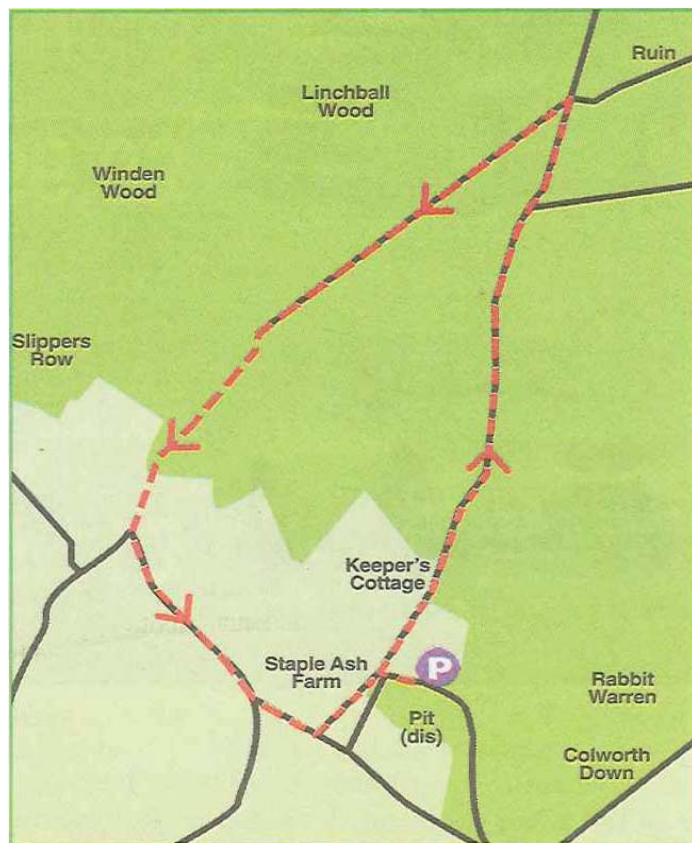


West Dean Woods



It is wild daffodil time again. This walk of 4.2 kms (2.7 miles) takes you through the main colony. Park roadside SU844153 under beech trees on minor road between West Dean and Chilgrove. Muddy most of the way.

This is not the same walk as last year as we turn on a left-hand circuit not right, through Cowdray woods. Walk west 200 yards along road, then turn right into a sunken trackway, staying on this bridleway for nearly 2kms. It goes past my home into the Sussex Wildlife Trust nature reserve which is devoted to maintaining one of the finest examples of hazel coppice in the country.

Wild orchids such as the fly, butterfly, birdnest, spotted and early purple grow on the edges of the bridleway in spring. Forty different species of birds regularly breed in this reserve and you will hear many of them today.

Note to butchers broom near overhead cables, and a large whitebeam with badger set just inside wood a few yards on. Four hundred species of wild plants grow in nature reserve. Look for the unusual Good Friday grass on right hand bank under largish beech.

Before you reach daffodils look for coal tits and also marsh and willow tits in dense larch and oak trees where the path is very wet. Daffodil colony has about three million plants but not every year is a good flower year. Pass the second large chalk ball placed here by famous sculptor Andy Goldsworthy.

Leaving the daffodils, walk ahead with young beech coppice and larch on left, Douglas firs on right. Pass third chalk ball and enter old Norway spruce plantation. Note very large Bronze Age tumulus on left, with trees unfortunately planted over, on Cowdray land.

Ahead to small clearing, sharp left on bridleway arrow just before reaching yet another chalk ball. The track spectacularly crosses a dozen ancient field boundaries known as lynchets, dating back to Bronze, Iron, and Roman times when this wood was an arable farm. They are spaced about every 80 yards.

The Norway spruce trees today are home to firecrests and gold crest, Europe's smallest birds and their songs are very high pitched. Keep left at new blue arrow, coming down to Sandy's Bottom with four ancient beech trees and vehicle junction. Take the largest track south-west under very tall Douglas firs about a hundred years of age. Through old hazel rue to tarmac road where turn left. Old orchard on right is a good place to look for the rare hawfinches often seen hereabouts. Note old magpies' nest in large hawthorn bush across meadow. Pass Staple Ash farm.

Left at road junction by pond. Uphill, then left into paddock and tree guards around new walnut trees and so back to your start point. The Morris remained tucked up in bed.

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