



Kingley Vale and West Dean

Distance: 16 km=10 miles or 11½ km=7 miles easy-to-moderate walking

Region: West Sussex

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Refreshments: West Dean

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

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

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Woodland, forest trails, views, quiet country lanes

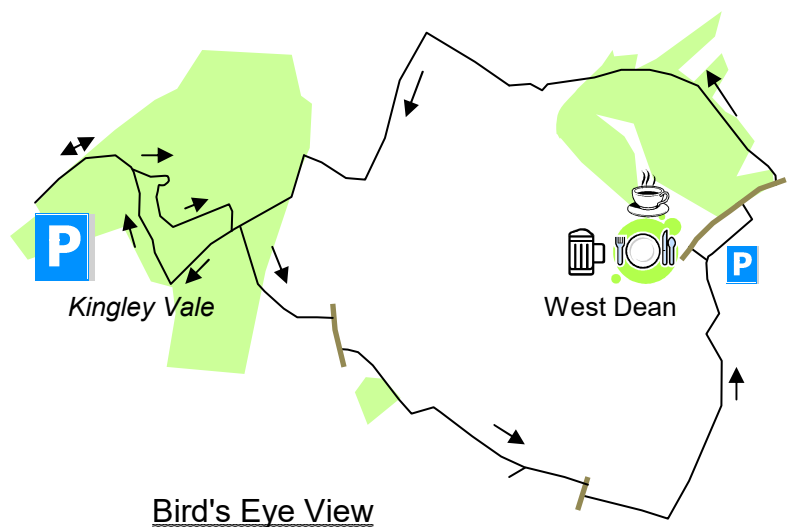
In Brief

This is the second walk in the famous Kingley Vale in West Sussex. This time you leave the forest and descend into open country to visit a village, more forest and open meadows with extensive views, before returning to Kingley Vale in a figure-of-eight plan. As expected, there are a few gradients in Kingley Vale to test your legs. In West Dean there is a pub offering rare ales and some good food. (To enquire at *The Selsey Arms*, ring 01243-811465, vital as they sometimes close for a wedding.)



There is just one narrow section in Kingley Vale where nettles can be a problem for wearers of shorts. The paths are all firm and well made, so sensible walking shoes or trainers should be all you need, except in wet conditions. There are *no* compulsory stiles and *one* sheep field, presenting no major problem for your dog if you have a lead handy.

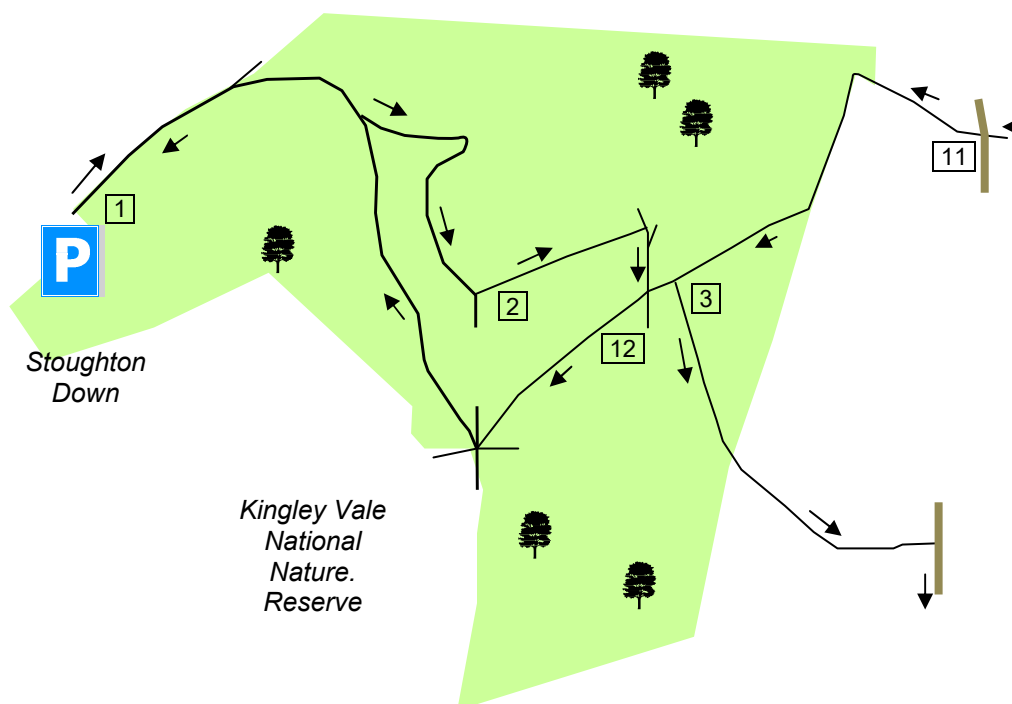
The walk begins at the **Stoughton Down** car park, near Chichester, West Sussex. The postcode of the nearby farm (¼ mile away) is **PO18 9JG**. This car park is incredibly popular with mountain bikers, but there's plenty of room, sometimes overflowing onto the grass. You can also begin the walk in a parallel side road in **West Dean**, postcode **PO18 0QY** (start at ) , reducing the length to 11½ km=7 miles, but without exploring much of the wonderful Kingley Vale forest. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



