

# THE VANGUARD WAY

(SOUTH TO NORTH)

**A different experience in the other direction!**

## SECTION B

**Exceat Bridge to Berwick Station**



**ROUTE DESCRIPTION**  
and points of interest along the route

**SECTION B**  
**Exceat Bridge to Berwick Station**

**COLIN SAUNDERS**

Second Edition (South-North)  
Version 2.0

This second edition of the south-north route description was first published in 2017 and replaces the first edition published in 2011. It is only available as an online resource.

**Designed by Brian Bellwood**

Published by the Vanguards Rambling Club  
35 Gerrards Close, Oakwood, London, N14 4RH, England

© *VANGUARDS RAMBLING CLUB 2011, 2017*

**To find out about any late changes to the route, please visit [www.vanguardway.org.uk](http://www.vanguardway.org.uk) and click on the 'latest news' button.**

Colin Saunders asserts his right to be identified as the author of this work. Whilst the information contained in this guide was believed to be correct at the time of writing, the author and publishers accept no responsibility for the consequences of any inaccuracies. However, we shall be pleased to receive your comments and information of alterations for consideration. Please email [colin@vanguardway.org.uk](mailto:colin@vanguardway.org.uk) or write to Colin Saunders, 35 Gerrards Close, Oakwood, London, N14 4RH, England.

# Vanguard Way **SOUTH-NORTH** Route Description: Section B

## **SECTION B: EXCEAT BRIDGE TO BERWICK STATION**

**10.5 km (6.5 miles)**

This second edition of the South-North version of the Route Description is based on a survey undertaken by club members in 2017. Inevitably changes to the route and facilities will occur, and we try to keep abreast of them. It is our intention to bring out an updated version of the Route Descriptions and Companion as necessary, but **please refer to the Latest News page on our website [www.vanguardway.org.uk](http://www.vanguardway.org.uk) for any changes that may have taken place meanwhile.**

Paragraphs are numbered for ease of reference. However, please note that this South-North version uses the same numbering system for locations along the route as the original North-South version, so they appear to run in reverse order, i.e. in this section from B(9.15) to B(9.1). (The individual route description paragraphs in this South-North section are preceded by the letter B to distinguish them from the North-South versions.)

The route is marked on Ordnance Survey Explorer and Landranger maps, though you should note that in some places it is incorrectly marked on some older maps - we draw your attention to specific instances where relevant. Downloadable maps in pdf format showing the correct route are available on our website. Grid references are given at each numbered point to help identify the route. The country is divided into 100 km squares identified by a two letter code, and following standard OS practice we include these letters in our grid references. In this section they are mostly in square TQ, but some are in TV.

In this route description:

The actual route description is shown in black Roman (upright) text.

Links with stations and other key places off route are shown in boxes with a grey background.

*Italic text is used for items that are not part of the main route description, including:*

- *Key information about facilities (see Vanguard Way Companion for more details)*
- *Road and street names \**
- *Advice and asides.*

\* The mention of a road or street name does not necessarily mean that you will see this name on the spot, but it may be helpful if you need to be picked up or set down, or to find your position on a street map.

**Underlined bold italic text** indicates that more details can be found in the Commentary, which follows the route description.

Distances and altitudes are given in kilometres (km) and metres (m); but if you are more familiar with miles and yards, remember that 1 km is about five eighths of a mile and that 100m is about the same as 110 yards. To roughly convert metres to feet, multiply by three and add 10 per cent.

*Note: Many stretches on this section cross large fields, often with no distinguishing feature to guide you. So for some stretches we give a compass bearing (CB) as a guide - see the Equipment section of the Introduction to the Route.*









### **Abbreviations**

Bw	=	bridleway	KA	=	keep ahead	N	=	north
CB	=	compass bearing	TL	=	turn left	S	=	south
FB	=	footbridge	TR	=	turn right	E	=	east
Fp	=	footpath	L	=	left	W	=	west
KG	=	kissing gate	R	=	right			
NP	=	no pavement (see below)						
Rd	=	road	m	=	metres			
Tk	=	track	km	=	kilometres			
VGW	=	Vanguard Way	>	=	off route			

## Vanguard Way **SOUTH-NORTH** Route Description: Section B

---

### Key to symbols

 = Bus	 = Cafés etc	 = Toilets
 = Train	 = Pubs	 = Phone box
 = Taxi	 = Accommodation	

### Roads with no pavement

'NP' in the route description indicates that the road has no pavement. You should take great care when walking along them, as traffic may approach at speed. Generally, you should walk in single file along the right-hand side, but this may be dangerous at a right-hand bend, where you cannot see approaching traffic, and the driver, not seeing you, may keep too close to the bend. You should therefore follow the advice given in the Highway Code for such situations, which is: 'It may be safer to cross the road well before a right-hand bend so that oncoming traffic has a better chance of seeing you. Cross back after the bend.' If walking in poor light conditions or in the dark, always wear something light, luminous or reflective on top.

### Public transport

On route: Trains and buses at Berwick Station. Buses at Exceat Bridge, Exceat Visitor Centre, Westdean, Litlington, Alfriston and Berwick Crossroads. Link with bus stops at Drusilla's Corner.

