



Kingley Vale and the Downland Churches

Distance: 21 km=13 miles or 10½ km=6½ miles

moderate walking

Region: West Sussex

Date written: 23-jul-2011

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Refreshments: Stoughton, Walderton

Map: Explorer 120 (Chichester) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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Yew forest, views, woodland, medieval churches

In Brief

This glorious walk has everything for a day's adventure: a visit to the legendary yew forest of Kingley Vale, one stiff climb and some neolithic earthworks. And after taking your breath away with the vast views, this walk does the same at the opposite scale: through the awesome silence of two or three medieval Downland churches.

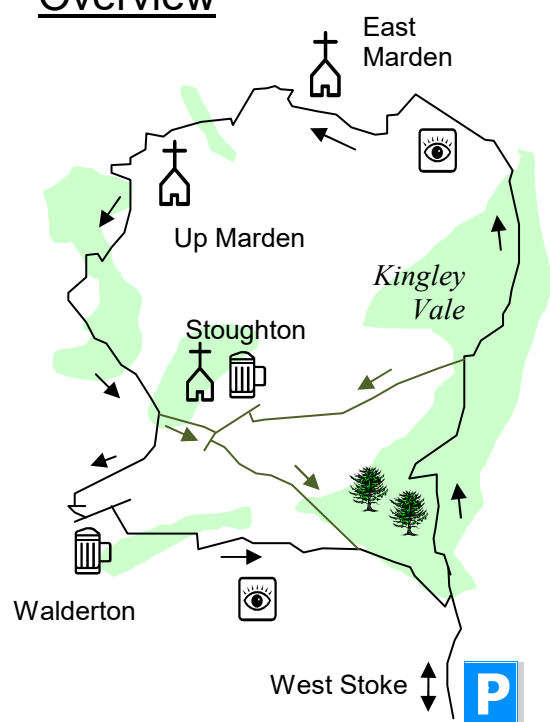


There are no nettles to worry a person in shorts. Boots are recommended because some of the paths are stony and there is one path that tends to be muddy in the wetter seasons. Any sensible attire is fine but always take a waterproof as the South Downs sometimes attract a brief shower. Your dog can come, with a lead of course.

This walk has a shorter option which includes Kingley Vale and the Devil's Humps but misses the Downland villages and churches, returning via Stoughton. The main walk has two options on returning, one via Walderton with terrific views and one via Stoughton.

The walk begins at the **West Stoke car park**, 3 miles=5 km north west of Chichester, West Sussex (**postcode PO18 9BN** grid ref SU 824 088). Walderton is also a possible start, postcode **PO18 9ED**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Overview



