



Chanctonbury, Steyning & the South Downs A Ring with a View

Distance: 12½ km=8 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: West Sussex

Date written: 5-aug-2010

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Refreshments: Steyning, Washington

Last update: 21-apr-2025

Maps: Explorer 121 (Arundel) & 122 (Steyning) *hopefully not needed*

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

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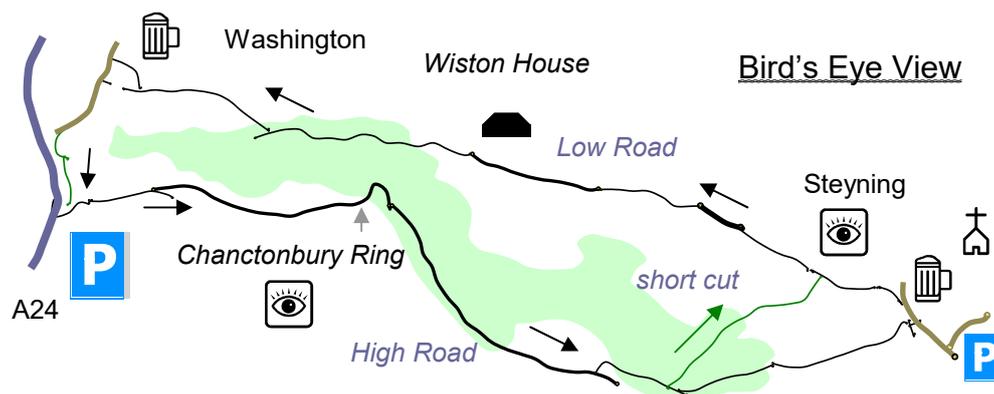
High hills, views, village, country town, woodland

In Brief



This walk takes you along a stretch of the South Downs with fine views all round and, after a visit to a lovely small country town, along a lower route full of interest and back over the Downs again. The going is easy over the chalk downs but you may encounter mud on the lower paths in the wetter seasons, when ankle boots are an advantage. The walk has two parts: a **high road**, with fine views, and a contrasting **low road** with many beautiful points of interest. Steyning offers many good opportunities for refreshment. The pub at Washington may have closed.

The walk begins at the **Washington car park**. The nearest postcode is **RH20 4AZ**, grid ref TQ 119 120, www.w3w.co/replayed.sweeter.yummy. But careful ! It is best to ignore the satnav for the last mile as it might lead you to the wrong car park. For full details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**). An *alternative start* (preferred by many walkers) is **Steyning** (postcode **BN44 3YB**), where there is parking near the church. You can also park at the **Chanctonbury Ring car park**, postcode **BN44 3DN**, www.w3w.co/lucky.pointer.failed (start at Low Road section **7**).

