

Berwick-Wilmington-Alfriston checked	Alfriston to Exceat to Seaford last checked	Berwick-Alciston-Alfriston checked	Reverse walk last checked	Exceat to East Dean last checked
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Berwick to Seaford

Length:	- Berwick station to Exceat	14.4km (8.9 miles)
	- Berwick station to Seaford	20km (12.4 miles)
	- a) Alternative start	reduces walk by 1.8km (1.1 miles)
	- b) Berwick Circular	13.8km (8.6 miles)
	- c) Ending at Birling Gap... ...or East Dean	19.8km (12.3 miles) 21.4km (13.3 miles)
	- d) Reverse walk: Seaford to Berwick station	16.8km (10.4 miles)

Toughness: - 7 out of 10: two extended hill climbs, otherwise flat or gently undulating
- 5 out of 10 for a) & d), 4 out of 10 for b), 8 out of 10 for c)

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

Features

This walk crosses over the South Downs to the sea, linking Berwick, Wilmington, Alfriston, Exceat (pronounced *Ex-seet*, though *Ex-ee-at* is a widespread mispronunciation), Cuckmere Haven and Seaford

The highlights are climbs up two of the most beautiful hills in the South Downs, both of them affording panoramic views. The first of these is Windover Hill behind Wilmington, on which is found the chalk figure of the Long Man of Wilmington – seen at close quarters on this walk. The second is High and Over, a dramatic vantage point above the Cuckmere River, with views down towards Cuckmere Haven and the sea.

Before and between these two hills are two fairly flat sections – one approaching the South Downs ridge from the north, and the other along the pretty valley of the Cuckmere River south of Alfriston. Alfriston offers a range of wonderful pubs for lunch, as well as at least two tea rooms. An alternative start from Berwick takes in the village of Alciston and Berwick church, which was decorated by members of the Bloomsbury Group. The Cricketers Inn near Berwick church is a delightful alternative lunch stop on this option.

You can end the walk at the Exceat, from where there are very regular buses back to Seaford - or carry on to Seaford via Cuckmere Haven and the over the cliffs of Seaford Head, a beautiful 6km (3.7 miles) extension, with stunning backward views of the chalk cliffs of the Seven Sisters.

Alternatively if you are feeling energetic you can walk over the Seven Sisters to Birling Gap and East Dean.

Note that this walk is perfectly practical in winter – the lowland areas can be muddy, but no more so than anywhere else. However, it is worth noting that from October to March the sun shines into your eyes more or less constantly from Berwick to Exceat – perhaps not a great hardship if the weather has otherwise been grey and bleak.

Walk options

a) Alternative start: This shorter (and less strenuous) start bypasses Wilmington, the Long Man and Windover Hill, and takes you over fields through the pleasant village of Alciston and on via Berwick church, decorated by the Bloomsbury Group, to Alfriston. The Cricketers near Berwick church is a possible alternative pub lunch stop here. From Berwick station to Alfriston this route is 6.9km (4.3 miles), making a total walk from Berwick station to Exceat of **12.2km (7.6 miles)** and from Berwick station to Seaford of **18.2km (11.3 miles)**. *To do this option start the walk directions at paragraph 53 on page 7*

b) Berwick Circular: After following the main walk directions to Wilmington and Alfriston, you can use these directions to return to Berwick station via Berwick Church. Note that this route is similar to, but not quite the same as, option a) above, taking a shorter 5.1km (3.2 mile) route from Alfriston to Berwick station. It makes a total circular walk of **13.8km (8.6 miles)**. *To do this option follow the main walk directions until Alfriston, then switch to paragraph 179 on page 14. If doing this option you only need pages 1-7 and 14-15.*

c) Ending at Birling Gap or East Dean: From Exceat it is not much further - but definitely more effort - to finish the main walk by going over the wonderful undulating cliffs of the Seven Sisters. When the 13 bus is running (see Transport) you can then finish the walk at Birling Gap, 5.8km/3.6 miles from Exceat, making a total walk from Berwick station of **19.8km (12.3 miles)**: otherwise it is a 1.6km (1 mile) further walk inland to East Dean from where you can get the 12 bus to either Eastbourne or Seaford for the train home. This makes a walk of **21.4km (13.3 miles)** from Berwick station. *To do this option follow the main walk until Exceat, then switch to paragraph 126 on page 11.*

d) Reverse walk: Seaford to Berwick station: In this direction you start with the fine cliff walk over Seaford Head, with magnificent views of the Seven Sisters, and then head inland over High and Over Hill to Alfriston. After tea there you head across the fields to Berwick church and on to Berwick station. This makes a walk of **16.8km (10.4 miles)**. *For directions for this option see paragraph 147 on page 13. If doing this option you only need pages 1-4 and 13-15.*

Transport

All walks apart from option d) start at **Berwick station** (in Sussex), which you reach from Victoria via a change in Lewes. You usually have to wait 20 minutes there for the Berwick connection, so journey times from London are as much as one hour 40 minutes. *(Ignore suggestions on the online timetable to change at Polegate, which confers no advantages and is less pleasant).*

For **d) Reverse walk: Seaford to Berwick station** you also change at Lewes (usually with a tighter connection) for the branch line to Seaford (trains every half hour).

In either case catch **the first train after 9am** from London to get to lunch in time. **A day return to Berwick** will usually be accepted from Seaford and vice versa: if not you will only have to pay a single fare as far as Lewes.

To end the walk at Exceat, you now have to walk from the Cuckmere Inn for 400 metres along the main road to the Seven Sisters Visitor Centre bus stop, since the stop near the Cuckmere Inn has been removed. From there very regular **12, 12a or 12x buses** go to Seaford (every 10-15 minutes seven days a week: more like every half hour after 8pm: check times on www.buses.co.uk). Get off at the library stop and carry on along the road for 200 metres or so, keeping right at the roundabout, to find the station.

