



Barcombe and the Ouse

Distance: 10 km=6½ miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex

Date written: 12-sep-2021

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Refreshments: Barcombe, *The Anchor Inn*

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

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

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Country village, meadows, sheep pastures, river, pub, church, woodland

In Brief

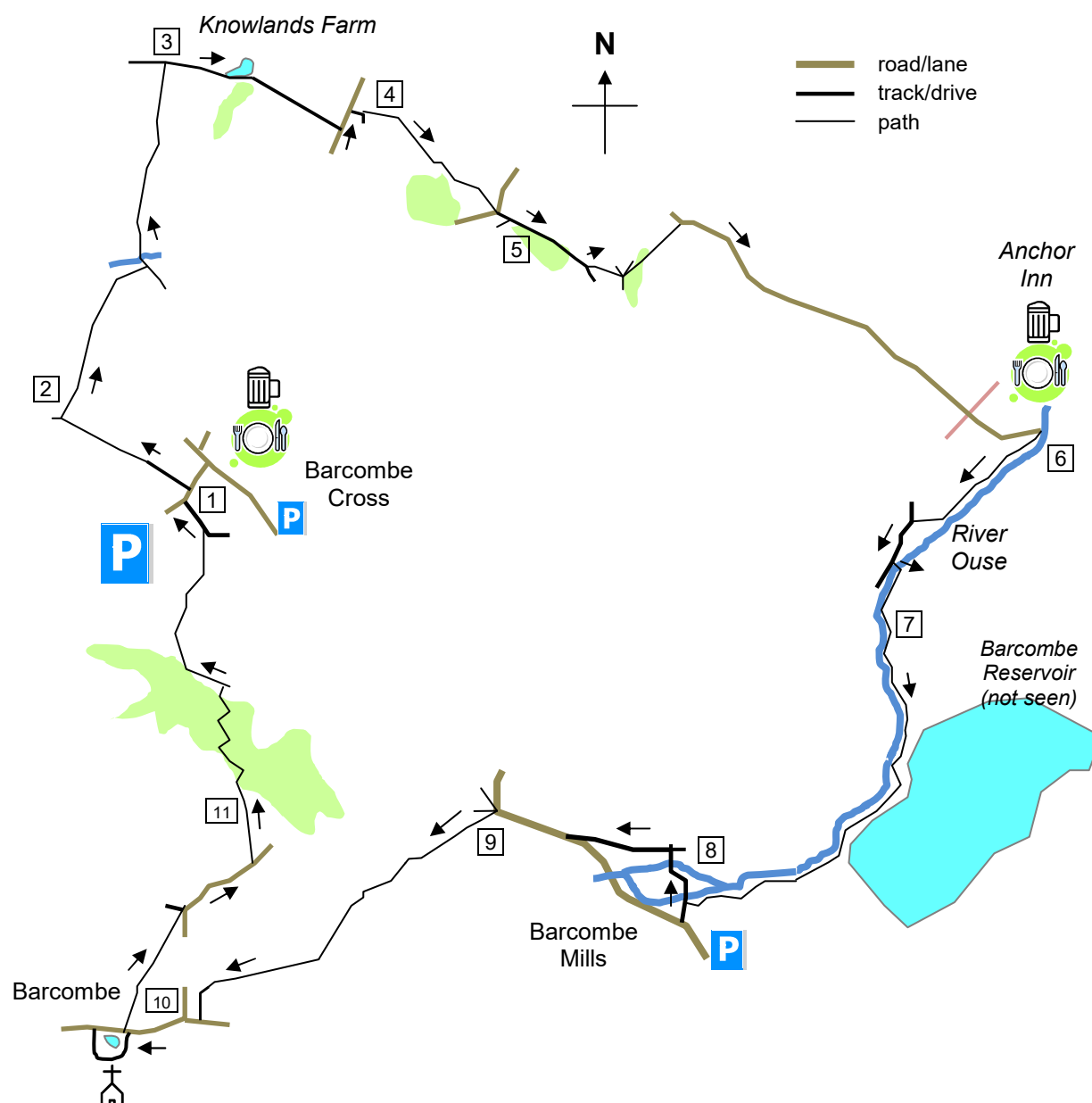
This is a walk of great variety, taking you along a path beside the River Ouse where you will find the company of many other walkers and families. The rest of the walk is a peaceful stroll through meadows, visiting all three of the villages that make up Barcombe: the populous and friendly Barcombe Cross, the bustling Barcombe Mills on the river, and the tranquil old village where the medieval church is found. The central point of this walk is the *Anchor Inn*, a hugely popular destination for weekend trippers. (To book or enquire, ring 01273-400414.)



