



Ditchling and Clayton Windmills

Distance 17 km=10½ miles moderate-to-easy walking

Region: East Sussex, West Sussex

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Last update: 8-jul-2014

Refreshments: Ditchling

Map: Explorer 122 (Steyping) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Village, hills, woodland, windmills

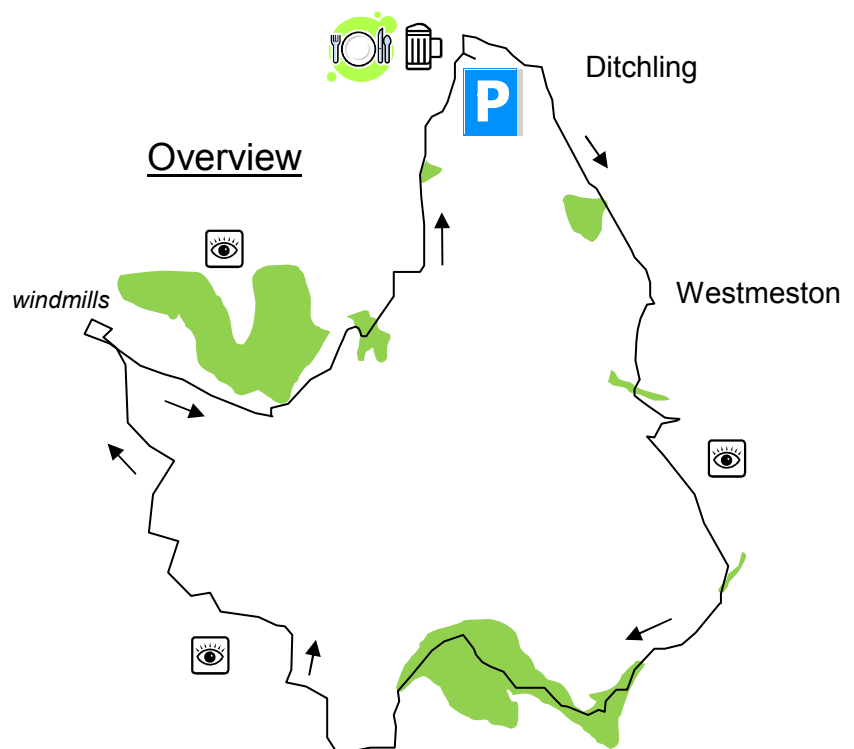
In Brief

The walk up to the Clayton Windmills on top of the South Downs must be one of the best known classic walks in Sussex. But this walk takes a different angle, leading you through another village and over some wonderful landscapes, and along paths that even seasoned walkers may not know. It is perfect at any time of the year.



There are a few nettles and brambles on the lower paths that might irritate bare legs but any sensible clothing and footwear will be fine. Your dog will love this walk (except possibly for a stile at the start of Leg 3).

The walk begins at the public car park in Ditchling, East Sussex, behind the Village Hall, **postcode BN6 8TT**. It is signed near the crossroads with a blue "P Free" For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

