

# **RICHARD'S**

## **SOUTH DOWNS WAY CHALLENGE**



**THE SOUTH DOWNS WAY SPANS 100 MILES FROM  
WINCHESTER TO EASTBOURNE.**

**THIS SERIES OF TEN WALKS HIGHLIGHTS JUST SOME OF THE  
HISTORY AND NATURAL WONDERS OF THE BEAUTIFUL SOUTH DOWNS**

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### WALK 1 - WINCHESTER TO EXTON... 12.3 MILES

The South Downs Way begins at the National Trust run Winchester City Mill and having crossed the River and then the M3 you leave the City behind and follow footpaths across fields and lanes to Chilcomb.



A steep climb out of the village leads you up to the South Downs Way's first hill, Cheesefoot Head. To get here you will have walked 3.3 miles.



Crossing the A272 carefully, Cheesefoot Head affords great views to the north across the vast natural bowl towards Telegraph Clump. The natural amphitheatre at Cheesefoot Head became a vast encampment of allied troops prior to D-Day. Thousands of American and British troops filled the steeply sloping banks to see Joe Louis, the heavyweight champion of the world - serving in the US army as a physical education teacher - at a US Army boxing tournament.



General Eisenhower also used the large amphitheatre to address American troops just prior to D-Day. Nowadays it is more often used for festivals.



The bridle path leads us North down the Temple Valley then east using the Allan King Way towards Gander Down. Then you carefully cross the A272 for the second and final time and head south down farm tracks to Millbarrow Down and the Milbury's pub.

A further 4 miles or so along lanes and down tracks and you will have reached Exton, a beautiful village (with another great pub The Shoe Inn) in the Meon Valley and will have covered **12.3 miles** - the first, and one of the longest sections of the walk completed!



**Next walk - Exton to Queen Elizabeth Country Park (Petersfield) ...9.6 miles. Your total will then be 21.9 miles!**

### WALK 2 - EXTON TO QUEEN ELIZABETH COUNTRY PARK AND BURITON... 11.5 MILES

Leaving the lovely village of Exton behind, cross the River Meon, then the disused railway, and start the ascent of Old Winchester Hill. It's a bit of a climb!



At the top enjoy the views from the remains of the old Iron Age fort (An hour's walk and you've already covered 2.2 miles).

After a bit of gentle hilltop walking, descend following farm tracks and then up again, following quiet Bridlepaths, over Small Down.

After 4 miles or so, you reach Mercury Park, (formerly HMS Mercury). Have a breather and a coffee at the Sustainability Centre. In fact, if you don't know about it already, have a virtual look around on [www.sustainability-centre.org](http://www.sustainability-centre.org) *"We are a learning and study centre, a beacon for sustainability, based in the heart of Hampshire's South Downs National Park in the UK. We are an authentic model of sustainability. We share practical solutions to inspire and enable people to become the planet protectors and change makers that our world needs. We offer an immersive, practical and creative approach to education. We inspire and support change-makers."*



At Hyden Cross crossroads you'll have great views to the North. Follow this ridge through woodlands then fields to Butser Hill. Ancient earthworks and tumuli abound this site.

From here descend the sweeping grass slopes, pass under the busy A3, and reach another rest stop at the Queen Elizabeth Country Park.

Now time to enjoy the delights of the QE2 Country Park, but you will have to earn it, as you have a stiff ascent up a long rising valley. This will get you breathing before a final stroll to the Buriton car park.

If you want to explore the QE2 Country Park from the comfort of your sofa, then follow this link to whet your appetite for the real thing! [www.hants.gov.uk/thingstodo/countryparks/qecp](http://www.hants.gov.uk/thingstodo/countryparks/qecp)



To get here you have covered another 11.5 miles, so approx 24 in total thus far...

**Next walk - Buriton to Cocking Hill...11 miles. Your total will be 35.9 mile**



### WALK 3 - BURITON TO COCKING HILL... 11 MILES

The last walk took you from Exton to the eastern edge of the QE2 Country Park and Buriton, approx 24 miles from the start.



