

# AA

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## Devil's Dyke and the World's Grandest View

**A fine walk with glimpses over the most famous of all the dry chalk valleys.**

**Distance** 3 miles (4.8km)

**Minimum time** 1hr 30min

**Ascent/gradient** 656ft (200m)

**Level of difficulty** Medium

**Paths** Field and woodland paths, 6 stiles

**Landscape** Chalk grassland, steep escarpment and woodland

**Suggested map** aqua3 OS Explorer 122 South Downs Way - Steyning to Newhaven

**Start/finish** TQ 268112

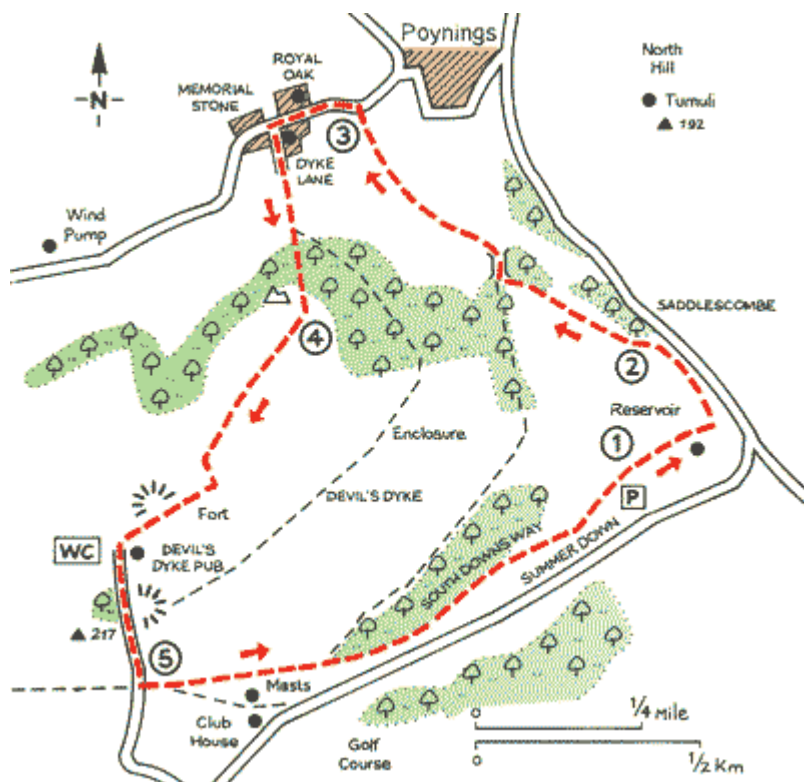
**Dog friendliness** Mostly off lead. On lead on approach to Poynings

**Parking** Summer Down free car park

**Public toilets** By Devil's Dyke pub

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**1** From the Summer Down car park go through the kissing gate and veer right. Join the South Downs Way and follow it alongside lines of trees. Soon the path curves left and drops down to the road. Part company with the South Downs Way at this point, as it crosses over to join the private road to Saddlescombe, and follow the verge for about 75yds (68m). Bear left at the footpath sign and drop down the bank to a stile.

**2** Follow the line of the tarmac lane as it curves right to reach a waymark. Leave the lane and walk ahead alongside power lines, keeping the line of trees and bushes on the right. Look for a narrow path disappearing into the vegetation and make for a stile. Drop down some steps into the woods and turn right at a junction with a bridleway. Take the path running off half left and follow it between fields and a wooded dell. Pass over a stile and continue to a stile in the left boundary. Cross a footbridge to a further stile and now turn right towards Poynings.

**3** Head for a gate and footpath sign and turn left at the road. Follow the parallel path along to the Royal Oak and then continue to Dyke Lane on the left. There is a memorial stone here, dedicated to the memory of George Stephen Cave Cuttress, a resident of Poynings for over 50 years, and erected by his widow. Follow the tarmac bridleway and soon it narrows to path. On reaching the fork, by a National Trust sign for Devil's Dyke, veer right and begin climbing the steps.

