



Bignor and the South Downs *A Roman Villa under the Hill*

Distance: 18 km=11 miles

moderate walking

Region: West Sussex

Date written: 6-feb-2011

Author: Hautboy

Date revised: 12-oct-2014

Refreshments: Sutton

Last update: 24-sep-2021

Map: Explorer 121 (Arundel) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Forest, high hills, views, ancient churches, villages, Roman Villa

In Brief

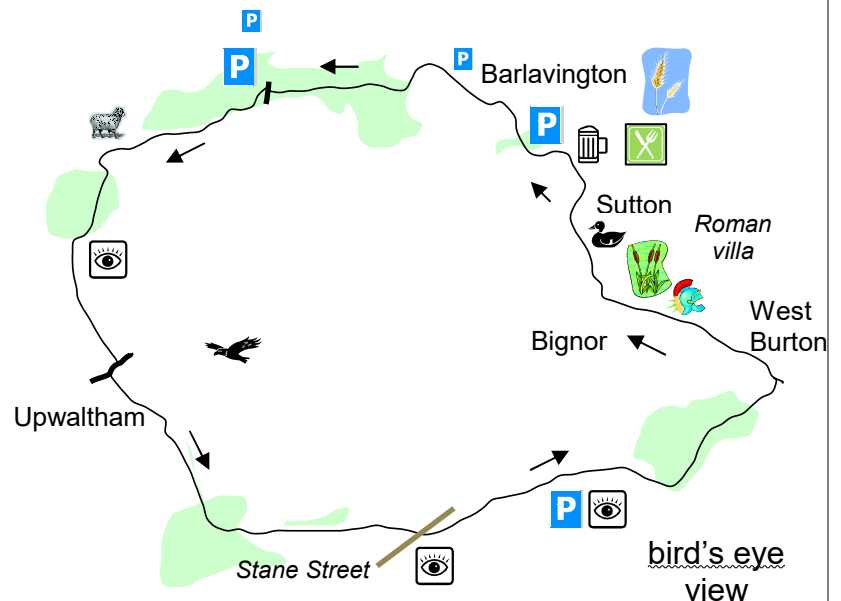
This is a walk of stunning quality and interest, combining an energetic walk over some of the highest points on the South Downs with the gems and delights of the historic villages west of the Arun, plus the Roman villa at Bignor (£6.50 entrance fee).

There is a good pub en route, at Sutton, but you need to arrive in good time as it may be popular. To enquire or book at the *White Horse* in Sutton, use their website (www.whitehorseinn-sutton.co.uk). The revamped White Horse has been beautifully refurbished. The food is very good indeed and one pays for that quality. If you want a sandwich, take a picnic.



There are no nettles but summer undergrowth can be thick. Good shoes are adequate in summer, boots necessary in the wetter months. Hills are mainly an easy climb. The walk would be fine for a dog too. The stile count is low.

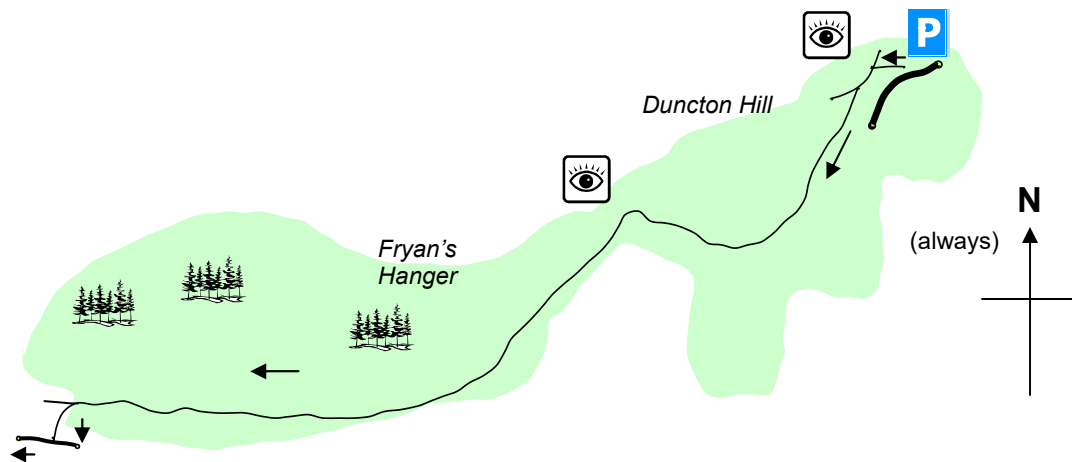
The walk begins at the **Duncton Hill Viewpoint** just south of Duncton on the A285, approximate postcode **GU28 0LT**, grid ref SU 954 161. For more details and for other possible starting points, see the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