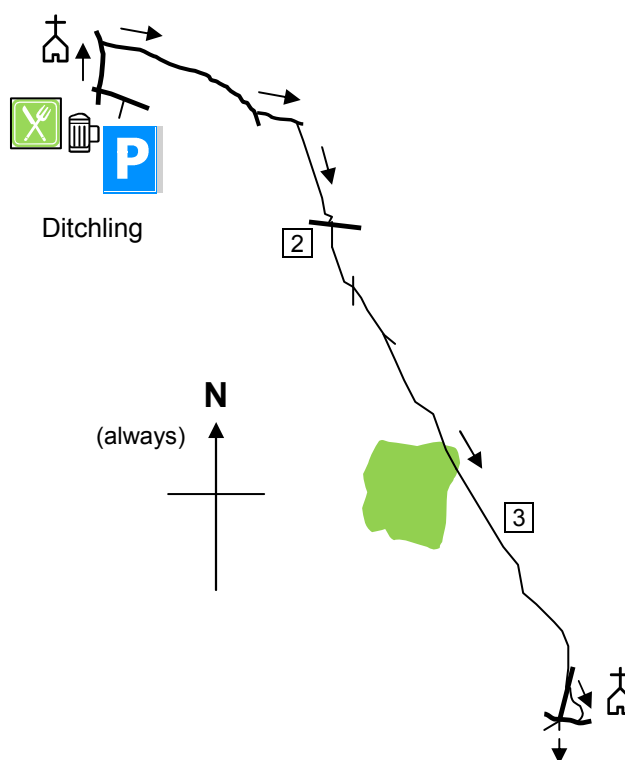
Ditchling dates back at least to Saxon times. The first record is from 765 as "Dicelinga", that is, "Dicul's people". King Alfred the Great held lands here. From 1435 until the 1900s the land was owned by the Marquess of Abergavenny (see other walks in this series "Coldrum Stones and Luddesdown" and "A Way Through the Rocks"). In 2007, Ditchling was featured in a BBC documentary called "Storyville: A Very English Village". St Margaret's Church, visible from afar on top of its mound, is unmistakable by its square tower and squat spire. The area around the church reveals several Sarcen Stones which indicate a possible link to a pagan past. Opposite the church, the spectacular timber-framed Elizabethan house is Wings Place. Just south-east of Ditchling is a spur of the Downs called "Blackdog Hill" which is supposedly haunted by the ghost of a headless Black Dog.

Ditchling has two pubs. "The Bull" is a comfortable inn which also offers a comprehensive breakfast menu. "The White Horse", up towards the church, is an excellent blend of a friendly local and a gastropub with an imaginative menu. So one way to pass the day is to begin with breakfast in "the Bull" and finish with supper in "the White Horse". Near the latter is also the Ditchling Tea Room. At the crossroads, "The General" is an unusual eatery – a self-styled "bohemian" café that offers middle-east inspired wraps and extraordinary layered cakes.

Leg 1: Ditchling to Westmeston 2¾ km=1¾ miles

1 The walk begins with a short loop through this charming village. Turn **left** to the main village crossroads and turn **right** alongside *The Bull*. Walk up the High Street. In 130m, turn **right** on East End Lane. You pass a whole range of houses and cottages of every conceivable style. Where the lane curves right at *Pardons* and *East End House*, leave it by keeping straight ahead on Farm Lane. Go through a yellow metal gate and, in 20m, turn **right** past a playground, pass either side of the cricket pavilion, and go out to the main road via the exit for cars. Take a narrow footpath between hedges immediately opposite on the other side of the main road. This path is easy to miss as the signpost that says *to Westmeston* is almost hidden.

2 The path goes through an old kissing-gate and runs alongside a wall to a residential road. Turn **right** on the road for just 20m and fork **left** at a fingerpost onto a footpath. This narrow enclosed path goes over a bridge and a V-stile into a rough meadow. Immediately, at a fork, take the **right**-hand of two narrow paths across the meadow. The path soon zigzags right-left through a large metal gate. It then veers right and continues along a wild green strip. Soon you come to a fork in front a huge willow. Take the **left** fork, passing several redundant stiles, entering a plantation of young ash trees. Keep to the **left**, soon going along two planks and



through a tall metal gate into a hayfield. Keep to the **right**-hand side of the field, heading straight for the South Downs that loom ahead.

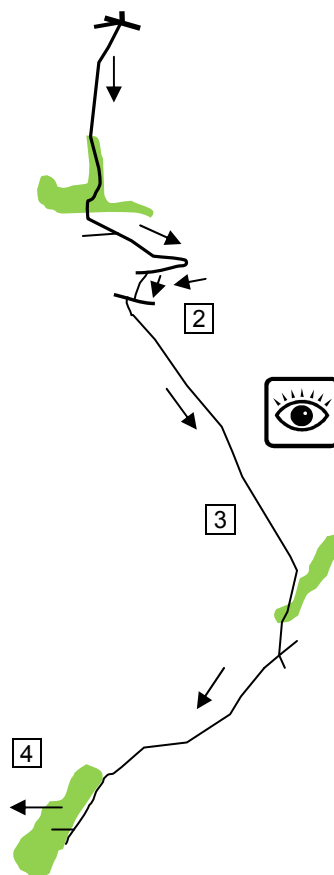
- At the other side, go through another tall metal gate, over a bridge with rails, over a step-stile and straight across a meadow. (You may need to go through a wire fence by lifting the plastic handle: this is quite harmless and is used to pen the horses.) At the other side, go over a stile and along the left-hand side of a horse pasture. Next, your path leads you over another stile and straight across a grassy meadow. *The house on your left with its barns and other buildings is the historic Westmeston Place, dating from about 1500.* At the other side, go over a split-table-stile, down some steps, over a tarmac drive, up some steps and along a path parallel to the road. Where the path finally comes down to the road, cross straight over the road to a drive and veer **right** to a path between walls, then up steps onto the churchyard of St Martin's, Westmeston.