### Distances from Exceat Bridge to:

Exceat Visitor Centre	0.6 km	(0.4 miles)
Westdean	1.1 km	(0.7 miles)
Litlington	3.4 km	(2.1 miles)
Alfriston	5.6 km	(3.4 miles)
>Drusilla's	8.1 km	(5.1 miles)
A27 Lewes Road	8.0 km	(5.0 miles)
Berwick Station	10.5 km	(6.5 miles)

### Overview

After a short stretch beside the A259 you have a short but steep climb behind Exceat Visitor Centre to another grand view – of Cuckmere Haven with its spectacular meanders and the English Channel. And it can only be seen by fliers and walkers! This is the first of three shoulders of the South Downs that must be surmounted along this section, in company with the South Downs Way. In between are two long flights of steps – but going down in each case! The first has 218 steps, the second 68. These are the figures we arrived at on our last visit – they seem to work out differently each time, and may depend on whether you include tree roots serving as steps, and the duration of any previous pub stop. You will encounter the hidden village of Westdean, Friston Forest, lonely Charleston Manor, the popular ramblers' refreshment haunt of Litlington, tourist-orientated Alfriston and tranquil Berwick Village. Finally you follow a former Roman road to reach Berwick Station.

**Lowest and highest points.** Exceat Bridge (4m); near Clapham Farm (53m).

---

## Vanguard Way **SOUTH-NORTH** Route Description: Section B

---

### **ALL INFORMATION SHOWN IS SUBJECT TO ALTERATION WITHOUT NOTICE**

If your trip relies on the provision of public transport, catering etc, you are strongly advised to check in advance that they will be available on the day of your visit. Further information about these facilities is provided in the Vanguard Way Companion available at [www.vanguardway.org.uk](http://www.vanguardway.org.uk) (click the 'Directions and Maps' button). If you carry a smartphone, there are apps that give up-to-date information on public transport. Search engines will provide information on refreshments, taxis and other services nearby. This can also be done on Google or Bing maps by typing e.g. 'Pubs Forest Row' in the search box, then the map will highlight locations together with website links if available.

We will always be pleased to hear about any changes you may find, in which case please email [colin@vanguardway.org.uk](mailto:colin@vanguardway.org.uk).

---

### **BEFORE SETTING OUT ALONG THE VANGUARD WAY**

Please read the [Introduction to the route](#), available from the 'Directions and maps' pages of our website [www.vanguardway.org.uk](http://www.vanguardway.org.uk). It contains important information that will be helpful when reading this route description.

**And don't forget to look at the Latest News page on our website for any developments affecting this and any other part of the route.**

---


### **PROBLEMS WHILE WALKING THE ROUTE**


If you encounter an obstruction, closure or diversion on a public right of way, please tell us about it by emailing [colin@vanguardway.org.uk](mailto:colin@vanguardway.org.uk).

---

## Vanguard Way **SOUTH-NORTH** Route Description: Section B

**Section B of the VGW(South-North) starts at Exceat Bridge [TV 513 992]**  
in Lewes District in the county of East Sussex.

 Frequent buses to here from Eastbourne, Seaford, Newhaven and Brighton. The Cuckmere Community Bus calls here on Tuesdays and Fridays (also Saturdays and Sundays from March to October) between Berwick Station and Seaford or vv.

 The Cuckmere Inn.

### **B(10.1) [TV 513 992]**

This paragraph describes a triple crossing of the busy A259 Eastbourne Road that is required here - you should **take great care** at each crossing point. Care is also needed on the narrow pavement, which has steep drops on either side. This situation is unsatisfactory and the Vanguard Way Working Party has asked East Sussex County Council to consider how it can be improved. Meanwhile, a more attractive alternative route avoiding the rather unpleasant walk beside the A259 can be followed if preferred, as described in the panel below.

- a) From Cuckmere Inn car park, cross A259 Eastbourne Road with **care** then TR on footpath on L side of bridge. Here you leave Lewes District and enter Wealden District, both in East Sussex. You are still within the South Downs National Park (see Section A).
- b) On far side of bridge cross back to R side of Rd.


#### **Alternative route avoiding walk beside A259 Eastbourne Road**




This route adds about 1.6 km (1 mile) to the distance but avoids the unpleasant footpath beside the A259 and provides wonderful views over Cuckmere Haven and the meanders.

- a) Immediately after crossing back to R side of Rd, before bus stop, TR to follow Fp between Cuckmere meanders and new cut.
- b) In 1 km, at waymark post, TL over causeway and across (or beside) stile. (If causeway flooded, turn sharp L along bank and through KG, then sharp R along Tk to fingerpost.)
- c) TL through gate to fingerpost, joining South Downs Way.
- d) Go through gate and up steps to ascend grassy hillside in direction indicated by SDW finger.
- e) At brow of hill, ignore small gate down to L and KA to reach and go through small gate beside farm gate, where you have a magnificent view of the Cuckmere meanders.
- f) Follow L (lower) of two worn grass Tks (as indicated by SDW arrow disc), descending gradually to A259 by cattle grid and bus stop.
- g) Cross A269 with **great care** to rejoin VGW main route at point B(9.15a) below.

