



The Wealdway

THE COMPLETE GUIDE



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Overview

The Wealdway: Gravesend to Eastbourne Across the Weald

The Wealdway is a 133 km waymarked footpath across [England](#), running north-to-south from Gravesend on the Thames estuary to Eastbourne on the English Channel. Most walkers take around 7 days. It is a moderate point-to-point route, suited to hikers comfortable with repeated lowland hills, muddy field paths and mixed navigation rather than technical terrain. Expect woodland, farmland, river walking, Ashdown Forest, chalk downs and a final descent to Eastbourne Pier.

Route Overview

The route officially starts at the Gordon Promenade waterfront in Gravesend, Kent, and finishes at Eastbourne Pier, East Sussex. Heading south, it passes Sole Street, Luddesdown and Trottscliffe, where it links with the North Downs Way, then Platt, Mereworth Woods and West Peckham before following the River Medway into Tonbridge. South of Tonbridge it continues via Bidborough, Withyham, Ashdown Forest, Buxted/Uckfield, Blackboys, East Hoathly, Hailsham, Upper Dicker, Arlington and Wilmington. The final section climbs onto the South Downs past the Long Man of Wilmington, then goes via Folkington and Jevington to Eastbourne. This is a linear trail, so plan onward transport from Eastbourne; many walkers also section-walk it using railway stations.

History of the Wealdway

The Wealdway was conceived in 1970 by members of the Ramblers' Association to link the Thames estuary with the English Channel through the Weald. Early route descriptions appeared in the mid-1970s, but poor rights of way between Uckfield and Eastbourne delayed full publication until 1981. The name "Weald" comes from Old English for forest, reflecting a landscape once covered by dense woodland and later known for iron-making. Kent Ramblers are involved in maintaining the route and publish the guidebook.

Notable highlights

- **Ashdown Forest:** The Wealdway makes a full traverse of this open High Weald landscape of heath, gorse and pine. It is also the real-life setting associated with A. A. Milne's Hundred Acre Wood in the Winnie-the-Pooh stories.
- **Long Man of Wilmington:** The route passes beneath this 70 m chalk hill figure on Windover Hill during the final climb onto the South Downs. Its age is debated, but it remains one of England's best-known human chalk figures.
- **River Medway at Tonbridge:** A roughly six-mile riverside section leads into Tonbridge. The town's motte-and-bailey castle stands beside the river and adds a strong historic marker to the route.
- **Weald ironworking heritage:** The Weald was once England's main iron-producing region. Former ore-pits and hammer ponds along the route are reminders of the area's Roman-to-Tudor industrial past.
- **Beachy Head and Eastbourne:** Near the southern end, the trail climbs onto the South Downs close to Beachy Head before descending to Eastbourne Pier. It is a memorable finish, but the Wealdway is

mainly an inland route, not a coastal path.

Challenges to expect

The Wealdway is not technically hard, but it accumulates around 2,000 m of ascent over 133 km. Expect steep chalk scarp climbs onto the North Downs and South Downs, wet clay in the central Weald, slippery field paths after rain and short surfaced town sections. Waymarking is generally strong with “WW” arrows, but carry a map or GPS. For a hillier comparison, see the [Beacons Way](#); for a more coastal UK route, compare the [Anglesey Coastal Path](#).

Key Data

Country	United Kingdom, England
Distance	133 km
Duration	7 days
Difficulty	Moderate
Trail type	Point to point
Elevation gain/loss	2000 m
Highest point	220 m
Terrain & landscape	Forest, Grassland, Hills
Trail surface	Dirt, Grass, Gravel
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

The Wealdway is a satisfying north–south crossing of south-east England, running from the Thames Estuary at Gravesend to the seafront at Eastbourne. It suits walkers who want a proper multi-day journey without technical mountain ground, linking riverside paths, chalk downs, woods, clay farmland and open heath.

Its strength is variety. The route climbs through the Kentish North Downs, crosses the Greensand country and the River Medway around Tonbridge, then enters the wooded and heathery High Weald before dropping into the Low Weald villages of Sussex.

Ashdown Forest gives the walk its broadest, wildest-feeling section, with Camp Hill the modest high point at around 220 m. The finish is a classic South Downs finale, passing the Long Man of Wilmington and descending to Eastbourne Pier on the English Channel.

This is a moderate trail, not a stroll between towns. The 132 km route builds up about 2,000 m of ascent, the Wealden clay can be slow and slippery after rain, and accommodation in the rural middle needs planning rather than guesswork.

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

Stage-by-Stage Guide

The stage distances below follow the 8-day breakdown in this guide and should be treated as approximate. The Wealdway is waymarked with **WW** arrows, but it still needs proper map navigation: the route often links small field paths, woodland tracks and lanes where a missed turn can take time to correct.

Stage 1: Gravesend to Wrotham Heath — approx. 26 km

This is the longest day in the 8-stage itinerary and gives the route a varied start: riverside walking from Gordon Promenade in Gravesend, then a steady southward move into the Kent countryside and onto the North Downs. The stage passes or approaches Sole Street, Luddesdown and Trottiscliffe before finishing at Wrotham Heath.

The walking is mainly lowland footpaths, field edges, woodland sections and chalk downland. Around Luddesdown and the North Downs the route becomes more undulating, with dry valleys and exposed chalk slopes rather than technical terrain.

A key landmark is the brief meeting with the North Downs Way and Pilgrims' Way near Trottiscliffe. Take care here not to follow the better-known trail by mistake: stay with the **WW** waymarks unless deliberately leaving the route.

Start the day well supplied in Gravesend. Food and water options after leaving town are more limited and depend on village services, opening hours and any planned detours; this should be checked before travelling. Accommodation at or near Wrotham Heath should be booked ahead, with Platt and nearby rail-linked settlements useful for planning.

Gravesend station is a short walk from the start, while Sole Street and Borough Green & Wrotham stations give useful access for shortening, starting or leaving this stage. The main practical warnings are length, navigation through fields and woods, and slippery chalk or mud after rain.

Stage 2: Wrotham Heath to Tonbridge — approx. 22 km

This stage continues through Kent, crossing the Greensand country and one of the route's major woodland sections before dropping towards the Medway valley. From Wrotham Heath the route passes Platt, Mereworth Woods and West Peckham before reaching Tonbridge.

Mereworth Woods is the main feature of the day: a large block of ancient and conifer woodland where paths, tracks and junctions require attention. Underfoot conditions can vary quickly after rain, with woodland mud and wet leaf litter making progress slower than the distance suggests.

The approach to Tonbridge brings a clear change of character, with the River Medway and the town's historic castle beside the river forming the main end-of-day landmarks. Tonbridge is one of the best resupply and accommodation points on the Wealdway, so it is a sensible place to restock properly before the more rural central stages.

Food and water are much more reliable at the end in Tonbridge than through the middle of the stage. Any lunch stops or village services between Wrotham Heath and Tonbridge should be checked before travelling.

Borough Green & Wrotham station is useful near the start, and Tonbridge station makes the end of the stage straightforward for section-walkers. Navigation is generally helped by waymarks, but the woodland and field-path sections still need a map or GPS track kept to hand.

Stage 3: Tonbridge to Fordcombe — approx. 16 km

This is a shorter stage, but it should not be treated as a rest day if the ground is wet. The route leaves Tonbridge and the Medway valley, then works through the western Kent countryside towards Bidborough, Speldhurst and Fordcombe.

Expect a mix of field paths, woodland tracks and lanes, with more of the High Weald feel beginning to appear. The walking is not high or exposed, but the repeated changes between fields, woods and small lanes make navigation more involved than on an obvious ridge path.

Tonbridge is the best place to buy food before setting off. Fordcombe is a rural end point, so food, water and evening meal arrangements should be planned in advance; this should be checked before travelling.

Accommodation around Fordcombe is much less plentiful than in Tonbridge. Many walkers will need to book early or use nearby rail access to reach lodging off-route.

Tonbridge station gives excellent access at the start of the day, while Ashurst station is the useful rail option for Fordcombe. The main warning is the combination of short distance and slow going: after rain, Wealden clay and shaded woodland can make this stage muddier than expected.

Stage 4: Fordcombe to Ashdown Forest — approx. 16 km

This stage moves deeper into the High Weald and towards the most distinctive landscape on the route. From Fordcombe the Wealdway passes Withyham, with Five Hundred Acre Wood lying just off the route, before climbing onto Ashdown Forest.

The terrain is a mixture of wooded paths, field paths, green lanes and eventually more open heathland. The change from enclosed High Weald woodland to the heath, gorse and pine of Ashdown Forest is one of the major transitions of the whole walk.

Ashdown Forest is also more exposed than the wooded stages before it. In poor weather, wind and rain can make the open heath feel much more committing, even though the altitude is modest.

Food and water options are limited on this rural stage and should be planned before leaving Fordcombe. Do not rely on finding services on-route unless they have been checked in advance.

Accommodation at or near Ashdown Forest is limited and should be booked ahead. For transport, Ashurst is the practical rail link for Fordcombe at the start; onward arrangements from the Ashdown Forest end should be planned carefully, as the briefest route to accommodation may not be on the line of the trail.

Navigation on the forest needs attention. Open heathland can make paths look less defined than in farmland, so stay alert for **WW** markers and use a map or GPS track to avoid drifting onto the wrong path.

Stage 5: Ashdown Forest to Blackboys — approx. 15 km

This is one of the signature stages of the Wealdway. It completes the Ashdown Forest traverse, crosses the high open heath around Camp Hill — the route's highest point at about 220 m — and then heads south through Buxted towards Blackboys.

The first part of the stage is the most open of the trail so far, with wide views across the Weald from the Ashdown Forest plateau. After that, the route gradually loses the heathland character and returns to paths, lanes and field walking as it moves towards the Low Weald.

Underfoot conditions can be mixed. The open forest tracks are generally straightforward in good weather, but the approach into the lower Weald can become muddy and slippery after rain, especially on clay soils.

Food and water should not be assumed between the main settlements. Buxted and Blackboys are the key planning points for this stage, but current services and opening times should be checked before travelling.

Buxted station gives useful public transport access near the route, and Uckfield is another important rail-linked town in the wider central section. Accommodation in and around Blackboys is more limited than in larger towns, so booking ahead or using rail access to stay off-route may be necessary.

The main warnings are exposure on Ashdown Forest, mud after rain, and navigation where the trail leaves the open forest and re-enters field-and-lane country. In mist or low cloud, the high heathland sections deserve particular attention.

Stage 6: Blackboys to Hellingly — approx. 17 km

This stage is a classic Low Weald day, linking small Sussex villages through clay farmland. From Blackboys the route passes East Hoathly and Chiddingly before reaching Hellingly.

The scenery is gentler than Ashdown Forest and the South Downs, but the walking can be slow in wet weather. Expect field paths, woodland margins, lanes and heavy clay underfoot, with timber-framed village buildings and medieval churches forming the main landmarks.

Navigation is more about concentration than difficulty. The trail repeatedly changes direction between fields, woods and small lanes, so waymarks should be backed up by a map or GPS track.

Food and water availability is village-based and should be checked before travelling, especially outside peak daytime hours. Carry enough for the full stage if relying on uncertain services.

Accommodation at Hellingly itself may be limited, and nearby larger settlements such as Hailsham are likely to be part of the planning for many walkers. Book ahead rather than assuming a room will be available at the end of the day.

There is no major technical hazard on this stage, but mud is a real practical issue. After prolonged rain, the Low Weald clay can be waterlogged, slippery and tiring, so waterproof footwear and a realistic pace are important.

Stage 7: Hellingly to Wilmington — approx. 13 km

This shorter stage carries the route from the Low Weald towards the South Downs. From Hellingly the Wealdway passes Upper Dicker and Arlington before reaching Wilmington, beneath the downs and close to the Long Man of Wilmington.

The day begins with more field and lowland walking, then the landscape starts to open as the South Downs escarpment comes into view. The approach to Wilmington is one of the clearest points on the trail where the final chalk range begins to dominate the route ahead.

The Long Man of Wilmington on Windover Hill is the main landmark. The Wealdway passes beneath this chalk hill figure as it prepares for the final climb onto the South Downs.

Food and water options remain rural and should be checked before travelling. Because the walking day is shorter, some walkers may choose to combine this with another stage, but doing so adds the South Downs climb and should only be planned with daylight, weather and accommodation in mind.

Berwick station is useful for Arlington, and Polegate station is useful for Wilmington and Folkington access. Accommodation at or near Wilmington should be booked ahead, with nearby transport links useful if staying off-route.

The main warning is the transition from lowland paths to downland. Wet clay may still slow progress before Wilmington, while the chalk slopes ahead are more exposed to wind and weather.

Stage 8: Wilmington to Eastbourne — approx. 17 km

The final stage is a high-level South Downs finish, very different in feel from the wooded and clay-rich middle of the Wealdway. From Wilmington the route climbs past the Long Man area, then passes Folkington and Jevington before joining the downland approach towards Eastbourne.

