

Eastbourne to Birling Gap last checked	Birling Gap to East Dean last checked	East Dean to E'bourne last checked	
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Eastbourne to East Dean

Via Beachy Head and Birling Gap

Length	Main walk	11.5km (7.1 miles)
	a) Eastbourne to Exceat	14.8km (9.2 miles)
	b) Via Flagstaff Point	13.5km (8.4 miles)
	c) Eastbourne Circular	17.9km (11.1 miles)

Toughness 5 out of 10: one very steep climb up onto Beachy Head: Three short climbs in the afternoon: otherwise flat or downhill

Map OS Explorer OL25 (formerly 123), Landranger 199

Features

You start this walk along Eastbourne's pleasant seafront, and then follow the coast into a hidden valley (with fine downland flowers and butterflies in summer), from where it is a steep climb up onto Beachy Head for lunch. The next stretch is one of the great classic coastal walks, a rolling descent along chalk cliffs down to Birling Gap for tea. From there, you have a gentle climb inland, with fine sea and downland views, to the village of East Dean, where there are further refreshment options, and frequent buses back to Eastbourne.

Walk options

a) The obvious way to extend this walk is to **carry on from Birling Gap along the coast over the Seven Sisters**, a very famous section of undulating chalk cliffs, to Exceat, a strenuous but very scenic 5.6km (3.5 miles) from Birling Gap, making a total walk of **14.8km (9.2 miles)** from Eastbourne. The way to Exceat is never in doubt: from the summit of Haven Brow, the last and highest Sister, you veer right at the signpost to follow the South Downs Way to the road and Exceat Visitor Centre. Here there is the Saltmarsh tea room, and 400 metres further down the road to the west, the Cuckmere Inn. From both places you can get the 12 or 12A bus to Seaford or to Eastbourne. (Seaford is nearer from this point and your Eastbourne train ticket will usually be accepted on trains out of Seaford).

b) A shorter version of the above is to **go over the first three Sisters to Flagstaff Point**, marked by a Sarsen stone monument, and here turn inland up to East Dean, but the route up to East Dean is not quite as scenic as the direct one from Birling Gap. This route is 4.3km (2.7 miles)

from Birling Gap, making a total walk of **13.4km (8.3 miles)** to East Dean. *To do this option follow the main walk to Birling Gap and then continue with paragraph 29 on page 5.*

c) Another idea is to to **make a circular walk** by carrying on from East Dean back to Eastbourne, adding 6.4km (4 miles) to the walk, to make a total walk of **17.9km (11.1 miles)**. This route is not as scenic as the coastal parts of the walk, but is a pleasant enough walk initially along a quiet downland valley and then over the ridge and down into Eastbourne. It has the virtue of introducing the little visited territory at the heart of the downs, but does involve a mile on Eastbourne streets to get to the station at the end. It is possible to cut out this last section (but also quite a nice descent into Eastbourne) by taking a bus halfway, 3.2km (2 miles) into the extension. *To do this option, follow the main walk to East Dean and then switch to paragraph 40 on page 5.*

Transport

Trains to **Eastbourne** take 1.5 hours and go from **Victoria** station at 16 and 46 past. The **9.46** gets you to Eastbourne at 11.15, which will get you to the Beachy Head pub in reasonable time, but if you are doing this walk in the summer and fancy a swim before lunch, get the **9.16**. Buy a **day return to Eastbourne**.

To get back from East Dean catch the frequent (as often as every ten minutes and operating well into the evening) **12/12A bus** to Eastbourne, which takes 15 minutes. For more details, see the end of the walk directions. There is also a **13X bus**, 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. **For the rest of the year** (mid September to mid June), this three times a day service operates on **Sundays only**.

Lunch and tea

The **Beachy Head pub**, 5.4km (3.3 miles) into the walk, offers a good selection of food, and has both an outside terrace and inside tables with fine views south westwards over the downs and sea. It now offers table service, but you can also order at the bar. It is open all afternoon, year round.

Birling Gap's National Trust tea room. 9.2km (5.7 miles) into the walk, has a lovely sea front location. It is open till 5pm daily from March to October, 4pm in winter.

In East Dean the **Tiger Inn** has been a favourite with walkers for generations, and was revamped in 2012. See www.beachyhead.org.uk/the_tiger_inn

Next to the Tiger Inn is the **Hiker's Rest** tearoom which is open till 4pm weekdays and 4.30pm weekends in winter (closed early January), and 4.30pm weekdays and 5pm weekends in summer.