If following the main route:

- c) Continue along R side of Rd for 500m, passing junction with Litlington Road on your L and a car park on your R. The Cuckmere meander on your R is the home of **Seven Sisters Canoe Centre**.
- d) By the bus stop, with **great care** cross Rd to the entrance into the Visitor Centre and Saltmarsh Farmhouse café. The **South Downs Way** (SDW) comes in from the R here and joins the VGW for the next 4.8 km.

 Frequent buses from here to Eastbourne, Seaford, Newhaven and Brighton (also from the Cuckmere Inn - see above). The Cuckmere Community Bus calls here on Tuesdays and Fridays (also Saturdays and Sundays from March to October) between Berwick Station and Seaford or vv.

   Adjacent to the Visitor Centre.

 Exceat Farmhouse.

## Vanguard Way **SOUTH-NORTH** Route Description: Section B

### B(9.15) [TV 519 994]


*Between Exceat and Buxted (Sections B to E) the VGW is joined or crossed at various points by the Wealden Walks.*

- Together with SDW, KA up tarmac drive to R of Cuckmere Cycle Co (ceased trading at time of writing in April 2016) and go through KG.
- KA up steep field to top.

*Two seats here provide an opportunity for a breather and to admire the outstanding view of the Cuckmere Estuary with its meandering river. The seats are dedicated to the memory of local ramblers John Sewell (1928-1998) and Julya Comber (1937-1992).*

- Go through KG and cross stile in flint wall.
- TR then in a few metres TL into Friston Forest.
- Follow Fp as it descends 218 steps then at foot KA past village pond and green phone box to Rd (*The Lane*) at Westdean.

 *The Cuckmere Community Bus serves Westdean pond on Tuesdays and Fridays.*

 *By pond.*

### B(9.14) [TV 524 997]

- Still with SDW, cross Rd and KA up tarmac drive past Forge Cottage, a Grade II listed building.
- Where tarmac drive bears R, KA up concrete Tk (signed The Glebe).
- KA beside gate and continue uphill for 100m back into Friston Forest.
- At junction (with SDW signpost) TL and follow Fp uphill.
- In 200m KA at fork (slightly uphill), ignoring Tk descending to L.
- Follow Fp as it bends R, passing T-junction of Tks to second T-junction with memorial seat.


*You can TL here if you wish to visit Friston Forest car park (400m W).*

 *The Cuckmere Community Bus stops at Friston Forest car park (400m W) on Tuesdays and Fridays (also Saturdays and Sundays between March and October) between Berwick Station and Seaford or vv.*

 *In Friston Forest car park.*

### B(9.13) [TQ 521 002]

- Still with SDW, KA for 200m then at next Tk junction KA between posts.
- Descend two flights of steps (totalling 68). *Take **great care** and use handrail, especially if wet, and beware of barbed wire fence on your left.*
- At foot, TL along enclosed Tk for 40m to pass back entrance (gate marked 'Private') of Charleston Manor.
- KA for another 40m to stile on your R.

 *The Cuckmere Community Bus stops on the road (300m W) on Tuesdays and Fridays (also Saturdays and Sundays between March and October) between Berwick Station and Seaford or vv.*


### B(9.12) [TQ 521 006]


- Still with SDW, cross stile and climb L side of field beside hedge, crossing or passing stile. *Approaching top of rise note the White Horse of Litlington over to your L on Cradle Hill, while away to your R is Clapham Farm. The valley on the right of the White Horse, stretching back for 2 km, is largely occupied by **Rathfinny**, Britain's largest vineyard.*
- At flint wall go through first KG and KA along R side of meadow.
- Go through second KG then descend next field steeply quarter L to go through third KG. *You have now left the South Downs proper but are still within the National Park area.*


→ Continued over →

## Vanguard Way **SOUTH-NORTH** Route Description: Section B

- d) TL on Rd (*Clapham Lane*) in **Litlington** passing Smuggler's Rest (a Grade II listed building) and the village hall, then shortly TR along *The Street*.
- e) Pass Plough & Harrow pub, then in 20m TL on narrow metalled Fp.

 *The Cuckmere Community Bus calls here on Tuesdays and Fridays (also Saturdays and Sundays between March and October) between Berwick Station and Seaford or vv.*

 *Plough and Harrow pub.*

 *Litlington Tea Gardens – TL along The Street and KA for 80m.*


 *To L at Rd.*



### **B(9.11) [TQ 523 017]**

- a) Still with SDW, at end of Fp TR beside **Cuckmere River**. *One of the buildings on the hilltop ahead used to be Alfriston Youth Hostel, but sadly it closed in 2015.*
- b) Follow embankment beside river northwards for 1.8 km, passing through several KGs, and with a fine view of Alfriston church, to **White Bridge**.

### **B(9.10) [TQ 522 031]**


- a) Cross bridge (SDW goes R on far side) and KA on metalled Fp into **Alfriston** village.
- b) Pass village green, where Rathfinny vineyard has an outlet in the Gun Room on your L. Further away on your L are **St Andrew's Church** and the **Clergy House**. KA on walled Fp with **The Tanneries** and United Reformed Church on your R.
- c) At Alfriston High Street TR. **Take care** as you walk along the narrow pavements as traffic comes close and sometimes irresponsibly fast.
- d) Pass **Star Inn** on your L, and **George Inn** on your R, to Waterloo Square, wherein are located **Ye Olde Smugglers Inn**, **Village Stores**, several tea-rooms and shops.

