

Bepton, Chilgrove and the South Downs

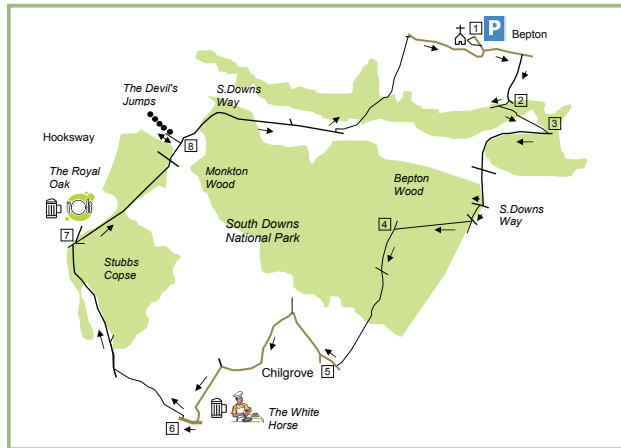
Here is another Downland walk that you will remember for its beauty and originality. A Norman church, a secret orchid hillside and a Bronze-Age burial site are among the surprises, along with two excellent country pubs, both of which the Editor can recommend! The views from Linch Down are particularly memorable. Taken with permission from www.fancyfreewalks.org.

The walk

1. From the side of the car park, follow a wooden rail and a little tarmac path to go through a wooden swing-gate past a bench with views, reaching the side entrance to the church. This little church is usually open and is definitely worth visiting. Continue down a path from the side entrance to exit through a wooden swing-gate onto the approach lane. Turn right, going past a small pond, and turn left at a T-junction onto Bugshill Lane. You pass the Old Rectory and a farm and reach a junction in 400m with Bepton village on your left. Instead turn right on a signed byway. Follow this stone-lined path for 500m. If you encounter some mud here it should soon be gone and should not return until just before the end. As the path curves left into trees you come to a marker post on your left.

2. What follows here is a remarkable route to the orchid hillside and you will need to concentrate. Turn right at the marker post, as indicated by the blue arrow, steeply uphill, in 30m going under a tall beech and a yew tree. After the yew tree you need to measure exactly 100m (150 paces). The path rises for 60m, then flattens out under ash trees. After 25m, it rises a little, zigzagging slightly left-right over roots. Immediately look for a faint path very sharp left. (In fact it is a crossing path.) The path runs straight up a long gently rising contour. Take this path, almost reversing your direction. The path becomes clearer as you proceed, although you will need to step over the debris of small fallen branches. After 170m, your path comes into a lighter area of shrubs and curves right up to a small metal gate. Go through the gate onto Bepton Down. Keep ahead up the sloping meadow on a faint path, but keeping just to the left of the brow of the hill so that you get the best advantage of the fine views to your left. You pass a solitary round beech about 30m on your left. The views are of Black Down and Bexleyhill. Keep following the path into the far corner where there is a large metal gate. Go through a wooden swing-gate beside it and turn very sharp right on a broad track.

3. The grassy slope of Bepton Down, with fine views beyond, is now on your right, with steep woods on your left. Stay on this chalky path,



soon avoiding an unmarked path on your left. The path curves left, flattens out and runs between fields, leading to a 4-way fingerpost. The crossing track here is the South Downs Way. Cross straight over on a grassy bridleway and, in 350m, at a 3-way fingerpost, turn right. In 25m, turn left on a horse track slightly downhill. Muntjac deer roam these woods and you may be lucky enough to see them. In 150m, go straight over a wide forestry track on what may be a rather muddy patch. In just 20m, leave your straight downward path by forking right on another wide forestry track through Bepton Wood. You shortly pass a 2-way fingerpost, confirming that this is an official bridleway. Your path descends gently, then more steeply and afterwards suddenly up again between plantations. You reach a junction of several paths by a 3-way fingerpost.

