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## Berwick to Birling Gap

### via Wilmington, Jevington and Flagstaff point

<b>Length:</b>	<b>Berwick to Birling Gap</b>	18.9km (11.8 miles)
	<b>Berwick to Friston</b>	15.2km (9.4 miles)
	<b>Berwick to East Dean</b>	16.2km (10.4 miles)
	<b>Berwick to Birling Gap and back again to East Dean</b>	21.3km (13.2 miles)
	<b>Berwick to Exceat via Flagstaff Point</b>	21.1km (13.1 miles)

**Toughness:** 5 out of 10: two well-graded climbs up onto the South Downs, and three short steep climbs onto the Seven Sisters at the end, but otherwise flat or undulating

**Maps:** OS Landranger 199; Explorer OL25 (formerly 123).

### Features

This walk uses the same start as the Berwick to Seaford walk also on this site, following a relatively flat route across fields to the village of Wilmington at the base of the downs, with fine views of its famous chalk cut figure, the Long Man of Wilmington (see panel page 4). After Wilmington you go right to the base of the Long Man and climb up onto the downs, crossing their lonely centre to the picturesque village of Jevington, with stunning views en route. After that you climb onto long ridge, with more fine views, to the village of Friston, and descend to the sea at Flagstaff Point, the central point in the Seven Sisters chalk cliffs, walking over three of the Sisters to Birling Gap.

### Walk options

Finishing the walk at Birling Gap depends on the 13X bus being in operation, which from mid September to mid June is only on Sundays (see **Transport** overleaf) and even in summer has a quite limited service.

However, if the 13X is not running, you can do this walk in a slightly modified form using the very frequent **12/A/X** route (also on [www.buses.co.uk](http://www.buses.co.uk)) which runs daily and year round along the main road from Friston and East Dean to Eastbourne till late in the evening. Using this you can:

- **finish the walk at Friston** after **15km (9.4 miles)** or at **East Dean** (where there are various tea options) after **16.2km (10.4 miles)** - see paragraphs 58 and 59 on page 6
- **walk to Birling Gap and then inland to East Dean**, making a total walk of **21.3km (13.2 miles)** - see paragraph 70 on page 7.
- **walk from Flagstaff Point to Exceat** and get the 12 bus from there, making a total walk of **21.2km (13.1 miles)** - see paragraph 65 of the directions on page 7.

## Transport

Take a train from **London Victoria** to **Lewes**, and change there for hourly trains to **Berwick**. The online rail timetable often suggests changing at Polegate, but there is no advantage in this. Catch the first train after 9am to get to Berwick in time (currently the 9.47). Buy **a day return to Eastbourne**.

At the end of the walk you need to catch a bus to get to Eastbourne railway station. Ideally this should be the **13X**, which serves **Birling Gap** and **Beachy Head**. This operates twice an hour from mid June to mid September on **Sundays only**: on **Mondays to Saturdays** in this period it operates three times a day, with a bus from Birling Gap to Eastbourne currently at 5.18pm and one to Seaford at 6.24pm. **For the rest of the year** (mid September to mid June), this three times a day service operates on **Sundays only**. See [www.buses.co.uk](http://www.buses.co.uk) for details.

If the 13X is not running, or if you end the walk at **Friston** or **East Dean**, the **12** and **12A** buses run very frequently to both Eastbourne. There can be buses as often as every ten minutes in the day: later in the evening the service is half hourly but continues till very late. From **Exceat** it is quicker to get the bus to Seaford rather than Eastbourne and get the train from there.

**Trains back from Eastbourne** are every half hour until late. A return train ticket to Eastbourne is usually accepted from Seaford if you end up there: trains from this station are half hourly and you change at Lewes (or occasionally Brighton) for London.

## Lunch

**The Giant's Rest** in Wilmington (01323 870207), 4.8km/3 miles into the walk, is a deservedly popular pub with a very creative menu. It serves food all day Saturdays and Sundays and from 12-3pm and 7-9pm on weekdays.

A later option is the very characterful **Eight Bells** in Jevington (01323 484442), 9.8km (6.1 miles) into the walk, which serves food all afternoon (but check this).

There are lots of fine **picnic** spots on this walk, including the churchyard in Wilmington, with its fine ancient yew, and up on the downs above the Long Man

## Tea

The **Jevington Tea Garden** reopened in April 2019 after a gap of some years. I have no information on opening times and have not had a chance to try it out since it reopened, but in its past incarnation it offered excellent tea and cakes in a tranquil house garden.

