



The Star

Exceat, Friston Forest,
The Seven Sisters,
Cuckmere Haven

Distance: 6.5 miles approximately.

Route: Exceat, Friston Forest,
The Seven Sisters, Cuckmere River

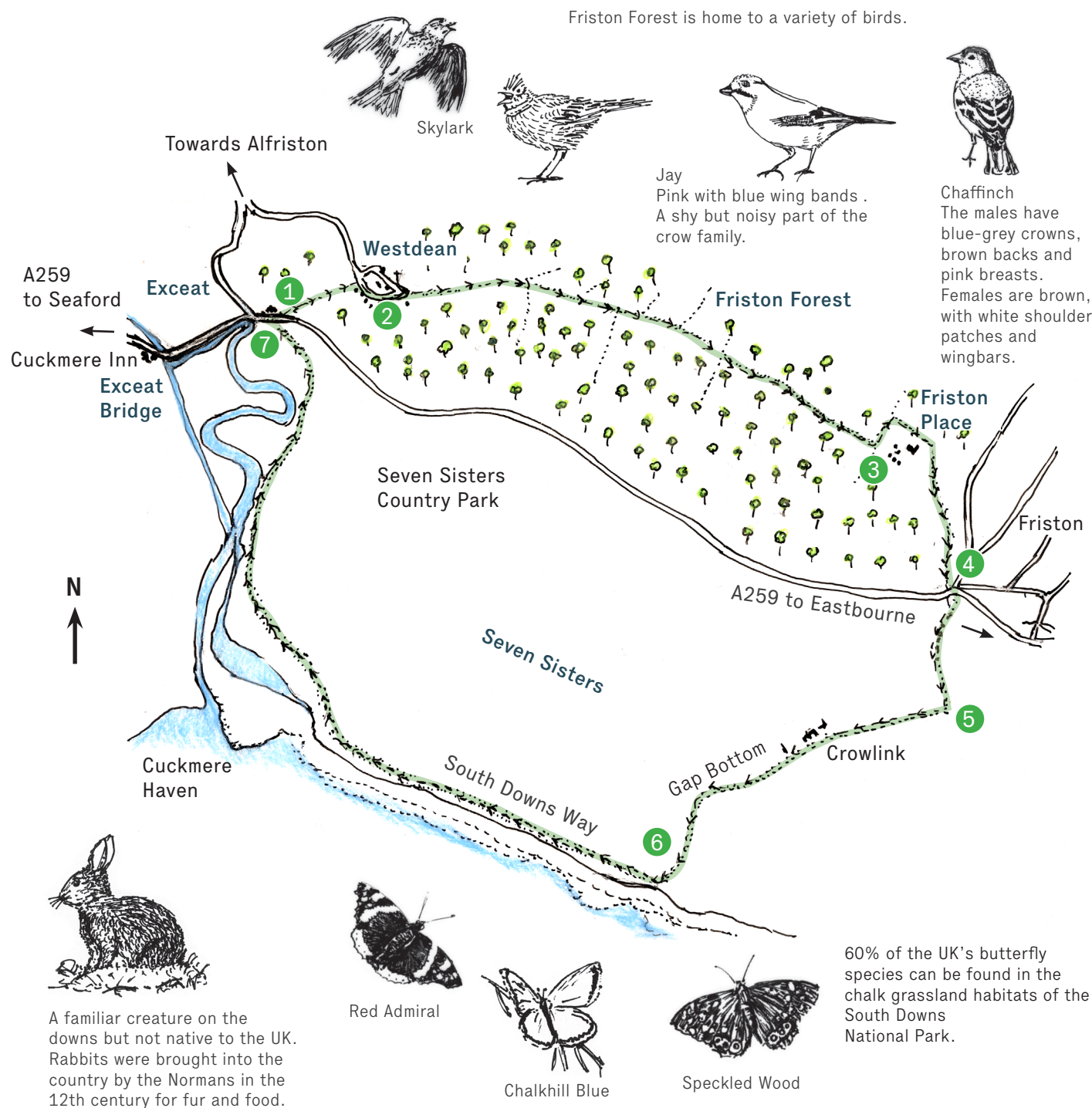
Map: OS Explorer OL25, Eastbourne
& Beachy Head.

Conditions: Footpath through woods,
downland slopes and steep climbs and
descents along the coastal cliff path.

