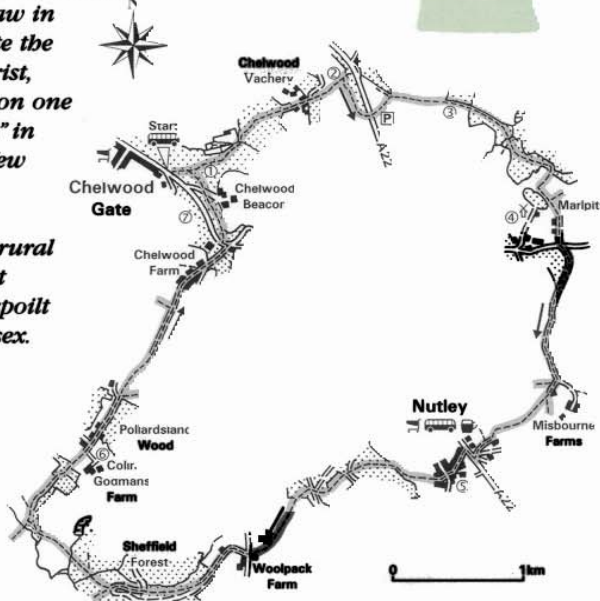




# "Verily the most villainously ugly spot I ever saw in ENGLAND"

*"Verily the most villainously ugly spot I ever saw in England". So wrote the traveller and diarist, William Cobbett, on one of his "rural rides" in 1822. Hopefully, few modern visitors would agree after taking this "rural walk" around part of the largest, unspoilt beatland in Sussex.*



**Length 9 Miles - 14 Kilometres**  
**Approximately 5 hours - Grade 4**

**START** - Beaconsfield Road, Chelwood Gate (O.S. Explorer 18 - NGR 423295)

**ACCESS** - Car - Street parking in Beaconsfield Road, Chelwood Gate  
Bus - 261 and 265  
Train - Nil

**PUBLIC TOILETS** - Nil

**REFRESHMENTS** - Pub at Nutley  
Village shops at Nutley and Chelwood Gate

**CAUTION** - The section of the walk across Ashdown Forest has very minimal signing by order of the Conservators of the Forest. There are two crossings of the A22

9  
Miles



# "Verily the most villainously ugly spot I ever saw in ENGLAND"

- The reason for Ashdown Forest's survival becomes apparent in the poor quality of the soils, which renders them useless for growing crops of any sort but capable of supporting woodland and heathland. The area therefore became a hunting park from 1268, with the mixture of woodland and clearings being ideal to support herds of deer.
- The area around Ashdown Forest was ringed with settlements, the parishes of which all included an area of the Forest. Within this, the poorest folk enjoyed common rights such as pasture and estovers (the right to take wood for fuel or repairs). Such rights could make a huge difference to a person who owned no land of his own. Gradually, the clash between the hunting and common rights over the forest became a greater problem. The lords erected fences to enclose the land and the commoners pulled them down again. Adding to the problem was the enclosure of various pieces of land as ironworks and the removal of most of the trees to fuel this industry.
- Matters came to a head in 1693. By then the iron industry had gone, but so had the trees. A Royal Decree of that year stipulated which areas were to be enclosed and retained 6,400 acres as common (the present area of public use). The landscape this left is typified by the present surroundings - enclosed, fenced fields to the left and unenclosed, undeveloped common to the right.
- Nutley windmill is the earliest working windmill left in Sussex today. Dating from 1680 - 1730, the mill is a type known as a post mill. It was moved from an unknown location to Nutley in 1836, but fell into disuse early in the 20th century. It was restored to working order in 1981.

Another development on large commons and wide roadside verges, was squatting. Lacking tight manorial control, such land was ripe for the establishment of tiny, enclosed holdings, which gradually gave way to more permanent development as the years passed. Nutley is a typical such village.

Colin Godman's Farm can be seen away to the right of the walk. It is a low, sandstone house with a fine roof of Horsham stone - split sandstone slabs. The house was notable during the early 19th century for its large cellars used to store smuggled wool. Who was Colin Godman? The name is at least 500 years old, but unfortunately history is silent on its origins and how the house came to have it.

Chelwood Common was originally yet another area of common land abutting Ashdown Forest to the south and belonging to the Manor of Sheffield (Sheffield Park) estate. Parts of it at least were rented out, for in 1598 Thomas Bulman for "entercominge with his cattle upon the waste or common called Chelworth Common" paid "4d and one days work in Harvest".

9  
Miles

