

BALCOMBE AND ARDINGLY RESERVOIR, WEST SUSSEX



Challenging Terrain

7 miles
Circular
4 hours

080816



Access Notes



1. The walk has several climbs and descents throughout, including a couple of quite steep sections.
2. The paths are firm for the most part, but the woodland stretches can be very muddy in winter and some stretches of the bridleway alongside the reservoir are muddy all year round, so good boots are a must.
3. There are a few sections of road walking on quiet lanes so take care of traffic.
4. You will need to negotiate several gates, kissing gates, steps, a footbridge plus 2 stiles (both of which have gaps alongside which should be suitable for most dogs to pass through).
5. Most of the paths are enclosed, but you will need to cross one field that may be holding cattle, so take particular care with dogs.

Hi, I'm Luke and this is my West Sussex Weekends walk

It's a 7 mile loop from Balcombe rail station, taking in a long stretch of Ardingly Reservoir (a nature reserve) and the South of England Showground before the mandatory pub stop which will set you up for the return journey through woodlands and lanes. To read my full story visit www.west-sussex-weekends.com so I can tell you why I think you will love this walk and what highlights to expect. The West Sussex Weekends website is a great resource where you will also find ideas for places to stay, eat and drink plus plenty more inspirational stories to tempt you to explore more corners of West Sussex.

Getting there

The walk starts and finishes at Balcombe rail station which is served by trains from London Bridge and Brighton. If you are coming by car, the rail station has its own car park which costs £2.50 per day Mon-Fri and is free at weekends and Bank Holidays (correct June 2016).

Approximate post code **RH17 6JQ**.

If this car park is full, you could park along nearby Newlands, with respect to local residents.

Walk Sections



Start to Balcombe Mill



Leave Balcombe rail station via the exit steps on Platform 2 (not the car park side) and follow the steps up to the road. Turn left along the pavement for just a few paces and cross the road at the designated crossing point. Continue along this far pavement for a few more

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paces and then turn right to join the tarmac path leading you uphill with a wooden handrail running on your left. At the top of the slope you will come to a junction with a residential road, Newlands. Cross over to the far pavement and turn right along this, following the road as it swings left.

At the crossroads of paths (marked with a fingerpost) ignore the side paths, simply keep straight ahead on the road which becomes Oldlands Avenue. Continue all the way to the T-junction at the end and turn left along the pavement. Just after the pavement bears left (immediately after the side road Barn Meadow on your right), cross the road to reach the signed public bridleway. Go through the wide wooden gate (or use the adjacent stile) and follow this enclosed green track ahead to reach a gate.

NOTE: You may come across cattle in this pasture. Go through the gate and walk at about 1 o'clock, heading for the telegraph pole that sits at the corner of the woodland. When you reach this woodland corner, continue in the same direction along the remainder of the field, staying close to the fenced woodland on your left.

In the field corner you will find a choice of two paths out of the field. Do NOT take the metal gate to the left, instead take wooden kissing gate ahead. Follow the stone steps which lead you down through the woodland belt. At the bottom you will emerge to a junction with Mill Lane, directly alongside Balcombe Mill.

1 → 2 Balcombe Mill to West Hill



Turn right along the lane, taking care of traffic, and passing some of the former mill buildings on your right. The lane leads you over the end of Ardingly Reservoir, which will be your companion for the next stretch of the walk. Stay with the lane as it swings right, heading uphill, and about 150 metres later, turn right through the wooden gate to join the bridleway leading you into the site of Ardingly Reservoir.

Follow the stone bridleway path leading you steadily downhill and then meandering ahead with the reservoir bank running on your right. Sitting within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Ardingly Reservoir was constructed in 1978 and has three uses: water supply, nature conservation and recreation. It is one of two South East Water reservoirs which between them supply about 8% of the south east's drinking water. It is a popular fishing spot and the activity centre on the opposite bank offers sailing, windsurfing and canoeing. The adjacent grassland meadows are cut only every two years, allowing rare wild flowers and insects to flourish. On your waterside journey look out for ducks, geese and grebe on the water, ancient oaks and orchids on the banks and you may even be lucky enough to see a kingfisher.

