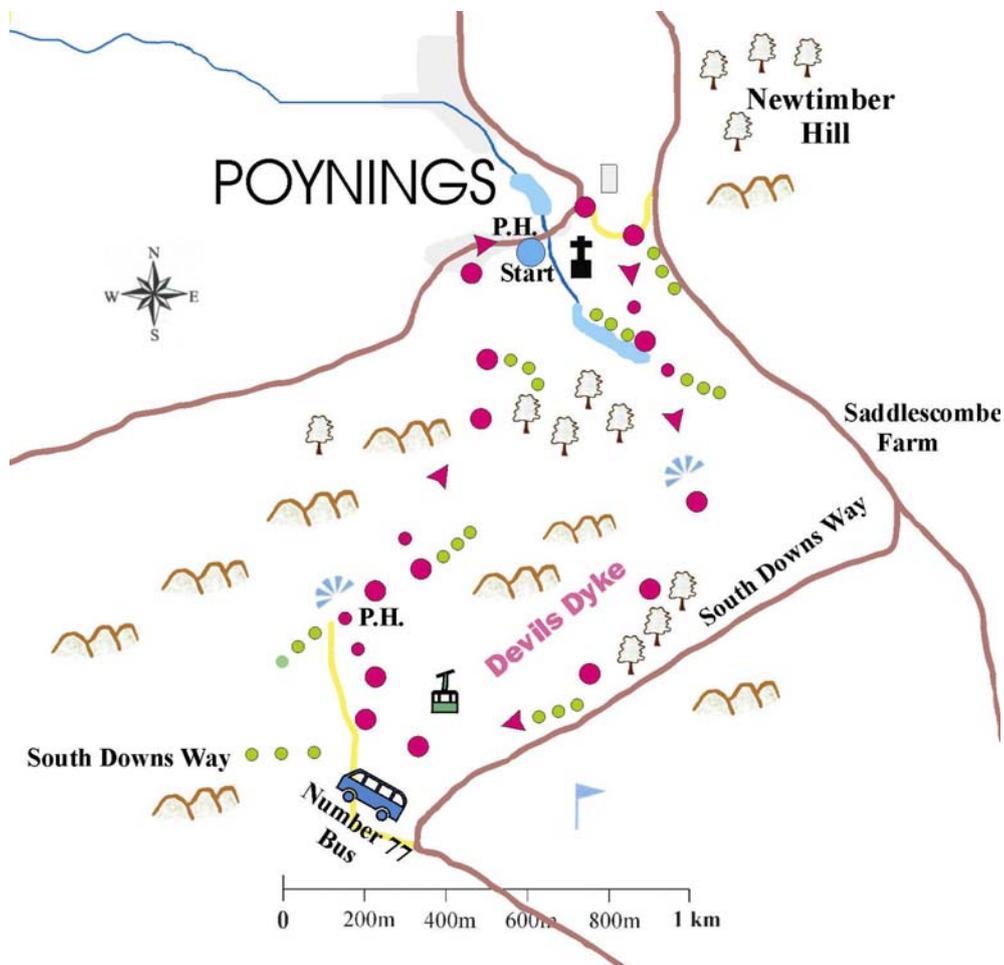


Poynings

- Start & Finish:** The Royal Oak Inn, Poynings. The pub car park is available to those carrying a copy of this walk, by kind permission. Grid Ref: TQ 263.120
- Distance:** 3 miles (5 kms). Allow 2 hours.
- Terrain:** A long climb of nearly 500 feet to the top of the South Downs, followed by a very steep descent down a stepped path. The rewards are some of the finest views in England.
- Stile count:** One only.
- Toilets:** Besides Devil's Dyke Hotel or see below.
- Refreshments:** The Royal Oak Inn, Poynings – good food from 12 noon every day.



Standing beneath the inn sign at the entrance to the car park, take the unmarked tarmac path heading east on the raised bank besides the main road.

The name Poynings derives from an Old English verb – ‘punian’, meaning to pound or hammer. It was often the tradition of South Saxon tribes to have a nickname – in this case the ‘punas’ or hammers. Puningas meant the people of the hammer.

The path you are walking along is dedicated to 'Cora', wife of impresario Emile Littler whose brother Prince Littler founded the London Palladium and ITV. They lived for many years at Downmere in the village. Cora died on 10th May 2004 – aged 102!

