

Local accommodation

Details of a wide variety of accommodation near the Cuckoo Trail can be obtained from:

www.enjoysussex.info

e-mail at tourism@wealden.gov.uk

or **01892 602884**

Information on local events can be obtained from the same sources.

Contact us / more information

The Cuckoo Trail is managed as a partnership between East Sussex County Council and Wealden District Council.

Contact the Cuckoo Trail Ranger on **01273 481637**

✉ **East Sussex County Council,
Countryside Management Service,
County Hall, St Annes Crescent,
Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1UE.**
📞 www.eastsussex.gov.uk

Or contact Wealden District Council on **01323 443126**

✉ **Wealden District Council,
Vicarage Lane,
Hailsham,
East Sussex BN27 2AX**
@ [email: corporate.assets@wealden.gov.uk](mailto:corporate.assets@wealden.gov.uk)
📞 www.wealden.gov.uk

If you, or somebody you know, would like the information contained in this document in large print, Braille, tape/CD; or in another language please contact Wealden District Council on 01323 443126 or info@wealden.gov.uk quoting ref number DP144115.02.12

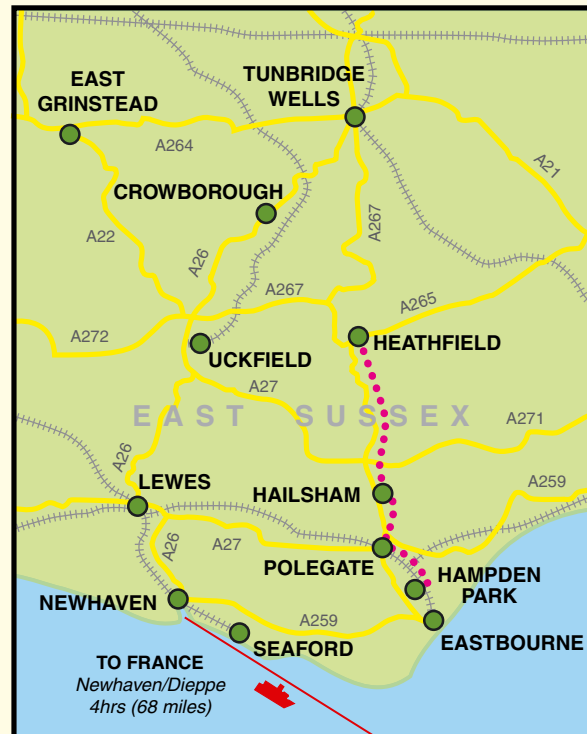
How to get to the Cuckoo Trail

Train: There are stations at Polegate and Hampden Park. For information on timetables contact National Rail Enquiries on 08457 48 49 50. At the time of writing, bikes can be carried free of charge though there are some restrictions during peak hours.

Bus: Service 51, 52, 53 operated by Eastbourne Buses/ Stagecoach links Polegate, Hailsham, Hellingly, Horam and Heathfield. For information on timetables contact 08712 00 22 33.

Car: There are free car parks at Heathfield, Horam, Hellingly and Hailsham and on-street parking at Polegate and Hampden Park.

Horsebox: Horsebox space is provided at the Hellingly car park, where the Trail is accessed via an easily graded ramp. A mounting block is provided.



This document reflects the author's views. The Interreg IVA 2 Seas Programme Authority is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.

The Cuckoo Trail



A 14 mile trail for walkers, cyclists and horseriders, taking you through the beautiful East Sussex countryside



"Investing in your future"
Crossborder Cooperation
programme 2007-2013
Part financed by the
European Union (European
Regional Development Fund)



Interreg IVA 2 Seas Crossborder
Cooperation programme
2007-2013



Since 1990, the Cuckoo Trail has been a leisure route used by walkers, cyclists and horseriders. It passes through some beautiful countryside and is extremely popular with some 250,000 visitors annually. Being mainly off-road it is suitable and safe for people of all ages and abilities. The slight gradients and sloped accesses make the Trail available to most mobility scooters and wheelchairs.

The history of the Cuckoo Trail

The Cuckoo Trail is now owned by Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council but was not originally built as a leisure facility.

Opened in 1880, the Cuckoo Line was the Polegate to Eridge railway built by the London Brighton and South Coast Railway to prevent its rival, the South Eastern Railway, accessing the Eastbourne traffic. It was named the Cuckoo Line after the tradition that the first cuckoo of spring was always heard at the Heathfield Fair. In time it settled down to become a country railway carrying milk, coal, livestock and timber as well as passengers.

From the 1950s onwards, rail passengers and goods were lost to the more convenient buses and lorries serving the area. Facing mounting financial losses, the line was closed by British Rail under the "Beeching cuts". Passenger trains north of Hailsham and goods trains north of Heathfield were withdrawn in 1965. Three years later all remaining services were curtailed and the track was torn up.