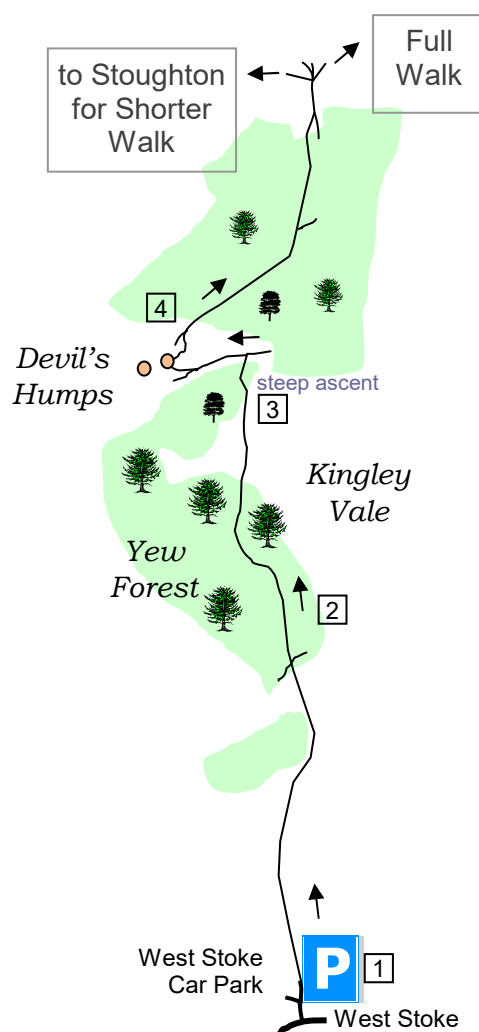
The Walk

Leg 1: Via Kingley Vale and the Devil's Humps to Stoughton Down

4 km=2½ miles

- 1 From the car park, go through the large wooden gate ahead, signposted *Kingley Vale*. The wide cinder track runs between fields, first under trees then into the open. It runs through a belt of trees and continues with woodland on the left. After about 1km, you reach a crossing path with a wooden gate ahead and a sign for the *Kingley Vale Nature Reserve*. Go straight ahead through the gate into the Reserve. On your right is a little hut with descriptive illustrations, stories and a ceiling showing the birdlife.

Kingley Vale is a National Nature Reserve run by Natural England. As well as the famous yew forest which you are about to see, it covers the chalk and grasslands, the bronze age earthworks and large areas of forest. The twisted and ancient yews of Kingley Vale are among the oldest living things in Britain and the atmosphere they convey is awesome, especially in the mist of a November morning.



- 2 Follow the main path ahead marked as a *National Trail* with metal posts and arrows to guide you. In roughly 150m, turn **right** at a trail marker post guiding you through the first glade of yew trees. Turn **right** again at marker post 4 to view more of the great yew trees. After marker post 5, there are still more trees to see on the right, but you need to keep **left** to exit by a narrow path out into the open again. Turn **right** at the next marker post and follow the trail beside a wild meadow and marker post 6. At the next post, the path rejoins the main path. Shortly, at marker post 8, turn **right** again to visit another sequence of great yews. The path comes out into open grasslands opposite marker post 11 where you have a daunting prospect of the climb ahead. Leave the National Trail here by keeping straight ahead past a crude bench. *The upcoming short ascent is very steep and sometimes slippery (2016: and hampered by fallen yews: you may find a bypass on the right to avoid crawling). Those who like things a lot easier – although longer – could continue to follow the National Trail as far as post 18 (see below*).*
- 3 Follow a faint path straight up the slope, heading past a group of small yews. As you go, you gain views behind to the coast. At the top of the slope, a log serves as a makeshift bench for admiring the view. Keep ahead into the yew trees. Your route from here is generally straight ahead

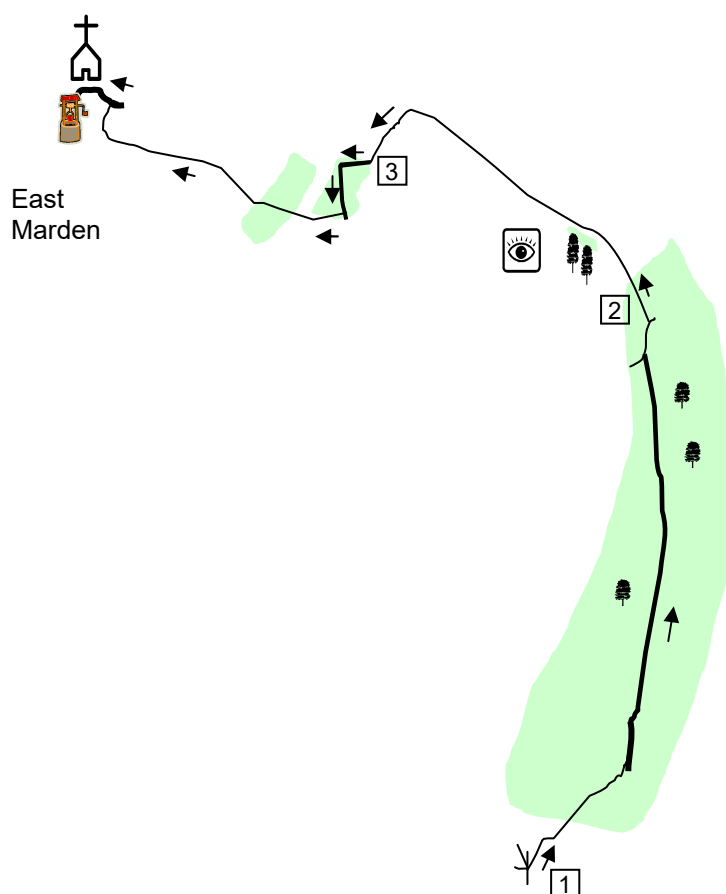
up the steepest part with some twists and turns. The path zigzags widely left-right and then goes steeply up over fallen trunks and roots. It zigzags right-left past fallen yews, after which you glimpse the light of the hillside ahead. Aim for a gap ahead in the undergrowth, to meet a wide crossing path on the open hillside near post 18*. Turn **left** on this path, soon going through a wooden gate and straight ahead with great views south. Ahead are the Devil's Humps. Climb the nearer one for a good view all around.

