

Walking the South Downs Way

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary – Winchester to Amberley

Itinerary

Day 1	Arrive Winchester
Day 2	Walk Winchester to Corhampton – 13 miles
Day 3	Walk Corhampton to Queen Elizabeth Country Park – 14 miles
Day 4	Walk Queen Elizabeth Country Park to Cocking – 11 miles
Day 5	Walk Cocking to Amberley – 12 miles
Day 6	End of Part 1 – Transfer to Eastbourne

Departs

June / July

Focus

Butterflies, Wildflowers and Birds

Grading

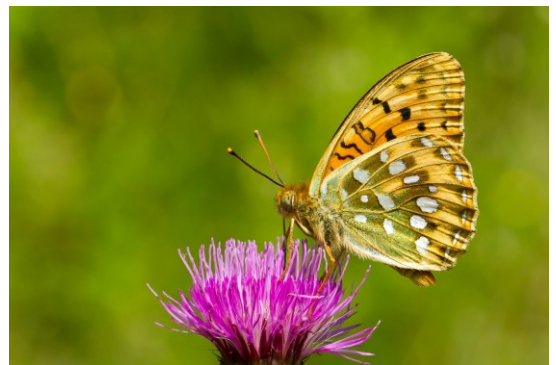
Grade B+ This is a walking holiday of 50 miles across downland over 4 days with frequent hills. Participants should be of a good level of fitness.

Dates and Prices

See www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code GBR376)

Highlights

- Complete one of England's greatest walks
- Butterflies such as Chalk Hill Blue and Dark Green Fritillary
- Orchids and wildflowers on some of England's finest chalk downs
- Iron age hillforts in ancient landscapes
- Birds including Firecrest, Yellowhammers, Grey Partridge and Raven
- Outstanding views from the English Channel to the North Downs



South Downs, Dark Green Fritillary, Firecrest



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Introduction

Following the crest of the South Downs from Winchester to Eastbourne, this rewarding walking holiday explores one of Britain's finest National Trails. Stretching for 100 miles across rolling chalk hills, flower-rich grasslands, ancient woodland and dramatic coastal cliffs, the South Downs Way combines outstanding scenery, exceptional biodiversity and a remarkable concentration of archaeological and historical sites. Along the route we encounter prehistoric hillforts, ancient trackways, picturesque villages and some of southern England's most iconic landscapes, including Butser Hill, Chanctonbury Ring, Devil's Dyke, Ditchling Beacon and the Seven Sisters.

The South Downs contain one of the largest surviving areas of chalk grassland in north-west Europe, a habitat often described as Britain's equivalent of a rainforest because of the extraordinary variety of plants and insects it supports. During spring and summer the downs can be alive with wildflowers, whilst butterflies such as Chalkhill Blue, Adonis Blue and Dark Green Fritillary drift across the flower-rich slopes. Skylarks provide a constant soundtrack above the rolling hills and Kestrels frequently hover over the escarpments searching for prey. Combined with ancient woodland, prehistoric earthworks, attractive downland villages and dramatic coastal scenery, the South Downs Way offers one of the finest opportunities to experience the natural and cultural heritage of southern England on foot.

Rather than changing accommodation throughout the journey, we divide our stay between two comfortable centres, Winchester and Eastbourne. Daily transfers allow us to walk the entire route carrying only a daypack, combining the satisfaction of completing one of England's greatest long-distance trails with the comfort of returning each evening to familiar surroundings.



Bee Orchid, South Downs

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of walks.

Day 1

Arrive Winchester

Winchester Cathedral



Arrive independently in Winchester and check into our hotel. One of England's most attractive and historic cities, Winchester was once the capital of Anglo-Saxon England and remains dominated by its magnificent cathedral and medieval streets. The city occupies a strategic position at the western edge of the South Downs and has long served as a gateway between southern England's chalk uplands and the wider countryside beyond.