Start uphill initially, along a small lane that then follows the undulating line of the escarpment overlooking Harting to the north.

You've walked five miles to Harting Hill and from here descend the grassy slope into the valley and then the footpath climbs steeply up to the fort at Beacon Hill. The fort was first built in the Bronze Age (8th Century BC to 6th Century BC) and updated during the Iron Age.

Alternatively, following the bridle path, you can traverse the hill, climbing more gently but eventually reaching the other side just beneath the summit of Beacon Hill.

A slight incline then, the only way is down, sweeping into another timeless valley, then steeply up a chalky track through the trees.

As you near the top of Philliswood Down look out for the memorial to a German pilot who was shot down and died here on Eagle Day, 13<sup>th</sup> August 1940, the very first day of the Germans' offensive to destroy the Royal Air Force, that was part of the Battle of Britain.

Just beyond and a sharp left turn takes you past the The Devil's Jumps, the best example of a Bronze Age barrow formation in Sussex.

According to Wikipedia, "*The **Devil's Jumps** are a group of five large bell barrows. The Devil's Jumps site is listed as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and as a Local Nature Reserve. Most barrows along the South Downs have been damaged by agriculture and treasure hunters but the Devil's Jumps are considered to be the best-preserved Bronze Age barrow group in Sussex. The barrows are laid out in a line running approximately south-east to north-west. The five barrows vary in diameter from 26 to 34 metres (85 to 112 ft) and stand up to 4.8 metres (16 ft) high. Two smaller barrows were situated close to the five main mounds. Traces remain of a sixth barrow. The Devil's Jumps have been dated to the Bronze Age and they are believed to be between three and four thousand years old. The Devil's Jumps were explored in the 19th century, when bones were found in two of the mounds, although some of the barrows contained no cremated remains at all. The main line of five barrows is aligned with sunset on Midsummer Day*"



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After nearly a mile, emerge from the trees and look to the Southeast, and you can see the grandstand at Goodwood Racecourse nine miles away. At times, and on a clear day you can see the Isle of Wight.



Linch Down gives way to Bepton Down and then the long descent (nearly two kilometres) of Cocking Down to the small car park at Cocking Hill, and the end of our walk today.

**And so, you have covered another 11 miles and have reached 35.9 miles in total, over a third of our total distance. Well done!**

### WALK 4 - COCKING HILL TO AMBERLEY... 11.8 MILES.

Leaving the small car park behind you, start the long drawn out climb of Heyshott Down. Top up with water at Hill Barn Farm and follow the track up through farmland.

As you reach the tree line, take a look back the way you just came for the last view you will have from the South Downs Way for a while, as the view to the south will now be obscured by trees for the next two miles.

Look on the map and you'll see this area abounds with Tumulus (burial mounds) and Cross Dykes (prehistoric boundary or defensive earthworks).



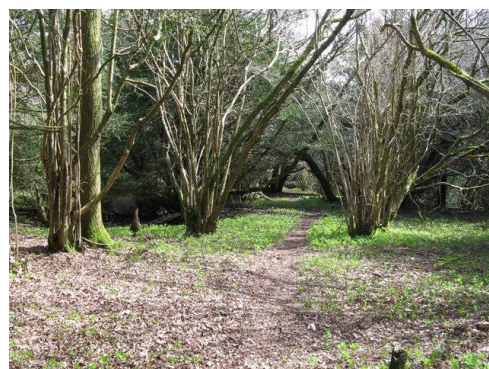
The next couple of miles are really quite flat but high, and pass by areas under conservation by the Graffham Downland Trust. Take time to read their information board.

At Graffham Down the views open up again and climbs a little as you near the second highest point (253 metres) on the South Downs Way at Crown Tegleaze.

Then, from the beautifully named Stickingspit Bottom, enjoy a long descent to Littleton Farm on the A285.

Cross carefully and prepare to climb once more a chalk track that steeply twists and turns back up to 240 metres at Sutton Down. Along the way the track passes through two ancient Cross Dykes.

The track skirts a steep wooded escarpment to the north. Follow the track with great views to the south, until at Gumber Corner you meet up with the Monarch's Way (which at this point is following the old Roman road of Stane Street).



