

THE VANGUARD WAY

‘From the suburbs to the sea’

ROUTE DESCRIPTION

and points of interest along the route

SECTION 9

Berwick Station to Exceat Bridge

COLIN SAUNDERS

Fourth Edition
Version 4.1

This fourth edition was first published in 2009.
It is only available as an online resource.

It replaces previous printed editions published in
1980, 1986 and 1997

Designed by Brian Bellwood

Published by the Vanguards Rambling Club
35 Gerrards Close, Oakwood, London, N14 4RH, England

© *VANGUARDS RAMBLING CLUB 1980, 1986, 1997, 2009*

Colin Saunders asserts his right to be identified as the author of this work. Whilst the information contained in this guide was believed to be correct at the time of writing, the author and publishers accept no responsibility for the consequences of any inaccuracies. However, we shall be pleased to receive your comments and information of alterations for consideration. Please email colin@vanguardway.org.uk or write to Colin Saunders, 35 Gerrards Close, Oakwood, London, N14 4RH, England.

VANGUARD WAY ROUTE DESCRIPTION: SECTION 9

SECTION 9: BERWICK STATION TO EXCEAT BRIDGE

10.5 km (6.5 miles)

The Route Description is based on a completely new survey undertaken by club members in 2006 and 2007. Inevitably changes to the route and facilities will occur, and we try to keep abreast of them. It is our intention to bring out an updated version of the Route Descriptions and Companion as necessary, but you can refer to the Latest News page on our website www.vanguardway.org.uk for any changes that may have taken place meanwhile.

Paragraphs are numbered for ease of reference. The route is marked on Ordnance Survey Explorer and Landranger maps, though you should note that in some places it is incorrectly marked on some older maps - we draw your attention to specific instances where relevant. Grid references are given at each numbered point to help identify the route. The country is divided into 100 km squares identified by a two letter code, and following standard OS practice we include these letters in our grid references. In this section they are mostly in square TQ but the stretch between Westdean and Exceat Bridge is in square TV.

In this route description:

The actual route description is shown in black Roman (upright) text.

Links with stations and other key places off route are shown in boxes with a grey background.

Italic text is used for items that are not part of the main route description, including:

- *Key information about facilities (see Vanguard Way Companion for more details)*
- *Road and street names **
- *Advice and asides.*

* The mention of a road or street name does not necessarily mean that you will see this name on the spot, but it may be helpful if you need to be picked up or set down, or to find your position on a street map.

Underlined bold italic text indicates that more details can be found in the Commentary, which follows the route description.

Distances and altitudes are given in metres (m) or kilometres (km); but if you are more familiar with yards and miles, remember that 100m is about the same as 110 yards, and that 1 km is about five eighths of a mile.

Abbreviations

> = off route
Bw = bridleway
Fp = footpath
Rd = road
Tk = track
VW = Vanguard Way

N = north
S = south
E = east
W = west

KA = keep ahead
TL = turn left
TR = turn right
L = left
R = right

m = metres
km = kilometres

VANGUARD WAY ROUTE DESCRIPTION: SECTION 9

Public transport

On route: Trains and buses at Berwick Station. Buses at Berwick Crossroads, Alfriston, Litlington, Westdean, Exceat Visitor Centre and Exceat Bridge.

Link with bus stops at Drusilla's Corner.

Distances from Berwick Station to:

A27 Lewes Road	2.5 km (1.6 miles)
>Drusilla's	3.6 km (2.2 miles)
Alfriston	4.9 km (3.1 miles)
Litlington	7.1 km (4.4 miles)
Westdean	9.4 km (5.8 miles)
Exceat Visitor Centre	9.9 km (6.1 miles)
Exceat Bridge	10.5 km (6.5 miles)

Overview

The section starts quite gently through rolling farmland then beside the winding Cuckmere River, but there is a sting in the tail as you surmount three shoulders of the South Downs. You must also climb two long flights of steps: the first of 68, the second an exhausting 218! These are the figures we arrived at on our last visit - they seem to work out differently each time, and may depend on whether you include tree roots serving as steps, and the duration of any previous pub stop.