**4** Follow the path up to a gate and continue up the stairs. From the higher ground there are breathtaking views to the north and west. Make for a kissing gate and head up the slope towards the inn. Keep the Devil's Dyke pub on your left and take the road round to the left, passing a bridleway on the left. Follow the path parallel to the road and look to the left for a definitive view of Devil's Dyke.

5 Head for the South Downs Way and turn left by a National Trust sign for Summer Down to a stile and gate. Follow the trail, keeping Devil's Dyke down to your left, and eventually you reach a stile leading into Summer Down car park.

Sussex is rich in legend and folklore and the Devil and his fiendish works crop up all over the county. The local landmark of Devil's Dyke is a prime example - perfectly blending the natural beauty of the South Downs with the mystery and originality of ancient mythology. Few other fables in this part of the country seem to have caught the public imagination in quite the same way.

Devil's Dyke is a geological quirk, a spectacular, steep-sided downland combe or cleft 300ft (91m) deep and half a mile (800m) long. According to legend, it was dug by the Devil as part of a trench extending to the sea. The idea was to try and flood the area with sea water and, in so doing, destroy the churches of the Weald. However, it seems the Devil might have been disturbed by a woman carrying a candle. Mistaking this for the dawn, he quickly disappeared, leaving his work unfinished. It's a charming tale but the reality of how Devil's Dyke came to be is probably a good deal less interesting. No one knows for sure how it originated but it was most likely to have been cut by glacial meltwaters when the ground was permanently frozen in the Ice Age.

Rising to over 600ft (180m), this most famous of beauty spots is also a magnificent viewpoint where the views stretch for miles in all directions. The Clayton Windmills are visible on a clear day, as are Chanctonbury Ring, Haywards Heath and parts of the Ashdown Forest. The artist Constable described this view as the grandest in the world.

Devil's Dyke has long been a tourist honey pot. During the Victorian era and in the early part of the 20th century, the place was akin to a bustling theme park with a cable car crossing the valley and a steam railway coming up from Brighton. On Whit Monday 1893 a staggering 30,000 people visited Devil's Dyke. In 1928 HRH the Duke of York dedicated the Dyke Estate for the use of the public forever and in fine weather it can seem just as crowded as it was in Queen Victoria's day. With the car park full and the surrounding downland slopes busy with people simply taking a relaxing stroll in the sunshine, Devil's Dyke assumes the feel of a seaside resort at the height of the season. Hang gliders swoop silently over the grassy downland like pterodactyls and kite flyers spill from their cars in search of fun and excitement. But don't let the crowds put you off. The views more than make up for the invasion of visitors, and away from the chalk slopes and the car park the walk soon heads for more peaceful surroundings.

Beginning on Summer Down, on the route of the South Downs Way, you drop down gradually to the village of Poynings where there may be time for a welcome pint at the Royal Oak. Rest and relax for as long as you can here because it's a long, steep climb to the Devil's Dyke pub. The last leg of the walk is gentle and relaxing by comparison.

## **Where to eat and drink**

The Royal Oak in the centre of Poynings includes a patio and gardens and offers home-cooked specialities, local seafood, vegetarian dishes, cask ales, tea and coffee. The Devil's Dyke pub, three quarters of the way round the walk, has a family dining area and garden patio. Sunday lunch, baguettes and salads feature on the menu.

## What to look for

Devil's Dyke consists of 183 acres (74ha) of open downland which is home to all manner of flora and fauna, including horseshoe vetch, the Pride of Sussex flower and the common spotted orchid. The adonis blue butterfly also inhabits the area. The Dyke lies within the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest. (SSSI).

## While you're there

Take a stroll through the village of Poynings, pronounced 'Punnings' locally. The village takes its name from the Poynges family, who held the manor here during the Middle Ages. Michael de Poynges, a one-time lord of the manor, left two hundred marcs (£2,400) in his will towards the building of the 14th-century Church of Holy Trinity.



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