

South Downs Way Challenge...Virtually

Week 9 of the Virtual South Downs Way – Itford Hill to Exceat.



Picking up the trail at Southease Station we begin today's walk with a winding yet steep ascent of Itford Hill, quickly attaining great views as you look back, of the broad valley floor leading back to Lewes to the north and Newhaven to the south.

This is easy walking along the top of the Downs with the familiar steep north facing escarpments and rolling hillsides towards the sea, and featuring the now familiar

barrows and dew ponds (look out for White Lion Pond and Red Lion Pond) that line the hilltop route.

Study the map and you will spot some great place names. Look out for Cow Wish Bottom, Toy Farm and the disused chalk pit of Bo Peep, overlooking Bo Peep Farm.

A Bostal is old Sussex dialect for a narrow, winding track leading up a hill, usually up the South Downs, and it's at Bostal Hill that we begin the long gradual descent towards Alfriston. Take care not to follow one of the Bostals down the steep hillside.

Arriving in Alfriston, you have the pick of three old pubs, each with a long history. This was smugglers country, and the Smugglers Inn in particular has an atmosphere that evokes the days when smuggling was a way of life for some.

At Alfriston we cross the Cuckmere River and head south. Looking back across the river you will first catch a glimpse of the 14th Century, St Andrew's church known as the Cathedral of the Downs, and then the Old Clergy House, the first building saved forever by the National Trust when it was purchased in 1896.

For a while the path closely follows the raised river banks, but at Litlington, leaves the river and a short climb across fields takes us past Charleston Manor, then up through the woods, through Westdean, then finally down again to the end of our journey today at Exceat. At Exceat is a visitor centre and refreshments.

Unwind as you take in Cuckmere Haven before you, and consider the 11.5 miles achieved today, and the 92.5 miles in total.

Next week we can look forward to the last 7.5 miles over the iconic Seven Sisters and the Birling Gap.

Until then stay fit and keep clocking up your miles.

