

# Walking the South Downs – 5 miles

## Ditchling Beacon to Devil's Dyke

This walk takes in one of the most stunning sections of the South Downs Way long-distance trail. Spring and summer bring an abundance of wildflowers into bloom. The richness of the plant life is thanks to the chalk soil which forms a unique grassland habitat. With great bus links from Brighton, why not make this a green day out and leave your car at home?

### Start point

Ditchling Beacon – grid ref: TQ 332113 – map: OS Landranger 198

### Getting there and facilities

Buses all year round from Brighton to Ditchling Beacon and between Brighton and Devil's Dyke (Jul-Sep: daily; spring & autumn: weekends & bank holidays; winter: Sundays). For public travel info, go to [www.transportdirect.co.uk](http://www.transportdirect.co.uk). WCs and a pub at Devil's Dyke, car parks at Ditchling Beacon and Devil's Dyke. Contact us on 01273 857712 or [devilsdyke@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:devilsdyke@nationaltrust.org.uk)

### Points of interest

The South Downs stretch 90 miles from Eastbourne to Winchester. The chalk landscape was formed over 100 million years ago from the remains of animals and plants. Today these grasslands are rich in wildflowers and herbs – over 50 species can live in one square metre!

- **Flora:**  
Lady's bedstraw, devil's-bit scabious, squinancywort, salad burnet, ribwort plantain and burnet saxifrage are just a few of the quirkily-named wildflowers living on the South Downs ridge. The orchids have a special relationship with a soil fungus that 'feeds' the orchid seedlings with nitrogen and phosphate in return for being provided with sugars.
- **Birds:**  
Listen out for skylark as they soar overhead. If you're lucky you might catch a sight of warblers, linnet, yellowhammer, grey partridge and corn bunting along the route too.
- **Ditchling Beacon:**  
At almost 250m, this is one of the highest points in the South Downs and gives great views in all directions. For this reason, it was a defensive stronghold in the early Iron Age. You can still see some of the fort's banks and ditches today.
- **Devil's Dyke:**  
This large dry valley has thrilled day-trippers since Victorian times, when there was a fairground here, a cable car crossed the hillside and a small train line brought visitors up from Brighton. It is also the site of a prehistoric hill fort and settlement. Today you'll see hang-gliders catching thermals and updrafts from the valley slopes.



Chalkhill blue (pictured here) and Adonis blue butterflies are distinguished from the common blue butterfly by their chequered wing tips. The Adonis blue is a deeper sky blue colour than the chalkhill blue.

© NTPL / Simon Ovenden



Many orchid species love the South Downs chalky soils, these include the bee, fragrant, common spotted and pyramidal orchids (shown here). They're best spotted in bloom in late spring and early summer.

© NTPL / Stephen Robson



The view through Devil's Dyke – the largest dry valley in the UK. The best places for spotting butterflies and wildflowers on the downs are steep slopes that do not have a history of ploughing and farming.

© NTPL

**“The views on this walk are stunning – look north to the Weald and south to the English Channel. The plant life and butterflies add vivid colours in summer time but a regular bus link makes this a great escape from Brighton all year round!”**