Now another drawn out climb to the top of Bignor Hill followed by a very steep and grassy (slippery when wet), route down. Finally, the last climb of the day, up a narrow chalky track...watch your footing here.



You are now skirting the western side of Bury Hill and emerge at the top to the most glorious of views on the South Downs Way.

Crossing the A29 carefully, take time to enjoy that magnificent view that we usually only glimpse from our car windows. Soak it in and try and work out your next route to Amberley below and Amberley Mount beyond. Finish this walk at the Whiteways café a few hundred yards south along the A29.

**A great way to finish this leg of 8.8 miles and 44.7 miles in total. You're nearly halfway already!**



### WALK 5 - WHITEWAYS KIOSK NEAR AMBERLEY TO WASHINGTON... 9 MILES.

Only a short one, but one of the toughest climbs. And you can reward ourselves with a pint at the end!



Starting at the Whiteways Café, trace back along footpath and re-join the South Downs Way before descending to the pretty village of Amberley. Prepare for one of the toughest climbs on the South Downs Way. A long slog, one and a half miles uphill, from near sea level to over 200 metres at Amberley Mount and then on to Rackham Hill.

Along the way, the road initially tops the high chalk cliffs of an old chalk quarry that is now the Amberley Museum *"Located in the heart of the South Downs National Park, our Museum is dedicated to preserving the industrial heritage of the South East. With 36 acres to explore and over 40 exhibits to visit, you can discover over 150 years of the South's working past in what was once a busy chalk quarry and lime works"*.

Further up explore a series of Tumuli and various earthworks dating back to the Bronze Age.



The steep escarpments allow stunning views to the North to Parham House and beyond across the Low Weald.

Keep walking high above Storrington and to the south you will see the distinct round mound of Harrow Hill, an important Bronze Age, and possibly Neolithic, mining site. Flint was mined here, and the hill is punctured with deep shafts and adjoining galleries.

The next couple of miles are easy walking (in the dry; really slow in the wet) across farmland with great views on a clear day in all directions.

Passing an unusual bunker surviving from the Second World War, you start a steep descent down Barnsfarm Hill, then Highden Hill to the busy A24.



Finish the walk at the car park off the A27 or detour to Washington and a visit to the Franklands Arms is your reward for another nine miles walked.

Go on... you've earned it!

**You are now over halfway with 54 miles covered!**

### WALK 6 - WASHINGTON TO TRULEIGH HILL... 8.4 MILES.

A mile down the A24, south of the Washington roundabout, is a small car park which is at the bottom of a sharp rise, up a windy chalk and flint track. This is the starting point for Walk #6 of our South Downs Way odyssey.

Set off gently and pace yourself up this 1 in 5 gradient, pass the old disused chalk pits and upwards to be rewarded with open views of the coastal plain to the south and a little further on, to Chanctonbury Ring.



The ring is now looking a little dishevelled after the Great Storm of 1987 which brought down a significant number of mature beech trees, but trees planted since are coming on well. The site of an Iron Age fort, Chanctonbury Ring was first planted with trees by Charles Goring, heir to the Wiston estate, when just 20 years old in 1760. Evidence of the Romans have also been found here, and it is said that if you run backwards around the ring six times you will summon the Devil.



Moving on, follow the ridge of the Downs for a mile or so, with often expansive views in all directions.

Look north and you may catch a glimpse of Wiston House (now a Government conference centre), and to the south lies the enormous Cissbury Ring.

Cissbury Ring is the second largest Iron Age fort in Britain. A large network of flint mines evidences earlier use of Cissbury Ring which was also important to the Romans, and may have been continually in use for over 2000 years.

Keep walking and the impressive Steyning Bowl opens up overlooking Steyning itself.

Walking past pig pens, you can pick out the finger remains of Bramber Castle, poking through the trees, and the huge chimney of the disused Shoreham Cement plant.







A sharp descent takes you through Botolphs, then over the River Adur. Looking from the bridge imagine the scene before the river silted up, when Bramber was a busy port, and the river would have been busy with boats and ships of all sizes.