Otherwise in Jevington, the **Eight Bells** pub 200 metres up the road (*see Lunch*) serves drinks all afternoon and apparently also offers cakes.

If ending in **East Dean**, refreshment options include the **Tiger Inn** on the village green and the adjacent **Hikers Rest** café which is open until 4.30pm in winter and 5.30pm in summer.

Otherwise, if you can reach it in time, the **National Trust café at Birling Gap** (01323 423197) is open until 5pm in summer or 4pm in winter.

If finishing the walk at **Exceat**, the **Saltmarsh** cafe by the Seven Sisters Visitor Centre, open to 5pm daily, is one option: or 400 metres along the main road, by Exceat Bridge, is the **Cuckmere Inn**, which has a fine outside terrace and serves hot drinks and food all afternoon and evening.

## Swimming notes

**Birling Gap** is also a lovely place for a dip, but has sharp underwater rocks (the remains of eroded cliffs), which make swimming very tricky in the lower half of the tide. However, when the tide is higher there is no problem at all, unless the sea is choppy, when it can break abruptly onto the shingle. At very low tide you can cross the rocks to sand beyond and swim from there. Whatever state of the tide, you get a fabulous panorama of the white cliffs of the Seven Sisters as you swim.

## WALK DIRECTIONS

### **Berwick station to Wilmington** **(4.6km/2.9 miles)**

1. Coming off platform 2 at Berwick (the platform you arrive at when coming from Lewes) turn right to the road in 20 metres.
2. Cross the road and turn left. In 25 metres, just before a garage on the right, turn right up the driveway to a house, a signposted footpath.
3. In 40 metres pass through a kissing gate into a field and veer slightly left to pass through a metal gate to the right of a mini-pylon in 100 metres.
4. Veer slightly left down across the next field, aiming for the left-hand end of a line of low trees.
5. In 150 metres, at the bottom of the dip, pass through a metal gate, across a plank bridge and through another gate, and carry on uphill with the fence to your right
6. At the top of the hill in 150 metres veer right along the fence to a gate in 50 metres. Cross this and carry on down the right-hand edge of the next field
7. In 150 metres, at the bottom of the hill, pass through a kissing gate and turn left on a lane.
8. In 50 metres, where the hedge ends to the right, turn right over a well-concealed (but signposted) stile. After it, turn half right across a field corner, heading towards the centre of a shrubby field boundary, with a house and gardens to your right
9. In 100 metres cross a stile and carry on through an area which can be overgrown in summer.
10. In 50 metres cross a stile and keep to the right-hand edge of the field beyond
11. In 120 metres exit the field over a stile and cross the road to carry on into a tarmac area on its far side. Turn left in 5 metres onto a path into a wooded area, parallel to the road.
12. In 80 metres follow the path as it curves round to the right. In 70 metres more, turn left to emerge onto the road once more, and go right across a bridge.
13. In 80 metres, at the far end of the bridge, **turn right** (*NOT* left) up the signposted **Wealdway**, a path down the bank through a very narrow gap in the scrub.
14. In 40 metres cross a stile and keep on up the right-hand edge of the field beyond.
15. In 150 metres follow the field edge round to the left and in another 150 metres, in the far right-hand corner of the field, turn left with the hedge, following an arrow on a post, heading gently uphill.
16. In 220 metres, at the top end of the field, cross a stile and then turn right following the Wealdway sign to pass through a metal gate in 8 metres.
17. Keep on up the right-hand edge of this field and up over a rise which gives you a fine view of the chalk figure of the Long Man of Wilmington (*see panel overleaf*) on the downs ahead.
18. In 300 metres more, at the bottom of the field, the official path cuts off the corner to a fieldgate about 40 metres in from the side of the field, but you may prefer to go around its edge to avoid trampling the crops.
19. Carry on up the right-hand edge of the next field. In 200 metres cross the railway line (with care!).
20. Beyond the railway line veer left across hummocky ground. There is no clear path but if you slant towards the left-hand edge of the space, in 100 metres you find a stile. Cross it to carry on down a narrow strip with a barbed wire fence right and a reed bed to the left.