St Martin's Norman church was built soon after 1100. The 14th-century entrance porch seems to have been botched in a later century to hold it together. The nave and font are Norman but the south aisle was added two centuries later. Raymond Briggs, author of "The Snowman" lives at Westmeston.

Veer **right** past the church and go through the lichgate to the road. Cross the road and turn **right**, reaching a crossroads.

Leg 2: Westmeston to Piddingworth Plantation 5½ km=3½ miles

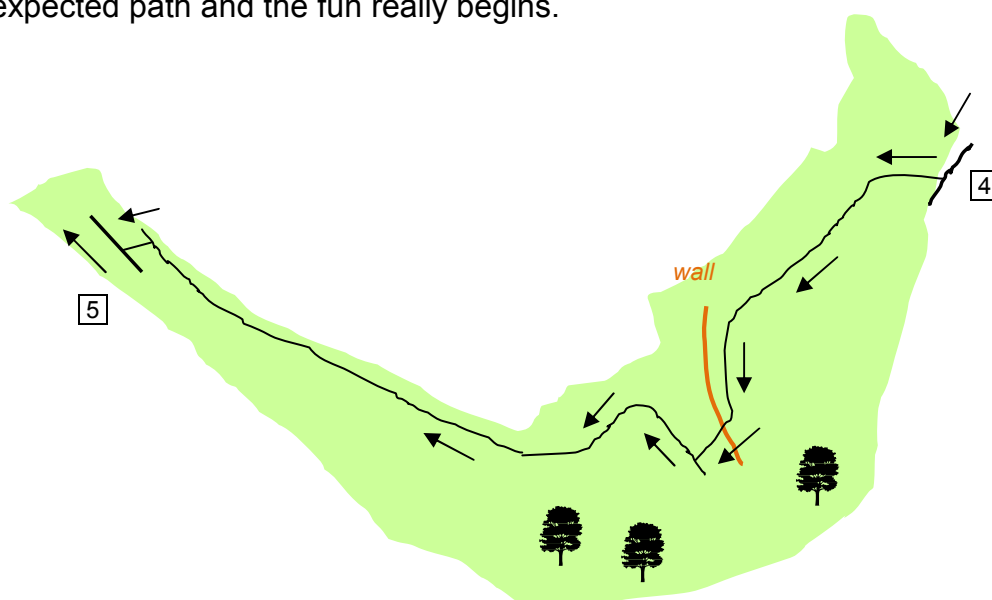
- Turn **left** up a semi-tarmac lane beside some cottages, shortly reaching Westmeston Farm. Here, go straight ahead through a wooden gate onto a wide stony path. This leads through a wooden gate onto the open hillside of the Downs. Keep to the main path as it curves left, passing several mounds, thought to be ancient burial mounds. Soon, ignore a narrow path sharp right with blue arrows. [2014: not seen by some walkers] (This would take you to Ditchling Beacon, a very popular spot with a car park.) Nearby are the earthworks of the hillfort where people report hearing a wild hunt flying overhead, accompanied by the sound of horses' hooves and yapping dogs – see the *Black Dog legend* above. As you go, views open out on the left. Go through a wooden gate, after which the sandy path becomes stony. Follow the path **right** round a hairpin, almost reversing your direction.



