



## Circular Walk 8: Mannings Heath to Monks Gate and back

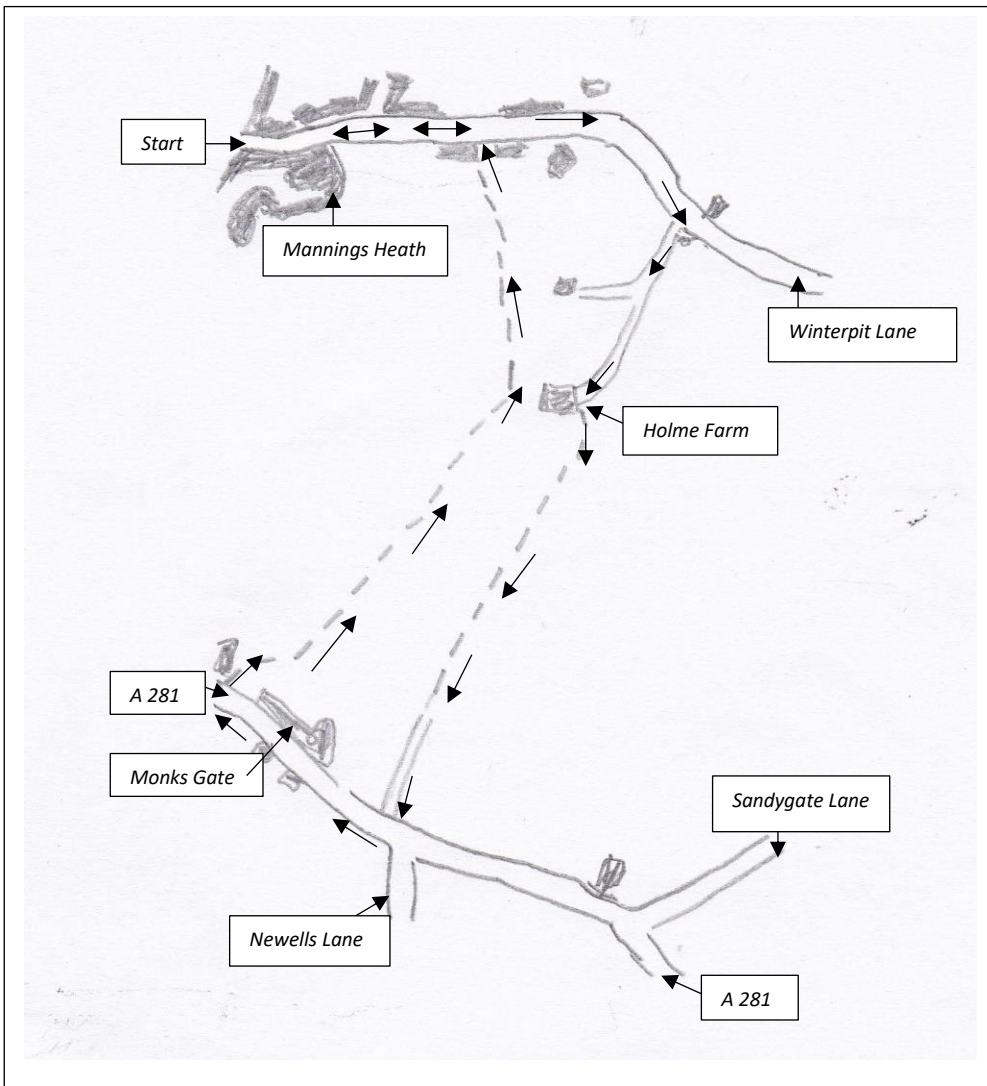
Distance: about 3 to 3.5 miles

Time: about 1.5 to 2 hours

Map: OS Explorer Map OL 34: Crawley and Horsham

Starting Point: Mannings Heath Village Shop

Grid Reference: 288 204



Fairly easy walk with some gentle slopes. Can be quite muddy after rain. Walking boots advised. Varied scenery.

1. From Mannings Heath Village shop, walk with care along Winterpit Lane (opposite the village shop). This used to be part of the old road to Cuckfield. Walk past the riding stables and down the hill. Near the bend at the bottom, turn off right down the tarmac track towards Holme Farm.
2. At the fork, keep straight ahead. Notice the coppiced hazels on your left and the beehives, just before the ponds. Currently, bees are seriously under threat from disease. In Spring the next field on your right is yellow with daffodils.
3. Just before the first of the three houses, turn left down a bridleway and head uphill. This bit can be well churned up by horses' hooves, but bear with it! Watch out for kestrels on the wires. The pond on the right is worth a look as you may see mallards and moorhens.
4. Enter the mixed woods and continue up a long gentle hill. When muddy look for deer foot prints. Note how the bridle way is sunken and fairly straight with quite a deep drainage ditch on the left hand side, suggesting that this was an ancient routeway. Note also that the wood is undergrown with rhododendron. This imported plant tends to take over and suppress the more natural undergrowth.
5. When you reach the gate at the end of the wood, pass through and look left to see Lower Beeding Church. There may be deer in the fields. In August, the field on the right was covered with yellow ragwort which is poisonous to animals. On the left of the path the brambles and thistles provide food for birds and insects. Further on, you'll see Old Camp Farm on the left. In World War 2, we think this was used to house Italian troops. Now you can see that part of it is being used as a dog agility training ground.
6. Cross the very busy and fast A281 with great care and walk right, towards Monks Gate. This is a narrow pedestrian footpath and dogs and children will need close supervision. Walk in single file, go past the Monks Gate and 40mph sign and the small industrial estate on the right. On the left note a cottage whose front door step is well below the level of the road, indicating that it is very old and built long before the road was tarmacked and resurfaced.
7. Continue along the A281. Just before the bend there is a 40mph sign and public footpath sign. Cross the A281 here with great care and take the gravel track (almost directly opposite the T junction sign) towards Monks Gate House. At its gate, take the right hand track towards Mara Cottage and at its entrance take the path on the left. Go straight ahead and at the entrance into a small field, bear left into a coppiced hazel wood and follow the path round a left bend with a field on your right. In Spring you can see bluebells in this wood. In the Middle Ages, archers boiled up bluebell bulbs to use as glue to stick feathers into their arrows. The coppiced hazel was used for firewood and fencing.
8. Exit the wood into a field with a stand of silver birches. In this field you can see mauve orchids in May or June. Look up and you may see a buzzard circling overhead. Enter and cross the next field. Through the trees on the left in the winter, you may catch a glimpse of Swallowfield House. Miss Biggs, who lived here, paid for the Church of the Good Shepherd in Church Road, Mannings Heath, to be built.

9. Enter another wood over a wooden stile. This wood also has bluebells in the Spring. At the end of the wood, cross the stile and take a path between the wood on the left and a field on the right. Take care as there may be some hidden rabbit holes as the path wends its way through bracken!

10. As you approach a house, the path turns left along a close boarded fence and then alongside the garden of the house. Continue downhill, through a couple of gates towards the ponds on either side. Cross the causeway between them – note it can get muddy! If you approach quietly, you may be rewarded with sightings of a heron or cormorant fishing or ducks and geese swimming. Note the proliferation of bulrushes round the margins of the ponds. It is a pretty spot and baby badgers have been seen here in the adjacent scrub in daylight.

10. Walk straight up the hill. There may be horses grazing in the field on your right. If you look diagonally to the right downhill, Lower Beeding Church is once again in view.

11. Cross the stile, turn left, walk alongside the riding school on your right, go through a gate and emerge onto Winterpit Lane. Turn left and walk downhill towards Mannings Heath Village Shop.