciding factor on this lowland, wooded route. Exposed weather can still affect long days, but the practical issue to plan around is mud, short winter daylight and the length of the official stages.

## Accommodation and transport considerations

For a continuous walk, the official west-to-east direction is easier to organise because the standard stage names and distances run from **Horsham to Cuckfield, East Grinstead, Groombridge, Matfield, Rolvenden, Flackley Ash and Rye**. Beds are thinner in smaller intermediate villages, and stage breaks around **Tenterden, Cranbrook and Flackley Ash** can vary between guides, so accommodation should be secured before committing to a direction.

Transport is good at both ends for a lowland trail: **Horsham, East Grinstead and Rye** all have railway stations, while other access points rely on connecting trains and local buses. Timetables, especially on Sundays and in smaller villages, should be checked before travelling.

## Recommendation

Walk the High Weald Landscape Trail **west to east, from Horsham to Rye**, unless accommodation availability or a specific transport plan strongly favours the reverse. The standard direction follows the official stage structure, gives a better scenic build-up through the High Weald, and finishes with the most satisfying arrival at Rye and Strand Quay.

## Accommodation Along the Route

The High Weald Landscape Trail works well as an inn-to-inn walk, but only if accommodation is planned before the itinerary is fixed. The strongest choice is at the trail ends and larger service centres: Horsham, the Cuckfield/Haywards Heath area, East Grinstead, Tenterden and Rye.

The awkward sections are the smaller intermediate villages, especially where the official stage breaks use places such as Groombridge, Matfield, Rolvenden and Flackley Ash. These are not places to arrive without a booking, and it is worth checking whether the available bed is actually on the line of the trail or needs a short taxi or local bus connection.

### Best overnight bases

| Place                                 | Accommodation level<br>(good/limited/none) | Best for                                                             | Notes                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Horsham                               | Good                                       | Night before starting                                                | The trail starts at Horsham railway station, making this the simplest place to stay before day 1. Hotels, inns, guesthouses and B&B-style options are the most practical fit here.                                           |
| Cuckfield /<br>Haywards<br>Heath area | Good                                       | End of day 1 / start<br>of day 2                                     | A useful first overnight area, but check whether the bed is in Cuckfield itself or nearby. If staying away from the trail line, confirm transport back to the route.                                                         |
| West Hoathly<br>area                  | Limited                                    | Alternative split<br>between Cuckfield<br>and East Grinstead         | Useful only if reshaping the longer second day. Accommodation is thinner than in the main towns, so availability should drive the plan rather than the other way round.                                                      |
| East Grinstead                        | Good                                       | End of day 2 / start<br>of day 3                                     | One of the strongest overnight stops on the route and a practical rail-access point for section walkers. A sensible place to build in a shorter or rest-style evening.                                                       |
| Groombridge                           | Limited                                    | End of day 3 / start<br>of day 4                                     | A logical overnight stop before the sandstone-outcrop section, but choice is limited compared with the larger towns. Book ahead and check food options for the evening.                                                      |
| Matfield                              | Limited                                    | End of day 4 / start<br>of day 5                                     | This is a small-village stop, so beds should be secured early. The following stage to Rolvenden is long, making an accurate start point important.                                                                           |
| Cranbrook /<br>Benenden area          | Limited                                    | Possible<br>adjustment to the<br>long Matfield–<br>Rolvenden section | The trail passes near these places rather than treating them as guaranteed overnight hubs. They may help break up the longest day, but route access, accommodation and onward transport should be checked before travelling. |

| Place          | Accommodation level<br>(good/limited/none) | Best for                              | Notes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rolvenden      | Limited                                    | End of day 5 / start of day 6         | A useful eastern-stage stop, but not a large accommodation centre. Book ahead, especially at weekends.                                                                                                                                 |
| Tenterden area | Good                                       | Alternative eastern-stage base        | The route passes near Tenterden, which has a stronger choice than many smaller villages. It can help solve awkward stage breaks around Rolvenden, Smallhythe Place and Flackley Ash, but may require a transfer to and from the trail. |
| Flackley Ash   | Limited                                    | End of day 6 / short final day to Rye | This stop is used in the official day split, near Northiam, but accommodation planning is essential. Breaks around Tenterden, Cranbrook and Flackley Ash vary between guides, so do not commit to a stage plan until beds are secured. |
| Rye            | Good                                       | Finish night                          | The finish at Strand Quay is below Rye, which is the obvious final overnight base and has rail access. Book ahead for weekends and holiday periods.                                                                                    |

## Booking strategy

Book the small-village nights first, then fit the easier town nights around them. In practice, that means checking Groombridge, Matfield, Rolvenden and Flackley Ash before assuming the seven-day schedule will work exactly as written.

Weekend pressure matters more here than remoteness. The High Weald is accessible from London and the south-east, and spring, summer and autumn weekends can tighten availability in attractive villages and towns. Late booking is most risky where there is only a small pool of inns, guesthouses or B&Bs.

Campsites exist in some towns and larger villages, but this is not a route with continuous, obvious camping at every stage end. Anyone planning to camp should confirm each night individually and not assume there will be a site close to the trail.

## Using taxis, buses and luggage transfers

Taxi transfers are often the cleanest way to solve awkward accommodation gaps, especially in the central and eastern stages where the route threads small villages and passes near, rather than directly through, some larger places. If using an off-route base such as the Tenterden area, arrange the return transfer in advance rather than relying on finding transport at the end of a long day.

Local buses and connecting trains can help section walkers, but small-village services and Sunday timetables should be checked before travelling. The stronger rail points for accommodation planning are Horsham, East Grinstead and Rye.

Dedicated baggage transfer should not be assumed. Walkers wanting to move luggage between overnight stops should check whether accommodation providers, local taxi firms or private transfer services can help before booking the itinerary.

## Camping and Wild Camping

The High Weald Landscape Trail can be camped, but it is not a classic backpacking route with frequent trailside pitches. It is a lowland, village-to-village walk through private farmland, ancient woodland, gardens, pasture and small settlements, so camping works best when booked in advance at established campsites near the larger towns and villages.

Accommodation is noticeably thinner in some of the intermediate villages, and this applies to camping as well as rooms. Before committing to a camping itinerary, check that campsites actually line up with the chosen stage breaks, especially around the longer middle and eastern stages.

### Campsites and practical camping options

The most realistic places to look for camping are around the larger service centres and trail corridors already used for overnight stops: Horsham, the Cuckfield/Haywards Heath area, East Grinstead, Tenterden and Rye. Availability, opening periods and whether small backpacking tents are accepted should be checked before travelling.

Some campsites may require a short road walk, bus connection or taxi from the trail. This is particularly relevant where the official stage end is a smaller place such as Groombridge, Matfield, Rolvenden or Flackley Ash, where options are less certain and should not be assumed.

| Route area                      | Camping practicality                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Horsham to Cuckfield            | Better chance of organised camping near larger settlements, but check exact location against the trail before booking.                             |
| Cuckfield to East Grinstead     | One of the more practical areas to plan a campsite-based stop because East Grinstead is a larger town with rail access.                            |
| East Grinstead to Groombridge   | Possible, but expect to plan carefully; do not assume a campsite at the stage end.                                                                 |
| Groombridge to Matfield         | More rural and less forgiving for spontaneous camping plans. Book ahead or arrange a transfer if needed.                                           |
| Matfield to Rolvenden           | The longest official day section, so campsite placement matters. Check options before fixing the itinerary.                                        |
| Rolvenden to Flackley Ash / Rye | Tenterden and Rye are the main areas to investigate. The final day into Rye is short, so many walkers may prefer to finish rather than camp again. |

Because the official stages include days of about 23 km, 27 km and 31 km, a camping pack will make the route feel harder than the headline “moderate” grade suggests. The constant small climbs, muddy clay paths and wet woodland sections can be tiring with a loaded rucksack, especially after rain.