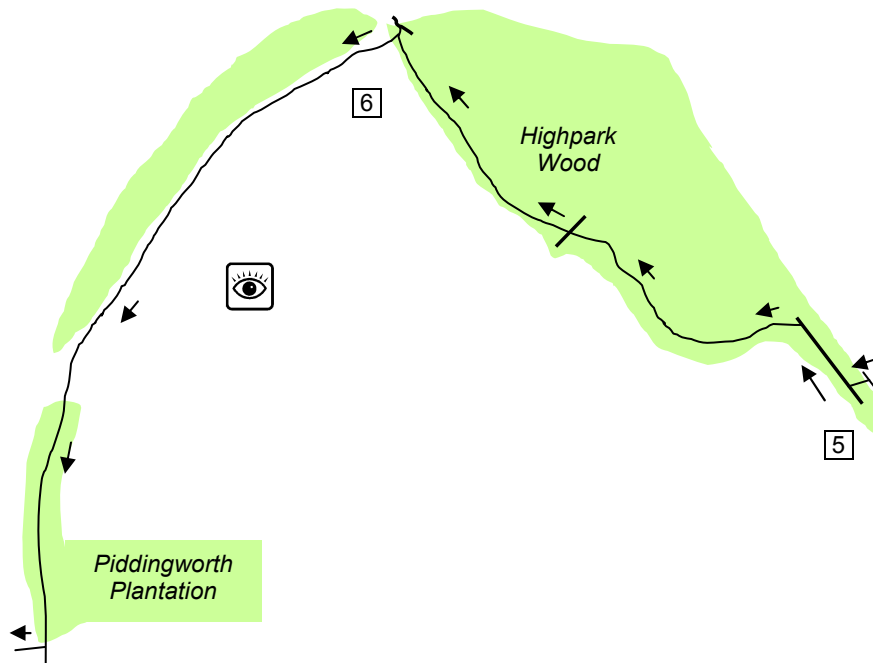
- Less than 100m after the hairpin, turn **left** on a more grassy path that runs between banks. At the top, there is a signpost, a fence and your first views south. Turn **right** here on a wide path, but only for 40m. Here, take a path

left which runs between hawthorns, through a wooden gate and diagonally across a large downland meadow, following a sign for *Stanmer and Ditchling Beacon* [2014: now gone]. This is a most exhilarating part of the walk, now that the ascent is over and you can enjoy a gentle downward slope with wide vistas in all directions. The natural shape of the South Downs is so convoluted, you feel like an ant crawling over a piece of sculpture. *Another piece of sculpture you cannot mistake is the new Amex Falmer Stadium of Brighton and Hove Albion.*

- 3 At the other side of the meadow, go through a wooden gate and straight down another meadow. Your path swings to the right through hawthorn and goes through another wooden gate. Soon you have a meadow on your left and you come to a junction with a wooden gate and a post on your right. Go **right** through the gate and down a path across the green meadowside, soon close to a wire fence on your right. *This is an especially rewarding area for observing butterflies in summer.* At the bottom, go through a wooden gate and along the right-hand side of another lovely meadow with woodland on your right. Half way along the edge of the meadow, go through a gate on your **right** by a marker post. Here, typical of these walks, you find an unexpected path and the fun really begins.



- 4 Turn immediately **right** on a narrow path into the wood. Ignore a wooden gate ahead that goes into pasture and instead turn **left** with the path, staying in the wood. The path rises for some distance through the wood in a location that rejoices in the name *Moon's Bottom* and becomes quite steep at times. At the top, your path bends **left** by a wall and shortly goes **right** through a gap in the wall. Follow the path up a steep bank and turn **right** on a crossing path. This path loops round to the **left** and runs beside a wall on your right. Where the wall bends right, your path also bends **right** to stay next to the wall. Follow this narrow path for about 350m. You come to a minor zigzag in the path with a break in the wall on your right and a path forking left where you can see a broad sandy path. Take this **left** fork and turn **right** on the broad straight sandy path.



