

THE VANGUARD WAY

(SOUTH TO NORTH)

A different experience in the other direction!

ROUTE DESCRIPTION and points of interest along the route

SECTION A

Newhaven to Exceat Bridge

COLIN SAUNDERS

First Edition (South-North)
Version 1.0

This first edition of the south-north route description
was first published in 2011.
It is only available as an online resource.

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VANGUARD WAY *SOUTH-NORTH* ROUTE DESCRIPTION: SECTION A

SECTION A: NEWHAVEN TO EXCEAT BRIDGE

9.7 km (6.0 miles)

This South-North version of the Route Description is based on a survey undertaken by club members in 2010. 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. However, please note that this South-North version uses the same numbering system for locations along the route as the original North-South version, so they appear to run in reverse order, i.e. in this section from A(10.10) to A(10.1). (The individual route description paragraphs in this South-North section are preceded by the letter A to distinguish them from the North-South versions.)

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. Downloadable maps in pdf format showing the correct route are available on our website. 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 Bishopstone and Westdean 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 kilometres (km) and metres (m); but if you are more familiar with miles and yards, remember that 1 km is about five eighths of a mile and that 100m is about the same as 110 yards. To roughly convert metres to feet, multiply by three and add 10 per cent.

Abbreviations

VGW = Vanguard Way	KA = keep ahead	> = off route
Bw = bridleway	TL = turn left	N = north
Fp = footpath	TR = turn right	S = south
Rd = road	L = left	E = east
Tk = track	R = right	W = west
m = metres	km =kilometres	

VANGUARD WAY *SOUTH-NORTH* ROUTE DESCRIPTION: SECTION A

Public transport

On route: Buses at Seaford and Exceat Bridge. Trains at Newhaven Harbour.

Links with Newhaven Town, Bishopstone and Seaford stations, and with bus stops at Bishopstone.

Distances from Newhaven Harbour Station to:

Tide Mills	1.3 km (0.8 miles)
>Bishopstone Station	2.5 km (1.5 miles)
>Seaford Station	4.0 km (2.5 miles)
Splash Point	4.8 km (3.0 miles)
Cuckmere Haven	7.8 km (4.8 miles)
Exceat Bridge	9.7 km (6.0 miles)

From Newhaven Town Station add 1.0 km (0.6 miles) to the above distances.

Overview

Going from south to north, the Vanguard Way starts at Newhaven Harbour Station. (Note that the ferry terminal for foot passengers is now located close to Newhaven Town Station, from where follow the link described below.) It follows footpaths beside Mill Creek to the historic Tide Mills, then there's a long stretch beside the sea through Seaford, passing a fascinating Martello tower. A steady climb up to Seaford Head brings the reward of a spectacular view of the Seven Sisters in line ahead, but don't forget to look back as you climb for the view along the Sussex Coast towards Brighton. There's an easy descent to Cuckmere Haven, where you can dip your toes in the English Channel – but take care as the current can be very strong. Finally you follow a level track to Exceat Bridge, where you join the River Cuckmere. The section is level except for the ascent over Seaford Head.

Cuckmere Estuary - a warning for the future

A proposal by the Environment Agency as a response to rising sea levels seems likely in due course to have a drastic effect on the scenery around the Cuckmere Estuary. It may even lead to flooding of the Vanguard Way route at high tide, though this may not come about for many years. If this policy goes ahead, there will be positive and negative effects for walkers. To quote from the Seven Sisters Country Park's website:

'Currently the land on the west side of the valley is spring and autumn pasture. Flooding will change this into saltmarsh with creeks and some areas of intertidal mudflat. Saltmarsh is very beautiful, particularly in summer, and aids in absorbing the force of the tides. Mudflat is an incredibly rich habitat which supports a great diversity of wildlife. As more silt is deposited each time the land is inundated, ground levels 'warp up' so that saltmarsh vegetation can spread. The Cuckmere valley supports a range of habitats from shingle to grazing pasture. Allowing the sea to inundate one area will simply create another habitat and increase diversity.'

However, it is intended that the protective embankments on either side of the river will not be maintained, with the result that footpaths running on top of them are in danger of being lost, though pressure is being exerted on the authorities to maintain them. This should not affect the Vanguard Way initially, as the route between Exceat Bridge and Cuckmere Haven is above the level that will be regularly flooded at high tide. But eventually at so-called 'spring tides' (nothing to do with the season - they occur at every full and new moon) parts of the route could be under water for short periods. In time, rising sea level could make this a more regular occurrence. The situation will be monitored and an alternative route will be sought if necessary.

