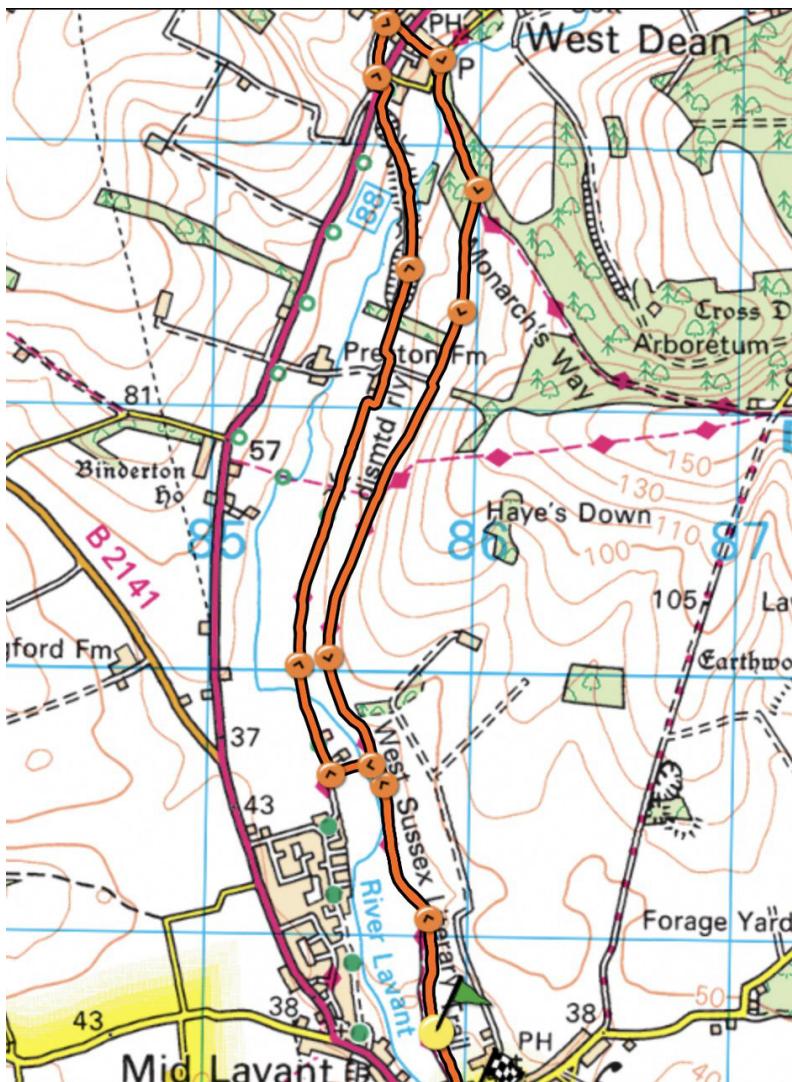

Favourite Nature Rambles Around Chichester

by David & Lynda Thornley

Lavant to West Dean



This walk is just right for certain people, it's flat all the way and there's a pub at the halfway point. It's also a delightful ramble through this picturesque valley heading out on the Centurion Way to West Dean and returning via the West Sussex Literary Trail.

It's just under six miles but very easy going on well established paths that are byways for the most part; the only down side is that it tends to be a bit busy at times, especially in the weekends.

The start and finish is by the cricket ground in Mid Lavant where there's plenty of room to park, usually right by the bridge that leads to the lane heading north.

This tracks the river Lavant and you can soon see the houses of Mid Lavant across the fields on the left hand side with Hayes Down, which is a pheasant shoot, on the right hand side.

After a short while the water works appears on the left where you take a short path that links the



Literary trail to the Centurion Way. This follows what's left of the old Chichester to Midhurst railway line and now forms an excellent cycleway from Fishbourne to West Dean.

There are plenty of reminders of the railway that was active up to 1970 carrying sugar beet from Singleton to Chichester even though passengers ceased well before. There are several bridges, most in good condition some with a few of the original maintenance markings which haven't faded yet.

Being so flat it doesn't take long to pass through the fields where sheep graze then under the road and up to the north of West Dean. The path finishes just past West Dean where the line formally entered a tunnel which is now home to bats and out of bounds. It is hoped that it will eventually be re-opened and extended the path to Midhurst.

Some steps lead down to the main road and The Dean public house which would be an ideal halfway house, alternatively there is the West Dean Stores very close by that sells drinks and is popular with cyclists as well as walkers.



Once refreshed it's only a hundred yards or so to the Lavant and a little foot bridge that crosses it leading to the path that goes uphill towards The Trundle; all very pretty with coppiced willow on the banks. Bordering it is the wall marking the boundary of West Dean gardens on the left; there are glimpses of them through the gates.

The main Literary path is about a quarter of a mile further on but if you like a to take a

diversion there's a short path through the woods that adds a bit of interest.

Once on the Literary Path you're on the edge of Chalk downland that's frequently grazed by sheep so dogs need to be carefully controlled. Much of the time the paths are well fenced but there are spots where problems could occur.

The whole valley has many areas of natural vegetation and meadow so there are plenty of butterflies to watch out for, especially the common ones such as large whites and meadow browns. The views over to the other side of the valley, over the old railway line are particularly pleasing as long as they're not interrupted by a motorbike speeding along the road that also follows the valley.



There is a major junction after a mile or so with a short link to the Centurion way in one direction and a trailing fork leading back up the hill toward The Trundle. Eventually the chalk gives way to a path close to the river with meadows for grazing cattle. These, we are informed, are used by the Three Harbours Grazing Beef which is available a local Co-ops, sounds like it would be well worth a try.

In summer the path was strangely silent in sharp contrast with the Spring when so many song birds were making themselves known. All too soon the houses of Lavant appear on the right and we're back where we started.