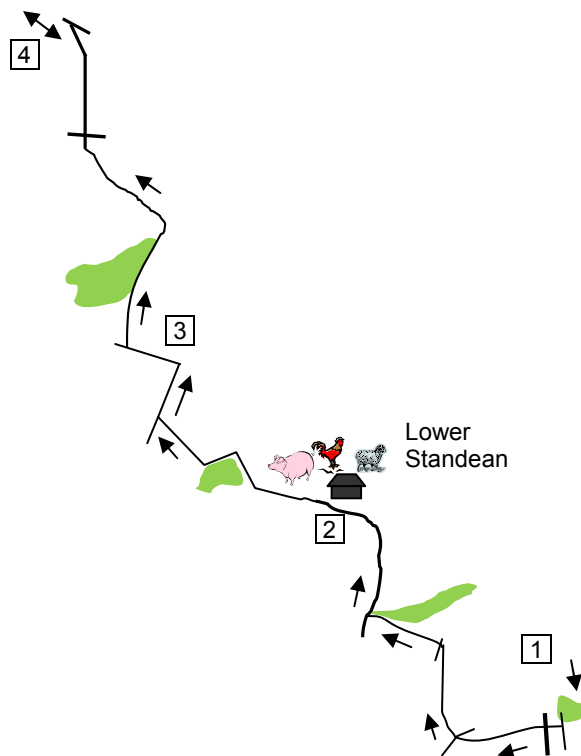
- 5 In 100m, by a post with a blue arrow, take a narrower path that forks **left**, thus leaving the official bridleway. This path runs through the woodland of Highpark Wood, going at one stage around a fallen tree trunk to meet a wide crossing track. Go straight over the track and continue on another narrow path through the wood. This path winds considerably but is always clear and there is a large meadow visible on your left as a guide. Finally you see, just ahead on the right, the main bridleway by a large corrugated iron shed. Just before this junction, turn **left** through a metal kissing-gate into the open meadow. You are on access land provided by Brighton and Hove Council and the fine open views south are a welcome change after the dark forest.
- 6 Keep ahead along the right-hand side of this meadow, enjoying the views all the way, including east to Lewes and the spur of the South Downs, until you see the road ahead at the far right corner. At this point, look for a small wooden gate a little to the left at the edge of a grove of trees. Go through this gate into a woodland of tall beeches. You are in the Piddingworth Plantation. Follow the main path through the wood which changes to more lowly trees with an occasional clearing. Finally, you emerge through a gate into another clover-filled open meadow. Tempting though this is, your route is now immediately **right**, following electricity wires.

Leg 3: Piddingworth Plantation to Jack and Jill 4½ km=2¾ miles

- 1 **See map overleaf.** Go through a wooden gate and cross the road to a track opposite (using a stile if the gap in the fence is closed), still following the wires. Keep on down this wide grassy path and, where the wires curve away left at a wooden swing-gate, ignore both and stay in the field, curving **right**. Soon on your left is the misnamed New Barn. Keep ahead over a track coming from the barn and continue downhill on a wide track. After a clump of trees, you reach a T-junction. Turn **right** here on a semi-tarmac track. The track reaches the farm settlement of Lower Standean. *Here is the true picture of a real working farm without gloss but with so much of interest.*

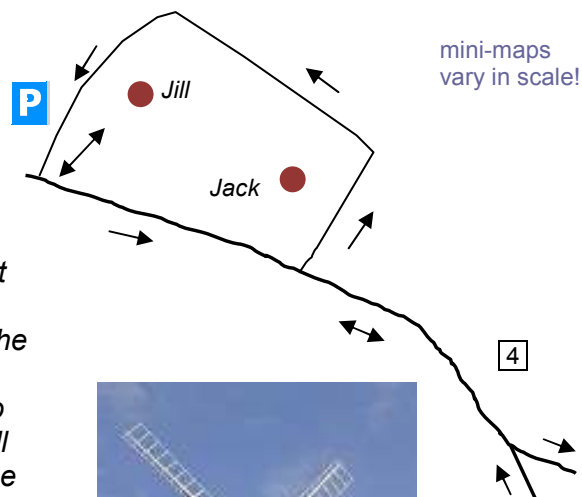
Every kind of farm machinery and building can be seen. The produce is remarkably varied, from poultry, sheep and pigs to prodigious quantities of wheat.

