



The Star

Alfriston, Firle, Charleston Farmhouse, Berwick

In the centre of the square is the medieval market cross, one of only two surviving in Sussex. Exit the square passing The Smugglers Inn whose name is a reminder that the Cuckmere River was a major smuggling route up until the 19th century. Leave the square and walk up West Street and up the hill out of the village. Towards the top of the hill on the left is a wooden crucifix which marks the site of a Saxon cemetery dating back to 5th and 6th centuries. Continue straight ahead and look back to enjoy the view over the village to the Downs. ① Where the road turns sharply to the right continue straight ahead on a track. When you get to a wooden post go straight ahead to follow a chalk path which was the old road.

You are now on the Old Coach Road, waymarked in red, indicating that the path is still classified as a byway open to vehicular traffic as well as walkers and riders. A few yards along the track, on the left is New Barn, a typical cluster of barn, cattle shelter and flint walled compound, sheltered by trees, a frequent and characteristic feature of East Sussex Downs.

The Old Coach Road now unwinds on a gently undulating route along the foot of the Downs for over three miles to Firle. After two thirds of a mile, where the track from Alciston joins from the right, go straight ahead, and after another half a mile, at Bo-peep Farm, ② cross the Firle Bostal road. Ignore another crossing track and after a further mile or so you will come to Beanstalk, once a Coaching Inn now a lovely tea garden.

WALK 3

The Polizzi Collection

Continue on the main track, ignoring tracks to right and left, continuing with the flint wall surrounding **Firle Park** on your right. The track finally veers right and takes you past a farm and into Firle Village. Keep walking on the road until you see The Ram Inn.

Access to the church of St Peter is on the right. The Tower and Nave date from the 13th century. Inside are some exceptional brasses and a number of Gage family tombs. Look out also for a window, designed by John Piper and installed in 1985 in memory of the Sixth Viscount Gage.

③ Take the narrow track on the right side of The Ram Inn, go past the cricket pitch and the playground, over the stile and at the T Junction, turn right and follow the road. When you come to a crossroads, go straight ahead and then immediately left and follow a route across the park marked by a series of wayposts with yellow arrows.

Firle Place is now in view to your right. The original house was built for Sir John Gage, Lord Chamberlain to Henry VIII, during the 15th century. The remaining fragments of the Tudor building are now encased by the present mansion, the work of the first Viscount Gage, who erected the present Georgian style north-east front in around 1750.

On the other side of the park ④ go through a bridge gate, cross a drive and go ahead between two cottages. Pass through an iron gate and follow a trodden path up across a field. At the top of a low rise go through a belt of woodland and ahead across three more fields.

Up the hill to your left is **Firle Tower**. Its origins are uncertain but it was used as a gamekeeper's cottage and also as a signalling tower from which messages could be sent to the nearby Plashett Estate, also in the ownership of the Gage Family.

In the far corner of the third field, go left through a bridle gate and, after a few yards, right, walking parallel to a hedge and ditch on your right. Beyond the end of the field, a farm track continues past a farm to Charleston.

Charleston Farm House was the home of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, artists at the centre of the so-called Bloomsbury Group of writers, artists and intellectuals, including Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster and Lytton Strachey.

Follow the access drive from Charleston. At a T-junction with another drive, ⑤ go directly ahead through a gap and follow power lines along a headland track. The track continues, a bit vague in places, in the same direction, soon passing to the left of Tilton Wood and a small pottery. An access drives takes you out to a lane.

Turn left and, after 30 yards ⑥ go right over a stile and walk downhill along a left field edge with a wide sweep of the downs escarpment directly ahead. In a field corner cross two stiles and bear half left, obliquely up a slope. In the far field former you have a choice of stiles. Go over the one on the left and forward along a left field edge to join the village street at **Alciston**.

Turn right, soon passing The Rose Cottage B&B on your right. Carry on past the church on your left.

The grouping of 13th century church, 14th century **tithe barn** and home farm, incorporating the remains of a medieval **dovecote**, is a delight.

Follow the land as it bears left by the tithe barn and then right to head towards the Downs. After another 100 yards, ⑦ go left through a wide gap and double back along a left field edge. In the field corner, turn right within the same field, keeping the hedge on your left, with the spire of Berwick Church directly ahead. In the next field corner go through a gap and left, still keeping a hedge on your left. After 130 yards, turn right and head for Berwick once more, now on a grassy strip between two fields. A rutted track and then a concrete farm access drive takes you out to the lane at **Berwick** ⑧.

The Cricketers Arms is now a short distance along the road to the left but, to continue the walk, go through a wide gap opposite. Now bear half right over a stile and along the right edge of the meadow with a house and garden and then a high flint wall on your right. Enter Berwick churchyard through a wicket gate.

Berwick Church with its fine shingled spire, is famous for its paintings and decorations by the Bloomsbury group of artists.

Leave the churchyard down steps to the right of the church entrance and turn left along a path. Once out into the open at a fine viewpoint, turn right along a wide track. After about 300 yards, at a T-junction with another farm track turn left and head for the Downs. After another 380 yards ⑨, at a T-junction, turn left back towards **Alfriston**.





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Alfriston, Firle,
Charleston Farmhouse, Berwick

Distance: 11 miles approximately.

Route: Alfriston, Old Coach Road, Firle,
Charleston Farmhouse, Alciston, Berwick.

Map: OS Explorer OL25, Eastbourne
& Beachy Head.

Conditions: Field paths and tracks along the
foot of the Downs. No significant hills.

Refreshments: Firle Place Tea Room and
Terrace, Ram Inn at Firle, Cricketers Arms at
Berwick.

Mobile Download: If you prefer to be guided
by your phone, please download the free OS
Maps app and then follow the QR code inside
to link to this route.

WALK 3

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