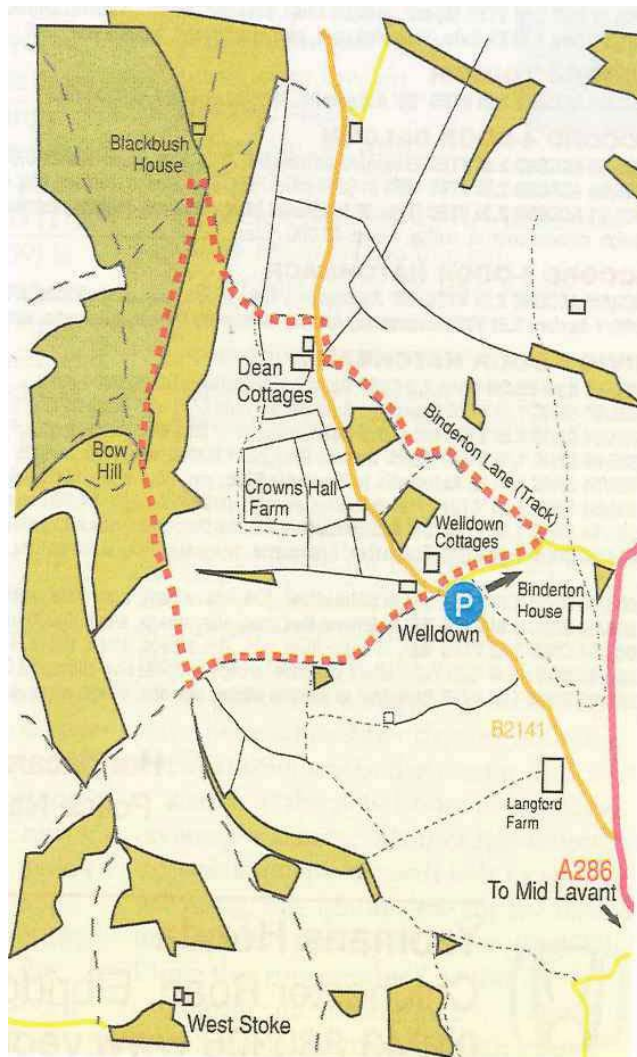


A Stroll around Chilgrove Valley



The idea of a walk around the sides of the Chilgrove Valley is so that you might, just might, see a kite. They nest somewhere in the area and sometimes they feed on the farm fields either side of the B2141.

The walk is nearly 4 ½, just over 7 kilometres. Limited roadside parking at Welldown on slip road junction to Binderton House, which used to be the home of Prime Minister Anthony Eden. He was foreign secretary to Winston Churchill during the war when he lived at Binderton.

Walk north-east up road passing splendid yew and holly hedge at top. Turn sharp left along bridleway to travel north-west. To your right the magnificent slopes of Bowhill, part of Kingley Vale NNR. Two- Ice Age eroded gullies and the whole escarpment covered in hundred-year-old yews can be seen, with beyond that the main valley rising on towards the

Isle of Wight. The grass fields below the yews are being reclaimed by West Dean Estate to downland as they were for centuries until 1950s.

Follow lane past Crows Hall copse and then Lawrence copse both of which are rich in flowers and birdlife. At main road Dean Cottages, right for 250 yards then left onto bridleway to cross open fields. Those on right near yews are very rich in flowers, with millions of rough hawkbit in early summer; also pyramid orchid and bee orchid. Please look from behind fence as you continue north-west uphill into the closed yew forest.

At the top sharp left then left again onto wide forest ride going south. Blackthorn bushes may hold bullfinches which sing like squeaky cartwheels. After one kilometre view opens wonderfully to left into the Ice-Age gully and over the Chilgrove Valley. Any kites? Buzzards?

Continue another kilometre gradually dropping downhill keeping left at BR crossroads through sunken trackways, which are very ancient English Nature graze flower-rich meadows to the left. Ahead brilliant view of Isle of Wight and Solent. England gets no better than this.

Cross Langford Farm fields where skylarks sing and lapwings, stone curlews, and grey partridge used to breed before the pesticide age. Left at bottom crossroads to pass a very nice rainwater pond often with a pair of mallard and sometimes green finches drinking. Pass Welldown copse of sycamore and beech and lords and ladies sprouting on the hedgebanks.

The farm fields here have been famous for all species of wild poppy in high summer for many years. The downhill double hedge usually holds whitethroat warblers and also the uncommon dewberry bramble. Back to ice-white aged Morris Minor.

Don't forget there is free entry to the West Dean Gardens shop, WC's and restaurant, which serves hot meals and snacks from 12pm until 2pm and afternoon tea and cakes throughout the day.

Open daily: November – February 10.30am until 4.00pm & March – October 10.30am until 5.00pm (Closed January 2011).

Written by Richard Williamson