The Devil's Humps are part of a bronze-age cemetery. There are in fact six of these "barrows" in this area. The two humps are bell type, the others being bowl and pond type, two of each. When a great chief of the Stone or Bronze Age died, it was customary for his people to erect a mound of earth or stones over his body, so that people of future generations coming near it might exclaim, "Great is this tumulus! Of a truth a mighty hero lies buried here." These barrows are about 3000 years old.

- 4 Continue over the Hump and turn **right** on a grassy path, almost doubling back. In 50m, veer **left** on a grassy crossing path that soon joins a stony track which steadily descends. Follow the track for some distance through forest. You will notice a blue arrow indicating the official bridleway to the right. Ignore this turn and stay on the track. Soon another bridleway joins from the right at another blue marker. Shortly after, you approach a junction with a 3-way fingerpost on your left. Here you have a choice.

Decision point. If you are doing the **shorter** walk, omitting the Mardens and the Downland churches but gaining an earlier lunch, skip to near the end of this text and do **Stoughton Descent 1**, rejoining the walk later where indicated. Otherwise, continue with the next stage.

Leg 2: Onwards to East Marden 5 km=3 miles

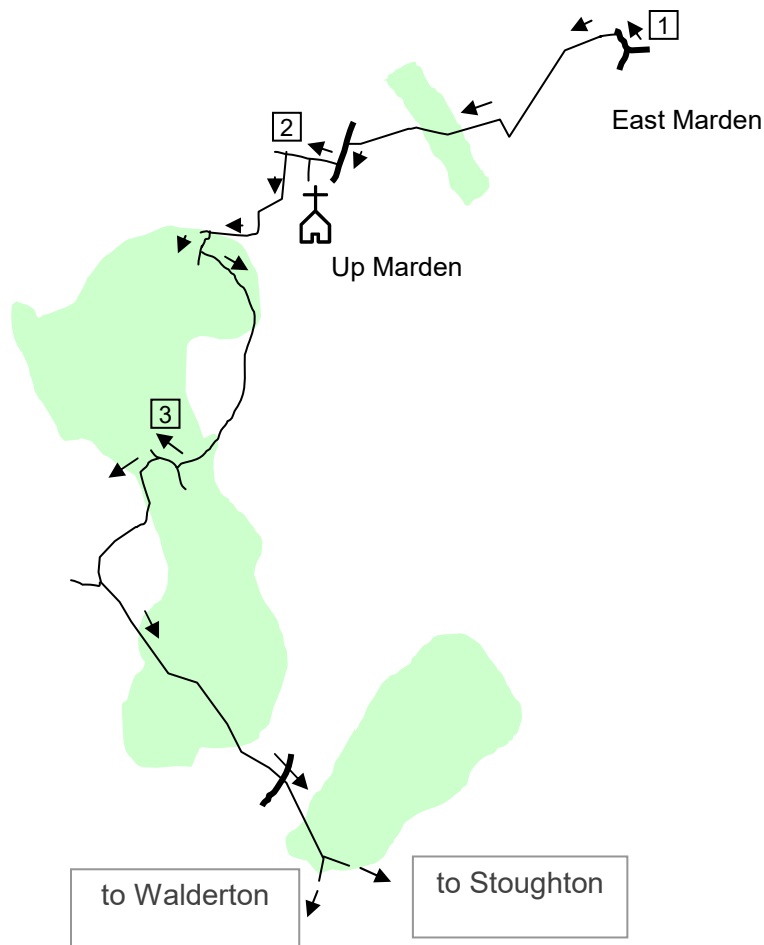


- 1 Ignore the wide path on the right uphill and take the **second** path, a quarter **right**, that goes slightly uphill between beeches. Ignore a fine path forking right through the trees and keep ahead on a narrower path which widens again and runs through more fine beeches. When the beeches finally end, at a fork, take the **left** path. The path gradually merges with the bridleway on your right. The bridleway curves right to a large wooden gate meeting another bridleway coming from the right. Pass by the gate and keep straight ahead alongside the garden fence of *Blackbush House*. *Forestry operations turn this area into a veritable quagmire in the wetter seasons, in which case you need to hop around the edges; however, this is the only really muddy patch on this walk.* This winding track runs through mixed woodland and passes a notice indicating that you are leaving Kingley Vale. At a fingerpost, the track bends left and right under yews. You pass a wooden gate on the left coming from the private West Dean Estate. Soon you reach a T-junction. Turn **right** on a track and, in just 10m, turn left through a small wooden gate into the open pasture of Chilgrove Hill.
