



Ditchling Beacon, West Sussex

Ditchling Beacon to Devil's Dyke, South Downs walk

TRAIL
Walking

GRADE
Moderate

DISTANCE
5 miles (8km)

TIME
1 hour 40 minutes

OS MAP
**Landranger 198;
Explorer 122**

Contact

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Facilities

Toilets and a pub at Devil's Dyke

Car parks at Ditchling Beacon and 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 wild flowers 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?



Terrain

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.

Things to see



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South Downs

The South Downs stretch 90 miles (144km) 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 wild flowers and herbs – over 50 species can live in one square metre. Lady's bedstraw, devil's-bit scabious, squinancywort, salad burnet, ribwort plantain and burnet saxifrage are just a few of the quirkily-named wild flowers that can be found here. Many orchid species thrive here including the bee, fragrant, common spotted and pyramidal (shown here). They're best spotted in bloom in late spring and early summer.

Devil's Dyke

The view through Devil's Dyke – the largest dry valley in the United Kingdom. The best places for spotting butterflies and wild flowers on the downs are steep slopes that don't have a history of ploughing and farming. 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's also the site of a prehistoric hill fort and settlement. Today, you'll see hang-gliders catching thermals and updrafts from the valley slopes.

Butterflies and birds

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. Listen out for skylark as they soar overhead, and if you're lucky you might catch a sight of warblers, linnets, yellowhammers, grey partridges and corn bunting along the route too.



Ditchling Beacon, West Sussex

Start/end

Start: Ditchling Beacon, grid ref: TQ332113

End: Ditchling Beacon, grid ref: TQ332113

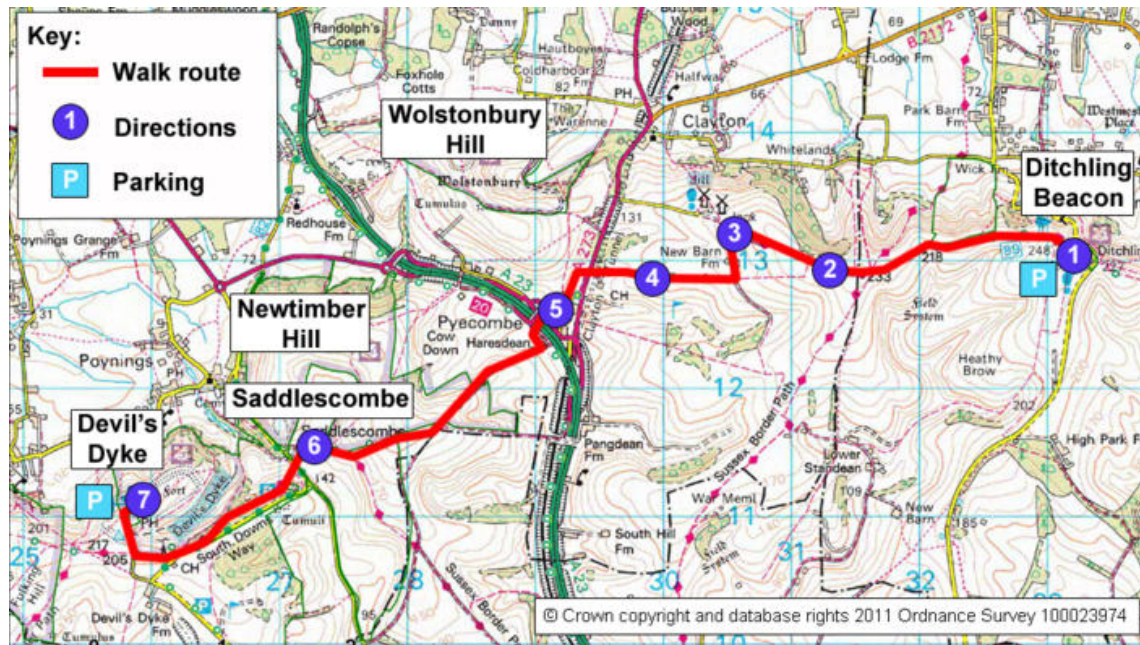
How to get there

By foot: Ditchling Beacon is on the South Downs Way

By bus: Buses all year round from Brighton to Ditchling Beacon and between Brighton and Devil's Dyke (July-September, daily; spring and autumn, weekends and bank holidays; winter, Sundays)

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1. Ditchling Beacon lies on the South Downs Way (SDW) long distance trail. Follow the blue acorn markers west along the chalk ridge, keeping the sea on your left. At around 820ft (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.

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. The majority of the trees are ash and beech, some a few hundred years old. There's a Saxon church in Clayton village with 11th-century frescos depicting the Last Judgement.

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 'tumuli' or ancient burial mounds. The windmills are affectionately called Jack and Jill. Jack is not open to the public, but Jill is open daily. From here you can see the northern edge of Brighton.

4. Continue on the SDW path, which runs due south of the windmills, passing New Barn Farm; then west to Pyecombe. There's a gastro pub in the village called The Plough Inn.

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 16th-century manor farm.

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.

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.