### Wild camping legality and reality

Wild camping is not permitted as of right on this route. The trail crosses a patchwork of private farmland, woods, lanes, historic estates and protected High Weald National Landscape countryside, so pitching



without the landowner's permission should not be treated as an option.

If a private landowner gives explicit permission, keep the camp discreet, late and brief, and leave no trace. Without permission, use an established campsite or booked accommodation instead.

The practical reality is that this is a poor route for stealth-style camping. The countryside is settled and worked, with fields, woodland compartments, gardens, grazing land, sunken lanes and villages close together rather than remote open country.

## **Water and supplies when camping**

Plan drinking water around towns, accommodation and confirmed facilities, not streams, ponds or woodland water. The High Weald has gill valleys, hammer ponds and wet woodland, but that does not mean reliable potable water.

A campsite booking should include a check on water access, toilet facilities and late-arrival rules. On longer sections, especially Matfield to Rolvenden, carry enough water for the full day unless a definite resupply point has been planned.

## **Fires, stoves and low-impact camping**

Open fires are inappropriate on this trail unless an established campsite specifically permits them. The route passes through ancient woodland, pasture, heathland patches and farmed countryside, where fire risk, livestock, ground damage and landowner concerns all matter.

Use a stove only where it is allowed and set it up safely away from dry grass, leaf litter, roots and fences. In dry spells, even a small stove needs care in woodland and field-edge locations.

Follow strict Leave No Trace practice: take all litter out, avoid damaging field margins, keep away from livestock, do not disturb woods or heritage sites, and leave gates and paths as found. Human waste should be dealt with only where lawful and appropriate; campsites and public facilities are the sensible option on this lowland route.

## **Seasonal considerations**

Late spring, summer and autumn are the most practical seasons for camping. Winter is possible in principle, but short days and waterlogged clay paths make long stages with camping gear much less attractive.

After rain, woodland and clay sections can be very muddy, so waterproof footwear, gaiters and dry bags are useful. Campsite ground conditions should also be checked in wet periods, as lowland grass pitches can become saturated.

## Food, Water and Resupply

The High Weald Landscape Trail is not a wilderness route, but it is a rural lowland walk with several long stretches between reliable services. Food planning is mainly about not assuming that every village has an open shop, pub or café when you arrive, especially on Sundays, Mondays, evenings and outside the main visitor season.

Resupply is easiest at the larger settlements on or close to the route: Horsham, the Cuckfield/Haywards Heath area, East Grinstead, Tenterden and Rye. Smaller places such as Matfield, Rolvenden, Wittersham and the intermediate villages may have limited or changing services, so carry enough food to finish the day even if a planned stop is closed.

### Practical food strategy

Start each day with lunch, high-energy snacks and an emergency reserve. This is particularly important on the longer official sections, especially Cuckfield to East Grinstead and Matfield to Rolvenden, where the distance and rural character make it unwise to rely on a mid-stage purchase.

Pubs and cafés can be useful, but opening hours in High Weald villages can be irregular. Do not build a walking day around a single pub lunch, café or shop without checking current opening times before setting off.

Visitor attractions close to the trail, such as Standen, Wakehurst, Borde Hill, Groombridge Place, Smallhythe Place and Chapel Down, may appear useful on a map, but they should not be treated as guaranteed resupply points. Access, admission, seasonal opening and catering arrangements can vary; this should be checked before travelling.

### Water planning

Reliable water should be taken from accommodation, public taps where available, cafés, pubs and shops when open. Plan to leave each overnight stop with enough water for the full walking day unless a known refill has been checked in advance.

For most walkers, 1.5–2 litres is a sensible starting amount for a cool-weather stage, with more in warm weather or if walking slowly through mud. The route's constant small climbs, clay paths and woodland sections can make progress harder than the modest height figures suggest.

Natural water is present in the landscape, including gill streams, ponds and the lower River Rother area near Rye, but it should not be relied on as routine drinking water. This is lowland agricultural and settled countryside; any natural water used in an emergency should be properly treated or filtered.

### Stage-by-stage resupply notes

| Section              | Food availability                                                                                               | Water availability                                                                          | Notes                                                                                                              |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Horsham to Cuckfield | Best stocked at the start in Horsham and at the end around Cuckfield. Mid-stage services should not be assumed. | Fill up before leaving Horsham; refill at the end of the day or at checked open businesses. | A 23 km first day through St Leonard's Forest and rural High Weald country. Carry lunch and snacks from the start. |

| Section                       | Food availability                                                                                                                                                                               | Water availability                                                                                          | Notes                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cuckfield to East Grinstead   | Better prospects at Cuckfield and East Grinstead; the route passes close to garden-rich country and West Hoathly, but do not rely on attractions or small villages for food.                    | Start with a full day's supply. Refill only where a café, pub, shop or accommodation stop has been checked. | One of the longer official days at about 27 km, with repeated ridges and muddy woodland possible after rain.                                                        |
| East Grinstead to Groombridge | East Grinstead is the most reliable place to stock up before setting out. Groombridge is the planned end point, but current services should be checked.                                         | Fill in East Grinstead. Refill options depend on open businesses en route or in Groombridge.                | The trail passes near Forest Row and through the sandstone-ridge country around Harrison's Rocks and High Rocks. Carry enough to avoid depending on a single stop.  |
| Groombridge to Matfield       | Limited rural resupply should be expected between the end points.                                                                                                                               | Leave Groombridge with enough water for the day unless a specific stop has been checked.                    | A 23 km rural stage. Matfield is a smaller village, so food and evening meal arrangements should be confirmed when booking accommodation.                           |
| Matfield to Rolvenden         | Treat this as the key food-carry stage. The route passes near places such as Brenchley, Cranbrook, Benenden and Tenterden, but it does not necessarily pass through every town centre.          | Carry a full day's water or plan checked refills in advance.                                                | The longest official section at about 31 km. Carry lunch, snacks and a reserve; do not assume easy resupply without a planned diversion or confirmed opening times. |
| Rolvenden to Flackley Ash     | Food availability is limited and accommodation-stage planning varies in this part of the route. Tenterden is near this eastern section, but the exact walking line and overnight choice matter. | Start with enough water for the full 20 km unless a confirmed stop is built into the day.                   | Check accommodation, evening meal options and breakfast/packed-lunch arrangements before committing to a break at Flackley Ash or nearby.                           |
| Flackley Ash to Rye           | Limited need for resupply on the trail itself because this is a short final section. Rye has the best end-of-walk options.                                                                      | Carry enough from the start; refill at Rye if needed.                                                       | About 7 km to Strand Quay. Even on a short day, carry water rather than relying on an early open café or shop.                                                      |

## Sunday and rural-opening cautions

Sunday services can be sparse in the smaller villages, and buses are also more limited in rural areas. If walking stage-by-stage, check food, water and transport together so that a closed shop does not combine with a missed bus or a long road walk to accommodation.

Accommodation hosts may be able to provide packed lunches or advise on nearby evening meals, but this should be arranged when booking rather than on arrival. On the longer middle and eastern stages, a booked bed without food nearby can create an avoidable problem at the end of a tiring day.

## Navigation and Waymarking

The High Weald Landscape Trail is generally straightforward to follow for walkers used to UK public rights of way. It is a waymarked regional long-distance route, signed in both directions with green named signs and discs showing a stylised tree and church.

It is not a statutory National Trail, so do not expect the same consistency of infrastructure as on routes such as the South Downs Way or North Downs Way. The waymarking is a major help, but it should be treated as support rather than the only navigation method.

### Maps and GPX

Carry a proper map or a reliable offline digital map. The relevant paper mapping is OS Explorer 134, 135, 136 and 125, which between them cover the route from Horsham to Rye.

