THE VANGUARD WAY

(SOUTH TO NORTH)

A different experience in the other direction!

SECTION B
Exceat Bridge to Berwick Station

Third edition (2025)

VANGUARD WAY ROUTE GUIDE

SECTION B

Exceat Bridge to Berwick Station

COLIN SAUNDERS

Third Edition (South-North)
Version 3.0

This 3rd edition of the south-north route description was first published in 2025 and replaces the 1st edition published in 2011 and the 2nd edition published in 2017. It is only available as an online resource.

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To find out about any late changes to the route, please visit www.vanguardway.org.uk and click on the 'latest news' button. Or visit our Facebook page (Vanguard Way Association)

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 or write to Colin Saunders, 35 Gerrards Close, Oakwood, London, N14 4RH, England.

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SECTION B: EXCEAT BRIDGE TO BERWICK STATION
10.5km (6.5 miles)

Distances from Exceat Bridge to:

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

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. The Flexibus service operated by East Sussex County Council may be able to help in places that are poorly served by public transport: for details search 'East Sussex Flexibus' or phone 01273 078203 (Monday to Saturday 06.30 to 19.30).

Abbreviations and symbols

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		

= Bus = Cafés etc = Toilets

= Train = Pubs = Phone box

Ž = Taxi ã = Accommodation = Take extra care – see below

Route 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 118 steps, the second 82. 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 points Exceat Bridge (4m). Highest point: near Clapham Farm (53m).

How to use this guide

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

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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. Maps showing the correct route are appended to this route guide. 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 guide:

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 blue 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.

⊗ **- Walking on roads and other hazards**
When walking, one should of course take care in all sorts of potentially hazardous situations, but especially when crossing or walking along roads. **Please read the 'Safety' chapter in our Introduction to the Route, which can be downloaded from our website vanguardway.org.uk.** We use this symbol ⊗ to draw your attention to situations that require extra care.

'**NP**' in the route description indicates that the road has no pavement or other provision for pedestrians. 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, and carry a torch.

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. It contains important information that will be helpful when reading this route description.

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ALL INFORMATION SHOWN IS SUBJECT TO ALTERATION WITHOUT NOTICE

This third edition of the South-North version of the Route Description is based on a completely new survey undertaken by members of the Vanguard Way Association in 2023.

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 vanguardway.org.uk for any changes that may have taken place meanwhile. You might also like to join our Facebook page, where news of developments affecting the Vanguard Way will be posted – just search Vanguard Way Association. Another way would be to join the Association, as members are kept up to date through the bi-monthly VGW News – details on our website.**

We will always be pleased to hear about any changes you may find, in which case please email route@vanguardway.org.uk.

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 (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.

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 route@vanguardway.org.uk.

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]*

The route here is shared with the King Charles III England Coast Path (see Section A) as far as the Visitor Centre in B(10.1d). 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. A new bridge is planned here, which should eliminate these crossings. Care is also needed on the narrow pavement leading to the Exceat Visitor Centre, which has steep drops on either side. This situation is unsatisfactory and the Vanguard Way Association has asked East Sussex County Council to consider how it can be improved. Meanwhile, the Vanguard Way Circular Route described below, though adding about 1.6 km (1 mile), provides an attractive alternative.*

a) From Cuckmere Inn car park, cross A259 Eastbourne Road ⊗ 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.

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Vanguard Way Circular Route providing an attractive alternative to walking beside A259 Eastbourne Road (shown in pale purple on our map). *It adds about 1.6km (1 mile) to the distance but avoids the unpleasant footpath beside the A259 and provides wonderful views across 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 1km, 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 towards a barrier, where you bear R up a footpath to continue along the VGW, but bear L for the Visitor Centre, toilets and Saltmarsh Farmhouse café. *The VGW changes partners here, as the King Charles III England Coast Path diverges to the right, while **South Downs Way** (SDW) comes in from the right and joins the VGW for the next 4.8km to Alfriston.*

🚌 *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.*

ã *Saltmarsh Farmhouse.*

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**.*

a) Together with SDW, KA up tarmac drive between flint barn and Exceat Cottage go through KG.
b) KA up steep field to top.
*A seat here (dedicated to the Grover family) provides an opportunity for a breather and to admire the outstanding view of the **Cuckmere Estuary** with its meandering river.*
c) Go through KG and cross stile in flint wall.
d) TR then in a few metres TL into ***Friston Forest***.
e) Follow Fp as it descends 118 steps then at foot KA between village pond and Pond Cottage to Rd *(The Lane)* at ***Westdean***.