Keep an eye on the 'Latest News' page on our website www.vanguardway.org.uk for any developments affecting this and any other part of the route.

Lowest and highest points. Tide Mills (1m); Seaford Head (86m).

VANGUARD WAY *SOUTH-NORTH* ROUTE DESCRIPTION: SECTION A

Section A(10) of the VGW (South-North) starts at Newhaven Harbour Station [TV 513 992]
in Lewes District in East Sussex.

[Transport] *Newhaven Harbour Station: direct trains from Brighton and Lewes. From Gatwick Airport, East Croydon and central London change at Brighton or Lewes.*

In 2007 the old ferry terminal for foot passengers closed and they must now check in at the vehicle terminal near Newhaven Town Station. As far as we know, this will not affect Newhaven Harbour Station, but keep an eye on the Latest News page on our website www.vanguardway.org.uk for news of any developments.

[Refreshments] *The Engineer pub is just a little way along the VGW link from Newhaven Town Station and there are more facilities in the town centre.*

Link from ferry terminal and Newhaven Town Station [0.9 km / 0.6 miles, TQ 449 015]

- a) From **ferry terminal** KA along pavement on left-hand side of approach road/car park.
- b) Just past roundabout TR across Rd to **Newhaven Town station** (if arriving by train TR out of station).
- c) TR along B2109 Railway Road (passing Parker Pen factory), which later becomes Clifton Road, then Beach Road.
- d) KA for 600 metres to Newhaven Harbour Station.

[Transport] *Direct trains from Brighton and Lewes. From Gatwick Airport, East Croydon and central London change at Brighton or Lewes.*

[Refreshments] *The car ferry terminal near Newhaven Town station has a café, open most of the day (but closed in the early afternoon on Saturdays and Sundays). For more pubs and cafés in the town centre, KA across the swing bridge, bear R along Northway then L into Bridge Street.*

[Toilets] *In car ferry terminal, available all day.*

[Accommodation] *In Newhaven town centre.*

A(10.10) [TQ 449 009]

Note: For some years there has been a proposal to build a new ferry terminal on land to the south of Newhaven Harbour station. Should this proceed, building work may affect this section of the VGW – keep an eye on the Latest News page on our website www.vanguardway.org.uk.

Take care along the creekside footpath: there is an unfortunate tendency for dog-owners to fail to remove the mess left by their pets!

*The VGW route coincides with that of the **Sussex Ouse Valley Way** as far as Seaford.*

- a) From Newhaven Harbour station TL to South Gate of NPP (Newhaven Port & Properties) and TR on to Beach Rd.
- b) TR for 75m then follow Fp (with VGW sign) parallel to Rd and with railway on R.
- c) Cross stepped footbridge over railway then continue along Fp between railway and Mill Creek. *Mill Creek is the former channel of the River Ouse. Here it disappears over a weir into the 'new' channel.*
- d) KA at Fp junction then in 350m (kissing gate) Fp diverges from railway line.
- e) Continue another 525m to cross concrete Tk into ruins of **Tide Mills**. *Here, for just 800m, you enter an outlying part of the **South Downs National Park**, which has been extended to include the Tide Mills site.*

A(10.9) [TV 459 002]

- a) Cross concrete Tk and KA on embankment, still beside Mill Creek.
- b) In 675m reach shingle beach and KA to red and white notice board.

Continued on next page ►

VANGUARD WAY *SOUTH-NORTH* ROUTE DESCRIPTION: SECTION A

- c) TL along concrete Tk (track of former railway from Seaford to Tide Mills) parallel to shore (Tk may be covered by shingle).
- d) Pass Newhaven & Seaford Sailing Club to Seaford Promenade and Marine Parade. *Note VGW signpost, where Sussex Ouse Valley Way starts/finishes. Also large house with turrets, called **The Buckle** at **Bishopstone**.*

[Transport] *The Seaford town circular bus serves Marine Parade here.*

[Toilets] *In the Buckle Car Park.*

Link with Bishopstone Station [330m, TV 469 998]

- a) *Leave Promenade at VGW signpost, cross Marine Parade with care and TL along righthand pavement.*
- b) *Just before bridge TR up steps and ramp to station platform.*

[Transport] *Trains to Newhaven, Lewes, Brighton. Change at Lewes or Brighton for Gatwick Airport, East Croydon and central London. Buses to Eastbourne, Newhaven and Brighton.*