A GPX file is strongly recommended, especially because printed guidance is now limited and the older High Weald Forum guidebook, *Along and Around the High Weald Landscape Trail*, is out of print. Use an app that can display OS 1:25,000-style mapping offline, not just a basic road map.

Download maps and the route before setting off each day. The trail crosses woodland, small fields, sunken lanes and gill valleys where phone signal and battery life should not be relied on as the sole navigation system.

### Where care is needed

Most navigation errors are likely to happen at ordinary lowland decision points rather than on exposed or technical ground: field-edge paths, woodland junctions, quiet lanes and places where several public footpaths meet. In the High Weald, paths can also be less obvious after rain where clay sections become churned or waterlogged.

Extra care is sensible around places where the trail passes close to, rather than directly through, named attractions or settlements. This includes areas near Borde Hill, Wakehurst, Standen House, Harrison's Rocks and High Rocks, Cranbrook, Benenden, Tenterden, Smallhythe Place and Chapel Down. Do not assume the main visitor entrance, village centre or obvious road line is the trail.

The long central and eastern stages, particularly the Matfield to Rolvenden section, also reward careful checking of the route in advance simply because the distance is long and small mistakes cost time.

### Suitability for less experienced navigators

The route is suitable for walkers with limited navigation experience if they are comfortable following UK rights of way, reading basic OS mapping and checking a GPX track at junctions. It is not a wilderness navigation route and there is no technical terrain, but the constant mix of woods, fields and lanes means attention is still required.

Before travelling, check for any path diversions and make sure the day's accommodation or transport point actually matches the chosen stage break. This is particularly important where different guides vary their breaks around Tenterden, Cranbrook and Flackley Ash.

# Terrain, Conditions and Difficulty in Practice

The High Weald Landscape Trail is a lowland walk, but it is not flat or fast in the way some lowland routes can be. Its difficulty comes from repeated small climbs, uneven field and woodland paths, and the need to cover several long stages on surfaces that can become slow after rain.

There is no technical terrain, no mountain exposure and no high-altitude weather risk. The highest ground is only about 183 m near West Hoathly, but the trail repeatedly drops into wooded gill valleys and climbs back onto ridges, giving a cumulative ascent of roughly 2,676 m over the full route.

## Path surfaces

Underfoot, expect a mixture of field paths, woodland tracks, pasture edges, sunken lanes and quiet minor roads. This is classic High Weald walking: small irregular fields, ancient woodland, wooded ridges and short valley crossings rather than long, engineered trail tread.

The walking is generally straightforward in dry conditions. After rain, the heavy clay and shaded woodland sections can become muddy, slippery and locally waterlogged, which makes the route feel noticeably harder than the elevation profile suggests.

Sunken lanes and enclosed woodland paths can hold water and churn up in wet weather. Waterproof boots or shoes with a reliable tread are more useful here than lightweight road-style footwear, especially outside high summer.

## Mud, wet ground and seasonal conditions

Mud is the main condition issue on this trail. Winter and early spring are the most difficult times underfoot, when clay paths can be saturated and daylight is short.

Late spring and summer usually give the easiest walking, though vegetation may narrow some field and woodland paths. Autumn can be excellent, but wet spells quickly bring back slippery clay, particularly in woods and valley bottoms.

There are no tidal crossings, high passes or technical hazards to plan around. The practical weather question is simple: how much rain has fallen recently, and how much extra time will muddy ground add to each stage?

## Climbs and descents

The climbs are rarely long, but they are frequent. The trail crosses the grain of the High Weald, linking ridges, stream valleys, woodland and pasture, so progress is often a pattern of short descent, wet or enclosed valley floor, then a climb back out.

This cumulative profile is what makes the official seven-day schedule feel moderate rather than easy. The longer stages, especially the 27 km Cuckfield to East Grinstead section and the 31 km Matfield to Rolvenden section, require steady pacing rather than technical skill.

In wet conditions, descents through woodland and on clay lanes can be more tiring than the climbs. Trekking poles are useful if carrying a full multi-day pack or walking after prolonged rain.

## **Roads, lanes and navigation**

The route uses quiet lanes as part of the link between field and woodland paths. These sections are generally part of the character of the High Weald rather than long road slogs, but care is still needed on narrow lanes with bends, high banks or limited verges.

Waymarking is a strength of the trail, with green named signs and tree-and-church discs. Even so, it is a regional long-distance route rather than a statutory National Trail, and walkers should carry OS Explorer 134, 135, 136 and 125 or a reliable GPX, especially where field exits, woodland junctions or minor lanes make the onward line less obvious.

## **Fields, woodland and livestock**

Much of the route passes through small fields, pasture and enclosed woodland. Where the trail crosses pasture, livestock may be present, so gates should be left as found and dogs kept under close control.

Expect typical lowland rights-of-way infrastructure: gates, field crossings, woodland entrances and occasional boundary features. None of this is technically difficult, but repeated transitions between fields, lanes and woods can slow progress compared with walking on a continuous broad track.

## **Rocky or exposed ground**

The sandstone outcrops near Groombridge, including Harrison's Rocks, High Rocks and Eridge Rocks, give this part of the trail a distinctive landscape character. They are notable features of the route corridor, but the High Weald Landscape Trail is not a scrambling or climbing route.

Exposure is limited. The trail is mostly sheltered by woodland, hedges and rolling countryside, though open fields and ridge-top stretches can feel more exposed in wind or heavy rain.

## **What makes the trail easier or harder in practice**

The trail is easier when walked in dry weather, with modest daily distances and accommodation booked close to the chosen stage ends. The frequent access to towns, villages and rail connections also makes it practical to walk in sections rather than carrying everything for a continuous week.

It becomes harder when clay paths are wet, when the longer official stages are walked with a full pack, or when accommodation gaps force extra distance at the end of an already long day. The terrain is not severe, but the combination of mud, repeated small hills and 20–31 km day stages is enough to punish under-preparation.



# Weather and Best Time to Walk

## Best time to walk

The best seasons for the High Weald Landscape Trail are **spring, summer and autumn**. Late spring is particularly good for the ancient woodland and gardens along the corridor, while autumn suits the route's wooded ridges, orchards and hop country on the Kent side.

Winter is possible for experienced, well-equipped lowland walkers, but it is not the easiest time to enjoy the trail. The main problems are **short daylight, muddy clay paths and waterlogged woodland sections**, especially after sustained rain.

## Seasonal conditions

| Season | What to expect                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Planning advice                                                                                                                        |
|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spring | One of the best times for the route, especially in late spring when the woods and gardens are at their strongest. Paths can still be muddy after wet weather.                                                                            | Carry waterproof footwear and allow extra time on woodland and field sections. Book ahead if walking near weekends or holiday periods. |
| Summer | Long daylight makes the official longer stages more manageable, especially the 27 km Cuckfield to East Grinstead day and the 31 km Matfield to Rolvenden day. Woodland gives useful shade, but open fields and lanes can still feel hot. | Start early on the longest days, carry enough water between villages, and check accommodation well in advance in smaller places.       |
| Autumn | A strong season for the High Weald, with woodland colour and the Kent orchards and hop country giving the eastern stages particular interest. Rain can quickly make clay paths greasy.                                                   | Good footwear matters more than speed. Expect slower going after wet spells, especially through woods and sunken lanes.                |
| Winter | Realistic as a section walk or for fit walkers with flexible plans, but less forgiving as a seven-day through-walk. Mud, waterlogged paths and short daylight are the limiting factors.                                                  | Keep stages conservative, carry a headtorch, and avoid assuming the official day distances will take the same time as in summer.       |

## Rain, mud and underfoot conditions

The biggest weather-related issue on this trail is not altitude or exposure, but **mud**. The route uses field paths, woodland tracks, sunken lanes and clay sections that can become slippery or waterlogged after rain.

