

COMMONS WALKS D

RUSTHALL COMMON

The walks which cover Rusthall Common are both short but can be run together to make a single walk of moderate duration. The reason for keeping the walks brief is that the nature of the terrain with its rocky outcrops and crevices makes it almost impossible to resist the temptation to clamber and explore. It would be difficult to get very lost. Also, by sitting quietly at some places – and there are many seats available on the walks – you may be fortunate to see something of the wildlife of the Common, perhaps a wren, no longer a common bird but not at all shy if you are in the right place at the right time, or one of the shyer animals.

WALK D1 Approximate length of walk – ¾ mile Allow about 30 minutes

1 This walk begins at the gates of St Paul's Church, Rusthall. The church was built in 1850 from local sandstone and, until the middle of the 20th century when residential development had taken place near the church and the trees of the Common were permitted to grow unchecked by grazing sheep and cattle, stood as a landmark for many miles about.

Take the pavement which runs from the gates past the war memorial on your right and soon bear right to the entrance to Nevill Park. Continue along keeping the white gates and fence on your right, to where the asphalt path meets the Langton Road, which we cross and take the path right to the Rusthall Road. Cross and follow the pavement left. At a point between the 3rd and 4th lampposts, a rough path drops down right and winds between rocks covered with lichens, moss and ivy to the Old Bull's Hollow quarry.

The combination of impressive rock faces, trees and undergrowth was particularly appealing to the Victorians who found it 'romantic and awe-inspiring'. They would look at the rock formations and find any number of likenesses to people, animals and things, and many rocks at Rusthall are known to this day as the Parson's Nose, Lion Rock, the Elephant and the like even though the similarity may have been somewhat fanciful in the first place and not much improved by a century and a half of erosion.

3 The path when it finds the rough floor of the quarry wanders out to the left to a point close to a rocky headland where it swings right. Almost at once you meet the driveway to a cottage which sits to your right. Take the drive as it rises left to a road signed Rusthall Park. The group of rocks on your left through which the road was

cut are the Parsons Nose rocks. Victorian photographs show a credible silhouette but today the likeness can just about be seen from the other side of the rocks.

Proceed straight across the road beside a large stone and brick garage and as the sandy track emerges above a clearing drift off the path to a seat looking across Harmony Street which runs through this hollow.

5 Facing you is one of the best known sights of the district-Toad Rock. "Toad Rock is to Tunbridge Wells what the leaning tower is to Pisa" wrote E.V. Lucas in 1904, and this time there is no denying the considerable likeness to its namesake. It is apparently an entirely natural phenomenon. This area has recently been designated a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Make your way to the road which runs in front of the Toad Rock Retreat public house. This is Upper Street which curves away up round the rocks and peters away to a sandy track which we leave by taking the asphalt path left. This rises through the rocks until it meets the Rusthall Road. Alternatively, continue round and pick up the path at the Rusthall Road. The way in which houses have fitted in the valleys of the rocks have always been a picturesque feature of this part of Rusthall. At Rusthall Road ignore the path directly opposite but turn left and at a point just before the entrance to Harmony Street cross Rusthall Road to a track which leads through the undergrowth to a clearing (much used for ad hoc games of football). The path cuts across the clearing to where a short stretch through trees brings you to Langton Road* again. Cross a little to your left and you are on the drive up to Rusthall Church where we began.

* (If you wish to link up with Walk D2 you need not go back to base but instead of crossing Langton Road, follow the pavement right to the finger post and pick up the walk there.)

COMMONS WALKS D

RUSTHALL COMMON

WALK D2 Approximate length of walk – 1¼ miles Allow about 45 minutes

1 Start this walk by the gates of Rusthall Church. With the war memorial behind you take the asphalt path straight ahead skirting a small meadow. Soon we cross the Langton Road (carefully, it comes upon you quickly!) and take the asphalt path left to a finger post. Take the branch to the right marked High Weald Link route. This runs straight as an arrow for about 400 yards between trees and bushes, emerging close to the cross roads at Rusthall Green. Cut the corner left at Coach Road passing, or resting, at the seat facing across the old drinking fountain.

