

Since 1990 the Cuckoo Trail has been a leisure route used by walkers, cyclists and horseriders. It is extremely popular and is mainly off-road so is suitable for people of all ages and abilities.

## History

The Cuckoo Trail is owned by Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council but this 'cycle/pathway' was not originally built for this purpose.

Opened in 1880, the Cuckoo Line was the Polegate to Eridge railway, carrying milk, livestock and animal feed as well as passengers. It was named the Cuckoo Line after the tradition that the first cuckoo of spring was heard at Heathfield Fair. Although it was a busy line it eventually closed due to the cuts made by Dr Beeching in 1968.

The Cuckoo Trail is 11 miles long joining three of the district's towns, Heathfield, Hailsham and Polegate. It also passes through the villages of Horam and Hellingly. The Trail has an extension to the south of Polegate which joins to Hampden Park in Eastbourne forming part of the National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 21.

## Cuckoo Trail users

**Walkers:** Can use all of the Cuckoo Trail.

**Cyclists:** Can use all of the Cuckoo Trail (but please dismount where signed).

**Horseriders:** Can ride from Hellingly to the south of Heathfield (approx 6.5 miles and back = 13 miles). From Summerhill Lane (south of Hailsham where the Trail can be accessed) to Polegate (approx. 2 miles). This section does involve going over a bridge which crosses the new A27 bypass. A mounting block is provided at

each end of the bridge. Riders can follow the bridlepath to Abbot's Wood, or follow the NCN 21 track and return north via Shepham Lane (again crossing the A27). Ordnance Survey Explorer 123 map is advised.

## Cuckoo Trail users code

Please

- do not leave litter
- respect neighbours of the Trail
- keep to the path and do not trespass on any adjacent land
- motor vehicles and motorcycles are prohibited
- shooting, firearms and fireworks are prohibited
- clear up your dog's mess and use bins provided

**Cyclists** please

- Carry a bell. Don't surprise people – ring your bell or call out, remember that many people are hard of hearing or visually impaired – don't assume that they can see or hear you
- Don't expect to cycle at high speeds, be prepared to slow down and stop if necessary
- Give way and leave plenty of room for walkers, horses and people with disabilities
- Slow down at junctions and bends
- Dismount where requested

**Walkers** please

- do not obstruct cyclists or horses
- keep dogs under control

**Horseriders** please

- give way to walkers and cyclists
- use the separate path where provided
- do not use the town sections of the Trail

## How to get to the Cuckoo Trail

**Train** There are stations at Polegate and Hampden Park. For information on time-tables contact National Rail Enquires on 08457 48 49 50. Bikes are carried free on trains throughout the South Central region (at the time of writing).

**Bus** Polegate, Hellingly, Horam and Heathfield routes are operated by Eastbourne Buses Service 52 and Service 53. Tel: 01323 416416.

**Car** There is car parking at Heathfield, Horam, Hellingly, Hailsham, Polegate and Hampden Park.

**Horsebox parking** The Hellingly Cuckoo Trail car park is off road and is large enough for a trailer or horsebox. The Trail is accessed via a ramp.

**Bike hire** Cycle Revival, Hailsham Road, Heathfield, East Sussex TN21 8AA Tel: 01435 866118  
Email: info@cyclerevival.co.uk www.cyclerevival.co.uk  
Open Mon-Sat 9.00-5.30pm. Advance booking advised.  
Cuckmere Cycle Company, at the Seven Sisters Country Park, a short drive from the Trail. Tel: 01323 870310  
Woody's (holidays/weekends) Tel: 07976 249143

## Accommodation near the Cuckoo Trail

If you are looking for places to stay, the Sussex Country Information Centre will be happy to book accommodation for you free of charge.

Please contact the

Sussex Country Information Centre  
Lower Dicker, Hailsham, East Sussex BN27 4DT  
Tel 01323 442667  
Email: sussexcountry.tic@wealden.gov.uk

## Events/Attractions

There are many local events and attractions near to the Cuckoo Trail which are well worth visiting. Some of these are highlighted throughout this brochure. For more information contact the Sussex Country Information Centre or go to www.sussexcountry.com.