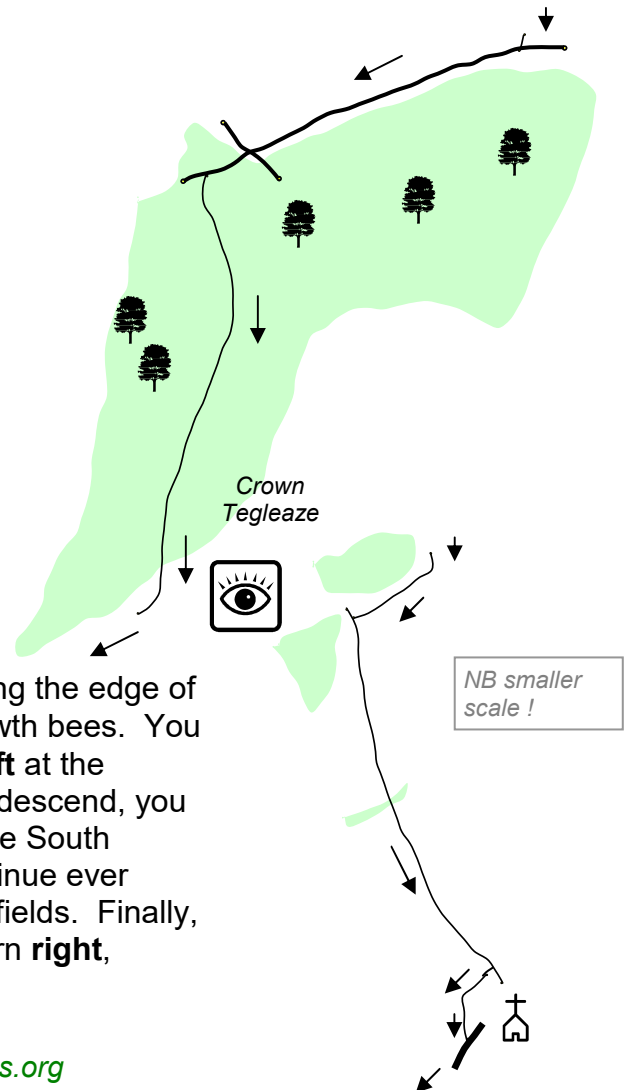
The Walk

I - *Gradus Primus*: Duncton Hill to Upwaltham 4 km=2½ miles

- 1 With the main road on your left, leave the car park by a signed footpath up some steps. At a T-junction, turn **left** on a wider chalky path. In 30m, at a fingerpost, take the **left** fork. The path winds its way away from the road, through yew trees and past some large buildings on the left, part of the chalkpit quarry. The path keeps rising by the steep slope of Fryan's Hanger next to a [2017: fallen] wire fence and eases up a little. After 1 km, it comes out to a large open meadow. Cut across immediately **left** over the grass, ignoring a waymarker half way along, to reach a wide track. Turn **right** on this track.