On **option c)** East Dean is served by the same 12 buses that serve Seaford. You can either get the bus to there to get the train or go the other (shorter) way into Eastbourne, in which case your

train ticket needs to be a **day return to Eastbourne**. On Sundays year round there is also a **13x bus service** to **Birling Gap**, serving Eastbourne via Beachy Head in one direction and Seaford in the other, which from April to October operates twice an hour, with the last bus about 7pm. In June, July and August there is also an hourly service on Saturdays, and six departures a day in each direction Mondays to Fridays. Check on www.buses.co.uk.

It may also be possible to start or finish the walk in **Alfriston** using **Cuckmere Buses** who serve various destinations from the main square in the village. See www.cuckmerebuses.org.uk

Swimming notes

Cuckmere Haven makes a wonderfully scenic place to swim in the sea, with the white cliffs of the Seven Sisters as a backdrop. The only thing to watch out for is the current from the Cuckmere River, where it joins the sea. Traditionally this has flowed straight out from the river mouth, but some years storms or currents create a shingle bar which diverts it to the left or right, creating possibly tricky conditions for swimmers. So have a good look to see what the latest position is. For three hours either side of low tide the sea retreats across a large area of rock and seaweed and it is very tricky to wade out far enough to get sufficient depth, at least on the west side of the beach; on the east side there is a sandy area that comes relatively close to the shore, making wading out at low tide easier.

Seaford at the end of the walk is a less scenic but much more reliable place for a swim, with a shelving shingle beach that gives a good depth of water at all states of the tide. When the sea is choppy the waves can crash onto the beach in an abrupt way, however, and swimming at such times can be dangerous.

Birling Gap is also a lovely place for a dip if you do **option c**. Again the best time for swimming is two or three hours either side of high tide: outside this period the sea retreats across jagged rocks (the remains of eroded cliffs). The most awkward time is when these rocks are covered by shallow water: however, at very low tide you can sometimes pick your way through the rocks to the sea beyond, the area immediately opposite the steps being particularly rock-free. As at Seaford, larger waves can slap quite sharply down onto the shingle here, making getting in and out of the sea awkward or even dangerous.

Lunch and tea

An early lunch option is the **Long Man Inn in Wilmington** (01323 368 525), 4.8km (3 miles) into the walk. I have not tried this pub since it reopened, but it has received good reviews. It serves food all afternoon and evening daily from 11am.

The George Inn in Alfriston (01323 870 319), 8.8km (5.4 miles) into the walk, or 6.6km (4.1 miles) by **a) the Alternative start**, is one of several pub options in this picturesque village. This characterful pub has a charming garden, which makes it popular in summer.

There are several tea rooms in Alfriston. The **Apiary Coffee Shop and Garden** is next door to the George Inn and is open to 4.30pm daily. The **Singing Kettle Restaurant and Tea Room** in the main square of Alfriston is open until 4.30pm daily. The **Badgers Tea House** nearby has both a charming courtyard, full of chirping sparrows in the summer, and inside seating. It open until 4.30pm Tuesday to Saturday. On the edge of Alfriston's village green, near the church, there is also the **Shot Coffee House**, a small cafe with both inside and outside seating, open to 4pm daily in the summer months (and possibly year round: they were trialling this in the autumn of 2022).

Alfriston Village Stores has everything you would need for a picnic, including a wonderful delicatessen selling pies and flans. It also sells homemade cakes and takeaway hot drinks.

On **a) Alternative start**, a possible early lunch stop is the **Cricketer's Arms** (01323 870 469) in Berwick village, 5.2km (3.2 miles) into the walk, which serves food all afternoon and into the early evening at weekends (to 5pm on Sundays, with drinks to 7pm). This is also true Mondays to Fridays in summer, but in winter the pub is only open and serving food at lunchtime on these days.

In Except the **Cuckmere Inn** (01323 892 247) is a busy and efficient chain pub, which serves tea, coffee and food all afternoon and evening. It has a large area of outside tables in the summer.

In Seaford, there is a **tea kiosk** with outside tables on the seafront just before the Martello Tower, which is very popular with locals. It is open until about 6pm, depending on season or the weather. **The Trawlers** near the station is regarded by many walkers as the best fish and chip shop in the south east. **The Plough Inn**, just before the church, is a pleasant pub which serves food as well as generous pots of tea, but a walker's favourite is the tiny **Steamworks** pub on the station, which serves coffee, tea and cakes as well as beer, and is open until late.

On **b) Berwick Circular** and **d) Reverse walk: Seaford to Berwick station, The Cricketer's Arms** just past Berwick church is a pleasant place for a drink or tea or a meal on a summer's evening- see above for details. **The Berwick Inn** next to Berwick station has also been revamped and is now a comfortable tea stop. It is closed Monday and Tuesday, but open all afternoon on other days. In summer you can sit in its garden and wait for the level crossing barriers to come down before dashing across to your train.

On **c) Ending at Birling Gap or East Dean**, the **National Trust tea room** at Birling Gap is situated right by the sea, if you can get there before it closes at around 5pm. East Dean has the atmospheric **Tiger Inn** with outside tables on its village green. Next door to the Tiger Inn, and seemingly run by it, is the **Hiker's Rest** tea room which is open till 4.30pm in winter, 5pm in summer, but closed in early January.

WALK DIRECTIONS

For a) Alternative start see paragraph 53 on page 7.

For d) Reverse walk: Seaford to Berwick see paragraph 147 on page 13.