- 2 Keep to the left-hand side of the pasture heading up towards a large clump of trees. *You have wonderful views left down the valley.* Eventually, on the far side, go through two small wooden gates. These are followed by metal gates on either side of a small meadow. Continue on a concrete drive, passing a bungalow. Before the drive bends right into a farm, go **left** over a stile (easily avoidable on its left). The path runs behind some small yards, goes through a metal gate, past a big oak and a pond, then on a narrow course by a horse pasture and over a stile. Turn **right** here on a track.
- 3 The track leads down to a tarmac drive by a 4-way fingerpost. Turn **left** on the drive, passing the modestly named *Hill Barn*. Opposite *Flint Barn*, at a fingerpost, turn **right** on a narrow path into trees. This path is fenced at first and then goes over a stile into an open hillside pasture. East Marden can be seen ahead in the valley. Go straight ahead down the steepest part, on a faint path across the grass. After a rather precipitous descent, go over a stile on the **left**. Now the path runs through tall shrubbery with a few avoidable nettles. Go over a stile, along the right-hand side of a barleyfield, over another stile and straight ahead on an enclosed path. At the end, go over a stile and straight ahead on a farm track. At a fingerpost, ignore a footpath left. At a 2-way fingerpost, turn **right**, going past some houses on your right, and go down a track to a lane in East Marden. Turn **left** on the lane soon reaching the well and the church.

East Marden is a village and a very small parish here on the Downs, covering 380 ha and measuring just over 1x2 km. Elevation is a variable 100m. Probably because of the bleak position, the houses are not much older than the early 1700s, in contrast to the thick-walled church. In the centre on the small green is the famous thatched well. This well has much of the original winching gear and rope. The small oak-beamed Church of St Peter has no separate chancel, a single bell and a small pipe organ. This instrument is 150 years old and came originally from St James's Palace where it was played upon by Prince Albert. The walls are whitewashed but hints of the old coloured walls are visible under the choir benches.