The Common on both sides of Coach Road is well known locally as the place to collect crab apples and wild raspberries in season (although blackberries are invading the territory). Go straight over Coach Road to a path which soon emerges from the trees to a small glade in which there are two ponds. The larger one on the left is evident, the smaller one may have to be searched for as it sits down among the undergrowth. Newts are abundant in, and dragonflies above, the larger pond. Bear a little to the left at the large pond and the track winds through the clearing to a set of steps cut into the wooded bank ahead. Ascend and take the path to the left through the light woodland ahead which winds its way to a wider section where other paths join. This place has a number of medium sized oak trees, bear right at the more mature oak, 4 yards on seek a path left. You will see a seat under a beech tree by the Langton Road.

10 A little to your left on the other side of the road is Tea Garden Lane and the sign to the Beacon Restaurant. Go down Tea Garden Lane (since there is no pavement, walk on the right facing any on-coming traffic, of course!). Just before you arrive at the 'Beacon', cross and take the gravel track off sharp left and soon there is a seat, the first of a number along this stretch of the way.

11 We are walking along the top of an escarpment and the views off to the South West towards Crowborough are very fine. This escarpment which forms the southern limit of Rusthall Common is the same geological formation as

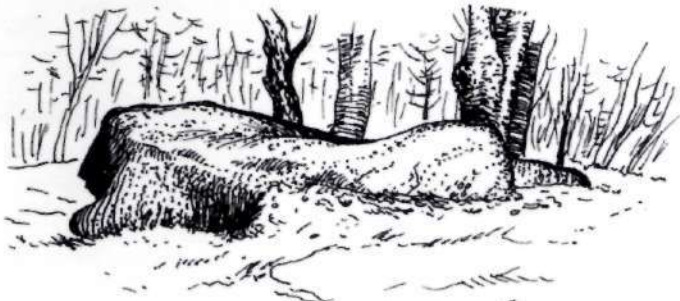
forms the northern edge of Tunbridge Wells Common. The spire in the middle distance is that of St. Mark's Church, Broadwater Down, in Tunbridge Wells.

14 Continue this walk spurning the apparent paths leading down the cliff edge. They are irresistible to children, exciting, and very dangerous! Soon you will come to one of the seats which faces a flight of steps descending a less precipitous section of the escarpment. These steps were originally cut and paved with sandstone treads in the 18th century and led down into Happy Valley.

After admiring the view descend the steps. The number of steps is not, it seems, always the same; "about 105" is the best official estimate. One reason for losing count may be a distraction off to the right near the foot of the flight (or on the left coming up of course!). A short path leads to what maps show as 'caves' - in fact shallow niches cut into the rock face, probably in the 18th century when there was much activity to develop Rusthall as a tourist health resort in opposition to or as an extension of the facilities at Tunbridge Wells. There are on Rusthall Common remains of a cold bath and other buildings of the time, and an even earlier Assembly Rooms. You may wish to count the steps as you descend, and if you have companions see if you agree at the bottom.

The path turns left here and passes a number of outcrops of sandstone until it comes close to the more accessible stacks of Happy Valley Rocks. You will see that the rocks here as elsewhere on the Common have been relentlessly attacked over the years by people scoring their names and dates in the sandstone. One of the clearest dates from 1929, but most are eroded to unintelligibility within a few decades. A few from the 19th century are still to be made out, it is said, on some rocks on the Common. It can be fun to try to find the oldest at any one group of rocks - but please resist the temptation to add your own carving.

15 The path here turns left again uphill. Although without benefit of steps, the ascent is never very steep and comes out alongside the churchyard of St Pauls which we skirt until joining the ridge path where we turn right and almost at once find ourselves back at the gate and memorial where we began our walk.