Berwick station to Wilmington **(4.5km/2.8 miles)**

- 1 Coming off platform 2 (the platform you arrive at when coming from Lewes), turn right to come 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 130 metres, veer right along the fence to a gate in 50 metres. Pass through 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, veer half right across a field corner, heading towards the centre of a shrubby field boundary.
- 9 In 120 metres, at the end of the field, keep straight ahead, with a garden fence to your right. Ignore a stile to the right in this fence, but in 10 metres more cross a stile straight ahead into an area that can be overgrown in summer.
- 10 In 50 metres more cross another stile. 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 100 metres more emerge onto the road once more, and turn 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 gap in the scrub.
- 14 In 40 metres cross a stile and keep on up the right-hand edge of a field.
- 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 (rather concealed by a hedge) and then turn right following the Wealdway sign to pass through a metal gate in 5 metres.
 - 17 Keep on up the right-hand edge of this field and over a rise which gives you a fine view of the chalk figure of the **Long Man of Wilmington** (see panel on page 6) on the downs ahead.
 - 18 In 300 metres more, at the bottom of the field, the right of way 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 slant towards the left-hand edge of the space and in 120 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 into an area that is getting somewhat overgrown with shrubs.
 - 21 In 80 metres cross a broken down 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 180 metres pass through a metal gate to the left of a (*currently missing*) 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 into the next field (through another missing fieldgate) and in 100 metres more go through a gate to the right of a double fieldgate. Beyond this curve right up a track for 100 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 along its rather faint former left-hand boundary.
 - 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 in 80 metres to reach the far side of the field in 150 metres more.
 - 29 Pass through a kissing gate to leave this field and carry on through a wood.
 - 30 In 60 metres emerge from the wood to carry on between plantations of mid-sized trees (*probably also destined to become a wood in due course*).
 - 31 In 200 metres, where the way ahead is blocked by a garden hedge and wall, turn right through a gap and then go left again along a path between bushes and young trees.
 - 32 In 70 metres you come to a wood and a footpath junction. **Here you have a choice:**
 - For the **Long Man Inn** or to see **Wilmington village** (which is quite pretty), *carry straight on through the wood* here and refer to paragraph 33 below.
 - **To go to Wilmington church without passing through the village**, *turn right* on the signposted Cuckmere Pilgrim's Path, onto a fenced path up the left-hand edge of a field. In 130 metres keep straight on uphill on a tarmac drive, soon with a field to your right and a fenced grassy space to your left. In 200 metres, opposite a stone seat on the right, turn left through a gate into the churchyard. Take the stony path diagonally across it to the church door. Turn left in front of the church, passing the **amazing yew tree** (reputed to be 1600 years old) and then round to the right beyond the church to descend to the road. *Continue with paragraph 36 overleaf.*
- Wilmington to Alfriston**
(4.3km/2.6 miles)
- 33 In 50 metres emerge from the wood and carry straight on down a driveway. In 70 metres you come to the road through the centre of the village. **Here you have a choice:**
 - *Turn left* here for the **Long Man Inn** in 200 metres. Retrace your

steps to this point after visiting the pub and carry on up the road.
Continue with paragraph 34 below.

- *Turn right* on the road to continue the walk without visiting the Long Man Inn. *Continue with paragraph 34 below.*
- 34** In 200 metres a pedestrian walkway starts on the right-hand side of the road, walled off from the road itself.
- 35** 40 metres after this starts, 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 via the far end of the churchyard (to the left of the church).
- 36** 130 metres past the church and just over the brow of the hill, with the **Long Man of Wilmington** now in view, veer left off the road onto a path that runs parallel to it on the other side of the hedge.
- 37** 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).

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.

- 38** At the top of this path, pass through a gate, and curve right with a grassy path to the fence at the bottom of the Long Man in 80 metres.

Here you have a choice:

- **The shortest and easiest route, saving 0.9km (0.9 miles) off the route**, is to turn right at the bottom of the Long Man, following a path across the hillside on a shelf, with an increasingly fine view to the right. In 400 metres this brings you to a gate. Beyond it go straight ahead at a path crossroads. In 100 metres more curve left with the now faint path over the top of the ridge until you come to a chalk track - the **South Downs Way**. Turn right on this and *continue with paragraph 43*.
 - **A slightly longer and more strenuous option**, which takes you up over the top of the Long Man with interesting views down onto it, is to turn left at the bottom of the Long Man, along a broad path across the face of the escarpment. *Continue with the directions in the next paragraph.*
- 39** In 300 metres turn sharp right (that is, slightly doubling back on yourself) up a broad path that slants steeply up the hillside on a shelf.
- 40** In 400 metres, at the top of the hill, follow the path over the brow and to a gate in a fence. Turn right after this gate.
- 41** The simplest route here is to cross the stile you see straight ahead in 60 metres, and carry on down a path with a fence and fine views to your right, passing right over the top of the Long Man. *Alternatively, you can go through the gate 50 metres to the left of the stile. Once through this gate, **fork right off the car-wide track**, to keep along the grassy edge of the escarpment, parallel to the path and fence below to your right. Keep to the right of a hummocky summit in 250 metres, and beyond it keep to the right of a large bowl in the Downs.*
- 42** Whichever route you choose, 400 metres brings you to a point where two tracks cross on a saddle. Take the track which curves left (the **South Downs Way**). In 100 metres you pass through a redundant gate.
- 43** In another 100 metres you pass a reservoir on your right. Remain on the track beyond it (though there are better views if you climb the grass bank to the right and walk along that)

