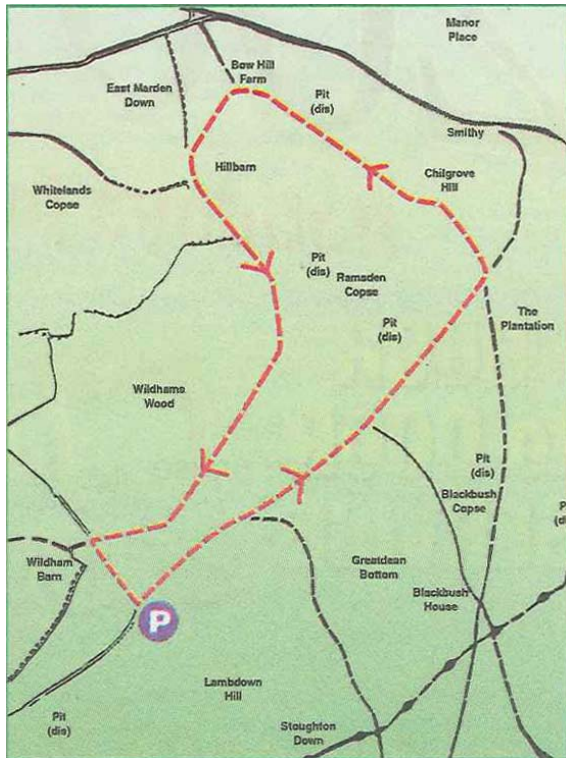


## Wildham Wood



Many people enjoy this magnificent walk (grid ref SU815126, 3m, 6kms) through downland woods with its fine views. A little slippery here and there and one gentle but fairly long climb.

Park one mile north-east of Stoughton but FC free car park closes at dusk. Start north-east along hard gravel road into 1951 beech plantation on right. Note on left two buckthorn, a spindle, and dogwood bushes among hawthorns.

Track veers right, but keep straight ahead into damp grassy bridleway (blue arrow). Two-hundred-year-old female yew on right marks small grove of younger yews.

Again straight on at blue arrow, eventually arriving at a remarkable ancient beech hedge which has grown very tall into mature trees. Eminently photographable. Twisted into contorted shapes at bottom, they seem to resemble a long line of circus elephants standing on tip-toe and with trunks stretched as high as they can reach. Now all standing on a quarter mile of orange carpet which is their leaves. Then a long avenue of 100-year-old yews self-sown either side of the rising stony path to the top of Chilgrove Hill. Note Turkey oak leaves on ground with serrated saw-tooth edges. Left over stile into meadow.

Now begins nearly a mile of wonderful views in every direction over downland woods. Most to right is West Dean Estate, edged by Cowdray and Goodwood's Trundle behind (south-east). Bignor Hill beyond with its two radio masts also visible.

Soon to left (south-west) the Solent and Isle of Wight, and a brief glimpse nearer, of the top of Bowhill with Bronze Age tumuli, due south. Stone age camp on Beacon Hill three miles ahead north-north-east. Pits on meadow around you reveal flint extraction for ancient house building. Geologically this is clay-with-flints left by Ice Ages. Gorse in hedge another indicator.

Keep left of Bow Hill Farm, on yellow arrow, passing dressage enclosure and steep pond on right. Right on yellow arrow following thuja hedge to bottom where turn left at footpath crossroads. Pass Hill Barn and Flint Barn on track leading back into Wildham Woods with knobbly field maples and old ash.

Slightly right then on yellow arrow, leaving said track to left. Into derelict hazel coppice with splendid clumps of butcher's broom. Note an old oak which has given up a long struggle with life in a hostile world, and on left a deep pit surrounded by seven yews.

Then curve to right at old male yew which actually is slightly hermaphrodite. Meadow on left and lovely long path on which grows the fairly rare relative of the teak tree, vervain (*Verbena officinalis*).

A good path for forest butterflies in summer and downland flowers for nearly a mile back to car park where Travellers' Joy the old Morris is luckily not rooted to the ground.

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**