

Hit the heights of Hartest



Hartest is one of these 'ideal' villages with a church, mansion, pub and cottages all huddled round a green and a brook. The Crown is open every day from noon. This five mile circuit goes from the village centre to Boxted then back offering impressive views over the valley and surrounding countryside. The whole distance will take between 2.5 and 3 hours to complete. At most times of the year surfaces underfoot are reasonable but it is best to avoid too strong a wind. The map needed is Ordnance Survey Explorer 211 (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket).

Park at the village hall opposite the green. Take the road to Melford and pass the school. Soon after, on the opposite side and next to a 30 mph sign, there is a fingerpost pointing between bungalows. Follow this path between wooden fences across the brook (NB This bridge is scheduled for repair but everyone seems happy to use it. If reluctant, return to the village green and take the footpath between the Crown and the Church and turn right) and turn right along the field edge.

On reaching a vehicle track turn right across a bridge and immediately left (waymarks) so that the brook is now on your left. Follow this field edge path. In the first true corner bear left to accompany a post and rail fence on the right (if you reach the road you have overshot by 100 metres) and continue ahead to eventually arrive at Boxted.



At the road turn left, keeping a wary eye open for vehicles as there is only a short section of pavement. Cross at the road junction and take the 'Safe Path' behind the hedge. At the first hedge gap on the left, cross the road to Street Farm. Head through the yard, up a hill beside a small wood and drop down again.

NOTE The next set of directions (*in italics*) follows the right of way and the Ordnance Survey map. *Turn right at the next none too obvious footpath junction (at the bottom of a dip and before you cross the brook). You are now walking gently uphill on a path with a hedge and ditch on the left. At the sleeper bridge you bear left then ahead so that a hedge and ditch is now on your right. Do not mistake this with the field on your right and continue up the hedge you have just been following. Continue to follow waymarks through another gap so that the hedge reappears on the left. Follow this path into the next field and continue along the edge. After a short distance a crossfield path should appear on the right. This is the official right of way and will take you uphill through growing crops to a gap in the hedge near cottages and then the road.*

Local villagers have devised their own alternative which is considerably easier and hopefully has the approval of the landowners.

At the bottom of the dip, cross the brook and turn right. Follow the headland of this large field with a hedge on the right up to the top of the hill, continue ahead into a second field and as soon as you start to go downhill, go through the hedge on the right. Follow the headland path to the left and then gently uphill to the road.

Turn left at the road soon passing some attractively named cottages. Elizel's Cottage takes some beating.

(If at this stage you are tiring take the next footpath on the left, pass through a gap in the hedge and turn right. This path stays with the hedge on the right and drops quite steeply in places. At the bottom take the path to the right, across a footbridge and emerge by the church. Turn left to return to the car park)

If still full of energy follow the road gently downhill. At Lark Rise, on the right, obey a fingerpost, and pass through a gap to join a path between arable fields. This open stretch affords wonderful views of the village over your left shoulder. Go through a hedge archway and continue ahead to the right of a plantation. You will join a track from a farm on the right and continue ahead. Turn left at the junction to follow a concrete and hardcore road downhill. You now have more choices. If at the next track junction you veer left you join a road going to the village centre * (pick up the instructions at the next asterisk) your total will be less than 4 miles. If you turn right along another sheltered track you will add another 1.5 miles. For the latter follow the track past a lone house soon reaching a sunken green lane. This continues along a headland to reach a hard surface track stretching both left and right. Take the left option and stay with this solid surface as it meanders past a lonely chalet style house, until you reach the road. Turn left. There is now a short section of downhill road walking but there should be little traffic.

When you reach Hartest Wood on the right (opposite Cooks Farm) enter and take the path to the bottom left corner passing a statue – 'The Gift' - and several seats.



Follow the path overlooking the lane (Pask's Path) back to the village, dropping to join the road just before a junction.* On reaching Green View go left into the estate, stay with the road to the end and then take the footpath ahead down some steps. This short detour avoids a hazardous section of the Lawshall road. When the steps finish turn left and then right across the bridge to find the village green. The village hall will now be seen ahead.

The Hartest Stone to be found at the top of the green is worth a look. It is rumoured to have been dug out from a field at Somerton and moved to the current site on a sledge pulled by 45 horses. This was done to celebrate the victories of the Duke of Marlborough in the war of the Spanish Succession. The stone has been used as a 'table for drink' during village celebrations since the 18th century.

The origin of Hartest Fair (now held every year on August Bank Holiday) was a national thanksgiving, held on 23 April 1789, for the recovery of King George III from 'an afflictive malady' (madness). On that day the inhabitants 'to evince their loyalty congregated at the stone to drink and make merry and from this very circumstance originated the wake or fair'. In later years it became the occasion for local rivalries to be settled between boys of surrounding villages.

Roger Medley
2026

Walked July