There is not much scratchy or stingy undergrowth on this walk, but the riverside path gets quite congested with unwanted vegetation and you may need to cover your legs. Most stiles have a dog gate or a wide gap, but a couple of them do not, so a large dog may have to be quite athletic and fearless. The paths are generally grassy or gravelly, with no need for heavy boots in the summer. In winter, this situation could change, especially around the locks and weirs on the river.

The walk begins in the village of **Barcombe Cross**, E.Sussex, roughly 4 miles north of Lewes, postcode **BN8 5BA**. There is a car park next to the shop: www.w3w.co/pull.playful.porridge. To leave more space for shoppers, it may be better to park on the roadside. There is a parking strip in Barcombe Mills Road, less than 200 yds on the right (turn right at the mini-roundabout): www.w3w.co/suppers.megawatt.voted. There is a car park at Barcombe Mills, off the main road, south east of the bridge: www.w3w.co/waters.confident.merge. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



Barcombe is really three villages. Barcombe Cross, where you begin the walk, is the main hub, with most of the population, which has grown recently with new housing settlements. Barcombe Mills was the source of industry and wealth, thanks to the River Ouse and the old railway station. Barcombe, the old village, with the 12th-century church was abandoned in the 1300s during the Black Death. The “Bar” of the name comes from “barley” (compare Barlavington in W.Sussex). Indeed, milling was big business, thanks to the river, and the village had 3½ flour mills (the “half” was because one mill straddled the river).

William Grantham, from one historic Barcombe family, is famous for reviving the 15th-century game of “stoolball” which sounds awful but is actually a game rather like cricket. It was named after the milkmaids who used their milking stools as bats and it is played with a bat shaped like a frying pan with the ball lofted high. For some reason, it still hasn’t caught on.



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The walk starts in the High Street of Barcombe Cross. There is a shop here, which also provides drinks and snacks and is open most hours. Close to it is the pub, the *Royal Oak*, re-opened in 2024, serving food and local ales; the “friendly staff” welcome dogs; small garden in rear. In the other direction, across the road, near the mini-roundabout, is the tiny church of St Francis of Assisi which rather helpfully has a loo.

- 1 On the other side of the road from the *Royal Oak* pub and the shop, and roughly mid-way between them, go down Grange Road, a rough driveway. You pass allotments and scarecrows (one of which is a mermaid), then playing fields. On your left are some community vegetable plots and leisure areas. Continue straight on after a tennis court and football field, going down steps and through a belt of trees into a green field beside a multiple signpost.
- 2 Turn **right** along the edge of the field and, where the edge bends away to the right, keep straight on, on a faint path across the centre. Go over a stile in a gap in the hedge into a rough meadow. Keep straight ahead across the centre. Your path veers right past a metal gate and you soon arrive at a very wide concrete bridge. Turn **left** over the bridge across the Bevern Stream. Go through a small wooden gate and keep ahead to a stile (redundant due to the open gate) and then into a large crop field. Keep to the right-hand edge of the field. After a bridge and stile in the far hedge, continue along the left-hand edge of the next field. At the far end, go over a step stile (the excellent work of the Monday Group) to reach a track.
- 3 Turn **right** on the track, passing through Knowlands Farm (*known for its Granary, its private Nature Reserve, its natural sourcing for building and cooking, and its event hosting*). Go out along the concrete drive, passing a large pond and seats on your left, with a distant “stag” sculpture. Continue uphill, past a small paddock for Shetland ponies, over a grid and out to a road. Turn **left** on the road, passing *Forge Cottage*, and **right** on a tarmac drive, keeping straight ahead through a small wooden gate and over a stile into a sheep field.
- 4 Keep to the left-hand side as it elbows right, giving you a fine view of the South Downs. At the bottom, disregard a pair of wooden gates that you can see ahead, and instead keep **left** to go over a stile in the hedgerow. Go straight up a slope into a sheep field and bear **right** to walk alongside the wooden fencing of Scobell’s Farm, passing its buildings on your right. Keep straight on to go over a step stile visible ahead, coming out to a tarmac lane. Cross straight over the lane onto a tarmac drive for *Banks Farm*.
- 5 Ignore a yellow arrow on your right shortly and keep straight on along the drive, passing a pair of semis. Just before the drive bends right, go **left** over a wooden bridge, up steps, and over a V-stile [Aug 2023: collapsed]. Go up the left-hand side of a patch of trees and grass and keep **left** to come out to a junction of farm tracks. Straight ahead there are two parallel tracks: take the **right**-hand, rougher track, the one that leads out into a field you can see ahead. At the field, follow the left-hand edge. As the edge bends away to the right, keep **left** to go over a V-stile and turn **right** on a tarmac lane. You have a walk of about 1km along this quiet lane to reach the *Anchor Inn*, meeting little more than pub traffic. At first you pass cottages and a small farm, then a section between hedgerows, before more open country. 150m before the pub you come over the old dismantled

