



WALK 4 LAVANT VALLEY

Distance: 8.5 km

Rating: EASY



This circular route follows the Centurion Way to West Dean and returns via the gentle lowland slopes of the hillside to the east of the fertile river valley. Grazing sheep are a feature of these hillsides. The walk as far as West Dean is suitable for wheelchair users and buggies.

HISTORY

- A** The name of **Sheepwash Lane** recalls the history of placing wooden sluices across the River Lavant to create ponds where sheep would be washed. The adjacent **Pound** was a stone-walled enclosure where lost or troublesome animals were collected, and redeemed for a fee.
- B** The Midhurst Road was Lavant's commercial centre, boasting a small **village shop** until the mid 1990s. House names like 'The Old Bakery' and 'The Old Blacksmiths' bear witness to other former trades.
- C** **Bleach's Garage** stood on the site of A1 Autos, providing fuel for local vehicles until 1983.
- D** **Lavant Station** (now private housing) served the Chichester to Midhurst line, which opened in 1881 but was never profitable. Passenger traffic ceased in 1935, but the Lavant to Chichester section remained in use for transporting sugar beet and gravel until 1993. The trackbed now forms part of the Centurion Way.
- E** From 1961 the **Lines Brothers factory** produced the famous Tri-ang Toys in Lavant. In 1970 it was taken over by Goodwood Toys.
- F** In 1917 the government built a **wood distillation factory** in Lavant, producing acetone for the munitions industry. It closed in 1919, but in 1923 it was bought by W. Pearce, Bentwood Company, who made wooden hoops for trunks, and rifle butts during WWII.
- G** **Binderton Chapel** was built in 1671 by Thomas Smythe, owner of Binderton House. The 17th Century house became Anthony Eden's refuge from London politics between 1941 and 1952.
- H** **Preston Farm**, owned by the Earls of Arundel in the Middle Ages, was a major sheep farm that produced huge quantities of cheese.
- I** Humans have altered the course of the **River Lavant** for almost 2,000 years. Originally entering the sea near Pagham, the Romans diverted it to Chichester and Fishbourne; and today it starts in East Dean and flows for 9 miles, entering Chichester Harbour at Apuldram.
- J** **West Dean Estate** is run by the Edward James Charitable Foundation, set up by Edward James, the surrealist philanthropist. West Dean House, with its award-winning gardens, is now a centre of excellence for arts and crafts.
- K** The exposed chalk crater in the hillside to the east of Binderton is the site where a German **V1 flying bomb** ("doodlebug") crashed in 1944.

NATURE

The fertile Lavant Valley consists of ancient sheep pasture, interspersed with poppy-edged cornfields. The River Lavant is a winterbourne and typically does not flow in the summer months.

When it runs, white flowers of **water crowfoot** drift on the surface. **Egrets** and **herons** arrive in search of fish and frogs, while migratory birds such as **martins**, **swifts**, **swallows** soar through the sky feeding on the insects.

As the water level drops, the riverbed often becomes choked with **blue water-speedwell**, **watercress** and deadly **hemlock water-dropwort**.

Rabbits and **hares** graze in the fields, keeping a wary eye out for **sparrowhawks** and **buzzards**. North of Preston Farm, flaps allow **badgers** access through the fence, while the path often shows evidence of their digging for worms and grubs.

The **ash**, **alder**, and **oak trees** along Marsh Lane provide a home for birds such as **long-tailed tits**, **bullfinches** and **chaffinches**. **Comma** and **Peacock** butterflies can be seen basking in the sun of the summer and early autumn.

The stream alongside the path provides a habitat for marsh plants such as **water figwort**, while the pink flowers of **great willowherb** and yellow **evening primrose** brighten its banks.

In autumn, Marsh Lane provides birds with a rich harvest of berries: **rosehips**, **elderberries**, **blackberries**, **haws** and **sloes**.

MARTIN

SWALLOW

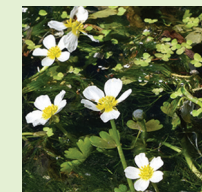
SWIFT



Haws



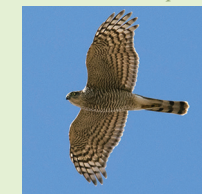
Evening primrose



Water crowfoot



Hemlock water-dropwort



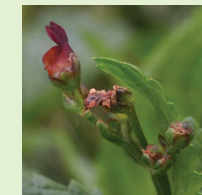
Sparrowhawk



Badger flap



Comma butterfly



Water figwort



Great willowherb

DIRECTIONS

1. Leave the Village Green, up Sheepwash Lane, passing the pond and old village pond, on your left. **(A)**
2. Go up the hill until you reach an archway, opposite the garage. **(B) (C)**
3. Pass through the archway and along the road past the Old Railway Station. **(D)**
4. Follow the road north through the houses for 1 km. **(E) (F)**
5. Once you meet the green central island go to the top right hand corner and back onto Centurion Way for 3.5km **(G) (H) (I)**
6. Pass through the tunnel and after 250m take the steps down past the school, to the A286 in West Dean Village.
7. Cross the road, and with the Dean Inn on your left, go down the lane past the Village Stores and turn right at the end by the river.
8. After 200m cross the river and take the path alongside the wall of the West Dean estate. **(J)**
9. On reaching the field (after the coppice), turn right and follow the valley back to the Village Green. **(K)**

Please take care when crossing roads, and follow the Countryside Code (www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code).



Supported by Lavant Parish Council.

