

A SUSSEX GUIDE

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# 20 SUSSEX WALKS



PAT BOWEN



SNAKE RIVER PRESS



## SNAKE RIVER PRESS

### **Book No 7**

*Books about Sussex for the enthusiast*

Published in 2007 by  
SNAKE RIVER PRESS  
South Downs Way, Alfriston, Sussex BN26 5XW  
**[www.snakeriverpress.co.uk](http://www.snakeriverpress.co.uk)**

ISBN 978-1-906022-06-8

This book was conceived, designed and produced by  
SNAKE RIVER PRESS

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ART DIRECTOR & PUBLISHER *Peter Bridgewater*  
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PAGE MAKEUP *Richard Constable & Chris Morris*  
COVER ILLUSTRATION *Ivan Hissey*  
CARTOGRAPHY *John Woodcock*  
CONSULTANT *Lorraine Harrison*

This book is typeset in Perpetua & Gill Sans,  
two fonts designed by Eric Gill

Printed and bound in China

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### **DEDICATION**

*For my daughters & grandchildren*

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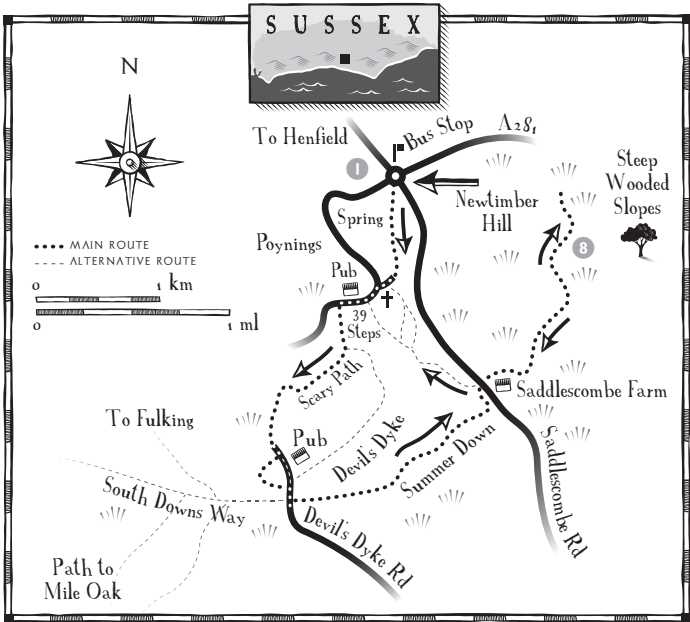
EASY

MEDIUM

CHALLENGING

## DEVIL'S DYKE

## SCRAMBLE &amp; CLAMBER

**Summary**

- ① **Start point:** TQ266128
- ② **Map:** OS Explorer 122
- ③ **Distance:** Circular; 5 miles (8 km), but can be shortened, lengthened or extended to become a linear walk
- ④ **Description:** Some steep climbs. Orchids and downland flowers make it ideal for late spring and summer
- ⑤ **Refreshments:** Pubs at the beginning and middle
- ⑥ **Transport:** Bus from Brighton at weekends only to Devil's Dyke; bus (Brighton to Henfield and Horsham) stops at Poynings roundabout (hourly service on weekdays, two hourly on weekends)

This is a Downs and woodland route mostly on open access land with clear landmarks that make it almost impossible to get lost, so children may safely choose their own paths, scramble in woods and enjoy dramatic slopes and exciting vistas. You can start from the car park at Devil's Dyke (buses at weekends only) or from Poynings. The bus stop nearest to Poynings is by the roundabout where the road turns sharply north towards Henfield.

❶ *Looking towards the Downs from the roundabout you can see the footpath going diagonally across two fields towards the square tower of Poynings' church nestling beneath the wooded hillside.*

An old oak tree to the west of the path stands beside a spring. It's not an exciting fountain of a spring like the one in Fulking, more of a muddy ooze with a trickle of water that has worn a groove in the smooth green of the field. However the trickle soon becomes a stream that eventually flows into the River Adur.