The terrain is mainly chalk downland, grassy tracks, open slopes and short surfaced sections as the route descends into town. The stage shares the final approach with the South Downs Way near Beachy Head before coming down to the A259 and finishing at Eastbourne Pier.

Views are a major feature of this stage. Around Folkington and Jevington the route follows downland country with outlooks back over the Weald, including towards Arlington Reservoir, before the final descent to the seafront.

Food and water should be planned at the start, as services on the downs are limited and opening times in villages should be checked before travelling. Eastbourne has the best end-of-walk facilities on the whole route, with accommodation, food and onward transport close to the finish.

Polegate station is useful for access to Wilmington, Folkington and the start of this final section, while Eastbourne station is close to the pier finish. The route's final town section is straightforward, but allow enough time for the descent from the downs and the walk through Eastbourne to the seafront.

The main warnings are exposure on the South Downs and slippery chalk or grass in wet weather. In wind, rain or low visibility, keep careful track of the **WW** waymarks and the shared South Downs Way section rather than relying on visible landmarks alone.

Recommended Itinerary

Approximate distances below use the stage split for the Wealdway. If staying off-route, or using a different overnight stop, check official mapping before booking accommodation.

Standard 8-day itinerary

This is the most balanced plan for independent walkers. It keeps most days moderate, avoids turning the clay-heavy middle into a slog, and leaves enough time for navigation through fields, woods and small lanes.

Day	From	To	Approx. distance	Why this stage makes sense	Services/accommodation notes
1	Gravesend	Wrotham Heath	26 km	A long opening day from the Thames Estuary through Kent countryside to the North Downs area. This gets the urban start behind you and reaches a useful overnight zone near the early chalk section.	Gravesend has strong rail access and is a practical place to arrive the night before. Accommodation around Wrotham Heath should be arranged ahead; Borough Green & Wrotham station is a useful nearby rail access point for this part of the route.
2	Wrotham Heath	Tonbridge	22 km	Crosses the Greensand country, including the Mereworth Woods / West Peckham section, before dropping towards the River Medway at Tonbridge. A good full day, but less demanding than the opener.	Tonbridge is one of the best service towns on the route, with rail access and a wider choice of places to stay than the rural stages either side.
3	Tonbridge	Fordcombe	16 km	A shorter day after two longer stages, useful because the route becomes more rural south of Tonbridge. It also allows time for the field-and-woodland navigation around Bidborough, Speldhurst and Fordcombe.	Fordcombe is a rural stop, so book accommodation carefully. Ashurst station is a useful access point for Fordcombe if staying off-route.

Day	From	To	Approx. distance	Why this stage makes sense	Services/accommodation notes
4	Fordcombe	Ashdown Forest	16 km	Keeps the approach to the High Weald manageable and avoids rushing the transition into Ashdown Forest. This is a sensible stage length if the ground is muddy.	Accommodation on and around the central rural section is sparse. Book ahead and be prepared to use an off-route stay or station access if needed.
5	Ashdown Forest	Blackboys	15 km	A deliberately short stage across high, open Wealden ground and onward towards the Low Weald. It gives time for Ashdown Forest, Camp Hill and any slower going on exposed or wet paths.	This is one of the sections where overnight logistics matter most. Blackboys is a small rural stop; do not assume accommodation or evening food without checking before travelling.
6	Blackboys	Hellingly	17 km	A moderate Low Weald day through the Sussex village belt, including East Hoathly and Chiddingly before Hellingly. The terrain is not technical, but clay paths can be slow after rain.	Rural services are limited compared with Tonbridge, Uckfield, Hailsham and Eastbourne. Accommodation should be booked in advance, with off-route options considered if needed.
7	Hellingly	Wilmington	13 km	A shorter approach day before the South Downs finale. It positions you beneath the chalk escarpment and the Long Man of Wilmington without making the final day too long.	Wilmington is a small downland village area rather than a major service centre. Polegate is one of the useful rail access points for the Wilmington / Folkington area.
8	Wilmington	Eastbourne	17 km	A strong final day over the South Downs via Folkington and Jevington, joining the high downland approach near Beachy Head before descending to Eastbourne Pier.	Eastbourne has the best end-of-walk logistics: rail access, seafront accommodation and onward trains to London Victoria and along the south coast.

Slower variant: 9–10 days

A slower itinerary suits walkers who prefer shorter days, are carrying camping gear, expect muddy conditions, or want more time in Ashdown Forest and on the South Downs. The best way to slow the route down is to break the longer northern stages and avoid over-stretching the rural middle.

Useful places to look at for shorter-stage planning include Sole Street, Borough Green & Wrotham, Tonbridge, Ashurst for Fordcombe, Buxted, Uckfield, Berwick for Arlington, and Polegate for Wilmington / Folkington. These are rail-accessible points within roughly a mile or two of the route, but exact walking distances from the path and current transport times should be checked before travelling.

Do not assume every village on the Wealdway has suitable accommodation. The rural central section is the main constraint, so the slower version often works better as a mix of on-route stays and short rail or taxi links to nearby towns.

Faster variant: 6-7 days

A faster itinerary suits fit walkers who are comfortable with long lowland days, repeated short climbs, and potentially slow going on Wealden clay. It is less forgiving in wet conditions and gives less room for accommodation problems in the rural centre.

For a 7-day walk, the simplest compression is to combine one pair of shorter stages. Commonly sensible options are:

- **Hellingly to Eastbourne in one day** by combining the 13 km Hellingly–Wilmington stage with the 17 km Wilmington–Eastbourne stage, making an approximate 30 km final day over the South Downs.
- **Tonbridge to Ashdown Forest in one day** by combining the 16 km Tonbridge–Fordcombe stage with the 16 km Fordcombe–Ashdown Forest stage, making an approximate 32 km day through a more rural section.
- **Ashdown Forest to Hellingly in one day** by combining the 15 km Ashdown Forest–Blackboys stage with the 17 km Blackboys–Hellingly stage, making an approximate 32 km day across the High Weald / Low Weald transition.

For a 6-day walk, two of those combinations are needed. That creates several days of around 30 km or more, so it is best reserved for walkers with proven multi-day fitness and accommodation already secured.

Planning the Route

How many days to allow

Most walkers should plan the Wealdway as a **6–8 day walk**, with **7 days** a sensible target for fit walkers carrying light luggage and **8 days** better if accommodation, public transport links or muddy conditions dictate shorter stages.

The route is not technically difficult, but it is rarely fast in the middle. Field paths, woodland tracks, clay lanes and repeated small climbs can make progress slower than the map suggests, especially after rain. A rushed itinerary is possible, but it leaves little margin for navigation checks, slow going through wet Wealden clay, or detours to accommodation away from the path.

A slower schedule works particularly well through the rural centre, where villages are small and accommodation is less frequent. The most practical itinerary is usually shaped less by distance and more by where beds, shops, pubs and rail links are available.

Choosing daily stages

The Wealdway has obvious staging points at larger settlements such as **Gravesend, Tonbridge, Uckfield, Hailsham and Eastbourne**, but the central sections are more awkward. Places such as **Fordcombe, Withyham, Ashdown Forest, Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly and Hellingly** help break the walk, yet services and accommodation should not be assumed.

A typical 8-day structure is:

Stage	Section	Approx. distance	Planning notes
1	Gravesend to Wrotham Heath	26 km	A long first day from the Thames Estuary into the North Downs area; consider rail access near the route if shortening.
2	Wrotham Heath to Tonbridge	22 km	Woodland and Greensand walking before the Medway valley; Tonbridge is a strong overnight and resupply point.
3	Tonbridge to Fordcombe	16 km	Shorter but useful after the longer opening stages; rural accommodation planning matters.
4	Fordcombe to Ashdown Forest	16 km	Enters the High Weald and the Ashdown Forest area; check overnight options carefully.
5	Ashdown Forest to Blackboys	15 km	Short on paper, but the terrain can be slow in poor conditions.
6	Blackboys to Hellingly	17 km	Low Weald villages and clay farmland; services may be limited between settlements.
7	Hellingly to Wilmington	13 km	A short approach to the South Downs, useful before the final hillier finish.
8	Wilmington to Eastbourne	17 km	Climbs onto the South Downs past the Long Man of Wilmington, then finishes at Eastbourne Pier.

For a 7-day walk, the simplest approach is to combine two of the shorter middle or southern stages, provided accommodation and transport still work. For a 6-day walk, expect several long days and less flexibility; this suits strong walkers more than first-time multi-day hikers.

Accommodation and resupply

Accommodation is the main constraint on the Wealdway. The end towns and larger settlements are straightforward by comparison, but the rural central section has fewer places to stay and fewer fallback options immediately on the line of the path.

Book accommodation ahead, especially around **Fordcombe, Withyham, Ashdown Forest, Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly and Hellingly**. Some walkers use nearby railway stations to reach accommodation off-route, which can make the itinerary easier without changing the walk itself.

Food planning should be tied to each day's end point. **Tonbridge, Uckfield, Hailsham and Eastbourne** are the most useful larger service stops on or near the route, while smaller villages should be treated as uncertain for full resupply unless checked in advance. Opening times, pub food availability and shop hours should be checked before travelling.

Carry enough water and food for each day rather than relying on frequent facilities. This is a lowland English route, not a remote mountain trail, but several sections pass through farmland, woods and small villages where services may be limited or closed.

Section-walking by train

The Wealdway is well suited to section hiking. Rail access at both ends is strong, and several stations lie within roughly a mile or two of the path.

Useful stations for breaking the route include **Gravesend, Sole Street, Borough Green & Wrotham, Tonbridge, Ashurst, Buxted, Uckfield, Berwick, Polegate** and **Eastbourne**. This makes it practical to walk the route over weekends or individual day walks rather than as one continuous trip.

Section walkers should plan the start and finish of each day around station access rather than village names alone. Some stations serve places slightly off the trail, so allow time for the link walk and check current train times before travelling.

Navigation and route-finding

The Wealdway is waymarked with **"WW"** on standard waymark arrows, but a map or GPX track is still strongly recommended. Much of the route uses field edges, woodland paths, green lanes and short road or village links, where missed turns can be easy in poor weather or summer growth.

Extra attention is useful through the more intricate field-and-woodland sections of the Weald, and around settlements where paths, lanes and rights of way converge. The Kent Ramblers guide is the key route description, and rights-of-way diversions should be checked before relying on an old printed route.

OS Explorer mapping for the full route spans several sheets, so digital mapping is often more convenient for through-walkers. A paper backup remains sensible if using a phone for navigation.

Weather, ground conditions and timing

Spring, summer and autumn are the best seasons. The main weather issue is not altitude but underfoot conditions: the clay sections in the Weald can become slippery, sticky and slow after rain.

Waterproof footwear or boots with reliable grip are useful for the middle of the route, even though the trail is lowland. In dry summer conditions, the same paths can be straightforward, but long field sections may be exposed and warm.

The North Downs and South Downs sections are more open, so wind, sun and rain feel more exposed there than in the wooded Weald. The final approach over the South Downs towards Eastbourne deserves a proper weather check, especially if visibility is poor.

Permits and access

No special hiking permit is needed for the Wealdway. It follows public rights of way and waymarked paths across Kent and East Sussex.

Normal countryside access responsibilities apply: keep to the line of the path, close gates, respect livestock and avoid assuming access beyond the signed route. Any temporary path closures or diversions should be checked before travelling.

Towns, Villages and Overnight Stops

Accommodation on the Wealdway is uneven. The best-served overnight stops are the larger towns at either end and around the middle — Gravesend, Tonbridge, Uckfield, Hailsham and Eastbourne — while the rural centre of the route has long stretches where beds, evening meals and shops can be limited.

Book accommodation before setting off, especially between Fordcombe, Ashdown Forest, Blackboys and Hellingly. Some walkers use nearby railway stations to reach accommodation off-route, which is often the most practical way to split the walk without forcing very long or very short days.

Place	Usefulness for walkers	Rail access
Gravesend	Strong start-point base with town services	Gravesend station
Sole Street	Useful early section-walking access	Sole Street station near the route
Wrotham Heath / Platt	Practical first-night area on a 7-8 day itinerary	Borough Green & Wrotham station for Wrotham Heath / Platt
Tonbridge	Major mid-route overnight stop with the best services in Kent section	Tonbridge station
Fordcombe	Rural stage end; accommodation should be planned carefully	Ashurst station for Fordcombe
Ashdown Forest	Scenic but sparse; do not assume nearby services	No route station listed; onward planning needed
Buxted / Uckfield	Useful service and rail-access area after Ashdown Forest	Buxted and Uckfield stations
Blackboys / East Hoathly / Chiddingly	Rural Low Weald stops; book ahead	No route station listed
Hellingly / Hailsham area	Useful stop before the South Downs approach	This should be checked before travelling
Arlington	Useful access point before Wilmington and the Downs	Berwick station for Arlington
Wilmington / Folkington	Good final-stage positioning, but limited village services	Polegate station for Wilmington / Folkington
Eastbourne	Strong finish-point base with full town services	Eastbourne station

Gravesend

Gravesend is the practical starting base for the Wealdway. The waymarked route begins at Gordon Promenade on the riverside beside the Thames Estuary, with Gravesend railway station a short walk away.