- 44 In 400 metres go through a gate, cross a road, and carry on down the track beyond
- 45 In about 100 metres more, just after the track curves right, **turn left up wooded steps** and pass through a wooden gate to **leave the South Downs Way**, and go diagonally right down across a field, heading for the houses and church of Alfriston in the valley below.
- 46 In 400 metres, at the bottom of the field, pass through a gap about 70 metres from the left-hand edge of the field, and carry on across the next field, heading for a point half way up its left-hand side, 250 metres away.
- 47 When you get to this point, exit the field and turn right down the edge of the field beyond, with a wooded strip separating you from it.
- 48 In 130 metres, go down steps and through a gate and keep on downhill alongside a garden wall to the right.
- 49 In 40 metres you come to a road. Go right here and in 10 metres turn left down a tarmac footpath, crossing a bridge over a stream in 20 metres.
- 50 Carry on beyond the bridge between hedges. In 150 metres you come to a much longer footbridge over the Cuckmere River.
- Here you have a choice:**
- **To continue on the walk without stopping in Alfriston**, turn left on the riverside path just before the footbridge and *continue with paragraph 90 on page 9.*
 - **To stop in Alfriston for lunch or tea, (or to do b) Circular Walk to Berwick)** carry on across the footbridge and continue with the directions in the next paragraph.
- 51 Beyond the footbridge, keep straight on, ignoring side paths, to emerge onto the main street of Alfriston in 300 metres. Turn right here to pass **The George Inn** (a possible late lunch stop) in 50 metres on the right. Just beyond it is the **Apiary Coffee House and Garden**.
- 52 In another 70 metres you come to the main square of Alfriston. **The Singing Kettle** restaurant and tea room is on the far side and the **Cuckmere Community Bus** stop is in front of it. The **Badgers Tea House** is up the

road to the right of the Singing Kettle, in 50 metres on the left.

For b) Berwick Circular refer to the directions in paragraph 179 on page 14.

To continue with the main walk retrace your steps from the square back past *The George Inn*, passing it on your left, or turn left out of it if you have stopped for lunch there, and carry on with paragraph 87 on page 9.

Berwick station to Alciston (3km/1.8 miles)

These are the directions for a) Alternative start - see Walk Options on page 2.

- 53 Coming off platform 2 (the platform you arrive at when coming from Lewes), turn right to the road in 20 metres. Turn right on the road, crossing the level crossing.
- 54 40 metres beyond the level crossing, just after a bungalow on the right-hand side, turn right up a tarmac drive towards a green corrugated industrial unit. (This path is signposted, but the sign is hidden in a hedge).
- 55 In 30 metres pass to the right of the industrial unit to carry on up a footpath.
- 56 In 100 metres the path veers half left and in 25 metres more you emerge into a field. Go diagonally across this, aiming for a low farm building which soon comes into view in the distance.
- 57 In 250 metres leave the field through a gate and carry on with a hedge to the right and a field to the left.
- 58 In 500 metres carry on past a house and (derelict?) farm to the right.
- 59 Just beyond this, cross a track and in 30 metres more go on through a wooden gate and on down a path between hedges.
- 60 In 300 metres follow the path into a wood. In another 120 metres turn left at a three-way junction (a three-armed footpath sign here has fallen over), with a red tiled house visible ahead (just about visible in summer).
- 61 Follow this path just inside a wood, as it curves round the bottom of a field (to your right) and then turns left away from the field into the wood.

- 62** In another 30 metres the path emerges from the wood into a field. The right of way goes diagonally across this, but it may be easier to follow the field edge around to the left.
- 63** Doing this brings you in 200 metres to a car-wide gap at the bottom of the field with a three-way signpost. Go through this gap and straight on uphill across the next field, heading for the right-hand end of a clump of trees.
- 64** In 100 metres, when you come to the corner of this clump of trees, pick up a path just inside its right-hand edge to come to a road in 40 metres.
- 65** Cross the road and turn right. In 20 metres turn left through a gap in the hedge (a footpath sign has fallen over here). Follow the left-hand edge of the field beyond downhill.
- 66** In 200 metres at the bottom of this field, pass through the gap into the next one and carry straight on uphill across it, heading for a point 40 metres to the left of a line of mini-pylons.
- 67** In 250 metres, at the top of the field, pass through a rather overgrown wooded strip to a stile. Veer slightly left across the small field beyond to another stile in 50 metres.
- 68** This brings you out onto the A27, which you need to cross. **This is a very busy road which requires CARE and PATIENCE to cross**, particularly as there is a **blind bend/hill in both directions** here. *You may find it safer to **walk 70 metres to the right** and cross via the traffic island in the middle of the road. If you do this you might as well carry on down the lane into Alciston village - the road in paragraph 70 below.*
- 69** Assuming that you do manage to cross the A27 from in front of the stile, your onward route is to slant left across a cycle path on the far side of the road and through a wooden kissing gate into a field. Keep on down its right-hand edge.
- 70** **[!]** In 130 metres, in a corner of this field, just by a greenhouse, there is a stile hidden in the undergrowth to the right, with a yellow arrow it. Cross this and pass between houses out onto a road. Turn left on this into **Alciston** village.

Alciston to Alfriston **(3.6km/2.2 miles)**

- 71** In 400 metres you can see the church on your left. Turn left up a fenced path towards it. Note the remains of a **medieval dovecote** to your right.
- 72** In 70 metres, just before a gate into the churchyard, go left through a wooden gate and carry on with the churchyard wall to your right.
- 73** The wall curves around to reach another gate in 120 metres. Pass through this and turn immediately right through a gap into the next field, then turn left slightly downhill along its left-hand edge.
- 74** Carry on along the edge of this long field, with Berwick church just about visible above the clump of trees on the hill in the distance.
- 75** In 600 metres, at the far end of the field, pass through a gap into the next field and turn left along its edge.
- 76** In 150 metres, at a footpath post, turn right, on a low ridge between two large fields, heading once again towards Berwick church.
- 77** In 400 metres, at the end of the field, climb a small rise and keep to the left of a clump of trees towards houses.
- 78** In 60 metres a concrete track merges from the right: carry on down this, and in 100 metres keep straight on at a track crossroads.
- 79** In another 80 metres you come to a T-junction with a road. Turn left here to reach the **Cricketer's Arms** in 200 metres; otherwise, **turn right** up what soon becomes a concrete drive.
- 80** In 90 metres, just before the gates of a manor house, go left following the "To the church" sign, up a path that winds around between high walls. In 100 metres enter the churchyard. Turn right towards the door of **Berwick church** (*see panel overleaf*).
- 81** If not visiting the church, turn left just in front of the door. If coming out of the church after a visit, turn right. In 30 metres, at the corner of the church, turn right. In 40 metres exit the churchyard through a gate and turn right along the field edge.