Depending on arrival times, there may be an opportunity to explore the city centre, stroll beside the clear waters of the River Itchen or visit Winchester Cathedral, one of the largest Gothic cathedrals in northern Europe. Winchester retains a wealth of historic architecture and atmospheric lanes which reward exploration, providing an enjoyable prelude to the days ahead.

This evening we gather for dinner and an introduction to the South Downs Way. Stretching eastwards to the sea, the route follows a landscape shaped by millions of years of geological change and thousands of years of human history. For generations the ridge has served as a route for travellers, traders, shepherds and pilgrims, and over the coming days we shall follow in their footsteps through one of Britain's most celebrated and beautiful cultural landscapes.

Overnight in Winchester.

Day 2

Winchester to Corhampton

Our walk begins at the official western terminus of the South Downs Way on the outskirts of Winchester. Leaving the city behind, we soon gain the open chalk downs that characterise much of our route eastwards, exchanging urban surroundings for rolling farmland, wide skies and broad ridgelines.

Ancient drove roads and grassy tracks guide us across the landscape, many of them following routes that have linked settlements across southern England for centuries. The distinctive chalk geology soon becomes evident in the gently rolling contours and free-draining soils that support the characteristic habitats of the South Downs National Park.

Throughout the day there are extensive views across rural Hampshire, revealing a patchwork of fields, hedgerows and woodland which help define the region's enduring character. Gradually the rhythm of long-distance walking begins to take hold as we settle into the trail and gain an appreciation for the scale of the journey ahead.

As we approach the Meon Valley, the landscape becomes increasingly attractive. This beautiful river valley cuts through the chalk downs and has long been recognised as one of Hampshire's most picturesque rural areas. Our day's walk concludes at Corhampton before we return by taxi to Winchester.

Distance 13 miles - Overnight in Winchester.

Day 3

Corhampton to Queen Elizabeth Country Park

Returning to Corhampton, we continue through one of the most historically and scenically rewarding sections of the South Downs Way. The route climbs steadily onto the downs, providing increasingly expansive views across the Meon Valley and the surrounding Hampshire countryside.

One of today's principal highlights is Old Winchester Hill, a superb National Nature Reserve crowned

by the earthworks of a remarkably well-preserved Iron Age hillfort. Occupied more than 2,000 years ago, the site commands magnificent views and provides a fascinating link to the people who once inhabited these uplands. The combination of archaeology, landscape and natural history is especially impressive and makes this one of the most memorable locations along the western Downs.

Old Winchester Hill also represents one of the finest surviving examples of traditional chalk grassland in Britain. During the flowering season the slopes become richly coloured by orchids and other chalk-loving plants which thrive on the thin calcareous soils. Such habitats are increasingly rare and demonstrate why the South Downs are recognised as one of the country's most important landscapes for wildlife conservation.

Continuing eastwards, we gradually approach Butser Hill, at 270 metres the highest point within the South Downs National Park. The broad summit offers some of the most extensive views on the entire trail. On clear days it is possible to see across much of Hampshire towards the Isle of Wight, whilst the rolling chalk ridge of the South Downs stretches eastwards into the distance.

Standing atop Butser Hill provides a wonderful opportunity to appreciate the scale and continuity of the landscape we are exploring. The downs appear as a great green spine running across southern England, linking together valleys, woodlands and open grasslands in a remarkably coherent and beautiful landscape. It is a moment that gives a tangible sense of both achievement and anticipation, for much of the route still lies ahead.

Descending from the high ground, we arrive at Queen Elizabeth Country Park before returning to Winchester.

Distance 14 miles - Overnight in Winchester.

Red Kite



Day 4

Queen Elizabeth Country Park to Cocking

Common Spotted Orchid



Today's route explores the wooded western heart of the South Downs. Climbing once more onto the ridge, we follow a succession of escarpments, ridges and wooded slopes that showcase the changing character of the National Park.