You will encounter tranquil Berwick Village, tourist-orientated Alfriston, the popular ramblers' refreshment haunt of Litlington, lonely Charleston Manor, Friston Forest and the hidden village of Westdean. Your efforts are finally rewarded with a grandstand view of Cuckmere Haven, with its spectacular meanders, and the English Channel before a steep descent to Exceat.

Lowest and highest points. Exceat Bridge (4m); near Clapham Farm (53m).

VANGUARD WAY ROUTE DESCRIPTION: SECTION 9

Section 9 of the VW starts at Berwick Station [TQ 526 068]

in Wealden District in the county of East Sussex.

[Transport] *Trains to Berwick Station from Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes, Brighton, Gatwick Airport, East Croydon and central London. Take care if crossing the railway lines from the Down platform (from London, East Croydon, Gatwick Airport, Brighton and Lewes).*

Buses: The Cuckmere Community Bus operates hither in the morning as follows: (Mondays) from Eastbourne, Polegate and Hailsham; (Tuesdays and Fridays) from Seaford and Exceat; (Wednesdays) from Hailsham and Alfriston; (Thursdays) from Eastbourne, Polegate and Alfriston; (Saturdays and Sundays March to October only) from Alfriston, Seaford and Exceat.

[Refreshments] *At the Berwick Inn. Convenience store on north side of level crossing.*

[Phone box] *By Berwick Stores.*

9.1 [TQ 526 067]

- Opposite the Berwick Inn go up the access way towards a green, metal warehouse.
- Go to righthand side of warehouse and take narrow Bw beside it to reach large field in 45m.
- Go half L across field to gate in hedge, now following the line of a **Roman road**.
- Pass through gate and, keeping hedge on R, KA along field edge for 450m, with free-range chickens in field on your R.
- Pass through gate and continue in front of Stonery Farm (*line of trees marks Roman road*).

9.2 [TQ 517 068]

After 40m turn sharp L (*leaving Roman road which continues ahead*) on to partially metalled, twisting Tk and follow to Rd (*Common Lane, which is on National Cycle Route 2*).

9.3 [TQ 517 064]

- Turn half L across Rd and follow Fp half L again down field.
- Locate plank bridge in tree line and cross stile into large field.
- Bear quarter L ($180^\circ = \text{due S}$) up rise towards L end of tree line.
- At hedge go through gap and over corner of next field to cross stile.

9.4 [TQ 519 060]

- Head down grass field (still 180°) to cross stream on rubble bridge through gap in hedge beside stile.
- Head up next field towards righthand of two telegraph poles (175°).
- Cross stile and go through gap at corner of hedge opposite.
- TR down field edge to cross stream via plank bridge and stile.
- Bear half L up field to cross dilapidated stile by metal gate on to main Rd (*A27 Lewes Road*).
- This road is very busy - take great care** as you cross Rd then TL for 50m to crossroads and bus shelter.

[Transport] *The Cuckmere Community Bus calls at the crossroads here on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays (also Saturdays and Sundays from March to October), to / from Berwick and Seaford stations. By walking 300m east along the A27, to the roundabout at Drusilla's Corner, there are more buses serving Alfriston, Lewes and Eastbourne.*

9.5 [TQ 520 053]

TR along Rd signed 'The Village (**Berwick**)'.

[Transport] *On certain days of the week, the Cuckmere Community Bus comes up to the Cricketers Arms.*

[Refreshments] *Cricketers Arms pub.*

[Phone box] *Opposite Cricketers Arms.*

VANGUARD WAY ROUTE DESCRIPTION: SECTION 9

9.6 [TQ 519 052]

- a) By phone box opposite Cricketers Arms pub TL along gravel Tk.
- b) Follow Tk as it bends R around pond towards buildings.
- c) Take concrete Fp to R of hedge and flint wall.
- d) Cross two stiles into field then KA keeping to L of trees, aiming for L side of church.
- e) Cross stile and KA along Tk past **Berwick Church**.