Bird's Eye View

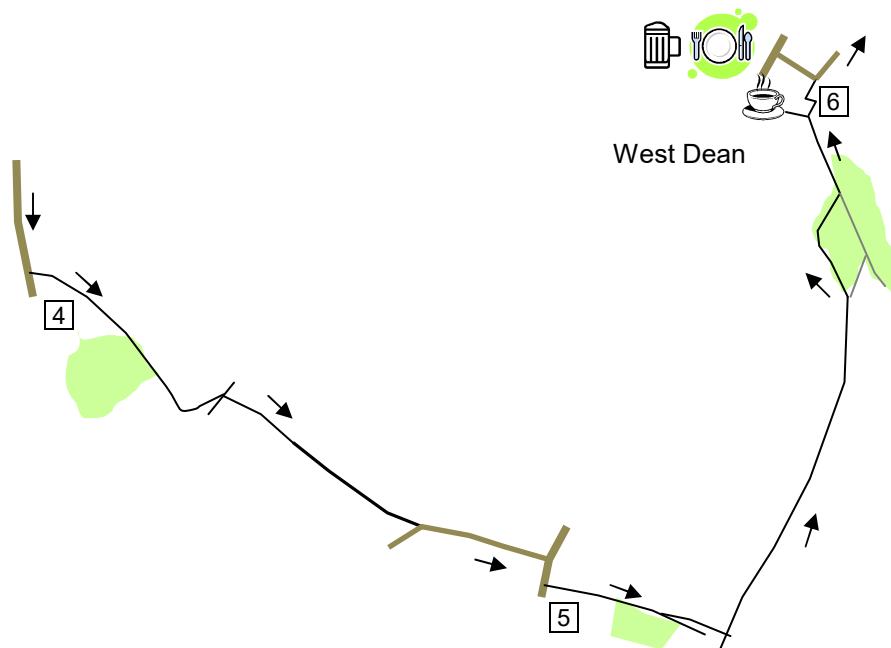
The Walk

Kingley Vale is a National Nature Reserve run by Natural England. It includes chalk and grasslands, bronze age earthworks and large areas of forest, including the famous ancient twisted yew trees which are among the oldest living things in Britain.



- 1 From the back of the Stoughton Down car park, go through a metal barrier on a wide gravel path, with a field on your left, woodland on your right. After ½ km **avoid** a left fork, staying on the main path. The path curves right and, in 300m, reaches another fork. Take the **left** fork, thus leaving the official bridleway. In 200m, this track takes a tight right hairpin in a rather spectacular landscape. 200m from the “head” of the hairpin, the track is straight again. In *another* 200m (that's about 220 yds or 3 minutes' walking), you need to look for a very obvious junction on your **left**. This is just before the track ahead curves right uphill. Your path is grassy, straight but unsigned. Turn **left** here, gently uphill.
- 2 This is a pleasant route, and if you are lucky you will find wild raspberries which are delicious. After 400m, you will glimpse a house up ahead on your left and, at the top, you come to a T-junction. Turn **right**. In 25m keep straight on as you are joined by a path coming from a fingerpost over on your left. In 100m, you pass a large bushy (evergreen) yew tree on your left. A bridleway intersects the path here, as you can see from a 4-way fingerpost on your right. Turn **sharp left** here. Your path runs through a dark yew grove which might have been a perfect spot for ancient Druidic ceremonies. In 50m or so, you reach a 4-way junction with a fingerpost. (This junction will be the fulcrum of your return journey.) Turn **right** at the 4-way junction.

