

# Points of literary interest

---

William Cobbett was born in Farnham, Surrey, in 1762, the son of a farmer. He had a varied and colourful career in the Army, in publishing, politics and farming. He once farmed near Botley, Hampshire, and was a Member of Parliament in his later years. Between 1822 and 1826 he undertook a series of countryside rides in order to assess the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the rural way of life. His journals of the rides were included in Cobbett's Weekly Register, and were later published in a single volume, *Rural Rides*, in 1830.

Cobbett made several rides through East Hampshire, including visits to Selborne and Petersfield in 1823 and 1826. This walk is focussed on Cobbett's ride through the Hampshire Hangers on Sunday 24 November 1822 which was first reported on 14 December 1822. Cobbett set out from East Meon on horseback to go to Thursley in Surrey but because of a principled objection to turnpikes and a deep dislike of heathland, and especially of Hindhead, he decided to take a more adventurous route via Hawkley and Headley:

## From *Rural Rides*

"The map of Hampshire (and we had none of Surrey) showed me the way to Headley, which lies on the West of Hindhead, down upon the flat. ...I, therefore, resolved to go to Headley, in spite of all the remonstrances of friends, who represented to me the danger of breaking my neck at Hawkley and of getting buried in the bogs of Woolmer Forest. My route was through East-Meon, Froxfield, Hawkley, Greatham, and then over Woolmer Forest, (a heath if you please) to Headley."

a The green lane leading to the parking place from the north west is probably one Cobbett took from Bower Farm to the Petersfield Road.

"I inquired simply, whether people were in the habit of going down it; and, the answer being in the affirmative, on I went through green-lanes and bridle-ways till I came to the turnpike-road from Petersfield to Winchester, which I crossed, going into a narrow and almost untrodden green-lane..."

b Cobbett continues: "Upon my asking the way to Hawkley, the woman at the cottage said, 'Right up the lane, Sir: you'll come to a hanger presently: you must take care, Sir:

you can't ride down: will your horses go alone?'"

It is still steep and can be muddy in winter!

Cobbett was very impressed with the scenery:

"... out we came, all in a moment, at the very edge of the hanger! And never, in all my life, was I so surprised and so delighted! I pulled up my horse, and sat and looked; and it was like looking from the top of a castle down into the sea..."

"These hangers are woods on the sides of very steep hills. The trees and underwood hang, in some sort, to the ground, instead of standing on it. Hence these places are called Hangers."

The sea-like view Cobbett describes is typical of the cloud inversions often seen from the upper parts of the Hangers in early mornings in winter.

c The foot of the chalk escarpment is usually muddy and slippery: "After crossing a little field and going through a farm-yard, we came into a lane, which was, at once, road and river."

Gilbert White described the rocky hollow lanes as "Among the singularities of this place" in Letter 5 to Thomas Pennant in *The Natural History of Selborne*.

d The church of St. Peter and St. Paul was built in 1865 in Neo-Norman style with walls of random stonework and a form of Romanesque spire known as a "Rhenish helm". This would not have been seen by Cobbett.

e Approaching the steep Upper Greensand escarpment above Scotland Farm, Cobbett descended down the hanger to the Gault clay vale on his way to Greatham: "...at last, got us safe into the indescribable dirt and mire of the road from Hawkley Green to Greatham. Here the bottom of all the land is this solid white stone, and the top is that mame [malmstone] which I have before described."

Cobbett continued his journey on to Headley and Thursley:

"Thus ended the most interesting day, as far as I know, that I ever passed in all my life. Hawkley hangers, promontories, and stone-roads will always come into my mind when I see, or hear of, picturesque views."

# How to get there

---

Warren Corner is 3½ miles north-west of Petersfield on the road up Stoner Hill linking with the A32 at Hedge Corner. There is a limited pull in for a couple of cars at the end of the green lane. Do not block the lane or entrance to field. For the shorter walk alternative, roadside parking is near the church in Hawkley village.

## Transport

**Rail:** Petersfield Station (3 miles) Liss Station (3 miles):  
[www.southwesttrains.co.uk](http://www.southwesttrains.co.uk)

## Places to visit

St. Peter and St. Paul's Church, Hawkley.

## Refreshments

The Hawkley Inn and The Trooper Inn.

## Further Information

Walks in East Hampshire: [www.easthants.gov.uk/walking](http://www.easthants.gov.uk/walking)  
Petersfield Tourist Information Centre: 01730 268829.  
Follow the Countryside Code: [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)  
The Hangers Way: [www.hants.gov.uk/walking](http://www.hants.gov.uk/walking)  
William Cobbett Society: [www.williamcobbett.org.uk](http://www.williamcobbett.org.uk)  
The Museum of Farnham: [farnhammaltings.com/museum](http://farnhammaltings.com/museum)

## Acknowledgements

This leaflet was prepared by Dr. June Chatfield for East Hampshire District Council. Revised 2017 with the kind assistance of Graeme Cottam. *Rural Rides* by William Cobbett (1830). *The Natural History of Selborne* by Gilbert White (1789).