*The footpath to your left here leads in 500m to **Drusilla's Zoo Park**.*

9.7 [TQ 518 048]

- a) Where Tk bears R behind church, take well defined Fp ahead.
- b) KA on Fp through several large fields, ignoring all side turns, for just over 1 km to reach Tk, which shortly leads to bend in Rd (**Winton Street** to L, *West Street* ahead).

[Accommodation] *In Winton Street.*

9.8 [TQ 517 037]

KA into **Alfriston**, along West Street, passing North Street Car Park (*toilets, note **Tower Folly***), to Waterloo Square, wherein are located **Smugglers Inn** and **Village Stores**.

[Transport] *Bus services to Lewes, Seaford and Eastbourne. The Cuckmere Community Bus comes here on most days of the week from Berwick and Seaford stations.*

[Refreshments] *Several pubs, cafés and tea-rooms.*

[Toilets] *In car park.*

[Accommodation] *Wide choice.*

9.9 [TQ 520 031]

- a) KA along the High Street past River Lane.

Take care as you walk along the narrow pavements as traffic comes close and sometimes irresponsibly fast. VW crosses South Downs Way here (see below) - the two routes will shortly be running together, but take a slightly different route through Alfriston.

- b) Soon after **George Inn** (on your L), and **Star Inn** and **Much Ado Books** (on your R), opposite Apiary shop, TL along Fp in alley beside hair salon.
- c) In 30m, with **St. Andrew's Church** to your R, take Fp bearing slightly L passing Farthings and **The Tanneries**.
- d) Follow Fp down to cross **Plonk Bridge**, where VW joins **South Downs Way** (SDW).

9.10 [TQ 522 031]

- a) TR to follow embankment southwards beside **Cuckmere River**.
- b) In 1.8 km, at seat by next bridge, TL on metalled Fp to Rd (*Litlington Road*) at **Litlington**.

[Transport] *The Cuckmere Community Bus calls here on Tuesdays and Fridays (also Saturdays and Sundays between March and October) between Berwick Station and Seaford or vice versa.*

[Refreshments] *TR with VW for Plough and Harrow pub; TL for Litlington Tea Gardens.*

[Accommodation] *For Alfriston Youth Hostel (Frog Firle, 450m) do not TL into Litlington but KA on metalled Fp, cross bridge, then KA uphill to Seaford-Alfriston Road and TR for 30m to hostel.*

[Phone box] *To L at Rd.*

VANGUARD WAY ROUTE DESCRIPTION: SECTION 9

9.11 [TQ 523 017]

- a) TR on to Rd, still with SDW.
 - b) Pass Plough & Harrow pub, then in 80m at Rd junction TL (*Clapham Lane*).
 - c) In 25m next to entrance for village hall TR through kissing gate.
 - d) Climb half L up field to kissing gate at top L corner. *This is where the VW starts its traverse of the South Downs.*
 - e) Follow L side of next field with Clapham Farm away to your L.
 - f) At end cross stile and follow R side of next field beside hedge.
- Note the White Horse of Litlington over to your R on Cradle Hill.
- g) Cross or pass stile and descend to trees at Charleston Manor.

[Transport] *The Cuckmere Community Bus stops on the road (300m W) on Tuesdays and Fridays (also Saturdays and Sundays between March and October) between Berwick Station and Seaford or vv.*

9.12 [TQ 521 006]

- a) Still with SDW, cross stile and TL on to Tk which passes gates on R after 30m.
- b) Continue along enclosed Tk for 40m then bear R up two flights of steps (totalling 68 - see Overview) into Friston Forest.
- c) At top, KA along broad Tk for 200m to Tk junction with memorial seat.

You can TR here if you wish to visit Friston Forest car park (400m W).

[Transport] *The Cuckmere Community Bus stops at Friston Forest car park (400m W) on Tuesdays and Fridays (also Saturdays and Sundays between March and October) between Berwick Station and Seaford or vv.*

[Toilets] *In Friston Forest car park.*

9.13 [TQ 521 002]

- a) Shortly KA at T-junction.
- b) At next junction KA (still with SDW) and descend gradually for 325m (*ignore Tks descending to R*).
- c) At T-junction TR and descend ahead (*ignoring side turnings*) past gate to Rd (*The Lane*).
- d) KA on Rd to village pond at Westdean.

