



Charlton and Singleton

Trail Summary

Trail : SUSSTR0029
Activity : Walk
Type : Tea Shop
Author : Jean Patefield
Distance : 4.3 miles / 7 kms
Ascent : 522 feet / 159 metres
Location : SU876139 / PO18 0HG

Within living memory, expanses of downland have fallen under the plough. What was once a colourful, living tapestry of flowers supporting populations of insects and birds is now, all too often, a sterile carpet of cereals. This route is not long or demanding. It explores an important nature reserve that acts as a reminder of the way things used to be. In addition to the interesting natural history, the views alone are well worth the walk. After Levin Down, the route visits two downland villages, Charlton and Singleton, the latter with a charming tea room attached to an artist's studio, before a short walk returns you to the start.

The trail has been taken from the book *Sussex Teashop Walks* by Jean Patefield. It has been reproduced with the kind permission of the publisher, Countryside Books.

Trail Description

1. Return to the road and turn right for 250 yards. A welcome footway starts at Cucumber Farm.
2. Immediately before a 'Singleton' sign, turn left on a signed bridleway. The track leads up to a gate. Through the gate, it becomes less distinct. Go ahead to a finger post then bear slightly left on a faint path to another finger post, indicating a cross path. Continue on to a gate, then ahead with a fence on the left to eventually arrive at another gate.

This is Levin Down Nature Reserve. The steep scarp slope of the South Downs faces north and the gentler dip slope faces south. The warm and sunny south-facing slopes have largely been ploughed up. Levin Down is an outlier of the main mass of the Downs and the south slope is too steep to plough so it is one of the few areas of chalk grassland with a southerly aspect. In fact, the name is thought to come from the Old English for Leave Alone Hill. It has a wonderful collection of chalk plants, such as the rich violet clustered bellflower and blue round-headed rampion, seen to best advantage when they are in flower in summer. The decline in grazing in recent years has allowed scrub to invade including many juniper bushes. These are easy to recognise because the berries smell of gin! The vegetation supports a varied population of butterflies, including the Duke of Burgundy fritillary and the distinctive chalkhill blue. Levin Down is owned by the Goodwood estate and managed by the Sussex Wildlife Trust. As explained elsewhere (see walk 14 of this book), the wonderful springy turf of the Downs is a semi-natural habitat maintained by grazing and left entirely to itself it would revert to scrub and then woodland. Some scrub has been cleared and a flock of South Down sheep introduced. The management plan is to maintain a range of habitats and so the maximum diversity of species. Therefore, not all the scrub has been cleared. For example, the Duke of Burgundy fritillary, a brown and orange butterfly with a wing span of about an inch, is found along wood edges and in half shade.

3. Through the gate follow a track for 50 yards as it bears round to the right. Immediately after the entrance to a small, disused quarry, turn right on a signed path up steps to a stile. Then walk by a fence on the left to a stile on the left into a wood. Follow the path through the wood and scrub along the hillside to meet a cross path in front of a fence.

The South Downs are made of chalk laid down at the bottom of the sea aeons ago and then thrown up into folds as a result of movements in the Earth's crust. During the last Ice Age they were not buried under ice but were an area of tundra, like Alaska is today. During this time, a thin layer of more acidic soil called loess was deposited on top of the chalk. This chalk heath supports more acid loving plants, such as heather, growing alongside chalk loving plants.

4. Turn right. After 25 yards fork left to remain by the fence to a stile, then press on across a field to a lane.

5. Turn left. At cross roads turn right, signed 'Goodwood 1', for 100 yards.

This is Charlton, once famous among the hunting fraternity. During the 18th century, the Charlton Hunt was the most famous in England. Its longest recorded chase started at 8 o'clock in the morning of 26th January 1738 and finished with a kill in Arundel Park at 6 o'clock, only three members having the stamina to stay the course to the end. The name of the pub, the Fox Goes Free, has a footnote in English social history. The Women's Institute was founded in Canada in 1897 and the first English branch (Singleton and East Dean) was launched here on 9th November 1915.

