

Waypoints

1. From the car park at **South Hill Barn** follow the concrete road south westerly towards the **Air Navigation Beacon** near **Seaford Head**. Turn left just after the stile and walk along the grassy track towards the sea, where it joins the coastal path (**Vanguard Way**). Follow the coastal path eastwards, and as you reach the top of a small rise one of the finest views on the South Coast appears before you.

The full glory of the **Seven Sisters** are resplendent, their whiteness glistening in the sun, contrasting so strongly with the grey-green of the sea and the bright blue of the sky. This scene subtly changes with the time of day, weather and the seasons and is one that you will never forget.

The downland slopes here are full of flowers in the spring and summer. Here in late March and April, large patches of the south facing slopes turn a violet blue, and in May the cliff tops are adorned with tufts of rosy-pink flowers, which blend in so exquisitely with the brown earth and blues and greens of the sky and sea, all with a backdrop of brilliant white cliffs.

2. Go down the sloping path towards **Hope Bottom**. In April this nature reserve at **Hope Gap** is a good place to see the influx of migratory birds. Take a short detour left up the sloping Path of Hope Bottom and listen to the calls of these birds as they delight in catching the plentiful supply of insects after their long flight from Africa.

Return to the point above **Hope Gap** itself and after you walk along the cliff edge path, named Short Cliff, sit for a moment on the well-positioned seat beside the path and look at the marvellous views of the **Cuckmere Haven** and the **Seven Sisters**. The route takes you just above the **Coastguard Cottages**. Follow the **Vanguard Way** path as it turns northwards and follows the bottom contour of the downland slopes towards the pub at **Exceat Bridge**, The **Golden Galleon**; well known for its excellent food and "home brewed" beers.

You could follow the path beside the **Cuckmere River** itself, but you will see more butterflies and a greater variety of plants by keeping to the shelter of the hillside. As you walk northwards, to the right of you are extensive salt marshes. In winter, these are the haunt of many species of ducks, geese and swans, but when the weather is very cold these birds return inland to the relative warmth of river estuaries near the sea.

3. On reaching the **Golden Galleon** pub and restaurant, cross over the **A259**, turn right over the bridge and then immediately left through a gate and follow the path alongside the eastern bank of the **Cuckmere River**. The river here is tidal, and its muddy banks are exposed at low tide. In front of you are large open areas of salt marsh and grassy meadows interspersed with drainage ditches. From late autumn through to early spring these low-lying fields are often flooded. In the summer, these wide open spaces are grazed by cattle, and then they are largely devoid of birds.
4. The path leads you through gates and over stiles, until a large reed bed appears to your right. This is **Charleston Reed Bed**. Soon **New Bridge** appears and is a good place to stop and admire the scenery all around you. High summer here is full of colour, with flowers of all kinds alongside the river itself and in the fields and beside the ditches.
5. Cross over **New Bridge** and follow the path on the western side of the river in a southerly direction.

After walking some 60 metres from New Bridge, you find yourself looking up at the immensity of the steep slope that forms the wonderful viewpoint of **High and Over**. The slope is partly wooded but if you have the agility do explore the grassy steep sided slopes for chalk loving

plants and butterflies.

6. A slight detour off the main path opposite **Charleston Reed Bed** takes you up to the spur leading to the top of **High and Over**.
7. Retrace your steps back to the river side path. The path becomes narrow just before you reach the artificial pond at **Brock Hole Bottom**. On the path's western side, chalk banks are covered in an array of chalkland flora. The path soon diverges away from the river to avoid private property, and climbs up the hill to join the **A259**. Keep to the macadam path to the north of this road, and then cross it at **Exceat Bridge**. Walk through the car park at the **Golden Galleon**. For the next 800 metres or so, follow the original track (**Vanguard Way**) that you came up, but at a point opposite Foxhole Bottom on the far side, take the wide track that leads uphill at right angles. This wide track leads to **Chyngton Farm**, and after about 60 metres it turns right and then left.
8. As you climb up the path towards the farm on a sunny day in summer. You are likely to see many of the commoner British butterflies. At **Chyngton Farm**, turn left and follow the road that leads back to the starting point at the car park. As you climb up this long steep road, look across to your left at Friston Forest, whose colours change so subtly with the seasons and which is featured in the next walk.