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

B(9.14) *[TV 524 997]*
a) Still with SDW, cross Rd and KA up tarmac drive past Forge Cottage, a Grade II listed building.
b) Where tarmac drive bears R, KA up concrete Tk (signed The Glebe).
c) KA on stony Tk signed The Glebe past gate and continue uphill for 120m back into Friston Forest.
d) At junction (with SDW signpost) TL and follow Fp uphill.
e) In 200m KA at fork (slightly uphill), ignoring Tk descending to L.
f) Follow Fp as it bends R, passing T-junction of Tks to second T-junction with memorial seat and yellow 'goalpost'.

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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]*

a) Still with SDW, KA for 220m then at next Tk junction KA between posts.
b) Descend two flights of steps (totalling 82). ***Take great care*** ⊗ *and use handrail, especially if wet, and beware of barbed wire fence on your left. Clapham Farm dominates the fields ahead.*
c) At foot, TL along enclosed Tk for 40m to pass back entrance (gate marked 'Private') of ***Charleston Manor***.
d) 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]*

a) Still with SDW, cross stile and climb steep and grassy 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 again. The broad valley on the right of the White Horse, stretching back for 2 km, is largely occupied by* ***Rathfinny****, one of Britain's largest vineyards.*
b) At flint wall go through first KG and KA along R side of meadow.
c) Go through second KG then descend next field steeply to go L of cottages and through third KG. *You have now left the South Downs proper but are still within the National Park area.*
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 – KA past the Plough & Harrow for 100m.

B(9.11) *[TQ 523 017]*

a) Still with SDW, at end of Fp TR close to ***Cuckmere River***. *One of the buildings on the hilltop ahead used to be Alfriston Youth Hostel, but sadly it closed in 2015. The footpath on this side of the river is sometimes flooded, but the one on the far bank may be passable, or follow the parallel road with care* ⊗.
b) In 150m TL through KG to follow embankment beside river northwards for 1.8 km, passing through another KG, and with a fine view of Alfriston church, to ***White Bridge***.

B(9.10) *[TQ 522 031]*

a) TL across White Bridge and KA on metalled Fp into ***Alfriston*** village. *The VGW joins the* ***Cuckmere Pilgrim Path*** *here, but the SDW takes a different route through the village to leave the VGW.*
b) Pass village green, where the flint Gun Room on your L is occupied by the Shot Coffee House. 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 ***George Inn*** on your R and ***Star Inn*** on your L to Waterloo Square, wherein are located ***Ye Olde Smugglers Inn***, ***Village Stores***, the Singing Kettle Teahouse 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.

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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.

B(9.8) *[TQ 517 037]*

a) Where Rd turns sharp R *(Winton Street)*, KA on Tk (byway). Then in 50m, where Tk bears L, KA on undulating Fp crossing, in effect, one huge field for 1 km. *The spire of Berwick church rises ahead, while to your right lies 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 Park*** and ***Alfriston Gardens***.

B(9.7) *[TQ 518 048]*

a) KA (to R of church), go through KG, head to R of trees then bear L to cross stile.

b) Follow Fp beside hedge to Berwick village pond.

c) 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. 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]*

a) TR along Rd to junction with *A27(T) Lewes Road* by bus shelter. *Here you leave the South Downs National Park. Note on your left a cottage called Giant View, presumably because it has a view of the Long Man of Wilmington (see above), though it's difficult to discern from ground level.*

b) ***This road is very busy – take great care*** ⊗ ***as you cross*** then TL along far side for 40m. ***If it is impossible to cross safely here in heavy traffic, TR for 275m along walking/cycling track to traffic lights at Drusilla's roundabout, cross there and return along 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 275m east along the A27, to Drusilla's Roundabout, there are more buses serving Alfriston, Lewes and Eastbourne.

B(9.5) *[TQ 520 053]*

a) Cross stile by metal gate then bear half L across field.

b) Cross stream via stile and wooden bridge then follow L side of field.

c) At field corner TL through gap in hedge then cross stile ahead.

d) KA across field following faint grass Tk (CB 335°).

e) Go through gap in dip to cross stream on mud/rubble bridge and KA up next field.