Leg 3: Over the Downs and a Dilemma 5 km=3 miles



- 1 Keep **right** past the church on the lane signposted *North Marden* (see the *Harting Down* walk in this series). In 50m, opposite a cottage, turn **left** over a stile and follow a faint path across the centre of a rather wild meadow. At the far corner, go over a stile and along the left-hand side of a field. At the corner, turn **right** as directed by the pointer and turn **left** at the next corner similarly. Immediately, your route crosses a farmer's path and skirts the left-hand side of a field. At the far corner, go up into woodland. This is another steep climb, although short and definitely the last for today. You quickly go over a crossing path at a fingerpost and continue your ascent. At the end, keep ahead on a farm track and come out into a lane at Up Marden. Turn **left** on the lane. Just after the end of a flint wall, turn **right** on a marked bridleway. On your left is Up Marden House. A little further on, between two tumbledown sheds, you reach, on the left, a lovingly tended lawn leading past yews and a copper beech to the Church of St Michael at Up Marden with its graves by the wall in the small cemetery, with the more recent grave of SAS hero Captain Westmacott.



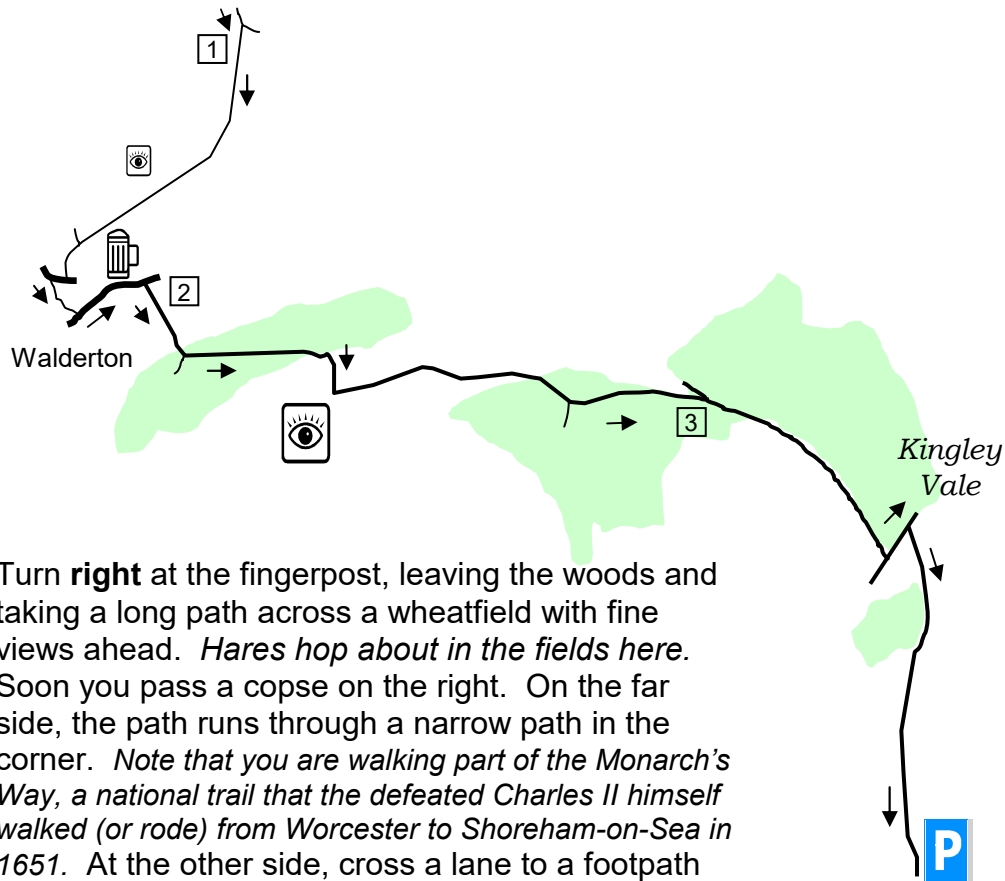
Up Marden church is the living spirit of a long-departed village. Turn your blind spot on the Victorian pulpit and wall plaques and you are in the 1200s. Nothing has been added. No electricity: only daylight invests the space with lucid stillness. Driven on the wind that sweeps the Downs, only rainy mortar taints the air within. The chancel arch speaks a riddle: why the chunky inner arch? was the original arch about to collapse? (The inner arch has been dated, controversially, to 1625.) Wall paintings were whitewashed over by Cromwell's

men but a large one has been uncovered and others peep through. Journalist Simon Jenkins wrote after a visit about “the Downland churches that disturb us unbelievers. ... There is not a cathedral in England that has their power to move the spirit.”