21. In 80 metres cross a stile into the next field and keep on up its left-hand edge.
22. In 400 metres exit this field through a metal gate in its top left-hand corner and turn right along the right-hand edge of the next field (that is, still in the same direction as before).
23. In 170 metres pass through a metal gate to the left of a fieldgate in the field corner and carry on down a grass track on the right-hand edge of a field.
24. In 80 metres follow the track through a metal gate and in 100 metres more go through another gate to the right of a double fieldgate. Beyond this curve right up a track for 80 metres to the A27.
25. **Cross the A27 with very great care** – it is always a busy road – and carry on up a road – Milton Street.
26. In 100 metres, just before a house on the left, turn **left** up a signposted footpath. (Ignore a slightly earlier path to the right).
27. In 150 metres pass through a kissing gate into a field and on up the left-hand edge of a field.
28. In 150 metres pass through another kissing gate and on up the left-hand edge of the next field, carrying straight on where the fence ends to reach the far side of the field in 130 metres more.
29. Pass through a kissing gate to leave this field and carry on through new trees.
30. In 60 metres emerge from the trees to carry on between two fields (a fence to the left, a bramble hedgerow and fence to the right), both of which appear to have been planted with young saplings.
31. In 200 metres turn right through a gap into a field and go left along its edge, with a hedge left and a fence right.
32. In 70 metres exit the far end of this field and carry on through a wood for 30 metres. Then cross a stile and carry on down a driveway for 70 metres to a road.
  - For lunch at the **Giant's Rest** pub turn **left** on the road for 250 metres. After lunch retrace your steps up the road.
  - **If not stopping for lunch**, turn **right** on the road.

*Continue with the directions in the next section*

## **Wilmington to Jevington** **(5.2km/3.2 miles)**

33. Carry on up the road through the village, going uphill, away from the A27. In 450 metres (coming from the Giant's Rest) or in 200 metres (if you have turned right and not stopped for lunch), a pedestrian walkway starts on the right-hand side of the road, walled off from the road itself. 40 metres after this starts, do not neglect to go up the steps to the right into the churchyard to see an amazing **yew tree** (reputed to be 1600 years old). After visiting it, return to the road and continue in the same direction as before.
34. 130 metres past the church, and just over the brow of the hill, with the **Long Man of Wilmington** now in plain view on the hill ahead, veer left off the road onto a path that runs parallel to it on its left-hand side.

The **Long Man of Wilmington** is one of those ancient chalk figures that may not in fact be that ancient. Certainly if you get up close to it, as you do on this walk, you will see that it is not a chalk-cut figure at all, but outlined by white stones, cemented together. These date from 1874 and before they were put in place the figure was only visible in certain lights.

The earliest known drawing of the figure dates from 1766, but in that it is holding a rake and a scythe, not the long poles it now has. How much earlier than that the figure was created, no one knows.

Whoever did create it understood perspective – it is elongated so that it looks in proportion when viewed from below. It is also special in depicting a human figure at all – though there are several white horses dotted around the country, the only other human chalk cut figure in England is the Cerne Abbas giant near Dorchester.

35. Follow this path down into the dip, and then left, away from the road and all the way up to the foot of the Long Man (about 600 metres), passing through a gate 100 metres before it.
36. **You have a choice at this point – i)** (below) **or ii)** (overleaf)
  - i) The most direct but steeper option is to turn left** at the bottom of the Long Man, along a broad path across the face of the escarpment.

In 300 metres turn **sharp right** (that is slightly doubling back on yourself) up a car-wide path that slants steeply up the hillside on a shelf (once marked by a signpost, but this is now only a stump).

In 400 metres, at the top of the hill, follow the path over the brow and through a gate in a fence. **Veer left** over the top of the ridge after this gate to find the South Downs Way on the far side of the hill, a distinct track curving around the top of a steep-sided valley. Turn left on this and continue the directions in paragraph 41 below.

**ii) A slightly longer and easier route**, which also gives a fine view of the Long Man from the top, is to *turn right* at the bottom of the Long Man, following a car-wide path as it climbs gently across the slope on a broad shelf, with an increasingly fine view to the right. Continue the directions in the next paragraph.