At the first junction of paths, ignore the bridleway signed off to

the left, simply continue alongside the reservoir edge. Eventually you will emerge out through a gate to reach a junction with the road, West Hill.

2 → 3 West Hill to St Peter's Church



Turn right along the pavement and follow it as it crosses the north-east arm of Ardingly Reservoir. At the far side, turn right through the kissing gate and follow the stone path as it leads you alongside the reservoir once again. Continue just until the first signed junction of footpaths (which is alongside a waterside bench on your right). Turn left here, crossing a stile to enter a grass meadow.

Follow the obvious grass path ahead, climbing up the meadow. Pass through the gap in the fence at the top and you will emerge to the corner of a crop field. Walk straight ahead, still climbing, following the left-hand boundary of this field. Take a moment to glance to your right and you will have good views across the reservoir and activity centre. At the top of the field, turn left to join the unmade farm track.

The farm track leads you past some barns on your left, to reach a signed junction of paths. Stay with the main track (at about 11 o'clock) and follow this past a row of properties on your right. Now simply keep ahead on this main track (which then becomes a lane), ignoring any paths to the sides. You will come to a road junction with St Peter's Church in Ardingly on your left.

3 → 4 St Peter's Church to Gardeners Arms



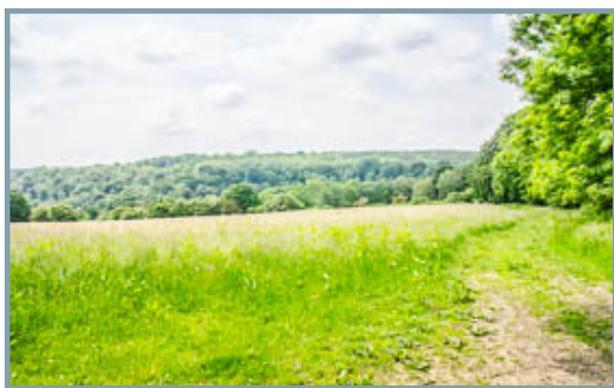
Turn right for a short distance (passing a pair of cottages with red-tiled fronts on your left) and then turn immediately left onto the signed public footpath, an unmade track between a fence and hedgerow. At the end of this track, pass through the single wooden gate (just to your right) and you will emerge to a T-

junction with the main access drive for the South of England Showground.

Turn left along this and follow it as it bears right (with the wire boundary fence of the showground running on your right). This showground, which is managed by the South of England Agricultural Society, hosts an eclectic mix of events throughout the year from country shows and horse events, to dog competitions and antique fairs.

At the first footpath fingerpost, ignore the path signed into a tunnel of trees on your left, instead stay with the access drive which bears slightly right. At the top of the main showground, stay with the access drive which turns right, exiting onto the B2028. Immediately opposite is the Gardeners Arms pub, the perfect spot for mid-walk refreshments.

4 → 5 Gardeners Arms to Footbridge



When you have finished at the pub, cross back over the road (to the showground side) and, with your back to the road, turn right along the pavement (with a hedge running on your left and the road to your right). Where this hedge line ends, turn left onto the tarmac access drive signed to Tillinghurst Farm (and marked as a public footpath). Further along, take time to enjoy the far reaching views across the wooded hillsides at about 10 o'clock.

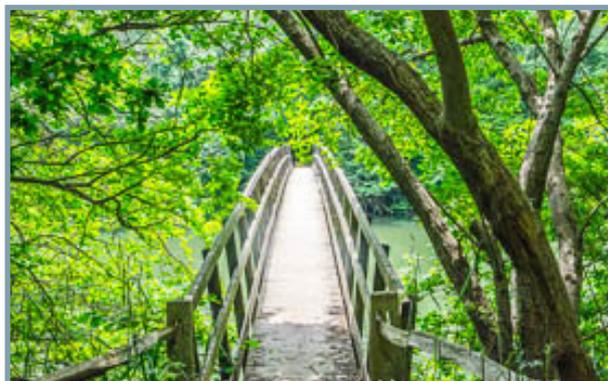
Continue straight ahead on the tarmac driveway which leads you steadily downhill between hedgerows. Pass through the metal entrance gate (or use the stile alongside) and, a few paces later you will come to a fork. Take the right-hand branch, passing a pond on your left, and then bear right to join the grass path which leads you along the right-hand edge of the farm's barns and outbuildings. Beyond the buildings, keep ahead to pick up the farm track and follow this steadily downhill to reach the corner of a hillside meadow.