This matters most on the longer official stages, where a muddy 23–31 km day can take noticeably longer than the distance suggests. Waterproof boots or trail shoes with reliable grip are more useful here than lightweight footwear with shallow tread.

After heavy rain, expect slow going through St Leonard's Forest, the wooded central High Weald, and the gill-valley and sandstone-ridge country around Groombridge. Quiet lanes can provide firmer walking in places, but do not rely on them to avoid mud entirely.



## Wind, cold, fog and storms

This is a lowland route with a high point of about 183 m near West Hoathly, so it does not have the exposed mountain-weather problems of higher British trails. Wind is still worth considering on open ridges, field edges and road sections, but it is rarely the main planning constraint.

Cold rain is more important than cold alone. In poor weather, the repeated small climbs over the ridged High Weald can become tiring, and wet woodland sections can make progress slow.

Fog or low cloud can make wayfinding harder across fields and around field boundaries, even on a waymarked trail. Carry OS Explorer maps 134, 135, 136 and 125 or a reliable GPX, rather than depending only on signs.

## Daylight and stage timing

Daylight is a major factor because the official itinerary includes several full walking days: Horsham to Cuckfield, Cuckfield to East Grinstead, Groombridge to Matfield, and especially Matfield to Rolvenden. In summer these are much easier to manage; in winter they need an early start and a realistic pace.

The final stage into Rye is short, but the earlier days should not be underestimated. Mud, wet grass, awkward field edges and repeated small climbs can make the High Weald slower than its modest elevation suggests.

## Accommodation and seasonal demand

Accommodation is available in towns and larger villages such as Horsham, the Cuckfield/Haywards Heath area, East Grinstead, Tenterden and Rye, but it is thinner in some intermediate villages. This matters more in good walking seasons, at weekends and where stage breaks vary around places such as Tenterden, Cranbrook and Flackley Ash.

Book beds before committing to a day-by-day plan. Garden and house opening times, campsite seasons and any local closures should be checked before travelling if they form part of the itinerary.

## Insects and ticks

The route passes through woodland, pasture and long grass, so normal lowland tick precautions are sensible in spring, summer and autumn. Check legs after walking through grass or bracken, and remove ticks promptly if found.

Biting insects are not usually the defining challenge of the route, but woodland edges and damp valleys can be irritating in warm, still weather. Lightweight long sleeves or repellent can be useful if camping or lingering around wooded sections.

# Safety Notes

## Emergency help

In an emergency in the UK, call **999** or **112** and ask for the appropriate service. Give the nearest village, road, landmark, grid reference or GPS location, and say that you are on the **High Weald Landscape Trail**.

This is a lowland route with frequent settlements and transport links, but it still crosses woods, fields and small valleys where help may not be immediate. Carry a charged phone and a power bank, especially if using a phone for mapping.

## Navigation and mobile signal

The trail is waymarked with green named signs and tree-and-church discs, but waymarks can be missed at field edges, lane junctions and woodland turns. Carry **OS Explorer 134, 135, 136 and 125** or a reliable offline GPX/map app rather than relying only on signs.

Mobile reception should not be treated as guaranteed. Wooded gill valleys, sunken lanes and enclosed woodland can reduce signal; if safe, moving to higher or more open ground may improve reception.

## Mud, footing and fatigue

The main underfoot hazard is not technical terrain but **mud, clay and slippery woodland paths**, particularly after rain. Waterproof boots or shoes with good grip are useful, and walking poles can help on churned-up descents and slick field paths.

The repeated small climbs over the ridged High Weald add up. The long official stages, especially the longer middle/eastern days, can become tiring late in the day if paths are slow, accommodation is off-route or daylight is short.

## Roads, lanes and crossings

The route uses field paths, woodland tracks and quiet lanes, with inevitable road crossings and short road-walking sections. On lanes without pavements, walk facing oncoming traffic where practical, keep visible, and take extra care on bends, high-banked sunken lanes and in poor light.

A small headtorch or rear safety light is sensible outside high summer. This is particularly useful if a muddy section delays arrival into a village or transport connection.

## Livestock and farmland

The trail crosses working farmland and pasture. Close gates, keep to the right of way, give livestock space, and avoid getting between animals and their young.

Dogs should be kept under close control, and on a lead where livestock, nesting birds or signed restrictions require it. Field margins and crop edges can be narrow, so avoid trampling crops when following waymarks.

## Weather, heat and cold

Although the High Weald is not high mountain country, weather still affects safety. Open fields and ridge sections can be exposed to wind, rain and summer sun, while woodland can stay wet and cold underfoot long after rain has stopped.

In hot weather, carry enough water between villages and use shade in woodland sensibly rather than pushing hard through the longest stages. In colder months, short daylight, mud and wet clothing are the main risks; start early and carry a warm layer and waterproofs.

## Water and wet ground

The route passes wooded gill valleys, streams, ponds and the River Rother area at Rye. There are no special water hazards to plan around, but banks can be muddy, steep or slippery after rain.

Do not rely on natural water sources for drinking. Carry water from towns, villages or accommodation, and check in advance where shops, pubs or cafés fit your chosen stage breaks.

## Solo hiking

Solo walking is realistic on this route, but the usual precautions apply. Leave a daily plan with someone, including the intended start and finish point, and update them if transport, accommodation or weather changes the plan.

Avoid starting a long stage late in the day. If walking alone in winter or after heavy rain, allow extra time for slow clay paths, missed waymarks and diversions.

## Check before setting off each day

Before leaving each morning, check:

- the weather forecast and expected daylight;
- the day's distance, ascent and likely escape points;
- transport times if finishing by train or bus, especially on Sundays and in smaller villages;
- accommodation check-in arrangements if staying off-route;
- food and water availability before the next village;
- any path closures, diversions or access notices — this should be checked before travelling;
- that offline maps or GPX files are downloaded and the phone has enough battery.

## Gear Recommendations

The High Weald Landscape Trail is not a mountain route, but it is harder on gear than its modest high point suggests. Expect long lowland days, repeated short climbs, wet grass, woodland mud, heavy clay and quiet lane sections. The best kit choices are those that keep feet dry, protect against changeable south-east England weather and allow reliable navigation through fields, woods and village approaches.

### Footwear

Waterproof walking shoes or lightweight boots are the most practical choice for most hikers. The route uses field paths, woodland tracks, sunken lanes and pasture, and the clay sections can become very muddy or waterlogged after rain.

In a dry summer, trail shoes may be comfortable for fit walkers moving light, but they should still have a grippy sole. In spring, autumn or after sustained rain, boots or waterproof low-cut shoes with good tread are safer and less tiring than smooth-soled trainers.

Gaiters are useful rather than essential. They earn their place after wet weather, when long grass, muddy field edges and woodland sections can soak trousers and socks early in the day.

### Waterproofs and layers

Carry a proper waterproof jacket on every stage, even if the forecast looks settled. Much of the trail is lowland, but the High Weald's ridges and open fields leave walkers exposed to wind and rain between wooded sections and villages.

Waterproof trousers are worth packing in spring, autumn and winter, and on any multi-day trip where a wet forecast is possible. For summer section walks, many hikers will manage with a jacket and quick-drying trousers, but mud and wet vegetation can still make lower-body waterproofing useful.

A light warm layer is enough for most three-season itineraries. The route does not reach high altitude, but long stages, lunch stops, rail waits and damp woodland can feel cold once movement stops.

### Navigation

The trail is waymarked with green named signs and tree-and-church discs, but do not rely on waymarks alone. Field-edge paths, woodland junctions and village exits are the places where mistakes are most likely.

Carry OS Explorer mapping for the whole route: **134, 135, 136 and 125**, or use a reliable digital map with the route loaded. A GPX track is strongly recommended, especially for section walkers joining and leaving the trail at intermediate points.