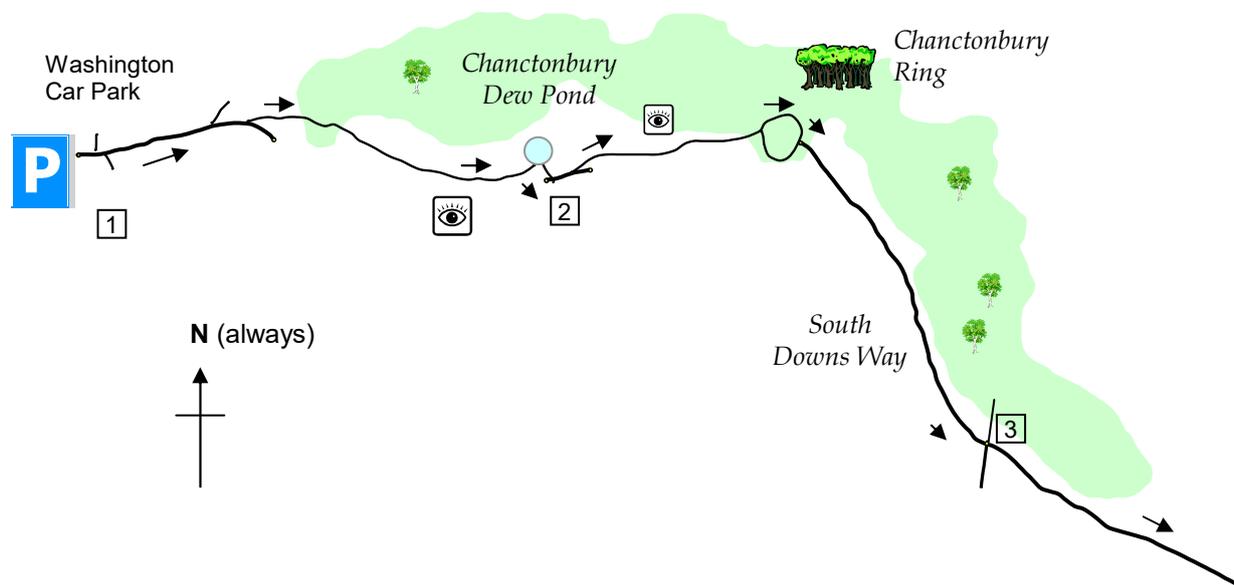


The Walk



This walk was previously the eastern part of a longer 20 km=12½ mile walk taking in Sullington. This longer walk is now available as a **big zipper** by combining it with the walk *Sullington, Chantry & the South Downs*. **Zip points** are indicated in the guides.

The High Road 6 km=4 miles



- 1 Go past the metal barrier at the end of the car park, signposted *South Downs Way*, on a flinty path uphill. *The South Down Way* is a 160 km=100 mile footpath and bridleway between Eastbourne and Winchester. At the top, at a fingerpost ignore a footpath left and, 20m later, ignore a cinder farm track right. Just after a gas relay station on your left, ignore a marked bridleway by a gate on the left and continue on the track. After 50m, leave the track by forking **left** on a signed path and going through a wooden gate, soon passing chalk earthworks on your right. *Close by in the valley is Washington village. Rock Mill (now sailless) can be seen just to the right of a sand quarry. Built in 1823, it appears on the village's shield was lived in by the composer John Ireland.* Keep straight ahead on a steep chalky path uphill and go through a wooden gate at the top. Keep in the same general direction up the grassy slope. You have a fine view to the left over the Weald to the North Downs. *As you ascend, the sea comes into view, near the big town of Worthing.* At the other side, at the highest point on the grass, go over a low bank to the Dew Pond in its ring of hawthorn.

Chanctonbury Dew Pond, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, was constructed about 1870 by a master bricklayer from the Wiston Estate. To hold water for thirsty sheep, a pond had to be "puddled" which involved building a layer of flint and covering it in clay. This pond was restored by the Sussex Society of Downsmen in 1970. There is at least one other in the vicinity but the others are mainly hidden by overgrowth.

