



Beachy Head and Eastbourne

Distance: 23 km=14½ miles moderate walking

Region: East Sussex

Written: 25-jun-2010 & 16-jun-2015

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Refreshments: Birling Gap, Beachy Head, Eastbourne, Jevington

Map: Explorer 123 (Newhaven to Eastbourne)

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

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Downland, village, river, seashore, cliffs, seaside town

In Brief

This is a mighty walk taking you over great chalk cliff of Beachy Head. On one side, there is a secret forest walk and two downland villages with an iconic pub and local ales. On the other side there is a truly enjoyable walk along the “prom” at Eastbourne to the pier, a truly fresh and delightful stretch.

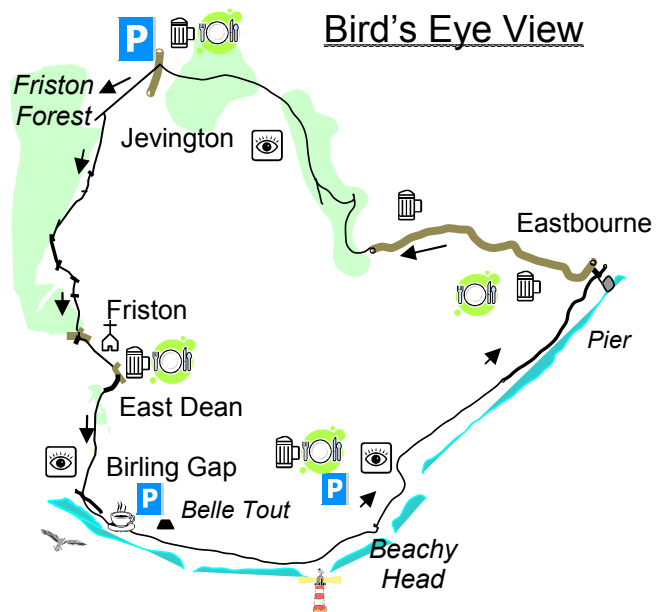


There are no nettles or brambles to worry bare legs and all the paths, except for one or two patches in the forest, are completely dry so any kind of attire and footwear should be fine. There is one stile on the route which might be a problem for a very large dog.



This walk is also part of the **Seven Sisters – Beachy Head Big Zipper**.

The walk begins at the small free car park on the west end of the village **Jevington**, postcode **BN26 5QF**. Other possible starting points are Birling Gap and Beachy Head (both pay-and-display). For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

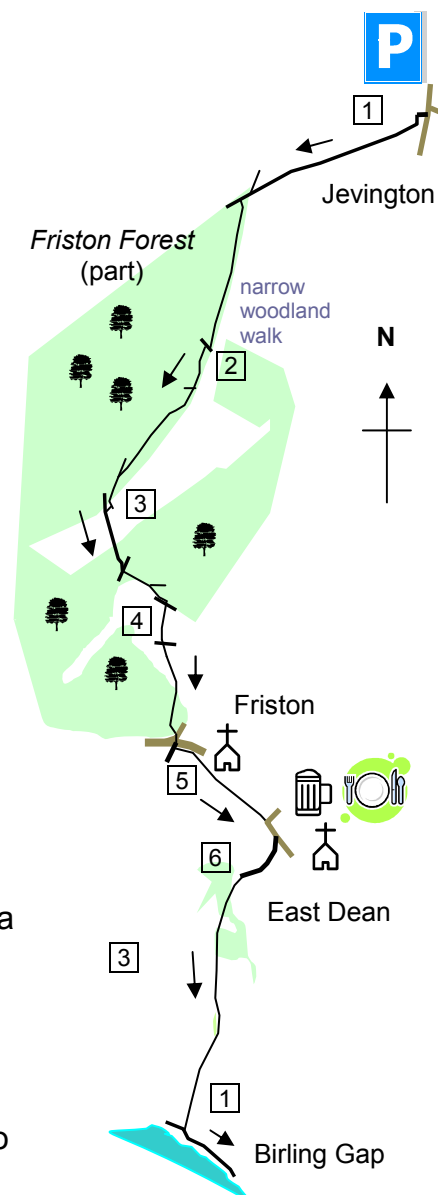


The Walk

The village of Jevington is a delightful place to start a walk with its cottages of local stone. The name means 'homestead of the people of Geoffa'. The Eight Bells pub / restaurant is nearer the east of the village. If you decide to walk from there to the church of St Andrews, you pass through an unusual wooden swivel gate. A rare elm grows in the grounds.