B(9.4) *[TQ 519 060]*

a) Go through gap or cross stile and bear half R to cut corner of field to gap in hedge.

b) Bear quarter L (CB 0°/360° = due N) down large field to cross wooden bridge in tree line (to L of 2nd electricity pole from R). ► ►

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c) Bear half L up field then into bushes and ascend to Rd (beware low steps) *(Common Lane, which is on National Cycle Route 2).*

B(9.3) *[TQ 517 064]*

a) Cross Rd half L and follow metalled drive (signed Stonery Farm) to R of Stonery Cottages, passing through gate.

b) The drive swings left then right. In 30 metres, before farm entrance, TR along grass Tk between hedge and fence. *Note: The farm buildings have been demolished and there's a proposal to build a small residential development on the site. This may result in some minor changes to the VGW route in this area.*

B(9.2) *[TQ 517 068]*

a) KA on grass Tk(Bw) for 550m, now following line of ***Roman road***.

b) Pass through gate then KA on faint Bw across field, where you may glimpse Arlington Reservoir away to your L.

c) Bw gradually bears L to corner of field, where follow enclosed Fp through scrub to Rd *(Station Road)* opposite Berwick Inn.

d) TL to level crossing, where Section B of the VGW(S-N) ends at:

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.

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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. 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. 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 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** is a network of self-guided walks set up by Wealden District Council – details are available at wealden.gov.uk/wealden-walks-blog.

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, 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 11th century and is one of the oldest occupied houses in Britain. All Saints Church is of Norman origin with

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14th 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 19th century West Dean Manor. There are also a 13th century timber-framed rectory and an older ruined manor house. *Note: Westdean is shown as one word on OS maps and on some bus timetables, but locally written as two words, West Dean. This one should not be confused with a larger West Dean near Chichester, West Sussex.*

B(9.13)

Historic **Charleston Manor** 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 (15th Century, originally thatched but now tiled) is the largest in Sussex. There is also a very old dovecote and 18th 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 (charlestonmanorfestival.com). *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 Firle 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 is the name of a vast vineyard, established in 2010, which occupies 160 hectares (400 acres) of the long valley south of Alfriston and now one of Britain's largest vineyards. 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, as well as guided tours, a shop, a restaurant, and its flint barns are available for bed and breakfast.

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 18th / early 19th 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)

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 829 according to the 2021 census, **Alfriston** 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.

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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 went through earlier. 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 8th to the 11th 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 12th 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. A chestnut tree planted in 1837 to commemorate the coronation of Queen Victoria had to be felled in 2006 due to safety concerns and has been replaced by a smaller one.

Until the 19th 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.

The **Cuckmere Pilgrim Path** was created in 2018 by the parishioners of St Michael and All Angels Church in Berwick. A circular trail of 19-22 km / 12-14 miles which you can start and finish at Berwick Station, it links seven churches at Selmeston, Alciston, Berwick, Alfriston, Lullington, Wilmington and Arlington, crosses Windover Hill and passes the Long Man of Wilmington.

Most of the buildings in the village centre are old and picturesque, and it is well worth exploring away from 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 14th 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). 14th century timber-framed, thatched priest's house, the first building ever acquired by the National Trust, for £10 in 1896.

The Gun Room has recently been refurbished, originally to accommodate a shop for the Rathfinny vineyard and subsequently a tea-room. It was built to house a huge gun during the Napoleonic Wars, then became the Memorial Hall in tribute to those who died during the First World War, and has now reverted to its original name.

The Tanneries was originally, as its name suggests, the site of a tannery, established in the late 18th century,

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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 20th 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. 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-19th century at Cuckmere Haven, and previously stood outside the Smugglers. Even Pevsner is not infallible: the Sussex book mistakenly calls it the Ship Inn. For many years owned by the Trusthouse Forte group, the Star is now owned by TV hotel guru Alex Polizzi and her mother Olga, daughter of (Lord) Charles Forte.

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

Ye Olde Smugglers Inne was previously called the Market Cross and both names are confusingly still shown outside. In the 19th 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.

The Six Bells pub is Grade II listed, dating from the 15th century. Until 2018 it was Moonrakers Restaurant.

Village Stores. Dating from the mid-19th century, its bow windows are Grade I listed, and the interior is a splendid reminder of how shops used to look in those days. Until 2020 it also served as the post office.

B(9.9)
Much Ado Books at 8 West Street (by the Smugglers Inn) 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 19th 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 Wigingtun - 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.' Various origins for the Long Man were postulated 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). However, in 2020, by analysing soil samples using a process called Optically Stimulated Luminescence, it was established that the Long Man was created in about 1545.

