

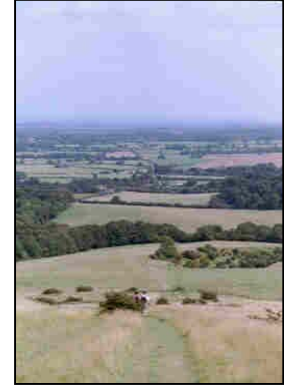
# The South Downs

From Crowborough the beautiful Sussex South Downs are within easy reach. Recognised as one of the most important chalk landscapes in England, much of the area has been designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Millions of years ago the South Downs were part of a massive chalk dome that covered much of southern England and the extreme north of France.

Extensive erosion has left the present land formation with a characteristic steep north facing scarp slope and gentle dip slope to the south. Anyone who has had the pleasure to complete the London to Brighton cycle ride will be able to testify to this!

One of the features of the Downs are the dry valleys (also known as wind gaps). They were created by rivers when the water level was much higher.



At the western end, the Downs merge into the hills of the Hampshire Basin and at the eastern end they are cut off by the sea, forming the Severn Sisters. There are four rivers that cut through the Downs; the Cuckmere, Ouse, Adur and Arun.

The Downs were originally covered by forest but extensive sheep farming has left a landscape of chalk grassland. During the Second World War much of the grassland was ploughed and has remained in cultivation. To the west of the river Arun, there is more woodland on the Downs.

Inhabited since ancient times the area has many historical features such as burial mounds, defensive sites and settlements.

The Downs are perfect for walking. There are a variety of landscapes to enjoy from inland county views to coastal views.

## Explore the South Downs from Crowborough

The following route requires the use of a car. For pubs in the area see the section on 'Eating in and eating out'.

Head south from Crowborough towards Uckfield on the A26. At Uckfield take the A22 towards Eastbourne.

At Polegate take the A27 from towards Brighton. After 2 miles there is a turning on the left signposted to the **Long Man of Wilmington**. There is a separate sheet in the Discovery Booklet that covers the Long Man in more detail.

From the Long Man of Wilmington continue on the same road towards **Litlington**. For an interesting detour take the first right turn and visit **Alfriston**.

Back on the road to Litlington head through the village and continue until you reach the T junction with the A259. On the way look out for the **White Horse** marked into the hillside.

Where the road meets the A259 take a left turn. After 2 1/2 miles at **East Dean** take the right turn towards **Beachy Head**.

After 1 mile you will arrive at **Birling Gap**, a low point in chalk cliff line, and a good place to stop and explore the beach.

Steps lead down onto the rocky shoreline. From here you can see the **Seven Sisters** out to the west. There is evidence of coastal erosion here. A row of houses are disappearing into the sea.

Back on the coast road it continues along towards **Beachy Head**, gaining height. Look out for the cliff top lighthouse, once the subject of a TV episode of Changing Rooms.

The lighthouse was recently moved 15m away from the rapidly eroding cliff.

2 miles from **Birling Gap** you will arrive at **Beachy Head**. There is a 'Harvester type' pub here and a Countryside Visitor Centre (details below). It is also a good spot to park and take a stroll along the cliff tops.

If you follow the path to the viewing point you will see the new working lighthouse down below in the sea.

Continuing on the road from Beachy Head it eventually loops back and meets the A259.



**Warning!!**  
At many points the drop at the cliff edge is sudden, with no fences.  
**Please take care.**

**Beachy Head Countryside Centre** - The Countryside Centre is situated at the end of the Seven Sisters with fabulous views of Birling Gap and the magnificent Heritage Coast. There is a highly innovative exhibition about Beachy Head and the Sussex Downland. Free admission. 01323 737273.

**Alternative walk** – The road that runs along the front at Eastbourne turns inland at the westerly end of the town (B2103). Where the road turns inland there is a small drinks kiosk at the bottom of the hill. From here there is a path that leads around the front of the Downs. This leads to a short circular walk on the lower Downs. Following the path closest to the shore one can take a detour down onto the rocky beach via steps at Cow Gap.