- 3 Follow the narrow path (which may be slippery and nettly) down through a woodland of scrub and sprawling yew trees. After 350m, you reach the edge of Kingley Vale by a noticeboard and emerge onto a grassy path with great views. You go through a small wooden gate and between a field and a Bramble bank. Your path veers right into a crop field and runs down the left-hand side. At a junction of fields, keep straight on, past an abandoned metal gate, passing a fingerpost. Follow the track along the left-hand side of a field and straight on, through a small wooden gate next to some large metal gates, to the main road. Turn **right** cautiously on the main road.



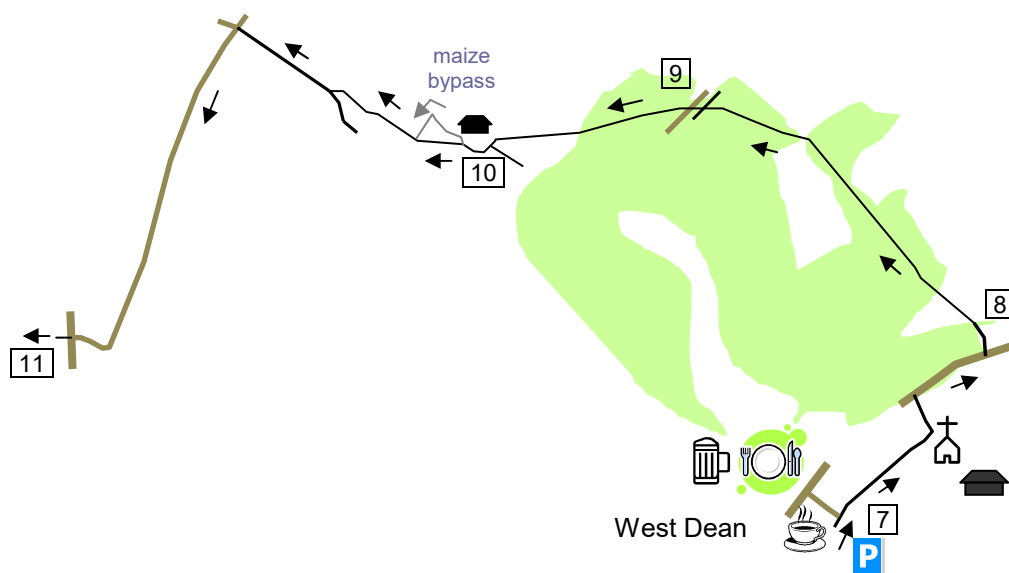
- 4 In 200m, after a long barn and opposite the entrance to a large flint cottage, turn **left** at a signpost on a bridleway. This easy wide path runs steadily uphill between fields. After 400m, you pass a signboard for the West Dean Estate (telling you that Lawrence Copse, on your right, can be visited by permit). As your path comes out into the open beside a crop field and bends left, take the **left**-hand fork, under trees. In 100m, cross over a flinty farm track and take a path, a fraction to your right, along the left-hand side of a field, heading for a house in the distance. [You have a good view of the spire of Chichester Cathedral.](#) As you pass the house, continue on a drive and, after ½ km, at a bend, continue ahead on a tarmac lane. You pass the flint wall and entrance to Binderton House. *Binderton is a parish, very rare in that it has no village. The house ("Old Binders") was once the home of PM Sir Anthony Eden.* At the main road, cross to a tarmac footway and turn **right**.
- 5 In only 50m or so, just before a house, turn **left** on a tarmac / gravel drive. After a bridge over a brisk stream, at a fingerpost, keep straight ahead, ignoring the right fork, soon going through the remains of a small wooden gate and crossing a bridge over the dismantled railway. [\(The old railway is also a hiking trail, the Centurion Way \(CW\), between West Dean and Chichester, but the established public footpath used on this walk shortly has better views and a more varied terrain; nevertheless, some walkers use the CW as an alternative route.\)](#) Go through a wooden gate and turn **left** along the left-hand edge of the green hillside. After 500m, a metal gate leads into the next meadow,