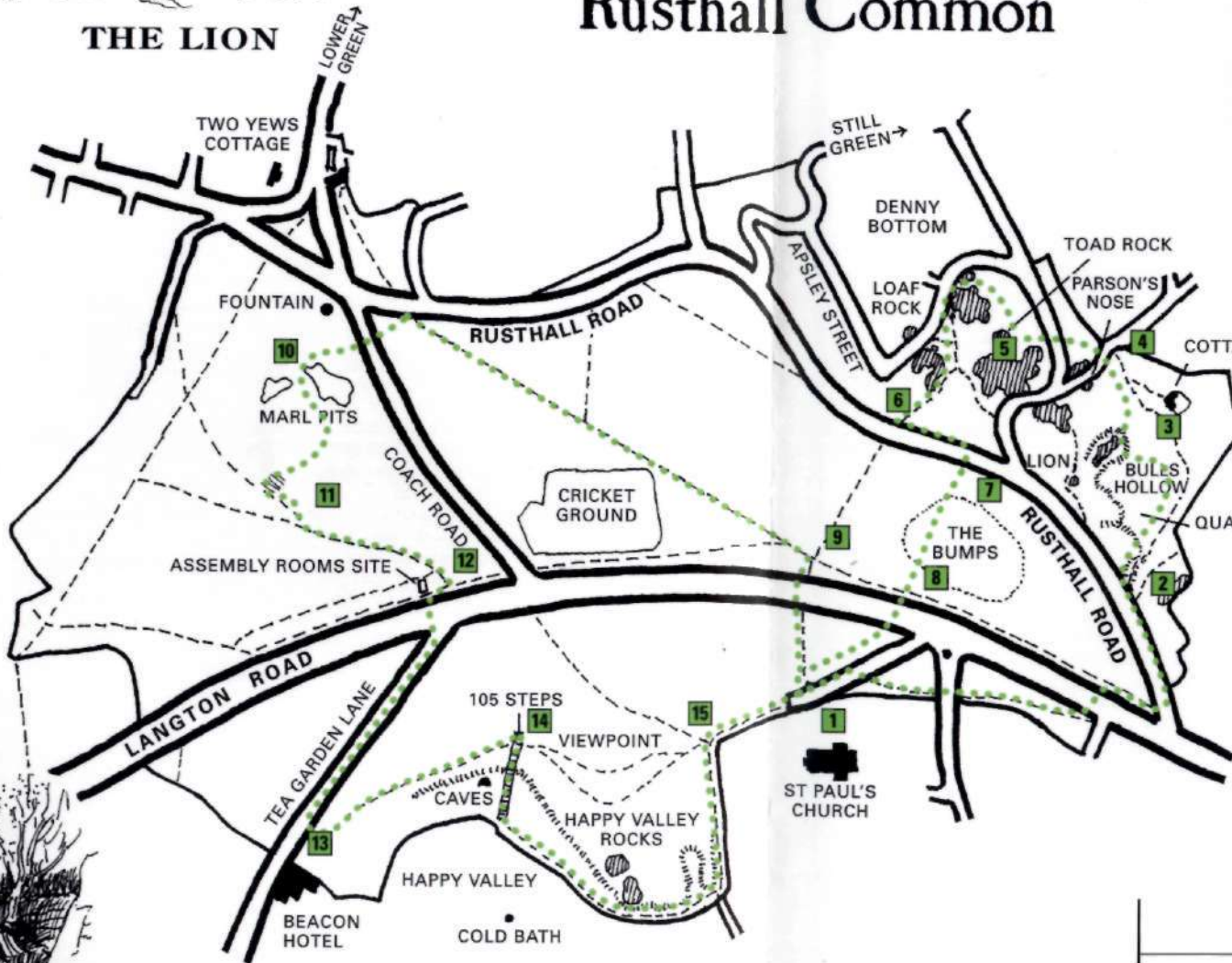


THE LION

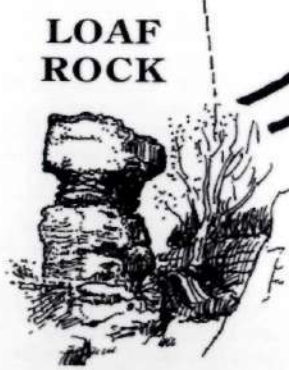


TOAD ROCK

Rusthall Common



THE PARSON'S NOSE



LOAF ROCK