Walk straight ahead on the grass track which follows the right-hand boundary, leading you steadily downhill. Pass through the gateway and continue along the right-hand boundary of this second meadow. In the bottom corner, keep ahead to join the narrow unmade path which leads you through a belt of woodland and along the edge of a very small meadow and through another gateway. At the end of this short section of track you will emerge into a third large meadow.

There is a bench just to your left here, the perfect spot to pause and take in the views. Walk ahead along the right-hand boundary and, towards the bottom you will pass a wooden facilities centre through the fence to your right. This sits within the grounds of Kew at Wakehurst, part of the Royal Botanic Gardens. The gardens surround an Elizabethan mansion and comprise ornamental gardens, woodland, sculptures, national plant collections and the millennium seed bank.

At the bottom of the meadow, pass through the gate ahead and glance to your right where you will see the elaborate side gate for Kew at Wakehurst. Turn left to join the woodland path. At the bottom of the slope, just before you reach the kissing gate ahead, turn right to reach the beautiful arched footbridge across the north-east arm of Ardingly Reservoir.

5 → 6 Footbridge to Edmunds Farm



Cross the bridge and about 10 paces beyond this, you will come to a fork. Bear right here, on the public footpath which leads you uphill through the woodland. Stay with this path which winds steeply up through the woodland. Eventually you will emerge out to a junction with a quiet tarmac lane. Turn left along this, taking care of any occasional traffic.

Stay with the main lane, passing a pond on your right and, further along, you will come to a white fingerpost road sign, marking a junction with Mill Lane. Turn right here, signed to Balcombe, and continue on the lane, still being aware of any traffic, to reach Edmunds Farm.

6 → 7 Edmunds Farm to Balcombe Centre



Pass Edmunds Farm and then continue on the lane for about half a mile and you will come to Balcombe Mill (which we passed on the outward leg). Follow the road as it swings right past buildings on your left and, just as the Mill House buildings begin on your right, turn left into the signed pubic footpath (which we used on the outward leg).

Climb the steps which lead you steeply up through the woodland. At the top, pass through the kissing gate to enter the cattle pasture. Walk straight ahead, following the line of fenced woodland on your right. Where this fence steps back, veer slightly left (about 11 o'clock) and pass through the gate in the

top boundary. Keep ahead along the green track and go through the gate (or adjacent stile) to reach the road in Balcombe. From here, we will be returning to Balcombe rail station, but via a different route in order to visit the shops, pub and tea rooms.

Turn right along the pavement. At the mini-roundabout, cross over Mill Lane and go straight ahead (passing a brick post box on your right) to join the tarmac footpath with a row of mature trees running on your left. At the top of the hill you will come to a road junction at the centre of Balcombe.

7 → 8 **Balcombe Centre to End**



There are plenty of options for some post-walk refreshments. At this junction you will find The Half Moon Inn as well as Balcombe Stores (which sells a range of local produce). Alternatively, you will shortly be passing the popular Balcombe Tea Rooms.

Turn left at this junction onto Bramble Hill (signed to the railway station and Cuckfield). A few metres along you will pass Balcombe Tea Rooms on your right. Follow the road all the way to the end, a T-junction with the B2036. Cross over to the far pavement with care and turn left along this (signed to Brighton). Continue for about 350 metres and you will come to Balcombe rail station on your right where this walk began.