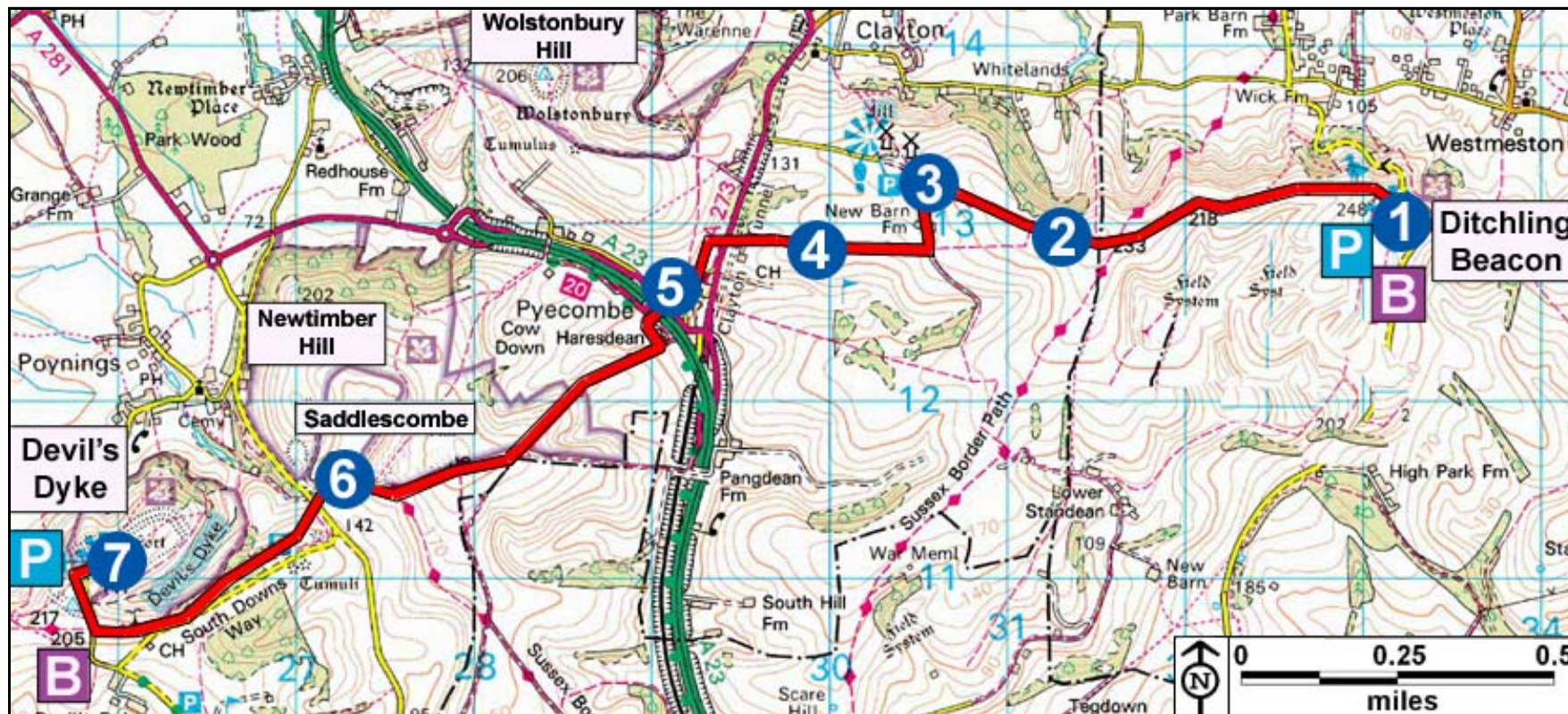
*Graham, National Trust warden*

### Distance and accessibility:

5 miles / 8km – a moderate to strenuous route with some steep climbs and descents – walk in either direction and return the same way or take the bus back to Brighton.

### Route and directions:

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| <p>1. Ditchling Beacon lies on the South Downs Way (SDW) long distance trail. Follow the blue acorn markers along the chalk ridge, keeping the sea on your left.</p>  | <p>2. Just before you reach the windmills is Clayton Holt. This is an ancient woodland estimated to be 10,000 years old and is worth a diversion off the main path.</p>                            | <p>3. Return to the SDW path and continue to Clayton windmills. The landscape is undulating and many of the mounds are not natural features, but</p>                                 | <p>4. Continue on the SDW path, which runs due south of the windmills, passing New Barn Farm.; then west to Pyecombe.</p> | <p>5. Cross the A273 then the A23 by way of a footbridge. From here on is National Trust land and the landscape quickly becomes stunning again. The path twists back into the Downs and to the historic hamlet of Saddlescombe, with its 16<sup>th</sup> century manor farm.</p> |
| <p>6. Take a quick signposted detour to the farm's donkey wheel and well which is thought to be 400 years old. Cross a road then follow the path to Devil's Dyke.</p> | <p>7. Marvel at this landscape that was carved out during the last Ice Age. Constable called the view of the Weald up here, "the best in all the land". Walk or take the bus back to Brighton.</p> | <p>The majority of the trees are ash and beech, some a few hundred years old. There is a Saxon church in Clayton village with 11th century frescos depicting the Last Judgement.</p> | <p>There is a gastro pub in the village called The Plough Inn.</p>  | <p>Marvel at this landscape that was carved out during the last Ice Age. Constable called the view of the Weald up here, "the best in all the land". Walk or take the bus back to Brighton.</p>  |



### National Trust places nearby:

- Wolstonbury Hill
- Nymans Garden
- Wakehurst Place
- Alfriston Clergy House

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[www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)