



Plumpton and the South Downs

Distance: 9½ km=6 miles

moderate walking

Region: East Sussex

Date written: 12-oct-2020

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Last update: 25-oct-2023

Refreshments: Plumpton

Map: Explorer 122 (Brighton) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Woodland, hilly downs, views, high trails, university, country inn

In Brief

You may know Plumpton from its racing calendar and imagine a large space on the open South Downs. In reality, Plumpton is a tiny village covering under the steep part of the South Downs, with a church and a pub, little more. At the start of the walk your eyes are fixed on the prospect of ascending the steep slope that is the South Downs. But in fact the ascent is gradual and hardly perceptible, making the starting stretch a cakewalk. You come up suddenly into the light and probably meet a host of other walkers along the South Downs Way. The walk takes you over the open downs before returning.



The *Half Moon* is one of the key inns of the South Downs, serving great food, visited by many from afar. Lunch is not too fussy and not overpriced, but on Sundays they push the sauceboat out a bit with dishes like local venison. To enquire, and for essential booking, ring 01273 890253.



All the paths on this walk are clear of undergrowth, so shorts are wearable. The surfaces are reliable and mainly dry, just a little stony. Most walkers in October seemed to wear sensible trainers, but boots are a good option. This is a good walk for your dog too, with only two easy stiles that have a liftable bar.

The walk begins next to the *Half Moon* pub in Plumpton, East Sussex, postcode **BN7 3AF**, www.w3w.co/eyeliner.vaccines.live. There is a wide dirt strip used for parking in the side road, Plumpton Lane, beside the pub. If you arrive early, park anywhere tight on the left: when you return you may find cars parked all the way down, even on the grass verge. Don't use the large pub car park as this is a popular place and all the spaces get filled up at lunch time. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

