

Eastbourne to Birling Gap last checked	Birlinging Gap to East Dean last checked	Birlinging Gap to East Dean via Flagstaff last checked	Eastbourne ending 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 Kitchen cafe, as well as the Grab and Go kiosk, and you can get 12, 12A or 12X bus on the main road 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). 400 metres down the road from the Visitor Centre is the Cuckmere Inn, but there is no longer a bus stop here, so you have to walk back to the Visitor Centre for onward travel.

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 33 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 44 on page 5.*

Transport

Trains to **Eastbourne** take 1.5 hours and go from **Victoria** station. Get **the train nearest to 9.45am** to get 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 train nearest to 9.15. 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/12X 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**. See www.buses.co.uk for the latest details

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. It has both inside and outside tables. It is open all afternoon daily for drinks, and serves food 11.30am to 3pm and 5.30pm to 9pm Monday to Friday, 11.30am to 9pm Saturday, and 11.30pm to 7pm Sunday.

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. It serves light meals, jacket potatoes, sandwiches and paninis, as well as hot drinks and cakes.

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 is 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 (though the section just seaward of the steps is *relatively* free of rocks). 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.

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 100 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 on a tarmac path. Beyond, curve left to descend steps and then pass the cafe restaurant 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 Wish 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-up look at the 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 40 metres up level with a road.
9. Turn left on the road. Where it ends in 450 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 150 metres, at the top of the rise, you pass a bench, with a fine view over Eastbourne to your left. 30 metres after the bench merge with a path coming uphill from the left and carry on over the hill top.
11. In 120 metres, just beyond the crest of the hill, fork left downhill, following an England Coast Path arrow on a post.
12. Follow the path as it crosses a large bowl, with playing fields at its bottom
13. Climbing up the far side of the bowl, ignore a broad grassy path climbing up the hill to your right. In another 120 metres, just before the crest of the hill, ignore a path forking left *.

(If you go down this path and then take the path slanting left shortly after the bottom of the steps, it 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.)*

14. Having ignored the path forking left, keep straight on, following the England Coast Path and South Downs Way arrows, skirting a landslip area to your left.
15. In 200 metres more you find yourself crossing another large bowl in the hillside. In 400 metres more, 150 metres after you start to climb out of the bowl and just past a bench on the right, there is no choice but to turn right, steeply uphill, on a broad grassy path. (*Ahead leads to a cliff edge.*)
16. You now have a **very steep climb** to Beachy Head, though with fine backward views. At the top of the slope cross a 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)

17. 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.
18. 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.*)

19. 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)**

20. 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.
21. In 300 metres the track goes through a fieldgate (usually open) and turns right. In 25 metres more, the South Downs Way is signposted to the left.
- 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 **Cafe Just Around the Corner**. 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 33 on page 5.
22. 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.
23. 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.
24. 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).
25. 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.
26. 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 a field. Keep on down its right-hand edge, passing to the left of a house, to come to a tarmac lane in 100 metres
27. Follow this tarmac lane into the centre of East Dean (a village green). Turn right across the green towards the **Tiger Inn** pub.
28. 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**.
29. In 20 metres, just after passing a wall to your left, turn left along the wall along the top of a car park.
30. In 50 metres, at the end of the car park, carry on down a path with a wall to your left and a field to your right.
31. Follow this path through three gates and over a low wall on steps, to come to the main road in 180 metres.
32. 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. The bus journey to Eastbourne takes about 15 minutes and stops right by the station.
- To do the **Eastbourne Circular** walk, carry on past the Eastbourne bus stop and switch to the directions in paragraph 45 on page 5.

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.

33. Having turned left onto the South Downs Way as mentioned in paragraph 21, carry on along the cliff tops for 1.6km over two major hills (**Went Hill** and **Baily's Hill**) and one minor one (**Flat Hill**), and then up onto **Flagstaff Point**, marked by its Sarsen stone monument (and with a fine view back to Birling Gap and Belle Tout lighthouse behind it).
34. At the monument turn right to head inland on a faint grassy track along the top of the ridge, passing through a gate in a wire livestock fence in 30 metres.
35. In 500 metres pass through a kissing gate to the left of a fieldgate and continue straight on, climbing gently and heading for a small group of isolated trees on the horizon, which become more prominent as you walk.
36. After 500 metres, 100 metres before the trees, leave the faint track you are on to pass to **right** of the trees (which turn out to be hawthorn bushes, bent over by the wind).
37. 170 metres after passing the trees, pass through a gap between a gorse bush on your left and a scrubby tree on your right.
38. 100 metres further pass through a gate to the right of a cattle grid and carry on up the tarmac road beyond.
39. In 150 metres turn right through a gate to the right of a fieldgate into a field, and bear slightly left, aiming for the point where a line of trees meets the left-hand end of a stone wall.
40. In 100 metres, when you get to the wall, pass through a gate tucked away behind a fieldgate, to pass the end of the wall and carry on down the left-hand edge of the field beyond, heading for houses.
41. In 150 metres, about 50 metres before the field end, curve right on a grass path to join one running directly downhill along the bottom of a shallow valley.
42. In 300 metres exit the bottom of the field through a gate to the right of a fieldgate, and carry on down a gravel driveway.
43. In 50 metres you come to a road. Pass to the right of the house ahead on the

road, to emerge onto the village green in 40 metres. Turn left across this to the **Tiger Inn**. Resume the main walk directions at paragraph 28 on page 4.

East Dean to Eastbourne (6.4km/4 miles)

44. Cross over the main road in paragraph 32 on page 4 and turn right along its far pavement, passing the bus stop.
45. In 250 metres veer left down Downs View Lane, a signposted bridleway. Carry on down this lane ignoring ways off.
46. 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 15 metres passes a vehicle-blocking barrier.
47. In another 100 metres pass a grey barn on your left. Carry on along fenced-in bridleway along a valley.
48. The way is now not in doubt for 1.5km. After that distance there is a farm to your left and the bridleway merges with its concrete driveway. Follow this to the right, uphill.
49. In another 120 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).
50. 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.
51. At the road turn right for 40 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.
52. Where the track forks in 100 metres you can take either branch, as they converge again later, but otherwise ignore ways off.
53. In 200 metres more you are nearing the top of a rise. Here, at a three-armed

footpath post, **fork left** on a signposted bridleway (where the right-hand fork is the South Downs Way).

54. You are now on a car-wide grassy path, which is soon descending more or less along the line of the ridge.
55. 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.
56. 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 more or less for the tall building on the seafront.
57. In 120 metres, where the tree edge ends, keep straight on downhill, still heading for the tall building.
58. In another 150 metres the path swings to the left around a tree corner and becomes more of a distinct track.
59. 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.
60. In 150 metres more you come to a road. Turn right downhill on this, ignoring a side road - Link Road - immediately to the right.
61. 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.

62. 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).
63. 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.