As you walk past the wooden benches ignore the footpath sign to the left, pass the Forge Garage on your right and emerge through a grand arch to a memorial seating area opposite Holy Trinity Church. Walk up into the churchyard.

Thomas de Poynings, Lord of the Manor, whose family had adopted the name of the village, rebuilt this large, cruciform church in 1370. Amongst other things it boasts an extraordinary wall painting of the Ten Commandments, with a more modern version below.

Follow the path behind the church to exit, through a gap in the wall, onto the road beneath a traditional yew tree. Turn right past The Rectory and as the road curves left uphill you will see two bridleway signs. Take the first of these to your right to walk between a high fence and a tree lined bank. A footpath joins you at this top end of the old millpond. Continue straight ahead following the blue bridleway signs through a particularly muddy section. After [passing a footpath to the left, a wooden gate opens out into the National Trust Estate of Devil's Dyke.

Just three rangers manage the 3,500 acres of nearby downland, designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Trust owns 200 acres of the dyke itself, which it manages for: 'Recreation, Landscape & Nature Conservation'.

Take the path to the left of the National Trust sign as you begin your climb up the southeast face of the imposing dyke. The path climbs quite steeply at first so take it gently and make as many stops as you wish to admire the view! Three quarters of the way up, the bridleway splits. Keep to the lower right hand path. There is a bench here where you can rest before making your final assault on the summit.

As the path finally levels off, walk over to the rim of the dyke, without losing height, and you may soon spot a large concrete block about 20 feet below the rim.

This was the southern end of the first aerial cableway in Britain, constructed in 1894, which carried visitors 1,200 feet across the dyke, dangling at one point 230 feet above the valley floor. It connected over the rise with the station at the top of the 4-mile run of the Dyke Railway, which had been linked to the Brighton Line in 1885.

Continue walking ahead and before reaching the public road at the top of the dyke swing right to walk down to the wooden gate below the trees. Pass through the gate and climb steeply to the hotel car park. Walk round to the front of the hotel and cross to the large stone seat with its pictorial information boards.

James Hubbard, a big game hunter, bought this estate in 1892 and transformed it into a huge tourist attraction. His hotel had a wine cellar rivalling the best in London; he organised fairs and bands and had the famous Gipsy Lee telling fortunes in her caravan – to both royalty and prime ministers. Small wonder that an estimated 30,000 people visited here on just one day at the turn of the century. On a clear day it is claimed you can see a church spire in Oxfordshire some 60 miles away and it is no surprise that our landscape painter, John Constable described this as:

'One of the greatest landscapes in the world'.

You must now leave this point carefully in order to find the path down into Poynings. With your back to the stone seat walk northeast (045 degrees) aiming towards the left side of the trees on distant Newtimber Hill, with the car park on your right. Some 150m past the end of the car park a path running around the rim of the downs will join from your left. As you reach it look down to your left where there is a large stone and concrete area.

This was the upper station of yet another mechanical attraction - a funicular railway that ran down the steep slope towards Poynings. It was constructed in 1898 but only operated for a few years, presumably because it didn't really go anywhere!

Now continue walking along the path, which is descending slowly as it heads towards Newtimber. In just 50 metres after the concrete area look down to your left and in the wire fence you will see a stile. Drop down the bank and cross the stile. Very carefully descend the next 30 metres straight down the face of the hill to meet a more gentle path descending left to right. Turn right and follow this narrow, vertiginous, path around the hillside. The path will soon divide and you should take the left fork heading downhill.

This path is not suitable for those who suffer from vertigo. For others it offers one of the finest views of the South Downs. Like all steep downhill descents it must be made slowly and very cautiously.

The path enters bushes and a series of steps lead to a kissing gate where you must turn left to continue steeply downhill. After an amazing total of 250 steps you will join a broader bridleway leading out of the National Trust Estate besides the well-kept garden of 'Longacres'. The path becomes Dyke Lane and returns you to the centre of Poynings where a right turn will bring you to the welcoming sight of the Royal Oak. The pub is open all day from 11 am (12 noon on Sunday) and serves excellent lunches.

This walk was researched and written for Mid Sussex District Council by Footprints of Sussex who lead local guided walks throughout the year. www.footprintsofsussex.co.uk

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