6. Turn right on a path signed 'Singleton 0.7m'. Posts show the line of the path as it heads for Singleton church, seen ahead. Go through a wooden kissing gate and follow the path between gardens to a road. Go ahead and when the road shortly ends, walk through an arch to the left of 4 Church Way. Follow the path past the church on the left to the entrance to Manor Farm on the left.

7. Turn right. Cross a road by the Fox and Hounds to the tea shop on the left.

Singleton is an attractive village of flint and brick buildings on the London Chichester road in the valley of the river Lavant. This is a 'winter bourne', a stream that only flows when the water table in the underlying chalk is high enough, usually during the winter. In the tea shop are some photographs showing what can happen when the water table is really high! Parts of the church date back to Saxon times, when the manor, one of the largest and wealthiest in England, was owned by Earl Godwin, father of the ill-fated King Harold, killed at the Battle of Hastings (see walk 18). The name lives on. Much of the surrounding area is owned by the Goodwood estate, Goodwood being a corruption of Godwin's wood. You may have noticed the tops of the grandstands at the racecourse visible above the Downs across the valley during the walk. Goodwood racecourse opened in 1801. In the days before modern transport, people had to stay locally during the races and Singleton was very crowded. There were bitter complaints from local residents about the rowdy behaviour and less savoury goings on among the racegoers and hangers-on.

8. From the tea shop turn left along the main road. Immediately past the post office on the right, turn right on a signed path. Go through a gate onto a cricket pitch. Skirt behind the club house to a stile by a gate, then walk along the right-hand side of a small field to a stile on the right. Over the stile, go ahead to a second stile onto a hedged path and follow this.

9. Immediately after crossing a brick bridge over a disused railway, do not go up steps ahead but turn right to a stile. Over the stile, press on to meet a track and turn right along it. At a junction with a second track after 40 yards, bear right.

This railway line opened in 1880. A station was built to serve the racecourse and it was a fine affair with a stained glass window and carpet in the waiting room. It closed to passengers in 1935 and goods traffic in 1954.

10. At the bottom of a dip, turn right under a bridge. After 20 yards cross a stile by a gate on the left. Head up the left-hand side of a field. At the top of the field, turn right to skirt round a wood on the left to eventually reach a stile. Over the stile go ahead to join a track and bear right to a road.