[Transport] *The Cuckmere Community Bus serves Westdean pond on Tuesdays and Fridays.*

[Phone box] *By pond.*

9.14 [TV 524 997]

- a) Still with SDW, KA on unsurfaced Rd past green phone box, then take Fp up very long flight of 218 steps (see Overview).
- b) Follow Fp through forest to stone wall.
- c) TR and in a few metres cross stone stile and go through gate. *You now have an outstanding view of the Cuckmere Estuary with its meandering river.*
- d) Descend very steeply with care to kissing gate at foot of hill.
- e) Pass between buildings to main Rd (*A269 East Dean Road, Eastbourne to Seaford*) at Exceat.

[Transport] *Frequent buses from here to Eastbourne, Seaford, Newhaven and Brighton (also from the Golden Galleon - see below). The Cuckmere Community Bus calls here on Tuesdays and Fridays (also Saturdays and Sundays from March to October) between Berwick Station and Seaford or vv.*

[Refreshments] *At the Visitor Centre.*

[Toilets] *At the Visitor Centre.*

[Phone box] *At the Visitor Centre.*

[Accommodation] *Exceat Farmhouse.*

VANGUARD WAY ROUTE DESCRIPTION: SECTION 9

The next two paragraphs describe a triple crossing of a busy main road that is required here - you should take great care at each crossing point. Care is also needed on the narrow pavement, which has steep drops on either side. This situation is unsatisfactory and the Vanguard Way Working Party has asked East Sussex County Council to consider how it can be improved.

9.15 [TV 519 994]

- a) Cross Rd with care. *SDW now diverges from VW by turning L uphill.*
- b) TR to use narrow pavement on L side of main Rd, passing junction with Litlington Road on your R and **Seven Sisters Canoe Centre** on your L.
- c) In 500m reach Exceat Bridge. Again carefully cross main Rd to pavement on R side of bridge, then back again to **Golden Galleon** pub, where Section 9 of the VW ends at:

10.1 [TV 513 992]

While crossing Cuckmere River you left Wealden District and entered Lewes District, both in East Sussex.

[Transport] *Frequent buses from here to Eastbourne, Seaford, Newhaven and Brighton. The Cuckmere Community Bus calls here on Tuesdays and Fridays (also Saturdays and Sundays from March to October) between Berwick Station and Seaford or vv.*

[Refreshments] *At the Golden Galleon pub.*

COMMENTARY

on places shown in bold italics and underlined in the route description

9.1

On Windover Hill to the southeast, 3 km away, is the **Long Man of Wilmington**, cut in the scarp slope of the South Downs, and normally just visible from the bottom of Berwick Inn's garden. At 70m (231 feet) high it is said to be the largest representation of the human form in Europe. According to the information board nearby, 'The earliest known reference to the Long Man suggests the original figure was a marking in the grass rather than a solid line. In 1874 the shape was marked with yellow bricks, later replaced by concrete blocks.' No clear evidence has yet been discovered of the Long Man's origin: it could have been cut at any time over a period of 2,500 years between BC 1000 and AD 1500, and is attributed variously to neolithic druids (as Baldur the Sun-God opening the gates of dawn) or to medieval monks (as St. Christopher, patron saint of travellers). We may never know!

For the next 800m the VW closely follows the line of Margary's **Roman road number 142**, which linked their forts or towns at Pevensey (Anderida), Lewes (possibly Mutuantonis or Mantuantonis), Chichester (Noviomagus Regnorum) and Ringwood (Regnum).

9.5

First recorded in Saxon times as Berewic (barley-farm), then in the Domesday book (1086) as Berewice, **Berwick** was once a place of some importance, being situated on a major crossroads and as the venue of the twice yearly East Sussex Moot. Now it has been by-passed and is a very quiet cul-de-sac.

