



Kingley Vale and the Downland Churches

Distance: 21 km=13 miles or 11 km=7 miles

moderate walking

Region: West Sussex

Date written: 23-jul-2011

Author: Hautboy

Date revised: 8-may-2018

Refreshments: Stoughton, Walderton

Last update: 10-apr-2025

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

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

Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

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.

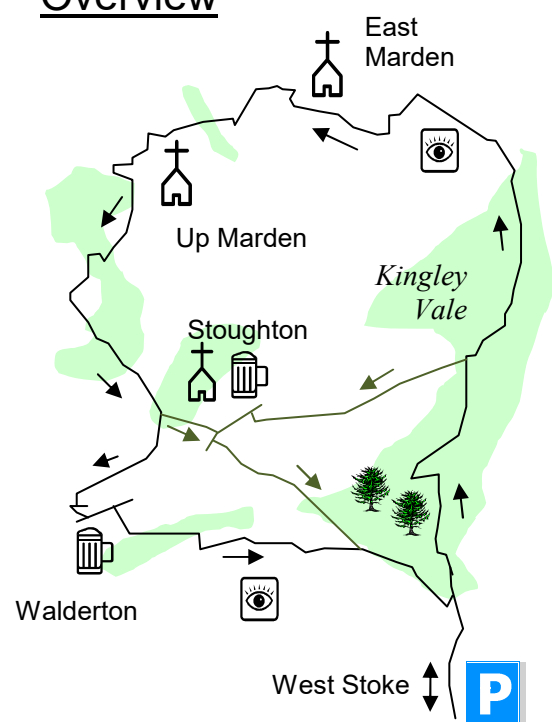


There are no nettles to worry a person in shorts. Boots are recommended because some of the paths are stony and there is one path that tends to be muddy in the wetter seasons. Any sensible attire is fine but always take a waterproof as the South Downs sometimes attract a brief shower. Your dog can come,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



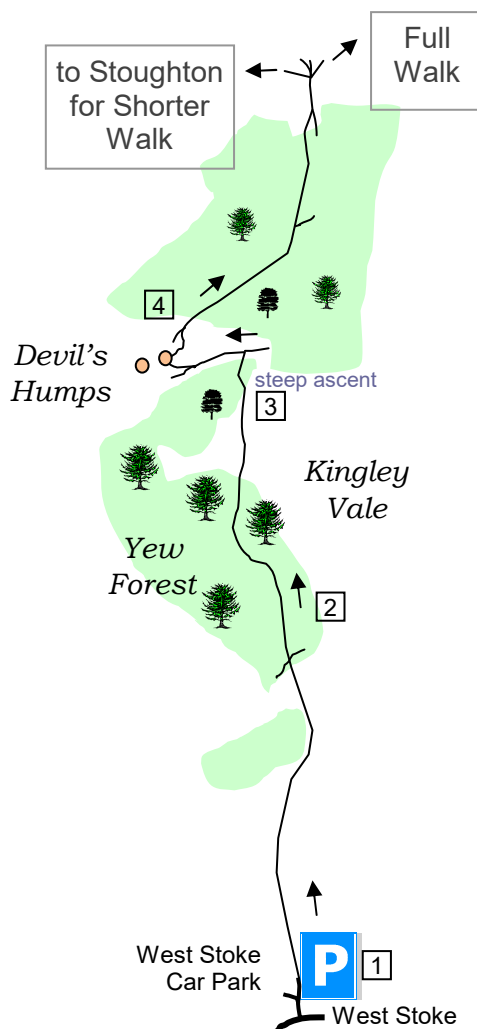
The Walk


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 swing 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 1 km, you reach a crossing path with a wooden gate ahead bearing the words *Kingley Vale N.N.R.* Go straight ahead through the swing gate into the Reserve. On your right is an info tablet and 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 *Nature Trail* with wooden posts and arrows to guide you. (2025: Unfortunately over the years the numbers on the posts have rubbed off: meanwhile you'll need to count, look and hope!) In 150m, fork **right** on a more earthy path and in 150m, by an info tablet and marker **post 4**, turn **right** to view some of the great yew trees. After marker **post 5** (almost hidden on your left), there are still more yews to see on the right, but you need to keep **left** to exit by a narrow path out into the open again. Turn immediately **right** at a post and follow the trail beside a wild meadow, passing marker **post 6** in 50m. In another 50m, at marker **post 7**, your path rejoins the main path. In 50m, at marker **post 8**, turn **right** again to visit another sequence of great yews. The path comes out into open grasslands. Turn **left** to marker post **11** and **right** by a crude bench. The short very steep ascent is clearly visible on the chalk up ahead. (The official footpath goes up through the dense yew trees but after recent storms and so many fallen trees, everyone now uses the path up the open hillside just to the right, which is much easier thanks to natural chalk steps.)