This is one of the easiest places on the trail to arrange accommodation, food and last-minute supplies. It is a sensible place to stay the night before starting if travelling from outside the area, particularly for an

early departure towards Sole Street, Luddesdown and the North Downs.

Gravesend has strong rail links, including Southeastern services and HS1 high-speed trains to London St Pancras and into Kent. Check current train times before fixing the first day's walking schedule.

Sole Street

Sole Street is an early access point south of Gravesend and is useful mainly for section-walkers rather than as a key overnight stop. The station lies within roughly a mile or two of the route, making it a practical place to join or leave the trail on the first Kent section.

Accommodation and evening-food options should not be assumed here. If planning to stop around Sole Street rather than continue to Wrotham Heath or Platt, book in advance and check opening times before travelling.

Luddesdown and Trottiscliffe

Luddesdown and Trottiscliffe sit in the North Downs part of the route, where the Wealdway passes through quiet chalk country and briefly meets the North Downs Way and Pilgrims' Way near Trottiscliffe. These are useful landmark villages rather than dependable service centres.

For most through-walkers they are places to pass through during the first day, not primary overnight bases. Carry enough food and water for the early rural section, as services should not be relied on without checking in advance.

Wrotham Heath and Platt

Wrotham Heath and Platt are practical first-night targets on an 8-day schedule, after the approximate 26 km stage from Gravesend. They also work as access points for walkers breaking the route into shorter sections.

Accommodation is more limited than in Gravesend or Tonbridge, so this area needs advance booking. Borough Green & Wrotham station is the listed rail access for Wrotham Heath and Platt, which makes it useful if accommodation on the route is full or if a section needs to be shortened.

Food and pub availability should be checked before relying on it for an evening meal or breakfast. This is a good point to reset before the route heads on through Mereworth Woods, West Peckham and towards Tonbridge.

Mereworth Woods and West Peckham

Mereworth Woods and West Peckham lie on the Kent section between Wrotham Heath / Platt and Tonbridge. This is a more rural part of the walk, with woodland and village walking rather than large settlement services.

They are not the most convenient overnight targets unless accommodation has been specifically arranged. Most walkers will treat this as a through-section between better-served stops, carrying food rather than depending on shops or cafés en route.

Tonbridge

Tonbridge is one of the most important overnight stops on the Wealdway. The route approaches via the River Medway area and the town sits around the point where the trail crosses the Medway valley.

This is a strong resupply and accommodation point, with town services and a railway station on or close to the route. It is a natural stop at the end of the second day on an 8-day itinerary, or a useful base for section-walkers tackling either the Kent section to the north or the High Weald section to the south.

Tonbridge is also a sensible place to solve logistics before the more thinly serviced central stretch. If accommodation between Fordcombe, Ashdown Forest and Blackboys is limited, Tonbridge is where plans should be checked and adjusted.

Bidborough, Speldhurst and Fordcombe

Bidborough, Speldhurst and Fordcombe take the route out of Tonbridge and into the wooded High Weald. Fordcombe is a listed stage end on an 8-day itinerary, but it is a rural stop rather than a large service centre.

Accommodation around Fordcombe should be booked before starting the walk. Ashurst station is the listed rail access for Fordcombe, which can be useful for reaching off-route accommodation or for section-walking.

Do not rely on frequent shops or cafés through this section. Carry enough food for the day and check evening-meal arrangements when booking accommodation.

Withyham and Five Hundred Acre Wood

Withyham and the Five Hundred Acre Wood area sit on the approach to Ashdown Forest. This is part of the more rural, wooded High Weald section where services become less predictable.

These are useful route landmarks rather than obvious overnight bases. If breaking the walk here, accommodation and food must be arranged in advance, and transport options should be checked before travelling.

Ashdown Forest and Camp Hill

Ashdown Forest is one of the defining sections of the Wealdway and includes the high open heathland around Camp Hill, the route's highest point at about 220 m. It is also one of the places where overnight planning needs care.

Although Ashdown Forest is a major landscape highlight, it should not be treated like a town stop. Accommodation and evening-food options in the rural area can be sparse, and walkers may need to use accommodation off-route or adjust stages around available beds.

There is no listed railway station directly on the route through Ashdown Forest in the standard access points. If using taxis, buses or off-route accommodation here, this should be checked before travelling.

Buxted and Uckfield

Buxted and Uckfield are important practical options after Ashdown Forest. Buxted station and Uckfield station are both listed as useful rail access points near the route, and Uckfield is one of the better-served

towns for accommodation in this part of the walk.

This area can be used to recover flexibility after the sparse Ashdown Forest section. It is a sensible place to resupply, arrange a night indoors, or join and leave the trail by rail when section-walking.

If staying in Buxted, Uckfield or nearby accommodation, check the exact walking connection to and from the Wealdway before booking. The route itself continues south towards Blackboys, East Hoathly and the Low Weald villages.

Blackboys

Blackboys is a listed stage end after the Ashdown Forest to Blackboys section. It sits in the Low Weald part of the route, where the going can be muddy and accommodation is more limited than in the larger towns.

This can be a useful overnight stop, but only if accommodation and food are booked in advance. Do not assume a full range of services; check evening meals, breakfast and packed-lunch options before committing to the stage.

East Hoathly and Chiddingly

East Hoathly and Chiddingly are small Low Weald villages on the route between Blackboys and Hellingly. They are useful for pacing the day and may provide opportunities for short breaks, but they should not be treated as guaranteed resupply points without checking current opening times.

Accommodation in this rural section is sparse compared with Tonbridge, Uckfield, Hailsham and Eastbourne. Walkers using these villages as overnight stops need confirmed bookings and a clear plan for food.

Hellingly and the Hailsham area

Hellingly is a practical stage end before the route continues towards Upper Dicker, Arlington and the South Downs. Nearby Hailsham is one of the better-served accommodation areas named for the trail, making this part of the route useful for an overnight stop.

Transport arrangements here should be checked before travelling, especially if using off-route accommodation. This is a good point to prepare for the final approach to the South Downs, where the character of the walk changes from Low Weald farmland to chalk escarpment walking.

Upper Dicker and Arlington

Upper Dicker and Arlington sit on the route north of the South Downs approach. Arlington is a useful access point because Berwick station is listed for Arlington, which helps with section-walking or reaching accommodation away from the trail.

This is a practical area for breaking the route before the climb towards Wilmington and the Long Man of Wilmington. Accommodation and food should still be arranged in advance, as the route is moving through villages rather than a large town-service corridor.

Wilmington

Wilmington is one of the most useful final-night stops on the Wealdway. The route passes beneath the Long Man of Wilmington during the climb onto the South Downs, making this a natural place to position before the last stage to Eastbourne.

Village services are limited compared with Eastbourne, so accommodation and evening food should be booked ahead. Polegate station is the listed rail access for Wilmington and Folkington, which gives useful flexibility if staying off-route or section-walking.

Folkington and Jevington

Folkington and Jevington lie under the South Downs escarpment on the final approach to Eastbourne. They are small downland settlements and are more useful as route landmarks than dependable overnight bases.

If using either as a stopping point, check accommodation, food and onward transport before travelling. Most walkers will continue over the South Downs and finish in Eastbourne, where services are much stronger.

Eastbourne

Eastbourne is the best-served finish point on the Wealdway. The route descends from the South Downs near Beachy Head to the A259 and finishes at Eastbourne Pier on the seafront.

Accommodation, food and onward transport are far easier here than anywhere in the rural final section. Eastbourne railway station is near the pier finish, with trains to London Victoria and along the south coast.

Staying in Eastbourne after finishing removes pressure from the final day, especially if walking from Wilmington or another downland-edge stop. Check train times before relying on a late onward connection.

Getting to the Start

By train

Gravesend is the simplest and most practical access point for the Wealdway. The waymarked start is on Gordon Promenade beside the Thames Estuary, a short walk from Gravesend railway station.

Gravesend is served by Southeastern trains, including HS1 high-speed services to London St Pancras and services into Kent. For most walkers coming from London, using the train avoids the main logistical problem of a point-to-point walk: needing to retrieve a car from the start after finishing at Eastbourne.

Check current train times before booking accommodation or fixing a first-day start time. This should be checked before travelling.

By bus

Bus access is not the main way to reach the start, because Gravesend already has strong rail access close to Gordon Promenade. Local bus options may be useful if staying away from the town centre or linking in from nearby Kent villages, but specific services and evening/Sunday timetables can change.

This should be checked before travelling.

By car

Driving to Gravesend is possible, but it is usually less convenient for a full end-to-end walk. The route finishes at Eastbourne Pier, not back at Gravesend, so leaving a vehicle at the start creates an extra return journey after the walk.

If driving, check current long-stay parking options in Gravesend before committing to the plan. Do not assume that town-centre or riverside parking will be suitable for a 6–8 day walk. This should be checked before travelling.

A common alternative is to travel to Gravesend by train, walk the route north to south, and leave Eastbourne by rail at the end.

From the nearest airport

For walkers arriving by air, the most straightforward plan is to connect into the London rail network and take a train to Gravesend, using HS1 or Southeastern services as appropriate. Exact airport-to-station routes depend on arrival airport and time of day.

Allow extra time if landing on the same day as starting the walk, especially if aiming to complete the longer first stage towards Wrotham Heath. Airport rail connections and late-running options should be checked before travelling.

Where to stay before starting

Gravesend is the best place to stay the night before starting. It has the practical advantage of being both the trailhead town and a rail-served town, so an early start from Gordon Promenade is straightforward.

Accommodation in Gravesend includes town-based options such as hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs. Book ahead if starting at a weekend or during busy holiday periods.

If staying outside Gravesend, factor in the morning transfer to the riverside start. A local taxi may be useful for early starts, late arrivals or heavy luggage, but availability should be checked in advance.

Getting Home from the Finish

The Wealdway finishes at Eastbourne Pier on the seafront. Eastbourne railway station is near the pier finish, making this one of the easier long-distance path finishes in south-east England for onward travel.

By train

Eastbourne has direct rail services to London Victoria and trains along the south coast. For most walkers, the simplest plan is to finish at the pier, walk into the town centre and leave by train from Eastbourne station.

Rail is also the most practical way to link back towards the start or to other points on the route. The Wealdway has useful intermediate rail access at places including Polegate, Berwick, Uckfield, Buxted, Ashurst, Tonbridge, Borough Green & Wrotham, Sole Street and Gravesend, so section-walkers can usually plan a return without a private vehicle.

If finishing late in the day, check the last train times before committing to the final stage over the South Downs. Timetables, engineering works and Sunday services can materially affect the journey home; this should be checked before travelling.

By bus

Local bus options are best treated as a short-hop connection within or around Eastbourne rather than the main way home from the trail. The finish is already close to the town centre, so many walkers will simply continue on foot to the railway station.

Bus routes and evening frequencies change, especially on Sundays and bank holidays. If a bus is needed from the seafront, the A259 or another part of Eastbourne, check current times before setting off on the final day.

By car/taxi

For a point-to-point walk, leaving a car at Eastbourne works best if the outward journey to Gravesend has already been arranged by rail, lift or separate vehicle. A full end-to-start taxi transfer between Eastbourne and Gravesend is unlikely to be the most economical option for most walkers.

Taxis are useful for short local movements at the finish, especially if staying away from the seafront or arriving tired after the South Downs descent. Pre-book if finishing in the evening, travelling with a group, or needing a larger vehicle for packs.

Do not rely on finding transport immediately at the downland edge or after descending from the Beachy Head area. Continue to the pier/town centre plan unless a taxi pick-up has been arranged in advance.

From the nearest airport

Airport travel is not normally the key logistics issue for the Wealdway finish; Eastbourne's rail links are the practical starting point for onward travel. If flying after the walk, choose flights around a realistic rail connection from Eastbourne rather than assuming a late same-day transfer will be straightforward.

Airport-specific rail and coach connections are timetable-dependent and should be checked before booking flights.

Where to stay at the finish

Eastbourne is one of the easiest places on the route to stay overnight, with a broad choice of hotels, guesthouses and other accommodation compared with the rural central stages. Staying in Eastbourne is sensible if the final day from Wilmington, Folkington and Jevington runs late, the weather slows progress on the South Downs, or onward trains are inconvenient.

An overnight stop also removes the pressure to descend from the Downs in time for a specific train. Book ahead in busy holiday periods and check the walking distance between the pier, the station and the accommodation before committing.

Which Direction Should You Walk?