9.6

St. Michael and All Angels Church (www.berwickchurch.org.uk) was built around 1130 on a pre-Christian sacred site, replacing an earlier wooden church. The mound in the churchyard is a Saxon barrow. Inside the church are an ancient font and some outstanding modern murals, painted at the request of the Bishop of Chichester between 1941 and 1943 by members of the Bloomsbury Group, who lived at Charleston Farmhouse nearby to the northwest (not to be confused with Charleston Manor to the south, which you pass later in this section). They were Vanessa Bell (sister of Virginia Woolf), her son Quentin Bell and Duncan Grant. The result is most effective, with clear windows allowing light into the church and good views from inside of the surrounding countryside. However, Pevsner was not much impressed. He wrote, 'It was a noble effort on the part of the bishop....yet if one remembers Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell in their prime, how sad does it seem now, so conventional, so sentimental.' He also said of the church, 'The north arcade suffered at the hands of the restorer of 1856. It is quite illiterate and clumsy on top. So is the chancel arch.'

The footpath to your left here leads to **Drusilla's Zoo Park** (500m E, www.drusillas.co.uk). In 1923, Captain L.D. Ann acquired a derelict farm on this site and developed a compact family leisure-centre. It now contains a small zoo, children's adventure playground, working pottery and bakery, craft and antique shops, a collection of moths and butterflies and good refreshment facilities (only available to those who have paid the entrance fee). Rare breeds of cattle are raised here. Nearby to the north at Drusilla's Corner on the A27 (and under the same management) is the English Wine Centre, one of the leading promoters of English wine.

9.7

Winton, nowadays in effect part of Alfriston, was probably the earliest Saxon settlement in these parts, around 450 AD, and was then called Wigington - the settlement of a chieftain called Wiga.

The crucifix you pass on the road into Alfriston was erected in 1919 by Alice S. Gregory (1867-1946), to denote the discovery of a Saxon graveyard (120 graves were excavated) near this spot during the building in 1912 of her house, which she then called 'The Sanctuary'. Alice, the daughter of a Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, is mentioned in *Notable Sussex Women* (Helena Wojtczak, Hastings Press) as having been

awarded the CBE in 1929 for her work in founding a maternity hospital and improving the status, training and working conditions for midwives.

9.8

Though now just a village, with a resident population of 769 according to the 2001 census, **Alfriston** (pronounced Orfriston, www.alfriston-village.co.uk) was formerly a town of some importance to this area. It is such an attractive and interesting place that the population may well be doubled by visitors. The narrow pavements can get very crowded, and it is a great shame that pedestrians have to compete with vehicular traffic for the restricted space.

This is one of several places that lay claim to the site of a monastery that became a major pilgrimage centre, from the 8th to the 11th centuries, after the martyrdom of St. Lewinna, a Christian who lived locally. Born about 640 and murdered by a heathen Saxon in 690, she was entombed in the monastery that is believed to have stood on the site of the present St. Andrew's Church, and many miracles were said to have been performed there. However, in 1058 the bones were stolen by the Flemish monk Balgarus (or Balger) and his scribe Drogo, who took them to their monastery at Bergues, then in Flanders but now in France. It is said that several of Lewinna's finger bones repeatedly fell out during their escape, and they left them behind – these bones are believed to remain at St. Andrew's beneath a stone dog with the face of a nun. Of the bones that went to Bergues, after several mishaps, it is thought that just one bone now remains.

The earliest known settlement here was recorded in 840 as plain Ælfred, but due to some grammatical nicety it seems that this was in fact named after Ælfreda, the sister of King Alfred the Great. Alfred certainly had connections with this area and is believed to have had a palace at Westdean, which the VW goes through later. Local tradition says he sheltered from the Danes and burned those pesky cakes here, though several other places stake a claim to that particular legend! But the settlement we now know as Alfriston was first recorded in 900 as Ælfricestun, Saxon for 'the defended settlement of Ælfric', one of Alfred's chieftains. In Domesday Book (1086) it was Alvricestone. Over the years, some 18 variations on the theme have been recorded, but since 1700 it has settled down as Alfriston.