37. In 300 metres pass through a gate and turn left at a path crossroads, going uphill, initially in a gully
38. In 130 metres ignore a track to the right and keep to the fence on your left. In another 80 metres ignore a grass track up the hill to the right and still keep to the fence
39. In 80 metres there is a stile to the left that you can cross and sit on a fine grassy perch to admire the view (it has no other obvious function). Otherwise keep along the fence. In another 80 metres you get interesting view of the Long Man from above.
40. In 300 metres more, at the top of the ridge, cross a stile and pass to the right of the hill ahead (no clear path) to merge in 80 metres with the South Downs Way, a distinct car-wide track curving around a deep valley to the right
41. In 180 metres, at the far end of this deep valley, fork left on a faint grassy path away from the fence and up over a ridge, following the South Downs Way sign.
42. Carry on across an undulating grassy plateau beyond, passing occasional footpath posts and with a line of gorse away to your left. (Ignore any apparent forks to the left towards the gorse: the SDW keeps broadly parallel to it)
43. Eventually in 500 metres this very indistinct path curves to the right, away from the gorse, following the top of a broad ridge, with a deep valley increasingly evident to your left. (This is still the South Downs Way but not very well waymarked here: however, the route is fairly obvious). (*Straight ahead of you after the curve to the right you are looking on the horizon at the back of the Seven Sisters cliff formation.*)
44. In 400 metres pass through a gate and curve left with the faint path, now gently downhill. In 300 metres, having come alongside the line of bushes to the left, the path comes to a gate
45. Beyond the gate keep on along a path between bushes. However, in 100 metres, at a crosspaths, **turn left downhill** into the trees.
46. In 300 metres after this path has curved right and levelled out, fork **right** at a junction marked by a footpath post (the less obvious of the two tracks)
47. In 70 metres keep straight on at a crosspath and carry on now more steeply downhill.
48. In 150 metres there are open fields to the right and you can see Jevington Church ahead. Stay on the path, passing a succession of fields to your right.
49. In 400 metres you come to **Jevington Church**.
  - **To carry on without visiting the Eight Bells pub** keep on downhill past the church on a road and continue with the paragraph 50 directions overleaf.
  - **To visit the Eight Bells pub** from this point turn left into the churchyard and in 10 metres veer right in front of the church door down a tarmac path. In 100 metres pass through a swing gate and carry on down a tarmac path with a fence right and a wall left. In 150 metres this brings you to a road. Carry on along this for 150 metres to the pub. **To resume the walk route after coming out of the pub**, retrace your steps up the road. In 150 metres **either** retrace your steps up through the churchyard, turning left downhill after it on the road and resuming the directions in paragraph 50 overleaf: **or** stay on the road coming from the pub as it curves left downhill (narrow with some fast traffic so **take great care**). In 250 metres or so ignore Willingdon Lane left, but in another 40 metres, just past Hawthorne Lodge, turn left up a

track signposted South Downs Way and resume the directions at paragraph 52 below.

50. In 200 metres you come to a road T-junction, where you turn right.
51. In 50 metres, just beyond the **Jevington Tea Garden** (aka Hawthorne Lodge) on the left, turn left up a lane, signposted South Downs Way.

### **Jevington to Friston** **(5.4km/3.3 miles)**

52. In 100 metres the lane ends and you carry on up a car-wide track. In 500 metres this brings you out into open fields.
53. Keep on up the track, with the way never in doubt, until in 1km or so, you come to the top of the hill. Here, just beyond a metal car-blocking barrier (often open these days), you come to four-way track junction. Take the first track to the right here, just beyond a clump of thorn bushes, passing through a gate to the right of a fieldgate into a field.
54. Follow a faint track slightly left across this field, with a fine panoramic view to your right.
55. In 200 metres pass through into the next field and keep on along its left-hand edge, along the line of the ridge.  
*On a clear day here you have a panoramic view of the sea, all the way from Hastings over your left shoulder to Brighton away to the right. About a third to the left ahead you can also see Belle Tout lighthouse, and to its right the dip of Birling Gap, the end of the walk.*
56. In 400 metres, just before a ruined building to the left, **turn right along the edge of a clump of trees**, following an arrow on a post.
57. In 100 metres, at the far end of the field, turn left through a gate onto a path that runs along the edge of the ridge, initially with a hedgerow on your left and a wire fence to your right.
58. You are now on an easy path that slowly widens into a track and takes you all along the ridge into Friston. In 2km (1.2 miles) the path becomes a residential road, and in another 1km it merges with a B-road to the right. 100 metres later it comes to a junction with the main A259 coast road, in front of **Friston church**. It is possible to catch a very frequent

**number 12 bus** here to Eastbourne (near side of road), or (when they are running, the half hourly 13X bus to Birling Gap or Beachy Head.

59. Otherwise, cross the road, and pass to the right of Friston church. There are two options here.
  - **To continue the walk to Flagstaff Point and Birling Gap**, carry straight on past Friston church down a side road. Refer to the directions in paragraph 60.
  - **To end the walk at East Dean**, turn left into Friston churchyard and pick up a path on its far side that passes through a second gate in 50 metres and emerges into a large field. Keep downhill across this and in 400 metres or so you come to a road, with the village green visible to your left. To get to the **Tiger Inn** turn left along this road, and then right downhill at the end of the green. The **Hiker's Rest** tea room is just beyond the pub. After tea **to catch a bus to Eastbourne** carry on downhill past the Tiger Inn onto a brick-paved driveway. Follow this to a road, and turn left. Carry on down this for 200 metres to a main road: **cross this with care** for the bus to Eastbourne.