Berwick church is famous for its murals, which were painted in 1941 by Duncan Grant, a member of the Bloomsbury Group. At the time he was living with Vanessa Bell, sister of Virginia Woolf, at the nearby farmhouse of Charleston. Bell had originally rented the farmhouse in the First World War when Grant was a conscientious objector and so had to come to Sussex to work on the land.

The paintings have many charming details - for example depictions of the four seasons on one side of the altar rail and the four Anglican sacraments on the other. But Grant's decoration of the church was controversial and not just on artistic grounds. The Bloomsbury Group had unconventional (ie modern) attitudes to sexual morality, and Grant and Bell had an illegitimate child, Angelica. She was used as the model for the Virgin Mary in the mural of the annunciation. This scandalised many Christians at the time.

Angelica remained unaware of her true father's identity until she was 16. Vanessa and her husband Clive Bell were already leading separate lives by the time she was born but he was happy to let her take his surname. Grant also went along with the deception. Vanessa thought this meant her daughter had two fathers. "In reality," Angelica later wrote, "I had none".

- 82 In 30 metres, at a footpath post, turn half left downhill, following a yellow arrow, on a path that heads out across the fields.
- 83 In 200 metres, at the bottom of the dip, pass through a gap in the hedge and carry on uphill between fields.
- 84 Keep straight on up and over the top of the hill, down through another shallower dip, and up the far side, until in 750 metres you merge with a gravel track coming from the right. Keep along this for 40 metres until you come to a tarmac road.
- 85 Go straight on down the road, ignoring a road to the left. Keep on this road, ignoring ways off, for 700 metres, until you reach the small central square of **Alfriston**. 50 metres *before* the square on the left you pass a back entrance to **Badgers Tea House and Gardens**, a possible light lunch or tea

stop, though currently to reach it you have to go into the square and turn left for 50 metres to find the front entrance, which is a little way beyond that of **The Singing Kettle** tea room.

- 86 Otherwise, NOT turning left in the square and carrying straight ahead up the main street of the village, in 100 metres you come to the **Apiary Coffee House and Garden** on the left and 10 metres beyond the **George Inn**.

Alfriston to Exceat **(5.4km/3.4 miles)**

- 87 60 metres beyond the George turn left down a footpath signposted to St Andrew's Church.
- 88 In 40 metres ignore the church and a signpost to the **Old Clergy House** right (*unless you want to visit them, or the **Shot Coffee House**, which is just ahead here on the left-hand side of the green*), and instead fork left down a path between stone walls.
- 89 In 70 metres merge with and then in 20 metres diverge from a track and go up a tarmac path to cross the footbridge over the Cuckmere River. Once over the bridge, turn right onto the riverside path.
- 90 Follow the riverside path along a low embankment, initially gently curved, then straight, until in 1km it turns sharply left through a double kissing gate. For the next 600 metres the river turns right, then left, then right to pass through another kissing gate.

The **Cuckmere River** is relatively small here, so it is a surprise to notice that it is tidal. High tide at Cuckmere Haven sends a pulse of river water back up the river and sometimes at this point it is even flowing backwards. It takes some time for this pulse to reach this high up the river, however, and by the time it does the tide is already falling down by the sea.

- 91 100 metres after this second kissing gate, ignore the South Downs Way turning to the left, to keep to the river bank, but in 60 metres more **turn right across a footbridge** over the Cuckmere River. Beyond, turn left through a kissing gate into a field, once more on a path along the embankment of the river, which is now to your left.

- 92** It is possible to stay on this riverside path all the way to Exceat if you wish, but otherwise, in 300 metres, cross a stile, and beyond it turn right to leave the embankment and head directly up the hill you can see ahead.
- 93** There is no clear path as you climb this hill, but your route is straight up the broad ridge onto **High and Over** hill, with increasingly fine views.
- 94** In 1.2km, near the top of the hill, a fence to the left and then a line of scrub funnels you to a kissing gate. Beyond this carry on up a path through scrub.
- 95** In 120 metres ignore a path to the right, to keep straight on.
- 96** In 70 metres more you pass a bench and the path becomes tarmac. In another 5 metres turn left at tarmac path T-junction.
- 97** In 120 metres you pass a roundel showing the view (though scrub has now obscured it). Keep straight on past this and 20 metres beyond it ignore a kissing gate to the right (again now hidden by scrub). In 25 metres more descend steps and through a kissing gate onto open hillside, with a wonderful view of Cuckmere Haven ahead of you.
- 98** You can go straight downhill at this point – a path soon materialises that follows the edge of the ridge down – but it is **very steep** and slippery when wet. A much pleasanter alternative is to **turn right along the line of scrub** immediately after passing through the kissing gate in paragraph 97, and go through a kissing gate into the next field in 40 metres.
- 99** Veer half left down across this field (which is open access land) heading for a clump of scrub on the lip of the escarpment 150 metres away.
- 100** Once you have passed beyond this clump veer left downhill, heading for the far bottom corner of the field, 500 metres away by the river.
- 101** When you get close to this far corner, there is a metal gate hidden in the fence about 40 metres uphill from the river. Pass through this and a metal kissing gate beyond, and carry straight on, with the river down a short escarpment to your left and a fenced-off field to your right.
- 102** In 300 metres you can see a pond below you: curve round to the right of this, following the escarpment as it descends into a dip.
- 103** At the bottom of the dip curve to the left and keep to the right of a line of scrub. Climb up a slope for 60 metres to emerge on the escarpment above the river once more.
- 104** Carry on along the top of the escarpment, following the river. You go up and down somewhat until in 600 metres a fence and a line of trees forces you uphill to the road.
- 105** Cross a stile and turn left on the road. In 130 metres the **Cuckmere Inn** is on the right, and just beyond it **Exceat Bridge**.
- To finish the walk here go over the bridge and carry on along the main road for 400 metres (there is a pavement on its right-hand side) to get to the Seven Sisters Visitor Centre bus stop. The first bus stop you see is on the opposite side of the road, and is served by buses in the direction of Eastbourne. But carry on around the bend in the road and you will see the westbound bus stop. Here you can get the 12, 12A or 12X bus to Seaford.*
- To do c) Ending at Birling Gap or East Dean, refer to paragraph 126 on page 11.*
- Exceat to Seaford**
(6.2km/3.9 miles)
- 106** Stay on the pub side of Exceat Bridge and walk down through its car park, with the river to the left.
- 107** In 80 metres, at the end of the car park, pass through a gate and on down a footpath.
- 108** In 250 metres there is a path junction, just before a fieldgate. Here you have a choice. I personally like the route along the river embankment, which is the path to the left at this junction: the slightly longer alternative is to go straight on through the fieldgate, which takes you on path along the right-hand edge of the valley.
- In **March** or **April** a third option suggested by one SWC walker takes you up over the downs past various large fields with sheep and lambs in. To do this **turn right** through a gate at the path junction and refer to paragraph 117 overleaf. Note