If starting from Bishopstone Station:

- a) *Exit via ramp at west (Newhaven) end of platform.*
- b) *At Rd, TL towards sea-front, ignoring rising Tk on L.*
- c) *In 200m cross Rd and through gate to Promenade, and TL along it to join VGW.*

Link with Bishopstone bus stops [520m, TV 470 002]

- a) *Leave Promenade at VGW signpost and immediately TL along lefthand pavement.*
- b) *Go under bridge and KA to main Rd.*
- c) *TR for bus stops (this side for Newhaven and Brighton; far side for Seaford, Exceat and Eastbourne).*

[Transport] *Buses to Newhaven, Brighton and Eastbourne.*

[Phone box] *250m to L along main Rd.*

If starting from Bishopstone bus stops:

- a) *Go to nearby roundabout and TL along Marine Parade, following signs for Bishopstone Station.*
- b) *Using righthand pavement, KA under bridge and continue for 200m.*
- c) *Shortly after sailing club, TR through gate and TL along Promenade to join VGW.*

A(10.8) [TV468 996]

- a) KA to sea side of wall along concrete-surfaced **Bonningstedt Promenade**.
- b) In 800 metres rejoin Marine Parade* and KA along promenade beside it for 1 km to junction with Dane Road (Beachcomber pub) in **Seaford**.

**Dog owners should note that, from May 1st to September 30th, their pets are banned from a 700-metre section of the beach, from this point to about 350 m past the Beachcomber pub (level with the junction of the Esplanade and West View). Notices posted along the seafront show where the ban operates.*

[Transport] *Beachcomber pub. Café in Salts Recreation Ground just before Beachcomber.*

[Toilets] *In Salts Recreation Ground, just before Beachcomber.*

The link with Seaford Station starts here – see next page. ►

Link with Seaford town centre and station [460m, TQ 482 991]

a) TL along Dane Road.

b) At junction of five Rds (Clinton Place, town centre) bear L round corner along Station Approach to Seaford Station.

[Transport] Trains to Newhaven, Lewes, Brighton. Change at Lewes or Brighton for Gatwick Airport, East Croydon and central London. Daily buses to Eastbourne, Newhaven and Brighton; also 'Ramblerbus' on Saturdays, Sundays and bank holidays to Berwick Station.

[Refreshments] Pubs, cafés and tearooms near Seaford Station.

[Phone box] Near Seaford Station.

[Accommodation] Good choice in town centre.

If starting from Seaford Station:

From station exit TR then immediately TR again along Dane Rd for 375m to sea-front, where TL to join VGW.

A(10.7) [TV 478 989]

a) KA along concrete or paved Esplanade between beach and road for 750m to **Martello Tower Number 74**.

Note the cream coloured building behind fields to your L – this is **Corsica Hall**.

[Refreshments] 400m beyond Dane Road TL along The Causeway (signed 'Town Centre') for Wellington and Old Boot pubs (100 metres off route). Kiosk just past the Martello Tower.

[Transport] The Seaford town circular bus route serves the Martello Tower.

[Toilets] Just past the Martello Tower.

A(10.6) [TV 485 985]

a) KA beside beach, passing colourful beach huts for 500m to **Splash Point**, where the Esplanade ends.

A(10.5) [TV 487 982]

a) After last beach hut bear L to VGW fingerpost and ascend the L hand winding Fp (the R hand one leads to a gull viewing area). Here you re-enter the South Downs National Park and stay within it until reaching the A27 road at Berwick.

b) Just before concrete viewing area with seats TR up steps then follow coastal path – the line of which may change as erosion wears the cliffs away. Halfway up take advantage of the seats to sit and admire the view back over Seaford towards Brighton. On a very clear day you may be able to see more of the Sussex coast further west.

c) Continue climbing to reach the top of **Seaford Head**.

Keep well away from the cliff edge – this applies all the way to Cuckmere Haven.

These cliffs are eroded by a combination of natural forces (waves, storms, ice) and fall into the sea at an average half a metre each year. Sometimes large chunks fall away without warning. Some sections of the coastal path may be roped off, then you must follow the alternative path further inland.

From the top of Seaford Head you have possibly the most outstanding view on the whole of the VGW – and even in the whole of Southern England – of the **Seven Sisters**.