railway. Arriving at the pub is quite a shock when you suddenly see a large car park and a lawn packed with daytrippers.



The Anchor Inn, established in 1790, is a boating centre on the River Ouse, as well as a pub / restaurant / hotel. You can take a small paddle boat upriver to the Fish Ladder Falls and back, and then quaff a few pints in the large garden or on the river terrace. Food is pub favourites, such as the renowned Anchor Burger. The matchless setting is the big attraction, of course.

- 6 After your break, staying on the same side of the river, turn **right** through the car park and go through a wooden swing-gate on the far side. (The *private* notice only refers to fishing rights.) The path follows the river beside a meadow and leads through a small metal gate. It then runs between fences, passing a WWII pill box and a converted mill house and comes out to a tarmac drive at a bend. Keep straight ahead along the drive. Shortly, just after a low corrugated building, turn **left** past a large, padlocked, metal gate, via a step-over bar, to cross the river. (The *private* notice only refers to motors.) Turn **right** on a grass path with the River Ouse now on your right.

It's better to say simply "The Ouse" because "ouse" means "water", derived from a Celtic word. The name is also used for rivers in Yorkshire and East Anglia. This Ouse is one of the four rivers that cut through the South Downs (near Lewes – see the "Lewes-Rodmell" walk on this site). The river offers anglers carp, pike and trout.

- 7 After about 500m, round several bends in the river, you come through a wooden swing-gate and over a long bridge across a creek. Keep following the path along the willow banks. (As usual, where there is water, there are also masses of those pink Himalayan balsam plants.) The large Barcombe Reservoir is on your left, hidden by a bank. You pass a pumping station where a notice explains how the eels (which are becoming endangered) are protected by a fine mesh. After a wooden swing-gate, there is a wide section of the river bank, a popular place for families and paddleboarders. You come through a small metal gate and over a long bridge across a creek.

FFR There are three bench seats here, a chance for a welcome rest. Finally you reach a brick bridge. Go up steps, over a V-stile and over the bridge, on a tarmac drive, with mill ponds on each side. This historic areas is known as *Barcombe Mills*. (If you want to view the sluice and the weir, you can go through a wooden gate on the right onto a grass bank, a quiet spot.)

Barcombe Mills was once the active heart of the village with several mills and a button factory, all now gone, although the mill ponds remain. The area is now a nature reserve, especially known for water birds. This spot is the tidal limit of the river and sometimes gets flooded.

- 8 Follow the winding drive (note the "bug hotel" on your right). There was a toll bridge here in 1066! You pass another sluice and a large wooden gate to reach a T-junction. Grade II-listed *Barcombe House* is on your right. Turn **left** at the junction on a tarmac lane and keep straight ahead past houses, parallel to the main road and joining it, soon passing the old station building. In 200m, where the road bends right, **leave** it by turning **left** over a step stile into a pasture. There are waymarkers here pointing in three directions.

