**South Downs to the Sea**

Enjoy our circular walk from East Lavant: 12.4km/7.7 miles, 4hrs (210m ascent/descent)

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**Route overview**

East Lavant is a classic Sussex downland village with flint-walled cottages and an historic church. This circular walk begins from the Royal Oak Inn and leaves the village on the West Sussex Literary Trail, initially snaking along the Lavant Valley, then picking up Monarch’s Way to the pretty village of West Dean, making for a very gentle start to the day in rolling countryside.

Arriving at West Dean Gardens, you can visit this site or continue the walk to the nearby Weald & Downland Living Museum in Singleton, which is also worth exploring. **Please follow our links for the sites in our walk notes below to check visitor information in advance.**

The second section of our route from Singleton is more challenging as it heads south via a climb to the summit of St Roche’s Hill for panoramic views that explains the strategic location here of an Iron Age hillfort, ‘The Trundle’. Goodwood racecourse is immediately below to the east and your steady descent back to East Lavant benefits from views to the sea.

You can **shorten the walk** using the bus to/from West Dean or Singleton; please see **Your options for this route** below before setting off.

**Note**: this walk involves an unavoidable 1.6km/1mile alongside a busy road but there is a pavement and this stretch is soon covered.

**Food & drink**

West Dean Gardens and Weald & Downland Living Museum have cafés.

West Dean Stores & Tea Room is open daily: [www.westdeanstores.co.uk/](http://www.westdeanstores.co.uk/)

The Partridge Inn, Singleton, is open daily: [www.thepartridgeinn.co.uk](http://www.thepartridgeinn.co.uk)

In Singleton, a bench in the church grounds makes a good spot for a picnic.

**Map:** OL8 Chichester

**On the map: clockwise circuit S**



**Start**

**Your options for this route**

* **Walk the whole route with/without visits** – follow our walk notes below
* **Walk to the gardens and/or museum and return by bus** – follow the walk notes then see ‘To return by bus’

**West Dean Gardens**

The site covers over 6000 acres and includes a Walled Kitchen Garden, Victorian Glasshouses, an Edwardian Pergola (covered in climbing roses, clematis, Japanese wisteria and honeysuckle), an award-winning Sunken Garden and the Spring Garden – pause here on a flintwork bridge over the meandering River Lavant to admire the exotic planting.

An arboretum is to be found on a 4km/2.5mile walk, with rhododendrons, azaleas, specimen trees and shrubs, and fine views of the Downs and the flint house of adjacent historic West Dean College, which specialises in art and conservation, and is part of a charity that runs the Gardens.

The restoration of the original C19th gardens began after the great storm of 1987 wrecked them. The site prides itself on its C21st approach to growing and displaying traditional and exotic fruit, vegetables and ornamentals in innovative ways. We found the place beautiful, well-kept and unusual.

Open daily 1030-1700. Entry fee. [www.westdean.org.uk/gardens](http://www.westdean.org.uk/gardens)

The café/restaurant has a terrace overlooking the valley and park, or you could picnic here. Allow a couple of hours to explore at a leisurely pace.

**The Weald and Downland Living Museum**

Known to many in the UK as the filming location for the TV programme ‘The Repair Shop’, this extensive **open-air museum** is home to over 50 historic buildings dating from 950 AD to the C19th, all salvaged from the local area. They were either in decay or threatened with destruction but were rescued, carefully dismantled and rebuilt in their original form.

This site brings to life traditional homes, farmsteads and rural industries, and enthusiastic volunteers in costume offer further information. Gardens, farm animals, walks, a mill pond and various activities complement the buildings that include barns, stables, granaries, a medieval hall, a charcoal burner’s camp, a carpenter’s shop, brick-drying shed, school, smithy, shops, market hall, Tudor kitchen, Edwardian tin tabernacle church, watermill and more!

Open daily 1030-1800. Entry fee. [www.wealddown.co.uk/](http://www.wealddown.co.uk/)

Allow 2-3 hours to see the whole site.

**Walk Notes**

* Turn R out of **The Royal Oak** and keep SA.
* Cross a bridge then leave Pook Lane, bearing R on Sheepwash Lane, with a stream on R and village green/cricket pitch on L
* After 200m cross a brick bridge over the stream at a wooden finger post, SP BW
* Follow this track (this is West Sussex Literary Trail) along the valley
* In 1.3km, at a green metal container on RHS, the track forks – either fork can be taken because the routes re-join but we suggest taking the R fork along a narrower path (passing a low bridge and track leading to a property over to the L)
* Reaching a gate at the corner of a field, keep SA through the gate to continue beside a hedge at the edge of the field, now grassy underfoot
* At a X-ing of BWs and a 4-way fingerpost, keep SA along the grassy way, with the field rising quite steeply on RHS – we saw a llama here among the sheep!
* After another 500m continue SA through a metal gate – there are trees on RHS here and the way ahead is along a stony track
* Reaching trees on LHS, keep SA to meet a TJ with a track that runs alongside a wall; bear L to join this track, going downhill

You are now following **Monarch’s Way**; the perimeter wall of the parkland of West Dean College is on the RHS.