this time fenced off. After 300m, another metal gate leads you along the left-hand grass verge of a crop field. In 250m or so, as woods begin on your left, go **left** on an unmarked path into woods. (The official path continues 150m into the corner and veers left at a T-junction, but this local village path is more attractive.) The woodland path curves right beside a long green meadow on your left and, after 350m total in the wood, you reach a stony track by a flint wall. Turn **left** on the track, reaching the outskirts of West Dean in 200m or so.

- 6 Opposite the big wrought-iron gates of the West Dean College grounds (giving a tantalising glimpse), turn **left** and immediately, just *before* a bridge, turn **right** alongside a weed-choked stream on your left. In 80m, go **left** over a very small stone bridge and **right** on a tarmac lane. *This lane, Church Lane, was once the main road in West Dean before the Peachey family moved it, together with most of the village.* Your route is to continue ahead to the church but, in 50m, on your left is a lane leading to two places of hospitality, the *West Dean Stores and Tea Room* and *The Selsey Arms* pub. It is best to backtrack afterwards and stay on Church Lane to avoid the main road.



West Dean Stores and Tea Room are one of the gems of the region, serving tea and hot meals under their famous knitted tea cosies. The Selsey Arms (pka the Ale and Cider House) was a great eccentric pub, well used by local people and the occasional sprawling golden retriever, serving some rare cloudy ciders. (However, walkers report it has been modernised and lost some character.) Ales are also unusual: their own West Dean ale is brewed for them in Steyning. Adjoining the bar, the large restaurant makes a spacious contrast, combining pub favourites with more adventurous creations of the chef, eaten in good weather on the large patio.



- 7 Continue along the lane all the way to the church. One wing of the vast flint-walled West Dean House is visible over the wall.

West Dean church is Norman, restored in 1934 after a fire. The church yard is remarkable for its many gravestones dating from the 1600s, some victims of the plague. The first on the right of the church shows a crossbones. This does not indicate a pirate or brigand but rather an unknown person or a mysterious cause of death – a kind of warning to keep your distance.

Turn **left** by the church, passing the converted stables and reaching the main road. Turn **right**, using the footway on the other side. In 250m, opposite the main entrance to West Dean College, turn **left** on a tarmac drive.

West Dean House is the largest flint structure in the country. William James 1854-1912 was the son of an American merchant who was completely self-made and raised his son in England. William expanded this vast structure (it had already been remodelled in the previous century by the Peachey family) and he and his high-society wife played host to royalty, including the future King Edward. The James family eventually gave the house over to education and it is now West Dean College, specialising in antique restoration, ceramics and other crafts.