- 2 Return to the bridleway and continue onwards. Ignore a footpath right and, immediately after, turn **left** through a gap and along the left-hand side of a large field, passing a wide gap in the trees where you can see the tiny bell tower of the church. Continue, with trees on your left, along the top of this large field, heading towards electricity pylons. Your path now turns **right** down the side and up again by a fingerpost. Just after a bend, look out for a post and unneeded stile. (*Don't miss them!*) Turn **left** here into woodland, away from the pylons. In 50m, at a fingerpost, turn **left** on a wide path downhill. The path goes down into a clearing in the valley and up again. Ignore a track on the left shortly and continue under ash trees. On your right, the trees of Grevitts Copse descend into the valley. The path runs along the left-hand side of a large field and, on the other side, enters woods and reaches a T-junction under tall beeches. Turn **right** on a wide path.
- 3 In 50m, fork **left** to a fingerpost. The path curves left, is joined by a path from the right and runs uphill for some distance. At the top of the rise, veer **right** at a yellow arrow on a track, avoiding the track ahead which is private. Keep straight ahead along a band of trees. Soon you pass some cottages of Lyecommon on your left. At a junction, keep straight ahead on a bridleway, ignoring the bridleway on the right. Keep to this tree-lined track as it enters deeper into woodland, following any blue arrows and thereby avoiding all turnings off, including a prominent right fork. At a fingerpost, continue ahead by a majestic oak. Soon the path winds downhill on a stony track and finally ends at a lane. Cross straight over the lane to a bridleway opposite and follow it between fields and into woods. Soon you meet a 3-way fingerpost.

Decision point. Here you have **two** ways of returning to the West Stoke car park and two possible places of refreshment. Route 1 has the best views of the walk and goes through the pretty village of **Walderton** where the traditional *Barley Mow* has a wide selection of food and is open all day Sunday (till 3 pm other days). Route 2 is a bit shorter and gives you another chance to stop at **Stoughton** where the up-market *Horse and Hounds* has a superior menu and fine real ales and is always open. Both pubs have a garden. For Route 1, simply continue with the next section. For Route 2, skip to near the end of this text and do **Stoughton Descent 2**.

Leg 4: Return via Walderton 6½ km=4 miles



- 1 Turn **right** at the fingerpost, leaving the woods and taking a long path across a wheatfield with fine views ahead. *Hares hop about in the fields here.* Soon you pass a copse on the right. On the far side, the path runs through a narrow path in the corner. *Note that you are walking part of the Monarch's Way, a national trail that the defeated Charles II himself walked (or rode) from Worcester to Shoreham-on-Sea in 1651.* At the other side, cross a lane to a footpath opposite, slightly right. Your path runs along the right-hand side of a field and, just over half-way, zigzags right-left to switch to the left-hand side of the adjoining field. Ignore a footpath right across the field. The path turns left by a wall down to a lane in the pretty village of Walderton. Turn **right** on the road for a short distance and, just before a bend and opposite a thatched cottage, turn **left** on a narrow footpath which at the time of writing is unmarked. Follow the path across a footbridge over the dry River Ems and cross the lawn to a road. Turn **left** on the road, shortly reaching the *Barley Mow*.



Despite its glossy website, the ivy-clad "Barley Mow" is a traditional pub. Ales include two Ringwood brews and the ubiquitous Doombar. Food is wide-ranged, from big steaks and swordfish down to sandwiches. Don't think the tables at the front are the only seating: there's a good garden at the back. The "Barley Mow" closes at 3pm except on Sundays when it stays open. Ring 023-9263-1321 if unsure.

