

## Walk 1 - Birling Gap, the Seven Sisters and Exceat

This is an abbreviated itinerary from Patrick Coulcher's book "Wildlife Walks around the Cuckmere Valley". For the full listing of the flowers and wildlife on this walk together with many illustrations, please [buy the book online](#) or from bookshops across Sussex.

**Distance:** 13 kilometres.

**Route:** Birling Gap, Cuckmere Haven, Exceat, Friston Forest, Friston, Birling Gap. Alternative route for the adventurous is by way of the beach under the cliffs.

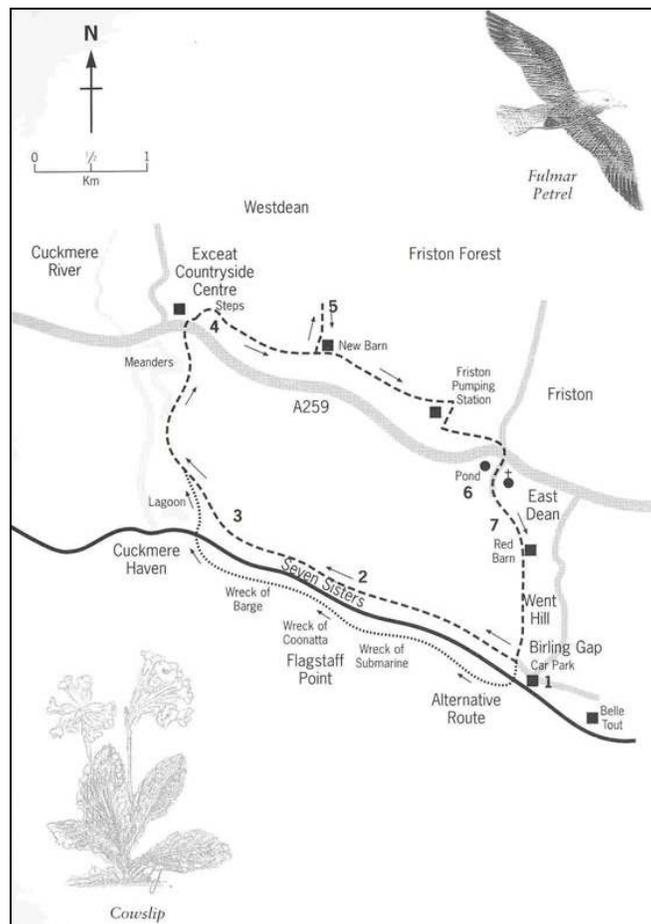
**Map:** OS Explorer 113: South Downs Way Newhaven to Eastbourne.

**Start/Parking:** Birling Gap Car Park.

**Transport:** Regular bus service to East Dean, Exceat.

**Conditions:** Most of the walk is on firm downland but conditions in Friston Forest can sometimes be muddy. Downland walk on Seven Sisters is up and down over low but sometimes steep hills. For the adventurous, an alternative route is to walk along the beach to the Cuckmere Haven to view old wrecks at low tide. **WARNING!** This alternative route should only be attempted by those who have experience of walking over large slippery rocks. It is a hazardous route and care should be taken to start as the tide is going out within about two hours of high tide. The tide should be one of over seven metres so that the wrecks are uncovered. It takes three hours to walk the distance under the cliffs. A mobile phone should accompany you!

**Refreshments:** Tea Rooms at Exceat Farm and Birling Gap.



## Waypoints

1. As you step out of your car at **Birling Gap**, you will smell the sea and you will sometimes savour the sharper tang of seaweed. Make your way up the unmade road that leads westwards and through the gate and stile up to the open downland itself.
2. Much will interest you as you make your way to the first stopping point at the seat beside the memorial stone above **Flagstaff Bottom**. Sit here awhile and admire the scenery all around you. Make your way westwards along the undulating coastal path that takes you over the remaining four sisters, Brass Point, Rough Brow, Short Brow and Haven Point.
3. The path leads downhill in a north-westerly direction through some mixed scrub. Follow the white concrete road northwards towards the main **A259**. Halfway along this road on the right there is a chalk cliff and embankment and above this is a steep downland slope.
4. When you reach the main **A259**, cross it at the entrance to the car park and make your way to the right past the **Exceat Countryside Centre** and up to the bicycle hire shop. Beyond this building there is a gate, and beyond this is an upward loping downland pasture over which the path leads you to a gate and an old flint wall with steps to help you over. The path leads down a long flight of wooden steps to the village of **Westdean** with its small pond. At the bottom of the steps follow the gravel road eastwards.
5. On the left-hand side about 1.2 kilometres along the track you will come across the house and converted barn named **New Barn**. As a short diversion follow the forest path that leads just east of north up from the west side of the house. This path opens out after about 120 metres and then climbs up to the main east/west forest track. Retrace your steps back the way you came down to New Barn and continue eastwards along the unpaved road. As you approach the **Friston Pumping Station** the track veers to the north through an iron gate. About 100 metres further on there is a T-Junction. Turn right and follow the path past two semi-detached cottages, Friston Down and Forest Cottage.
6. Just beyond the cottages there is another T-Junction. Turn left here and follow the track as it makes its way steadily uphill until at yet another junction you take the right fork as it traverses steeply up the hill through woods until it emerges on the opposite side of **Friston Pond** beside the busy **A259**.
7. Take the gravelled unmade road that leads from the pond, past the car-park and over a cattle grid. About 50 metres beyond the cattle grid and gate, break off left from the road and take the path beside a fence that leads south-easterly towards a line of trees. Follow the line of trees southwards and then turn left through a gate that leads to a prominent red-roofed barn named **Red Barn**. Just before this point you will get a good view the top of the escarpment of the village of **East Dean** below.
8. The path then leads down past **Red Barn** to the stile near the car park where the walk started.
9. **ALTERNATIVE ROUTE ALONG THE BEACH UNDER THE SEVEN SISTERS** Start off at the bottom of the steps at **Birling Gap** at about an hour after high tide. Consult tide tables and to get the most out of this alternative route - ensure that the tide is greater than 7 metres. Also, it is necessary to have a hard hat (against loose rock falling off the cliff) and a mobile phone for emergencies. Follow the beach westwards until you come to some old pieces of iron which are the remains of a **German submarine**. At this point keep under the cliff itself as walking is difficult lower down the beach. The going becomes quite difficult here even under the cliff itself, so be careful. On rounding Haven Brow, you will see the wide expanse of shingle (all the remains of flints, shaped and rounded over the millenniums by the waves).