Leg 1: Jevington to Birling Gap 6½ km=4 miles

- 1 Turn **right** out of the car park, without going back to the road, onto a chalky path indicated by a blue arrow. Continue straight across by some gates, uphill. Follow this stony path gently uphill for nearly 1 km to a crossing by a bench seat with great views and the great Friston Forest in front of you. Continue straight ahead on a wide path through the woods but only for 20m. Here, turn **left** on an unmarked narrow path into the trees and keep left at a fork. **You will be following this narrow path, just inside the wood, for 1.7 km.** To your left are the open downs. There are parallel paths on the open downs that you can use, as many people do. The only drawback is that these paths are sometimes used to exercise racehorses and you don't want to get in their way or risk injury. Your path runs close to a wire fence on your right, on the very edge of the forest. In about 400m, you go through an especially beautiful stretch with tall pines. After a total of 750m, your path is joined by another path from the right and you come to a crossing path with the open hillside on your left.
- 2 Turn **right** on the crossing path and immediately fork **left** on a path into the woods, passing a hollow on your left. Your path continues through the woodland, roughly 20m from the edge of the woods on your left. At one point, the path comes very close to the open hillside and goes over a bright crossing path before diving back into the trees. It goes right-left round a small gully and continues through the woods, always 20-40m from the edge, visible on your left. Your path goes round a very deep pit on your right. Shortly after, the path curves right and runs parallel to a wide path on your right. At a junction, veer right and left to join this wider path. In another 150m, this path suddenly comes out onto the open hillside opposite a flat Forestry Commission post. (As a check, just to your right are some horse jumps and Friston Water Tower is directly opposite you across the valley.)
- 3 Turn **right** along the hillside next to the wood for only 25m to reach a wide crossing path that emerges from the wood and runs downhill. Turn **left** on this path, going down the slope of the hillside. At the bottom, go past a *racehorse training* sign and a post with a blue arrow into woods. Follow this wide path downhill. At the bottom, go straight over a level crossing path with a metal barrier on your left, and continue in the direction *Friston* as given on the signpost. Keep straight ahead on this dirt path, avoiding a left fork. On your right are a parallel tarmac drive and the wall of *Friston Place*. Your



path comes to an end after about 250m where it suddenly bends right to meet the tarmac drive. Cross straight over the tarmac drive to go up three steps and through a small wooden gate into a sheep pasture within the walls of *Friston Place*.

- 4 Cross the pasture diagonally left and, at the other side, go through another small wooden gate, down six steps and across a drive. Go through a large wooden gate (or over a stile) into another sheep pasture. Go diagonally left up the grassy slope. At the top, near a metal fence, go over a stile ([a challenge for a large dog?](#)) and follow the path uphill. You go up two flights of steps, after which your path widens and continues uphill. At the top, by a marker post, go left through a small metal gate to a triangular junction of roads. Cross straight over the triangle of grass, cross the main road and take a side road marked *Crowlink, no Through Road*. *Crowlink is a tiny settlement on the downs, home at one time to Edith Nesbit author of the 'Railway Children'. On your right is Friston Pond, beautifully restored in 2013. Turn left* through the rotary gate into the churchyard of Friston Church of St Mary the Virgin. *This little 11th-century church is definitely worth a visit, with so many features from various times in history; this church was completely remodelled – in the 14th century!*