4. There are two possible routes through the forest to Chilgrove: the one chosen here takes you through West Dean Woods nature reserve and is especially attractive, although there is slightly more quiet lane walking afterwards. Turn left on a signed bridleway and follow this stony path for 450m where the bridleway goes over a crossing path near a wooden gate on your left. Note the grassy fringe on your left is another haven for orchids. You shortly pass notices for Sussex Wildlife Trust's West Dean Woods and a rather worn picnic corner. On your left is a long wattle fence. After an inspirational walk, you emerge by open fields with views ahead. Tall oaks and ash trees are your escort along a narrower grassy path. Finally our path ends at a wooden gate beside a large metal gate. Turn right here on a tarmac lane.

5. At a road junction, veer right, signposted Chilgrove, passing Staple Ash Farm and its thatched farm house. At a sharp left



bend by a drive and wooden gate, keep left, staying on the lane. Just before Yew Tree Cottage, ignore a footpath on your right. Your undulating lane goes under grid lines and curves right: avoid a footpath on the left here. At a 3-way fingerposted junction ignore a drive on the right for Brooks Farm and keep left passing several picturesque houses and cottages with their gardens. Note that the trophy fingerpost in the garden of no. 11 is for ornamentation only and does not indicate a right-of-way! Soon the lane zigzags left-right and reaches the White Horse in Chilgrove.

6. After a refreshment break, continue to the main road and turn right, using the grass verge where possible. In a short distance, go through a modern kissing-gate on your right and turn immediately left on the grass parallel to the road. As the meadow opens out, veer slightly right to go through another kissing-gate and straight across a crop field. A kissing-gate, a drive and another kissing-gate lead you along the right-hand side of a pasture. After a line of trees, you are walking beside another pasture. At the other side, go over a stile by a fingerpost and veer right onto a bridleway. At a fork with two large wooden gates, take the left fork as indicated. After a pleasant 500m, keep ahead at a diagonal crossing path by a 4-way fingerpost. Eventually, 1 km after the fork, you reach the hamlet of Hooksway opposite the Royal Oak.

7. After your break, facing the pub, turn right and keep straight on avoiding a bridleway through the car park on your left. There are now three possible routes ahead. Avoid the footpath by the wooden gate on your right and the track curving off to the left and take the middle option, passing a sign for a restricted byway uphill. Your path continues on a straight course, gradually uphill. After more than 1 km, you reach a 4-way fingerpost: keep

straight ahead, thus joining the South Downs Way (SDW). You will be following the SDW for most of the rest of the way. Soon there are meadows visible on either side as you go under large beeches. Soon, on your left is a sign for the Devil's Jumps, a Bronze Age monument and a short diversion not to be missed.

8. Continue along the SDW and shortly ignore a stile and footpath on your left. You are now on a beautiful wide path through a luxurious woodland of tall ash trees. The path curves right imperceptibly. Suddenly you are out of the woods with terrific views on both sides. At the end of the long meadow on your left, ignore a bridleway sharp left. The path rises with a view of Linch Down ahead. At the end of a fence, just after a 3-way fingerpost, turn left on a path that curves right down into trees. The path makes a shallow descent down the side of the hill with Didling Hanger on your left. The path becomes sunken under all beeches and ash. At a junction of paths near a meadow on your left, keep straight on downhill. The path continues between banks and you finally arrive at a drive in front of Linch Farm, through a large metal gate. Turn right and veer right on a tarmac lane, Bugshill Lane again. After some houses, the church comes into view on your left. The lane bends left under maple and beech. Turn left on a cul-de-sac lane leading back to Church Farm where the walk began.

DISTANCE: 10 miles

OS MAPS: Explorer 120 (Chichester)

STARTING POINT: The walk begins at Church Farm, Bepton, West Sussex, postcode GU29 0HX.

GETTING THERE: Bepton is signed west from the A286 Midhurst/Chichester road in the centre of Cocking. Follow the narrow winding lane for 1¼ miles, keep straight on at a 3-way junction (signposted Didling, Harting) and

continue another ¼ mile where you will see a right turn for Bepton Church. Go to the end and park thoughtfully in the generous space provided by Church Farm.

REFRESHMENTS: The White Horse, Chilgrove (T: 01243 519444, www.thewhitehorse.co.uk)
The Royal Oak, Hooksway (T: 01243 535257, www.royaloakhooksway.co.uk).

Top: South Downs Way on Didling Hill. In the distance is Linch Ball, one of the highest points on the South Downs (Dave Spicer).

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