Refreshments: The Cuckmere Inn,
Exceat Visitor Centre Tea Room.

WALK 4b

The Polizzi Collection





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Nowadays Exceat is little more than a name on a map and a few farm buildings by a bridge over the River Cuckmere but in Saxon times it was a fishing village and then one of King Alfred's Naval Bases. The village was abandoned by the mid 1400's after the decimation of the Black Death between 1348-49 and a later series of French raids. Its remains and the site of the church lie buried under fields.

An 18th-century converted barn serves as a visitor centre for the Seven Sisters Country Park, which covers the area of downland, river, estuary and coast to the south.

Turn right out of the car park alongside the busy main road to the bus stop. Cross with care to the paved path and drive opposite by a South Downs Way sign. ① Head up to a gate, and bearing slightly right continue up the field to the top. There's a fine view from there looking back over the Cuckmere meanders. Go through another gate and climb a stone stile in the wall, bearing right then left to enter **Friston Forest**, a delightful area of mixed woodland managed by the Forestry Commission. Descent a long flight of steps into the sleepy and unspoilt village of **Westdean**. At the bottom, go ahead at the path intersection to the land. ② Turn right along it

follow it round to the left. Just before reaching a Friston Forest sign, a short detour to the left brings you to the small, plain church with the short tower and spire typical of Sussex.

Keep ahead along the lane, heading uphill into woodland again, where the tarmac lane becomes a forest track. Now follow this lovely, broad, grassy track for nearly 1½ miles (2.4km) through the forest. At a fork take the right-hand uphill track, in the Friston direction, and later, where the roughly made-up forest track veers left, go ahead on a grassy path. Descend to cross a track, continue uphill again, keeping along the right-hand edge of an area of open grassland, and finally head downhill to pass beside a barrier onto a tarmac drive. ③

Turn left and just after the drive bends right take the narrow path that runs parallel to it on the left. At a waymark post, following the footpath signed for Friston and East Dean, turn right across the drive up the steps opposite and through a gate. Keep straight ahead across a field, go through a gate on a far side and descend steps to a tarmac drive. Cross it, bear slightly left to climb the stile opposite and continue diagonally and slightly uphill across a field to another stile in the far corner. Climb it and follow a path throughout woodland, finally climbing a stone stile on the left to reach a road near to its junction with the main road. ④ Go over the road and grass beyond to the main road.

Cross the busy main road with care and take the no-through road opposite signposted for Crowlink, passing between a lily pond on the right and Friston's small, attractive church on the left. If visibility is poor, carry straight on down the access road to **Crowlink**. Otherwise just before entering the National Trust's Crowlink car park, turn left through a gate and then turn half-right across a field. Go through a gate and bear right along a very indistinct path, ⑤ keeping in a straight line diagonally across the field. Although the numerous paths across this National Trust property may appear confusing, don't panic. Once you reach the brow of a hill, aim for the hamlet buildings spotted through the trees below. Look out for a stile in a wire fence, climb it and continue downhill to pass through a hedge gap onto the access lane. Turn left passing to the right of the cottages, go through a gate and walk through the dry valley of **Gap Bottom**, keeping by a wire fence and hedge

on the right. Continue along a wide, smooth, grassy path that winds through the shallow valley bottom to the edge of the cliffs. ⑥

Turn right onto the South Downs Way to Cuckmere Haven, a route that climbs over four of the series of chalk cliffs known as the **Seven Sisters**. There are some steep 'ups and downs' on this section but the superb cliff scenery and the magnificent, extensive views more than make up for the effort expended. Over the last brow you look down on **Cuckmere Haven**, the beautiful and unspoilt estuary of the Cuckmere, with its shingle beach, lagoons and meandering river, and beyond that to Seaford Head.

Descent steeply towards the beach and just before the final, steep descent, turn right through a gate and along the side of the valley above the river. Head downhill along a pleasant, grassy path, go through a gate on the left and bear right.

At a T-junction of tracks bear right, go through a gate and continue along a concrete track to the right of the marshes, lagoons and meanders of the Cuckmere among the finest river meanders in Britain. In 1846 this section of the river was straightened and canalised to reduce flooding. ⑦ As you near **Exceat**, bear left onto a grassy track, back to the car park.



View of Cuckmere Haven and the Seven Sisters from the Coastguard's cottages.

WALK 4b