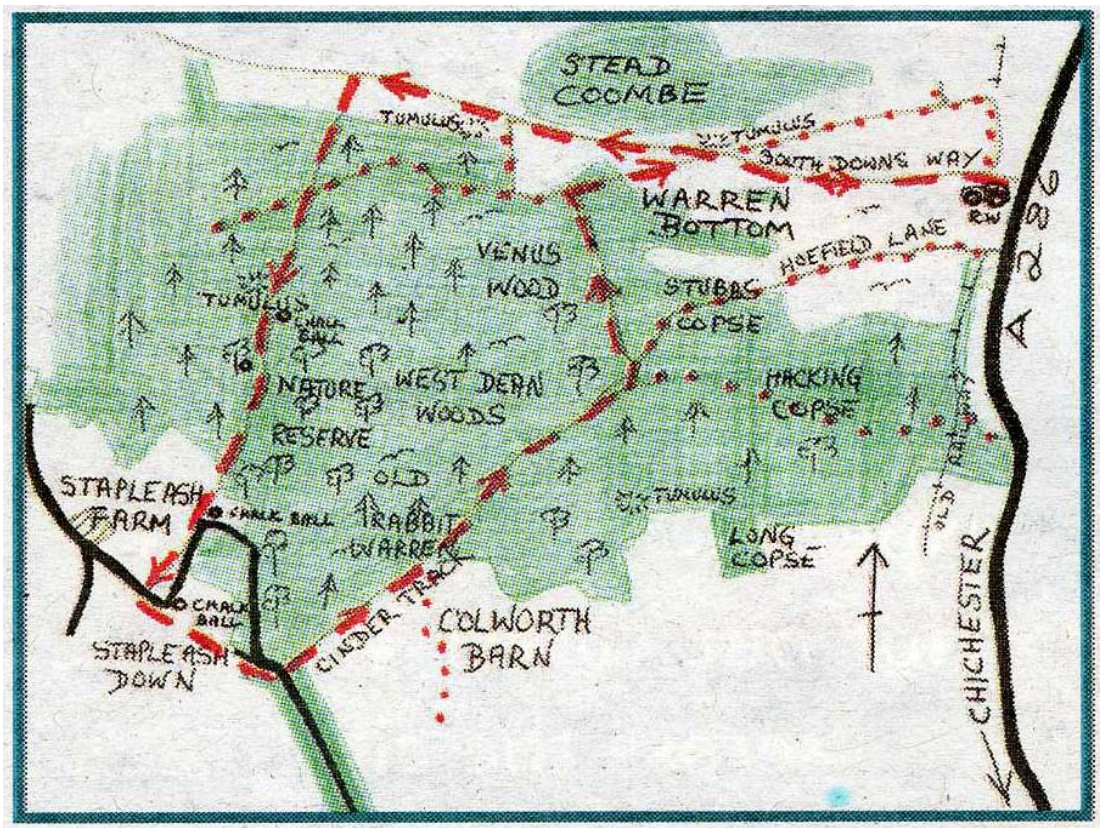


Cowdray and West Dean Woods



Here is a lovely walk of 10kms (6.2 miles) along South Downs Way and downland woods. Park top of Cocking Hill on A286 SU875166. Start west up the South Downs Way along Middlefield Lane.

As you climb up Cocking Down the view behind expands most wonderfully. You can see right over into Surrey. You pass two steep valley; Stead Coombe to right, Warren Bottom to left. Bottom is the more traditional Sussex name for a steep valley. The bare fields at top near trigpoint at 238m on right are a favourite haunt of skylarks though these have declined alarmingly in the 40 years I have known this walk.

Pass another small tumulus, this one to left in meadow SDW now dips down, crosses in distinct cross-dykes. Then come to water tanks where turn left along a line of beech trees. Enter spruce woodland, a good place to hear nightjars in summer, making their calls until late July.

Stay south-south-west on this bridleway for 2kms till you reach the road at Staple Ash Farm. You are passing through West Dean Woods. Please keep dogs under tight control everywhere. Hope you saw the fly orchids, spotted orchids and at least some of the 300 flowering plants in this reserve, not to speak of the 40 birds and 30 butterflies.

Left on to road, follow this uphill to Andy Goldsworthy chalk ball where straight ahead to cross Staple Ash Down rejoining the road after 500m. Another 100m when left through gate, north-east along edge of wood on the cinder track, made with

cinders from Wales in about 1900. Kite and skylark country right over Colworth Down. Now enter mixed woodlands used by the charcoal burners. Stay north-west keeping strictly to yellow arrows to avoid any of the many woodland tracks. Then go left again left to travel north-west now, between Venus Wood and Stubbs Copse.

Listen for goldcrests and firecrests in pines. On reaching T-junction turn right on yellow arrow back north-east to rejoin the SDW right, downhill back to the Morris, solid as one of those chalk balls.

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