The footpath to your right here leads to **Drusilla's Park** (500m E. In 1923, Captain L.D. Ann acquired a

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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 is **Alfriston Gardens**, a wedding and function centre that hosts the English Wine Centre, one of the leading promoters of English wine, which has a restaurant and shop.

Berwick Church (St. Michael and All Angels) 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 1st to 4th centuries, but many of them became totally eroded and lost to human knowledge. In the 20th 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, the proposed original final destination for the VGW (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.

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

Brass plaque outside the ticket office at Berwick Station

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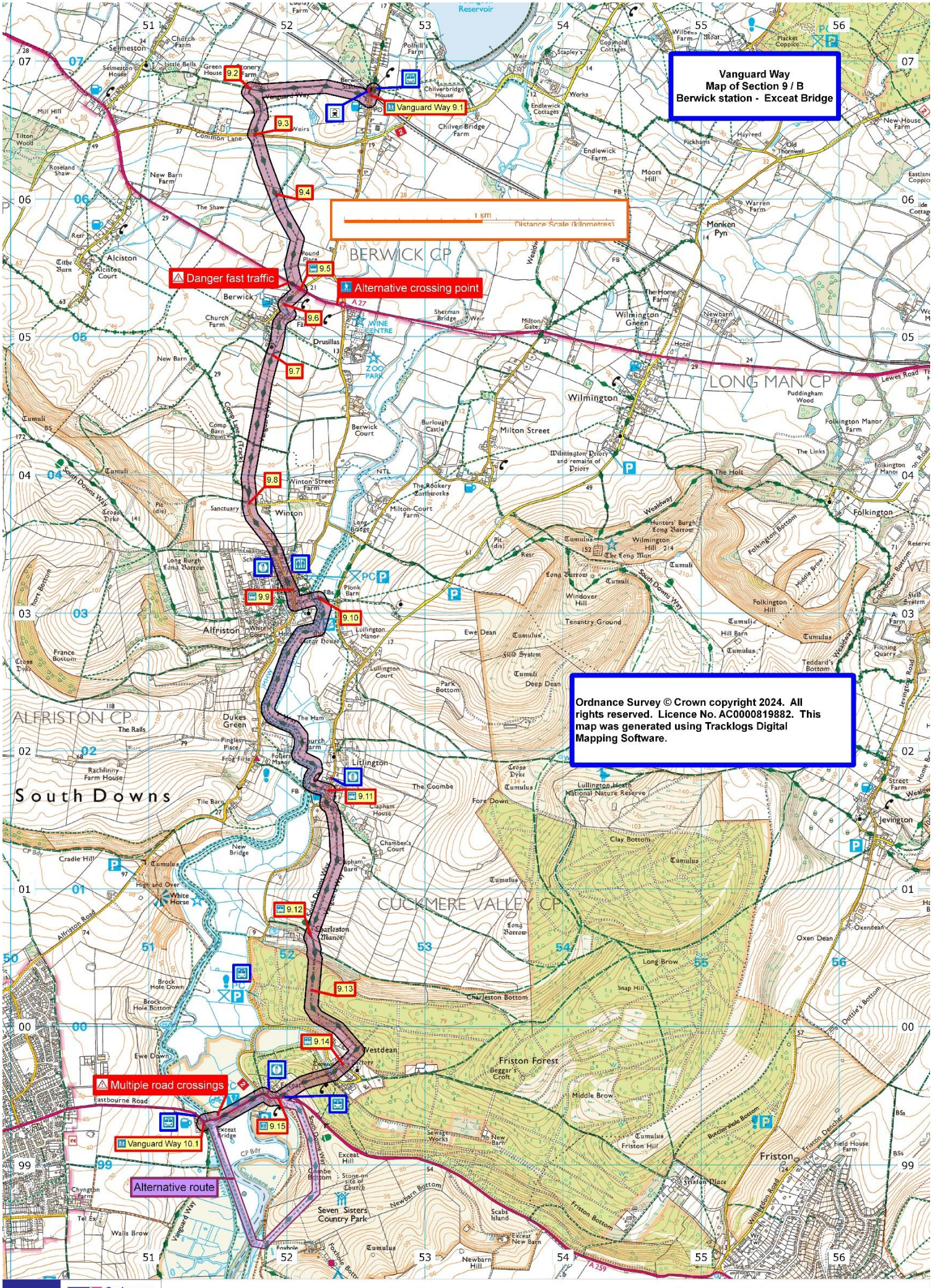

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