 *Infrequent bus services to Lewes, Seaford, Brighton, Polegate, Hailsham and Eastbourne. The Cuckmere Community Bus comes here on most days of the week from Berwick and Seaford stations. Note that some buses stop in Waterloo Square, others at the coach park in North Street – check with operator or in Village Stores.*

  ã *Wide choice – see VGW Companion.*

 *In car park (see below).*

### **B(9.9) [TQ 520 031]**

- a) At Waterloo Square (**take care** as traffic is coming from all directions) keep L of war memorial past Ye Olde Smugglers Inne (Market Inn), then KA along West Street, passing **Much Ado Books**, Badgers Tea House and car park (, note **Tower Folly**).
- b) KA for 600m, passing Sloe Lane and North Road, and climbing beyond the last houses of Alfriston to reach the outlying hamlet of **Winton**, passing crucifix at Alice Gregory's **The Sanctuary** on your L.

ã *In Winton Street – see VGW Companion.*

### **B(9.8) [TQ 517 037]**


- a) Where Rd turns sharp R (*Winton Street*), KA on Tk then in 50m, where Tk bears L, KA on undulating Fp crossing, in effect, one huge field for 1 km. *Note on your right the elegantly thatched Danny Cottage, a Grade II listed building. Comp Barn is off to your L, while away to your R is Windover Hill, on the north side of which (but not visible from the VGW) is the **Long Man of Wilmington**.*
- b) In the second dip, go through gate in hedge and cross plank bridge then KA up smaller field to Tk and Fp junction beside **Berwick Church**. *The footpath to your right here leads in 500m to **Drusilla's Zoo Park** and the **English Wine Centre**.*



## Vanguard Way **SOUTH-NORTH** Route Description: Section B

### **B(9.7)** [TQ 518 048]

- KA (to R of church), go through KG, head to R of trees then bear L to cross stile.
- Follow Fp beside hedge to Berwick village pond.
- KA past pond then TL along gravel Tk to Rd at **Berwick** village, with Cricketers Arms pub opposite.


 *On certain days of the week, the Cuckmere Community Bus comes up to the Cricketers Arms.*

 *Cricketers Arms pub ([www.cricketersberwick.co.uk/index.php](http://www.cricketersberwick.co.uk/index.php)). If you prefer real ale, note that it is kept out of sight in casks behind the bar – there are no handpumps!*

 *Opposite Cricketers Arms.*

### **B(9.6)** [TQ 519 052]

- TR along Rd to junction with A27(T) Lewes Road by bus shelter. Here you leave the South Downs National Park.
- This road is very busy – take great care as you cross** then TL along far side for 40m. *If it is impossible to cross here in heavy traffic, TR for 300m to the traffic lights by the roundabout (taking great care as there is no footway), cross there and return along the far side.*

 *The Cuckmere Community Bus calls at the crossroads here on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays (also Saturdays and Sundays from March to October), to / from Berwick and Seaford stations. By walking 300m east along the A27, to Drusilla's Roundabout, there are more buses serving Alfriston, Lewes and Eastbourne.*

### **B(9.5)** [TQ 520 053]

- Cross stile by metal gate then bear half L across field.
- Cross stream via stile and wooden bridge then follow L side of field.
- At field corner TL through gap in hedge then cross stile ahead.
- KA across field following faint grass Tk (CB 335°).
- Go through gap in dip to cross stream on mud/rubble bridge and KA up next field.

### **B(9.4)** [TQ 519 060]

- Go through gap or cross stile and bear half R to cut corner of field to gap in hedge.
- Bear quarter L (CB 0°/360° = due N) down large field to cross wooden bridge in tree line (to L of 2<sup>nd</sup> electricity pole from R).
- Bear half L up field then up steps to Rd (*Common Lane, which is on National Cycle Route 2*).

### **B(9.3)** [TQ 517 064]

- Cross Rd half L and follow metalled drive (signed Stonery Farm) to R of Stonery Cottages, passing through gate.
- The drive swings left then right. In 30 metres, before farm entrance, TR along grass Tk between hedge and fence.

### **B(9.2)** [TQ 517 068]





- KA on grass Tk(Bw) for 550m, now following line of **Roman road**.
- Pass through gate then KA on faint Bw across field, where you may glimpse Arlington Reservoir away to your L.
- Bw gradually bears L to corner of field, where follow enclosed Fp beside barn to Rd (*Coldharbour Road*) opposite Berwick Inn.
- TL to level crossing, where Section B of the VGW(S-N) ends at:

→ Continued over →

## Vanguard Way **SOUTH-NORTH** Route Description: Section B

---

### **B(9.1)** [TQ 526 067] **Berwick Station**

-  Trains from Berwick Station to (nearest platform) Lewes, Brighton, Gatwick Airport, East Croydon and central London; or (far platform - **take care** crossing railway lines) to Eastbourne and Hastings.
  -  The Cuckmere Community Bus operates hither in the morning as follows: (Mondays) from Eastbourne, Polegate and Hailsham; (Tuesdays and Fridays) from Seaford and Exceat; (Wednesdays) from Hailsham and Alfriston; (Thursdays) from Eastbourne, Polegate and Alfriston; (Saturdays and Sundays March to October only) from Alfriston, Seaford and Exceat.
  -  The Berwick Inn. Convenience store on north side of level crossing.
  -  By Berwick Stores.
- 

© 2017 Colin Saunders

### COMMENTARY

*on places shown in bold italics and underlined in the route description*

#### **B(10.1)**

The river meanders provide an ideal setting for the **Seven Sisters Canoe Centre**, operated by Buzz Active ([www.buzzactive.org.uk](http://www.buzzactive.org.uk)). Normally only pre-booked groups can use the facilities, though on some days it may be possible to just turn up and have a go.