Great markets were held in Alfriston from the reign of Richard I in the 12th century, and the town seems to have been of some importance at this time. The market place beside the Smugglers Inn is called Waterloo Square, commemorating the troops that were stationed here during the Napoleonic Wars - their parade ground extended to what is now the car park. The original market cross was erected in 1418 - a symbol to remind traders to deal honestly - but it has suffered a number of accidents over the centuries and the current cross dates from 1955. It is topped by a carved sea urchin, which was traditionally worn by local shepherds for good luck. The fine chestnut tree was planted in 1837 to commemorate the coronation of Queen Victoria.

Until the 19th century the Cuckmere River was navigable to Alfriston, and troops were able to embark on their ships here. This also made the town an ideal base for smuggling, which had been going on since the time of Richard I, but the practice reached a peak during the Napoleonic Wars, when taxes were raised substantially, and most of the town's inns and population were involved.

Most of the buildings in the village centre are old and picturesque, and it is well worth exploring away from the VW. A leaflet 'Alfriston & Cuckmere Valley', available in various locations in the village, provides information about most of these buildings, but here is something about those that are on or close to the route:

The **Tower Folly** in North Street Car Park is thought to have been built in the late 19th century as a playhouse for his children by a Mr Harris, owner of The Dene, a property that previously occupied this site.

Smugglers Inn. Previously called the 'Market Cross', the pub still confusingly shows both signs outside. In the 19th century it was the home and shop of Stanton Collins, the butcher, who was also head of the notorious Alfriston gang of smugglers, and the pub is reputed to contain secret passages. Collins was eventually transported to Australia, though later returned to Sussex. In July 2004, a car crashed into the

Market Cross, rebounded into the Smugglers, then coolly reversed and sped away, leaving a great hole (soon repaired) in the façade.

Village Stores. Dating from the mid 19th century, its bow windows are Grade I listed, and the interior is a splendid reminder of how shops used to look in those days.

9.9

George Inn. Formerly the George & Dragon, this is one of the oldest buildings in Alfriston, dating from the late 14th century, but rebuilt after a fire in 1943. It was also once a smugglers' haunt.

Star Inn. A half-timbered building, originally a hostelry of Battle Abbey, built in 1520. Its star sign is thought to represent the Star of Bethlehem. Several carvings adorn the exterior timbers of the building, but the carved lion was once the figurehead of a Dutch ship wrecked in the mid 19th century at Cuckmere Haven, and previously stood outside the Smugglers. Even Pevsner is not infallible: the Sussex book mistakenly calls it the Ship Inn.

Much Ado Books (www.muchadobooks.com) occupies No.1 Steamer Cottages, in the High Street just past Star Lane on the right. It was established in 2003 by an American couple, and has acquired a reputation as a literary and antiquarian centre.

St. Andrew's Church. Built of flint in the 14th century on the site of a monastery, and known as 'the Cathedral of the Downs' because of its size. St. Andrew's contains several interesting artefacts, also parish registers dating back to 1504, claimed to be the oldest in England. Look for the stone dog with a nun's face referred to above.

Clergy House (close to the church). 14th century half-timbered, thatched priest's house, the first building ever acquired by the National Trust, for £10 in 1896.

The Tanneries was originally, as its name suggests, the site of a tannery, established in the late 18th century, and using hides from a nearby slaughterhouse - it seems the air in Alfriston was once less wholesome than it is now. In the adjoining meadow, visible from the VW, is a small, rusting iron bark mill, which was used to crush granules of oak bark and acorns, from which was made a liquor used in the tanning process. The tannery closed in the early 20th century and was converted into three cottages, which were combined in 1927 to the present larger dwelling. In the 1930s it housed a tearoom and until fairly recently offered bed and breakfast and camping.

Plonk Bridge (named after the locality of Plonk to the east) is also known locally as White Bridge, to distinguish it from Long Bridge further north, which is also known as Red Bridge. There has been a bridge on this site for many centuries, but the current structure is the rebuilding of a previous one dating from the 1930s.