For fish and chips, the **Qualisea** restaurant in Eastbourne is recommended. From the Arndale Centre stop on the bus (see the end of the walk directions) carry on along the main shopping street, forking to the right at the end of the Arndale Centre down the pedestrianised section. Qualisea is on the left at the start of the last stretch of road to the seafront.

On the **circular walk to Eastbourne**, Grove Road, near the end of the walk, has cafes and there are pubs by the station.

Swimming notes

Eastbourne is a great place to swim in summer, with a long beach of shingle with good depth at high tide, descending to flat sand at low tide. The Beachy Head end of the beach is more unspoilt and less frequented, but at the town end of the beach, the pier and the white houses of the seafront make a nice backdrop, and there are also lifeguards here in summer. At low tide, it seems to be possible to wade out into deeper water at the pier end of the beach, but at the Beachy Head end an area of rocks and rock pools, bounded by an offshore reef, makes swimming impossible.

Birling Gap 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 swim, you get a fabulous panorama of the white cliffs of the Seven Sisters.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Eastbourne station to Beachy Head (5.4km/3.3 miles)

1. Come out of Eastbourne station via the ticket office exit on the left-hand side of the concourse, cross a side road and carry straight on down Eastbourne's shopping street, Terminus Road.
2. Stay on the shopping street, ignoring a major road to the right in 200 metres and another in 150 metres more.
3. In another 150 metres, where the road forks, take the right fork (more or less straight on, in fact) down a pedestrianised road (still Terminus Road, though not named as such here). This crosses two other roads, becomes a car road again, and then brings you to the seafront in another 400 metres.
4. At the seafront, cross the coast road, and descend from the higher level to the lower of the promenade, the path just at the top of the beach. Turn right along this, passing around or through the bandstand in 150 metres.
5. 200 metres beyond the bandstand leave the promenade (*or see ** in para 7 below*) to climb up across a small park to the circular Martello Tower (called "The Wish Tower" here).
6. Skirt around around on the inland edge of the Wish Tower, ie between it and the toilet block. Beyond, curve left to descend steps and then pass the cafe to pick up a terrace path to the **left** of the hedge on the left-hand edge of the lawn beyond, parallel to the sea.
7. You should now be on a broad tarmac (and later gravel) path that runs parallel to and above the promenade with fine views. (*** Another way to find this higher path is to stay on the promenade as it rounds the Martello tower, and then take any of the steps up to the right once the promenade straightens out: but I prefer the above route which gives you a nice aerial view of the seafront and a close look at the Martello tower*).
8. Stay on this upper promenade for 1.2km until it ends in a mini-open area: here take any path up to the right (eg a small one marked Chesterfield Walk, or a broader track just before it) to come in a few metres to a road.
9. Turn left on the road. Where it ends in 300 metres or so, just after St Bede's

School on the left, carry on past a refreshment kiosk onto the grass and then immediately **turn half left uphill** on the rightmost of two grassy paths.

10. In 100 metres, at the top of the rise, you pass a bench, with a fine view over Eastbourne to your left. Carry on over the hilltop, forking left downhill just beyond its crest to keep to the clifftop path. Follow this as it crosses a large bowl, with playing fields at its bottom.
11. Climbing up the far side of the bowl, ignore a broad grassy path climbing up the hill to your right. Instead, just beyond the crest of the hill **either** descend steps to cross a depression filled with thorn bushes **** or** do not descend the steps but keep right to skirt around the top of this bowl on a broad grassy path. (*It does not matter which route you take: whichever seems more obvious or agreeable.*)

****** If you go down the steps, ignore a path slanting off to the left shortly after the bottom of the steps. This leads to the beach at the base of Beachy Head, which is worth a visit at low tide, but is a big detour off this walk.

12. Either way in 200 metres after the steps you find yourself in another large open bowl in the hillside. In 300 metres on the far side of this, there is no choice but to veer right, steeply uphill, on a broad grassy path. (*Ahead leads to a cliff edge*).
13. You now have a **very steep climb** to Beachy Head, though with fine backward views. At the top of the slope you cross a low wooden fence and come to a monument to World War II bomber pilots who used Beachy Head as a navigation point. Here ignore the tarmac path going left and right and carry straight on up the grassy slope. Coming over the top of the hill you see the **Beachy Head** pub straight ahead.