that this route **does not** go to Cuckmere Haven and it misses out some fine coastal views.

- 109** In 1.2km (via the river) or 1.6km (via the valley edge) you come to **Cuckmere Haven** beach. Once you have enjoyed this, turn right (when facing the sea) and walk up the track about 60 metres inland from the cottages.
- 110** This curves left in 40 metres and crosses a grassy slope. Here **veer slightly left, off the track** and onto the grass, to pass a footpath signpost and the end of the cottages in another 100 metres, and to continue along the broad grassy path along the cliff top.
- 111** Follow this path for 3km. It descends to Hope Gap and then climbs in a valley (with wonderful backward views of the Seven Sisters) up over Seaford Head, and down between a golf course and the sea to the outskirts of Seaford.
- 112** Once in Seaford, walk along the seafont promenade, passing the **Martello Tower** (a round defensive tower from the Napoleonic Wars - see panel on page 13) in 400 metres. Just before this (and a toilet block), there is a **tea kiosk** on the right.
- 113** 350 metres after the Martello Tower turn right off the seafont down a road called 'The Causeway'.
- 114** In 150 metres, at the end of this road, turn left in front of the Wellington pub and then right up Church Street.
- 115** In 60 metres, turn left uphill at a T-junction, passing the **Plough Inn**, a possible tea stop, and then the church on your right. At the top of the hill you come to a mini-roundabout with **The Trawlers** fish and chip restaurant on your right.
- 116** Ignore the first road to the left at the roundabout, but take the second left, the main road through Seaford, and the station is on the left in about 40 metres, with the **Steamworks** pub on its platform.

March and April sheep and lambs variation

This variation on the route from Exceat to Seaford, suggested by a SWC walker, takes you past several large fields with sheep and lambs in March and April. However, it cuts out Cuckmere Haven and the fine coastal

views just beyond it. It is roughly the same length as the main walk route

- 117** Having turned right through the gate at the junction in paragraph 108, keep on up a field edge.
- 118** In 500 metres pass through a gate.
- 119** In 350 metres pass through another gate and turn left on a wide fenced path towards a farm.
- 120** In 70 metres turn right up another fenced path towards houses.
- 121** In 200 metres, at a T-junction, turn left along a part-tarmac track between houses.
- 122** In 200 metres pass through a car blocking barrier. Beyond, follow a track and later a concrete lane for 700 metres to the top of the hill.
- 123** At the top of the hill keep straight ahead across a car park, to cross a stile 50 metres to the right of a barn. Keep straight on across the huge field beyond.
- 124** In 600 metres cross a stile and turn right on the coast path.
- 125** In 1km the path starts to descend steeply and in 650 metres more you come to Seaford's seafont promenade. Continue the directions with paragraph 112 on page 11.

Exceat to Birling Gap (5.8km/4.6 miles)

An alternative ending to the walk over the chalk cliffs of the Seven Sisters (option c).

- 126** From the Cuckmere Inn, cross the road bridge and 20 metres beyond it go right through a kissing gate, to emerge onto the bank of the Cuckmere River. Carry on along this, with the river to your right.
- 127** In 800 metres pass through a kissing gate and in another 100 metres, just after a body of water ends on your left, turn left onto a chalk path between two lagoons.
- 128** In 25 metres cross a stile to the right of a gate and in 40 metres more turn right on a gravel track.
- 129** In another 40 metres, at a junction marked by a footpath post, fork left following the South Downs Way.

- 130** In 70 metres pass through a wooden gate and up steps. Carry on uphill, with a wire fence to your right following the fence, as it curves gently right uphill.
- 131** In 750 metres pass through a gate and carry straight on.
- 132** 250 metres later you come to the summit of **Haven Brow**, the first (and highest) of the **Seven Sisters**, which is marked with a two-armed signpost. Bear left along the clifftop, following the South Downs Way signpost.
- 133** You now pass into three dips and up over three summits, in order **Short Bottom, Short Brow, Limekiln Bottom, Rough Brow, Rough Bottom** and **Brass Point**. After the last of these you have a long 400 metre descent (the lateral distance, not the amount of vertical descent) to **Gap Bottom** before rising for 150 metres to reach the peak of **Flagstaff Point**, which is marked by a low Sarsen stone monument.
- 134** Beyond this keep straight on along the clifftop path for 2km over three more humps – one minor one – **Flat Hill** – and two major ones – **Baily’s Hill** and **Went Hill**.
- 135** 170 metres after the summit of Went Hill you pass through a wooden kissing gate onto a path through scrub. In 120 metres you come to a T-junction with a stony path.