- 2 As the meadow ends, you reach a crossing path with fine views to the south and west. As the huge fingerpost testifies, the path is part of the South Downs Way (SDW) which you will meet again. Continue straight ahead for 100m until you come to a junction with a fingerpost. Turn **left** here. This pleasant grassy path runs through a wildlife reserve with many butterflies and all kinds of tree, including a well-shaped yew. Avoid all turnings off till you finally pass a wooden gate to reach an open hillside. You are near the highest point on the South Downs, known as Crown Tegleaze (teg = young sheep, leaze = meadow), with great views to the sea and the Isle of Wight.



- 3 Turn **right**, as indicated by the fingerpost along the edge of the field, agleam with wildflowers and abuzz with bees. You pass the site of a WWII plane crash. Turn **left** at the corner, as signed, onto a farm track. As you descend, you have great views ahead of the main hills of the South Downs where you will soon be walking. Continue ever downwards, through a line of trees, between fields. Finally, about 100m from the road, at a fingerpost, turn **right**, arriving at Upwaltham Church.

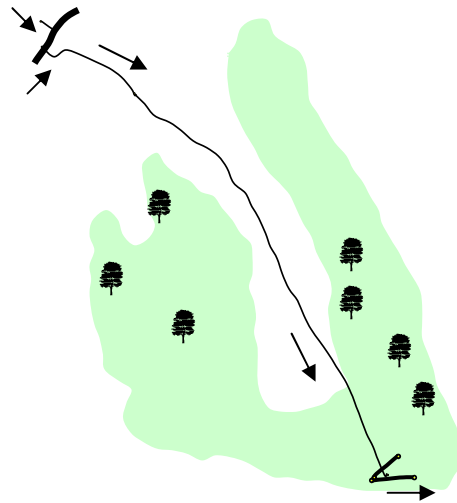


The peaceful Church of St Mary the Virgin, sometimes known as “The Church in the Field”, is a delight. Built in the 1100s, it has flint walls nearly a metre thick. The rounded chancel (the altar end) is very rare. There are few memorials and just a little stained glass, its simplicity being its greatest charm. The tiny hamlet of Upwaltham, much larger in past times when agriculture was a main pursuit, now has less than thirty inhabitants, mostly centred around the House Farm. The long valley in which it sits is “dry” since rainwater soaks straight down into the chalky underlay.

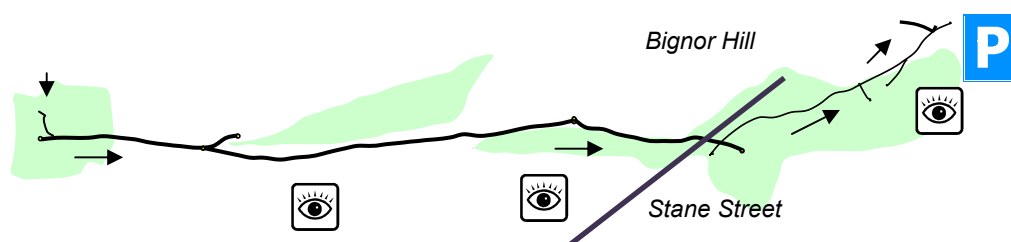
Turn **left** by a barn through a wooden gate, cross the main road carefully and turn **right** on it.

II – *Gradus Secundus*: Upwaltham to West Burton 7 km=4 miles

- In 30m go through a small (tight!) kissing gate into the yard of House Farm (which is available for hire). Turn **left** on the tarmac, through a kissing gate (if the big gate is closed), and then **right** on a wide grassy path up between meadows. Your path goes through an open metal gate, through bushes and between fields. Near the top, the path levels out and soon runs across the centre of a field. You meet the corner of a wood on the left by another WWII crash site, this time of the USAF. At the next corner, follow a blue arrow into woodland. At a three-way fingerpost, keep ahead. Soon after, at a T-junction with another fingerpost, turn **left**.