## Contact us/more information

The Cuckoo Trail is managed by Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council. Contact the Ranger on **01273 481637** or email [countryside.management@eastsussexcc.gov.uk](mailto:countryside.management@eastsussexcc.gov.uk)

East Sussex County Council  
Countryside Management Service  
Transport and Environment Department  
County Hall, St Anne's Crescent  
Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1UE

Or contact Wealden District Council on **01892 602756**  
Regeneration  
Wealden District Council  
Freepost SEA10959  
Crowborough, East Sussex TN6 1BR

We value your comments or feedback.

## Key to symbols

The symbols on each page show which facilities are available in the towns and villages on the Trail.



Heathfield

Horam

Heathfield to Polegate 11 miles

Hellingly

Hailsham

Polegate

Polegate to Hampden Park 3 miles

Hampden Park

**Benches** have been erected along the Trail. These were made from local oaks blown down in the hurricane in 1987.  
**Picnic tables** can be found near Heathfield, Horam, Hellingly and Polegate.

# Heathfield

The market town of Heathfield stands on one of the main ridges of the High Weald in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Surrounded by beautiful, rolling Sussex countryside there are magnificent views to the south from the High Street.

Heathfield gained its market charter in 1316. Later development of the area took place with the growth of the iron industry in the 16th and 17th centuries, and then with the coming of the railway in the 19th century. Old Heathfield was the original location of the settlement. At nearby Cade Street are the Heathfield Beacon and the memorial to Jack Cade, who, in 1450, led an insurrection of the common people and was reputedly killed near where the memorial is sited.

Natural gas was discovered in 1896 near Heathfield Railway station by some engineers who were actually looking for water.

Jonathan Harmer (1762-1849) was a talented stonemason and sculptor whose family lived in Heathfield. He started making ornamental bas-relief terracotta memorial plaques from local red clay at the beginning of the 19th century for people who couldn't afford expensive headstones. Fine examples of these headstones can be found at Heathfield and many other local churchyards.

Heathfield is an ideal touring base with a good range of general and specialist shops and other services. It still retains its links with the farming industry, which has shaped the surrounding countryside over the centuries.

The Millennium Green is linked to the Cuckoo Trail via a signposted route through the 240 metre Heathfield Tunnel. It is situated north of the tunnel behind the Co-Op supermarket. You are welcome to use the picnic tables and barbecues, explore the woodland and old railway track or just relax and enjoy the peaceful scenery. The glades and feature areas have accessible surfaces.

## Events/Attractions

**Le Marche** is a lively street market. There are both French and English stall holders and colourful street entertainers. Le Marche is held on August Bank Holiday Monday each year. There is safe parking for bicycles on the day.

**Le Tour de Wealden** This annual summer cycling event takes place in aid of charity. There are three routes to suit all abilities and ages and everyone is welcome to take part.

**Cuckoo Fair** The annual April Heffle (Heathfield) Cuckoo Fair was traditionally held on the 15th April. A old lady would always appear to release from her basket the first cuckoo of spring and this has been re-enacted in later years.

**Farmers Market** A wonderful opportunity to buy fresh, locally produced products; the farmers market is held on the third Saturday of every month, 9.00am-1.00pm, at the Co-Op car park.

**Heathfield Show** Held on the second May Bank Holiday weekend (Saturday), this annual agricultural show makes a wonderful family day out. With demonstrations, horse events, farming competitions, crafts and local produce on display throughout the day.

For more information on these events contact the Sussex Country Information Centre on 01323 442667.

Millennium Green

Old Heathfield



# Horam

Horam was originally a small hamlet which grew due to the opening of the Cuckoo Line in 1880.

The landscape is formed by streams which have carved valleys, by trees and hedgerows, and by narrow winding lanes.

The large deposits of Wadhurst Clay, formed about 130 million years ago, influence the kind of farming which is carried on today and have been exploited for brick manufacture at Marle Green, Horam.

Horam has the dubious honour of being the first village in the area to be hit by bombs and doodlebugs during the Second World War.

**Wild flowers** Look out for early purple orchids growing along the Trail between Horam and Hellingly in April and May. You will probably notice the smell of Ramsons (wild garlic) growing.

## Attraction

**Hidden Spring Vineyard** Vines Cross Road, Horam. Tel: 01435 812640  
Open Sat, Sun & Wed 11.00am to 5.00pm, 1 April to 24 December.  
Sample award-winning wines, apples and pears in this 28 acre vineyard/organic orchard. An ideal spot to picnic or come for a leisurely stroll. Caravan Club approved CL site. Groups welcome, although advance booking is requested.

