

Lowland Heath

Black Down is designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) as it contains one of Britain's rapidly disappearing habitats – Lowland Heath. Globally, this is rarer than the Amazonian Rainforest! It is home to rare bird species like the Dartford Warbler, Nightjar and Woodlark.

Heathland Restoration

Heathland was created by early Man who cleared the forest to graze animals which provided food and clothing. Without fertilisers this constantly "stripped" the soil of nutrients so that nothing but hardy heathers and grasses grew. The heath has dramatically changed over the past 60 years as few folk who used the commons were left. Without grazing invasive trees and plants quickly overtook the heathers by shading them from sunlight, threatening the wildlife that depends on the heath to survive. To return more areas to open heathland, which is of greater nature conservation value than the newer woodlands, selected felling and management (including grazing) is needed.

Topography & Geology

With a height of 280 metres and thus a rainfall of 950mm a year, Black Down is the highest point in West Sussex and the wettest in the Weald of South East England. It forms part of the Lower Greensand arc that surrounds the central basin of the Weald. The soil is a coarse, free-draining, acid sandstone interrupted by hard chert layers (quarried for roadstone), with an impermeable clay layer beneath. Rainwater percolates through the sandstone then travels horizontally when it meets the clay. It emerges on the hillside through the sandstone/clay join where a spring line forms, making the clay slippery and inducing the formation of a landslide zone on the south side which gives Black Down its characteristic shape, visible from as far away as Kent. The streams that drain out on the west form a source of the River Wey while those in the east and south drain to the River Rother.

The higher than average rainfall the hill collects helps to encourage bilberries to thrive. Three types of heather grow on Black Down, they all flower in August-September. Keep your eyes open by the bog ponds for colourful dragonflies and damselflies.

Archeology

The earliest evidence of human activity found at Black Down are Mesolithic flints (10,000-4,500 BC) and Neolithic flints (4,500-2,000 BC) some of which are now in Haslemere Museum. These finds, in an area with no naturally occurring flint, suggest that it was an important distribution point in prehistoric trading routes. There are two Bronze Age burial sites on the hill and evidence of a possible settlement. By the Middle Ages farms were established on the slopes with homes and pasture first mentioned in a 1481 Deed of Partition. A southern promontory was used as a beacon by the 16th century and later (1796) became a telegraph and then (1816) semaphore station. It was also used by the Home Guard in World War Two. Sunken tracks remain from centuries of use as droveways, cart tracks and smugglers' ways and many old placenames are still in use. In Victorian times writers and artists were drawn to the area which became known as a beauty spot.

Historical Associations

Tennyson's Lane - named after Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) who became Poet Laureate in 1850 and who lived locally at Aldworth House which was built for him as a summer retreat from the Isle of Wight and where he wrote much of his later poetry. Some of the elaborate exterior stonework and interior woodwork is said to reflect Tennyson's description of Arthur's Camelot in 'Idylls of the King'.

Black Down House (1607) with its panelled rooms and mullioned windows was used as Oliver Cromwell's headquarters during the Civil War.

Haslemere Area

Haslemere is an attractive old market town nestling near the point where three counties meet. This area was described in an early visitor guide as the 'fashionable capital of the beautiful Surrey highlands', it now lies within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and much of the beautiful countryside around Haslemere is owned by The National Trust. Black Down was given to them in 1944 by W.E. Hunter as a memorial to his wife.

Black Down

Black Down is a significant landscape feature and has great nature conservation value. It offers walkers and riders unspoilt country with panoramic views looking east and south over the Weald and also west across the Vale of Fernhurst to Hampshire.

The National Trust

For information on The National Trust please Tel: 01428 683207 or visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk. Black Down & Hindhead Committee of the National Trust (contact Tel: 01428 642562).

The Serpent Trail

A new 64 mile (103km) walking route through the Sussex Greensand Hills.

Sussex Border Path

A 159 mile (256km) long distance route following the inland borders of Sussex from Thorney Island in West Sussex to Rye in East Sussex.