Beachy Head to Birling Gap (3.8km/2.4 miles)

14. Coming out of the pub, turn right (or turn left before the road if not stopping) to carry on westwards on along the clifftop, downhill.
15. The way is not in doubt. You cross two big dips, the second of them before **Belle Tout lighthouse** (*the original lighthouse, which was often shrouded in*

fog, prompting construction of another lighthouse at the foot of the cliffs. This modern lighthouse can be seen when you look backwards on the climb up to Belle Tout, which is now an upmarket hotel.)

16. After passing Belle Tout on its landward side, there is a long gentle descent to Birling Gap, and its National Trust café.

From Birling Gap, follow the directions in the next two paragraphs for all options.

Birling Gap to East Dean **(2.3km/1.4 miles)**

17. From the cafe, walk inland through the car park and past the toilet block, and turn left on the car wide gravel track beyond it, which leads uphill past some houses.
18. In 300 metres the track goes through a gate and turns right. In 20 metres more, a path to the left leads onto the open clifftop
 - For option **a) to carry on across the Seven Sisters to Exceat**, 5.6km (3.5 miles) from this point, turn left on this path. Follow it across eight summits (*yes, there are **eight** Seven Sisters: count 'em!*). At the last and highest one, Haven Brow, which looks down upon the cove of Cuckmere Haven, veer right following the South Downs Way sign and follow the path downhill and along a tarmac track to emerge onto the road opposite the Seven Sisters Visitor Centre in Exceat. You can get a **number 12 or 13X bus** from here to Seaford (same side of the road) or cross the road for buses to Eastbourne. Cross the road and enter the Visitor Centre complex for the **Saltmarsh tea room**. Following the road left (westwards) for 400 metres brings you to the **Cuckmere Inn**, which also has a bus stop.
 - For option **b) to East Dean via Flagstaff Point** also turn left on the path and continue with the directions in paragraph 29 on page 5.
19. To ignore both these options and stay on the main walk route (*also the route for option **c) Eastbourne Circular***), ignore this turning and **keep straight on uphill** on the gravel track, going away from the sea.
20. 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. In 200 metres pass through another gate and keep uphill on a faint grassy track.

21. In 600 metres, near the top of the hill, you pass a barn with a striking orange roof. Here **veer right off the track to converge with the line of scrub** (which has a brief gap shortly afterwards, but then resumes).
22. 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.
23. Carry on down this path, passing through a gate in 150 metres and in 100 metres another. You are now in an open field. Keep on down its right-hand edge, passing to the left of a house, to come to a tarmac lane in 100 metres
24. Follow this tarmac lane into the centre of East Dean (a village green). Turn right across the green towards the **Tiger Inn** pub.
25. 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**.
26. Carry on down the brick-paved driveway to the road and turn left on it.
27. *Ignore the bus stop towards the end of this road on the right-hand side unless you want to catch the 13X bus back to Birling Gap and Beachy Head, in which case this is where it stops.* For all other buses, carry on to the main road: the stop for Eastbourne is **across** the main road, on the **right**.
 - To do the **Eastbourne Circular** walk, switch at this point to the directions in paragraph 40 on page 5.
28. When the bus comes, ask for a ticket to the Arndale Centre. The journey takes about 15 minutes, and the Arndale Centre stop is about 150 metres beyond the railway station. Getting off the bus, simply walk back up the road a short distance to find the station. If you stay on the bus it will take you within a few minutes to Eastbourne Pier, its end stop. This is a good option if you want to have fish and chips, or a final walk by the sea. For the **Qualisea** fish and chip restaurant, walk 150 metres south west from the pier and take the first major road inland – Terminus Road, which also

leads back to Eastbourne's main shopping street and the station.

Birling Gap to East Dean via Flagstaff Point (4.3km/2.7 mi)

This is a route takes you over three of the Seven Sisters before turning inland to East Dean.

29. Turn left through the gate onto the clifftop path mentioned in paragraph 18. Carry on 1.6km over two major and one minor hills, and up onto **Flagstaff Point**, marked by its Sarsen stone monument.
30. At the monument, turn right to head inland on a broad but faint grassy track, your direction 20 degrees.
31. In 500 metres, pass through a kissing gate to the left of a fieldgate, and continue straight on, heading for a small group of trees on the horizon, your direction now 60 degrees.
32. After 500 metres, 100 metres before the trees, take a faint right fork in the path which leads to the right of the trees, your direction 60 degrees.
33. In another 250 metres, 150 metres after passing the trees, pass through a gap between a gorse bush on your left and a scrubby tree on your right.
34. 100 metres further on you come to a road with a cattle grid with a roadside parking area beyond.
35. Just before the cattle grid, cross the stile to your right to follow the line of the fence to your right, your direction 120 degrees initially.
36. In 160 metres, **ignore a kissing gate in the fence to your left, but instead veer half left away from the fence**, heading for the right end of a line of trees 150 metres away, your direction 90 degrees.
37. When you get to the trees, keep to the right of them for another 100 metres, to reach the corner of the field. Here take the steps over a flint and concrete wall into a field to your right (**not the field straight ahead!**).
38. On the far side of the wall, turn left and follow it downhill. In 200 metres pass through a gate. and follow the concrete path for 90 metres down to the road. Turn left on this.
39. Follow this road (Went Way) for 50 metres to a junction with Upper Street