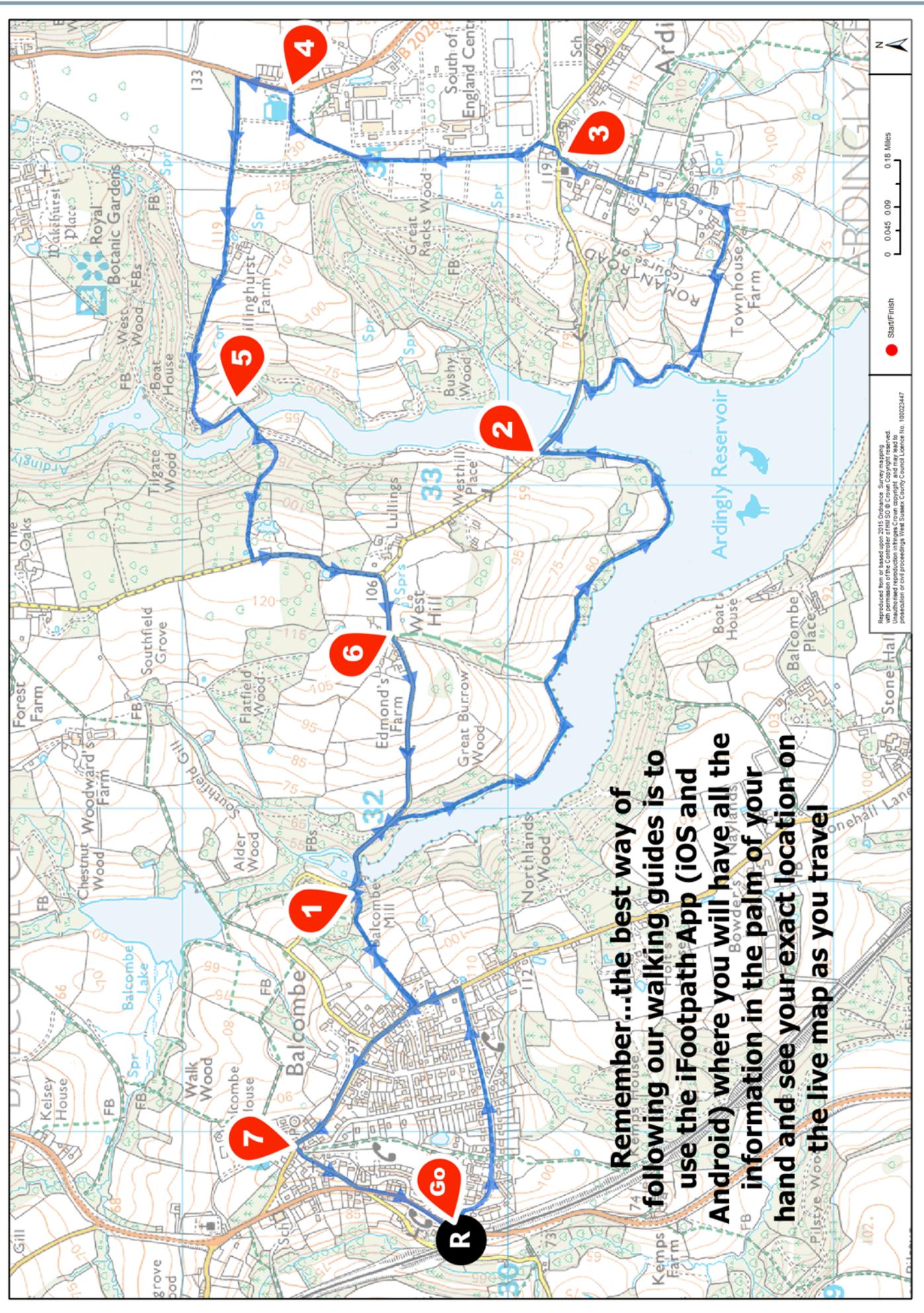
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Disclaimer

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Walking Safety

For your safety and comfort we recommend that you take the following with you on your walk: bottled water, snacks, a waterproof jacket, waterproof/sturdy boots, a woolly hat and fleece (in winter and cold weather), a fully-charged mobile phone, a whistle, a compass and an Ordnance Survey map of the area. Check the weather forecast before you leave, carry appropriate clothing and do not set out in fog or mist as these conditions can seriously affect your ability to navigate the route. Take particular care on cliff/mountain paths where steep drops can present a particular hazard. Some routes include sections along roads – take care to avoid any traffic at these points. Around farmland take care with children and dogs, particularly around machinery and livestock. If you are walking on the coast make sure you check the tide times before you set out.



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