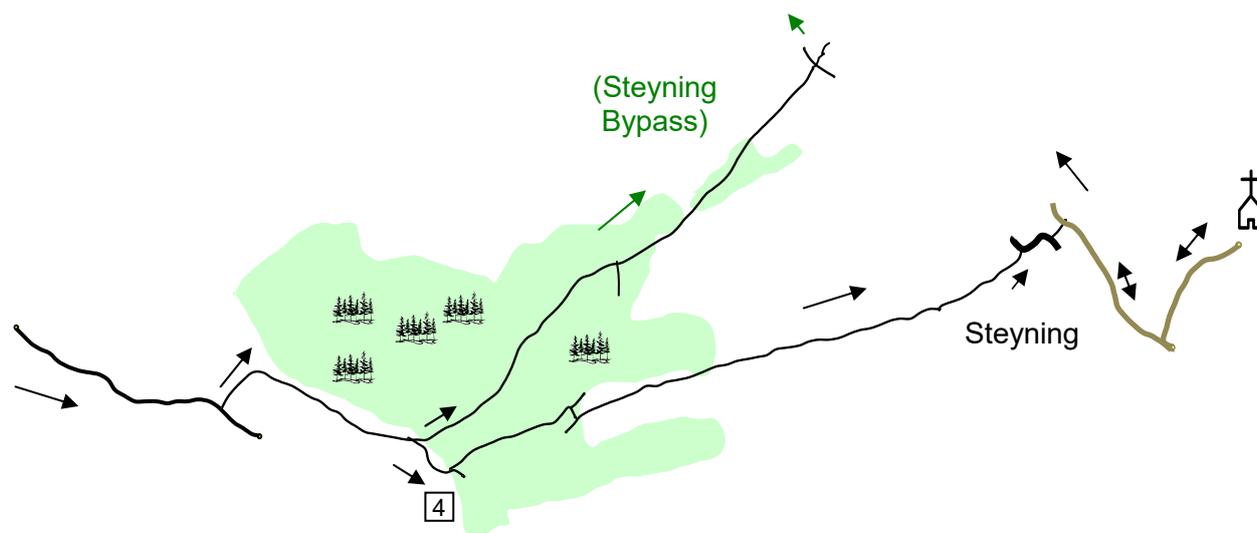
- 2 Turn **right** away from the pond and go through a wooden gate by an information tablet. Turn **left** on the track, beside a cattle grid, heading for the Chanctonbury Ring. **It is better to shift left up the grassy bank and walk on a parallel grassy ridge which has views on both sides, heading for the left-hand side of the Ring.** On reaching the Chanctonbury Ring, you can walk on a

clockwise circular course to obtain an overall view of the ancient earth-works.

Chanctonbury Hill was originally a hill fort and its position is truly commanding with views north across the Weald and south to the sea. It was probably built in the Iron Age, 600-400 BCE, but some Bronze Age (i.e. earlier) pottery has also been found here. The hill is just one of many historical details that crowd this area, with Roman Stane Street nearby and a Roman temple on the site. Saxon coins were found in the nearby farm in 1866. Another Ring, Cissbury, is just a mile or two away. Chanctonbury Ring must be the best-known feature of the South Downs for anyone looking from the north. The trees were planted by Charles Goring who acquired the Wiston Estate in 1743. To ensure that the trees thrived, he regularly brought water up the hill. The hollow ring was formed because of the large Roman temple in the centre which prevented those trees from taking root.

Continue from the Ring on the wide track, part of the South Downs Way (SDW), heading past a cylindrical tank, then through a gate by a cattle grid. In ½ km, at a 4-way junction, keep straight ahead.

- 3 In another ½ km or so, a track joins from the right. After 400m, at the end of a meadow on the left, at a new 3-way fingerpost, turn **left** on a path between wire fences, thus leaving the SDW. Your path turns right at the tree line. Follow this flinty path, walking beside a wood on your left. After 400m, you reach a fork by a post with blue arrows.



Decision point. For a shorter walk, postponing your visit to the delightful small town of Steypning to another day, jump to the **Steypning Bypass** near the end of this text.

- 4 (There are various routes into Steypning. An alternative to the text is to stay on the SDW shortly at a sign for *Pepperscoombe Down* and follow the Nature Trail round the curve of the hill into the town via *Newnham Lane*.) Take the **right-hand** fork, slightly uphill. The path goes between concrete posts by a field on the right and enters woodland. Just 15m into the woodland, fork **left** on a long path downhill through the wood, avoiding bike paths on your left. After 250m, the path comes to a junction where you can see over to your right a waymarker post and a wooden swing gate. Turn **right** to the gate and go **left** through it (or through the wide gap on its left). The path leads down and emerges from the woods by a new wooden swing gate, with a choice of two benches on the left, from which to enjoy your first view of Steypning



below. After 250m of open hillside, your path goes through a wooden swing gate into woods. Keep right on a narrow but straight path. It takes you through a small wooden gate on a straight route between hedges and later an unneeded wooden gate leading onto a track by some allotments. On reaching a road, keep straight ahead and, just after it bends right, turn **left** through a barrier down to the main street of Steyning, opposite the Dolls House Shop. *At the time of writing this shop also does “psychic readings on Fridays”.* The walk will continue **left** from here, but you cannot come without first seeing some of the town.