VANGUARD WAY ***SOUTH-NORTH*** ROUTE DESCRIPTION: SECTION A

A(10.4) [TV 494 978]

- a) KA with Seaford Golf Course on your L. *You shortly pass a sign indicating that you are entering **Seaford Head Nature Reserve**, which extends nearly all the way to Exceat Bridge. Almost hidden among shrubbery on your left is a 'space-age installation', which is actually a **DVOR**'. Away to your L at the top is **South Hill Barn** – if you need to reach it a stile gives access to a direct Fp.*
- b) Descend the dry valley ahead for 1.5 km. *On the way down you pass a steep and narrow cleft leading down to the sea – this is known as **Buckle Church**.*
- c) At the foot KA across Hope Bottom. *This is another dry valley which leads from **Hope Gap** up to the Chyngton Lane car park.*
- d) Climb again for a short time over Short Cliff then descend to kissing gate by cattle grid at start of row of cottages.

A(10.3) [TV 514 976]

- a) Descend Tk between fences with cottages on your R.
- b) Go through kissing gate on to beach at **Cuckmere Haven**.

A(10.2) [TV 515 977]

- a) TL past lifebuoy to go through a kissing gate and KA beside fence. *The conical cairn up to your L is the **Canadian War Memorial**.*
- b) Go through another kissing gate (bearing inscription 'Walkers' Gate – in loving memory of Peter and Madeleine Walker and their grandson Richard) to follow fenced Tk at foot of slope (Outbrook Bank) for 1.5 km, passing through four gates. *The hillside on your L is part of **Chyngton Farm**.*
- c) KA through car park beside River Cuckmere to where Section A of the VGW (south-north) ends at:

A10.1 [TV 513 992]

The **Golden Galleon** pub at **Exceat Bridge**.

COMMENTARY

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

A(10.10)

The small port of **Newhaven** (www.newhaven-sussex.co.uk) developed at the expense of Seaford after the 16th century when the River Ouse was diverted directly into the sea here. The town is nowadays best known for its ferry to Dieppe, which started in 1847 when the railway was extended from Lewes by the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway. The LBSCR also provided the three original paddle steamers, called *Newhaven*, *Brighton* and *Dieppe*. The service became very popular as it was the most direct and cheapest train/sea route between London and Paris, but fell into the doldrums after the inexorable rise of Dover as the main Cross-Channel car ferry port and the opening of the Channel Tunnel. After a period during the 1990s when the future of the service was in doubt, it has been reinvigorated by the provision of modern vessels, largely through the intercession of the local authorities in Dieppe, whose economy relies heavily on the continuance of this service.

The present ferry terminal replaced the old London and Paris Hotel. This was the venue for some riotous parties thrown during the 1890s by a Mr Charles Wells, 'The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo', as described in the famous song.

The original settlement, called Meeching, was founded by Saxons in the 5th century. It lay on the far side of the harbour in the area around the present marina, below an Iron Age hill fort dating from around 400 BC, now called Castle Hill. The Lords of the Manor of Meeching were the Gibbon family, one of whose members was Edward Gibbon, who is believed to have written some of his 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' here between 1776 and 1788.

Part of Castle Hill is now occupied by Newhaven Fort (also called Fort Newhaven, www.newhavenfort.org.uk), which was completed in 1871 close to the site of an earlier Napoleonic one. Now a military museum, its massive walls, ramparts, tunnels and gun emplacements help you experience what life was like in a 19th century Victorian Fortress. There are also displays about the First and Second World Wars. To reach the fort you have to continue into Newhaven town, cross the river, then turn left along South Road and Fort Road for 1.5 km.

The bridge over the River Ouse features constantly in the day-to-day life of Newhaven, as it is frequently opened to allow vessels through. The present electrically operated swing bridge was built in 1974, replacing an earlier manually operated one of 1866. That had replaced a wooden drawbridge, which in 1784 replaced a ferry.

The Bridge Inn was built in the 17th century and is now a listed building. It featured in the first 'reverse crossing' of the Vanguard Way, as it were, in February 1848, when King Louis Philippe and Queen Marie Amélie, in flight from the French Second Republic (and amongst the earliest passengers of the Dieppe ferry), stayed overnight there and left for Croydon the following day.

The town centre (1 km NW), up the hill on the far side of the river, is a pleasant place to explore, with its intricate street pattern. St. Michael's Church dates from Norman times. Its graveyard contains a monument to the crew of HMS Brazen and its captain, James Hanson, all of whom (except one single survivor) lost their lives when the ship was wrecked off Newhaven in a terrible storm in 1800, at the end of a four-year voyage of exploration. As a result of this tragedy, Newhaven's lifeboat began service in 1803, well before the establishment of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution in 1824.