The VW runs together with the **South Downs Way** National Trail (www.nationaltrail.co.uk/southdowns) for the next 4.8 km to Exceat. It is managed by Natural England, and runs for 162 km (100 miles) from Eastbourne to Winchester. Between Eastbourne and Alfriston there are two alternative routes, which come together at the point where the VW crosses the Cuckmere: a coastal one (partly shared with the VW) follows the Seven Sisters through Birling Gap, while an inland one follows the higher ridge, passing through Jevington.

9.10

The **Cuckmere River** flows for about 30 km from sources in the Greensand Ridge near Heathfield, through the South Downs past Alfriston. It was formerly much wider, possibly even covering most of the flat valley floor, and was navigable to Alfriston until the 19th century. It frequently flooded, but the river banks were raised in the 1930s to prevent this. The most plausible explanation of the name is from the Saxon 'cuwcmere', meaning lively pool, but it has never been recorded as such. As far back as 450 it was plain Coc, or Cocu, which may have been a Celtic name that was taken up by the Saxons. It passed through later centuries variously as Cokemaresho, Cookmere, Coukemere, Cokemere, Coukmere, Cuckmer and

Cockmare before taking on its present name. Bizarrely, in 1275 it was called (probably by very few people) Aqua de Longebar, after the local hundred (administrative district) of Longbridge, and at one time Wandelmestrouw, though why is not clear.

Litlington (Saxon = the defended settlement of Lytela's family) is a pretty little village nestling on a shelf of the South Downs. Its church, dating from Norman times, has interior arches of hard chalk, and there are ancient roof-timbers. The Plough & Harrow Inn was connected with smugglers in the late 18th / early 19th centuries. The tea garden claims to be the oldest in Sussex.

9.11

The **South Downs** (www.visitsouthdowns.com) is a range of hills extending for 120 km (75 miles) between Winchester in Hampshire and Eastbourne in East Sussex. The highest points are Butser Hill near Petersfield, Hampshire (270 m / 886 feet) and Ditchling Beacon (248 m / 814 ft) near Brighton. At the time of writing (July 2008) the Downs comprised two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (one each for Hampshire and Sussex) but a proposal to upgrade and combine them into a single National Park will hopefully take effect in the near future. This will fulfil a longstanding desire on the part of the conservation lobby, as when the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 was first proposed before the Second World War it was the intention that the South Downs should be one of the National Parks, but the ravages of war resulted in them being removed from the list.

The **White Horse of Litlington** is 27 metres long (nearly 90 feet). Local folklore says it stands on the site of 'Eve', a companion for 'Adam' (the Long Man of Wilmington), although there is no evidence for this. There are two more theories, neither of which has yet been proven. The least likely is that it was cut by two boys in 1860, when they imagined that a patch of bare chalk looked like a horse's head and decided to add the rest of the body. More likely it was cut in 1838 by James Pagden of Frog Firle Farm and his two brothers to commemorate the coronation of Queen Victoria. Having become obscured by overgrowth, the horse was recut in 1924 by three local gentlemen, (Messrs. Ade, Bovis and Hobbis) who carried out the deed in secret, overnight, to startle local people next morning. During the Second World War the horse was camouflaged to confuse enemy airmen. The horse and surrounding land were acquired by the National Trust in 1991 and regular maintenance ensures its high visibility. At some time during the 1980s, the stance was changed from standing to prancing, as this made the chalk infill more stable.

Historic **Charleston Manor** (www.charleston-manor.org.uk) was started in 1080 by William the Conqueror's cup-bearer, and was extended with Tudor and Georgian additions. Described by Pevsner as 'the perfect house in the perfect setting', it is shown in the Domesday Book (1086) as Cerletone (Ceorl's Farm). It has two tithe barns, one of which (15th Century, originally thatched but now tiled) is the largest in Sussex. There is also a very old dovecote and 18th Century stables. The beautiful gardens were first laid out in the 1930s by Lady Birley, wife of the portrait painter Sir Oswald Birley. All this is surrounded by banks of fir-trees climbing the Downs nearby. For a few years in the 1970s it was the venue of the English Wine Festival; it is now the venue each June for the Charleston Manor Festival of classical music.