The **Seven Sisters Country Park** extends eastwards, covering 113 hectares of chalk cliffs and river valley. It includes the land east of the river inland to Exceat Bridge and the first three 'sisters'. Established in 1971 by East Sussex County Council, one of its most welcome effects was the removal of a sprawling riverside caravan site, replaced by artificial lakes to attract birds, especially terns.

The Country Park's headquarters at Exceat has a visitor centre, a former farmhouse, where guided walks can be arranged for parties and cycles can be hired. It is also the base for Seaford Head Nature Reserve, which you passed through on Section A. There is an adjacent restaurant/tea-room.

The Living World Exhibition that used to occupy buildings at Litlington Road here has now closed.

The VGW runs together with the **South Downs Way** National Trail ([www.nationaltrail.co.uk/southdowns](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/southdowns)) for the next 4.8 km to Alfriston. It is managed by the South Downs National Park Authority and runs for 162 km (100 miles) from Eastbourne to Winchester. Between Eastbourne and Alfriston there are two alternative routes, which come together at the point where the VGW crosses the Cuckmere: a coastal one (partly shared with the VGW and for walkers only) follows the Seven Sisters through Birling Gap, while an inland one (for cyclists and horse-riders as well as walkers) follows the higher ridge, passing through Jevington.

#### **B(9.15)**

The **Wealden Walks** was a network of 20 walks set up by Wealden District Council, and you may still see its signs, though it is no longer supported and signs may have been removed.

**Cuckmere Estuary**. From this vantage point you can clearly visualise the effect of a rise in sea level some 500 years ago, which turned the land before you into a tidal estuary. The limits of the former estuary are clearly discernible. Eventually the sea level dropped, leaving an area of salt marsh. In the near future, a proposal to allow the sea to flood the adjoining land may drastically alter the view at high tide.

Like the Cuckmere, many rivers '**meander**', especially in their lower reaches where the water flows more slowly than upstream. The word comes from the Menderes or Meander river in Turkey, which is a prime example of this phenomenon. It is thought that rivers naturally assume this shape as it uses less energy than by flowing directly into the sea. But such a course is awkward to navigate, and a straight new channel was cut here in 1846, partly for the benefit of vessels heading for Alfriston but also to reduce the risk of flooding. Subsequently the mouth of the Cuckmere became clogged by a shingle bar, so now only small boats and canoes are able to make the trip upstream to Alfriston.

**Friston Forest** covers nearly 810 hectares (2,000 acres) of land acquired in the 1880s by the Eastbourne Water Company (now part of South East Water) as a catchment area. It was later leased to the Forestry Commission ([www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)) who in 1927 began planting - largely broadleaved trees, especially beech, with pines to give protection during growth against prevailing salt-laden winds. However, recent policy has been to replace the conifers with broadleaved trees. You may see roe deer, and the forest is home to many unusual varieties of plant and animal life: adders may be seen in summer - they will not attack unless provoked. A number of waymarked walks have been established, and details of these can be found in a leaflet available in the car park by the road to the west, reachable on a diversion from point B(9.13).

The secluded little village of **Westdean** hides away in a coombe at the foot of the South Downs, surrounded by Friston Forest, whose headquarters is located here in the house called Dean Lodge. For such a small

place it has much of interest. King Alfred the Great is thought to have built a palace and a hunting lodge here about 850. The Old Parsonage, also known as the Priest's House next to the church, dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century and is one of the oldest occupied houses in Britain. All Saints Church is of Norman origin with 14<sup>th</sup> century additions. As well as Forge Cottage beside the VGW, there are two other Grade II listed buildings in the village: the Upper Barn, and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century West Dean Manor. There are also a 13<sup>th</sup> century timber-framed rectory and an older ruined manor house.

### **B(9.13)**

Historic **Charleston Manor** ([www.charleston-manor.org.uk](http://www.charleston-manor.org.uk)) was started in 1080 by William the Conqueror's cup-bearer, and was extended with Tudor and Georgian additions. Described by Pevsner as 'the perfect house in the perfect setting', it is shown in the Domesday Book (1086) as Cerletone (Ceorl's Farm). It has two tithe barns, one of which (15<sup>th</sup> Century, originally thatched but now tiled) is the largest in Sussex. There is also a very old dovecote and 18<sup>th</sup> Century stables. The beautiful gardens were first laid out in the 1930s by Lady Birley, wife of the portrait painter Sir Oswald Birley. All this is surrounded by banks of fir-trees climbing the Downs nearby. For a few years in the 1970s it was the venue of the English Wine Festival; it is now the venue each June for the Charleston Manor Festival of classical music.