A phone can work well as the main navigation tool, but it should not be the only plan. Carry enough battery for a full day of mapping and transport checks, and have either paper mapping or offline mapping available if signal or battery life becomes a problem.

## Water and food carry

The route passes towns, villages and visitor attractions, but services are not evenly spaced and some intermediate villages are small. Carry enough water and food to complete the day's stage without depending on a specific pub, café or shop being open.

For most walkers, capacity for roughly **1.5–2 litres of water** is sensible in normal three-season conditions, with more on hot summer days or on the longer stages. Refill opportunities should be planned around known overnight stops, larger villages and confirmed facilities rather than assumed from the map.

Food carry can stay fairly light for inn-to-inn walkers, but a substantial packed lunch and emergency snacks are wise. This is especially important on longer days such as the Matfield to Rolvenden stage, where committing to a full day without reliable mid-stage supplies would be a mistake.

## Trekking poles

Trekking poles are optional but useful on this trail. They help with balance on muddy clay, slippery woodland descents and rutted sunken lanes, and they reduce fatigue over repeated short climbs.

Fast walkers and those with knee issues may appreciate poles more than casual section walkers. Rubber tips are considerate on quiet lane sections and through built-up areas.

## Power and electronics

Carry a power bank if using a phone for navigation, accommodation details, train times or bus connections. This is particularly important for multi-day walkers and anyone relying on digital mapping rather than paper maps.

Keep the GPX, maps and booking details available offline. Intermediate transport depends on connecting trains and local buses in places, and timetables should be checked before travelling, especially on Sundays and in smaller villages.

## Sun, insects and seasonal extras

In summer, carry sun cream, a hat and enough water for warm field sections between woodland cover. The route is not continuously exposed, but the mix of open pasture, lanes and ridges can still mean several hours in direct sun.

Insect repellent can be useful in warm, still weather, especially around woodland, pasture and damp valley sections. Tick checks are sensible after walking through long grass and woodland edges.

In winter or during short-day autumn trips, carry a head torch even on day walks. Mud, route-finding pauses and transport delays can turn a planned daylight finish into a late arrival.

## Inn-to-inn hikers

Inn-to-inn walkers can keep packs moderate, but should not strip the kit down too far. Daily stages are long enough that waterproofs, spare warm layer, navigation, lunch, snacks and a full water carry remain essential.

A small dry bag or pack liner is recommended for spare clothing and booking documents. Wet clay paths and persistent rain are more likely to affect comfort than technical difficulty.

Footwear matters more than spare clothing weight. A clean, dry pair of socks for the evening and a method for drying footwear overnight will make the week easier.

## **Campers**

Camping is possible in the wider trail corridor, but campsites are not evenly distributed and accommodation is thinner in the smaller intermediate villages. Campsites and stage breaks should be checked and booked before committing to a camping itinerary.

A lightweight three-season tent, warm sleeping system and reliable waterproof packing are appropriate. The main challenge is not altitude or exposure, but carrying camping weight over repeated ridges, muddy paths and long official stages.

Campers should carry more food flexibility than inn-to-inn walkers. Do not assume that every small village near the route has a shop, evening meal option or guaranteed resupply.

## **Fast and section hikers**

Fast hikers and day-section walkers can travel light, particularly with the trail's strong rail access at Horsham, East Grinstead and Rye. However, lightweight should not mean unprepared: waterproof shell, warm layer, navigation, food, water and phone power still belong in the pack.

For section walking, pre-load the exact start and exit points. The waymarked line is straightforward once on it, but joining from stations, bus stops or nearby villages can add the most awkward navigation of the day.

Trail shoes may suit dry-weather fast sections, but grip is more important than speed after rain. Muddy woodland and clay field paths can make this a slower walk than the map profile suggests.



## Budget and Costs

The High Weald Landscape Trail is a comparatively accessible UK walk, but it is not a cheap wilderness-style route if completed using inns and B&Bs every night. Accommodation is the main cost, followed by evening meals, rail travel and any taxis needed to bridge awkward stage breaks.

All figures below are indicative planning ranges in **GBP (£)** for one person walking the route over seven days. Prices vary by season, day of week, room type and how early beds are booked, so current prices should be checked before booking.

### Typical total budget

| Style       | Likely approach                                                                                        | Indicative cost for 7 days, excluding travel to/from home |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Budget      | Campsites where they fit the stages, simple rooms where needed, supermarket lunches, limited pub meals | <b>£315–£560</b>                                          |
| Mid-range   | B&Bs, inns or modest hotels most nights, pub dinners, café stops where available                       | <b>£630–£1,050</b>                                        |
| Comfortable | Better inns/hotels, private rooms, regular pub meals, taxis to/from accommodation where useful         | <b>£1,050–£1,750+</b>                                     |

Solo walkers should expect a higher per-person accommodation cost than two walkers sharing twin or double rooms. The smaller intermediate villages can have limited beds, so booking late may force either more expensive accommodation or taxi transfers to nearby towns.

### Accommodation costs

Accommodation is mixed along the trail: hotels, inns, guesthouses, B&Bs and campsites are available in towns and larger villages such as **Horsham, the Cuckfield/Haywards Heath area, East Grinstead, Tenterden and Rye**, but options are thinner around smaller stage ends.

As a rough guide:

| Overnight style                      | Typical planning allowance   |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Campsite pitch / basic camping night | <b>£10–£25 per person</b>    |
| Simple B&B, inn or guesthouse        | <b>£60–£110 per person</b>   |
| Mid-range hotel or good inn          | <b>£90–£160 per person</b>   |
| More comfortable hotel stay          | <b>£140–£220+ per person</b> |

Camping can reduce the cost substantially, but it should not be assumed that a campsite will line up neatly with every official stage. Check locations carefully before committing to a camping itinerary, particularly around the smaller intermediate breaks.

## Food and drink

Food costs depend heavily on whether lunches are bought from shops in larger settlements or taken in pubs and cafés. Some rural stretches have limited services, so buying lunch supplies before leaving towns such as **Horsham, East Grinstead, Tenterden or Rye** can be cheaper and more reliable.

| Food style                                           | Daily planning allowance |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Self-catered breakfasts/lunches, occasional pub meal | <b>£15–£30 per day</b>   |
| Mixed café, shop and pub eating                      | <b>£30–£55 per day</b>   |
| Pub meals most days, drinks and café stops           | <b>£55–£85+ per day</b>  |

Accommodation rates may or may not include breakfast. Packed lunches are worth asking about when staying in rural inns or B&Bs, especially before longer stages such as **Matfield to Rolvenden**.

## Transport costs

The route has strong rail access for a lowland trail. **Horsham, East Grinstead** and **Rye** have railway stations, and many access points are practical for section walking from London and the south-east.

Rail fares vary too much to price reliably here. Advance tickets, off-peak travel and railcards can make a significant difference, while same-day peak travel can be much more expensive. Train and bus times should be checked before travelling, especially on Sundays and where local buses are needed for smaller villages.

For a thru-hike, budget for:

- travel to **Horsham railway station** at the start;
- travel home from **Rye** at the finish;
- any extra rail or bus journeys needed if accommodation is off-route;
- contingency taxi money if a bus connection is missed or impractical.

## Taxis and off-route accommodation

Taxis are not essential if accommodation is booked directly on or near the route, but they can become useful where beds are scarce. A short rural taxi hop can add a noticeable cost, and longer transfers can quickly undermine a budget itinerary.

Pre-book taxis where possible rather than assuming availability at the end of a walking day. This is particularly important around smaller villages and non-urban stage breaks such as **Matfield, Rolvenden** and **Flackley Ash**.