The West Pier Signal Cannon at the exit from **Newhaven Harbour** Station, which formerly marked the end of the VGW, has been removed - as yet we know not how, why, whither or whether it will return. It was made in about 1870, and was presumably originally installed on Brighton's West Pier to signal the start of sailing races. It was installed here in May 1979 to mark the visit of Sir Peter Parker, Chairman of the British Railways Board - no doubt this seemed a relatively exciting event in what is at present a somewhat bleak and uninspiring locality.

VANGUARD WAY *SOUTH-NORTH* ROUTE DESCRIPTION: SECTION A

However, a substantial harbourside development by Oakdene Homes (www.oakdene-homes.co.uk) is proposed and this should brighten up the area, as in addition to homes, restaurants, shops and sporting facilities are planned. As far as we are aware, this proposal should not significantly affect the VGW route, though it is likely to include a new ferry terminal further to seaward.

The VGW coincides with the **Sussex Ouse Valley Way** (www.sussexousevalleyway.co.uk) as far as Seaford. This was the idea of Terry Owen and Peter Anderson, of the publishers Per-Rambulations, who also devised the Tandridge Border Path encountered later. It was established with the collaboration of East and West Sussex County Councils and the Sussex Downs Conservation Board. The route runs for 67 km (42 miles) from Lower Beeding near Horsham to Seaford, passing close to Haywards Heath and through Lewes and Newhaven.

The ‘forgotten village’ of **Tide Mills** is well worth exploring, with interpretation panels scattered around to tell you the full, fascinating story. It contains the ruins of a former tide-powered corn-mill and the thriving village that once surrounded it. The flint-built mill opened in 1761, with flour being taken by barge up Mill Creek and the River Ouse to Lewes or by sea elsewhere. It was operated by the flow of water pushed into the surrounding ponds by tidal action, and for a while the building was surmounted by a windmill for extra power. In 1795 this was the scene of a mutiny by locally based troops in protest at prices and living conditions.

The arrival of the railway to Seaford in 1864 heralded the end for the mill. Although a branch came into Tide Mills from Bishopstone, the development of the east quay at Newhaven for the railway closed Mill Creek. It then became cheaper to send corn away for milling, and the mill closed in 1883. Another branch of the railway came here from Newhaven, to carry ballast. Traces of the track beds can still be seen. The mill continued in use as a warehouse until 1900 and was demolished in 1901. The village housed about a hundred mill workers and remained occupied until 1940.

During the First World War a seaplane station operated from the beach to the west. In the 1920s and 30s a Chailey Heritage hospital was actually built on the beach for boys with physical disabilities, and a horse hospital occupied part of the village. During the Second World War, the buildings were demolished to prevent their use as cover for invading troops, and the remains were used for hand-to-hand fighting practice. In 2004 a number of organisations worked together to reveal more of the remains, and the site is under consideration by English Heritage as a Scheduled Monument.

The **South Downs National Park** (www.southdowns.gov.uk) formally came into being on 1 April 2011, though it had been functioning in ‘shadow mode’ since 1 April 2010. This followed a protracted campaign by many organisations for national park status over a period of some 60 years. It had been proposed as one of the national parks under The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949, but this was rejected as the South Downs had suffered so much deprecation during World War 2. Instead, two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty were created for the South Downs, one each in Hampshire and Sussex. National parks in Britain are not publicly owned, but the status confers substantial protection (even more than that of an AONB) from unsuitable development.

A(10.9)

The Buckle, now a private residence but until fairly recently a pub, is named after the buckle that forms part of the coat of arms of the Pelham family. The circular addition to the building reflects the Martello Tower at Seaford. In 1545 this was the site of a great battle between French invaders and English troops led by Sir Nicholas Pelham, who were victorious - this led to the motto, ‘Pelham did repel ‘em’.

In the early 20th century, **Bishopstone** was the target for development as a commuter town but fortunately this never came about, otherwise the beautiful valley and downs to the north would have been covered in houses. Even so, there are two substantial residential developments either side of the main road. By rights, this location should be known as ‘Bishopstone-on-Sea’, as the original (and very secluded) village lies in a fold of the South Downs 1.5 km north of here.

A(10.8)

Bonningstedt Promenade is named after one of Seaford's twin towns, Bonningstedt, which is near Hamburg in Germany. A plaque high up on the wall, further along the promenade, indicates that Seaford is also twinned with Crivitz, in Wisconsin, USA, and Rachoni, on the island of Thassos in Greece.