Among the highlights is Harting Down, where magnificent views stretch across the Weald to the north and the Isle of Wight to the south. The views are among the most celebrated anywhere

on the trail, encompassing rolling farmland, wooded valleys and distant ridges extending far beyond the South Downs themselves. The open slopes provide ideal hunting territory for Kestrels, whose distinctive hovering flight is frequently seen against the skyline.

Throughout the day evidence of past human activity is ever-present. Ancient field systems, trackways and earthworks reveal a landscape that has been shaped and utilised continuously for thousands of years. Eventually we descend towards Cocking, a charming village nestled beneath the downs in rural West Sussex.

Distance 11 miles - Overnight in Winchester.

Day 5

Cocking to Amberley

Many walkers regard this as one of the finest sections of the entire South Downs Way. Leaving Cocking, we traverse a series of sweeping ridges that deliver magnificent views over the surrounding countryside.

This stretch of trail captures much of what makes the South Downs so special: wide horizons, easy walking and an ever-changing interplay between open grassland, woodland and cultivated farmland. The chalk escarpment forms a constant backdrop, while the broad ridges encourage a steady pace and allow ample opportunity to appreciate the landscape.

This section is also notable for the sense of continuity it offers. Much of the route follows ancient ridge-top pathways that have linked communities for centuries, and as we walk it is easy to imagine generations of shepherds, traders and travellers using these same routes across the downs. The broad skies and sense of openness create a wonderfully timeless atmosphere.

The thermals generated along the escarpment often attract soaring Buzzards, whilst the unmistakable silhouette and croaking call of a Raven may occasionally accompany our progress across the hills. The eventual descent into Amberley is particularly rewarding, leading us towards one of Sussex's prettiest villages, with its historic cottages, church and imposing castle setting at the foot of the Downs.

Distance 12 miles - Overnight in Winchester.

Day 6

End of Part 1. Transfer to Eastbourne for Part 2

Grey Partridge



Today, those guests just completing Part 1 of the walk will depart for home. Those completing the full walk will independently transfer to Eastbourne, our base for the remainder of the tour. Situated between the South Downs and the English Channel, Eastbourne provides an excellent centre from which to explore the eastern half of the trail.

The change of base reflects the changing character of the landscape. While the western downs are characterised by wooded escarpments and broad agricultural ridges, the eastern sections increasingly reveal larger panoramas, open downland and a growing maritime influence.

Depending on arrival time, there may be an opportunity to enjoy the elegant seafront, explore the town's Victorian architecture or simply relax before dinner.

Overnight in Eastbourne.

Tour Grading & Focus

Grade B+ – This tour is designed for those with a good level of fitness who would like to see the wildlife and flora of England's chalk downlands on foot. It is a challenging walk with plenty of up and downhill sections that offers a real sense of achievement for those who take part. The tour covers 50 miles over four consecutive days.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

We will hope for warm, sunny days, but clients should come prepared for all eventualities on this tour. We hope for good weather but even in summer the British weather is unpredictable, so please be prepared for all eventualities. Therefore, warm clothing, waterproofs and sun cream should all be packed. Good quality, comfortable walking boots are recommended and walking poles should be considered.

Binoculars are desirable and cameras optional for those that wish. Macro lenses are perfect for photography, but please be mindful of others who just wish to watch the butterflies and view the wildflowers. Please bring a daypack to carry picnic lunches and water.

Food & Accommodation Included in the Price

Breakfast and evening meals are included in the holiday cost, beginning with the evening meal on Day 1 and finishing with breakfast on Day 6. Accommodation will be a comfortable hotel, in twin, double or single rooms, all of which are en suite. Those making their way to the start of the tour by train should aim to arrive at Winchester railway station, from which it is less than half a mile to the hotel (taxis are available if you don't wish to walk). Lunches, daytime snacks and drinks are not included in the cost of this tour, and we will buy these from shops or cafes each day.

Extending your holiday

We are more than happy to book additional nights at the hotel for you on a bed and breakfast basis at additional cost. Please request this at the time of booking.

How to Book Your Place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests, at the time of booking.

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