- 2 Continue along the road, passing Cooks Lane on the left. Just after the last house, turn **right** on a track marked as a public way. At a junction by a Forestry Commission sign, avoiding a path on the right, keep straight ahead past a wooden barrier on a bridleway. The bridleway path bends left and runs gradually uphill for some distance with the woodland on the left getting gradually steeper. After nearly 700m, look for a post with a blue arrow. Fork **right** here on a narrow path and, at a fingerpost, turn **right** between fields. Your path passes some derelict farm buildings and reaches a junction at the corner. *Here you have the best views of the walk, with Chichester Harbour, Emsworth and Hayling Island ahead, Langstone Harbour and the Isle of Wight further to the right.* Turn **left** on a path

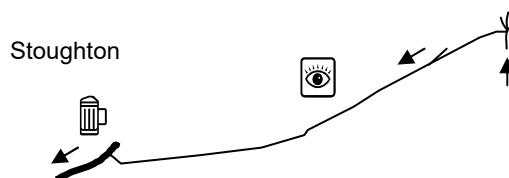
between fields. The path goes gently uphill with improving views. Eventually the path veers right into woods. At a marker post, ignore a bridgeway right. The stony path comes out of the woods and runs by a field on the left. Where the fence curves left, fork right at a post with a blue arrow back into trees, dominated by a tall beech and yew trees. Soon you are joined by a bridgeway from the left.

At this point, the [Stoughton Return](#) re-joins the walk.

- 3 Soon you enter a more open landscape with fine views of Chichester Cathedral. Your path passes a gate and noticeboard for Kingley Vale. The long cinder track gradually descends with the trees of Kingley Vale on your left and a field on your right. Finally you reach a T-junction at the bottom. Turn **left** here. At a junction by gates turn **right** on the path by which you arrived and soon arrive at the car park where the walk began.

Stoughton Descent 1 2½ km=1½ miles

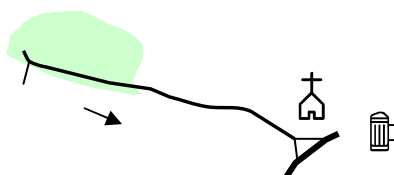
Take this short cut if you are doing the shorter walk. You will miss the [Mardens](#) and the wonderful [Downland churches](#). This short cut takes you direct to [Stoughton](#) where there is a good place for food and drink.



Turn **left** at the 3-way fingerpost on a path that runs beside a wire fence. As you come from under the trees by a bench, Stoughton is visible in the valley ahead. Descend between wire fences and join a wider farm track by a large metal gate. *Note that you are walking part of the Monarch's Way, a national trail from Worcester to Shoreham-on-Sea.* As you get nearer a farm, ignore a bridgeway right and continue between fields and pastures, passing the farm on your left. Turn **right** in front of some more farm buildings and veer left by *Old Bartons* to meet a lane. Turn left on the lane, soon reaching the *Hare and Hounds* pub in Stoughton. Turn now to the section **Stoughton Return** below, where the pub and the village are described.

Stoughton Descent 2 600 m=0.4 miles

Take this route if you are finishing the **longer** walk via Stoughton. There is a good place to eat or drink in the village.



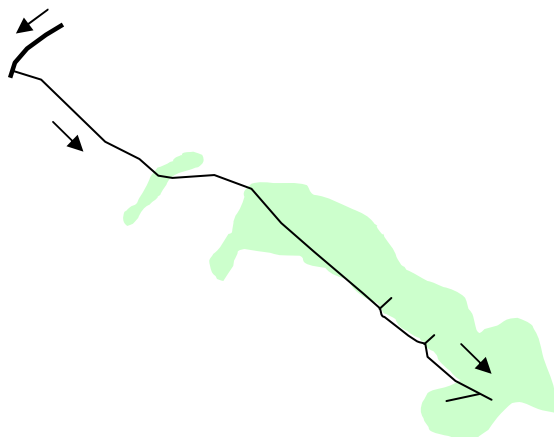
Ignore the footpath on the right and stay on the bridgeway through the woods. You come out of the woods and walk between fields and hedges. 200m further, you enter the village of Stoughton as the track curves its way past houses and gardens. Soon you reach the village green at a junction. Turn **left** to the *Hare and Hounds* pub. Turn now to the section **Stoughton Return** below, where the pub and the village are described.

