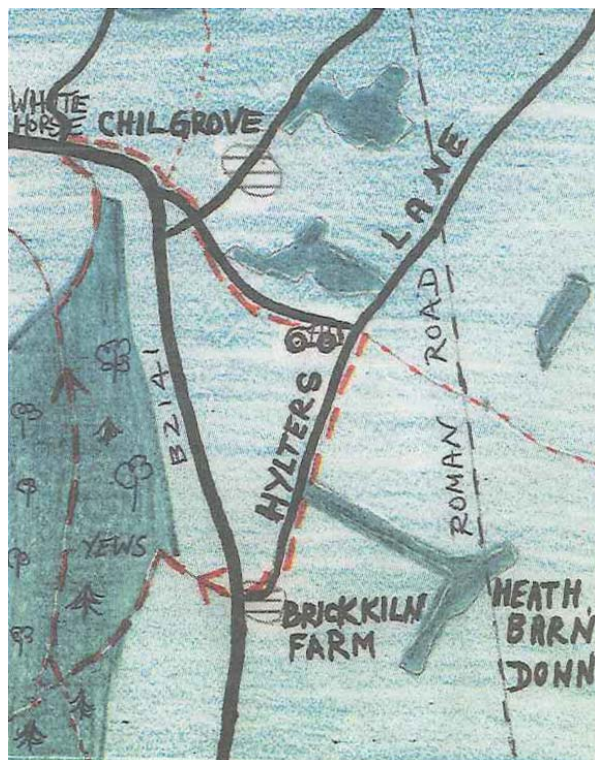


## Chilgrove and Hylters Down



Downland, woodland, and farmland: this ramble of 5.8k (3.5 miles) also has birds, flowers, an ancient monument and a village pub with restaurant. Road verge parking at Hylters crossroads SU840137 near a small group of trees which includes a turkey oak. Lots of birdwatchers stop on Hylters Lane to scan for flocks of finches which may include bramblings in winter, also red kites and harriers.

Walk southwest down road noting verges packed with a tall purple flowering plant called greater knapweed. Also large scabious with pale blue flowers. Good hedges usually filled with linnets, chaffinches, greenfinches.

Downhill to Brick Kiln Farm with house sparrows and house martins sometimes in flocks, the hedges now of blackthorn and wild plum.

Turn right to cross main road and onto a green bridleway between fields. Turn sharp left up the bank after 300m to enter the northern end of the Kingley Vale NNR – the finest yew forest in Europe with its 30,000 yew trees. On your left over the fence is a field only recently taken out of cultivation to become a super-rich flower meadow with 5,000 pyramid orchids in season. The path now turns southwest up a steep hill into part of the yew forest.

As you near the top look left into an Iron Age circular stronghold called Goosehill Camp. Shortly after this turn sharp right to walk north, along the plateau of clay-with-flints to pass Blackbush House. This was once used as the first isolation hospital 200 years ago to test inoculation against smallpox. Blackbush copse is dark and damp, but summer butterflies include silverwashed fritillaries and white admirals.

At crossways turn right downhill curving westwards to find Chilgrove green. Chilgrove meant either 'grove in a gorge' or 'Ceola's grove'.

Turn east along verge of main road, past the cricket pitch, and after road bend to south, take left minor road past the postbox, then straight ahead over crossroads leaving Chilgrove park to left. It is now 900 metres uphill and down dale back to the old Morris on the verge.

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**