❷ *When you reach the farm, the footpath appears to lead into an agricultural machinery cemetery. Walk between the barns and farm buildings until you come to the drive. Turn right towards the church and then left through the village. Pass the pub and take the second footpath to the left, heading up towards the Downs through a twitten (a narrow path between hedges or buildings), then between fields and into the woods where the path forks. The right-hand fork takes you up the '39 steps' (ironically named by the valiant volunteers who maintain all 200 of them) through a hazel coppice and onto one of the finest revetted hillside paths on the Downs. See below for an alternative route.*

This is not a path for vertigo sufferers or nervous parents with very young children, or when the ground is slippery in wet weather. It follows the curve of the hillside, giving wide

unbroken views to the north and west with violets and cowslips at your feet in spring, and orchids and round-headed rampion as the year progresses. The steepness of the slope above and below and the narrowness of the path create a delightful sense of adventure and achievement. A little way along you cross a straight, wide trackway in the grass which is all that remains of the steep-grade railway that carried passengers down to Poynings for 2d between 1897 and 1908.

❸ *The path comes to a gate which brings you to the ditch and bank of the Neolithic hillfort enclosure near the Dyke car park, toilets and refreshments.*

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#### **Alternative route 1**

Take the left fork by the '39 steps' and follow the less precipitous route through sycamore woods to a bridle path where you turn right and arrive at the western boundary of the hillfort and then the Dyke car park.

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❹ *From the car park walk west across the road, heading towards a rectangular brick building near the ditch and bank that mark the south-western perimeter of the hillfort.*

This building may have once housed a camera obscura, one of Mr Hubbard's attractions. He was landlord of the Dyke Hotel in the 1890s and laid on various inducements to visitors who came at first in wagonettes, and later by train (the line closed in 1938). From this viewpoint

you can see Firl Beacon in the east, Shoreham power station due south, and Lancing, Cissbury and Chanctonbury Rings to the west.

### Alternative route 2

There are old drove-way paths from the South Downs Way (SDW), a little further up on top of the ridge that take you to Hove, Portslade and Southwick. It is also possible to walk further along the SDW to where a bostal (steep-sided) track comes up from Fulking. This winds down the north side of the hill to a lively spring where hundreds of sheep were once washed in spring before shearing. From Fulking (where there is a pub) you can follow footpath signs across meadows, through oak and bluebell woods and past lonely willow-fringed pools, to the sandy common at Oreham and on to Henfield. This would make a linear walk of about 9 miles (14.5 km).

**5** *For this short circuit staying on the Downs, turn east away from the abandoned building by the trig point and walk back across the field to the road and then to the head of the Dyke – the longest, deepest and widest dry valley in England. From here you can stay high up on the South Downs Way and walk east along Summer Down, passing the concrete blocks that were the supports of the aerial cableway that once stretched across the chasm carrying intrepid passengers in an open carriage (see photographs in the pub). Alternatively, you can venture down to the bottom where there is a sheltered microclimate relished by butterflies, badgers and rabbits.*

Near the deepest part of the valley you walk over two mounds; these are the ‘graves’ of the Devil and his wife – though how and when they died are not well known. Satan may have succumbed from disappointment at being thwarted in his plan to drown the good folk of the Sussex Weald.

The story is that he stood high on the Downs one evening and was dismayed to see how many fine churches there were scattered across the Weald. He looked to the south, saw the sea, and decided that a huge ditch would allow the tide to break through the hills and flood the land beyond. That same night he began to dig. An old woman who lived nearby became aware of the Devil at work. She put a candle in her window and woke her cockerel to make it crow. When the Devil heard it he saw the light and thought that it was dawn. He hurried back to his dark abode, leaving the great ditch unfinished and the Wealden churches safe. Some people say that clods of earth fell from his mighty boots as he went, forming the round hills of the western Downs and, finally, the Isle of Wight.