Travel & Local Information

For information on Haslemere and the local area and other walks contact:

Haslemere Visitor & Local Information Centre
(Funded by Haslemere Town Council & Haslemere Initiative)

at Haslemere Museum,
78 High Street,
Haslemere
GU27 2LA
tel: 01428 645425
www.haslemere.com/vic

Black Down is a 30 minute walk from Haslemere station (Waterloo & Portsmouth). Turn left along Lower Street. Continue into the High Street, passing the Town Hall. Go straight ahead into Petworth Road. Take the second road on the right (Haste Hill). It bears right uphill and joins Tennyson's Lane at a five-way junction (straight across). Continue along the lane, bearing left, until you reach the car park.

For local train and bus information call Travel Line South East on 08706 082608 or visit their website: www.travelline.org.uk

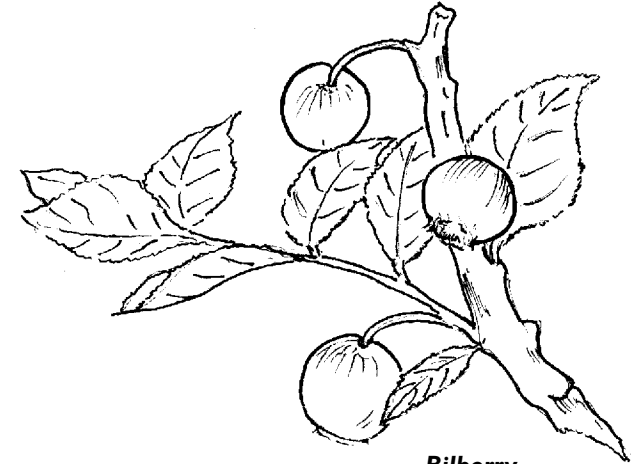
Refreshments and accommodation are available in Haslemere and surrounding villages.

Follow the Countryside Code

Please

- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Consider other people.

Black Down Walk



Bilberry

*An unusual circular
walk through heath and
wood near Haslemere,
with spectacular views.*

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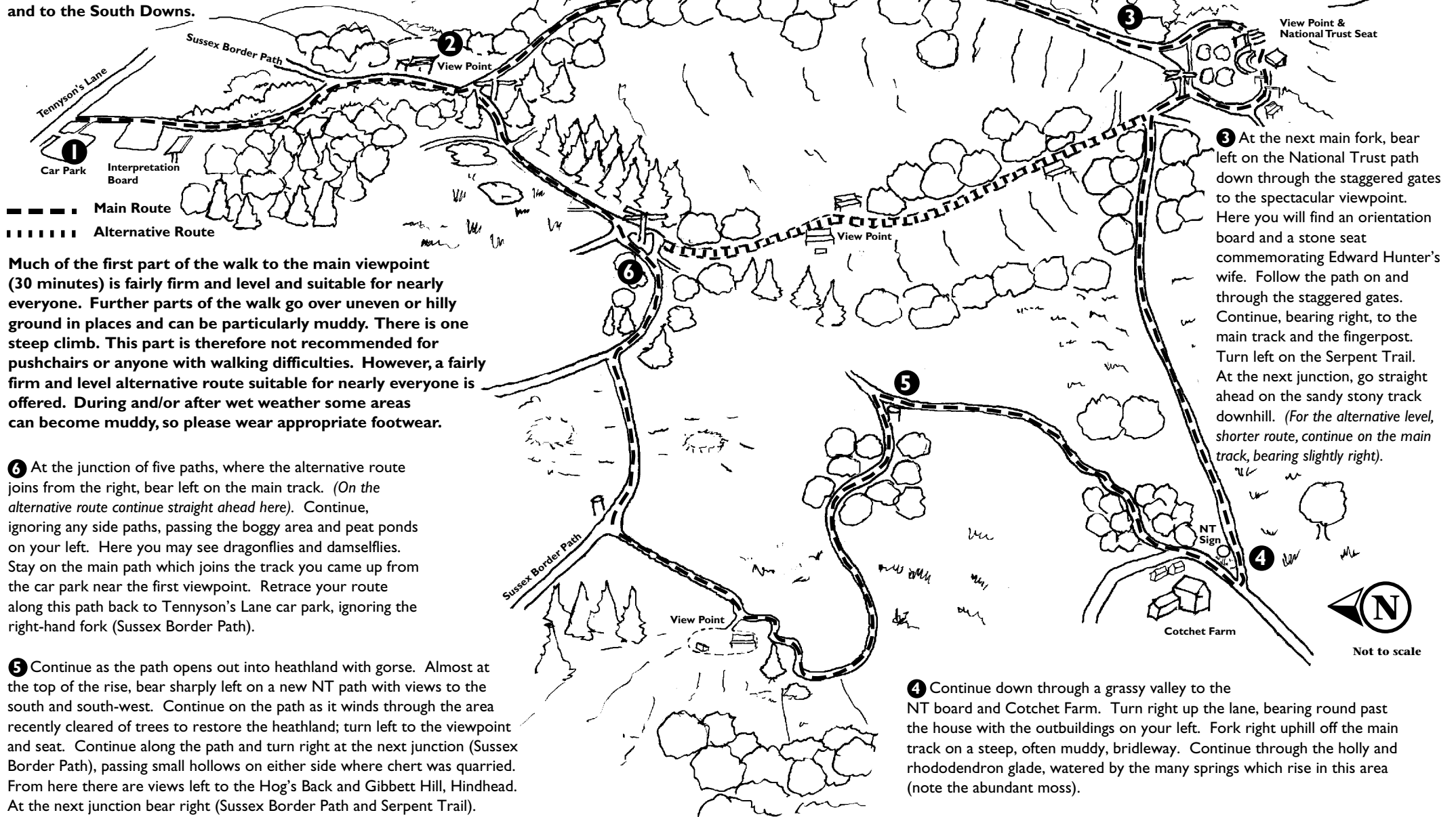
Black Down Walk