### **Friston to Flagstaff Point** **(2km/1.2 miles)**

60. After 300 metres on the road you come to the National Trust car park for **Crowlink**. Go straight through this car park and carry straight on up the grassy hill ahead, ignoring a tarmac lane curving to the right.
61. In 150 metres you pass through a gap in the gorse and come over the top of the hill. Here veer slightly right, heading towards the left-hand edge of a clump of trees 200 metres ahead (no clear path).
62. Beyond the trees head keep on gently downhill towards the sea, keeping parallel to the valley on the right. (You may be able to see the stone monument on Flagstaff Point as a tiny dot on the coast in the far distance, but this soon disappears from view. Eventually a faint grass track materialises on a shelf, but don't worry if you can't find this.)
63. In about 600 metres you should be walking along the top of a broad ridge, with the stone monument visible in the distance slightly to the left. In 400 metres more, you come to a fence and

pass through it via a kissing gate to the right of a fieldgate.

**64.** Beyond the kissing gate veer slightly left to head directly downhill to the sea and the stone monument.

**65.** In 500 metres you come to **Flagstaff Point**, halfway along the Seven Sisters.

- **To finish the walk at Exceat (4km/2.5 miles)** from this point), turn right (west) at Flagstaff Point and walk over four more of the Sisters (**Brass Point, Rough Brow, Short Brow** and **Haven Brow**) until you have a fine view of Cuckmere Haven below you. Here follow the path to the right (the South Downs Way) to head inland to the main road and the Seven Sisters Visitor Centre, where **12** and **12a buses** to Seaford go on this side of the road and buses to Eastbourne from the opposite side: the **Saltmarsh** cafe is in the Visitor Centre complex. Alternatively if you keep to the riverside on your walk inland you will come directly to the **Cuckmere Inn** by Exceat Bridge (or you can reach this from the Visitor Centre by turning left on the main road for 400 metres).
- **To carry on to Birling Gap** refer to the next section.

### **Flagstaff Point to Birling Gap (1.8km/1.1 miles)**

**66.** Turn left (east) at Flagstaff Point and carry on over three further humps of the Seven Sisters - **Flat Hill, Baily's Hill** and **Went Hill**.

**67.** About 100 metres after the summit of Went Hill your way is blocked by a fence. Pass through this via a kissing gate, and on down the clear path beyond. In 70 metres you pass into bushes.

**68.** In another 30 metres you come to a gravel path T-junction

- **To carry straight on to East Dean without going down to Birling Gap**, turn left at this junction and refer to paragraph 73 opposite.
- For **Birling Gap**, turn right at the junction, curving left past a fieldgate in another 30 metres. You are now on a gently descending track, passing houses.

**69.** In 250 metres, at the end of the track, Birling Gap's toilets, café and beach are

to your right. Or carry on to the road to find the bus stop for Eastbourne on the far side of the road just before the bend, with the one to Seaford being after the bend on this side of the road.

### **Birling Gap to East Dean (2.4km/1.5 miles)**

**70.** Retrace your steps up the gravel track (ie, coming away from the seafront at Birling Gap, turn left beyond the toilet block on a track leading westward).

**71.** In 250 metres, the track goes through a gate and turns right.

**72.** 30 metres after this ignore a path to the left (the path along the Seven Sisters you came in on) and instead continue straight uphill, away from the sea.

**73.** In 50 metres go through a gate into a field.

**74.** Keep uphill across this field, following the ridge line, with fine views of the sea behind and to the left.

**75.** In 150 metres pass through another gate and keep uphill on open downland.

**76.** Eventually near the top of the hill you pass a barn on your right. **Beyond this, keep close to the line of scrub to the right.**

**77.** 300 metres or so beyond the barn, look out for a footpath post to the right, which indicates the start of a path slanting through the scrub and down the escarpment.

**78.** After passing through two gates on this path, it emerges into an open space: keep straight on, passing to the left of a house in 100 metres, to pass through a fieldgate and come to a tarmac lane.

**79.** Follow this tarmac lane for 250 metres into the centre of East Dean (a village green). Cross the green towards the **Tiger Inn** pub.

**80.** Just in front of the Tiger Inn turn right down a brick-paved driveway. Immediately to your right here is another tea stop – the **Hikers Rest**.

**81.** Carry on down the brick-paved driveway to the road, and turn left on it

**82.** Carry on for 200 metres to a junction with the main road. **Cross this with care**, to find the bus stop for Eastbourne on the far side.