- 9 Take the **leftmost** path, along the short bottom side. Your path takes you over a stile and along the left-hand side of a crop field. **Take care to stay on the footpath as it becomes very narrow.** Your path turns a fraction **left** and takes you through a field of wild vegetation. **Take care! this path is quite concealed; it is also narrow and may be overgrown.** A bridge-with-rails is followed by a path through an apple orchard shared by sheep. A bridge with stile, a short meadow and another stile lead into a well-defined path through the middle of a maize field. At the other side, keep straight ahead into the next field. Take a faint path which veers **right**, heading for a redbrick house. At the other side, go through a small wooden gate, across a small hayfield, and **left** before a large wooden gate. Follow a bendy path, coming out to a drive (*noting the bird sculpture*). Continue on the drive, coming out to a tarmac lane with good views of the South Downs. Turn **right** on the lane and shortly **left** at a T-junction in the original village of Barcombe. *On the other side of the wall on your right is The Beeches, a historic house, built in the 1700s, also an upmarket B&B.* After some manicured hedges, you reach a sign on the left for the church.



The present Barcombe Church of St Mary The Virgin was begun in the 1100s and, as usual, restored by the Victorians. The stained glass is notable: in the north nave, the armorial glass (i.e. displaying coats of arms) dates from 1657 but was brought over from Lincolnshire by the Granthams. The glass in the south aisle is Victorian and some of it is by the celebrated designer Charles Eamer Kempe (1837-1907) who studied with William Morris and lived in nearby Lindfield.

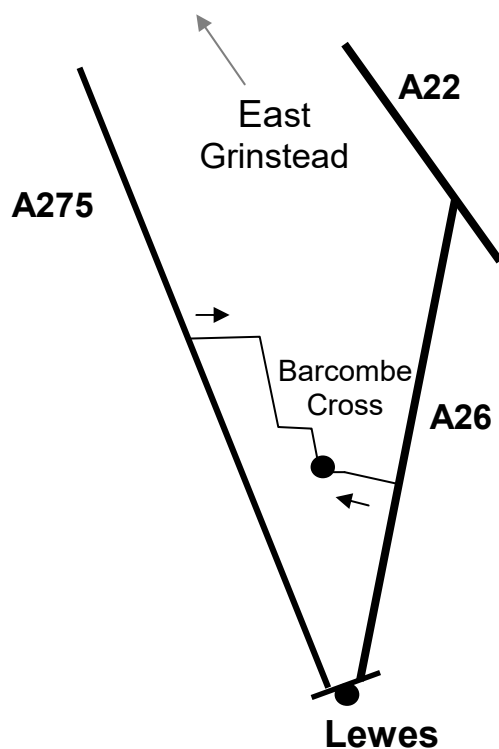
Your continued route is a footpath on the **right** almost opposite the entrance to the church. But first you cannot miss the chance to see this ancient church, with its thatched open pound, ancient barn and duck pond. It is pleasant to take a little loop along the drive, round to the right, back to the road. A delightful and unexpected feature of the church is the food box outside the porch which you are welcome to sample – also a loo in the extension at the back.

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- 10 Have turned **right** on the footpath, go through a wooden swing-gate and along the right-hand side of a rough meadow. After a stile, keep ahead similarly in the next meadow, avoiding a path that goes diagonally left. A wooden swing-gate takes you out to a lane. Turn **right** and quickly **left** on a road through more of the old village of Barcombe. After 200m on this road, in open country, and nearly 100m before the next house in the distance, look left for a step stile in the hedge. (This stile is easily missed – as a guide, it is just after a wider passing space for cars.) Go **left** over this stile and take a path across the hay meadow.
- 11 Go over a stile under a large oak and continue in the same direction in the next meadow. Go over a stile (or through the large wooden gate) and keep to the right-hand edge of the next meadow. At a signpost, go **right**, down into a wood. You meet a level crossing path which is the course of the old E.Grinstead-Lewes Railway. Go straight over, down a slope. At a signpost, go through a small wooden gate in a fence and continue up a slope on a brambly path, passing under wires. You emerge in a crop field. Turn **left** along the edge and keep right round the next corner towards houses in the distance. Where the field ends, keep ahead on a tarmac path between garden fences. At the far end, turn **left** on a tarmac lane, crossing over a residential road, into the centre of Barcombe Cross, next to the *Royal Oak*, where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Barcombe Cross is about 4 miles north of Lewes. There are several ways to get there. Barcombe is signed from the A275 ($\frac{2}{3}$ mile south of Chailey) and from the A26 (4 miles south of its junction with the A22). Follow the clear road-signs.



By bus/train: bus 121 or 122 from Lewes, not Sunday. Check the timetables.

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