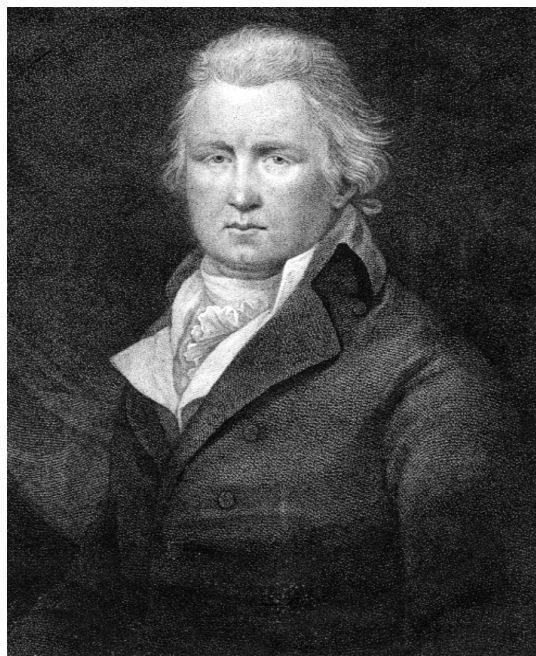
## Maps

Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 133 Haslemere & Petersfield (1:25,000).

# William Cobbett 1763–1835

---

## *A walk around Hawkley*



“...the beauties, the matchless beauties  
of the scenery.”

From *Rural Rides*

# Route

---

## The full route is about 6 miles (3 hours).

The route is moderately strenuous if completed in full, but can be divided into two circuits.

The first circuit (1–4 then 9–11) is 4 miles long and includes some steep inclines (2 hours).

The shorter second circuit (4-9) is 2 miles long (1 hour) and less arduous. Park near the church at Upper Green, Hawkley for this circuit.

1. Park at the pull-in on Petersfield Road as described in How to get there overleaf. See (a).
2. Cross the Petersfield Road and walk along the lane opposite to Warren Corner. Here, take a right turning (straight ahead) down the lane along the edge of a wood (The Warren Nature Reserve). Where the road surface ends, take a narrow path ahead and down the hanger. See (b). Proceed down to junction with road. See (c).
3. Turn right and proceed to Hawkley village, taking great care on the road. This is one of the hollow ways full of ferns, typical of the area. See (c).

Hawkley church with its distinctive bell tower was built after Cobbett's time, in 1865 (d). He would have passed by the old Chapel of Ease.

4. Enter the village and keep left past the church on your right. Turn left at the T junction (signposted Newton Valence and Alton). Notice the wooded chalk escarpment of Hawkley Hanger on the skyline to the left and the south slope of Noar Hill ahead.
5. Turn right (signposted Empshott and Selborne) and then take a right fork (Hawkley Hurst and Mabbotts) down a small road with a few houses, keep right to Mabbotts and, at a sharp left bend, take a bridle path right up a steep bank, and along eastern edge of field until it meets a road. See (e).

6. Turn left and look for a footpath right next to a farm gate and follow this to the next road.
7. Take the road turning straight ahead (Upper Green) and into Hawkley past The Hawkley Inn, a convenient point for refreshment.
8. At the Upper Green and church, take a track left (signposted Hangers Way) down Cheesecombe Farm Lane. Look for oblique path on right signposted to Steep and Petersfield on Hangers Way. Proceed down path and over stile to field with houses on left and look for Hangers Way signpost on left. Take the footpath to the right across field with valley on your left. Climb stile and follow path along woodland edge to stile and bridge over stream. The footpath continues parallel with the stream (now on your right) to Middle Oakshott Farm.
9. Follow Hangers Way signs up the hill alongside Oakshott Hanger woodland and around a field. Then up the hill across a field – turn to admire view of Hawkley and the Hangers from the top. Enter woodland and follow path to Old Litten Lane. A detour, left, signposted Cobbetts View, leads to a viewpoint (not documented as actually seen by Cobbett). Retrace steps and continue along Old Litten Lane. Another detour, left to Shoulder of Mutton Hill takes you to a viewpoint and the Poet's Stone commemorating Edward Thomas. Retrace steps and continue left then at junction keep right, still on Old Litten Lane. Turn sharp right at the junction.
10. Take bridleway on left opposite a flint and brick cottage to road at Warren Corner, then turn left for the Petersfield road and parking place.

# Map