- 8 Follow the track, through an arch under the old railway, passing a scout campsite on your left, and take a grassy path uphill between wire fences. Your path takes you through a metal kissing-gate and uphill into woods. Follow this wide straight path through the Highdown Plantation, going over a farmer's track in a lighter area. Keep straight ahead, following yellow arrows until the path descends to a junction of tracks, about 1¼ km from the main road. Cross straight over a track onto a much narrower path leading to a tarmac lane.
- 9 Cross straight over the lane and bear **left** and **right** on a path up into more woodland. This wide path leads uphill to reach a 4-way junction with a fingerpost after 150m. Cross straight over, a fraction left, and take a clear wide path uphill through more woodland. At the top, emerging from the wood, a 2-way fingerpost directs you to keep straight ahead, in fact at a slight angle to your left. *In late summer you may need to find your way through some maize. At the time of writing, this was only 15m wide and easy to cross but at other times the path was obscure.* Continue in the same direction across a cereal field, slightly to your left. (In late summer this will be completely bare after reaping.) As you come over the rise, aim to the left of a farm house ahead. In the corner your route may shift a little right-left to pass to the left of the house. *You have joined the Monarch Way (MW) an incredible route from Worcester, via Dorset, to the sea at Shoreham.*
- 10 Keep round the side of the farm, passing close to a grey corrugated barn on your right. Your next path veers at an angle **left** (due west) across the centre of the crop field to a marker post at the other side. *In springtime, the field may be ploughed up but you can keep to the path by looking out for the marker post. However, in late summer the footpath had been completely obliterated by a maize crop and the following alternative should be used. Just after the far corner of the (first) grey barn, veer **left** away from the buildings on a wide farmer's track across the centre of the crop field. In 100m, the track zigzags a fraction right and left and reaches the far corner of the field under a large ash tree. Turn **left** along the edge of the field. In 30m, you enter another field, normally a cereal field which may be bare. Continue as before, along the left-hand edge. In 50m, you see on your left a stile. Turn **right** here, thus re-joining the footpath. You have great views ahead and, at the bottom, the path zigzags a little left-right to take you through a gap by a redundant stile into another cereal field. Continue as before, straight down the field and, after 100m or so, veer **left** over a bank and **right** to continue your direction on a wide track. Follow this easy wide path for 350m to arrive at a junction of tarmac lanes. Turn **left** at the junction in the direction *Chichester*. Passing two small houses,*

turn **right** with the lane after 1 km, just before a farm. Follow the lane, quickly reaching a main road (the B2141). *You are still on the MW.*

- 11 **See map with section 1.** Cross straight over the road and take a wide grassy bridleway opposite, sometimes festooned with log stacks. In 300m or so, as soon as the path enters woods, turn **left** at a fingerpost, up a bank and keep left, passing a notice board for Kingley Vale, indicating that you are nearing the end of your journey. *As the path briefly comes out into the open, you catch sight of the top of the spire of Chichester Cathedral.* After 300m, your path curves right uphill. You pass through an area of ancient yew trees which are so typical of Kingley Vale. (See the walk "Kingley Vale and the Downland Churches" in this series.) Near the top, you follow a grassy path in a clearing and, 350m from the start of this uphill stretch, you reach a 4-way junction of paths by a fingerpost, familiar from your outward journey if you began in Stoughton Down.

If you did *not* begin this walk in Stoughton Down and you do not want to explore this wonderful landscape any further, turn **left** at the 4-way junction and resume the walk at section 3.

- 12 Your return leg is similar to the outward leg but using a different, more direct path. Continue **straight ahead** through the yew grove, still on the MW, to reach a crossing path after 50m or so. Cross straight over, a fraction to your left, by a blue arrow. You are now on a very wide path, going down through woods. After ½ km, you reach a 6-way junction of paths. **Ignore** the first path on your right, a gravel forestry path, and **ignore** the path straight ahead, under the fingerpost, beside a meadow. Instead, take the **second** path on your right, a little obscure at first, running downhill under beeches. The tall young trees here are stupendous. They give way to mixed forest and the path becomes stony. You meet a track from the right (familiar from your outward journey). After a 3-way fingerpost, your wide path curves left and finally reaches the Stoughton Down car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: your route to Stoughton Down is a wonderful scenic drive through (if you come via the A3) South Harting and the Mardens. Just before Petersfield, turn **left** onto the A272, turning **left** with it in $\frac{2}{3}$ mile at the next roundabout (brown tourist sign *Uppark*). In 0.2 mile, turn **right** onto the B2199 (still *Uppark*), soon joining the B2146 all the way to South Harting. Just after South Harting, fork **left** onto the B2141 (signpost *Chilgrove, Lavant*). Follow the B2141 into North Marden and there turn **right** for *East Marden*. In East Marden at the little thatched well, keep **right** (signposted *Stoughton, Westbourne*). The car park is on the left in 1½ miles.

West Dean is on the main A286 Midurst-Chichester road. Take a side lane beside the pub and park in the parallel lane where there is a dirt strip.

By bus/train: Stagecoach bus 60 from Chichester to West Dean, not Sun. Check the timetable.

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