 3 Follow the path towards the slope, heading past a group of small yews and begin your ascent. As you pause for breath, you gain views behind to the coast with Chichester Cathedral visible. At the top of the steepest part there is a flat section from where you can pause to admire the view.

Continue up a taxing flight of steps to meet, near the top, a wide crossing path on the open hillside near post **17**. Turn **left** on this path to go past post **18**. In 100m go through a wooden swing gate and continue straight on with great views south. Head straight for a round earth mound, one of a pair known as the Devil's Humps. Just before the Hump, cross straight over a wide diagonal chalky track. In 15m you reach a grassy crossing path just before the Hump. Your route is **right** on this green path. But first you may want to climb the Hump for a good view all around.

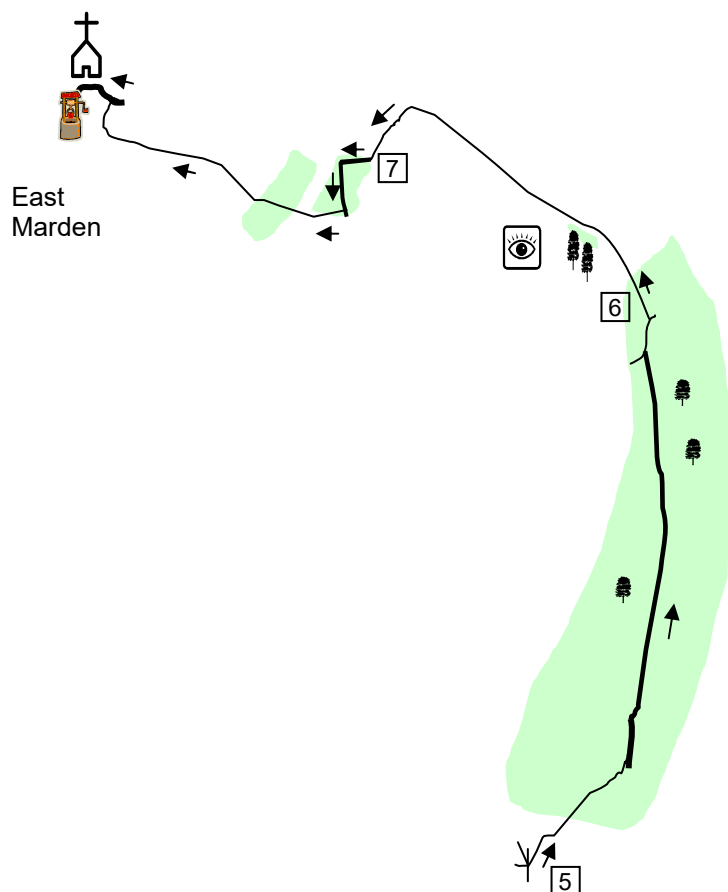


The Devil's Humps are part of a bronze-age cemetery. There are in fact six of these "barrows" in this area. The two humps are bell type, the others being bowl and pond type, two of each. When a great chief of the Stone or Bronze Age died, it was customary for his people to erect a mound of earth or stones 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** Having turned **right** on the grassy path, continue 100m to arrive at an information board. A rutted track merges with you from the left. Turn **right** and follow the track through a double metal gate, steadily descending amidst forest. In 600m you will notice a blue arrow indicating the official bridleway to the right. Ignore this turn and stay on the track. In 450m the bridleway re-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 section.

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



5 Ignore the rough track on the right uphill and take the **second** path, a quarter **right**, that goes slightly uphill under beeches, past a fingerpost with a *Monarch's Way* badge. Your path widens and runs under more magnificent beeches. The beeches finally end at a 4-way fingerpost. Take the **left** fork. *Forestry operations turn this area into a veritable quagmire in the wetter seasons, in which case you need to hop around the edges; however, the rest of the walk is generally much drier.* The path gradually merges with a bridleway from your right and it shortly passes a post with a blue arrow, followed by another fingerpost near a large wooden gate. Keep straight ahead past the gate, alongside the garden fence of *Blackbush House*. This winding track runs through mixed woodland and in 600m passes a notice indicating that you are leaving Kingley Vale. In another 250m, at a fingerpost, the track bends left and right under yews. In 350m you pass a wooden gate on the left coming from the private West Dean Estate. A further 100m takes you to 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.