* At the end of this track, cross a steam to meet a lane on a corner at the edge of the village of West Dean and turn R

**West Dean**

Place names with ‘dean’ or ‘dene’ or ‘don’ derive from a Saxon word meaning ‘small valley’. This is apt as the pond in the village of East Dean, just a few miles upstream, is considered to be the source of the River Lavant. The church, the village pub and most of the houses are built with traditional flint, with brick quoins (wall corners) for strength and a good edge, and with bricks as window dressings (for the same reasons).

* Now follow this lane through the village, with a stream on RHS (**West Dean Stores & Tea Room** is just around the corner at the first L)
* Keep SA along the lane to reach a church as lane bends L

**St Andrew’s Church**

The parish church is essentially a C20th recreation of a C18th remodelling of a C11th-13th original. Saxon in origin, the nave was altered at the time of adding the chancel in the C13th whilst the tower and transepts were added in the C18th along with amending its general appearance. The interior and most of the windows had to be rebuilt after a fire in 1934.

* After passing the church, follow the lane up to the main road (A286)
* Turn R on the main road (crossing carefully to use pavement)

**Note**: this section beside a busy road is not ideal but unavoidable to access the gardens or museum on foot, and also to continue our walk.

* In 600m, if you plan to visit **West Dean Gardens**, cross the road to the entrance/vehicle access on R; otherwise stay on LHS and follow notes from \*\***To continue the walk** below

**5.8km/3.6miles; 1hr 45mins**

**Leaving West Dean Gardens**

* Follow vehicle access road to the main road

**If returning to the Royal Oak now by bus**, turn L at main road and use the grass verge to find the bus stop on LHS (see bus details at the end of these notes).

* Otherwise, exit the gardens and turn R on the main road, crossing to other side to use pavement (and now follow notes below)

**\*\*To continue the walk**

* Keep SA alongside main road, crossing to other side at a bridge where pavement continues, and passing sign showing arrival in Singleton (on R you may be able to see some of the museum buildings)
* Where the main road bends L at a J, turn R for the museum if you plan to visit; otherwise follow main road for another 130m to reach a YJ\* and then follow notes from **\*\*\*To continue the walk from YJ\*** below

**Leaving the Museum**

(for bus stop and to continue the walk)

* From the museum exit, turn L on lane, using pavement on RHS
* At J with main road, bear R to continue alongside main road
* In 130m reach a YJ\* with lane leading off R

**If returning to the Royal Oak now by bus**, keep SA on main road for another 100m to find ‘Groom’s Yard’ bus stop on same side of road (we felt the driver may not see you if you wait in the shelter)

**\*\*\*To continue the walk from YJ\***

* Fork R off the main road at YJ along a narrow lane, just after ‘Old Cottage’, keeping a low flint wall on RHS (no pavement here)
* After 160m at X-roads with **The Partridge Inn** on corner, turn R
* In just 30m turn L along a narrow path towards the church
* After going through a gate into the churchyard turn R, SP

**Note**: there is a bench behind the church that makes a good picnic spot

**7km/4.3miles; 2hrs 10mins**

**Singleton**

The place name derives from the Anglo-Saxon ‘sengel’ meaning ‘burnt clearing’. The village grew larger than the more remote Charlton and East Dean further up the valley because it was on a main road and because its church was a so-called ‘hundredal’ church, meaning it was the central church in the ‘Hundred of Singleton’, a Saxon administrative collection of smaller parishes. It was owned at the time by Earl Godwin, the father of King Harold who died at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. (Nearby Goodwood House and Estate means ‘Godwin’s Wood’.)

**Church of Blessed Virgin Mary**

The church itself is Saxon, demonstrated by the typically tall narrow early C11th nave walls, a large squat square tower and three Saxon windows. Inside the tower, a triangular-headed door (visible from the middle aisle, half way up the tower) leads onto thin air high above the nave! It is surmised that there was once an upper floor and room here, lit by the highest window, that would have been lived in by the group of priests serving the Hundred’s smaller churches. The Saxon tower arch was rebuilt in the C12th or C13th with a pointed arch; the aisles you see were a later C15th addition, the arcades leading to the aisles being cut into the original Saxon walls in an Early English style like Westminster Abbey. The oak roofs are also C15th as are the Tudor pews (c.1450). Originally churches did not possess seating except maybe a bench by a wall for the elderly or infirm, so these are probably the first pews in this church.