For more information on events and attractions, please contact the Sussex Country Information Centre on 01323 442667

# Hellingly

Hellingly is a small, attractive village, famous for its unusual churchyard.

The church of St Peter & St Paul has a rare circular churchyard of Saxon origin, known as a cric. Standing seven feet above the encircling houses, it is held in place by tall brick walls and criss-crossed by brick paths laid by unemployed labourers in 1824. The circular form of the burial ground is believed to represent the Celtic symbol of immortality and was raised above ground level to keep the dead dry.

The church itself was built in about 1190 and has a good early English chancel and north transept. There is a splendid gilded organ in the western gallery. Three well-preserved Harmer terracotta plaques can be found in the churchyard (see Heathfield).

**Horselunges Manor** (a private dwelling) can be found a couple of hundred yards from the Cuckoo Trail. This magnificently timbered, moated Manor house was built around 1475

on a much older site and restored in 1925. The odd name probably comes from two 14th-century owners – Herst and Lyngyver.

Look out for **Hellingly Station**, now a private dwelling next to the Trail. It still has ornate plasterwork, canopy fretwork and stained glass windows. A branch line once ran from here to Hellingly Hospital.

**Arboretum** Sited opposite the old railway station, the Arboretum was

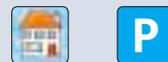
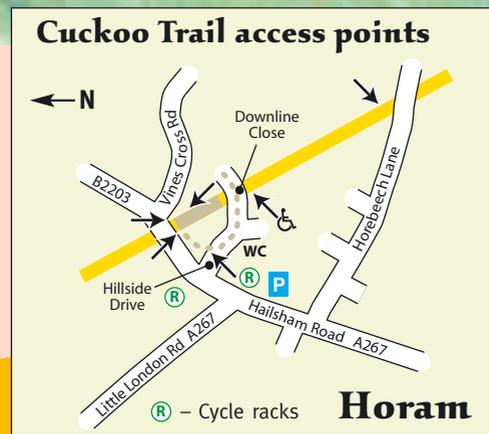
initiated by the Parish Council to mark the Millennium. The award-winning project is managed and maintained by its Friends, a local community group. Planting was completed in 2002 at a Golden Jubilee celebration.

**Watermill** (private dwelling) To the west of the Cuckoo Trail where the path crosses Mill Lane is a recently-restored watermill on an ancient site, here since at least 1255 when it was owned by Battle Abbey.

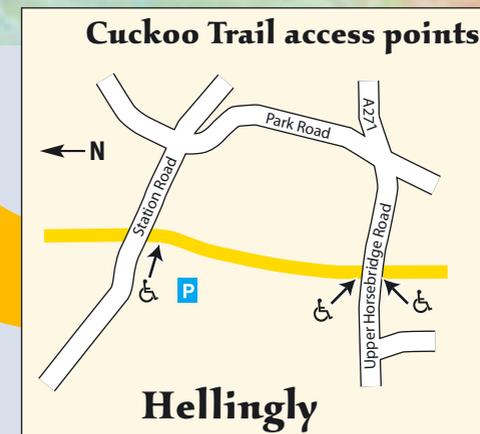
Hellingly church

High Street, Horam

← Heathfield 2 miles



← Horam 4½ miles



Hailsham 1½ miles →

# Hailsham

**Hailsham was first granted its Market Charter in 1252 by Henry III, so it could hold its own cattle market which spread out from Market Square.**

Many historic buildings can be found in Hailsham, the present shopping centre is in scale with the Georgian buildings of the High Street. Close to the town centre visitors will easily find St Mary's church with an important perpendicular tower built in chequers of flint and squared stone, and dating from the 15th century. Not far from the church visitors will find several of the oldest buildings including the Pavilion Cinema and the Hailsham Heritage Centre. See opposite for more information.

**The Fleur de Lys** Originally an inn on Market Street it dates from 1540 and has had a varied history as a Poor House c.1870, a butchers, sweet shop and Post Office. Nowadays, it makes a fine setting for the Town Council

Offices. During the reign of Elizabeth I coaches from London had their terminus here.

**Common Pond** Originally a dammed stream to make carp ponds for the Manor House. It was also used for cooling of metal in the casting of bells. The pond and Hailsham Common were enclosed in 1855 and in 1922 the pond was bought by the Town Council, upkeep and improvements have been made to this in recent years. You will pass the pond whilst cycling or walking the Trail.

The largest industry in the area is still agriculture, though other industries have existed in the past. Rope making and cattle feed mills, formerly important, have virtually disappeared.