About This Walk

This interesting circular walk is 5km (3¼ miles) long and takes approximately 1-1½ hours. It starts from the car park in Tennyson's Lane, Haslemere. The route takes you through heathland and woodland and is covered by OS Explorer map 133. There are very fine views of the Sussex Weald and to the South Downs.

1 Start at the car park in Tennyson's Lane. Go up the track off the lane, past the second car park and continue, passing the interpretation board. A track (Sussex Border Path) joins from the left. Continue on up the sunken lane edged with bilberry and gorse, surrounded by coniferous and mixed woodland.

2 Turn left after a short distance to the viewpoint and seat for good views to the south-east. Continue on along the track. Turn left at fork (after approx. 75m), following the Serpent Trail and left again at next fork. Continue, ignoring any side paths and pass through the beech hanger. Continue straight ahead at the junction. Bear right at the fork on the Serpent Trail.



Much of the first part of the walk to the main viewpoint (30 minutes) is fairly firm and level and suitable for nearly everyone. Further parts of the walk go over uneven or hilly ground in places and can be particularly muddy. There is one steep climb. This part is therefore not recommended for pushchairs or anyone with walking difficulties. However, a fairly firm and level alternative route suitable for nearly everyone is offered. During and/or after wet weather some areas can become muddy, so please wear appropriate footwear.

6 At the junction of five paths, where the alternative route joins from the right, bear left on the main track. (On the alternative route continue straight ahead here). Continue, ignoring any side paths, passing the boggy area and peat ponds on your left. Here you may see dragonflies and damselflies. Stay on the main path which joins the track you came up from the car park near the first viewpoint. Retrace your route along this path back to Tennyson's Lane car park, ignoring the right-hand fork (Sussex Border Path).

5 Continue as the path opens out into heathland with gorse. Almost at the top of the rise, bear sharply left on a new NT path with views to the south and south-west. Continue on the path as it winds through the area recently cleared of trees to restore the heathland; turn left to the viewpoint and seat. Continue along the path and turn right at the next junction (Sussex Border Path), passing small hollows on either side where chert was quarried. From here there are views left to the Hog's Back and Gibbett Hill, Hindhead. At the next junction bear right (Sussex Border Path and Serpent Trail).

4 Continue down through a grassy valley to the NT board and Cotchet Farm. Turn right up the lane, bearing round past the house with the outbuildings on your left. Fork right uphill off the main track on a steep, often muddy, bridleway. Continue through the holly and rhododendron glade, watered by the many springs which rise in this area (note the abundant moss).

3 At the next main fork, bear left on the National Trust path down through the staggered gates to the spectacular viewpoint. Here you will find an orientation board and a stone seat commemorating Edward Hunter's wife. Follow the path on and through the staggered gates. Continue, bearing right, to the main track and the fingerpost. Turn left on the Serpent Trail. At the next junction, go straight ahead on the sandy stony track downhill. (For the alternative level, shorter route, continue on the main track, bearing slightly right).



Not to scale