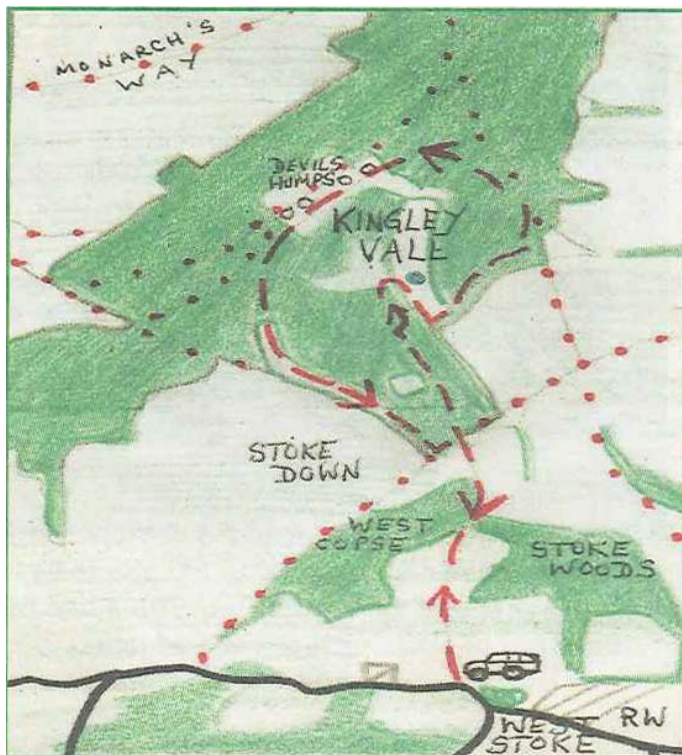


Kingley Vale



Distance 6km (3.8 miles). Park at SU825088 West Stoke – Funtington back road. Walk north along gravel road for 0.75 miles through farmland to the famous national nature reserve with its 30,000 yew trees. Small information centre I built in 1965 and new Natural England display panels outside.

Continue north with ancient yews to right. Note Roman pond on right under trees. This is the spot Tennyson enjoyed – his ghost has been seen. Keep to right as path diverges then you will be close to all the very biggest yews. Age unknown but Forestry

commission suggest up to 3,000 years. They number about 30. All have been pollarded in the distant past. Sharp right into yew grove shows the biggest and best in last 200 metres of valley.

Note more dry, ancient ponds, also Celtic/Roman field boundaries which cover the whole of the valley. Emerging from ancient trees stand a while to view vast bowl or natural amphitheatre around you. Slope trees vary between 100 – 200 years mainly. Two ancient village sites to west and north of you in valley bottom, one Bronze Age the other Iron Age/Roman.

Walk east past pond I made in 1976 across downland meadow. Path rises into young yew forest and curls left around valley bowl towards hilltop. Near the top as Isle of Wight comes into view note Stone Age flint mines close by on other side (east) of path. Farther on note memorial stone to Britain's founder of nature conservation principles, Sir Arthur Tansley. This was his favourite view in Britain. Next stop is the two Bronze Age tumuli on hilltop ahead. These are 3,500 years old, known as the Kings' Graves.

Views to north of Uppark, north-east to Monkton, Edward James' surrealist house, south to Pagham harbour, Chichester harbour, Solent. On a very, very clear summer's evening you can sometimes see Beachy Head. Keep left off hill to complete circular tour. Cross ancient earthwork at bridge gate. All the way downhill in summer note wild orchids on bank, some of the 300 species of wild flower here. Also most of the 35 species of butterflies. In winter – fallow deer, migrant birds like redwings, also buzzards and ravens.

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