

Circular Walk 5 Around Maplehurst

This walk is around two miles and gives you some lovely, far reaching views of the South Downs. "Hurst" in Old English means a wooded hill, and on this walk you will understand why early settlers gave the land this name. A thousand years ago the whole area would have been heavily wooded but now, much of it has been cleared for pasture for horses. Notice how the trees though support wildlife. You could even keep a count of the numbers of different wild flowers that you see in the woods, especially in spring before the leaves on the trees burst out.

During this walk, on a late, sunny March day, I had six sightings of buzzards, so keep an eye on the sky for these raptors soaring on the thermals. Listen too, and you may hear one "mew".

1. Drive through Nuthurst and at the crossroads in the centre of Maplehurst, turn left into Park Lane for a short distance. Park on the right, near the entrance to Heathtolt Farm. Take the public footpath downhill and look at the trees to your left. *Why did someone plant the Scots Firs and can you see the black rooks in the rookery, high in the trees?*
2. Go through the farm yard and glance at the middens. *You may see some small black and white birds that wag their tails. Their name is a very obvious "Pied Wagtails".* Leave by the grassy track, that heads towards a copse.
3. As you enter it, turn left and head uphill. *In March, it was a picture with violets and white wood anemones. Bluebells will come later.*
4. Emerge into a field, though unfortunately the view is spoilt by pylons. Turn left along side of the field and when you come to a footpath, turn right and head across the field, under the pylons. Face the Downs: on the right, in the distance, you will see a hill with a pylon on its summit. *This is Bignor Hill, famous for its footpath sign in Latin! The Roman Stane Street, and Bignor Villa nearby would once have been very busy. How odd when the Romans left our shores and these villas fell into disrepair. The Saxons simply ignored them!*

5. Go over the stile and into another copse with a small pond to the right. Walk down past a woven fence, over a stream, then over a stile and turn left. Almost immediately at a cross-road, cross another stile and head towards a large oak in the field. There is a large house called Ivory's to your right. Head towards the left hand corner of the field and by a telegraph pole, you will find another stile. Climb over it and turn right, along a tarmac drive.
6. Walk straight on, past a riding school on the left and through a stable area. Head towards two semi-detached houses with black doors. At the footpath sign, turn left up another tarmac drive towards High Hurst Manor.
7. Walk uphill and turn to face the Downs. *At the weekend, with binoculars, you can see the car park at Devils Dyke and hang gliders. Pan left along the Downs and you can see the white windmills called Jack and Jill. Pan right for Lancing College.*
8. Continue up the hill now and enter High Hurst copse, carpeted with white anemones and violets. Go straight ahead and then bear left into an area that is coppiced and thick with bluebells.
9. Climb over another stile into a field and head diagonally left across it, towards a metal gate. *Notice the route of the road ahead, along the ridge of the high land where it's drier. This will be an old routeway.*
10. Cross the stile and go through a gate by a pond. Go straight ahead, up a hill, *where primroses grow and wild strawberries.* After climbing two more stiles you will reach Park Lane. Turn left to where you parked at the start of your walk.