The Wealdway is normally described and walked **north to south**, from **Gordon Promenade in Gravesend to Eastbourne Pier**. This is the natural direction of the route as published in most route descriptions: it starts beside the Thames Estuary, crosses the Weald, then finishes on the English Channel after the South Downs.

Walking it in reverse is entirely possible, and transport works well at both ends, but southbound gives the better overall shape to the journey.

Gravesend to Eastbourne: the standard direction

Southbound is the most satisfying direction for most walkers. The route builds from the Thames Estuary through the Kent countryside, climbs and crosses the North Downs, passes through the Medway valley at Tonbridge, then works across the High Weald and Ashdown Forest before the final approach over the South Downs to Eastbourne.

That progression gives the trail a clear geographical logic: estuary to channel, with a full cross-section of the Weald in between. The finish is also much stronger psychologically. Coming off the South Downs near Beachy Head and descending to Eastbourne Pier gives a definite end point, especially after several days of inland field paths, woods, clay lanes and downland crossings.

Transport is straightforward in this direction. Gravesend railway station is a short walk from the riverside start, and Eastbourne station is convenient for leaving at the end. If section-walking, the line of stations near the route — including Sole Street, Borough Green & Wrotham, Tonbridge, Ashurst, Buxted, Uckfield, Berwick and Polegate — makes either direction workable.

Eastbourne to Gravesend: the reverse direction

Northbound has no major technical disadvantage. The total ascent is the same, the route remains a moderate lowland walk, and there are no mountain-style climbs where direction is critical.

The main difference is the feel of the route. Starting at Eastbourne means tackling the South Downs section immediately, then gradually moving inland through the Low Weald, Ashdown Forest and Kent before finishing on the Thames at Gravesend. Gordon Promenade is a clear terminus, but for many walkers it feels less dramatic than reaching the sea at Eastbourne after crossing the Weald.

Reverse walking may suit a particular accommodation plan, rail connection or section-walking schedule. It can also make sense if lodging is easier to secure on specific nights in Tonbridge, Uckfield, Hailsham, Eastbourne or other nearby towns. The rural central section remains the main planning constraint whichever way you walk, so accommodation should be booked ahead.

Are the climbs easier one way?

There is no decisive climbing advantage. The Wealdway accumulates about **2,009 m of ascent** through repeated lowland rises, chalk-scarp climbs and undulating Wealden ground rather than through one sustained mountain climb.

Southbound saves the South Downs for the finale, including the approach beneath the Long Man of Wilmington and the high ground before Eastbourne. Northbound puts that downland work at the start. The muddy Wealden clay in the middle of the route is not made easier by direction; after rain it can be slow and slippery either way.

Weather and exposure

Weather is not usually a reason to choose one direction over the other. The route is mostly inland, with exposed sections on the North Downs, Ashdown Forest and the South Downs, but there is no coastal-tide or ferry-style timing issue to plan around.

In poor weather, the practical priorities are the same in both directions: allow extra time for muddy clay paths, carry reliable navigation for field and woodland sections, and be prepared for wind and rain on the open downland and heath.

Recommendation

For a full end-to-end walk, choose **Gravesend to Eastbourne**. It is the standard direction, gives the best landscape progression, works cleanly with rail access, and provides the most satisfying finish at Eastbourne Pier after the final South Downs section.

Walk **Eastbourne to Gravesend** only if transport, accommodation availability or a section-walking plan makes it more convenient.

Accommodation Along the Route

Accommodation on the Wealdway is workable, but it is not evenly spread. The strongest choice is at the larger towns and transport nodes — Gravesend, Tonbridge, Uckfield, Hailsham and Eastbourne — while the rural middle of the route has noticeably fewer beds.

For most walkers, accommodation planning should come before finalising daily distances. The standard 6–8 day itinerary often places overnight stops in or near small villages, woodland edges or heathland, where choice may be very limited and a short taxi transfer or rail hop may be more realistic than trying to sleep exactly on the line of the path.

Best overnight bases

Gravesend and Eastbourne are the simplest places to book, with town-centre accommodation and rail access close to the start and finish. Tonbridge is the strongest mid-route base and is a good point to reset supplies, dry kit and adjust the schedule.

The more awkward nights are around Wrotham Heath/Platt, Fordcombe, Ashdown Forest, Blackboys and the Low Weald villages. These places can work, but availability should not be assumed, especially for a weekend or holiday-period walk in the main spring-to-autumn season.

Uckfield and Hailsham are useful larger bases when the direct line of the trail offers too little. The Wealdway is also well suited to using nearby railway stations for off-route overnights, with stations near the route at Sole Street, Borough Green & Wrotham, Tonbridge, Ashurst, Buxted, Uckfield, Berwick and Polegate.

Place	Accommodation level	Best for	Notes
Gravesend	Good	Pre-walk night, early start	Town accommodation and rail access make this the easiest place to begin without a vehicle. The Gordon Promenade start is a short walk from the station.
Sole Street / Luddesdown	Limited	Short first section or rail-based walking	Useful for section walkers, but not a main overnight hub for an end-to-end itinerary.
Wrotham Heath / Platt	Limited	First night on a 7–8 day itinerary	Accommodation should be booked before committing to this as a stage end. Borough Green & Wrotham station can help with off-route logistics.
Mereworth Woods / West Peckham	None to limited	Passing-through section	Do not rely on finding accommodation in the woodland section itself. Plan to continue to a booked village stop or Tonbridge.
Tonbridge	Good	Major mid-route overnight, resupply, schedule adjustment	One of the best accommodation bases on the route, with rail access and town services beside the River Medway section.

Place	Accommodation level	Best for	Notes
Bidborough / Speldhurst / Fordcombe	Limited	Quiet rural overnight if booked ahead	Attractive stage-end country, but limited beds. Ashurst station can be useful for reaching accommodation off-route.
Withyham / Ashdown Forest / Camp Hill	Limited to none on the open forest	Awkward central section	Camp Hill and the open heath are not accommodation bases. Expect to use booked lodging around the forest edge, or adjust via Ashurst, Buxted or Uckfield depending on the chosen stage split.
Buxted / Uckfield	Good around Uckfield	Practical off-route or near-route base	Useful for solving the Ashdown Forest to Low Weald accommodation gap. Buxted and Uckfield both have rail access near the route corridor.
Blackboys / East Hoathly / Chiddingly	Limited	Rural Low Weald overnight	These small Sussex villages sit in the sparsest part of the accommodation pattern. Book ahead and have a fallback plan.
Hellingly / Hailsham area	Good around Hailsham	Southern Low Weald overnight	Hailsham gives stronger choice than the smaller villages and can be useful before the approach to the South Downs.
Upper Dicker / Arlington / Berwick	Limited	Flexible stage break before Wilmington	Berwick station can help if accommodation directly on the route is unavailable.
Wilmington / Folkington / Jevington	Limited	Final downland stage break	Small downland settlements below the South Downs escarpment. Book ahead or use Polegate/Eastbourne as the practical fallback.
Eastbourne	Good	Finish night, onward travel	The easiest finish base, with town accommodation, seafront options and a railway station near the pier finish.

Booking strategy

Book the rural central nights first, then fit the town nights around them. Tonbridge, Uckfield, Hailsham and Eastbourne usually give more flexibility, while Fordcombe, Ashdown Forest, Blackboys and the smaller Low Weald villages are where an itinerary is most likely to fail if left late.

For a 6-day crossing, longer stages may reduce the number of awkward rural overnights, but they also increase the chance of finishing tired on muddy clay paths. For a 7–8 day crossing, the walking days are easier to balance, but more nights fall in places with limited accommodation.

Spring, summer and autumn are the normal walking seasons for this route, so weekends and holiday periods should be treated as higher risk for availability. Current opening dates, room availability and cancellation terms should be checked before travelling.

Inn-to-inn, camping and baggage

The Wealdway can work as an inn-to-inn walk, but it is not a route where every ideal stage end has a convenient pub room or guesthouse. Expect to use a mix of hotels, inns, guesthouses and B&Bs, with occasional off-route moves where the countryside is too sparse.

Some campsites exist along the broader route corridor, but they are not frequent enough to assume a simple campsite-to-campsite itinerary without careful planning. Locations, opening seasons and whether they suit a walking stage should be checked before travelling.

Dedicated luggage-transfer provision should not be assumed for the Wealdway. If walking with heavy bags is a concern, local taxi transfers between the path and accommodation can solve awkward gaps, but these should be arranged in advance, particularly around Ashdown Forest and the Low Weald villages.

Camping and Wild Camping

Camping is possible on the Wealdway, but it needs more planning than on a remote upland trail. The route passes through several towns and villages, and there are some campsites on or near the line, but provision is not evenly spaced and the rural central section is noticeably sparse. Do not assume there will be a campsite at the end of each walking day.

For most walkers, the most practical camping plan is to book pitches in advance and be willing to make short detours from the trail. The Wealdway's good rail access also helps: if a stage end has no suitable camping, nearby stations such as Tonbridge, Buxted, Uckfield, Berwick or Polegate may allow a practical link to accommodation off-route. Current campsite opening dates, pitch availability and access from the path should be checked before travelling.

Does the Wealdway suit camping?

The Wealdway can be walked with camping gear, but it is not the easiest lightweight camping route in southern England. The walking is moderate rather than technical, yet repeated climbs over the North Downs, Greensand Ridge, Ashdown Forest and South Downs feel harder with a full pack. The Wealden clay in the middle stages can also be slow, slippery and tiring after rain.

Camping works best for walkers who are comfortable with flexible stage lengths and occasional off-route logistics. If following a fixed 6–8 day schedule, book every night before setting off, especially between Tonbridge, Fordcombe, Ashdown Forest, Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly and Hellingly, where services are more spread out.

Wild camping legality and reality

There is no general right to wild camp on the Wealdway. In England, camping on private land normally requires the landowner's permission, and this route crosses a patchwork of farmland, woods, commons, villages, protected landscapes and downland. The High Weald National Landscape, Ashdown Forest and the South Downs National Park are not a licence to camp wherever you like.

In practical terms, discreet unauthorised camping is particularly unsuitable on much of this route. The path often runs through working farmland, enclosed woods, field edges and village approaches, with frequent rights-of-way boundaries and limited genuinely secluded public land. On open heath and downland, camping can be highly visible and may conflict with local rules, conservation management and fire-risk controls.

If you want a wild-camp style night, seek explicit permission from the landowner, farm or site manager in advance. Where local rules are unclear, they must be checked locally before relying on a camping plan.

Route sections and camping practicality

Section	Camping practicality
Gravesend to Wrotham Heath	The route starts in a built-up riverside town and then moves into North Downs countryside. Plan a booked site or accommodation rather than expecting informal camping.

Section	Camping practicality
Wrotham Heath to Tonbridge	Woodland and farmland dominate, including the Greensand and Mereworth Woods area. Camping options need checking in advance; Tonbridge is the most practical service centre.
Tonbridge to Fordcombe	Shorter walking day but rural. Do not assume camping at Fordcombe without a prior booking or permission.
Fordcombe to Ashdown Forest	Attractive but logistically sensitive, with woodland, High Weald countryside and the approach to Ashdown Forest. Wild camping should not be treated as a default option.
Ashdown Forest to Blackboys	Open heath and rural lanes make this a poor section for unplanned camping. Fires and stove use may be restricted in dry conditions; check local rules.
Blackboys to Hellingly	Low Weald farmland and villages. Booked camping or off-route accommodation is more realistic than trying to find a legal overnight spot.
Hellingly to Wilmington	Shorter stage into the South Downs approach. Plan ahead around Arlington, Wilmington or nearby transport links.
Wilmington to Eastbourne	The finale crosses exposed South Downs ground before descending to Eastbourne. This is not a section for informal camping; use booked accommodation or finish at the coast.

Water and resupply when camping

Carry enough water for the walking day plus cooking if camping. The route passes through towns and villages including Gravesend, Tonbridge, Buxted, Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly, Hellingly, Wilmington and Eastbourne, but services are not continuous and some rural sections have long gaps between reliable taps or shops.

Do not rely on natural water from rivers, ponds, ditches or woodland streams. The River Medway around Tonbridge is a major valley crossing, not a drinking-water source. Any natural water used in an emergency should be properly treated, but the better plan is to refill at accommodation, cafés, pubs, shops or agreed water points where available.

Fires, stoves and low-impact camping

Open fires are not appropriate on this route unless a formal campsite specifically permits them. This is especially important on Ashdown Forest heathland, in woods, on dry grass and on the South Downs, where fire risk and conservation damage can be serious. Use a stove only where it is permitted and safe, and never on dry vegetation or peaty/heathy ground.

Follow strict low-impact practice throughout: camp only where permitted, keep groups small, avoid blocking paths or field access, leave gates and boundaries as found, pack out all rubbish and food waste, and use proper toilets wherever possible. The Wealdway is a lowland rights-of-way route through lived-in and working landscapes, so good camping behaviour matters as much as navigation.