- 2 Continue through the farm, passing a verdant sheep pasture on the right and some comfortable-looking pigsties. At a marker post, ignore paths left and right as you approach a flinty building on the left. At a pair of large metal gates [2014: now disused], turn **left** into a meadow. At the corner, turn **right** along the edge. You come to a pair of metal gates and a crosspaths. This is the Sussex Border Path (SBP), the section that runs between the two Sussexes, from near East Grinstead to near Hove. Continue regardless, along the left-hand side of the meadow. At the end, go through a line of hawthorn, through a gate and turn **right** onto an enclosed path. Here you gain your first sight of the windmills.



- 3 The path comes out into a wheatfield. Turn **left** here on a path between fields. At a fingerpost in the corner, turn **right**. The path descends beside a field and curves uphill with golf links on your left and with the village of Pyecombe visible in the valley to the left. At a 4-way fingerpost, go straight on, thus joining the South Downs Way a long-distance trail running from Winchester to Eastbourne. Your track goes by a metal gate, passes New Barn Farm and comes to a junction just before the Windmills. The return route is sharp right here, but first you will want to make a quick excursion to the windmills.

- 4 Veer **left** to continue on the track to the windmills. Just before Jack, the black tower mill, turn **right** on a path by a fence. From here you get a good view of Jack.



There have been windmills on this site at least from 1765. Jack is a brick tower mill with a rotating cap that allowed the sweeps to face the wind. It was built in 1866. In 1906 both Jack and Jill fell into disuse and Jack was leased to various people as a holiday home. Jack is still in private hands. In 1973 Jack and Jill became movie stars with the making of the film "The Black Windmill", with Michael Caine, Janet Suzman and Donald Pleasence, no less. At the time of writing, poor Jack is in a pitiful state with two sweeps removed and peeling paint. [September 2011: maybe there is hope for restoration – Jack is for sale! Willing to buy?]



Perhaps its salvation will come with the next film.

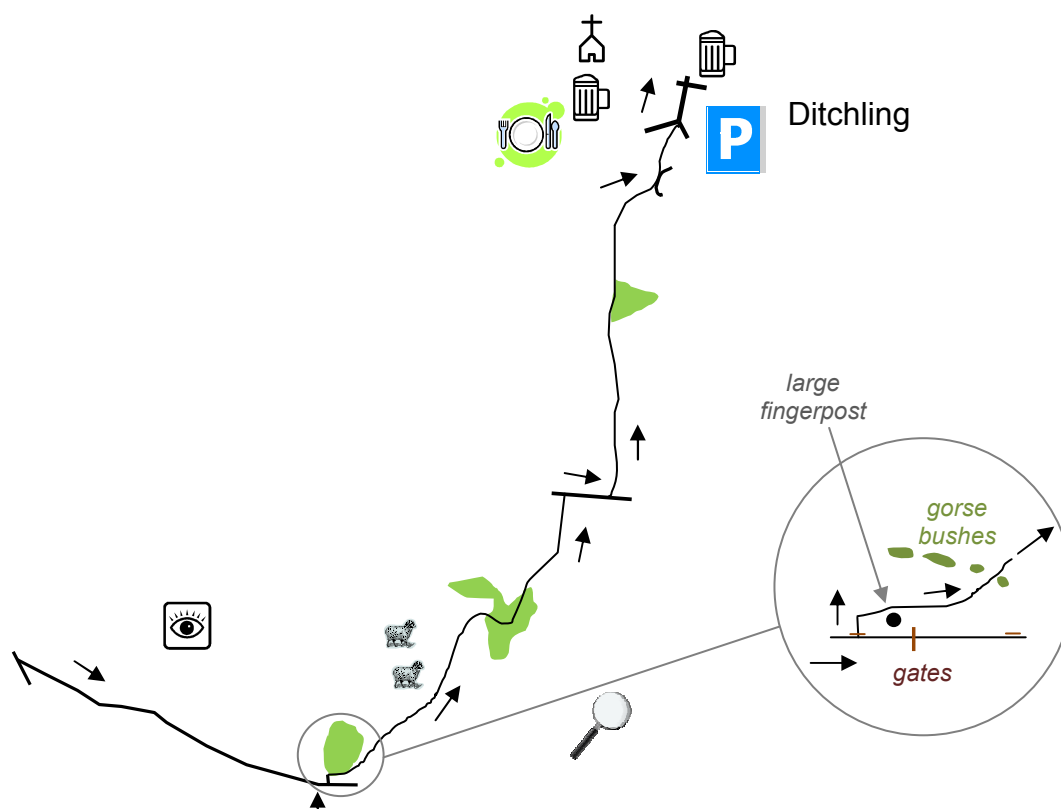
Continue to a corner where the path turns **left**. Continue until you have a gate ahead and the car park for Jill on the left. Go **left** between posts into the car park and **left** again on the track, immediately passing the entrance to Jill.