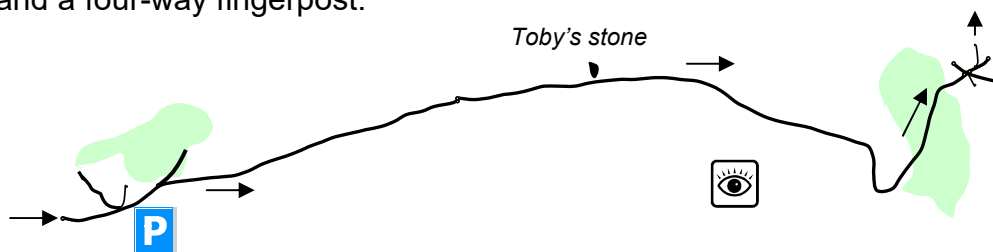


- The track comes out of the woods and runs between fields. In 200m, at a fingerpost, take the **right** fork, keeping the trees on your left. At the next 3-way junction, keep straight ahead in the direction of Gumber Bothy (a traditional camping barn of the National Trust, charging £10 per night). After a wooden gate, at the next junction, there is a four-way fingerpost and a fine view sharp right down the path across the sheep pasture. *This is Stane Street, an ancient Roman road to Chichester. You could, some other day, walk from here in a dead straight line to the distant city or indeed back almost to London. This path is also part of the Monarch’s Way, a mighty trail that recreates the escape route to the Channel used by the young Charles II after the Battle of Worcester.* Keep straight ahead, almost immediately coming to another four-way fingerpost (just before the next large wooden gate). Go diagonally **left** here. The path becomes pleasant and grassy. Ignore all turnings off to arrive, in about 600m, at the major junction and car park at the top of Bignor Hill.

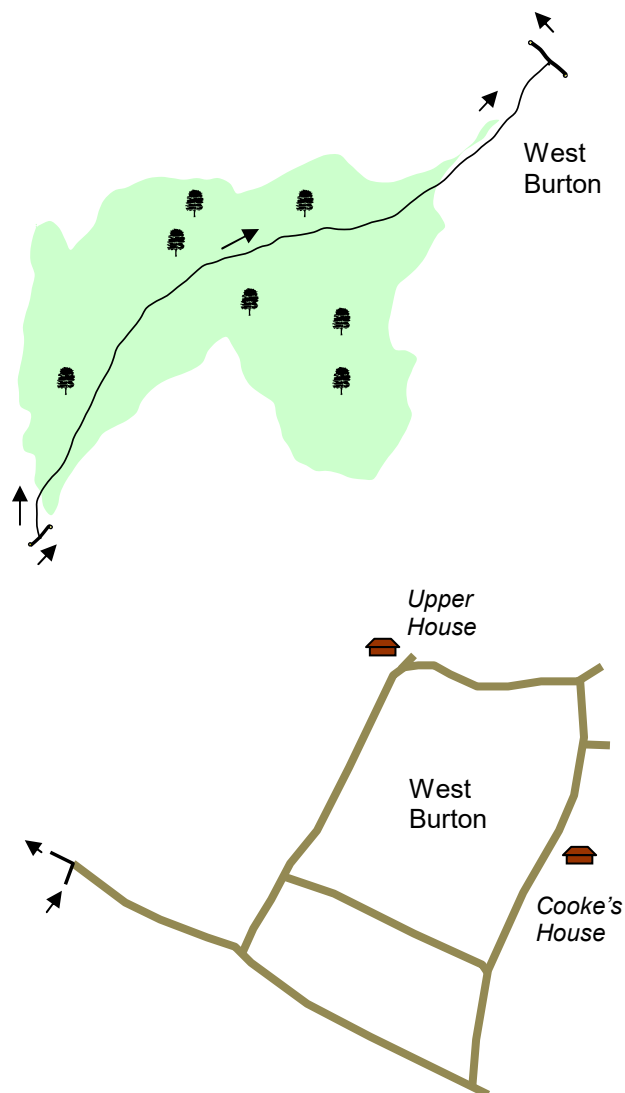


Bignor Hill is a favourite family walking zone, famous for the views all round and historical associations. The bilingual signpost shows the way to Chichester (“Noviomagus”). There are several Bronze Age burial mounds visible here. The hill is part of the National Trust’s Slindon Estate which preserves large chunks of the South Downs near here.