Food, Water and Resupply

The Wealdway is not a wilderness route, but resupply is uneven. Food and drink are straightforward at the larger towns at either end and around Tonbridge, while the rural Wealden middle requires more planning, especially through the wooded High Weald, Ashdown Forest and the smaller Sussex villages.

Do not plan this walk on the assumption that every village has an open shop or pub when you arrive. Rural opening hours, Sunday trading and seasonal café/pub hours can be limited, and this should be checked before travelling.

Food planning

The safest approach is to start each walking day with breakfast arranged, lunch already carried, and an emergency snack buffer. On a typical stage, carry enough food to finish the day without relying on a mid-stage stop; treat any pub, café or village shop as a bonus unless opening hours have been checked.

Food is easiest to organise in Gravesend, Tonbridge and Eastbourne, with other larger settlements near the route such as Uckfield also useful for walkers using rail or accommodation off-route. The central section is more awkward: Fordcombe, Withyham, Ashdown Forest, Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly and Hellingly are rural places where services may be limited or not directly on the line of walking.

For a 6–8 day itinerary, consider buying food for the next stage whenever passing through a larger town rather than waiting for the next village. This is particularly important before the Ashdown Forest traverse and before the quieter Low Weald stages.

Water planning

Tap water from accommodation, cafés and pubs is the most reliable source. Refill fully at the start of each day and whenever a staffed stop is available.

Most walkers should carry around 1.5–2 litres in normal spring or autumn conditions, more in warm weather or when crossing the more exposed downland sections. The North Downs, Ashdown Forest and South Downs can feel surprisingly dry and exposed compared with the wooded and clay sections.

Natural water should not be treated as a routine supply. The route crosses the River Medway around Tonbridge and passes through farmland, woodland and heath, but rivers, ponds and streams in this landscape should be filtered or treated before drinking. In practice, planning around tap-water refills is simpler and safer.

Section-by-section resupply guide

Section	Food availability	Water availability	Notes
Gravesend to Wrotham Heath	Best arranged before leaving Gravesend. Services become more rural after the start, with villages including Sole Street, Luddesdown and Trottiscliffe on or near the line.	Start with full bottles in Gravesend. Refill only where a pub, café, shop or accommodation is open.	This is a relatively long first stage on many itineraries, so carry lunch from the start rather than relying on a village stop.

Section	Food availability	Water availability	Notes
Wrotham Heath to Tonbridge	Resupply improves at Tonbridge. Between Wrotham Heath, Platt, Mereworth Woods and West Peckham, do not assume regular food stops.	Fill before leaving accommodation and again in Tonbridge. Natural water is not a dependable drinking source.	Mereworth Woods and the Greensand section make this a poor place to run short of snacks or water.
Tonbridge to Fordcombe	Tonbridge is the key resupply point. After leaving town, services become more limited through Bidborough, Speldhurst and towards Fordcombe.	Refill fully in Tonbridge. Later refills depend on open hospitality or accommodation.	This is a shorter stage on many schedules, but it is still sensible to carry lunch from Tonbridge.
Fordcombe to Ashdown Forest	Limited rural resupply. Withyham is on the route area, but food availability should be checked before relying on it.	Carry enough water for the full stage unless a known open stop has been planned.	This is one of the sections where a self-sufficient daypack matters most. Carry lunch and spare snacks.
Ashdown Forest to Blackboys	Food availability is limited until the end of the stage. Do not rely on finding supplies on the open heath or in the forest section.	Start with full bottles. Streams or ponds on heathland/woodland sections should be treated if used.	The high open ground around Camp Hill can be exposed in warm or windy weather. Carry extra water in summer.
Blackboys to Hellingly	Rural village-to-village walking through places including East Hoathly and Chiddingly. Some services may exist, but hours can be restricted.	Refill at accommodation or staffed village stops where available.	Sunday and Monday opening can be a particular issue in small villages; check ahead and carry a fallback meal.
Hellingly to Wilmington	More rural walking through Upper Dicker and Arlington before reaching the South Downs edge. Food should be planned in advance.	Carry enough water from the start. Refill only from confirmed open facilities.	This is a shorter stage on many itineraries, but it leads into the downland finish where exposed walking increases water demand.
Wilmington to Eastbourne	Limited before Eastbourne unless a planned stop is open around Folkington or Jevington. Full resupply is available at the finish in Eastbourne.	Start with full bottles in Wilmington. Carry enough for the South Downs section and descent to Eastbourne.	The final approach over the South Downs is exposed; in warm weather, do not start this section under-watered.

Practical resupply tips

Book accommodation with breakfast where possible, especially in the rural middle of the route. If evening meals are not available on site, check whether there is an open pub or food option within walking distance before booking.

Carry one spare meal or high-calorie emergency option through the central Weald. This is less about remoteness and more about short opening hours, fully booked pubs, and the awkwardness of arriving after kitchens have closed.

If section-walking by train, resupply is easier. Stations near the route include Gravesend, Sole Street, Borough Green & Wrotham, Tonbridge, Ashurst, Buxted, Uckfield, Berwick, Polegate and Eastbourne, allowing walkers to step off-route to larger settlements when needed. Train times and onward walking distances should be checked before travelling.

Navigation and Waymarking

The Wealdway is a waymarked lowland trail, signed with the letters “**WW**” on standard public-footpath waymark arrows. For much of the route this makes it reasonably straightforward to follow, especially for walkers used to English rights-of-way, field edges, stiles, woodland tracks and lane junctions.

It should not be treated as a route that can be walked on signs alone. The trail changes direction frequently through fields, woods and villages, and missing a waymark at a hedge gap or path junction can send you onto another right of way. Carry a map, use an offline mapping app, and keep a GPX track available as a back-up.

Maps, guidebook and GPX

The most useful navigation set-up is:

- the **Kent Ramblers Wealdway guidebook**, which is the most authoritative route description;
- **OS Explorer mapping** for field-level detail;
- an offline digital map or GPX track on a phone or GPS device;
- a power bank if navigating mainly by phone.

OS Explorer sheets covering the route are **123, 135, 136, 147, 148 and 163**. That is a lot of paper mapping for one walk, so many hikers use digital OS mapping with the relevant areas downloaded, plus printed extracts for the day's section.

GPX and KMZ files are available from route-planning resources such as Walking Englishman, and the route is also available as a multi-stage collection on Komoot. GPX files are helpful on the Wealdway because the walking is rarely technically difficult, but the line can be fiddly through farmland, woods and villages.

Where navigation needs more care

The early Kent section crosses the North Downs and briefly meets the **North Downs Way / Pilgrims' Way** near Trottiscliffe. Check that you continue following **WW** signs rather than being pulled onto another named trail.

Around **Mereworth Woods**, expect woodland-track navigation where path junctions can be less obvious than on open downland. Keep checking the direction of travel rather than relying on the next marker always being visible from the last.

The **Tonbridge** area and the two crossings of the **River Medway** involve more built-up and riverside walking. Urban edges can be just as easy to misread as open country, so use the map closely when entering and leaving the town.

Through the central Weald, including the rural sections around **Fordcombe, Withyham, Ashdown Forest, Buxted, Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly** and **Hellingly**, expect frequent field and woodland navigation. The clay ground can become muddy and slippery after rain, which makes it easier to miss trodden lines across fields or choose the wrong side of a hedge.

On **Ashdown Forest**, the terrain is more open, with heath, gorse and pine rather than enclosed farmland. Visibility and a clear sense of direction matter here, particularly if cloud, rain or fading light reduce the usefulness of distant landmarks.

The final approach links with the **South Downs Way** near the Eastbourne end. The downland walking is generally clearer underfoot, but there are still several named routes and paths in the South Downs, so keep checking that the route is still taking you towards the descent to the A259 and the seafront finish at **Eastbourne Pier**.

Mobile signal and offline navigation

Mobile coverage should not be assumed across the whole route, especially in wooded valleys and the more rural central sections. Download maps and GPX files before leaving accommodation each morning, and avoid relying on live data for route-finding.

A phone with offline OS mapping is usually sufficient for competent walkers, provided it is backed up with spare battery and at least one non-phone navigation option. For solo walkers, winter-shortened days, or anyone walking after heavy rain, paper mapping is still sensible.

Is it suitable for less experienced navigators?

Yes, provided expectations are realistic. The Wealdway is well-signed by long-distance-path standards and has no technical mountain navigation, but it is still an 82-mile point-to-point route across a complex network of English rights of way.

Walkers with limited navigation experience should be comfortable matching a map to the ground, identifying public-footpath waymarks, checking field exits, and correcting small errors without relying on phone signal. If those skills are in place, the Wealdway makes a good first multi-day trail; if not, practise on shorter signed routes before committing to the full walk.

Terrain, Conditions and Difficulty in Practice

What the walking is like underfoot

The Wealdway is a lowland walking route, not a mountain trail. There is no technical scrambling, no rocky ground to speak of and no need for specialist equipment beyond normal long-distance walking kit.

The challenge comes from variety and accumulation: field paths, woodland tracks, green lanes, riverside towpath, grassy downland and short surfaced sections through towns and villages. The route changes direction often between fields and woods, so progress can be slower than the headline distance suggests, especially when the ground is wet or waymarks are missed.

The waymarking uses standard arrows marked with the letters **WW**, but this is still a route where a map or GPX is useful. Field-edge paths, woodland junctions and village exits are the places most likely to require attention.

Mud, clay and wet ground

The middle of the route is the section most affected by mud. The heavier Wealden clay through the Low Weald and parts of the High Weald can become waterlogged and slippery after rain, particularly on field paths, woodland edges and enclosed tracks.

This is one of the main reasons the Wealdway can feel harder than its moderate rating. A 15–17 km day on claggy clay can take noticeably longer than the same distance on chalk or surfaced paths.

Waterproof boots or robust trail shoes with good grip are sensible outside dry summer conditions. Lightweight footwear is fine only when the forecast and recent ground conditions are reliably dry.

Climbs, descents and exposure

The route's total ascent is about **2,009 m**, spread across repeated lowland climbs rather than one major mountain day. The high point is **Camp Hill on Ashdown Forest**, at about **220 m**, so altitude is never the issue; the work comes from the repeated rise and fall across the Weald.

The sharper-feeling climbs are on the chalk scarps of the **North Downs** early in the route and the **South Downs** near the finish. These are not technically difficult, but they can be steep enough to affect pace, especially with a multi-day pack.

The downland sections are also more exposed than the wooded and field sections. Wind, sun and rain are felt more strongly on the open chalk slopes, on Ashdown Forest's heathland and during the high-level approach towards Eastbourne.

Road and surfaced walking

The Wealdway is not a road-walking route, but it does include short surfaced sections through **Gravesend**, **Tonbridge**, villages along the line, and **Eastbourne**. These are useful for services and access, but they can be tiring underfoot after long muddy or grassy sections.

Expect the overall feel to be rural for most of the route, with short urban or village transitions rather than long continuous pavement walking.

Terrain by broad section

Section	Practical terrain notes
Gravesend to Wrotham Heath	Starts on the riverside promenade at Gravesend before heading into Kent countryside. The route climbs onto the North Downs around Luddesdown and Trottscliffe, with chalk downland and the first meaningful ascents.
Wrotham Heath to Tonbridge	A mix of field paths, green lanes and woodland, including the Greensand and Mereworth Woods area. The approach to Tonbridge includes the River Medway valley and riverside walking.
Tonbridge to Fordcombe and Withyham	More typical High Weald walking: fields, woods, enclosed paths and frequent changes of direction. Mud becomes a more significant factor after rain.
Withyham to Ashdown Forest and Camp Hill	The route opens out onto Ashdown Forest, with heath, gorse and pine. This is one of the more exposed parts of the Wealdway and includes the highest ground on the route.
Ashdown Forest to Hellingly	The trail drops into the Low Weald, where clay farmland and village-to-village field walking can be slow in wet conditions. Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly and Hellingly sit in this more rolling, rural middle-southern section.
Hellingly to Eastbourne via Wilmington and Jevington	The route builds towards the South Downs, passing beneath the Long Man of Wilmington before climbing onto chalk downland. The final approach shares high downland terrain near Beachy Head before descending to Eastbourne seafront.

Seasonal conditions

Spring can be one of the best times for the Wealdway, but wet spells leave the clay sections heavy. Woodland paths and field edges may stay muddy long after rain.

Summer usually gives the easiest underfoot conditions, especially on chalk and field paths. The open sections on Ashdown Forest and the South Downs can feel hot and exposed, so water planning matters on longer stages.

Autumn is often rewarding but can quickly become slippery once rain returns. Fallen leaves in woodland can hide ruts, roots and wet clay.

The route is listed primarily as a **spring, summer and autumn** walk. Winter walking is possible in principle on public rights of way, but short daylight, saturated clay and slippery field paths make it a slower and more committing undertaking.

What makes it feel easier or harder

The Wealdway feels easiest when the ground is dry, accommodation is close to the route and daily distances are kept moderate. The waymarking, regular villages and railway access near several points make it a manageable first multi-day walk for fit hikers.