- 5 Continue through the churchyard, going through two swing-gates. Suddenly you have the long sweep of the green-swathed valley of buttercups ahead – a stunning picture. On reaching the bottom, go through a large wooden gate by a NT sign for *Crowlink*, coming out to a road at a bend in East Dean. Turn **right** on the road, quickly reaching the green. There are two restaurants in the street. *On the left-hand side a blue plaque identifies the house where Sherlock Holmes spent his last years as a bee keeper. The Hikers Rest coffee and gift shop is in the right-hand corner. The big attraction on the green must be the Tiger Inn, the pride of Beachy Head.*



This 16th-century inn speaks for itself even before you arrive – the location could not be more perfect. You will have competition from the less hardy types who use the ample car park next door. The lunch menu is simple and tasty, the deep plates of soup and the gourmet Tiger burgers being notable. Beer is brewed next door, in the Beachy Head Brewery who produce Original, South Downs and LightHouse ales and a rather alarming brew called 'Legless Rambler'. In case you can't stagger on, the Tiger has five bedrooms.

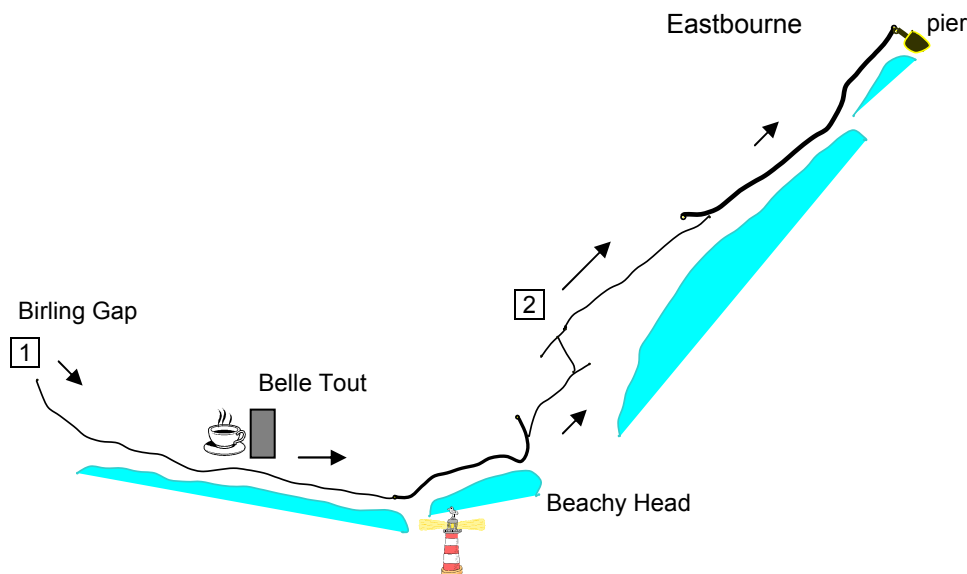


Continue on the road to a fork. *An off-piste diversion at the left fork will take you to East Dean church, definitely worth a visit. Take the right fork, the more level option. Follow the tarmac past houses and gardens, including Underhill House, to the end and here go through a large metal gate.*

- 6 Go uphill on a grass path and, almost immediately, fork **left**, going up by a wire fence to a small wooden gate. Follow the path uphill, with woodland on your right. Another small wooden gate takes you on a straight path shaded by hawthorns. You pass a seat with great views and reach the open hillside where sheep graze. Stay on the left-hand side, heading directly for a hut with a pink roof. Pass the hut on your left and continue in the same direction towards a line of thorn bushes, passing them on your right. There are two wooden gates ahead. Go through the left-hand gate and continue straight downhill in a grassy meadow. Go past a NT sign for *Crowlink* and through a wooden gate. Follow the chalky track, keeping straight on at a fingerpost, thus joining the South Downs Way. You pass bungalows, quickly reaching Birling Gap where there is a NT shop, café and exhibition.



Leg 2: Birling Gap to Eastbourne 8½ km=5½ miles



The **Seven Sisters – Beachy Head Big Zipper** joins here and continues to the end.

- 1** Facing the sea and turning **left** along the self-guided route up some steps, you soon reach the Belle Tout lighthouse.