- 3 Follow the track past the car park and a noticeboard. Immediately fork **right** here to leave the tarmac track and head off on the wide chalky path that rises over the hill beyond. This is another part of the South Downs Way (SDW), running between fields, a magnificent high route. As you go over the hill, the valley of the Arun is spread out below. You pass a horse mounting block dedicated to James Wentworth Toby, who was master of the Cowdray Hunt. At a junction with a fingerpost, follow the SDW as it hairpins left. The track wheels right to reach some corrugated iron barns and a four-way fingerpost.



- 4 Go straight over on a bridleway with the barns on your right, thus leaving the SDW, but immediately take the narrow path on the **left** into woods. [Sep 2021: this lovely path has radically changed following what can only be described as a chain saw massacre. The narrow path is now a double width track, with all trees within 3m of the edges cut down (all types – not only ash) with a huge log stack to the left of the start of the walk into the woods. The wide track merges with the original path towards the bottom of this stretch.] The path takes a high route above the steep drop into Egg Bottom on the left. Soon it begins to descend steeply and may be slippery when wet. At the bottom it joins another track (care! slippery camber) and arrives at the village of West Burton next to *Fogdens*. Turn **left** here on a tarmac footpath. However, as a pleasant diversion, a quick survey of this remarkable village is recommended. You can turn right and do a small circular tour taking in *Cooke’s House*.



West Burton is often combined in descriptions with Bury 1 km to the east, their names being linked. Together they contain a remarkably high proportion of listed buildings. Many are thatched, many timber-framed and infilled with local stone. Bury House was the home of writer John Galsworthy during his last seven years. Cooke’s (or Coke’s) house in West Burton dates from 1500.

III – *Gradus Tertius*: West Burton to Duncton Hill 5 km=3½ miles

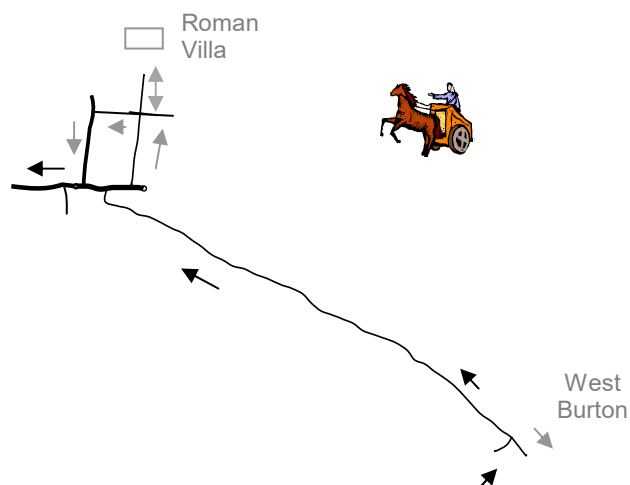
- 1 Having turned left by *Fogdens*, follow the narrow path as it runs beside a stream and gardens and then crosses the stream. The streams form a pond on the right known locally as the Pill Pond. At the end of the path, turn **right** along the edge of the field. In the far corner, go over a footbridge with rails and then over another smaller bridge and continue along the left-hand side of the next field next to the hedge on your left. At a fingerpost follow the sign along and round the edge of the field. Aim for an opening in the far right-hand corner. The path leads out to a road near Bignor.

At this point, there is a short loop to enable you to visit, for an entrance fee, Bignor Roman Villa. The Villa is one of the wonders of these parts. If you have never previously visited it, this is a place on no account to be missed. The villa has a tea room (open to non-visitors, closing at 4pm). If you do **not** wish to visit the Villa or if it is closed (November through February), turn **left** on the road, keep straight ahead at a junction in 200m and skip to section 2 below.