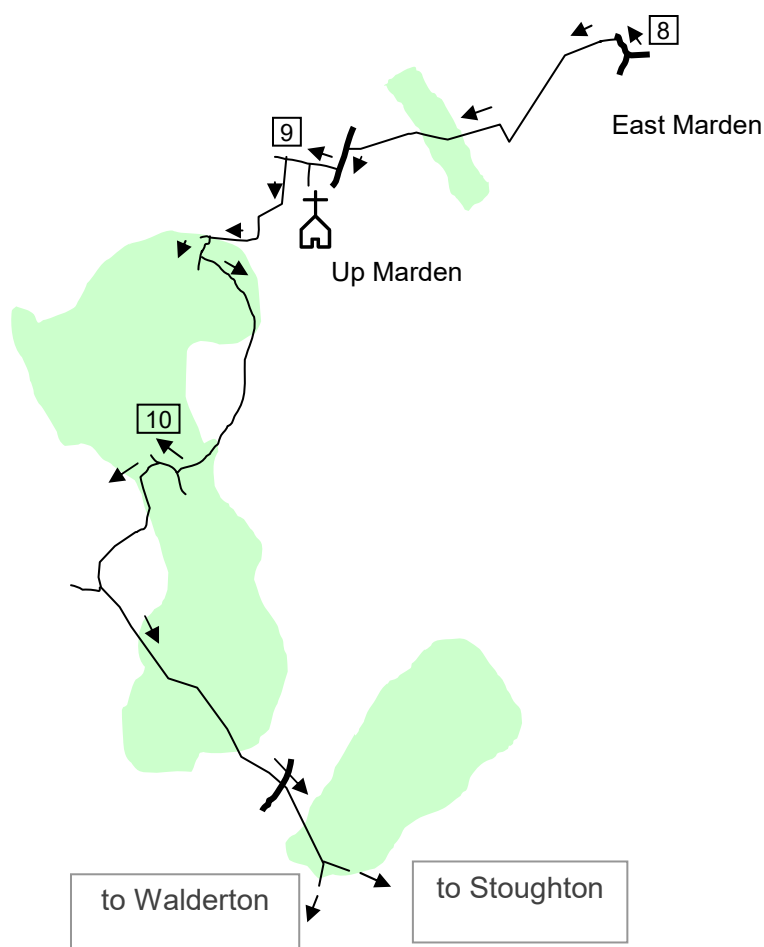
6  Keep to the left-hand side of the pasture heading up towards a large clump of trees. *You have wonderful views left down the valley.* Eventually, on the far side, go through two small wooden gates. These are followed by metal gates on either side of a smaller meadow. Continue on a concrete drive, passing a bungalow. Before the drive bends right into a farm, go **left** over a stile. The path runs behind some small yards, past a big oak and a pond, then on a narrow course by a pasture and over a stile. Turn **right** here on a track.

7 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**. The path runs through tall shrubbery with a few avoidable nettles (and ramsons in spring). Go past an old collapsed stile and along the **right**-hand side of a crop field, past an unneeded stile and straight ahead on a farm track. After a large barn, ignore a signed footpath left. Shortly after, at a 2-way fingerpost, turn **right** and go down a track past houses to a lane in East Marden. Turn **left** on the lane soon reaching the village 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



- 8 Keep **right** past the church on the lane signposted *North Marden* (see the *Harting Down* walk in this series). In 50m, opposite a cottage called *Cobbersfield*, turn **left** through a metal kissing-gate and follow a faint path across the centre of a rather wild pasture. At the opposite corner, go over a stile and along the left-hand side of a field. At the corner, turn **right** as directed by the pointer. Go to the next fingerpost (which is under an electricity pole), turn **left** and go along the **left**-hand edge of a field, still under electricity wires. At the far corner, go up into woodland. This is another steep climb, although short and the last for today. You quickly go over a crossing path at a fingerpost to continue your ascent. At the end, continue beside a field on your right and keep ahead on a farm track to come out onto a tarmac 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.