It feels harder after rain, on the clay-heavy central sections, and when rural accommodation gaps force longer days or off-route transfers. The repeated small climbs also add up: none is severe on its own, but the total ascent is comparable to a hillier route than the lowland label might suggest.

The main practical difficulty is therefore not exposure, remoteness or technical terrain. It is maintaining steady progress across mixed lowland surfaces, navigating accurately through fields and woods, and allowing enough time for mud, gates, village exits and repeated short climbs.

Weather and Best Time to Walk

The Wealdway is best treated as a three-season walk: spring, summer and autumn. It is a lowland route rather than a mountain trail, but weather still affects progress because much of the middle section crosses Wealden clay, field paths and woodland tracks that become slow, slippery and tiring after rain.

The main weather-related planning issue is not altitude or exposure for long periods, but underfoot conditions. The North Downs and South Downs scarps are exposed in wind and poor visibility, while the Low Weald and wooded central stages can be very muddy after wet spells.

Best season

Season	What to expect	Planning advice
Spring	Often one of the better times for the route, with longer daylight returning and fields, woods and downland generally more pleasant than in winter. Wet spells can still leave the clay middle heavy underfoot.	A strong choice for a full traverse, but waterproof footwear and gaiters are useful after rain. Book rural accommodation ahead, especially around the central stages.
Summer	Long daylight makes the 6–8 day itinerary easier, especially on the longer Gravesend–Wrotham Heath and Wrotham Heath–Tonbridge stages. Open chalk and heathland sections can feel exposed in hot sun.	Start early on warm days, carry enough water between villages, and avoid assuming every rural section has easy resupply. Accommodation should be booked in advance.
Autumn	Often good walking conditions early in the season, with cooler days than summer. After sustained rain, the Wealden clay, field edges and woodland paths can become increasingly muddy.	A good option if daylight still suits your stage lengths. Later autumn needs more conservative timing, particularly through the central rural sections.
Winter	Realistic for experienced walkers as a lowland route, but not the best season for most full-route hikers. Short daylight, wet clay, slippery fields and possible poor visibility make progress slower.	Better suited to section-walking by train than a continuous end-to-end trip. Check transport, accommodation and rights-of-way diversions before travelling.

Rain, mud and trail surfaces

Rain has the biggest impact on the Wealdway. The clay of the Low Weald and parts of the central route can be waterlogged and slippery, particularly around the field-and-woodland sections between the High Weald, Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly and Hellingly.

After wet weather, allow more time than the map distance suggests. Boots with a reliable sole are preferable to lightweight shoes when the ground is saturated, and poles can help on greasy descents and chalk-scarp climbs.

The River Medway valley around Tonbridge and the riverside approach into town can also feel slower in wet conditions, even though the walking remains non-technical. Mud is more likely to be the limiting factor than steepness.

Heat, wind and exposure

The most exposed sections are the chalk downland at either end and the open heath of Ashdown Forest around Camp Hill, the highest point of the route at about 220 m. These areas are not high mountains, but they offer less shelter than the wooded Weald and can be uncomfortable in strong wind, heavy rain or hot sun.

In summer, plan water and food carefully before the longer rural stretches. The route passes towns and villages, but services are not continuous, and the accommodation-sparse central section should not be treated like a town-to-town promenade.

Fog, storms and navigation

Fog or low cloud can make the open parts of Ashdown Forest and the South Downs finale less straightforward, especially where the route crosses open heath, downland or field paths rather than following obvious lanes. The Wealdway is waymarked with “WW” arrows, but a map, GPX route or guidebook remains important in poor visibility.

Thunderstorms and strong winds matter most on the exposed downs and open heathland. If bad weather is forecast, the strong rail access along the route makes it practical to shorten or re-time individual stages rather than forcing a long day.

Daylight and itinerary timing

For a continuous 6–8 day walk, daylight is a serious consideration outside late spring and summer. Several stages involve frequent navigation between fields, woods and lanes, where walking in fading light is slower and increases the chance of missing a waymark.

In shorter-day seasons, an 8-day schedule is more forgiving than a compressed 6-day itinerary. Section-walkers can use rail access at Gravesend, Sole Street, Borough Green & Wrotham, Tonbridge, Ashurst, Buxted, Uckfield, Berwick, Polegate and Eastbourne to avoid overlong days in poor conditions.

Accommodation and seasonal practicality

Weather and accommodation planning are linked on the Wealdway. The rural middle of the route has fewer places to stay than Gravesend, Tonbridge, Uckfield, Hailsham and Eastbourne, so poor weather can be awkward if there is no flexible stopping point nearby.

Book ahead in all seasons, and especially for a full traverse. Current opening days, availability and transport connections should be checked before travelling.

Safety Notes

The Wealdway is a moderate lowland route, not a technical mountain walk, but it still needs sensible day-to-day planning. The main risks are slippery clay, exposed downland and heathland sections, field-and-woodland navigation, road crossings and long rural stretches where services are limited.

Emergency help

In the UK, call **999** or **112** for police, fire, ambulance or mountain rescue/coastguard assistance. Give a clear location using a grid reference, What3Words, nearby road, village or named feature where possible.

Mobile signal should not be relied on continuously, especially in wooded valleys, rural farmland and parts of Ashdown Forest. Carry an offline map or paper OS mapping, and make sure the route file and phone battery are available before leaving each morning.

Navigation and remoteness

The Wealdway is waymarked with **“WW”** arrows, but it crosses many fields, woods, lanes and village edges where signs can be missed or obscured. The central Wealden sections are the easiest places to lose time through small navigation errors, particularly in poor visibility, after dusk or where field paths are faint.

Carry a proper map and know the next village, road or railway fallback point for the day. This matters most through the more rural middle of the route, where accommodation and services are sparse and detours can be awkward.

Mud, slips and underfoot conditions

The Wealden clay in the middle of the route can become waterlogged and very slippery after rain. Expect slow going on field paths, green lanes and woodland tracks, especially between the High Weald, Low Weald villages and the approach towards Hellingly.

Footwear with good grip is more important than speed on this trail. Trekking poles can be useful on muddy descents, churned field edges and the chalk scarp climbs on the North Downs and South Downs.

Weather exposure

Most of the route is sheltered by farmland, woodland and villages, but the open sections need respect. The North Downs, Ashdown Forest, Camp Hill and the South Downs near Wilmington, Folkington, Jevington and the Eastbourne approach can be exposed to wind, rain, sun and sudden changes in temperature.

Carry waterproofs and an extra warm layer even in spring and autumn. In summer, the exposed chalk and heathland sections can feel hot, with limited shade between breaks, so start early, carry enough water and use sun protection.

Roads, lanes and village sections

The Wealdway uses a mix of footpaths, tracks, green lanes, riverside paths and short surfaced sections through towns and villages. Expect road crossings and some lane walking, particularly around settlements such as Gravesend, Wrotham Heath, Tonbridge, Uckfield-side country, Hellingly, Wilmington and Eastbourne.

Walk facing oncoming traffic where there is no pavement, use verges carefully and take extra care on bends, at farm entrances and in poor light. A small reflective item or headtorch is useful if a stage runs late.

Livestock and farmland

Much of the route crosses working farmland. Keep to the right of way, close gates behind you, and give livestock a wide berth. If cattle are present, move calmly and avoid getting between cows and calves.

Dogs should be kept under close control, and on a lead wherever livestock, ground-nesting birds, roads or access signs require it. Ashdown Forest and downland areas can have sensitive habitats, so staying on the line of the path is part of safe and responsible walking.

Water safety

The route begins beside the Thames Estuary at Gravesend, follows riverside ground around the River Medway and finishes at the seafront in Eastbourne. Treat promenades, towpaths, riverbanks and wet grass with care, especially after rain or in poor light.

Do not enter floodwater, and avoid unstable or undercut banks. If riverside sections are affected by flooding or path closures, use the signed diversion or check the current right-of-way status before continuing.

Solo hiking

The Wealdway is suitable for experienced solo walkers, but the quieter middle stages deserve the same preparation as more remote routes. Tell someone the day's start and finish points, expected arrival time and any planned off-route accommodation or station exit.

Solo walkers should be especially cautious about late starts, low phone battery, missed waymarks and trying to push on after dark. The route's rail access makes it practical to shorten or exit a day if conditions deteriorate.

Check before setting off each day

- Weather forecast for the day's open sections, especially Ashdown Forest and the South Downs.
- Whether heavy rain has made Wealden clay sections slow, slippery or flooded.
- Current public transport times if using stations such as Sole Street, Borough Green & Wrotham, Tonbridge, Ashurst, Buxted, Uckfield, Berwick or Polegate.
- Accommodation check-in arrangements, particularly in the rural central section.
- Offline maps, route file, phone battery and backup power.
- Water and food for the full stage, allowing for limited services between villages.

- Daylight hours and realistic walking time, including mud and ascent.
- Any rights-of-way diversions or temporary closures. This should be checked before travelling.

Gear Recommendations

The Wealdway is a lowland trail, so the gear problem is not altitude or technical ground. It is mud, repeated short climbs, exposed chalk escarpments, field-and-woodland navigation and the practicalities of linking accommodation across a rural middle section.

Footwear

Choose footwear for wet clay rather than for rocky mountain terrain. The middle of the route across the Weald can be waterlogged and slippery after rain, especially on field paths, woodland tracks and green lanes, so shoes with shallow road-style tread are a poor choice outside dry summer spells.

Waterproof walking shoes or lightweight boots are the most versatile option for most walkers. Boots give extra support on slippery clay and on the repeated climbs over the North Downs and South Downs; trail shoes can work in dry conditions if they have aggressive grip and the walker is comfortable with wet grass and mud.

Gaiters are worth considering in spring and autumn, or after prolonged rain. They are not essential, but they help keep clay, wet grass and woodland debris out of footwear.

Waterproofs and layers

Carry a proper waterproof jacket throughout the walking season. The route includes exposed sections on the North Downs, Ashdown Forest and the South Downs, where rain and wind feel more severe than the modest heights suggest.

Waterproof trousers are strongly recommended outside settled summer weather. They are particularly useful on wet field margins and overgrown paths, where legs can be soaked even when it is not actively raining.

A light warm layer should be packed even in summer. Ashdown Forest, Camp Hill and the final South Downs section near Eastbourne are open enough for wind-chill during stops, especially if the day has been warm and sweaty in the wooded Weald.

Navigation

The Wealdway is waymarked with **WW** arrows, but do not rely on waymarks alone. Much of the route moves through fields, woods, lanes and village edges, where missed turns can cost time and add road walking.

Carry at least one reliable offline navigation method. Sensible options include the Kent Ramblers guidebook, OS mapping, a downloaded GPX route, or a mapping app with the relevant area saved for offline use. OS Explorer sheets 123, 135, 136, 147, 148 and 163 cover the route.

A phone is useful, but it should not be the only navigation tool unless it is backed up with offline maps and spare power. A small power bank is a good precaution for multi-day walkers using a phone for maps, accommodation details and rail connections.

Water and food carry

A water capacity of around 1.5–2 litres is sensible for most walkers, with more in hot weather. The route passes through towns and villages, but services are not evenly spaced, and the rural central section has fewer easy resupply options than the start and finish.

Carry lunch and snacks for the full walking day unless a definite stop has been planned. This matters most between the larger service points such as Tonbridge, Uckfield, Hailsham and Eastbourne, and on days crossing Ashdown Forest, the Low Weald villages and the South Downs approach.

Do not assume every village on the map has a shop, café or pub open when needed. Opening times, closures and accommodation meal arrangements should be checked before travelling.

Trekking poles

Trekking poles are optional but useful on this route. They help with the repeated short climbs and descents over the chalk scarps and are particularly helpful on slippery Wealden clay after rain.

They are less important for fast walkers travelling light in dry summer conditions. For heavier packs, camping loads or autumn walking, poles are a practical way to reduce slips and knee strain.

Camping gear

The Wealdway can be walked with camping gear, but it is not a trail where camping removes all planning pressure. Accommodation and campsites are mixed across the route, with the rural central section noticeably sparse, so overnight stops should be arranged before setting out.

Campers should keep the load compact and weatherproof. A lightweight tent, warm sleeping system, waterproof pack liner and the ability to carry a full day's food are more useful here than specialist mountain equipment.

Do not rely on finding an informal pitch at the end of the day. Campsite availability, booking requirements and exact locations should be checked before travelling.

Different kit priorities by walking style

Walking style	Gear priorities
Inn-to-inn hikers	Comfortable waterproof footwear, waterproof jacket and trousers, light warm layer, offline navigation, power bank, day food and enough water for long gaps between services. A large expedition pack is unnecessary if accommodation is booked.
Campers	All inn-to-inn essentials, plus a compact shelter, sleeping bag, mat, stove and full wet-weather packing system. Keep weight under control: the route is lowland, but 132 km and about 2,009 m of cumulative ascent make heavy packs tiring.
Fast or section hikers	Trail shoes may be suitable in dry conditions, but grip still matters. Carry minimal spare clothing but do not omit waterproofs, offline navigation, food, water and a charged phone, especially when linking sections by rail from stations near the route.