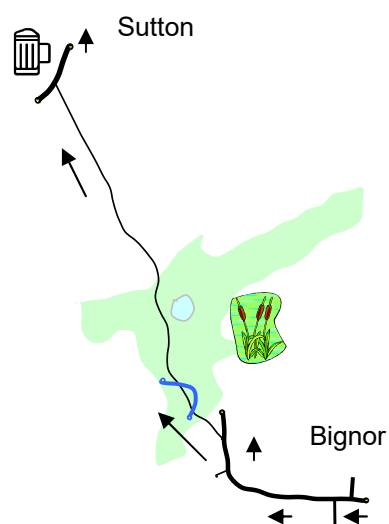
Turn **right** along the road and, after 80m, **left** through some gates. Follow the track beside a vineyard to a crossing track. The Roman Villa is straight ahead.

Bignor Roman Villa was built in around the year 300. It was lost beneath farmland until the early 1800s when it was rapidly excavated and has been a tourist attraction ever since. Its crowning glory are the mosaic floors, the best in Britain. One of them is 24m long. They show Venus & Cupid, Gladiators, Medusa and Ganymede. Also visible is the hypocaust under-floor heating system. For the Romano-British inhabitants it was close to Stane Street and to the Roman town of Chichester, giving them profitable trade for the produce of the rich farmland they worked.



After visiting the Villa, return to the crossing track and turn **right** on it (or turn **left** if you did not visit the Villa), going through a tall wooden gate. At the end, by the historic timbered *Yeoman's House*, turn **left** on the road. *Bignor is worth exploring further, having many other old properties and a fine church.* At a T-junction, turn **right**.

- 2 In 30m, by a shed and farmhouse of Bignor Farm, ignore a rough lane on the left and keep straight ahead. (The rough lane leads up to the car park on Bignor Hill.) Your lane soon bends right. Ignore a footpath left that runs over a bridge across a stream. The next sign is just before a house on the left. Fork **left** here through a gate and take a delightful route that crosses the lawn in front of the house. This section is a charming surprise and one of the little gems of this area. To the left is a waterfall. The rushing stream passes under a bridge and, after a walk through the water garden, under another bridge. The last footbridge is by the



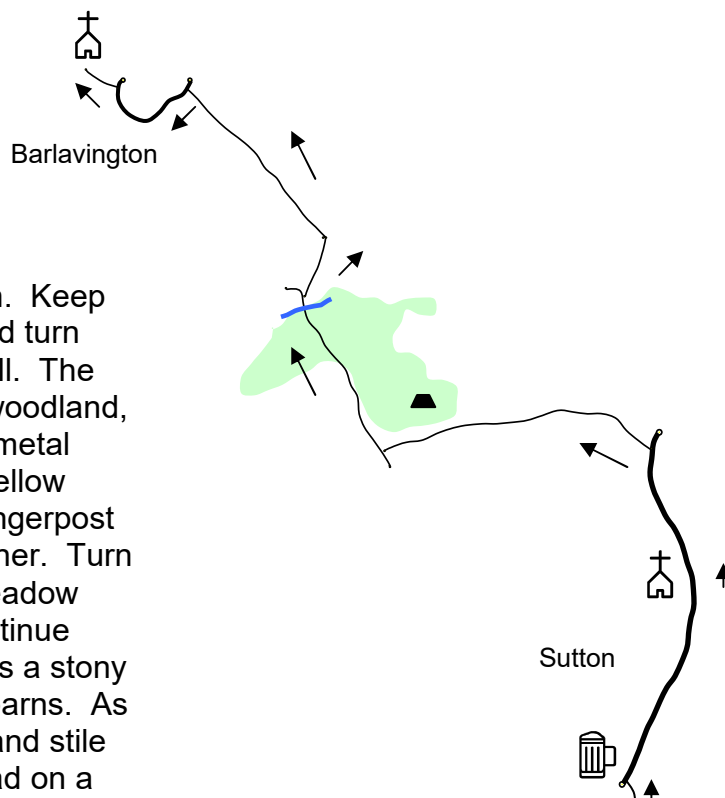
large and picturesque garden of another house. The path then goes right at a fingerpost and left over a sturdy bridge and a large wooden gate or a stile. Go straight across along the right-hand side of a meadow and then across the centre of another. Go by a redundant stile and cross the centre of a field along a grassy strip. Finally, a board walk and an enclosed path takes you down to a road in the village of Sutton, opposite the *White Horse Inn*.