Here you have a choice:

- **To continue the walk to East Dean without stopping at Birling Gap**, turn left at the T-junction and continue with the directions in paragraph 136 opposite.
- **To visit the beach or tea room at Birling Gap, or to end the walk here** (when the number 13 bus is running), turn right at the T-junction. In 25 metres turn left with the path, past a wooden fieldgate onto what is now a gravel track. Carry on down this track and in 250 metres, 30 metres before you come to a road, turn right at steps leading down to a toilet block, and across the car park to the cliff top of Birling Gap, where you will find the **National Trust tea room** and visitor centre, the recommended tea stop. Here are also steps down the cliff to the beach. **The bus stop for Seaford** is on **this** side of the

road just before the car park, while **the bus to Eastbourne** goes from the bus stop on the **other** side of the road, just before the car park.

If you want to continue the walk to East Dean from Birling Gap, retrace your steps up the track. In 250 metres the track goes through a gate and turns right. In 25 metres ignore the South Downs Way signposted to the left and keep straight on. Continue with the directions in the next section.

Birlinging Gap to East Dean
(1.6km/1 mile)

- 136** In 70 metres or so pass through a gate into an open field, and keep uphill across this, with fine views of the sea behind and to the left.
- 137** In 200 metres pass through another gate and keep uphill on a faint grassy track.
- 138** In 600 metres, near the top of the hill, you pass a barn with a red metal roof. Here **veer right off the track to converge with the line of scrub** (which has a brief gap shortly afterwards, but then resumes).
- 139** 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.
- 140** Carry on down this path, passing through a gate in 150 metres and in 120 metres gateposts with a gate missing. You are now in an open field. Keep on down its right-hand edge, passing to the left of a house and through a fieldgate, to come to a tarmac lane in 100 metres
- 141** Follow this tarmac lane into the centre of East Dean (a village green). Turn right across the green towards the **Tiger Inn** pub.
- 142** 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**.
- 143** In 20 metres, just after passing a wall to your left, turn left along the wall along the top of a car park.
- 144** In 50 metres, at the end of the car park, carry on down a path with a wall to your left and a field fence to your right.

- 145** Follow this path through two gates and over a low wall on steps, to come to the main road in 200 metres.
- 146** Turn right on the road. The bus stop to Seaford is in 50 metres on the same side of the road, while the one to Eastbourne is in another 40 metres on the opposite side of the road.

Seaford to Exceat **(6.2km/3.9 miles)**

These are directions for option d)
Reverse walk: Seaford to Berwick

- 147** Leaving Seaford Station turn right. In 40 metres turn right down Church Street, heading towards the church, ignoring a road (Dane Road) to the right.
- 148** In another 70 metres you pass the church on your left. In a further 100 metres, as the road curves to the left, continue straight on (still on Church Street).
- 149** In 60 metres, at a T-junction, turn left and in 10 metres turn right along The Causeway.
- 150** In 150 metres you come to the seafront, where you cross the road and turn left along the seafront promenade towards the chalk cliffs.
- 151** In 350 metres you pass the **Martello Tower**.

This **Martello Tower** is the most westerly of a chain of 103 such fortresses built to protect the South East coast of England against invasion in the early part of the Napoleonic Wars. The other end of the chain is in Aldeburgh in Suffolk.

- 152** In a further 400 metres, at the start of the cliffs, and just before the harbour wall, veer left up a curving gravel path that climbs a grassy slope.
- 153** In 100 metres veer right off this path onto the grassy slope. You are now on the cliff top path, climbing uphill.
- 154** You now follow the cliff top path for 3km to Cuckmere Haven. Initially there is a golf course to your left. In 500 metres you come to the top of the hill and 400 metres later you pass a radar beacon (a navigational aid for commercial aircraft) to your left. The golf course ends soon after. The white cliffs of the Seven Sisters are now visible in the distance..

- 155** 1.4km later, after a long steady descent, the latter part of in a shallow valley with fine views of the Seven Sisters ahead, you reach **Hope Gap**, where some steps lead down to the sea.

- 156** Ignore the steps and instead bear slightly left here, following the cliff top path up a steep slope. The path soon levels out and in 500 metres, you come to a row of cottages.

- 157** *The track downhill past the cottages no longer reaches the sea due to erosion, so carry on past it on the edge of a grassy space, with scrub to your right in 30 metres.*

- 158** In 120 metres more you come down onto the shingle beach of **Cuckmere Haven**.

*The sea is making a determined effort to break through the beach to the marsh here. If it succeeds and the river path becomes inaccessible, an alternative route is to turn **sharp left** just before the beach, which takes you onto a path along the valley edge, which leads all the way to the Cuckmere Inn (paragraph 162 below).*

- 159** Otherwise continue straight across the shingle, passing a small lagoon on your left, until you come to the bank of the **Cuckmere River** in 100 metres.

- 160** In 1.2km, 300 metres before the road bridge, the bank makes a sharp turn left along a line of shrubs.

- 161** 80 metres later, at a crosspaths, go right to follow a path between two barbed wire fences.

- 162** In 250 metres pass through a wooden gate to enter the car park of the **Cuckmere Inn**. Carry on through the car park for 80 metres to reach the main road. The entrance to the pub is on the left.

Exceat to Alfriston **(5.4km/3.4 miles)**

- 163** Carry on past the pub (or turn left out of it after lunch) to cross the main road and turn left along the pavement on its far side.

- 164** In 130 metres turn right onto a signposted footpath into a field.

- 165** Contour across the field to come to an escarpment above the river and follow the path along this, with the river to your right.