The Belle Tout lighthouse was a very belated response to many shipwrecks at Beachy Head, a notorious hazard to shipping. The first granite lighthouse only started operation in 1834. Its siting on the cliff top made it difficult to see – a severe flaw in a lighthouse – and the new one was built (see later). The building was later sold as a private residence. It was damaged during World War 2 by Canadian artillery who were apparently trying to miss it. The BBC filmed 'The Life and Loves of a She-Devil' there and it also featured in the James Bond film 'The Living Daylights'. Most famously, in 1999 the 850-ton Belle Tout was moved 17 metres from the cliff face using a system of hydraulic jacks and four lubricated steel-and-concrete beams which remain in place in case they should be needed again. It is now an elegant B&B. There is also a little café here.

Further along, you reach the most southerly point of Beachy Head.

The cliff at Beachy Head is, at 162 metres, the highest chalk sea cliff in Britain. The chalk of the cliffs are a testament to 30 million years of a subtropical period, up to 65 million years ago, when the skeletons of microscopic plankton hardened into chalk. The chalk was then eroded and shaped by ice ages. The name Beachy Head is a corruption of the French word 'Beauchef' meaning 'beautiful headland' and nothing to do with a beach. The new red-and-white lighthouse started operation in 1902 and is now automated. Beachy Head is notoriously a favourite location for suicides.



Further on, you pass the *Beachy Head* pub over on the left. After this, take the tarmac path along the cliff edge. After passing a viewing platform, fork **right** on a level stony path, indicated by a white acorn symbol. Soon Eastbourne is in view. This is a pleasant path on a wooded slope. When you reach a wooden post with a waymark, take the **left** fork and follow the path round left. At a junction at the top, turn **right** on a wide grassy path, thus leaving the South Downs Way. (You may of course stay on the SDW back to the start avoiding Eastbourne.)

- 2 Stay on this lovely wide grassy path all the way to the start of the town, at the end going down steps. There are several routes to the pier: the road, the lower promenade and a middle promenade which is a little uncomfortable because of the well-meaning gravel. There are also several gardens along the way. After 2 km=1½ miles you arrive at the pier.

Eastbourne pier was opened in 1870. It featured a theatre (now a bar and nightclub) and a camera obscura. There are several shops and kiosks and of course a fine view of the town. (See the picture on our homepage.)

Leg 3: Eastbourne to Jevington 7½ km=4½ miles

- 1 Turn **left** opposite the pier and go up Cavendish Place and then **left** on Seaside Road. In about 200m, turn right onto the pedestrian-only Terminus Road. Pass the *Duke of Devonshire* and the *Terminus* and a portland stone sundial. At the end of the pedestrianised section, keep ahead past the station. At a roundabout, zig-zag left-right into Southfields Road and follow for some way to a T-junction with a road called The Goffs. Turn **left** here.



- 2 The Goffs leads into the High Street of Eastbourne Old Town.

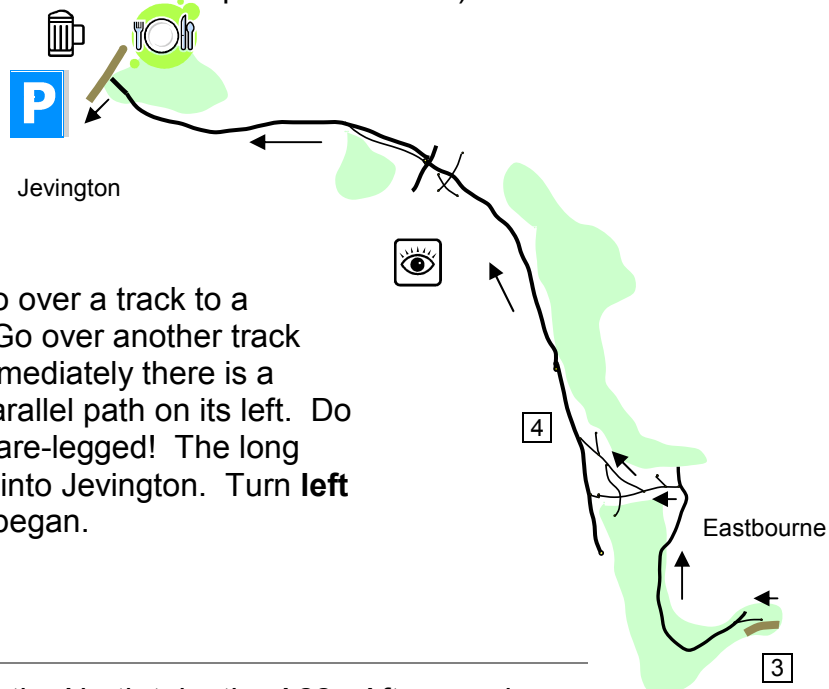
The old town was once called 'Bourne' and then 'East Bourne', made up from a group of hamlets. It is much older than the Victorian seaside resort. St Mary's Church is late 12th century. The Lamb Inn (Harvey's) dates from 1240 but its cellars go back to 1180.