Sutton is another immaculate Sussex village. In 1870 it had a population of 364 and 67 houses, already expanding with the nearness of the railway. Sutton has not had a shop since 1971 and the school closed in the 1960s. The church of St John the Baptist, built from local Pulborough stone, has a wall dating from 1090, some exceptional stained glass and a local painting.

The pub survived thanks to the stubbornness of the villagers. In the 1950s Sir Ian Anstruther moved to nearby Barlavington and, finding that the White Horse was under threat, bought it to ensure its future as a pub. His family ran it for many years and, when it was finally sold, it was with a covenant that it would always be run as a pub. The pub, which also offers accommodation, was fully renovated in 2018 and re-opened on 2 Dec 2018. It provides a quality lunch menu and a Sunday roast. Visit their website (www.whitehorseinn-sutton.co.uk) or contact Odile for a booking or for information.

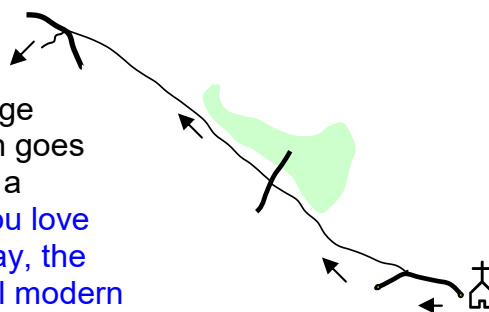


- 3 Continue up the road with the *White Horse* on your left. Ignore all side paths till you pass the church after 400m. Just after the Rectory, where the road curves right, turn **left** on a tarmac footpath. Continue on a track beside a field, then past a chalet-style house on a narrower path. Keep straight on to the edge of a meadow and turn **right** on a pleasant grassy path downhill. The path goes quite steeply down through woodland, then over a stream and through a new metal kissing gate. Keep ahead, ignoring a yellow arrow pointing left. Veer **right** past a fingerpost to go over past a broken stile in the corner. Turn **left** up the left-hand side of the next meadow towards the pines of Barlavington. Continue straight ahead whilst your path becomes a stony track. Turn **left** in front of some black barns. As the track bends right, avoid a footpath and stile on your left. At a farm shed, keep ahead on a narrow path through a wooden gate. Welcome into the little world of Barlavington!

