

Millpond Bottom



A walk (start SU804164, 4m, 6.5km) on the high tops with distant views and a mysterious dry valley called Millpond Bottom – will all be revealed?

Park on the WSCC layby off the B2141, three miles southeast of South Harting. A rapid road, so keep on wide grass vergé to walk east uphill.

When opposite North Marden you disappear left like a rabbit into the bolt hole of a hazel-girt twitten across the fields. Note how said hazels self-prune themselves sending up scores of new walking sticks as the old parent wood becomes woodpecker treasure trove!

Left onto maroon arrow of public right of way then, in 300m, left again onto blue arrow bridleway, noting badger prints in mud.

Through bridlegate and onto tarmac road between beech avenue. These trees are a little stunted by wind and flints. Past Yew Tree Cottage with its female yew, and keep right along fingerpost route.

More yews appear, and unknown to you, is a great forest of them on private land and a little to the west of you, in deep dry valley. Not as good as Kingley Vale's yew forest though.

Look for blue arrow pointing to brick path ahead as Telegraph House fades left behind you. Like me, you will say 'hear, hear' as you pass little carved notice pleading 'Please don't drop litter on the downs.' After awhile, take blue arrow right to join South Downs Way for the next 1.5 km.

On your right a meadow leased by Murray Downland Trust from West Dean Estate. This trust needs your help by the way. On your left, a bank which runs for 1.5km enclosing the prehistoric fort of Beacon hill. There is a spectacular viewpoint, off this walk, if you took next turning left into National Trust land.

First we cross the head of Millpond Bottom on a right curving, chalk, downhill track. Black cattle usually far below trying to keep the downland flora in place with all its fescue grass, spotted orchids, kidney vetch and blue summer butterflies.

But where is the pond? Now up Pen Hill with its splendid yellow hill ants and three-tier defence system of bank-and-ditch dating from the Stone Age. Then curve left downhill, right on blue SDW, skirting wood, right onto maroon going south. Cross open cereal fields sometimes full of wintering skylarks, coming at last to the mysterious pond only if the weather has been wet. Notice how the ground, rarely, forms a natural (?) declivity. Very odd.

Keep right on maroon uphill where badgers have been active and follow ancient hazel wood of Germanleith on left, to join our original outwalk and so back to Morris Traveller with no travelling mysteries to solve today.

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