Go past (or visit) the *Lamb*, Waitrose and St Mary's church and over traffic lights. Upland Road curves right and becomes East Dean Road. Immediately after a side road fork **right** by a seat onto a footpath.

- 3 **See mini-map overleaf.** This lovely level woodland path is joined from the right by a track. It goes around the valley with houses on the right. After some distance, the main path zig-zags left-right uphill. Stay on this main path until it emerges from the woods. 20m after coming out of the woods, turn **left** uphill on a narrow path and in 10m ignore a minor path that forks right. There is a fine view behind over the town. Go through a gap in the trees. About 30m from the gap, before you reach the top, turn right on a crossing path. Where the path forks near the top, take the **left**-hand fork,

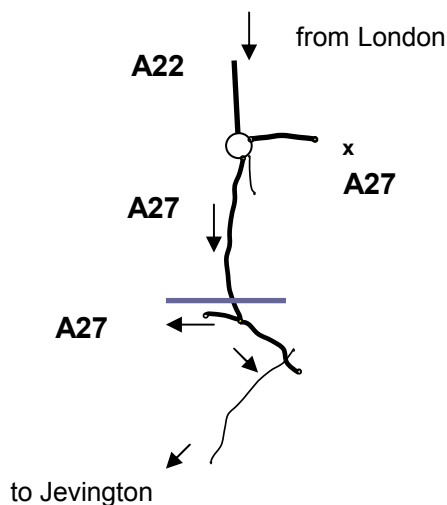
the higher option, which leads to the top and meets a wide path. This is the South Downs Way. Turn **right** on it. (The very wide grassy path runs parallel to a track and most walkers choose the path for comfort.)

- 4 The path goes past a round dewpond and then, on the right, past a burial mound surmounted by a stone pillar. On the left, you can see the route over the cliffs that form the earlier part of this walk. The path curves left gently uphill. Go over a track to a triangulation pillar on your left. Go over another track and through a one-bar gate. Immediately there is a choice between a track and a parallel path on its left. Do *not* choose the path if you are bare-legged! The long stony path eventually descends into Jevington. Turn **left** for the car park where the walk began.



Getting there

By car: to get to **Jevington** from the North take the A22. After passing Hailsham, about 5 miles=8 km from Eastbourne, you reach the big roundabout by Polegate Services. Go **straight ahead** at the roundabout, ignoring the major left turn for Eastbourne, on the road signposted *Brighton, Newhaven A27, Lewes, Alfriston, Willingdon*, the Polegate Bypass. Soon the road splits, with the right-hand lane signposted *A27 Brighton Newhaven Lewes*. Keep to the **left** lane as for *Polegate, Willingdon*. The road goes over a railway, curves left, and passes that sharp right turn for the A27. Soon after, you reach a crossroads with traffic lights. Turn right on the Wannock Road signposted *Wannock Jevington East Dean*. Follow the road for 4 km = 2½ miles into the village of Jevington. The car park is at the far end of the village on the right, just past the (closed) *Hungry Monk* and two minor roads on the left. It is marked with a white-on-blue **P**.



By train: begin the walk at **Eastbourne Railway Station**.

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