Note: Charleston Manor should not be confused with Charleston Farmhouse, home of the Bloomsbury Group artists Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, which lies to the northwest – see also Berwick Church at B(9.8).

### **B(9.12)**

The **White Horse of Litlington** is 27 metres long (nearly 90 feet). Local folklore says it stands on the site of 'Eve', a companion for 'Adam' (the Long Man of Wilmington), although there is no evidence for this. There are two more theories, neither of which has yet been proven. The least likely is that it was cut by two boys in 1860, when they imagined that a patch of bare chalk looked like a horse's head and decided to add the rest of the body. More likely it was cut in 1838 by James Pagden of Frog Firl Farm and his two brothers to commemorate the coronation of Queen Victoria. Having become obscured by overgrowth, the horse was recut in 1924 by three local gentlemen, (Messrs. Ade, Bovis and Hobbis) who carried out the deed in secret, overnight, to startle local people next morning. During the Second World War the horse was camouflaged to confuse enemy airmen. The horse and surrounding land were acquired by the National Trust in 1991 and regular maintenance ensures its high visibility. At some time during the 1980s, the stance was changed from standing to prancing, as this made the chalk infill more stable.

**Rathfinny** ([www.rathfinnyestate.com](http://www.rathfinnyestate.com)) is the name of a vast new vineyard, established in 2010, which occupies the long valley south of Alfriston. It is now by far Britain's largest vineyard in size, though its vines are not yet in full production. Its first wine went on sale in 2015, but the intention is to produce some of the best sparkling wine. There is a wine trail around the estate, and its flint barns are available for bed and breakfast. The wine can be bought at the Gun Room in Alfriston, which you will pass on the way into the village.

**Litlington** (Saxon = the defended settlement of Lytela's family) is a pretty little village nestling on a shelf of the South Downs. Its church, dating from Norman times, has interior arches of hard chalk, and there are ancient roof-timbers. The Plough & Harrow Inn was connected with smugglers in the late 18<sup>th</sup> / early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As well as Smuggler's Rest, passed on the VGW, there are three other Grade II listed buildings in the village: 1 & 2 Plough Lane, near the pub, Pear Tree Cottage and Well Cottage. The tea garden claims to be the oldest in Sussex.

### **B(9.11)**

The **Cuckmere River** flows for about 30 km from sources in the Greensand Ridge near Heathfield, through the South Downs past Alfriston. It was formerly much wider, possibly even covering most of the flat valley floor, and was navigable to Alfriston until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It frequently flooded, but the river banks were raised in the 1930s to prevent this. The most plausible explanation of the name is from the Saxon

## Vanguard Way **SOUTH-NORTH** Route Description: Section B

‘cuwcmere’, meaning lively pool, but it has never been recorded as such. As far back as 450 it was plain Coc, or Cocu, which may have been a Celtic name that was taken up by the Saxons. It passed through later centuries variously as Cokemaresho, Cookmere, Coukemere, Cokemere, Coukmere, Cuckmer and Cockmare before taking on its present spelling. Bizarrely, in 1275 it was called (probably by very few people) Aqua de Longebar, after the local hundred (administrative district) of Longbridge, and at one time Wandelmestrouw, though why is not clear.

**White Bridge** is the name more generally used locally, though its original name is Plonk Bridge, as shown on some maps, after the locality of Plonk to the east. This is to distinguish it from Red Bridge further north, also known as Long Bridge. There has been a bridge on this site for many centuries, but the current structure is the rebuilding of a previous one dating from the 1930s.

### **B(9.10)**

Though now just a village, with a resident population of 769 according to the 2001 census, **Alfriston** ([www.alfriston-village.co.uk](http://www.alfriston-village.co.uk)) was formerly a town of some importance to this area. It is such an attractive and interesting place that the population may well be doubled by visitors. The narrow pavements can get very crowded, and it is a great shame that pedestrians have to compete with vehicular traffic for the restricted space.

There is disagreement as to how the name should be pronounced. Many say ‘All-friston’ but this seems to be an affectation in view of the origin as described below. The settlement we now know as Alfriston was first reliably recorded in 900 AD as Ælfricestun, Saxon for ‘the defended settlement of Ælfric’, one of Alfred’s chieftains. In Domesday Book (1086) it was Alvricestone. Some have claimed a connection with King Alfred the Great (849-899), even that he burned those pesky cakes here, though this is almost certainly apocryphal, and there is an unsubstantiated record of an earlier settlement called Ælfred, though due to some grammatical nicety it seems that this would have been named after Alfred’s sister Ælfreda. Alfred may have had a palace at Westdean, which the VGW goes through later. Over the years, some 18 variations on the theme have been recorded, but since 1700 it has settled down as Alfriston.

Alfriston is one of several places that lay claim to the site of a monastery that became a major pilgrimage centre, from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, after the martyrdom of St. Lewinna, a Christian who lived locally. Born about 640 and murdered by a heathen Saxon in 690, she was entombed in the monastery that is believed to have stood on the site of the present St. Andrew’s Church, and many miracles were said to have been performed there. However, in 1058 the bones were stolen by the Flemish monk Balgarus (or Balger) and his scribe Drogo, who took them to their monastery at Bergues, then in Flanders but now in France. It is said that several of Lewinna’s finger bones repeatedly fell out during their escape, and they left them behind – these bones are believed to remain at St. Andrew’s beneath a stone dog with the face of a nun. Of the bones that went to Bergues, after several mishaps, it is thought that just one bone now remains.