Hailsham has a good range of services including supermarkets, pubs and tearooms.

## Events/Attractions

**A Farmers' and Craft Market** takes place on the second Saturday of each month Tel: 01323 833359.

**Hailsham Leisure Centre**, including swimming pool. Vicarage Lane, Hailsham. Tel: 01323 846755. Café for refreshments and food.

**Heritage Centre** Blackman's Yard (rear of Town Council offices, Market Street) Manned by volunteers of the Hailsham Historical & Natural History Society. Open May – September 10.30 – 12.30pm Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays only. Well worth a visit.

**Hailsham Pavilion** was restored to its former glory and reopened in January 2000 as a cinema and theatre. Well worth a visit if you have time. For the programme and tickets phone 01323 841414.

**Old Loom Mill** Mulbrooks, Ersham Road, Hailsham Tel:01323 848007. A large centre for discounted fabrics and knitting yarns. Tea Rooms. Country views of the South Downs, Craft Hall in which a wide range of crafts are being made on site and offered for sale. Easy parking. Open Monday to Sat 9-5pm Sun & Bank Hols. 10-5 pm

**Knockhatch Adventure Park** Hempstead Lane, Hailsham Tel: 01323 442051.

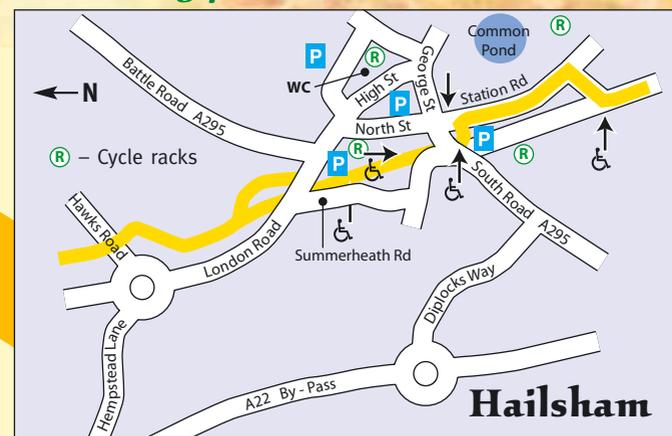
www.knockhatch.com  
On A22 west of Hailsham  
Adventure park with playgrounds. crazy golf, play barn, nature trail, birds of prey, reptiles, animals and lots more.

**Michelham Priory** Upper Dicker, near Hailsham. Tel: 01323 844224. www.sussexpast.co.uk  
Historic house and remains of Augustinian Priory set in seven acres of beautiful gardens, surrounded by the longest water-filled medieval moat in England. Working watermill, nature trail, sculpture trail, restaurant and shop. Open 1 March to 31 October. Closed Mondays except in August and Bank Holidays.

**Abbots Wood** (Forestry Commission) 360 hectares of mixed woodland gifted by Henry I to Battle Abbey and once overseen by the Abbot (hence its name). Ancient ditches and banks can still be seen. The coppice areas support rare dormice and pearl-bordered fritillaries.

For more information on events and attractions contact the Sussex Country Information Centre on 01323 442667.

← **Hellingly 1½ miles**



**Polegate 3 miles** →

Wood near Hailsham

Hailsham Pavilion

## Cuckoo Trail access points



# Polegate

Polegate's importance in modern times stems from its railway junction. Even today its rail links are important with its fast trains to Gatwick and Victoria.

Polegate has an abundance of unspoilt countryside on its doorstep and would keep the dedicated walker going for many days. There are delightful walks through wooded countryside between Hailsham and the Cuckmere Valley and many varied views from the numerous walks on the Sussex Downland.

Near Polegate are the pretty hamlets of Wannock and Otham where there are remains of a priory founded in the late 12th century.

Wilmington village is only a few miles from Polegate where the Long Man of Wilmington is cut into the chalk of the Downs.

## Attractions

Near Polegate is **Filching Manor**, a fine timber-framed building dating from the 15th century. This is also the home of a motor museum and a go-kart track for enthusiasts.

**Polegate Windmill** Polegate Tower Mill was built in 1817 for local farmer and landowner Joseph Seymour. The mill is now owned by the Eastbourne Civic Society, but much of the fundraising is carried out by the

Polegate Tower Mill

Friends of Polegate Windmill.