Near the ‘graves’ are four mysterious half-moon shapes of chalk in the hillside. These were made by motorbike riders in the 1960s and, although they look like damage, patches of bare ground are beneficial to many insects of the chalk grassland, including the chalkhill blue butterfly.

**6** *At the bottom of the valley where a gate marks the end of the open access land, you can continue through an interesting marshy, low-lying wooded area to Poynings and back to the bus route. To make a longer walk, take one of the paths up the southern slope of the valley and climb to the South Downs Way at the top. Turn left and follow the wide track down to cross the road at Saddlescombe.*

The hamlet of Saddlescombe includes a farm which was once a valuable possession of the order of the Knights Templar and is now owned by the National Trust. There are open days twice a year when you can look around the very old and atmospheric farm buildings, see rural crafts still being practised, watch heavy horses working, and explore the gardens and orchard with its geese and unusual chickens.

**7** *To the north and east of Saddlescombe, Newtimber Hill beckons. Go through the gate at the end of the houses and take the first path on the left. Keep close to the hedge on your left to find a path that leads between fields and downland banks up the hill. Another gate takes you into the next section and the path runs by a fence up to a grove of oaks at the top.*

Here the sweet coconut-scented gorse is always in flower – as it must be, since country lore tells that it is only out of bloom when kissing is out of season. You will surely need to stop

for breath as you climb Newtimber; look back and see how Saddlescombe nestles, utterly at home in the shelter of the hills.

Once on Newtimber there are paths and possibilities in every direction: you can walk to Waterhall, Patcham, Pyecombe or Haresdean. But the hill itself rewards exploration. Among its secrets is a grove of juniper (once widespread on the Downs), and an ancient small-leaved lime tree which, with the yellow archangel, ramsons, bluebells and dogs' mercury, indicates that this is ancient woodland. There are gigantic beech trees, some dead and fallen, and some thriving. The clay in the soil allows oaks to grow, and many fungi. All the woodland species of birds are here too, their singing almost drowning out the drone of the London road.

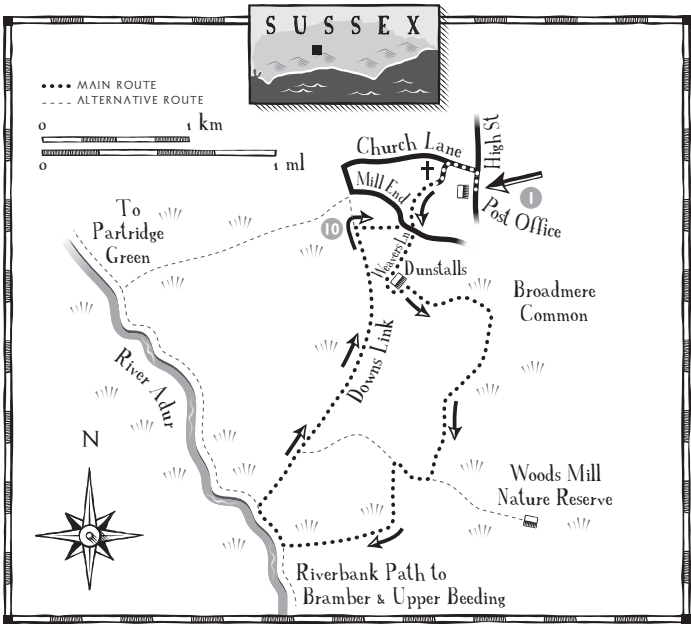
Various art groups come to Newtimber and make giants and dryads, noble archways, tiny altars, spider webs of creepers and spirals or cairns of stones which slide slowly and gently back into the landscape.

Newtimber hill is a good destination for a rainy day – the woods provide shelter and moisture brings out the sweetness of the smells.