Great markets were held in Alfriston from the reign of Richard I in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and the town seems to have been of some importance at this time. The market place beside the Smugglers Inn is called Waterloo Square, commemorating the troops that were stationed here during the Napoleonic Wars - their parade ground extended to what is now the car park. The original market cross was erected in 1418 - a symbol to remind traders to deal honestly - but it has suffered a number of accidents over the centuries and the current cross dates from 1955. It is topped by a carved sea urchin, which was traditionally worn by local shepherds for good luck. The fine chestnut tree was planted in 1837 to commemorate the coronation of Queen Victoria.

Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Cuckmere River was navigable to Alfriston, and troops were able to embark on their ships here. This also made the town an ideal base for smuggling, which had been going on since the time of Richard I, but the practice reached a peak during the Napoleonic Wars, when taxes were raised substantially, and most of the town’s inns and population were involved.

Most of the buildings in the village centre are old and picturesque, and it is well worth exploring away from

## Vanguard Way **SOUTH-NORTH** Route Description: Section B

---

the VGW. A leaflet 'Alfriston & Cuckmere Valley', available in various locations in the village, provides information about most of these buildings, but here is something about those that are on or close to the route:

**St. Andrew's Church.** Built of flint in the 14<sup>th</sup> century on the site of a monastery, and known as 'the Cathedral of the Downs' because of its size. St. Andrew's contains several interesting artefacts, also parish registers dating back to 1504, claimed to be the oldest in England. Look for the stone dog with a nun's face referred to above.

**The Clergy House** (close to the church) ([www.nationaltrust.org.uk/alfriston-clergy-house](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/alfriston-clergy-house)). 14<sup>th</sup> century timber-framed, thatched priest's house, the first building ever acquired by the National Trust, for £10 in 1896.

**The Tanneries** was originally, as its name suggests, the site of a tannery, established in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and using hides from a nearby slaughterhouse - it seems the air in Alfriston was once less wholesome than it is now. In the adjoining meadow, visible from the VGW, is a small, rusting iron bark mill, which was used to crush granules of oak bark and acorns, from which was made a liquor used in the tanning process. The tannery closed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was converted into three cottages, which were combined in 1927 to the present larger dwelling. In the 1930s it housed a tearoom and until fairly recently offered bed and breakfast and camping.

**Star Inn** ([www.thestaralfriston.co.uk](http://www.thestaralfriston.co.uk)). A half-timbered building, originally a hostelry of Battle Abbey, built in 1520. Its star sign is thought to represent the Star of Bethlehem. Several carvings adorn the exterior timbers of the building, but the carved lion was once the figurehead of a Dutch ship wrecked in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century at Cuckmere Haven, and previously stood outside the Smugglers. Even Pevsner is not infallible: the Sussex book mistakenly calls it the Ship Inn.

**George Inn** ([thegeorge-alfriston.com](http://thegeorge-alfriston.com)). Formerly the George & Dragon, this is one of the oldest buildings in Alfriston, dating from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, but rebuilt after a fire in 1943. It was also once a smugglers' haunt.

**Ye Olde Smugglers Inne** (previously called the Market Cross) the pub still confusingly shows both signs outside. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was the home and shop of Stanton Collins, the butcher, who was also head of the notorious Alfriston gang of smugglers, and the pub is reputed to contain secret passages. Collins was eventually transported to Australia, though later returned to Sussex. In July 2004, a car crashed into the market cross, rebounded into the Smugglers, then coolly reversed and sped away, leaving a great hole (soon repaired) in the façade.

**Village Stores.** Dating from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, its bow windows are Grade I listed, and the interior is a splendid reminder of how shops used to look in those days.

### **B(9.9)**

**Much Ado Books** ([www.muchadobooks.com](http://www.muchadobooks.com)) at 8 West Street was established in 2003 by an American couple, and has acquired a reputation as a literary and antiquarian centre.

The **Tower Folly** in North Street Car Park is thought to have been built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a playhouse for his children by a Mr Harris, owner of The Dene, a property that previously occupied this site.

**Winton**, nowadays in effect part of Alfriston, was probably the earliest Saxon settlement in these parts, around 450 AD, and was then called Wigington - the settlement of a chieftain called Wiga.

The crucifix you pass on the road out of Alfriston was erected in 1919 by Alice S. Gregory (1867-1946), to denote the discovery of a Saxon graveyard (120 graves were excavated) near this spot during the building in 1912 of her house, which she then called '**The Sanctuary**'. Alice, the daughter of a Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, is mentioned in *Notable Sussex Women* (Helena Wojtczak, Hastings Press) as having been awarded the CBE in 1929 for her work in founding a maternity hospital and improving the status, training and working conditions for midwives.