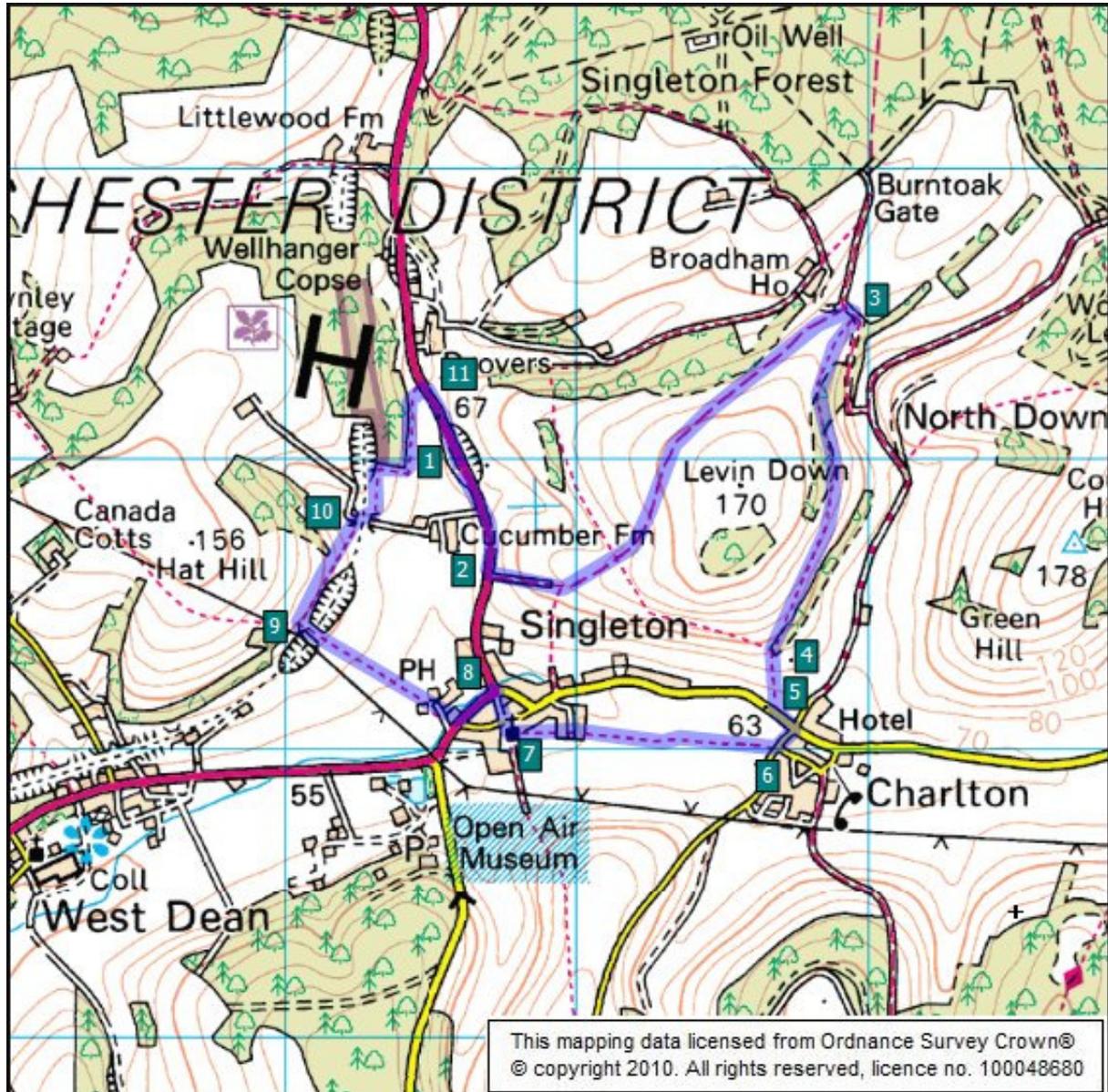
Across the road is the entrance to 'Drovers', a fine 18th century house and once an inn with secret passages and cellars frequented by smugglers. It was bought by a member of the Egremont family of Petworth House (see walk 3) who converted it into a country house. Until then the road used to run beneath the windows but it was diverted away to maintain the family's privacy. The smugglers were brutal and vicious men (see walk 13). The Duke of Richmond, owner of the Goodwood estate, was not intimidated and several were hanged on the gallows on the Trundle on the other side of the valley. The gallows stood until 1791 when struck by lightning.

11. Turn right, back to the start.

Singleton Studio Tea Rooms

Sue Martin set up Singleton Studio Tea Rooms as a tea room and craft gallery selling her own and her brothers' work. Particularly interesting is a collection of over 800 limited edition prints in the Portraits of Britain series depicting scenes from all corners of these islands. Increasing artistic success means Lynn Williams now runs the tea room. This charming establishment overlooking the village pond offers an excellent selection of delicious cakes, including unusual varieties such as a Victorian peach and fig cake. For lunch there are sandwiches and filled jacket potatoes as well as daily specials. The tea room is open every day throughout the summer between 10 am and 5 pm, extending to 5.30 pm at weekends. In winter it is open at weekends. Tel. 01243 811899. When the tea shop is closed, the pub in Singleton, the Fox and Hounds, serves food.

Trail Map



Location

The parking area on the west side of the A286 1/2 mile north of Singleton is the starting point for this trail. If you wish to visit the tea shop at the beginning or end of your walk, start in Singleton where there is limited street parking. The tea shop is on the main road by the village pond. You will then start the walk at point 8.