

CUT OUT
& KEEP

Photo: Ian R Lancaster

The Seven Sisters from Seaford Head

Walking through Sussex history

Meander through Crowlink, Exceat,
and the Seven Sisters Country Park

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Going for a walk holds many pleasures – exercise, scenery, nature, contemplation, companionship – but we sometimes forget that

we are walking surrounded by the past. This hilly walk certainly offers plenty of exercise in beautiful surroundings, but there is also the chance to glimpse traces of bygone lives.

Starting down what feels like a smuggler's track, our suspicions are confirmed by the sight of coastguard cottages on Brass Point. Further on, the meanders of the Cuckmere River were straightened out in 1846; future history will see rising sea levels allowed to reclaim the floodplain as wildlife-rich saltmarshes.

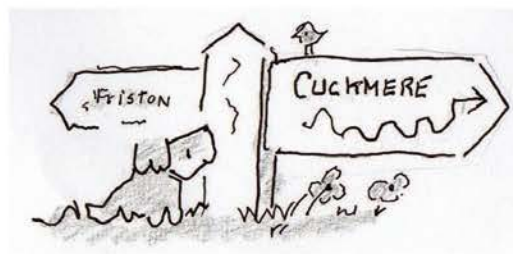


Illustration: Graham Jeffrey

'It's as the crow (drunkenly) flies'

The river, which some believe was formerly known as the Exe, leads us to the lost village of Exceat (pronounced 'Ex-seet'), which may have been one of Alfred the Great's naval ports; it later became a busy fishing village which vanished as a result of French raids or, more likely, the Black Death. ♦

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COMPASS POINTS

- Location:** Near East Dean, East Sussex.

- Distance:** Six and a half miles (10.5km).

- Terrain:** Clifftops, downland, forest.

- Ascent:** 1,208ft (368m).

- Where to park:** Crowlink NT car park.

- Grid reference:** TV549979

- Sat nav:** BN20 OAX

- What3Words:** ///cheered.amplifier.miles

- Map:** OS Explorer OL25, *Eastbourne & Beachy Head*.

- Dog-friendly:** Yes (livestock in some fields).

- Child-friendly:** Keep away from cliff edges.

- Refreshments:** Café at Exceat.

THE WALK

1 Go through the gate next to the cattle grid at the southern end of the car park and carry on down the lane as it crosses a second cattle grid and becomes a rough track. At the end of the lane continue through a gate onto a bridleway. After going through another gate, Gap Bottom widens out to pass an old dew pond. The sea soon comes into view. After an electric fence (and before the cliff edge!) turn right at a T-junction to follow the clifftops along the South Downs Way (SDW). On a clear day the Rampion wind farm can be seen out to sea.

2 Climbing over Brass Point an information board has details about the Coastguard Station which used to be there and lists the names of the (eight) Seven Sisters. Rough Brow and Short Brow follow and then after Haven Brow, the last one, the best part of the day's climbing is done. Linger here to enjoy splendid views across Cuckmere Haven to Seaford Head and the river valley.

3 A fingerpost points the way along the SDW, gently descending to the valley floor, passing a bench which

makes a great coffee stop. After the gate at the bottom, follow the track all the way to the A259 and cross this busy road with caution.

4 By the road a fingerpost points the way past a cottage to a gate leading into a field. Climb steeply to a bench at the top that offers a wonderful view of the River Cuckmere's meanders.

5 Cross the stile set in the flint wall. Descend the long flight of wooden steps into the hamlet of West Dean.

6 Leave the SDW at Pond Cottage by turning right along a road, soon leaving the village behind. The road enters Friston Forest, climbing uphill to become a track. After 500 yards, take a fork right and follow the track, ignoring any side paths. In 750 yards the main path swings left, but carry straight on along a lesser path. After a while, go straight over a crossing track, climbing steadily.

7 When the path reaches the road by a second Pond Cottage at Friston Place, turn left along the road then right

at the corner. After 250 yards watch carefully for a gate in the flint wall on the right. Go through this and follow the path diagonally across a field. On the far side cross the lane and go over a stile to traverse another field diagonally. Then continue through a woodland area before emerging at the junction of Old Willington Road and the A259.

8 Re-cross the A259 to a pond, a church (Google the unusual "Tapsel gate"), and the end of Crowlink Lane. An information board explains the wildlife and history of Friston Pond, which has been there since Saxon times and features in the *Domesday Book*. Go down the lane to arrive back at the car park.

Explore Sussex

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