**Old Loom Mill** See previous page.

For more information on events and attractions contact the Sussex Country Information Centre on 01323 442667.

# Hampden Park – Eastbourne

Shinewater Marsh

Along this part of the Trail look out for birds and waterfowl which are attracted to Shinewater Marsh all year round.

Hampden Park has a range of shops and services as well as the train station.

To the south of Hampden Park is Eastbourne, perhaps the most aristocratic of the Sussex resorts with its air of Victorian opulence. The promenade and flower gardens between the bandstand and the pier are worth a visit as is the award-winning marina. Eastbourne has theatres, cinemas, museums, an art gallery, and a fine shopping centre, including the undercover Arndale Centre.

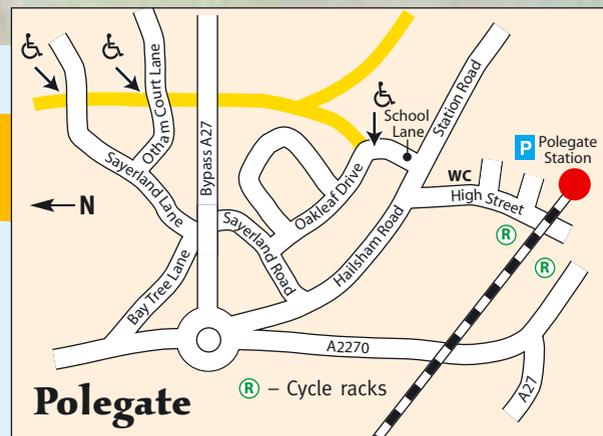
## Attraction

The large park at **Hampden Park** features a lake populated with ducks and swans, a large grassland area for leisure activities and mixed deciduous and coniferous woodland. In spring Hampden Park is bursting with sweeping drifts of daffodils, crocuses and bluebells, and there are also year-round displays such as the fernery beside the lake's waterfall.

In nearby Eastbourne you can find the Eastbourne Miniature Steam Railway Adventure Park, Lloyds Lanes and Laserquest, Trax Indoor Karting Centre and Eastbourne Golfing Park. Or head into the town centre for a full range of beach attractions and activities.

For information on accommodation, attractions and events in Eastbourne contact Eastbourne Tourist Information Centre on 01323 411400 [www.visiteastbourne.com](http://www.visiteastbourne.com)

← Hailsham 3 miles



Hampden Park 3 miles →

## Cuckoo Trail access points



To Polegate town centre and railway station

Polegate

← Polegate 3 miles



## Cuckoo Trail access points

On Fletching Road there is an entrance to Shinewater Park. Follow the path and the NCN Route 21 signs link you to the Cuckoo Trail at Polegate.

Route from Hampden Park Station to Cycle Route



Hampden Park

## Can you spot the Cuckoo connection? – Wildlife and nature along the Trail

**The Cuckoo Trail** provides a wildlife corridor through a rich and varied landscape, from the High Weald, down the Cuckmere Valley and into the fringes of the Pevensey Levels. Conservation of wildlife is one of the aims of the Cuckoo Trail.

**Cuckoo** A summer visitor. Listen for the distinctive call from April to June. Lays its eggs in the nests of birds of other species (mainly Dunnock in this area). The young Cuckoo ejects the hosts' own eggs and demands all the food from the unwitting parents. It is grey with a long tail, usually solitary and flying with shallow wing beats. **Dunnock** Like a sparrow but not a sparrow! Commonly seen hopping about on or near the ground along the Trail. Grey-brown with darker stripes on its back and a narrow beak. The Dunnock sings a rolling, warbling song from an

exposed perch. It nests in dense cover such as thorn bushes and may unwittingly play host to a Cuckoo.

**Orange Tip** The Orange Tip butterfly starts life as a bright orange egg. This deters other butterflies from laying eggs on the same plant. Only the male butterfly has an orange tip to the cream wings.

**Lady's Smock** Also known as Cuckoo Flower. Commonly found in damp places along the Trail. The pale mauve flowers with four petals appear in spring. The green caterpillars of the Orange Tip butterfly feed mainly on the Cuckoo Flower.

**Lords and Ladies** Also known as Cuckoo Pint. Can be seen for most of the year in shaded areas. The leaves are arrow-shaped and glossy. The flower starts white, turns black then produces a cluster of green berries, which go bright orange-red in the autumn (poisonous).

# The Cuckoo Trail

For walkers, cyclists and horseriders