**8** *To complete the circuit, return via Saddlescombe to try a different way back round the Dyke or take one of the many paths down on the west side of the road back to Poynings and you can retrace your steps to the bus stop.*

# HENFIELD

## SWANS & NIGHTINGALES



### Summary

- ① **Start point:** Henfield High Street, TQ216162
- ② **Map:** OS Explorer 122
- ③ **Distance:** Circular; 5 miles (8 km), can easily be shortened or lengthened
- ④ **Description:** Flat with muddy sections. Paths and tracks easy to follow, one section along disused railway embankment (shared with cyclists). Possible detour to visit Woods Mill Nature Reserve
- ⑤ **Refreshments:** Available at beginning and end, none on route
- ⑥ **Transport:** Buses from Brighton, Horsham, Pulborough and Burgess Hill (hourly on weekdays, two hourly on Sundays)

This gentle route begins in Henfield and goes through an old section of the village, past the church and former tanyard area where there are ancient hedgerows full of birds, as well as houses and cottages of great age and character. When you reach the banks of the Adur you can decide how long to spend walking by the river as there are many different ways to return to Henfield. The village has a museum, interesting buildings and lots of ancient lanes and twittens.



**1** Starting from the Post Office in Henfield High Street, walk north towards the White Hart Inn, which has a Horsham stone roof, and turn left along Church Lane. At the fork by a big oak tree, go left along Church Terrace and you will pass the Cat House.

This is an ancient timber framed house that, in the 19th century, was occupied by Bob Ward whose canary was killed by a cat. Bob believed that the cat belonged to Canon Woodard, resident of Church Street (and founder of Lancing College and other prestigious schools). You won't be able to miss the boards on the house, picturing the alleged murderer. Bob made them to remind the Canon of his cat's offence.

When you enter the churchyard at the end of this terrace, you will come upon an unusual arrangement of yew trees – there are around 100 of them, planted in close avenues and tightly clipped to create extraordinarily dense, green solid presences. The church is on the site of a Saxon building, and is built mostly of local stone with the characteristic West Sussex roof of Horsham slabs.

**2** Leave the churchyard by the main gate and turn left into Church Lane, now heading south past Old Tudor Cottage. At the fork, go left (marked Tanyard) and you come to a footpath by Tanyard field. With the hedge on your right, walk alongside the field until you come to a lane beside a

magnificent magnolia tree. Turn left here, passing the large and variously textured house once occupied by William Borrer, a botanist, and then go right into Blackgate Lane. This becomes a twitten and brings you out onto Nep Town Road opposite the Gardeners Arms.

Nep Town is apparently a combination of the two local names for this area – 'new town' and 'up town' – and the pub's name may reflect the nearby flower gardens and nurseries in this region of mild winters, light sandy soils, plentiful water supplies and (before the 1960s) a good rail connection to London.

**3** Cross the road and walk up Weavers Lane from where you can see clearly how Henfield developed on a spur of high ground – here called the Nab.

There is a fine view across the fields to the Downs – the wooded top of Chanctonbury Ring in the west and the masts of Truleigh Hill in the east – with the gap created by the Adur river between them. Further away to the east is Devil's Dyke.

**4** A footpath sign shows the path going through the hedge opposite the end of Weavers Lane and then around to the right following the edge of the field. At the end of the field it turns downhill towards Dunstalls, a timber-frame house in the valley. Climb two stiles at the bottom and turn right, and then left to walk past

*Dunstalls. The path goes away from the house between evergreen hedges; when you come to a junction, turn left, climb the stile and walk along the southern boundary of Dunstalls' garden. There is a footbridge, another stile and a muddy path between streams in this damp valley. Then there is another stile and the path continues eastwards across marshy land with wooden walkways to help.*

This valley bottom is clearly where water emerges from the sandy hill on your left (which is in fact called Spring Hill). The moist clay soil of the valley supports fine oak trees. It's definitely wellie terrain in winter, but the many streams and springs are distinctive and delightful features.