Seaford (www.seaford.co.uk) has a long history. It was once a port, whose harbour lay in what is now a flat plain behind the Esplanade. It came into use as a result of the development of a shingle bar at the mouth of the River Ouse (called Medewynd or Midwyn in earlier times), which over centuries forced it eastwards to enter the sea here. Consequently it became a major port from pre-Roman times, and the Romans made good use of it. A Saxon prince called Ella landed here in 477 and established the kingdom of the South Saxons - Sussex. Previously known as Mecredesburn, the first record as 'Sæforda' was in 788.

The town prospered, but was regularly raided by French pirates. In the early 13th century it became a member of the Confederation of the Cinque Ports, not in its own right but as a 'limb' of Hastings. Although the origins of this distinguished ancient body are not clear, it is believed that it was established as an informal association of fishermen during the time of Edward the Confessor (1042 - 1066). Although the name comes from the French for five, it is pronounced 'sink', not 'sank'. The original five ports were Hastings, Romney, Hythe, Dover and Sandwich, but they were soon joined by Rye and Winchelsea, and at one time the confederation stretched from Seaford in Sussex to Brightlingsea in Essex. Today, the confederation consists of seven 'head ports' (those mentioned above, with New Romney replacing Romney) plus seven corporate members (Folkestone, Deal, Ramsgate, Margate, Faversham, Lydd and Tenterden).

There used to be a theory that Seaford's demise as a port was due to a terrible storm in 1579, which resulted in the River Ouse breaking through the shingle bank at what is now Newhaven. However, it is now clear that human intervention some 40 years earlier was the cause. For many decades before that, the river upstream of Seaford had been silting up, making navigation increasingly difficult for vessels bringing goods from Lewes and beyond. So commercial and political interests insisted that a cut be made at the small fishing village of Meeching, further west, so that the river could flow directly into the sea there and avoid Seaford. This resulted in the 'New Haven'.

Seaford fell into decline, eventually losing its membership of the Cinque Ports. But during the 19th century the rise of sea-bathing as a healthy pastime, and especially the arrival of the railway in 1864, led to a revival in the town's fortunes. However, Pevsner (unaware of future linguistic trends) wrote, 'Seaford is the least gay of the chain of south coast seaside places. It has no pavilion, no amusement arcade, a short esplanade which, at the time of writing, appears far from thriving.'

Seaford no longer has its own Member of Parliament, but over the years has had connections with no fewer than six Prime Ministers. During the 18th century its MPs included William Pitt 'the Elder' and George Canning; and the Pelham family from nearby Bishopstone provided Henry Pelham and the Duke of Newcastle. More recently, the descendants of Thomas Harben of Corsica Hall included Joseph and Neville Chamberlain.

During the Second World War, Seaford became a restricted zone, with no access for people from outside the area. The town was occupied by troops, especially Canadians, and played a major part in the D-Day invasion of 1944.

Seaford has few buildings of note, but St. Leonard's Church in Church Lane, near the town centre, has a Norman wall and massive 15th century tower.

A(10.7)

This **Martello Tower**, built in 1810, was the westernmost of a chain of 74 such defensive forts built during the Napoleonic Wars in the first decade of the 19th century by the Royal Engineers along the Kent and Sussex coasts between Folkestone and Seaford. A further 29 were built later along the Essex and Suffolk coasts. They were named after the Torre della Martella in Corsica, on which the design was based; it had walls nearly six feet thick and a swivel cannon on the roof. For added security, entrance to a Martello tower

VANGUARD WAY *SOUTH-NORTH* ROUTE DESCRIPTION: SECTION A

was at first floor level, reachable only with a ladder. This fort, completed in 1806, had a complement of one officer and 24 men, and a moat for further protection. Two more towers were planned for Seaford but never built, due to the cost and the peace treaty in 1815, and in the end not one shot was fired in anger. However, many of the Martello towers, including this one, were reoccupied during the Second World War as anti-aircraft batteries. Various uses have been made of it subsequently, even as a skating rink or hot baths for a while. The tower was substantially rebuilt in 1978 and is now the home of Seaford's Museum of Local History (www.seafordmuseum.co.uk). For such a small building, there is a great deal of interest inside, and local people call it 'The Tardis'.