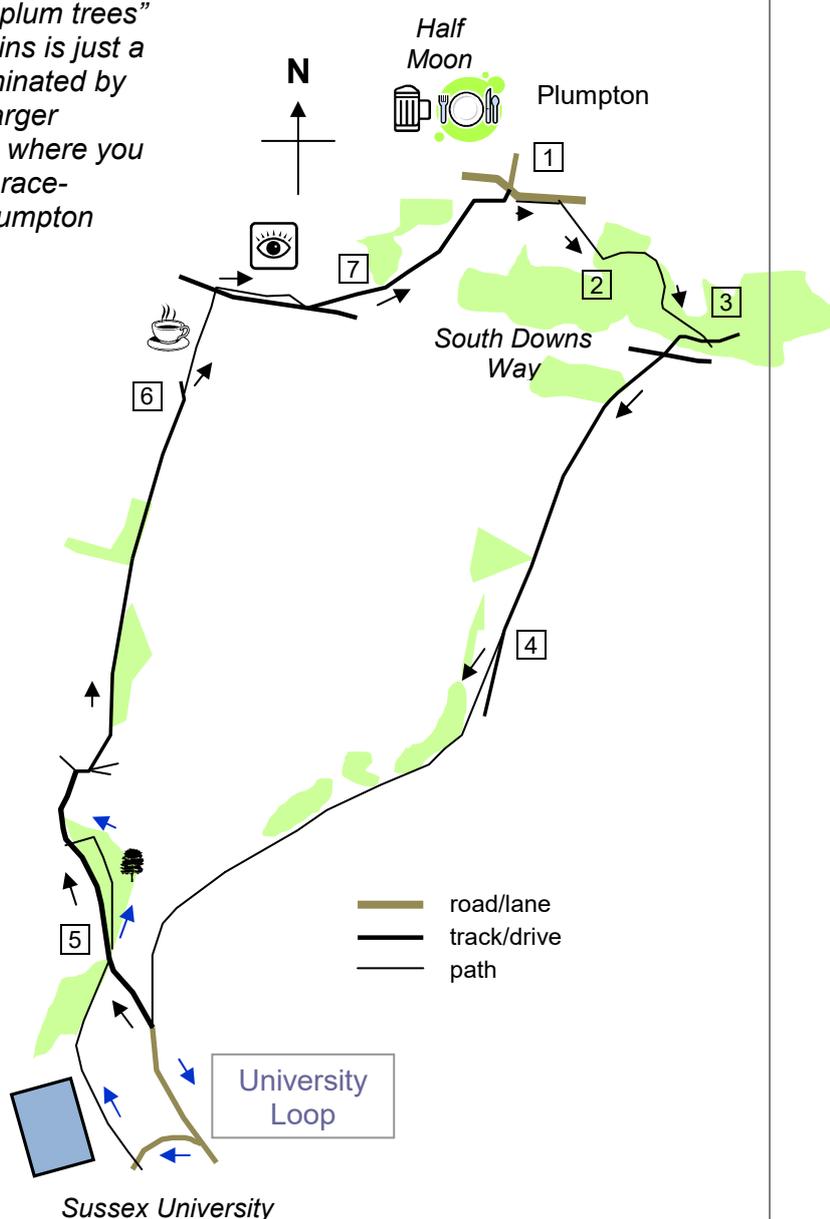
The Walk

The name "Plumpton" means "place of plum trees" but the little village where this walk begins is just a few scattered houses and the pub, dominated by the big Plumpton College. The much larger village, to the north, is Plumpton Green where you find the railway station and the famous race-course, all visited on the sister walk "Plumpton Fields and Meadows".

1 With the *Half Moon* on your left, walk along the main road, ignoring the side road. (If you parked in the side road, go back to the main road and turn left.) Use the footway on the right. It shortly rises through bushes, parallel to the road. As soon as you come out into a field, take a wide chalky track diagonally **right** across the centre of the field. At the top, go over a ladder stile (the top bar is liftable), across a green sloping meadow and over a similar stile into the steep woods that crowd this northern bluff of the South Downs.

2 Take a path up through the woods, quickly veering right on a wider path which curves **left** uphill, easing the gradient. In about 50m, ignore a junction on the right and stay on the track which now curves right, gently uphill. The woodland here is an area of protected wildlife and soon you pass through a metal National Trust gate. Finally, you emerge from the tree canopy into an open area at a major junction of tracks dominated by the steep slope of Black Cap.

3 Turn **sharp** right uphill on a wide chalky track. In 200m, you reach the top of the South Downs and a major junction. (Another walk in this series touches the same point – see "Lewes and the South Downs".) Bear **right** through the smaller of two wooden gates to find a 5-way fingerpost. The South Downs Way (long-distance path) executes a tight bend here. The right fork goes west to Ditchling Beacon (see the walk "Ditchling and Clayton Windmills"). Instead, take the **left** fork, signed to *Housedean Farm*, a wide hedged path leading across the Downs, with the tall buildings of Brighton in view in the distance. In 1km you come through a wooden gate at a junction of fields. In a further 120m at a 3-way junction, keep straight ahead past a large metal gate, thus leaving the South Downs Way.



4 In nearly 200m, you come through another wooden gate beside a very large metal gate. Immediately **leave** the chalky track by forking **right** on a narrow grassy path that runs beside a wire fence on your right. In 400m or so you pass a redundant metal gate where a path joins from the left. In a further 600m you come through a wooden gate. In another 500m you join a bridleway coming from the right through a metal gate. *St Mary's Farm is visible in the valley below, with High Park Farm high on the hill beyond.* Your path is now unfenced and soon it elbows left. *On the hill on your left is Balmer Farm, site of a lost medieval village.* You come over a crossing path just before some ruined buildings and a large oak. (The right turn, unofficially, is a short cut through bushes and a band of trees, after which you should turn **right** on the tarmac lane described below.) The path finally comes out to a tarmac lane.

Decision point. If you would like to take a slightly longer route with a view of Sussex University's sports ground and campus, skip to the end of this guide and do the section called **University Loop**. Otherwise ...

Turn very sharp **right** on the tree-lined tarmac lane (private to motorists) and follow it downhill for 300m to meet a bridleway coming from the left.

5 (Here is an optional short splendid woodland walk, a Sussex secret, alternative to the drive:- in only 10m go **right** steeply up a bank; follow a wide path in the beechwoods; in 600m, at a T-junction, go **left**, steeply down turning **right** to re-join the lane; otherwise ...). Follow the lane for 700m to reach the buildings of St Mary's Farm. At the end of the concrete, ignore the metal gates ahead and turn **right** with the main track. Shortly, at a 3-pronged fork, keep **left**. You now have a long gradual ascent on this flinty path, made easier by the central grass strip. *If you pause and turn round during your ascent, you can see the Brighton and Hove Albion soccer stadium on top of the hill.* Finally, after 800m or so, you come out into an open field, with woodland on your left. The track ascends to the top of the ridge where it approaches the buildings Streathill Farm.