## Luggage transfer and packages

The High Weald Landscape Trail is a regional long-distance route rather than a statutory National Trail, so walkers should not assume the same level of route-specific baggage-transfer infrastructure found on the busiest UK trails. Some accommodation providers or local taxi firms may be able to move bags by arrangement, but this should be checked before travelling.

Self-guided walking packages may be available from walking holiday companies, usually bundling accommodation and luggage movement. Prices depend on room standard, season and whether transfers are included, so current package prices should be checked before booking.

### **Paid attractions and optional extras**

Several highlights on or near the trail can add worthwhile but optional costs. **Standen House and Garden, Wakehurst, Borde Hill Garden, Groombridge Place, Smallhythe Place, Chapel Down vineyard** and the **Kent & East Sussex Railway** all require separate planning if you want to visit rather than simply pass nearby.

Opening times, admission prices and tour availability vary by season. Check current prices before building these stops into the walking budget.

## Luggage Transfer, Guided Tours and Support Services

The High Weald Landscape Trail is a well-waymarked regional route rather than a heavily commercialised National Trail, so support is more ad hoc than on routes such as the South Downs Way or Coast to Coast. Do not assume there will be a single dedicated baggage company covering every stage from Horsham to Rye; arrange support before booking non-refundable accommodation.

For many walkers, the simplest approach is to carry a light pack and use the railway access at Horsham, East Grinstead and Rye for joining, leaving or splitting the route. Luggage transfer becomes more useful if walking the full route in one week, using B&Bs or inns, or tackling the longer middle stages without wanting to carry overnight gear.

### Luggage transfer

A practical baggage plan usually means arranging transfers between booked accommodation, often via local taxi firms or a general courier rather than a named trail-specific service. This should be checked before travelling, especially for the smaller overnight stops such as Matfield, Rolvenden and Flackley Ash, where accommodation and transport options are thinner.

When booking accommodation, ask three questions clearly:

- whether they can receive a bag before check-in;
- whether they are happy for a bag to be collected after check-out;
- whether they can recommend a local taxi or courier used by walkers.

Keep baggage to one clearly labelled soft bag where possible. Rural B&Bs and inns may have limited space, and drivers are more likely to accept a straightforward transfer if the bag is manageable and the collection time is agreed in advance.

The stages where luggage support is most valuable are the longer days into East Grinstead, Matfield and Rolvenden. The Matfield to Rolvenden stage is the longest official day, so reducing pack weight there can make a noticeable difference on the repeated ridges, fields, lanes and muddy woodland paths.

### Self-guided walking packages

A self-guided package may suit walkers who want the accommodation, baggage movements and route notes arranged in one booking. Availability for this trail should be checked before travelling, as the High Weald Landscape Trail has less of a fixed commercial infrastructure than better-known UK long-distance routes.

A typical self-guided arrangement, where available, would normally include accommodation booking, luggage transfers, daily route information and emergency contact details. Check carefully that the itinerary follows the High Weald Landscape Trail itself and that overnight stops match the official seven-stage pattern or any adjusted stages being used.

Pay particular attention to the eastern half of the trail. Stage breaks around Cranbrook, Tenterden and Flackley Ash vary between itineraries, and the trail passes near some places rather than directly through

their centres. Transfers between the path and accommodation may therefore be part of the practical plan.

## Guided walking

A guide is not essential for most competent walkers. The route is waymarked with green named signs and tree-and-church discs, and the terrain is non-technical lowland walking.

Guided support may still be useful for groups, walkers who want local interpretation of the High Weald landscape, or anyone combining the route with visits to places such as Standen, Wakehurst, Borde Hill, Groombridge Place, Smallhythe Place or the gardens and vineyards near the trail corridor. Entry, opening dates and any guided arrangements for those sites should be checked separately.

If booking a guide, clarify whether the service covers the full point-to-point trail or only selected day walks. Also confirm how road transfers, bad-weather changes and end-of-day transport are handled, especially on Sundays and in the smaller villages.

## Taxi transfers and public-transport back-up

Taxis are the most flexible form of support on this route, particularly for reaching accommodation away from the path, shortening a day, or linking back to rail stations. Book ahead rather than relying on immediate availability in villages.

Useful rail anchors include Horsham at the start, East Grinstead part-way through, and Rye at the finish. Intermediate access often depends on connecting trains and local buses, so timetables should be checked before travelling, particularly on Sundays.

For section walkers, rail access makes baggage support less necessary. A common strategy is to walk one or two stages at a time, return by public transport, and avoid carrying overnight luggage altogether.

## What to arrange before setting off

| Support need                  | Best approach                                                                          | Booking note                                                        |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Full-route baggage transfer   | Ask accommodation for local taxi/courier options or use a bespoke luggage arrangement  | Confirm every collection and delivery point in advance              |
| Accommodation off the trail   | Pre-book taxis between the path and the accommodation                                  | Especially important around smaller intermediate villages           |
| Shortening a long day         | Identify taxi pick-up points before starting the stage                                 | Mobile reception and rural availability should not be assumed       |
| Section walking               | Use rail access at Horsham, East Grinstead and Rye where practical                     | Check train and bus times, especially Sundays                       |
| Guided or self-guided package | Use a walking-holiday operator only if the itinerary and support are clearly specified | Confirm current dates, prices and baggage arrangements when booking |

The key is not to leave support arrangements informal. The High Weald is well settled, but the route threads small villages, woodland, fields and quiet lanes; services are real but not always immediately beside the path.

## Shorter Hikes and Best Sections

The High Weald Landscape Trail works well as a section walk because it crosses a settled, rail-accessible part of south-east England. The easiest logistics are at Horsham, East Grinstead and Rye, all of which have railway stations; intermediate villages usually need local buses, taxis or a lift, and Sunday services should be checked before travelling.

Distances below use the official seven-section breakdown, rounded to the nearest kilometre.

| Best for           | Suggested section                                           | Approx. distance | Why choose it                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Transport notes                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Best single day    | East Grinstead to Groombridge                               | 21 km            | A manageable full-day section with a station start, wooded High Weald country and the transition towards the sandstone outcrop landscape near Groombridge.                                                                         | Start at East Grinstead railway station. Groombridge onward travel is less straightforward and should be planned with local buses, taxi options or a pre-arranged lift. |
| Best scenery       | Groombridge to Matfield                                     | 23 km            | The strongest section for the trail's sandstone character, with Harrison's Rocks, High Rocks and Eridge Rocks close to the route, plus wooded ridges and quiet Wealden lanes.                                                      | Both ends are village-based rather than simple railheads. Check local bus times carefully, especially at weekends, or arrange a taxi/lift.                              |
| Best weekend       | East Grinstead to Matfield, overnighting around Groombridge | 44 km            | A satisfying two-day sample of the central High Weald: East Grinstead, the Groombridge area, sandstone outcrops and rolling woodland-and-field walking.                                                                            | East Grinstead gives the cleanest rail start. Groombridge and Matfield require local transport planning; book accommodation before fixing the itinerary.                |
| Best 3-day section | Cuckfield to Groombridge                                    | 69 km            | A strong cross-section of the western and central trail, taking in the garden-rich corridor near Borde Hill, Wakehurst and Standen, then continuing through East Grinstead towards Groombridge.                                    | Cuckfield and Groombridge need local bus/taxi planning. East Grinstead is the most useful rail access point within the section.                                         |
| Best 4-day section | Horsham to Groombridge                                      | 71 km            | Covers the western half from the official start at Horsham station through St Leonard's Forest, Cuckfield, the West Hoathly ridge area, Standen and East Grinstead before finishing near the sandstone country around Groombridge. | Horsham and East Grinstead have railway stations. Groombridge onward travel should be checked before travelling.                                                        |