The Cuckoo Trail now runs for 11 miles along the route of the railway, linking three of the District's larger towns; Heathfield, Hailsham and Polegate. It also passes through the villages of Horam and Hellingly. An extension south of Polegate takes the Trail onto Eastbourne.

Benches have been erected along the Trail, many carved from fallen trees by local craftsmen. Picnic tables and bike racks are located at intervals along the Trail, but you are welcome to picnic where you like on route.

Sculpted gateways to the Trail are provided at the access points between Hailsham and Polegate, whilst a Wildlife Sculpture Trail is laid out for a mile north of Hellingly.

Cuckoo Trail users

Walkers: Can use all of the Cuckoo Trail.

Cyclists: Can use all of the Cuckoo Trail but should dismount where signed.

Horseriders: Can ride between Hellingly and the south of Heathfield and between Summerhill Lane south of Hailsham and Polegate. This latter section involves going over a bridge, which crosses the A27 Polegate bypass, where a mounting block is provided at each end.

Cuckoo Trail users code

Please

- Do not leave litter
- Respect neighbours of the Trail
- Keep to the Trail 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, using the bins provided

Walkers please

- Do not obstruct cyclists or horses
- Keep dogs under control

Cyclists please

- Carry a bell. Don't surprise people - ring your bell or call out, remembering that many people are hard of hearing or visually impaired. Don't just 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

Horseriders please

- Give way to cyclists and walkers
- Use the separate path where provided
- Do not use the town sections of the Trail in Hailsham and Heathfield

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 Similar to 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.

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.

Orange Tip The Orange Tip butterfly starts life as a bright orange egg. This deters other Orange Tips from laying eggs on the same plant. Only the male butterfly has an orange tip to the cream wings. The green caterpillars of the Orange Tip 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 and are poisonous.



Places/attractions along the Trail

Heathfield

The market town of Heathfield stands high on one of the main ridges of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It gained a charter in 1316 to hold a fair, which was traditionally held on 15 April. An old lady would appear to release the first cuckoo of spring from her basket, giving rise to the "Cuckoo Fair" name. The fair is still held today when this event is re-enacted.

The coming of the railway in 1880 caused the village to resite from the original settlement of Old Heathfield, about a mile away, to the area around the new station. The railway was also responsible for the discovery of a small natural gas field, which was found by engineers boring for water and for many years was used to light the station. The fine Heathfield station building remains standing today and is presently a kitchen shop.

Heathfield Millennium Green is situated along the railway trackbed, forming an attractive extension to the Cuckoo Trail. During the summer, this can be accessed through the 270 yard long Heathfield Tunnel, dug by hand by navvies between 1878 and 1880 and lined with millions of hand-made bricks formed from the clay dug out of the tunnel – early recycling! The Millennium Green itself offers a further walk along the railway trackbed or shorter walks in the adjacent woodland. Picnic tables and barbecues are also provided.

Horam

Horam was originally a small hamlet, which grew up around the station, which was supposed to serve the village of Waldron, some two miles away. A small fragment of the platform and the station nameboard survive alongside the Trail today to mark the original station. Horam has a range of shops, pubs and cafes.

Hellingly

Hellingly is an attractive village clustered around its church. Adjacent to the Trail and now a private dwelling is the former Hellingly station. This still shows the high standard of passenger provision on this line with ornate plasterwork, mock-Tudor chimneys, canopy fretwork and stained glass windows. An electric tramway once ran from here to the nearby Hellingly Asylum.

Opposite the old station is the Hellingly Arboretum, initiated by the Parish Council to mark the millennium. Planting was completed in 2002 at a Golden Jubilee celebration. Running northwards from the old station site for about a mile is a sculpture trail with wooden plaques depicting wildlife to be seen along the Trail.

Hailsham

Hailsham is an historic town, first granted its market charter in 1252 by King Henry III so that it could hold its own cattle market, which survived until recently. The town was once famous for its rope making, the largest such industry in Sussex and a statue in the town centre commemorates this. Hailsham Common pond is the last survivor of the former town common, enclosed in 1855 and now mostly built over. Formed by damming a stream to make carp ponds for the manor house, it is now maintained for recreation.

Hailsham has a range of shops, supermarkets, pubs and tearooms.

Polegate

Polegate's importance dates back to the arrival of the railways in Sussex. Originally a wayside station on the 1846 line from Brighton to Hastings, it swiftly became a junction for lines to Eastbourne and Hailsham; the latter now forming the Cuckoo Trail. Unsurprisingly, a settlement grew up around the station, offering services to travellers and staff; a welcome which extends to Cuckoo Trail visitors today!

Polegate has a range of shops and services and a mainline train station.

Hampden Park

Along this part of the Trail, look out for birds and waterfowl, which are attracted to Shinewater Park. Herons, cormorants, Cetti's warblers and other wildfowl may be seen all year round, while in summer there are also reed and sedge warblers, house martins and swallows.

Hampden Park has a range of shops and services and a mainline train station.