6 Go **right** through a small wooden gate and follow a grass path along the left-hand side of a crop field. Ignore a blue arrow pointing diagonally right shortly (the path is always cropped over) and continue to the top. Go through a wooden gate and turn **right** on a wide track, the South Downs Way again. *However, for a there-and-back refreshment stop, by turning instead **left** and immediately **left** again, you will find an open-air pop-up café "The Pink Pit Stop" which serves hot drinks and snacks, open Thur to Mon till 2pm (4pm at weekends).* Immediately go **left** through a small wooden swing-gate by a sign *Access Land* and turn **right** on the velvet grass surface, parallel to the track. (This pleasant little diversion is optional and repays itself with much better views of Plumpton College, Plumpton church and part of the village, and the country beyond as far as Plumpton Racecourse.) In 400m, go **right** through a swing-gate to re-join the track just before a fingerpost, but immediately fork **left** downhill on a wide sandy track.



7 The track runs steeply down. Avoid all turnings off, in particularly a blue arrow and gate on your right and a path on your left shortly after. The surface changes to brick and concrete, back to dirt. The track finally snakes down to the main road, opposite the *Half Moon* pub where the walk began.

University Loop

Veer **left** down the tarmac lane. In 500m, turn sharp **right** on a tarmac drive. There is a sign on the other side for *US (University of Sussex), Falmer Sports Complex*. The tarmac “drive” is in fact Pavilion Road as you see shortly. Pass the buildings of the Sports Complex on your left. On your right are some of the immaculate sports pitches available to students. Continue on the road leading out. Just before a road junction (*) visible ahead, turn **right** on a woodland bridleway. (Actually, this is a bridleway crossing. There is no sign but you may see an orange blaze on the tree.) Soon the monstrous buildings of the University of Sussex are arrayed below on your left.

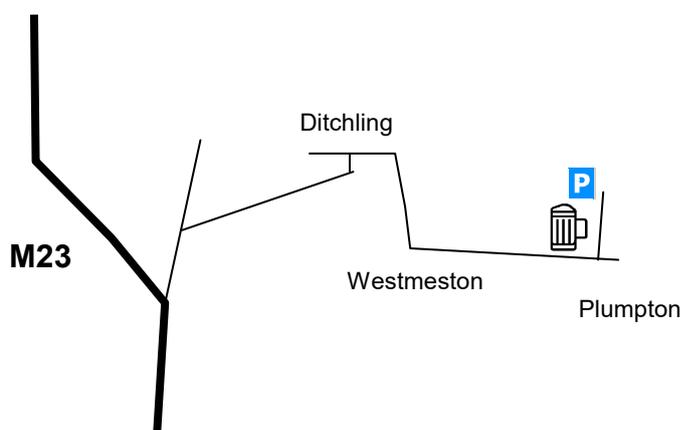
The University of Sussex was one of the first public “plate glass” research universities, meaning modern (instituted in 1961), non-private, non-vocational. In fact, the idea for a “Brighton university” was mooted in 1911 but WWI intervened. About a third of its intake are research students, a big chunk from abroad and the work of the University contributes so much to the economy that it pipped Oxford in 1980 for its income from grants and contracts. It may also hold the gold star for controversies, taking funds from the Middle East and drugs manufacturers and having had supremo of conspiracy theorists Kees van der Pijl as professor. When you enrol as a student you are matched with a “buddy”, usually someone with the same interests and one year ahead of you, to support you and help you find your feet. Notable alumni include comedian Sara Pascoe, actor Nigel Planer, news anchorman Clive Myrie, writers Ian McEwan and Philippa Gregory, TV journalist Michael Buerk and too many politicians to list here.

Soon the trees take over and you are joined from the left by a wider track. You come out finally to meet the tarmac lane. Continue straight ahead.

Now re-join the main walk from section [5](#).

Getting there

By car: coming from the London or M25 direction, your satnav will probably direct you on the M23 as far as the Pyecombe exit, then on a pleasant tour of the villages of Clayton, Ditchling, and Westmeston (all visited on other walks in this series). Turn left just after the pub and park on the strip on the left.



By bus/train: University bus from Brighton station, several frequent routes: see University website. Use your map to find the best drop-off point and start at the road junction marked with (*) in the University Loop above.

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