- 166** The path climbs, then descends, then climbs again. In 600 metres, after the second climb, a track veers left, but your route is the narrower path slanting downhill along the hedgerow into a dip.
- 167** In 60 metres, at the bottom of the dip, keep ahead up a hillside, passing a pond right and then following a fence to your left, still with the river down the escarpment to your right.
- 168** In 300 metres pass through a kissing gate into a vast grassy field. Your ultimate destination here is the top of **High and Over Hill**, diagonally up to your left. But rather than making a direct beeline for it, turn left to skirt to the left of a rough bowl on the hillside, about 350 metres away.
- 169** After you pass the bowl keep on uphill for another 100 metres to pass around the top of another bit of rough escarpment, veering right after it. Then converge with the scrub line at the top of the hill (which should be to your left) to pass through a kissing gate next to the line of scrub in 170 metres.
- 170** In 40 metres turn left through a kissing gate in the field corner and walk up steps to come in 50 metres to a stone viewpoint (though in fact the view is better at the kissing gate you have just passed through).
- 171** Keep straight on beyond the viewpoint, with the escarpment to your right on a tarmac path into the scrub.
- 172** In 120 metres ignore a path to the left (which leads to a car park, though this is not obvious from this point), and keep on the path with the scrub-covered escarpment to your right.
- 173** In 70 metres a path joins from the left. In another 120 metres you emerge onto a broad, gently descending grassy ridge curving round in a crescent. Follow this all the way to the bottom of the hill.
- 174** In 1.2km you come back to the river bank. Turn left along this river bank.
- 175** In 300 metres cross the river on a footbridge, and again turn left along its far bank. Ignore a path to the right in 60 metres to keep on the river bank.
- 176** In 1.7km, just after curving around past a church on the opposite bank, you come to another footbridge: turn left across this into the village of Alfriston.
- 177** On the far side of the footbridge keep straight on up a path. In 70 metres there are stone walls either side of the path. In 50 metres more, where the walls end, the **Shot Coffee House** is immediately behind you to your left. Otherwise, keep straight on for another 40 metres to come to the main street of the village.
- 178** Turn right here to pass the **George Inn** in 50 metres, with the **Apiary Coffee House and Garden** just beyond it. In another 80 metres you come to the main square of Alfriston with **The Singing Kettle** ahead and the **Badgers Tea House** just around the corner to its right.

Alfriston to Berwick station
(5.2km/3.2 miles)

*This is the ending of **b) Berwick Circular** and also **d) Reverse walk: Seaford to Berwick**.*

- 179** Take the road forking left from the end of the square (West Street, though the nameplate is not obvious), passing the *back* entrance to the Badgers Tea House on your right in 50 metres. In 80 metres more ignore Sloe Lane forking right.
- 180** In another 600 metres, at the top of the hill, you reach a track and road crossroads: here go straight on, down a gravel track.
- 181** In 40 metres, fork right off the track down a path signposted WW (for Wealden Walks) towards Berwick church which is soon visible on the hill in the distance.
- 182** Follow the path down across the dip and up over a hill, and then down into another dip, until in 1km you come up to the top of a hill, with a line of trees in front of you.
- 183** Here veer right on a faint track. In 40 metres turn left through a gate into the churchyard of **Berwick church**.
- 184** Turn right to pass around the church and then turn left beyond it to find the main door. The church is well-worth a quick visit to see the murals painted in it by the Bloomsbury Group – see panel on page 9.
- 185** Coming out of the church carry straight on down the path (or turn right when

- level with the door if not stopping) and exit the churchyard by a kissing gate in 50 metres, ignoring a tarmac path to the left.
- 186** Carry on down the field, heading for a stile beyond the trees, midway along the bottom edge. In 150 metres cross the stile and follow the path beyond with a hedge to your right and nettles and scrub to your left.
- 187** In 50 metres carry on down a concrete path between a wall and a hedge.
- 188** In 100 metres the path curves right and then left onto a gravel drive, passing a pond to your left.
- 189** In 40 metres, beyond the pond, follow the track round to the left.
- 190** In 70 metres you come to a T-junction, with the **Cricketer's Arms** ahead. Turn right on the road in front of it.
- 191** In 150 metres cross the busy A27, **taking great care**. Ignore the minor road ahead, but turn left on the pavement.
- 192** In 40 metres go right across a stile to the right of a metal fieldgate, and turn half left across the field beyond, aiming to the left of a tree on its far side.
- 193** In 100 metres cross a footbridge to the left of the tree and keep on along the left-hand edge of the field beyond.
- 194** In 250 metres exit this field through a gap in its top left-hand corner and go across a grassy strip and over a stile into a field. Cross this diagonally (ie keeping straight on from the stile).
- 195** In 250 metres cross a ditch into the next field and carry on uphill.
- 196** In 130 metres, at the top of the hill, cross a stile. Your onward route is not at all obvious here, but in fact it is the same direction as before – that is, half right from the stile, aiming roughly for a distant telegraph pole.
- 197** In 60 metres cross into another field and keep on in the same direction, diagonally across the field, aiming to a point about 50 metres to the left of a telegraph pole, which is 300 metres away. **The exit from this field is not visible until you are about two thirds of the way across it**, when you should be able to see a gap marked by a footpath sign.
- 198** When you get to the gap, cross a footbridge and a band of trees, to emerge in 20 metres into a field. Veer left up across it, heading for a house on a hill.
- 199** In 80 metres exit this field in its top corner onto a road. Cross this (watch out for the occasional fast car) and go on up a gravel driveway to Stonery Farm.
- 200** In 50 metres pass through a gate to the left of metal gates. Follow the driveway beyond.
- 201** In 350 metres, at the top of the hill, just before the driveway enters a (derelict?) farm complex, go right on a car-wide grass path, with the farm buildings now to your left.
- 202** In 80 metres, where the farm buildings end, pass through a gap (a fieldgate missing here) and keep on along a broad grassy path with a field to your right and a hedgerow to your left.
- 203** In 500 metres go through a gate and carry straight on across the field beyond.
- 204** In 250 metres exit the field down an unmarked path in its far left-hand corner. Follow this for 130 metres past an industrial unit and out onto a road. Turn left to come to Berwick station in 40 metres, with the **Berwick Inn** on your right. You can sit in the garden of this pub in summer while waiting for your train, as there is ample time while the level crossing barriers come down to cross the road to the London-bound platform (which is the one on this side of the tracks).