At a corner of the nave/chancel there is a slender, stone spiral staircase that leads abruptly to a tall ‘window’ overlooking the congregation: surely this wasn’t a precarious pulpit? A set of notes at the church reveals that this was a stair that used to give access to a ‘roodloft’, a gallery surmounting the rood screen which used to divide the nave from the chancel; above the centre of this gallery was a ‘holy rood’ or cross.

* From the churchyard path beside the perimeter wall, head SA through a farmyard up a farm track (with a hill ahead)
* 200m from leaving the farmyard, go SA through a wooden gate (beside a pair of wooden field gates), keeping field boundary on LHS
* As you climb (quite steep here) you can see St Roche’s Hill ahead with two communications masts
* In 550m, head SA through a gate (alongside a field gate) SP FP, now keeping field boundary on RHS
* As you climb more steadily alongside a crop field on LHS, Goodwood racecourse grandstands hove into view
* In 350m through a wooden gate (alongside a field gate) meet a single-track lane; bear R up the lane (there is a rough verge handy if needed)
* In 500m meet a triangle with a car park at the foot of the final push up the hill
* Bear slightly L across the car park to an entrance/exit to cross the road carefully (sight lines are not brilliant), to take some steps SA
* After a few steps to a fingerpost, bear R on a narrow path SP FP to a gate (with a very strong spring!)
* In 180m (with a mast on RHS) go through a gap in the fort’s perimeter ditch and bank and bear L (ignoring a more obvious track SA) for 150m through the middle of the fort to the trig point (a concrete pillar)

**9km/6miles; 3hrs**

**St Roche’s Hill & The Trundle**

The views from the top are stunning, including Chichester, its Harbour, the Solent and beyond the Isle of Wight to the SW, and Goodwood racecourse just below to the E. Wander around the encircling earthwork on top of the bank, reminding yourself this was created with primitive hand tools alone.

All you can actually see today of the ancient fortifications are some encircling grassy mounds; the view is exceptional though, if unfortunately marred by two radio masts.

William Blake fell in love with this view of what he described as ‘England’s green and pleasant land’ in the preface to his epic poem ‘Milton’ (but now more much likely to be known from the lyrics for the hymn ‘Jerusalem’).

On race days the northeast slope of St. Roche’s Hill is enterprisingly colonised by some spectators of Goodwood Racecourse, who prefer the unofficial grandstand to paying the entrance fee!

* Over the top, bear R from the trig point on a faint grass path, immediately passing a small hollow (ignore an obvious grass path SA in the direction of distant Chichester)
* In 80m join a grassy track to head L down past the second mast on R to the fort’s opposite perimeter bank
* In 100m, immediately after passing through the earthwork, take a path to RHS of the obvious stony track ahead (access for communications masts) to walk down a grassy path along the edge of a field parallel to the access track
* In 450m at a lane through a gate, turn L to pass a car park on LHS
* Head SA on a wide stony track
* Now steadily descend SA off the hill down Chalkpit Lane for 2.5km

**Note**: vehicles are permitted to use this lane

* At the bottom of Chalkpit Lane, turn R on the road, picking up the pavement through the village
* In a further 200m, arrive back at the inn on RHS

**12.4km/7.7miles; 4hrs 5mins**

**To return to East Lavant by bus**

8-10mins on bus then 1km/0.7miles (12-15mins) on foot to the Royal Oak

**Stagecoach bus no. 60** (Midhurst-Chichester). Mon-Sat every 30mins; Sun hourly. Times are subject to change so please check online or locally. [www.stagecoachbus.com/routes/south/60/midhurst-chichester/xpao060.i](http://www.stagecoachbus.com/routes/south/60/midhurst-chichester/xpao060.i)

**From the Gardens**, follow vehicle access road to exit; turn L for bus stop.

**From the Museum**, turn L at exit to reach main road; turn R to follow main road for 250m to ‘Groom’s Yard’ bus stop (about 100m after J on R).

**Both**: Ask the driver to drop you at ‘Earl of March’ bus stop (Lavant). From bus stop, follow a path from pub car park (SP FP) across a field to reach a lane (village green on R). Turn R; at J with Pook Lane, bear L. Keep SA for the inn on LHS.