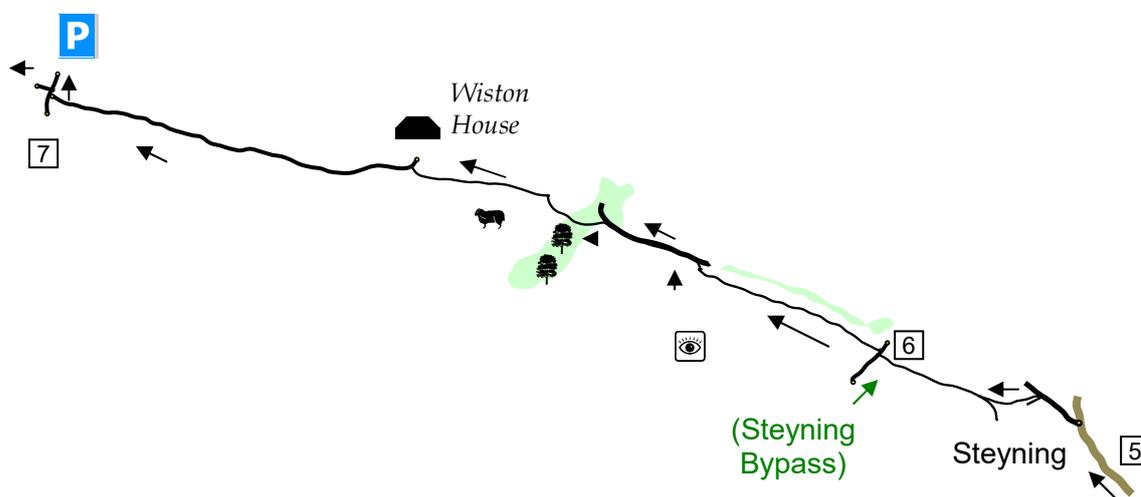
On entering the Saxon town of Steyning (pronounced “Stenning”), you immediately know that you are in a special place. If you turn right along the main street you will notice that the usual big chain store names are missing (except for the Co-op) and instead there are family grocers, bakers, butchers and some other interesting specialist shops. The vegetable shop (Sussex Produce Company) has an excellent restaurant at the back. Also on the left is the Cobblestone Walk leading to a charming miniature shopping village with food, clothes, knick-knacks and objets d’art. At the end of the street is the old town, on the left down Church Street with the 15th-century half-timbered Brotherhood Hall on the right and the Norfolk Arms on the left. At the small green by “Saxon Cottage” is the site where the last person in England was burned at the stake.

A little further down, you reach the huge 12th-century Norman church of St Andrew. Inside, the high double sweep of its Norman arches show its venerable origins. The church is also dedicated to St Cuthman who, legend has it, settled here after pushing his mother in a wheelbarrow and founded the town’s first wooden church around 800, and whose shrine drew many pilgrims.

Steyning was once a busy port but in the 1300s the sea receded. It was always an important market town and the wooden rails at the junction of Church Street and the High Street are where cattle used to be tethered on market days.



The Low Road 6 km=3½ miles



- 5 After your visit, return westwards along the High Street, past the Dolls House Shop on your right. Where the street bends right, leave it by keeping straight ahead on Mouse Lane, a name that seems so appropriate for the small cottages that occupy the lane. In only 100m, just past the last thatched cottage, go diagonally **left** on a track and, in 10m, fork **right** on a hidden narrow footpath by a large elaborate *Steyning Downland Scheme Gateway* info board. Your path takes you over a stile* and into a meadow of wild grass. (* 2025: Stile barbwired and hard to climb over: better to continue on the track and in 40m turn **right** at a metal gate.) The path meets another path from the left and continues beside a ribbon fence. At the end, go

through a metal swing gate and fork **left** on a narrow footpath, ignoring the wide stony track right. The path goes down steps and meets a crossing track. Continue straight over.