There is a notable absence of hotels along Seaford's sea-front - there seems to be no demand. The row of modern houses behind a wall beyond the Martello Tower is the site of the Esplanade Hotel, opened in 1891 in anticipation of a boom in visitors, but soon closed when this did not materialise on the hoped-for scale. It did, however, provide accommodation for a short stay by King Edward VII in 1905. The abandoned hotel was used as a set for the film *A Fragment of Fear* in 1970.

Corsica Hall was formerly a nursing home, then Seaford College of Education, and has now been converted into luxury apartments. It stands on the site of the original Corsica Hall, home of the Harben family whose descendants include the prime ministers Joseph and Neville Chamberlain. Its name is said to derive from the profits made on wine smuggled from Corsica, but this may be apocryphal.

A(10.6)

At **Splash Point** are the remains of the Splash Point Hotel, built on the site of a fort that protected the entrance to Seaford Harbour. It was occupied by troops during the Second World War but demolished soon afterwards when the sea wall failed to prevent erosion. The cliffs here are a favourite nesting place for kittiwakes, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has set up a viewpoint with seats.

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.

A(10.5)

Seaford Head, 86m above the sea, is the site of a formidable Iron Age hill-fort, whose ramparts were much higher and more extensive than the scant remains you see today, as most of it has fallen into the sea. It was built by the Celts then used by the Romans as a burial ground from the 2nd century AD. The hill-fort was preceded by a Bronze Age 'bowl barrow' grave, probably of a local chieftain, which during 19th century excavations yielded a hoard of flint axes and other tools. In 1850, the army blew up part of the cliff to form some kind of protective defence in the sea, but this was in vain as the fallen chalk was quickly eroded by sea action. The event was accompanied by much publicity and witnessed by hordes of trippers from boats offshore and other vantage points. In spring and early summer, this area is the first landfall in Britain for many migratory species of birds and butterflies.

On a fine day, as well as the view eastward of the Seven Sisters, you can look back along the Sussex coast towards Brighton and even, so they say, if clear enough, Selsey Bill and the Isle of Wight.

You now have possibly the most outstanding view on the whole VGW, and even in the whole of Southern England: the Seven Sisters. Together with Seaford Head, they form the Sussex Heritage Coast. There is an even better view later on from Cuckmere Haven.

From left to right the 'sisters' are Haven Brow, Short Brow, Rough Brow, Bran Point, Flagstaff Point, Baily's Brow and Went Hill Brow - perhaps the Brow Brothers would have been equally appropriate. There is in fact an eighth sister, sometimes called Shy Sister as 'she' is so difficult to distinguish, being invisible from this end and only just discernible from the far end. Just out of sight beyond the furthest sister lie Beachy Head and Eastbourne. The tall building on Baily's Brow is Belle Tout Lighthouse, now in private ownership but expected to become a guest house in the near future. It is in constant danger of falling into the sea, and in 1999 was moved in one piece 17 metres inland on rails; it will now have to be moved again

soon if it is to survive. In front of that is Birling Gap, a favourite refreshment stop for walkers.

The chalk that makes up the cliffs of the Seven Sisters and Seaford Head was formed under the sea some 85 million years ago from the skeletons of minute sea creatures that floated down as they died and became compressed. The stratum that you see here continued south to join what is now mainland Europe, until Britain was severed after the last great Ice Age 10,000 years ago. The brown coloured material that appears amongst the chalk is loess (pronounced 'lerce'), rock from Arctic regions that during the Ice Age was ground down to a fine powder and blown here, filling gaps in the chalk. The short, springy grassland behind the cliffs is typical of chalk landscapes.

A(10.4)

Seaford Head Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, consists of 123 hectares of chalk down and river valley, most of which is owned by Seaford Town Council. It lies between Cuckmere River and Seaford Head Golf Course, and extends inland to Exceat Bridge. There are many species of plant and animal life, including some uncommon ones, that thrive on chalk grassland. Look out for skylarks, Adonis and chalkhill blue butterflies and the bloody-nosed beetle. A feature of the flora is its unusually small growth due to the exposed conditions. The slope to your left is known as Badgers Bank, due to the high incidence hereabouts of these shy and nocturnal creatures, as well as rabbits. It was the site of Poynings Town, a village established in the 14th century to house refugees from Seaford during the Black Death and the worst raids by French pirates; but it too became the target of pirates and was eventually abandoned. The reserve was established in 1969 by Lewes District Council and local farmers D.L. Paul & Sons Ltd. It shares offices with the Seven Sisters Country Park at Exceat. Further information at: www.seaford-sussex.co.uk/sfh/index.html.