From here, Beeding Hill is a long slow climb from sea level to 168 metres. Stop and look back from time to time and take in the glorious views of the Adur Valley, and the Downs

beyond stretching into the distance from whence you have come.

Then the march continues up Truleigh Hill, with the Radio masts in sight, and today's walk finishes with a welcome rest and refreshment at the Youth Hostel, just before the Radio Station at the summit.

**So, today's walk, of another 8.4 miles, means you have now completed 62.4 miles of the South Downs Way. You're nearly two thirds of the way with some of the most classic South Downs terrain still to come.**

### WALK 7 - TRULEIGH HILL... DITCHLING BEACON 8 MILES.

Meeting at the YMCA building at the top of Truleigh Hill, today continue your eastward trek and passing the antennae at the Radio Station, continue to the viewpoint at Edburton Hill.

Sat on the bench facing north and over the edge of the precipitous Fulking Escarpment are long views across the Weald. Immediately to your right are earthworks outlining the ruins of an old Norman Motte and Bailey Castle, and further beyond the escarpment is the pub at the top of Devils Dyke.



It is now an undulating walk to get to the pub and behind it is Devil's Dyke itself.

The footpath follows the southern rim of the Dyke and sweeps down into Saddlescombe Valley and the welcome stop at Saddlescombe Farm with its small cafe. Once owned by the Knights Templar (who dug the well in the 13th century) the farm is now run by the National Trust.



Refreshed you now have a good slog up the long steep side of West Hill. Stop and turn for a moment when halfway up and you will be rewarded with a great view of Devil's Dyke, and on a clear day, the escarpment beyond leading all the way to Chanctonbury Ring in the distance.

Follow the fence over the dome of the hill and the peace is shattered by the traffic noise as you descend into Pycombe Valley.

Cross the bridge over the busy A23 and a short climb up an old lane takes you past the beautiful old church to the small village of Pycombe.



Try and open the gate to the churchyard. The design is known as a Tapsel Gate and is unique to Sussex. This is one of only six that survive.

Pycombe was split in two following the ravages of the Plague between 1603 and 1621, when survivors moved away and up the road to what is now known as Pycombe Street.

Follow the South Downs Way through the village, and as you cross the A273 to the golf course you may not be aware that you are also crossing the London to Brighton railway line, deep underground, built by the Victorians, and known as the Clayton Tunnel.

Now through the beautiful golf course and up the next hill to the Jack and Jill Windmills.



Jack Mill is a private residence.

Jill Mill has been restored and is now fully operational and open to the public on Sundays.

Now follow the track east, and as you get to the top, and cross the County border into East Sussex, make a point to turn and look back at the view that in a single vista takes in the whole of West Sussex, The Weald, the Coastal plain and the Downs.

As the escarpment to the north again steepens, and with views across Keymer and Ditchling, the flat(ish) route passes ancient Tumuli and Dew ponds and eventually reaches Ditchling Beacon, the site of an old fort and journey's end.

**Today's walk has been 8 miles and you have now covered just over 70 miles of the SDW in total....**



### WALK 8 - DITCHLING BEACON TO ITFORD HILL. - 11.4 MILES

You re-join your Walk of the South Downs Way at the top of Ditchling Beacon, the site of an old Iron Age fort. Used as a beacon site for centuries it was used to warn Queen Elizabeth I of the Spanish Armada lumbering east along the English Channel.

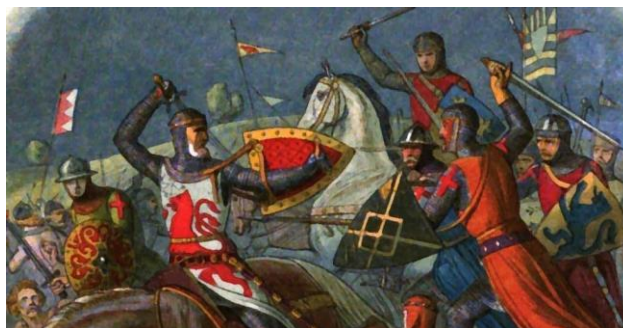
Now follow this elevated path past many tumuli for a couple of miles.