| Best for                            | Suggested section                                      | Approx. distance | Why choose it                                                                                                                                                                | Transport notes                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Best 5-day section                  | Cuckfield to Rolvenden                                 | 122 km           | A substantial almost-thru-hike covering the central High Weald and into Kent's hop, orchard and oast-house country, without needing to include the short final day into Rye. | Accommodation and onward transport become more important east of Matfield. Stage breaks around Cranbrook, Benenden, Tenterden and Rolvenden vary, so beds and buses should be checked before committing. |
| Best for beginners                  | Flackley Ash to Rye                                    | 7 km             | The official final section is short and gives a low-commitment taste of the route, ending properly at Strand Quay below Rye's medieval hill town.                            | Rye has a railway station. Getting to Flackley Ash requires local bus, taxi or lift planning; this should be checked before travelling.                                                                  |
| Best for public transport           | Horsham to Cuckfield, or East Grinstead to Groombridge | 23 km / 21 km    | Horsham to Cuckfield starts directly at a railway station; East Grinstead to Groombridge also starts from a station and makes a good one-day section.                        | The start logistics are easier than the finish logistics. Cuckfield and Groombridge onward travel depend on local services and should be checked before travelling.                                      |
| Best for villages and accommodation | Horsham to East Grinstead                              | 50 km            | A two-day western section using Horsham, Cuckfield and East Grinstead, where accommodation choices are generally better than in the smaller intermediate villages.           | Rail access at Horsham and East Grinstead makes this one of the easier multi-day sections to organise. Book Cuckfield-area accommodation ahead.                                                          |
| Best camping option                 | Short sections based around larger towns and villages  | Varies           | Camping is possible on the wider route only where campsites line up with the chosen stages; the smaller villages do not always give convenient options.                      | Do not assume camping will solve accommodation gaps. Check campsite locations, opening dates and public transport before travelling.                                                                     |

## Best day walk: East Grinstead to Groombridge

East Grinstead to Groombridge is the most practical full-day sample for walkers who want a substantial section without committing to the whole trail. It starts from a railway town, follows the route east through classic High Weald countryside and finishes on the Sussex-Kent border at Groombridge.

At about 21 km, it is long enough to feel like a proper stage but shorter than the heavier 27 km and 31 km days elsewhere on the route. The main planning issue is the finish: Groombridge is not as simple a railhead as East Grinstead, so onward buses, taxis or a lift should be arranged in advance.

## **Best scenic section: Groombridge to Matfield**

For landscape variety, Groombridge to Matfield is the standout section. The trail passes close to the sandstone outcrops around Harrison's Rocks, High Rocks and Eridge Rocks, giving this part of the route a more distinctive ridge-and-rock character than many lowland paths.

The section is around 23 km, so it remains a proper day's walk. It is best done in dry or settled weather if possible, as the High Weald's woodland and clay paths can be muddy after rain.

## **Best weekend section: East Grinstead to Matfield**

A strong two-day itinerary is East Grinstead to Matfield, using Groombridge as the natural overnight area. This links the railway access at East Grinstead with the central High Weald's wooded ridges, Groombridge, the sandstone outcrop country and the quieter lanes and fields towards Matfield.

The total is about 44 km over two days. Accommodation should be booked before travel, and transport away from Matfield should be checked carefully, particularly on Sundays.

## **Best 3–5 day options**

For three days, Cuckfield to Groombridge gives a varied 69 km section through the garden-rich western High Weald, the West Hoathly ridge area, the Standen/East Grinstead corridor and on towards Groombridge. This is a good choice if the aim is to see a representative central slice of the trail rather than simply walk from an easy railhead.

For four days, Horsham to Groombridge is simpler to frame: start at Horsham railway station and follow the first half of the route across St Leonard's Forest, Cuckfield, East Grinstead and into the Groombridge area. The finish still needs local transport planning, but the start is straightforward.

For five days, Cuckfield to Rolvenden gives a deeper traverse from the western/central High Weald into Kent's hop-and-orchard country. This is more demanding logistically because accommodation and transport east of Matfield need closer attention, and stage breaks around Cranbrook, Benenden, Tenterden and Rolvenden should be fixed only after beds and onward travel are checked.

## **Best short taster: Flackley Ash to Rye**

The final official section from Flackley Ash to Rye is only about 7 km, making it the easiest way to sample the route without a full-day commitment. It also gives the satisfaction of finishing at Strand Quay, below Rye's medieval hill town and above the River Rother and Romney Marsh.

The drawback is access to the start. Rye has a railway station at the finish, but reaching Flackley Ash needs a local bus, taxi or lift, and this should be checked before travelling.

## Highlights and Points of Interest

The High Weald Landscape Trail is strongest as a cultural and landscape walk: ancient woodland, small fields, sunken lanes, sandstone outcrops, gardens, oast houses and historic Wealden settlements. Many of the best stops are just off the walking line rather than directly on it, so allow time in the day plan if visiting houses, gardens or vineyards.

### Best places to allow extra time

| Place or area                                 | Why it is worth slowing down                                                                                                                      | Planning note                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| St Leonard's Forest                           | Early immersion in the western High Weald: wooded paths, ridges and enclosed Wealden country soon after leaving Horsham.                          | Woodland and clay paths can be muddy after rain.                                                            |
| Borde Hill Garden                             | A noted garden near Haywards Heath in the garden-rich western High Weald.                                                                         | The trail passes near rather than through; check opening times before planning a visit.                     |
| Wakehurst                                     | Kew's wild botanic garden and the Millennium Seed Bank, set in a wooded High Weald estate near Ardingly and West Hoathly.                         | Close to the trail corridor rather than an automatic on-route stop; allow extra time if detouring.          |
| West Hoathly ridge                            | Around the highest part of the walk, at about 183 m, with the route following the central wooded High Weald ridge rather than a summit.           | Do not expect a mountain-style top; the interest is the rolling ridgeline landscape.                        |
| Standen House and Garden                      | National Trust Arts and Crafts country house near East Grinstead, designed by Philip Webb with William Morris interiors.                          | The trail passes close by; admission applies and opening times should be checked before travelling.         |
| Harrison's Rocks, High Rocks and Eridge Rocks | Ardingly-sandstone outcrops in woodland near Groombridge, famous as climbing crags and one of the most distinctive natural features on the route. | A good area to avoid rushing; paths can be rougher and muddier in woodland after rain.                      |
| Groombridge Place                             | Moated manor and formal gardens at Groombridge on the Sussex-Kent border.                                                                         | Useful as a cultural stop on the East Grinstead to Groombridge / Groombridge to Matfield part of the route. |
| Kent hop-and-orchard country                  | Between Matfield and Rolvenden the trail enters classic Kent High Weald scenery, with hop gardens, orchards and traditional oast houses.          | This is a long-stage part of the walk, so balance sightseeing with daylight and accommodation plans.        |
| Smallhythe Place                              | Half-timbered former home of Victorian actress Ellen Terry, now National Trust, near Tenterden.                                                   | Passed towards the end of the walk; check opening arrangements if intending to visit.                       |
| Chapel Down vineyard                          | One of England's best-known vineyards, near Tenterden, which the route skirts on its eastern stages.                                              | A possible detour or planned stop rather than a guaranteed on-trail visit.                                  |

| Place or area       | Why it is worth slowing down                                                                                       | Planning note                                                                                                               |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tenterden           | Wealden market town with weatherboarded houses and the terminus of the Kent & East Sussex Railway.                 | The trail passes near Tenterden; accommodation and transport plans should be checked before relying on it as a stage break. |
| Rye and Strand Quay | The finish below Rye, a cobbled medieval hill town and former Cinque Port above the River Rother and Romney Marsh. | Worth allowing time after finishing, especially if travelling home by rail from Rye.                                        |

## Landscape character to look out for

The route is a good example of the High Weald's medieval countryside: small irregular fields, ancient woodland, pasture, sunken lanes and ridge-top settlements. The interest is cumulative rather than concentrated in a single viewpoint, so the best days are often those where the route repeatedly drops into wooded gill valleys and climbs back onto low ridges.