DVOR = Doppler VHF Omni-Directional Range Beacon, used in Air Traffic Control. See www.trevord.com/navaids/sfd.htm for further information.

The flint barn away to your left is **South Hill Barn**, which is currently under consideration for use as a visitor centre for the nature reserve. There is a car park behind it.

A little way out to sea, there may be small fishing boats - they will probably be after mackerel.

There has never been a church at **Buckle Church** but, according to the information board here, it may have been called thus after a hermitage that existed here in 1372 and was thought by later visitors to have been a church. Buckle probably derives from the Pelham family coat of arms, which includes a buckle (see above). An alternative theory is that the name derives from an old landslip to the west known as Puck Church Parlour. The turf around here is grazed by rabbits: this creates a habitat for plants such as thrift, ground ivy and kidney vetch, which are the food source for the mining bee.

Hope Gap is the southernmost point of the VGW, and an example of the geological formation known as a hanging valley. There is an interpretation panel at the top of the steps but unfortunately it is very worn and barely legible in places. Briefly, it explains the origin of this landscape, resulting from the ice-cap that covered Britain during an earlier Ice Age 14,000 years ago. As the ice melted, rivers flowing to the sea cut valleys in the chalk, such as the one (now dry) that rises from Hope Gap, which probably flowed into the Cuckmere further south when Britain was joined to Europe. Then the rising sea cut back into the land, forming the cliffs, and this valley was left hanging, high above sea level. This probably also applied to the valleys that separate the Seven Sisters. The cliffs are gradually being eroded, and the rocky platform just above sea level shows their former extent. A scene from the *Dad's Army* film was shot in the valley in 1971.

You can descend the 66 concrete steps to explore the rock pools and shingle beach, but bathing is not recommended due to submerged rocks and strong currents.

A(10.3)

During the Second World War, **Cuckmere Haven** was heavily defended as it was expected to be a major landing point for the German invasion - which never came.

King Alfred the Great is said to have established here a shipyard, where part of the fleet was built that helped to defeat the Danes in 878. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries this was the scene of many a run-in between coastguards and smugglers as the latter attempted to land. Its importance as a safe anchorage is demonstrated by an offer in 1787 of £1 million by the Dutch government to build a harbour here, but the threat of war with the French put paid to that.

Small cargo vessels and barges were able to reach Alfriston until the mid 20th century, but the shingle bank that has built up across the mouth contributed to the demise of navigation. This is the result of erosion of the chalk cliffs, which also brings down the embedded flint. The soft chalk is then eroded by the sea to leave vast quantities of hard flint pebbles that form the shingle.

The lake on the far side of the river was artificially created in 1975 for the benefit of seabirds.

The River Cuckmere now follows a straight cut from Exceat Bridge to the sea, built in 1846. This has cut off the meanders that the river used to follow on the far side – you will get a better view of these in the next section. The river is kept in its artificial channel by embankments. As sea level rises, it is unlikely that the embankments will be raised, then the sea will eventually return to the surrounding reclaimed pastures, which would in due course revert to the original salt marsh.

A(10.2)

A plaque on the **Canadian War Memorial** reads:

‘This plaque commemorates the soldiers who died in this area, and specifically in this field, during World War II. Their numbers are unknown but their memory lives on. The following is a personal testimony from Corporal Leslie Edwards (1920-2004), a local man who served in the area and laid poppies on this spot every Remembrance Day until his death:

“I will never forget the day in 1940 when a Canadian company came to Cuckmere and pitched their tents in this field. I was stationed here and knew that bombers regularly used this valley for navigation purposes. I tried to tell the commanding officer but he was not interested in what I had to say. Two mornings later the Messerschmidts arrived. Just as the sun was rising they came skimming over the water and up the valley. Around Alfriston they banked hard and came back. Bearing down on the tents they opened fire. Steam, soil and grass rose in front of them as bullets and bombs covered the ground. All the young men in the marquees and bell tents were killed. The commanding officer, who was shaving at the time in the middle coastguard cottage, died instantly when a shell came through the wall that held his mirror.”

Remember me when I am gone away, Come far away into the silent land. Christina Rossetti.

The fields of **Chyngton Farm** were ploughed up for food production during World War II. The farm was acquired by the National Trust in 1993 and has been returned to grass to recreate typical downland scenery.

A(10.1)

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 ‘aecsecat’, the Saxon for oak grove (or oak corner, depending on source of information).

The current bridge was built in 1876 to replace an earlier one, which itself replaced a ferry.

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