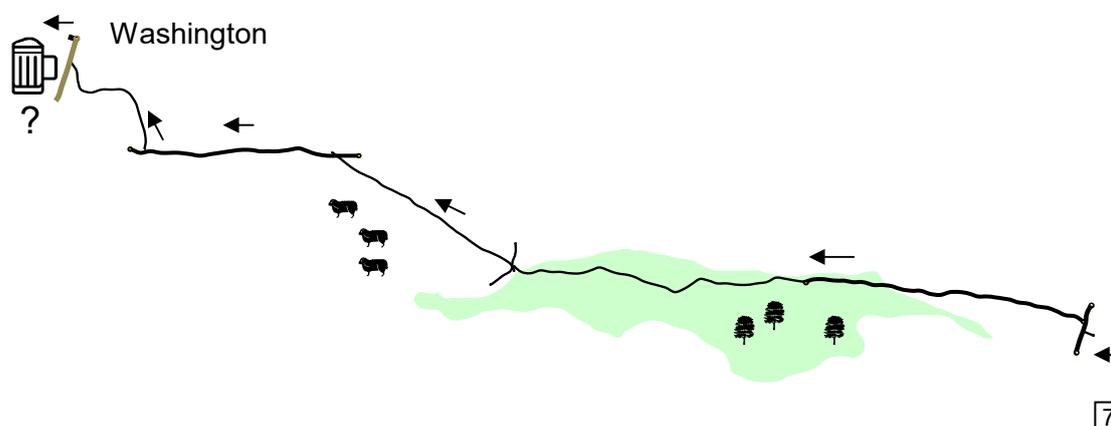
Here the **Steying Bypass** short cut meets the longer walk.

- 6 Go up steps and along the right-hand side of a field. *The Chanctonbury Ring is visible ahead to the left.* In 500m, at the end of the field, turn **right** through a metal gate and **left** on the lane. (Some walkers stay in the field on an unofficial path.) Where the lane starts to curve right under trees, turn **left** at a fingerpost and **right** along the field edge again. Go left at the field corner and, in 30m, turn **right** through trees, over a stream, over a stile and into a cereal field. Keep to the path as it curves right and left over a stile onto a wide enclosed path. *On your right, foliage permitting, Wiston House with its grey clad walls and fine conservatory comes into view.*

Wiston House is a 16th-century manor house, set in this spectacular secluded spot at the foot of the South Downs. It was home to the Goring family that moulded their influence so profoundly on the surrounding countryside and especially on the Downs above the house. Since 1950, it has been the home of Wilton Park, a centre for the discussion of international policy, an institution created in 1946 by Winston Churchill to re-establish peace and democracy in Europe.

The route continues to a tarmac drive where it turns **left** and under a fancy steel bridge linking some grounds of the House. Where the drive bends right, keep straight on over through a metal gate next to a (broken) stile. After 500m, continue over a concrete stile (or via a metal gate) through the farmyard of Great Barn Farm, soon passing some tumbledown sheds.

- P Leave the farm via some (open) double metal gates at a T-junction and follow the track **right** and immediately **left** on another track. (Staying on the first track leads to the Chanctonbury Ring car park.)



- 7 The track runs beside some cottages by a large metal gate and in 250m becomes a muddy woodland track. In 400m, you pass through an open metal gate, passing an old rusty shed. Continue straight on following the track left slightly uphill, then, at the top, turn **right** for a short distance. Ignore a track on the left that goes uphill and follow the main track gently downhill [Jan 2022: stepping over some fallen branches]. The path narrows and zig-zags left-right through some deep woods, going through one more gate and passing lesser side paths. Follow the main path gradually downhill through handsome beechwoods and finally through a large metal gate at the corner of a sheep meadow. Go **right** through a wooden gate and cross the field diagonally to go through a wooden gate in a wire fence.