### **B(9.8)**

Cut into the northern slope of Windover Hill is the **Long Man of Wilmington**. At 70m (231 feet) high it is said to be the largest representation of the human form in Europe. According to the information board at Wilmington, 'The earliest known reference to the Long Man suggests the original figure was a marking in the grass rather than a solid line. In 1874 the shape was marked with yellow bricks, later replaced by concrete blocks.' No clear evidence has yet been discovered of the Long Man's origin: it could have been cut at any time over a period of 2,500 years between BC 1000 and AD 1500, and is attributed variously to Neolithic druids (as Baldur the Sun-God opening the gates of dawn) or to medieval monks (as St. Christopher, patron saint of travellers). We may never know!

The footpath to your right here leads to **Drusilla's Zoo Park** (500m E, [www.drusillas.co.uk](http://www.drusillas.co.uk)). In 1923, Captain L.D. Ann acquired a derelict farm on this site and developed a compact family leisure-centre. It now contains a small zoo, children's adventure playground, working pottery and bakery, craft and antique shops, a collection of moths and butterflies and good refreshment facilities (only available to those who have paid the entrance fee). Rare breeds of cattle are raised here.

Nearby to the north at Drusilla's Corner on the A27 (and under the same management) is the **English Wine Centre** ([www.englishwine.co.uk](http://www.englishwine.co.uk)), one of the leading promoters of English wine, which has a restaurant and shop.

**Berwick Church** (St. Michael and All Angels, [www.berwickchurch.org.uk](http://www.berwickchurch.org.uk)) was built around 1130 on a pre-Christian sacred site, replacing an earlier wooden church. The mound in the churchyard is a Saxon barrow. Inside the church are an ancient font and some outstanding modern murals, painted at the request of the Bishop of Chichester between 1941 and 1943 by members of the Bloomsbury Group, who lived at Charleston Farmhouse nearby to the northwest (not to be confused with Charleston Manor to the south, which you pass later in this section). They were Vanessa Bell (sister of Virginia Woolf), her son Quentin Bell and Duncan Grant. The result is most effective, with clear windows allowing light into the church and good views from inside of the surrounding countryside. However, Pevsner was not much impressed. He wrote, 'It was a noble effort on the part of the bishop ... yet if one remembers Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell in their prime, how sad does it seem now, so conventional, so sentimental.' He also said of the church, 'The north arcade suffered at the hands of the restorer of 1856. It is quite illiterate and clumsy on top. So is the chancel arch.'

First recorded in Saxon times as Berewic (barley-farm), then in the Domesday book (1086) as Berewice, **Berwick** (pronounced 'Berrick') was once a place of some importance, being situated on a major crossroads and as the venue of the twice yearly East Sussex Moot. Now it has been by-passed and is a very quiet cul-de-sac.

### **B(9.2)**

For 800m here, the VGW closely follows the line of a **Roman road**, which linked their forts or towns at Pevensey (Anderida), Lewes (possibly Mutuantonis or Mantuantonis), Chichester (Noviomagus Regnorum) and Ringwood (Regnum). Sitting on top of a 3m high agger (embankment), the road would have been about 6m wide with a ditch either side.

Britain was criss-crossed by well-engineered roads built by the Romans during the 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, but many of them became totally eroded and lost to human knowledge. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century aerial photography revealed straight lines in, for example, crop marks and hedges, which often turned out to be the lines of Roman roads. This road was such a case, discovered by Ivan Margary (1896-1976), author of *Roman Roads in Britain*, from an aerial photo he took in 1929. He gave each Roman road a number, and this is his number 142. Some Roman roads, such as Watling Street, have distinctive names, but this one has no name.

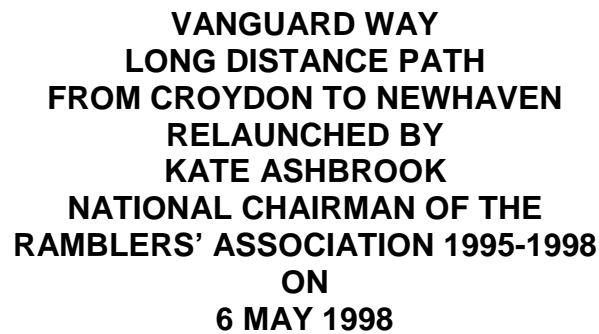
Although this small settlement has no official name on the map, we refer to it as **Berwick Station** to distinguish it from Berwick Village further south. The community developed around the railway station and includes the Berwick Inn ([www.theberwickinn.co.uk](http://www.theberwickinn.co.uk)), the proposed original final destination for the VGW

## Vanguard Way **SOUTH-NORTH** Route Description: Section B

---

(see *How it all began* on our website). The inn was originally called the Fuller's Arms, then became the Berwick Arms before reaching its current name. Outside the ticket office is a plaque commemorating the relaunch of the Vanguard Way, which took place here when the route was extended to Newhaven in 1998.

*Brass plaque outside  
the ticket office at  
Berwick Station*



**VANGUARD WAY  
LONG DISTANCE PATH  
FROM CROYDON TO NEWHAVEN  
RELAUNCHED BY  
KATE ASHBROOK  
NATIONAL CHAIRMAN OF THE  
RAMBLERS' ASSOCIATION 1995-1998  
ON  
6 MAY 1998**



© 2017 Colin Saunders



**Vanguard Way  
Map of Section 9/B  
Berwick Station – Exceat Bridge**