Seasonal extras

In spring and autumn, prioritise mud management: grippy footwear, gaiters, waterproof trousers and a dry bag or liner inside the pack. Paths across the Wealden clay can stay wet after rain.

In summer, add sun protection for the open chalk downland, Ashdown Forest and the South Downs finish. A hat, sunglasses, sunscreen and extra water capacity are useful on exposed stages.

In warm weather, insect repellent is sensible for woodland, heath and riverside sections. After walking through long grass or scrub, check skin and clothing before the evening stop.

A small head torch is worthwhile for all multi-day walkers, even in the brighter months. Delays from mud, navigation errors or late accommodation check-in can make the last kilometres slower than expected.

Budget and Costs

The Wealdway is usually a moderate-cost UK long-distance walk rather than a wilderness expedition. The main expense is accommodation: Gravesend, Tonbridge, Uckfield, Hailsham and Eastbourne have the widest choice, while the rural middle of the route is much tighter and can push costs up if the nearest available bed is off-route.

Use the figures below as planning allowances, not fixed quotes. Prices vary sharply by season, day of week, room type and how early accommodation is booked, so current prices should be checked before booking.

Typical daily budget

Style	Accommodation approach	Food approach	Likely daily allowance
Budget	Campsites where practical, hostels or the cheapest available rooms where needed	Supermarket lunches, simple pub/café meals, carried snacks	£45–£85 per person
Mid-range	B&Bs, inns and modest hotels, usually sharing a twin/double room	Breakfast included where possible, pub dinner, packed lunch	£90–£150 per person
Comfortable	Better hotels or more flexible off-route accommodation, occasional taxis	Sit-down meals, cafés, less reliance on carrying food	£150–£230+ per person

Solo walkers should budget more cautiously, as single rooms on a route with limited rural accommodation can be expensive. Walkers sharing twin or double rooms will usually get better value.

Whole-route cost estimate

For a typical 7-day itinerary, allow roughly:

Style	Approximate total, excluding travel to/from the route
Budget	£315–£595
Mid-range	£630–£1,050
Comfortable	£1,050–£1,610+

An 8-day itinerary usually costs more overall because it adds another night's accommodation, but it can reduce the need for taxis and may open up more practical overnight stops. A faster 6-day itinerary may reduce accommodation nights but can force longer days and less choice over where to stay.

Accommodation costs

Accommodation is the biggest variable on the Wealdway. The towns at both ends and along the route give the best chance of finding lower prices, especially Gravesend, Tonbridge and Eastbourne. The central rural stages around Fordcombe, Ashdown Forest, Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly and Hellingly need earlier planning.

A practical allowance is:

- **Camping:** cheapest where a suitable campsite fits the stage, but campsites are not evenly spaced along the whole route. Check current availability before committing to a camping itinerary.
- **B&Bs, inns and guesthouses:** usually the most practical mid-range option, especially for walkers who want breakfast and a dry room for kit.
- **Hotels:** easiest in larger towns, and useful at Gravesend, Tonbridge and Eastbourne, but prices can rise at busy times.

Do not assume there will be a bed exactly at each preferred stage end. If staying off-route, add the cost of a taxi, bus or rail connection into the budget.

Food and drink

Food costs depend on how much is bought from shops versus pubs and cafés. A low-cost walker carrying supermarket lunches and snacks can keep daily food spend down, while a walker relying on pub dinners and café stops should budget noticeably more.

A sensible food allowance is:

Food style	Daily allowance
Mostly self-catered lunches and snacks, simple evening meal	£15–£30
Mixed cafés, packed lunches and pub dinners	£30–£50
Frequent cafés, pub meals and extra drinks	£50+

Carry enough food for the quieter rural sections, especially between the larger towns. The Wealdway passes villages and small settlements, but services are not guaranteed at useful times or exactly on the path.

Transport costs

The route is well set up for rail access. Gravesend has a station a short walk from the Gordon Promenade start, and Eastbourne has a station near the pier finish. Intermediate stations near the route include Sole Street, Borough Green & Wrotham, Tonbridge, Ashurst, Buxted, Uckfield, Berwick and Polegate, which makes section-walking by train practical.

Rail costs vary by operator, time of day, ticket type and how far ahead tickets are booked. Check current fares before travelling. Budget extra if using rail to leave and rejoin the route from off-route accommodation.

Taxis and off-route stays

Taxis are most relevant in the rural middle of the walk, where accommodation is sparse and a bed may be in a nearby village or town rather than directly on the Wealdway. Even short taxi transfers can add up over several nights.

As a rough planning approach, set aside a contingency for two or three local transfers if accommodation cannot be found on-route. Taxi availability in smaller villages should be arranged in advance rather than

left until the end of a walking day.

Luggage transfer and packages

The Wealdway does not have the same obvious, standardised baggage-transfer infrastructure as some busier National Trails. If luggage transfer is wanted, it will usually need to be arranged through accommodation providers, local taxi firms or a walking-holiday operator willing to build a custom itinerary. This should be checked before travelling.

Self-guided or guided packages may be possible through general UK walking-holiday companies, but prices vary by itinerary, room type, baggage arrangements and whether transfers are included. Treat package quotes as route-specific rather than assuming a fixed Wealdway tariff.

Where to save money

The easiest savings are made by booking accommodation early, using the rail network for section walks, sharing rooms, carrying lunches and avoiding unnecessary taxi transfers. A carefully planned 7- or 8-day itinerary with rail-accessible overnight stops can be cheaper than chasing ideal stage lengths through the rural centre.

The least predictable costs are last-minute accommodation and taxis. On this route, a low daily walking cost can quickly become a mid-range trip if the only available bed is off-route.

Luggage Transfer, Guided Tours and Support Services

The Wealdway is a practical route for independent walkers, but it does not have the same obvious support infrastructure as busier National Trails. Most hikers either carry their own overnight kit, use rail links to split the route into day walks, or arrange ad hoc taxi support between accommodation and the trail.

Because the central rural stages have sparse accommodation, support services should be planned before booking the whole walk. This is especially important around Fordcombe, Withyham, Ashdown Forest, Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly and Hellingly, where a short taxi link to lodging may be more realistic than finding accommodation directly on the path.

Luggage transfer

Do not assume that a continuous baggage-transfer service is available for the full Gravesend to Eastbourne route. If walking the Wealdway with luggage support, arrange it directly with accommodation providers, local taxi firms or a walking-holiday organiser before committing to dates. This should be checked before travelling.

A workable luggage plan normally means booking each night's accommodation first, then asking whether bags can be moved to the next stop or whether a local taxi can do it. Towns such as Gravesend, Tonbridge, Uckfield, Hailsham and Eastbourne are more practical for arranging services than the smaller villages and rural sections.

Luggage transfer is most useful if:

- walking the route in 6–8 consecutive days;
- using B&Bs, inns or hotels rather than camping;
- staying off-route because accommodation is sparse in the middle of the walk;
- avoiding a heavy pack on muddy Wealden clay and the repeated climbs onto the North Downs and South Downs.

It is less necessary if section-walking by train, as the route has useful rail access at Gravesend, Eastbourne and near several intermediate points including Sole Street, Borough Green & Wrotham, Tonbridge, Ashurst, Buxted, Uckfield, Berwick and Polegate.

Self-guided walking packages

Self-guided packages are possible in principle, but the Wealdway is less commonly packaged than better-known UK long-distance trails. Any walking-holiday company used for this route should clearly include accommodation booking, daily route notes or GPX files, baggage arrangements and any taxi transfers needed where overnight stops are away from the path.

Before booking, check exactly how the company handles the rural central section and whether the itinerary follows the Wealdway itself or uses nearby stations and accommodation bases. Also confirm current prices, single-room supplements, luggage limits and what happens if a booked taxi or accommodation transfer is needed at the end of a stage.

Guided walking

A fully guided end-to-end Wealdway walk is not normally necessary for competent walkers. The path is waymarked with “WW” arrows, the terrain is non-technical, and the main challenges are distance, mud, cumulative ascent and field-and-woodland navigation.

A guide may still suit walkers who want a supported group format, are unfamiliar with UK rights of way, or prefer help with navigation through the more intricate Wealden sections. Guided availability, dates and group sizes vary, so this should be checked before travelling.

Taxi transfers and off-route accommodation

Taxi transfers are often the most flexible support option on the Wealdway. They can solve three common problems: reaching accommodation away from the trail, shortening a day in poor weather, or linking a stage end to a nearby railway station.

Pre-booking is strongly advised for rural finish points. Do not rely on finding a taxi at small villages or road crossings, particularly around the central High Weald and Low Weald sections.

Useful planning points include:

Support need	Practical approach
Off-route accommodation	Book the room first, then arrange a taxi from the nearest road access or village on the Wealdway.
Section-walking	Use the railway stations near the route where practical, then use taxis only for awkward gaps.
Luggage movement	Ask accommodation providers whether they can receive bags and whether a local taxi can carry luggage onward.
Bad-weather escape	Identify nearby villages, stations or road access points before starting each day, especially across Ashdown Forest and the clay sections of the Low Weald.

For taxi-based support, agree the pickup point carefully. Many Wealdway stage ends are villages, lanes or path junctions rather than formal trailheads, so the driver may need a clear village name, road name, pub, church, station or other obvious meeting point.

Shorter Hikes and Best Sections

The Wealdway works well as a section-walk because several railway stations sit close to the line of the route. The easiest short versions are those that start or finish at Gravesend, Tonbridge, Ashurst, Buxted, Uckfield, Polegate or Eastbourne, rather than trying to end in the more rural central villages where accommodation and onward transport can be thin.

Distances below use the standard stage distances from the full route. Where a station is described as being near the path rather than directly on it, allow extra access distance and check current train times before travelling.

Best for	Start and end	Approx distance	Why this section works	Transport notes
Best single day	Wilmington to Eastbourne	17 km	The strongest one-day finish on the route: the Long Man of Wilmington, Folkington and Jevington, the climb onto the South Downs, the high-level approach near Beachy Head and the descent to Eastbourne Pier.	Polegate station is near the route for Wilmington/Folkington access; Eastbourne station is close to the pier finish. Check the access route from Polegate to the trail before travelling.
Best beginner day	Tonbridge to Fordcombe	16 km	A manageable full stage with no technical ground, passing out from Tonbridge through the Wealden field-and-woodland landscape via Bidborough and Speldhurst. It gives a proper taste of the route without committing to a long or remote day.	Tonbridge has a railway station. Ashurst station is the practical rail access for Fordcombe, with an additional approach or exit walk.
Best weekend section	Gravesend to Tonbridge	48 km over 2 days	A substantial but practical weekend crossing from the Thames Estuary start through the Kentish North Downs, Trottiscliffe, the Pilgrims' Way / North Downs Way area, Mereworth Woods and the Medway valley into Tonbridge.	Gravesend and Tonbridge both have stations. Sole Street and Borough Green & Wrotham also sit close enough to the route to help with shortening, splitting or bailing out.
Best 3-5 day section	Ashdown Forest to Eastbourne	About 62 km over 4 days	The most varied shorter version: Ashdown Forest and Camp Hill, the clay villages of the Low Weald, Hellingly and Arlington, then the Long Man of Wilmington and the South Downs finish into Eastbourne.	The Ashdown Forest start needs careful logistics. Buxted and Uckfield provide rail access on or near the route south of the forest, while Eastbourne has a station at the finish. Exact access mileage from the chosen start point should be checked before travelling.

Best for	Start and end	Approx distance	Why this section works	Transport notes
Best scenery	Fordcombe to Ashdown Forest	16 km	A compact High Weald day, moving from the Fordcombe area through Withyham towards the open heath, gorse and pine of Ashdown Forest. This is the best short choice for walkers who want the Wealdway's inland heath-and-woodland character rather than the coastal finish.	Ashurst station is the rail access for Fordcombe. Ashdown Forest is less convenient for public transport, so arrange onward travel in advance or continue towards Buxted/Uckfield. This should be checked before travelling.
Best for public transport	Gravesend to Tonbridge	48 km, or shorter rail-linked sections	This northern section has the densest useful rail pattern on the trail and is the easiest part to divide into day walks. It also includes several major route features: Gravesend, the North Downs, Trottiscliffe, Mereworth Woods and Tonbridge.	Use Gravesend, Sole Street, Borough Green & Wrotham and Tonbridge, depending on how much of the route you want to cover in a day.
Best for villages and accommodation logistics	Wrotham Heath / Platt to Tonbridge	22 km	A good compromise between rural walking and practical overnight planning, with Platt, Mereworth Woods, West Peckham and a finish in Tonbridge, one of the best-served towns on the route for beds and rail.	Borough Green & Wrotham station is the practical access for Wrotham Heath / Platt. Tonbridge has strong rail access and a wider accommodation base than the rural middle of the trail.