Jill is a post mill dating from 1821. She was originally built on Dyke Road in Brighton, where she was known as Lashmar's New Mill. In 1852 she was moved to Clayton. She has suffered a lot of damage in the past, mainly from storms, including the storm of 1987 when the sails were set in motion despite the brakes being on, which set fire to the mill (a constant hazard). Jill still grinds flour and is in working order under the ownership of Mid Sussex District Council. Jill is open to the public most Sundays from May to September.



Continue on the track, avoiding the private entrance to Jack, to the junction that you arrived at and fork **left**. (If you did not visit the windmills, turn sharp right.)

Leg 4: Jack and Jill to Ditchling 4¼ km=2¾ miles



- 1 Your track goes very gently uphill for some distance. Go through a metal gate and continue with fine views left to the villages of Keymer and Hassocks, to Oldland Windmill and across the Weald to the North Downs. You are joined by the South Downs Way coming from the right. Just before the next wooden gate, you will notice a stylish 4-way fingerpost in a small meadow on the left. Turn **left** before you reach it, through a small wooden gate on the left. Turn immediately **right** to go past the fingerpost, which is part of Keymer's contribution to the South Downs Way. Keep ahead into

the next meadow, going parallel with a wire fence and with the track you were on. Where the hillside opens out, opposite a wooden gate in the fence on your right, veer **left** so that you are going diagonally down the slope. Do *not* turn left to the marker post you can see dead left: it is at best irrelevant. Aim for the **right**-most gorse bush – the one that is only 50m from the fence, and pass just to the **left** of it. Now you can clearly see the path ahead winding down the slope of the hill on the right of the deep valley (known as Coombe Bottom).

- 2 Your clear chalky path is probably shared with a vast number of sheep. This hillside is known as Burnhouse Bostall. As it nears the bottom, the path curves right and then sharp left through trees. It then takes you past a horse pasture on the left. At the end of the pasture, ignore a stile on the right (which leads into the National Trust Ditchling Down) and continue on the track through a wooden gate beside a large metal gate. On reaching a lane, turn **right**. In 150m, turn **left** over a stile on a signed enclosed footpath.
- 3 At a farm, go through two small metal gates and across a pasture. At the other side, go through a small metal gate and along the right-hand side of a meadow. Oldland Windmill is now clearly visible and the spire of Ditchling Church also comes into view. Go through a gap and a fraction left across the centre of the next meadow, then through a gap in a hedge under a large oak and a fraction right across the next meadow. On the other side, go through a small wooden gate on the right, over a bridge and over a step-stile. The path runs between fences and comes out to a residential road. Turn immediately **left** to a track by no. 17 and continue on a narrow path by a fence and into trees. *Note the tree house in the garden on the left.* The path continues to follow the fence and finally arrives at a junction in Ditchling. Go straight across Beacon Road to join the pavement and turn **left** into the centre of the village where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Ditchling is near Brighton, so the route is via the M23 / A23. Whether coming from the London area or from Brighton, turn off at the sign *Hassocks* A273. Keep following signs for *Hassocks* until you see a sign for *Ditchling* at a fork off to the right. Turn right at the crossroads in the middle of town. The free car park is almost immediately on the right.

By bus/train: bus 824 from Burgess Hill or Hassocks railway station, not Sunday. Check the timetables.

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