Stoughton Return 2 km=1¼ miles + 2½ km=1½ miles

Take this route on arriving at Stoughton.



The “Hare and Hounds” is a superior gastropub and knows it, as you can tell from the stylish pub sign and from the fact that its website has three pages devoted to the wine list. Nevertheless, if you need only a quick drink there are two small bars on the right-hand side with an impressive range of ales if you can drag the staff away from the restaurant side. Look out for “specials” written in chalk. One excellent item for lunch time is the £10 platter that provides soup, Cumberland sausage and other meats plus bread, cheese and homemade chutney: they seem to be well prepared for walkers. The pub is listed as open all day every day but if in doubt ring 023-9263-1433.



After refreshment, with your back to the pub, turn **right** along the lane, passing a small green. The church is a short distance up a track on the right and is unmissable. You need to return to the road to re-join the walk.



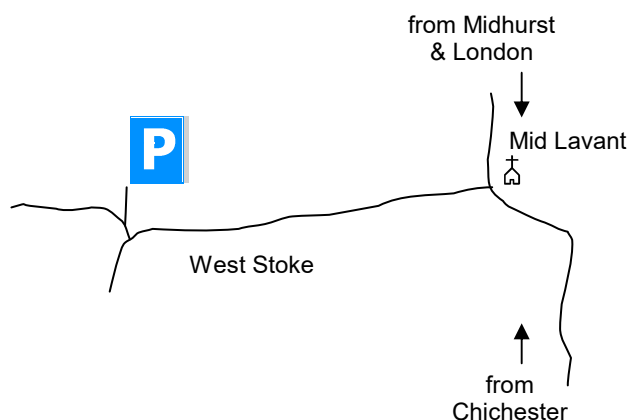
Stoughton Church of St Mary is the largest of the small Downland churches. It is one of a group of eight parishes known as the Octagon. It is also one of the oldest, dating from around the time of the Norman Conquest. You are immediately struck by the squat bell tower (with six bells) on the south side, which was erected in the late 1300s. Inside, you will notice the short nave, wooden beams and the arched altar window and the hanging lanterns which were clearly lit by oil until recently.

Continue along the lane, and in a few metres turn **left** between *Jeremys* and *Tythe Barn House* on a concrete track marked as a bridleway. The path runs between hedges and shortly you pass a memorial to a Polish pilot. The path gets gradually steeper and runs through some trees, then between a grassy bank and a meadow. In 200m, it enters woods again and continues to ascend. Finally you emerge by a field near a metal gate, where the route continues on a pleasant grassy path, beside a field on the right with a concrete tank. As you progress, ignore two marked bridleways on the left, staying at all times by the field and passing on your left a dense young beechwood. As the field ends, leave the track by keeping straight ahead on a narrow path into yew trees. At a fingerpost, a track joins from the right.

Now re-join the main walk at Leg 4, section 3.

Getting there

By car: if coming from the direction of London, take the A286 via Haslemere and Midhurst, signposted to Chichester. After Singleton and West Dean, you enter Lavant. As the road curves and passes the church with the little wooden tower, turn right on a road signposted *East Ashling, Funtington*. In just over 2 miles=3½ km, you go through the village of West Stoke and pass West Stoke House. Shortly after, at a left bend, turn **right** in the direction of a brown sign for the Nature Reserve and, in a few metres, park in the car park on the right.



From Chichester, take the B2178, signposted *Funtington, E. Ashling*, which goes through West Stoke.

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