To the South you will catch glimpses of the new Brighton and Hove Albion stadium nestled in the folds of the hillside.

The South Downs Way bridle path then turns south, and the next mile or so descends to almost sea level.

To the east, towards Lewes, imagine the scene at Offham Hill in 1264, when French-born Sir Simon de Montfort positioned his men high above the Royalist army of Henry III, achieving strategic advantage and surprise, and winning the Battle of Lewes in 1264. The Earl of Montfort captured King Henry III and became the most powerful man in England.



Cross the A27 via a small bridge, then under the railway line between Brighton and Lewes. Then begins a steep ascent once more to almost 200 metres, and the walker is rewarded with broad views in all directions.



The steep escarpment to the left overhangs the village of Kingston with Lewes beyond.

The long walk along the ridge again passes a succession of tumuli (otherwise known as Barrows) which are Neolithic or Bronze Age burial mounds of stones and earth raised over graves. These high areas were settled 8000 years ago affording some safety and security from the lower lying wetlands below.

Tumuli are usually found outside of settlements and villages, either side of ancient paths or tracks.

You can now enjoy the long easy descent back to sea level and Southease. Pause for a moment to admire the rather beautiful 11 century church with its round tower topped with a conical steeple.

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Then cross the River Ouse.



When the meandering Ouse was canalised in the 18 Century it was necessary to build a bridge. 100 years later the wooden bridge was replaced by the present wrought iron swing bridge to enable high masted ocean going vessels to reach Lewes. The bridge is now Grade II listed.

And so you reach the end of this section of the South Downs Way at the foot of Itford Hill.

**You have today covered a further 11.4 miles and have less than 20 miles of the South Downs Way to travel.**

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### WALK 9 - ITFORD HILL TO EXCEAT.



Picking up the trail at Southease Station you 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 you 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 you 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 you 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 there 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 Walk you can look forward to the last 7.5 miles over the iconic Seven Sisters and the Birling Gap.**



### WALK 10 - EXCEAT TO EASTBOURNE.

#### THE FINAL LEG!

Today you begin the final leg of the South Downs Way at Exceat at the head of Cuckmere Haven, and look forward to the ups and downs of the Seven Sisters clifftops, taking in the Birling Gap along the way, and finishing our trek on the edge of Eastbourne.

Exceat was once at the head of a small gauge rail line that took sea gravel from the Haven to the road further up the valley.

Cuckmere Haven itself is a floodplain, and as you gain altitude you may be able to make out the course of old waterways.

For three centuries this was a popular landing ground for smugglers, and in the last century was eyed by the Nazis as a potential landing ground for invading Nazi troops, such that defences were positioned in the water, on the beaches and on land, some of which are still visible today.



The South Downs Way takes you up the side of a hill called Haven Brow. Before you opens up the view of the Seven Sisters.



There are in fact now eight hills as the erosion of the cliffs is in the process of creating an additional rise at Went Hill, just before you reach the Birling Gap.

The natural erosion of these chalk cliffs keeps them white.

Enjoy the undulating, often steep sides of the sisters until you reach the Birling Gap, a National Trust property complete with Shop and cafe.

Here you can learn the story of this place that has been inhabited for thousands of years and evokes the memories of smugglers and the stories of national defence over centuries.



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Uphill once again takes you along the highest chalk sea cliffs in Britain at Beachy Head.



You will pass by the Belle Tout lighthouse, built in 1832 and which, in 1999, was picked up and moved back 17 metres from the edge of the crumbling sea cliffs.

At 531 feet visitors are advised to keep away from the edge, but enjoy this last couple of miles of the South Downs as you pass by the viewpoint for the Beachy Head lighthouse far below, then past the welcome sight of The Beachy Head pub (that was a listening post in the Second World War).

Thankfully from here the end of the walk is nearby and it is all downhill to the very edge of Eastbourne and journey's end.



**7.5 miles completed today and 100 miles for the full South Downs Way experience. Congratulations!**