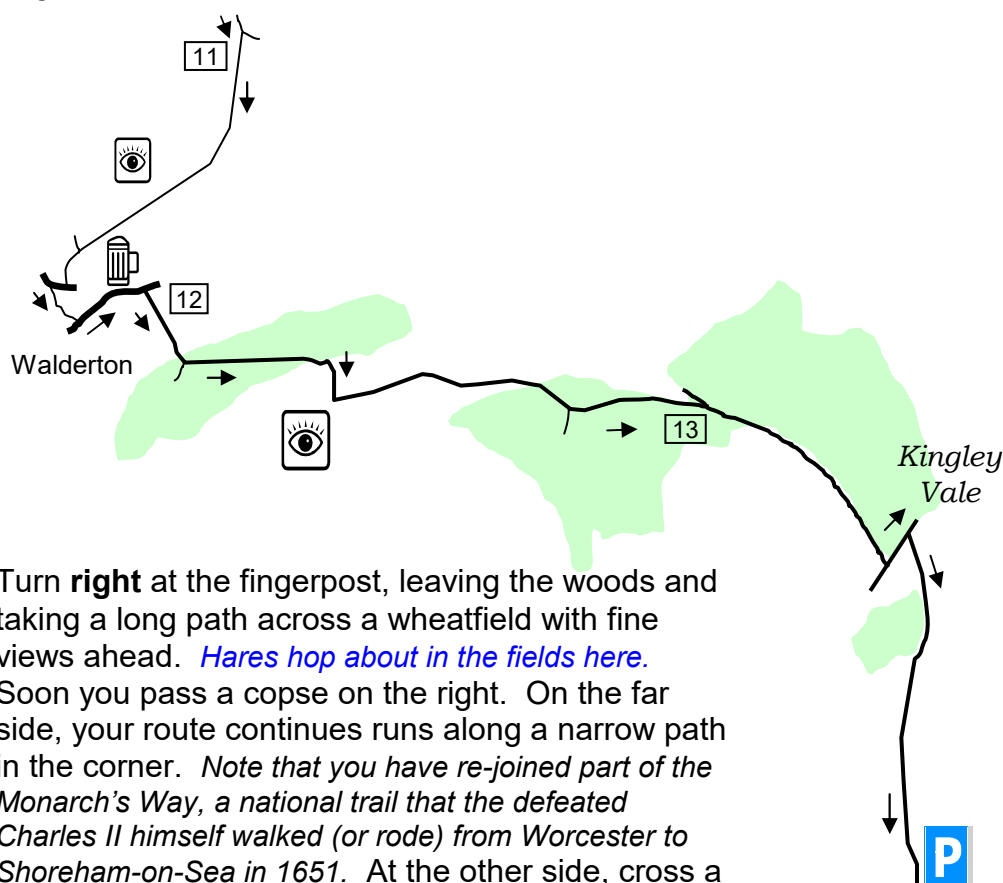
Up Marden church is the living spirit of a long-departed village. Turn your blind spot on the Victorian pulpit and wall plaques (and the new candelabras) and you are in the 1200s. Nothing has been added. No electricity: only daylight invests the space with lucid stillness. Driven on the wind that sweeps 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."

- 9 Return to the bridleway and continue onwards, immediately passing the restored Up Marden Cart Shed, with its interesting history displayed on the wall. Go past a large metal gate and in 50m ignore a footpath right. 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, weaving right and left at the corners, heading towards electricity pylons. Your path now turns **right** down the side and up again by a fingerpost. 100m from the fingerpost, just after a bend, look out for a post with a yellow arrow and redundant stile. (*Don't miss them!*) Turn **left** here into woodland. In 50m, at a 3-way fingerpost, turn **left** on a wide path downhill. The path goes down into a clearing in the valley and up again. Ignore a signposted 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.
- 10 In 50m, fork **left** to a fingerpost. The path curves left, is joined by a path from the right and runs uphill for about 200m. At the top of the rise, avoid the track ahead which is private and veer **right** at a yellow arrow on a track. Keep straight ahead along a band of trees. Soon you pass some houses of Lyecommon on your left. At a junction, ignore the drive on your right and keep straight ahead on a bridleway. Keep to this tree-lined track as it enters deeper into woodland, following any blue arrows and thereby avoiding all turnings off. About 250m into the woodland, you pass a majestic beech on your right. The path winds downhill on a stony track. At a 3-way fingerpost, ignore the right turn and continue onwards to meet a tarmac 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 *Hare 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



- 11 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, your route continues runs along a narrow path in the corner. *Note that you have re-joined 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 fence 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 unmarked footpath. Follow the path across a footbridge over the 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 in the afternoon on weekdays, is open all day Saturday and on Sundays it stays open till 6. Ring 023-9263-1321 for info.

