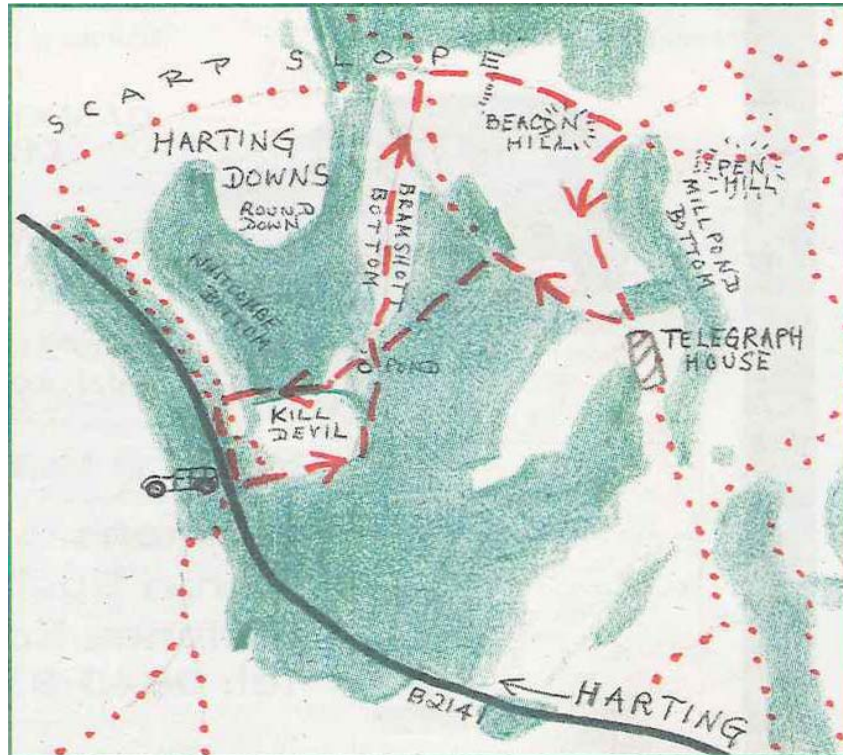


Beacon Hill



This is a downland walk of 5.3 kilometres (3.4 miles) with spectacular views and a visit to a Bronze Age hill-fort. Park under beech trees west side of B2141 Chilgrove-South Harting road.

Cross road east into Kill Devil Copse on blue arrow alongside meadow. A new metal gate on your right allows access into Telegraph House great yew forest and large old hazel trees here. At meadow end sharp left downhill with a mighty beech tree and steep slope below. Arrive junction of Whitcombe and Bramshott Bottoms with small remade dewpond. This area always reminds me of the kind of historic meeting place chosen by Thomas Hardy for enactment of a dramatic moment in a novel.

Follow yellow arrow ahead into Bramshott Bottom. In winter this is a lonely rather eerie place with desert colours from dry grasses. I saw a pair of stonechats here. The hawthorn and yew scrub high to left and right hold many woodland birds. This valley, scoured by ancient Ice Age, climbs eventually to its end on the chalk bridge between Harting Down to left and Beacon Hill to right.

So now turn right to climb the steep steps onto Beacon hill, which is 242m (794ft). Note juniper bush near a small ash tree, and fine downland turf over the whole of this sheep- and deer-grazed nature serve. Views at top described on National Trust orienteering plinth though for some unknown reason they have left out Steep Hill above Petersfield. Brilliant views of the steep downland escarpment both east and west. Neolithic and Bronze Age hill-fort banks intact but centre cultivated.

Continue east near trees until down steep hill as West Dean Estate's Millpond Bottom appears below you to the right. Note the ancient, triple, defensive bank ahead.

Sharp right at cross-tracks on South Downs Way, southwards passing Murray Downland Trust's Under Beacon nature reserve on left. Approaching woodland, now sharp right staying on SDW for 500m. Then sharp left into gorse scrub downhill back to the two Bottoms, noting lovely ant castles and yellow hill ants. Cross your earlier path through small metal gate, passing a yew tree layering its branches to form new trees. Uphill, path curving right, to pass again Kill Devil Copse meadow now on you left.

On reaching the main road, follow woodland path next to it, to left, downhill back to the old Morris gleaming white as the Beacon Hill fort chalk and the ossuary of its ancient dramas.

Who knows what happened there three thousand years ago.

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