**5** *At a five-way footpath junction, take the second right and head south, over a stream and alongside a hedge. Climb a stile leading into Brook Lane and turn left to walk past a big pond. Stay on the lane which passes a swampy area with great spreading willow trees, knee deep in water on the right. When the lane bends left just before a little flat bridge, take the footpath on the right which brings you onto Broadmere Common.*

Here there is water everywhere, filling pits and depressions created by clay and sand excavations in the past. Associated plants and trees surround the pools and nightingales still sing here in the willows and oaks in the spring.

**6** *After just a short section of the Common, the path becomes a steep-sided green lane heading south and climbing gently to a house and stables. At the junction, take the second right, a wide grassy track that goes behind the stable and continues between hedges to a gate by a weather-boarded house and more stables. Follow the drive through another gate and then turn left and climb the stile by a gate into a field containing a line of pylons. Walk along the left-hand boundary of the field, either by the hedge or in among the belt of oaks which grow like an avenue. Go through a gateway at the end of the field and continue in the same (east) direction to a stile and a metal gate where a footpath sign directs you across a short section of field until you come to a stream.*

#### **Alternative route**

Turn left here to walk alongside the stream to reach Woods Mill Nature Reserve.

**7** *Otherwise turn right and follow the stream bank to an old, lichen-covered brick bridge. There is a short cut across the field to this point which is easy on a second visit, but less obvious when encountered for the first time. Cross over this old bridge and walk between two huge, shelterless fields until you come to a tarmac drive where you turn right and right again at the next junction. You are now heading towards Stretham Farmhouse and following the route of a Roman road that goes to Hassocks and beyond in the east and Washington and Storrington in the west.*

From here you can see the wooded slopes of the Downs above Steyning, the steep grassy flanks of Truleigh Hill, with its landmark collection of masts, and Lancing Clump, which is the hilltop just west of the gap made by the river. Looking back towards Henfield, you can see Southview Terrace, the line of houses on the Nab.

**8** *When the drive bends round towards Stretham Farm, the footpath goes to the left of Stretham Manor gateway. One more hedge-gap and you reach the banks of the Adur where you turn right.*

On a balmy summer's day the brown swirling waters (where the down-river flow meets the up-river tide) make this a cool and pleasant section; when there's a strong, wintry south-westerly funnelling through the gap and across the river valley, the river-bank path is cold and exposed. But there are choices: between this point and Partridge Green further north, there are many footpaths leading eastwards back to Henfield. Some can be muddy and hard to find, but others are on tracks and lanes and are easier.

The first of these is the Downs Link trail which comes down to the river by the old railway bridge just a little way ahead of you. Here there is an information sign about the Bishops' Palace site further up the river. On your right stands Stretham Manor with its splendid brick and timber buildings.

**9** *The Downs Link track, which is clearly signed, goes away from the river by the Manor and can provide welcome relief from mud and wind. It is a sheltered, well-drained embankment.*

On each side there are streams and water meadows which flood in winter and attract flocks of geese, ducks, waders and swans (you'll need binoculars to see them well). In summer the dense and varied hedges make this a green lane full of wild roses, bird-song and butterflies. Sections of the route have masses of sloes and blackberries in autumn.

**10** *As you approach Henfield, the embankment climbs higher above the surrounding fields to where there are scattered houses and the hedges become more organized. At a T-junction turn right and quickly left onto a track that goes along in front of houses and becomes a lane. Continue uphill to another T-junction and turn right. You will soon come to Mill End where there is a mixture of old and new houses. The road passes a forge and a light industrial area (presumably where the mill used to be) and then passes Blackgate Lane where there is a stall selling locally grown flowers all year round. Retrace your steps along Blackgate Lane but turn right at the magnolia tree junction and then left to walk along the east side of Tanyard field, by a hedge of beech and holly. This path leads into Craggits Lane which takes you to Church Lane where you turn right to arrive back at Henfield High Street.*