9.12

Friston Forest covers nearly 810 hectares (2,000 acres) of land acquired in the 1880s by the Eastbourne Water Company (now part of South East Water) as a catchment area. It was later leased to the Forestry Commission (www.forestry.gov.uk) who in 1927 began planting - largely broadleaved trees, especially beech, with pines to give protection during growth against prevailing salt-laden winds. However, recent policy has been to replace the conifers with broadleaved trees. You may see roe deer, and the forest is home to many unusual varieties of plant and animal life: adders may be seen in summer - they will not attack unless provoked. A number of waymarked walks have been established, and details of these can be found in a leaflet available in the car park by the road to the west, reachable on a diversion from point 9.13.

9.13

The secluded little village of **Westdean** hides away in a coombe at the foot of the South Downs, surrounded by Friston Forest, whose headquarters is located here in the house called Dean Lodge. For such a small place it has much of interest. King Alfred the Great is thought to have built a palace and a hunting lodge here about 850. The Old Parsonage, also known as the Priest's House (and which offers bed and breakfast), next to the church, dates back to the 11th century and is one of the oldest occupied houses in Britain. All Saints Church is of Norman origin with 14th century additions. There is a 13th century timber-framed rectory, and a ruined manor house.

9.14

Like the Cuckmere, many rivers '**meander**', especially in their lower reaches where the water flows more slowly than upstream. The word comes from the Menderes or Meander river in Turkey, which is a prime example of this phenomenon. It is thought that rivers naturally assume this shape as it uses less energy than by flowing directly into the sea. But such a course is awkward to navigate, and a straight new channel was cut here in 1846, partly for the benefit of vessels heading for Alfriston but also to reduce the risk of flooding. Subsequently the mouth of the Cuckmere became clogged by a shingle bar, so now only small boats and canoes are able to make the trip upstream to Alfriston.

From this vantage point you can clearly visualise the effect of a rise in sea level some 500 years ago, which turned the land before you into a tidal estuary. The limits of the former estuary are clearly discernible. Eventually the sea level dropped, leaving an area of salt marsh. In the near future, a proposal to allow the sea to flood the adjoining land may drastically alter the view at high tide.

9.15

Exceat (pronounced 'Eckset' or sometimes 'Ackset' in Sussex dialect) was until the 15th century a flourishing settlement on Cuckmere Haven, but was wiped out by the Black Death, raids by French pirates and poor harvests. There are almost as many theories for the origin of its unusual name as there are letters in it. Recorded in Domesday Book (1086) as Essete, this may refer to 'settlers by the Exe' (possibly an early name for the Cuckmere River); or to 'Ecci's settlement'; or to the land of the Aese (the first kings of Kent); or to 'aecscet', the Saxon for oak grove (or oak corner, depending on source of information).

The **Seven Sisters Country Park** extends eastwards, covering 113 hectares of chalk cliffs and river valley. It includes the land east of the river inland to Exceat Bridge and the first three 'sisters'. Established in 1971 by East Sussex County Council, one of its most welcome effects was the removal of a sprawling riverside caravan site, replaced by artificial lakes to attract birds, especially terns. The best view of the Seven Sisters can be obtained from Seaford Head further along the VW. The Country Park's headquarters at Exceat has a visitor centre, a former farmhouse, where guided walks can be arranged for parties and cycles can be hired. It is also the base for Seaford Head Nature Reserve, which you will walk through on Section 10.

The river meanders provide an ideal setting for the **Seven Sisters Canoe Centre**. Normally only pre-booked groups can use the facilities, though on some days it may be possible to just turn up and have a go.

The Living World Exhibition that used to occupy buildings to the right here has now closed.

The **Golden Galleon** was previously a tea room, established in 1930 by Captain Douglas Ann of Drusilla's fame (see above).