Now aim for a metal gate visible in a fence on the left of a line of trees ahead. Once through the gate, continue in the same direction to the edge of a large pasture and bear **left** on a track along the perimeter. Go through a gate in the corner and keep ahead similarly. Half way along this second pasture, just after some farm buildings on the right, turn **right** over a stile. (Or, if you want to reduce the number of stiles, which are all sheep-netted and unsuitable for dogs unless extremely athletic, you can simply continue straight on to the road and turn **right**.) Traverse a small meadow, go over a stile and bear **left**. Go over another stile, across a drive to an enclosed, rather overgrown, path, over a stile and a wooden bridge across a stream. Finally go across a small meadow and over the last stile to the road opposite the *Frankland Arms* in Washington.



The Frankland Arms re-opened in 2020. Walkers are made very welcome (even with muddy boots!) and the food is good and reasonably priced. The Frankland Arms is a 200-year old coaching inn. Originally called the “Washington Inn”, it was renamed, maybe as a toadying gesture, in honour of William Frankland a nearby landowner. The family’s crest on the wall bears the motto “Franke Lande, Franke Mynde” meaning “free country (makes for a) free spirit”. For a detailed anecdotal account of the pub’s hilarious history, go to www.franklandarms.co.uk/about.htm.

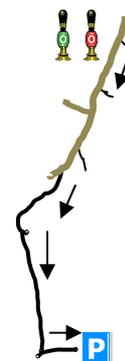
*The historic village of Washington is worth exploring. The church (**left** on the road and **right** in 200m on The Street) is especially worth seeing.*



If you are doing the **Big Zipper** walk, skip now to the separate *Sullington, Chantry and the South Downs* walk and begin it with the stretch called **The Low Road**. Otherwise, finish this walk with the short section below.

Village to Car Park

Turn **left** on the road. Continue past The Street on your right and ignore footpaths on the left. Just after *Meadowlea*, fork **left** on a concrete drive which winds gently uphill and eventually bends left. Turn sharp **right** at a marker post on another drive. Follow the drive to the end where, on the **left** is the car park where the walk began.



Steyning Bypass

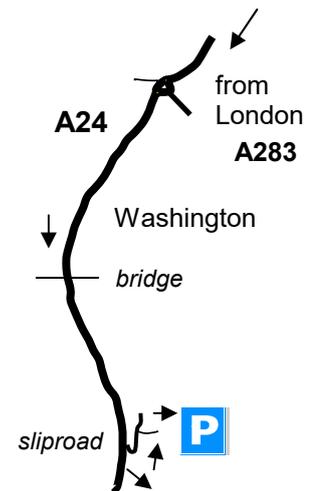
This short cut shortens the walk by 1.3 km=0.8 mile, postponing your visit to the wonderful town of Steyning to another time.

For map, see *The High Road* above. Take the **left**-hand fork, downhill through woodland. In 500m, join a bridleway coming from the right and stay on the path until it emerges from the woodland and runs as a track between meadows with views all around. Just a few metres from a tarmac lane and metal gate visible ahead, you come to a crossing path with steps each side. Turn **left** here. Now re-join the Eastern Walk, The Low Road, at section **6**.

Getting there

By car: the car park is just off the **A24** road. If coming from the north, about 10 miles=16 km from Worthing, you reach the **Washington roundabout**. Continue *straight ahead*, ignoring the left turn to Washington. 1 mile further, turn **left** on a sliproad, doubling back. The car park, which is unsigned, is immediately up a chalky track on the right.

By bus: No. 2A from Brighton station to Steyning. Bus 23 from Worthing or Horsham to Washington. Others available. Check the timetables.



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