Camping on shorter sections

Camping is possible in places along the Wealdway, but it is not the simplest way to section-walk the route. Campsites are not as consistently available as rail-linked towns and villages, and the rural central section has sparse services.

For a camping-based short hike, build the itinerary around currently operating campsites first, then adjust the walking days to fit. Do not assume that every standard stage end has a convenient campsite; this should be checked before travelling.

Highlights and Points of Interest

The Wealdway is best enjoyed as a sequence of changing landscapes rather than a route built around one single landmark. The most rewarding places to slow down are the chalk scarps at either end, the Medway valley around Tonbridge, the open heath of Ashdown Forest, and the South Downs approach to Eastbourne.

Gordon Promenade, Gravesend

The route begins on Gordon Promenade beside the Thames Estuary, giving the walk a clear sea-to-sea feel even though almost all of the Wealdway is inland. It is worth allowing a little time here before setting off, as the riverside start is a strong contrast with the Kent fields, woods and downland that follow.

Gravesend is also the most practical place to make last-minute adjustments before the rural walking begins, with the railway station a short walk from the start.

Luddesdown, Trottiscliffe and the Kentish North Downs

The early Kent section climbs away from the Thames into the North Downs, passing through quieter chalk country around Luddesdown. This is one of the first places where the route starts to feel properly rural, with dry valleys and chalk downland replacing the urban fringe.

Near Trottiscliffe the Wealdway briefly meets the North Downs Way and the Pilgrims' Way. Walkers interested in long-distance path networks may want to pause here, as it is one of several points where the Wealdway links with major routes across southern England.

Mereworth Woods and the Greensand country

Mereworth Woods is a notable change in character: a large block of ancient and conifer woodland crossed in the Kent section. It gives shade, enclosure and a different underfoot feel after the more open North Downs walking.

This is a good section to take steadily rather than rush through. Woodland waymarking and junctions can demand more attention than open downland, especially when leaf cover or mud makes paths less distinct.

River Medway and Tonbridge

The approach into Tonbridge along the River Medway is one of the most satisfying town arrivals on the route. The Wealdway crosses the Medway valley twice in this part of Kent, so the river is more than a brief landmark; it shapes a whole section of the walk.

Tonbridge is worth extra time if the schedule allows. Its Norman motte-and-bailey castle stands beside the Medway, and the town is also one of the main service and transport points on the route, making it a natural place for a shorter walking day, resupply or overnight stop.

Bidborough, Speldhurst and Fordcombe

South of Tonbridge the route moves into a more intricate landscape of fields, lanes, woodland edges and villages. Bidborough, Speldhurst and Fordcombe mark the transition from the Medway country towards the wooded High Weald.

This part of the Wealdway is not dominated by one major sight, but it is important for pacing. Navigation between fields and woods becomes more frequent, and the walking can feel slower than the map distance suggests, particularly after rain.

Ashdown Forest and Five Hundred Acre Wood

Ashdown Forest is the central highlight of the Wealdway and one of the best reasons to walk the route end to end. The path makes a full traverse of the open High Weald heath, with heather, gorse and pine replacing the enclosed field-and-woodland pattern of the surrounding countryside.

The area is also the real-life landscape behind A. A. Milne's Hundred Acre Wood, with Five Hundred Acre Wood lying just off the route. Walkers with flexible accommodation plans may find this the most rewarding part of the trail to explore at a slower pace, but distances and onward transport should be planned carefully because the central rural section has fewer services.

Camp Hill, Ashdown Forest

Camp Hill, at about 220 m, is the highest point on the Wealdway. It is not a mountain summit, but on a lowland route the open heathland gives a real sense of height and space.

This is one of the best viewpoints on the trail, with wide views over the Weald in suitable weather. The exposure also means conditions can feel different from the wooded approaches, so an extra layer is useful even on otherwise mild days.

The Low Weald villages: Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly and Hellingly

The Low Weald section through Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly and Hellingly is quieter and more understated than Ashdown Forest or the South Downs. Its interest lies in small Sussex villages, timber-framed houses, medieval churches and clay farmland.

This is also the part of the walk where muddy Wealden clay can be most noticeable after rain. Allowing time for slower going is more useful here than planning ambitious sightseeing detours.

Arlington and the approach to the South Downs

Around Arlington the Wealdway begins to feel close to its final landscape change. The route is moving out of the Low Weald towards the South Downs, and views start to open towards the chalk escarpment.

This area is useful as a staging point for walkers breaking the final approach, with Berwick station lying near the route for Arlington. Current services should be checked before travelling.

Wilmington and the Long Man of Wilmington

The Long Man of Wilmington is one of the signature landmarks of the whole route. The Wealdway passes beneath this 70 m chalk hill figure on Windover Hill during the climb onto the South Downs.

It is worth building in time here rather than treating it as just another waypoint. The climb also marks a clear change from the heavier Wealden farmland to the open chalk downland of the final stage.

Folkington, Jevington and the South Downs escarpment

Folkington and Jevington are small downland settlements tucked below the South Downs escarpment, with tiny churches and a strong sense of being under the chalk hills. The route follows an old terraced coach road through this area, with views over Arlington Reservoir and back across the Weald.

This is one of the most scenic late sections of the trail, but it is also exposed compared with the woods and lanes earlier in the walk. In hot, wet or windy weather, the final downland miles can feel more demanding than their low altitude suggests.

Beachy Head approach, Eastbourne Pier and the English Channel

The final approach shares ground with the South Downs Way near Beachy Head before descending towards Eastbourne. It gives the Wealdway a high-level finish after days of crossing the inland Weald.

Eastbourne Pier provides a clear end point on the English Channel and is a good place to allow time after the walk rather than rushing straight to the station. The contrast with the Thames Estuary start at Gravesend is one of the route's most satisfying features.

Common Mistakes and Planning Tips

The Wealdway is straightforward in technical terms, but it catches walkers who treat it as an easy town-to-town stroll. The main planning risks are accommodation gaps, muddy ground, repeated short climbs, and assuming that waymarks and village services will solve everything on the day.

Common mistake	Practical fix
Leaving accommodation until late	Book the rural middle of the route first, especially around Fordcombe, Ashdown Forest, Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly and Hellingly. Gravesend, Tonbridge, Uckfield, Hailsham and Eastbourne have more options, but the central Weald is noticeably thinner.
Planning stages only by distance	Allow for slow going on Wealden clay, woodland paths and field navigation. A 16–17 km day in the muddy middle can feel harder than the number suggests, especially after rain.
Assuming every village has a shop or café	Carry food for the day unless a stop has been checked in advance. Small villages such as Fordcombe, Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly, Hellingly, Folkington and Jevington should not be treated as guaranteed resupply points.
Relying only on the WW waymarks	Carry a map, route description or offline GPX as well as following the waymarks. The route uses many field paths, woodland tracks and small lanes, where a missed arrow can cost time.
Underestimating the mud	Use footwear with grip and expect slippery, waterlogged sections in the Low Weald and wooded middle after rain. Lightweight road-style shoes are a poor choice outside dry summer conditions.
Treating the route as flat because it is lowland	Budget energy for repeated climbs over the North Downs, Greensand Ridge, Ashdown Forest and South Downs. The high point is only around 220 m at Camp Hill, but the route still accumulates about 2,009 m of ascent.
Starting or finishing without transport time built in	Gravesend station is convenient for the Gordon Promenade start, and Eastbourne station is near the pier finish, but train times should still be checked before travelling. The same applies to section-walking from Sole Street, Borough Green & Wrotham, Tonbridge, Ashurst, Buxted, Uckfield, Berwick and Polegate.
Using an old route file without checking diversions	Rights of way, temporary closures and waymarking can change. Carry current mapping and check the latest route information before setting out, especially if following an older GPX file or printed description.

Accommodation: book the middle before the ends

The easiest places to find beds are the larger towns and transport hubs: Gravesend, Tonbridge, Uckfield, Hailsham and Eastbourne. The harder part is linking the rural central stages without forcing an over-long day.

The sections around Fordcombe, Withyham, Ashdown Forest, Blackboys, East Hoathly, Chiddingly and Hellingly need the most care. Some walkers use nearby railway stations to reach accommodation off-route, but this adds time and should be planned as part of the walking day rather than left as a backup.

Do not assume a seven-day schedule suits every walker

The Wealdway is commonly walked in about a week, but the standard split is not automatically the best one. The opening stage from Gravesend to Wrotham Heath is around 26 km, and the Wrotham Heath to Tonbridge stage is around 22 km, which can be a demanding start with a full pack.

An eight-day plan gives more room through the rural centre and reduces the risk of rushing field navigation late in the day. Strong walkers can compress the route, but only if accommodation and onward transport still line up.

Plan food and water conservatively

This is not a remote mountain route, but there are long rural stretches where services are limited or uncertain. Do not build a day around an assumed pub, shop or café unless opening times have been checked before travelling.

Carry enough water and food to reach the next certain stop. This is particularly important through the wooded and village sections of the High Weald and Low Weald, where the map may show settlements but not necessarily useful resupply.

Keep navigation active, even on a waymarked trail

The Wealdway is signed with “WW” on standard waymark arrows, and much of the route is easy to follow. The problems usually come at field edges, woodland junctions, green lanes and short road links where several public rights of way meet.

A phone with offline mapping is useful, but it should not be the only navigation tool. Carry current OS mapping or the Kent Ramblers route description, and make sure any GPX file matches the intended route before starting.

Treat the mud as a real planning factor

The middle of the Wealdway crosses heavy Wealden clay, which can be slow, sticky and slippery after rain. This affects pace, boot choice and how far a comfortable day should be.

In wet spring or autumn conditions, allow extra time through the Low Weald and woodland sections. Gaiters and trekking poles can be useful, but the bigger fix is not overloading the day with distance.

Do not underestimate the exposed downs

The North Downs near the start and the South Downs finale are not technical, but they are more exposed than the enclosed Wealden sections. Wind, rain and strong sun can all feel more significant on the open chalk scarp than in the woods and lanes.

Check the forecast before the downland days and carry layers that work in wind as well as rain. The final approach towards Eastbourne shares the high ground near Beachy Head before descending to the A259 and the pier, so it is worth keeping enough time and energy for the finish rather than treating it as a simple town walk.

Use the railway, but do not improvise every connection

The Wealdway is well suited to section-walking because rail access is strong at both ends and at several points near the route. Useful stations include Gravesend, Sole Street, Borough Green & Wrotham, Tonbridge, Ashurst, Buxted, Uckfield, Berwick, Polegate and Eastbourne.

However, “near the route” can still mean an extra walk or local connection. Check current timetables, station access and the walking link to the trail before committing to a section plan, especially on Sundays and public holidays.

Check the finish logistics before the last day

The route finishes at Eastbourne Pier after descending from the South Downs near Beachy Head and the A259. Eastbourne has a railway station near the seafront finish, making onward travel straightforward when planned properly.

Do not leave return tickets, accommodation check-in or onward transport to chance at the end of a long final day. Train times and any engineering works should be checked before travelling.

Final Advice

The Wealdway suits walkers who want a proper point-to-point journey without committing to mountain terrain or remote logistics. It is a strong choice for a first multi-day trail, provided daily distances are kept sensible and accommodation is arranged before setting off, especially through the rural middle of the route.

The main planning issue is not navigation difficulty or exposure; it is the combination of sparse accommodation, repeated short climbs and slow going on Wealden clay after rain. A 7–8 day itinerary is more forgiving than compressing the route into long days, particularly between Tonbridge, Ashdown Forest, Blackboys and Hellingly.

The most rewarding section for many walkers is the traverse of Ashdown Forest, where the route reaches its highest ground at Camp Hill and opens out from field-and-woodland walking onto heath, gorse and wider Wealden views. The finale is also memorable: the climb past the Long Man of Wilmington onto the South Downs gives the route a fitting high-level finish before dropping to Eastbourne Pier.

The Wealdway works well either as a continuous thru-hike or as a section walk. Through-walking gives the clearest sense of crossing the Weald from the Thames Estuary to the English Channel, but the rail access at Gravesend, Tonbridge, Buxted, Uckfield, Berwick, Polegate and Eastbourne makes breaking the route into day walks or weekends very practical.

Carry reliable mapping or a GPX track even though the route is waymarked with “WW” arrows. Field edges, woodland paths and urban fringes can be easy places to miss a turn, and rights-of-way diversions should be checked before travelling. In wet periods, choose footwear for mud rather than speed: the middle of the trail can be far slower than its modest altitude suggests.

For most walkers, the best approach is to book beds early, leave slack in the schedule, and treat the Wealdway as a varied lowland crossing rather than an easy stroll. Planned well, it is one of the most practical long-distance ways to experience the full Kent and Sussex Weald in a single journey.