where you can see the **Tiger Inn**, directly ahead of you on the other side of the village green. Cross the green towards it and resume the main walk directions at paragraph 25 on page 4.

East Dean to Eastbourne (6.4km/4 miles)

40. Cross over the main road in paragraph 27 on page 4 and turn right along its far pavement, passing the bus stop.
41. In 250 metres turn left down Downs View Lane, a signposted bridleway. Carry on down this lane ignoring ways off.
42. In 400 metres, where the lane ends at a fieldgate (with another 50 metres further on), veer right off the track onto a grass path which in 20 metres passes a vehicle-blocking barrier.
43. In another 100 metres pass a grey barn on your left. Carry on along fenced-in bridleway along a valley.
44. The way is now not in doubt for 1.3km. After that distance you pass another car-blocking barrier and carry straight on, now with a stone wall to your left. In another 150 metres there is a farm to your left and the bridleway merges with its concrete driveway. Follow this to the right, uphill.
45. In another 150 metres a sign rather unexpectedly warns you of golf balls (presumably coming over the hill to your left, though it is unclear how a walker could see or anticipate them).
46. Carrying on up the concrete driveway, in 600 metres you come to the top of the ridge and a T-junction with the South Downs Way. Turn right here and follow the SDW for 150 metres until you come to a main road.
47. At the road turn right for 30 metres to come to the signposted road crossing point for the SDW. *40 metres further on at this point, on the **same** side of the road, is a **bus stop** from where very regular **No 12 buses** go to **Eastbourne**, though it is a bleak place to wait on an inclement day.* However, to continue the walk cross the main road with care and carry on up the SDW on the other side, initially gravel and then a grassy path, with a fine view of Eastbourne to the left.
48. Where the track forks in 100 metres you can take either branch, as they converge

again later, but otherwise ignore ways off.

49. In 200 metres more you are nearing the top of a rise with a trigonometry point (a low concrete pillar) on it. 100 metres **before** the trig point, at a three-armed footpath post **fork left** on a public bridleway (where the right-hand fork is the South Downs Way).
50. You are now on a car-wide grassy path, which descends more or less along the line of the ridge.
51. Ignore ways off. In 300 metres keep to the main path as it curves slightly right, now heading for a tall white building in the distance on the Eastbourne seafront.
52. In another 200 metres, carry on down the **right-hand edge** of a broad strip between trees, ignoring a fork down its left-hand side. You are still heading directly for the tall building on the seafront.
53. In 120 metres, where the tree edge ends, keep straight on downhill, still heading for the tall building.
54. In another 150 metres the path swings to the left around a tree corner and becomes more of a distinct track.
55. In another 180 metres you can see houses to the right over a brick wall. Keep parallel to the brick wall and in another 100 metres take the right fork to remain alongside it.
56. In 150 metres more you come to a road. Turn right downhill on this, ignoring a side road - Link Road - immediately to the right.
57. In 200 metres merge with a road from the right and keep straight on downhill at a five-way road junction. In 300 metres more you come to a slantways crossroad with a busier road.
 - **If you keep straight ahead at this junction** - down Carlisle Road, though the sign is not very obvious - you come in 1km to the seafront right by the Wish Tower and you can then make your way inland along Terminus Road, about 100 metres before the pier, to the station. This adds about 1.3km to the walk.

However, **to go directly to the station**, turn left onto the larger road at the crossroads (Mead Road, but again the sign is not obvious) and continue with the directions in the next paragraph.

58. Ignoring ways off, in 700 metres there is a church on the right-hand side of the road. Here ignore Saffron Road to the left, but beyond it fork left around a grand ornate building (Eastbourne town hall) up a No Entry shopping street (Grove Road, but again the sign is not obvious).
59. There are some refreshment options in this street. Otherwise in 350 metres, at the top of the road, you come to a major road junction and **Eastbourne station** is visible to the right.