- 12 Continue along the road, passing Cooks Lane on the left. Just after the last house, turn **right** on a track marked by a fingerpost as a public way. At a junction by a Forestry Commission sign, leave the track as it curves away right and keep straight ahead past a metal barrier on a bridleway. The bridleway 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 and fork **right** on a narrow path (which also skips the mud). (If you miss the post, you can see the junction on the right after 50m). 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*



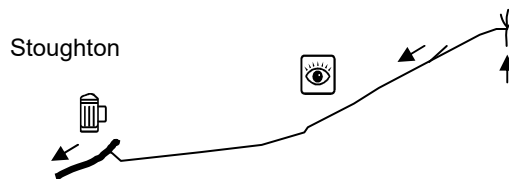
ahead, Langstone Harbour and the Isle of Wight further to the right. At a 3-way fingerpost, turn **left** on a path between fields. The path goes gently uphill with improving views. After nearly 1 km the path enters woods. In 100m, at a marker post, ignore a bridleway right. The stony path comes out of the woods and runs by a field on the left. Where the fence boundary curves left, fork **right** at a post with a blue arrow back into trees, dominated by a tall beech and yew trees. In 100m you are joined by a bridleway from the left.

At this point, the Stoughton Return re-joins the walk.

- 13 In 100m or so you enter a more open landscape with fine views of Chichester Cathedral. Your path merges with a track from the left and passes a gate with a noticeboard for Kingley Vale. Stay on the long cinder track, gradually descending 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. In 100m or so, at a junction by gates, turn **right** on the path by which you came, soon to arrive at the car park where the walk began.

Stoughton Descent 1 2½ km=1½ miles

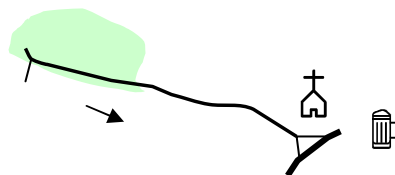
Take this short cut if you are doing the shorter walk. You will miss the Mardens and the wonderful Downland churches. This short cut takes you direct to Stoughton where there is a good place for food and drink.



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 bridleway 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 bridleway 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

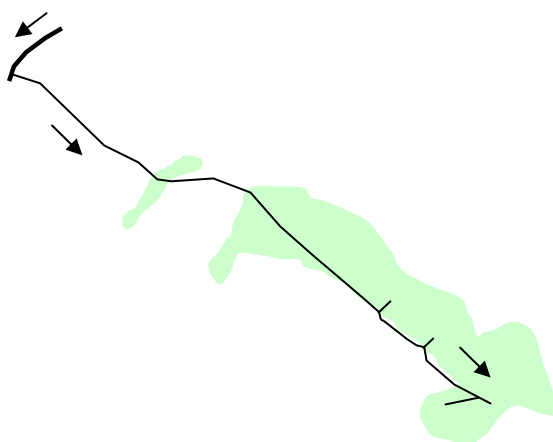
past houses and gardens. Soon you reach the village green at a junction. Turn **left** to the *Hare and Hounds* pub. Turn now to the section **Stoughton Return** below, where the pub and the village are described.

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.



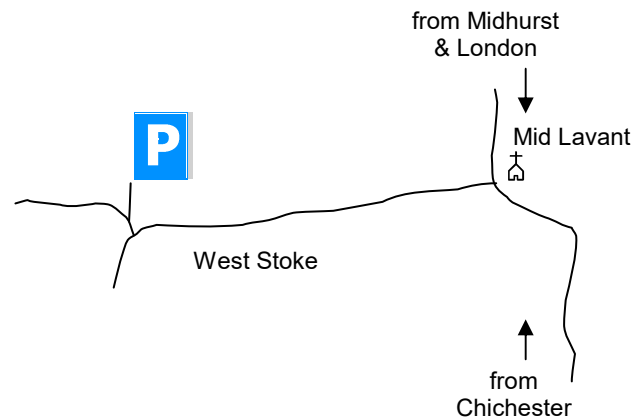
Stoughton Church of St Mary is the largest of the small Downland churches. It is one of a group of eight parishes known as the Octagon. It is also one of the oldest, dating from around the time of the Norman Conquest. You are immediately struck by the squat bell tower (with six bells) on the south side, 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, by a marker post, 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 **13**.

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.

fancy more free walks? www.fancyfreewalks.org