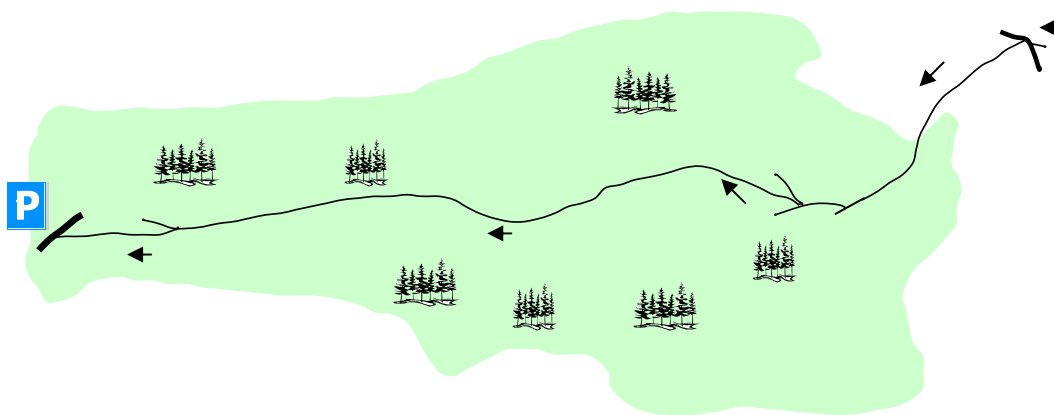


The name "Barlavington" was originally "Baerlaffe", meaning the barley fields belonging to the Saxon Laffa clan. Nowadays you see some green meadows with one or two horses, the stone walls and the little church, with a handful of scattered cottages. In the past there was a larger population, possibly seasonally employed, tilling the fields. It is listed in the Domesday book, which gives it a size of 5 hides (i.e. land suitable for 5 households) and a value of 100 shillings. The Church of St Mary was then well used. It was built by William Dawtrej between 1160 and 1190 as part of a monastic foundation. The plain Early English construction conceals some modern sculpture under the lancet windows.

4 Go round the church, out via a gate and **left** along the lane. At a fingerpost, where the lane veers left, turn **right** on a drive. Go through a gap in the left-hand corner of the hedge facing you onto an enclosed footpath. The path goes steeply downhill and over a stream to a lane by a cottage. (A mere sparrow's hop from here, if you love this spot and would like a peaceful overnight stay, the *Folly Hide* is a rustic Shepherd Hut fitted with all modern conveniences (browse for details)). Cross the lane to a path opposite, up some steps, then over a stile, along the right-hand side of a meadow, over another (almost hidden) stile to a road.



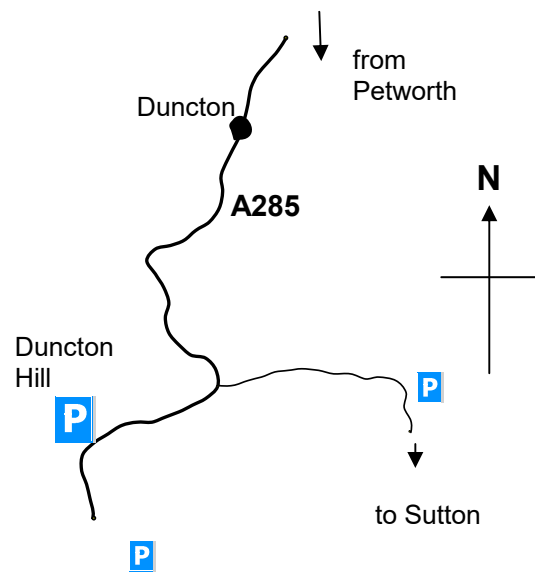
5 Cross the road to a path opposite. Go through a small metal gate and uphill between meadows. The path enters woodland and bends right at a fingerpost. At the top of a slope, you reach a 3-way fingerpost. [Sep 2021: more rough forestry work in progress here, with the path widened and side tracks cut, but directions still apply.] Take the **right** fork. 80m after, you reach another fingerpost, this time with four blue arrows. Take the **second** path from the right, that is, the **middle** of the three paths ahead. This is a magnificent and easy path through woods soon with the deep slope of Duncton Hanger on your right. After about 600m, you reach a fingerpost. Ignore the right fork indicated by the post and continue straight ahead, shortly reaching the road opposite the Duncton Hill Viewpoint. Cross the road carefully to where the walk began.



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Getting there

By car: the car park at the Duncton Hill viewpoint is on the A285 Petworth - Chichester road. If coming from the north, go through Duncton and, nearly 1 mile (1.5km) later, as the road sweeps right round a tight corner and goes steeply uphill, the car park is half way up on the right. The car park is small but, if you are making a reasonably early start, this should not be a problem. If you find it full or you have several cars, simply turn around and take the next right towards Sutton. Park on the verge at a bend where the footpaths cross the lane (stage 5 in the preceding text) or continue to Sutton village where there is plenty of room beside the road with the pub handy. There is also parking in a slip road on the A285 800m south of the viewpoint. Another possible starting point is at the large car park on Bignor Hill.



By bus/train: various buses from Amberley, Arundel or Pulborough stations to Bury or Sutton. Check the timetables.