Sandstone becomes especially memorable around Groombridge, where Harrison's Rocks, High Rocks and Eridge Rocks give the walk a more dramatic, wooded-ridge character. These outcrops are well known to climbers, but they also make this one of the most distinctive walking sections of the trail.

In the eastern stages, the scenery shifts towards Kent's hop and orchard country. Traditional oast houses, orchards and hop gardens are part of the local character between Matfield and Rolvenden, and make this section feel noticeably different from the wooded Sussex ridges earlier in the walk.

## Historic and cultural interest

The High Weald was once an important iron-working landscape, powered by oak woodland and water. Hammer ponds in the old forge valleys are a key clue to that past, and they sit naturally within the same wooded, stream-cut terrain that makes the walking so undulating.

The route also has an unusually strong garden and country-house theme for a long-distance trail. Borde Hill, Wakehurst, Standen House and Garden, Groombridge Place and Smallhythe Place all reward extra time, but opening days, admission and access arrangements change through the year and should be checked before travelling.

## Towns and villages with the most practical appeal

Horsham, East Grinstead and Rye are the most important trail towns for rail access. Rye is also the strongest finish-point stop, with the trail ending at Strand Quay below the medieval hill town.

Cuckfield, Groombridge, Matfield, Rolvenden, Wittersham and the villages near Cranbrook, Benenden and Tenterden give the route much of its Wealden character. Services and accommodation are thinner in smaller places, so these are best treated as planned stops rather than assumed resupply points.

## Common Mistakes and Planning Tips

The High Weald Landscape Trail is not technically difficult, but it is easy to plan badly. The main traps are logistical: long lowland days, muddy clay, uneven services between villages and stage breaks that do not always match available beds.

| Common mistake                                    | Better plan                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Treating it as an easy lowland stroll             | Plan for seven proper walking days. The route has no mountain terrain, but the repeated ridges, gill valleys and small climbs add up to roughly 2,676 m of ascent.                                                                                                                 |
| Leaving accommodation until late                  | Book ahead, especially away from Horsham, East Grinstead, Tenterden and Rye. Beds are thinner in the smaller intermediate villages, and stage breaks around Tenterden, Cranbrook and Flackley Ash vary between guides.                                                             |
| Assuming the official stages suit every walker    | Use the official seven-day structure as a framework, not a rule. Day 5 from Matfield to Rolvenden is the longest at about 31 km, while the final day from Flackley Ash to Rye is only about 7 km, so many walkers will want to adjust breaks if accommodation and transport allow. |
| Relying only on waymarks                          | The route is waymarked with green named signs and tree-and-church discs, but carry OS Explorer 134, 135, 136 and 125 or a reliable GPX. Printed guidance is limited, and the old High Weald Forum guidebook is out of print.                                                       |
| Underestimating mud                               | Take footwear that can cope with wet woodland and clay paths. After rain, the High Weald's field edges, sunken lanes and wooded sections can be slow, slippery and tiring.                                                                                                         |
| Assuming every village has the services needed    | Check food, water and shop options before each day, especially on stages through smaller villages and near-only settlements. Do not build a day around an unconfirmed shop, pub or café stop. This should be checked before travelling.                                            |
| Forgetting Sunday transport limitations           | Rail access is strong at Horsham, East Grinstead and Rye, but intermediate links use local buses and connecting trains. Verify timetables before fixing a section-walk plan, especially on Sundays and from smaller villages.                                                      |
| Planning from one distance figure too tightly     | Use 145 km / 90 miles as the official distance, but allow for GPS variance of around 151 km / 94 miles depending on the track used. The difference is not huge, but it matters when arranging pick-ups, evening meals or late trains after a long stage.                           |
| Treating it like a National Trail                 | This is a regional long-distance route, not a statutory National Trail. Expect good waymarking, but not the same level of trail infrastructure, guidebook availability or service density associated with the best-known National Trails.                                          |
| Building sightseeing stops into already long days | Standen, Wakehurst, Borde Hill, Smallhythe Place and Chapel Down are close to or skirted by the trail rather than automatic quick visits. Check opening times, admission and detour time before adding them to a walking day.                                                      |

### Stage planning tips

The western and central sections can feel slower than their map profile suggests. The high point near West Hoathly is only about 183 m, but the route repeatedly crosses wooded ridges and small valleys rather than following a single level corridor.

The Matfield to Rolvenden section deserves particular attention. At about 31 km, it is the longest official day, and it comes after several already substantial stages. If walking the trail in a week, start this day early and avoid relying on uncertain late-day services.

The short final section from Flackley Ash to Rye can be useful rather than wasteful. It gives a margin for slow conditions earlier in the week, a late start after accommodation logistics, or time to reach Strand Quay without turning the finish into a rushed transport connection.

## **Navigation and route currency**

Waymarks are helpful, but they should not be the only navigation system. Carry the relevant OS Explorer maps or a dependable offline GPX, and make sure the route line, accommodation location and public transport stop all match before setting out each morning.

Check for path diversions before travelling. This is especially important if using an older GPX file or a copied itinerary, because small rights-of-way changes, temporary closures or local diversions can add time on a route with already long stages.

## **Weather, ground and kit**

The main weather-related issue is not exposure but ground condition. Wet clay and woodland mud can turn a moderate day into a slow one, so waterproof footwear, gaiters in wet seasons and walking poles are more useful here than heavy mountain kit.

Winter is possible for experienced walkers, but it is the muddiest period and has the shortest daylight. Late spring, summer and autumn are generally more practical, with late spring particularly good for woodland and garden interest and autumn for colour.



## Final Advice

The High Weald Landscape Trail is best for walkers who enjoy historic lowland countryside, old woodland, ridge-top villages, sandstone outcrops, gardens and Kentish hop-and-orchard country more than big summits or remote terrain. It is not technically difficult, but it should not be underestimated: the repeated small climbs, long official stages and muddy clay paths after rain make it a genuine week-long walk.

The main planning task is accommodation. Beds are straightforward in larger places such as Horsham, East Grinstead, Tenterden and Rye, but thinner around smaller intermediate villages, and stage breaks near places such as Cranbrook, Tenterden and Flackley Ash can vary between guides. Book ahead, check that each night's stop fits the day's mileage, and confirm transport options before relying on buses or trains, especially on Sundays.

Navigation is helped by green named signs and tree-and-church discs, but a map or reliable GPX is still sensible. Carry OS Explorer 134, 135, 136 and 125, or an up-to-date digital equivalent, and check for any local path diversions before travelling. Printed guidebook coverage is limited, so do not rely on finding detailed route notes at short notice.

The trail works well both as a full thru-hike and as a section walk. Walking it in one go gives the strongest sense of the High Weald changing from the wooded western ridges around St Leonard's Forest and West Hoathly to the sandstone country near Groombridge and the hop-and-orchard landscapes towards Rolvenden, Smallhythe and Rye. Section-walking is equally practical because Horsham, East Grinstead and Rye have rail access, with other access points possible using connecting trains and local buses.

For most walkers, late spring and autumn offer the best balance of scenery and conditions: bluebell woods and gardens in late spring, colour in autumn, and generally more daylight than winter. After sustained rain, expect slow going through woodland and clay sections, and allow extra time rather than planning every day to the limit.

The most rewarding approach is to treat the route as a landscape journey rather than a race between towns. Leave time for the sandstone outcrops near Groombridge, the garden-rich western High Weald, the Kentish oast-house country, Smallhythe Place and the final arrival at Strand Quay below Rye. With accommodation fixed, transport checked and wet-weather footwear chosen carefully, the High Weald Landscape Trail is one of south-east England's most satisfying long-distance lowland walks.