

and enters another hazel corridor as it crosses the old golf course and descends to the valley bottom, close to where the main valley is joined. Turn right at a T junction (left is private) and follow the track along the valley bottom. After about 200 metres, look out for an enclosed path on the left signposted "Pilcher Monument". It is a five-minute uphill walk to the monument where there is a stone plaque and an information board including historic pictures and a great viewpoint.

*Percy Pilcher was an early aviation pioneer who flew hang gliders from this valley in 1896/7. He built a powered triplane but was killed in an accident in 1899 before it could fly. If he had lived to fly the triplane, the history of powered flight could have been different as the Wright Brothers first flight in America was not until 1903.*

- 7 Beyond the turning for the monument, the path soon reaches buildings at Upper Austin Lodge. The path widens into a surfaced lane and bends left then right through the complex of buildings. After passing a pair of semi-detached houses, turn left onto a path that soon leads to a driveway (formally the drive to the club house).
- 8 You are now at the confluence of two dry valleys and the route heads up the second, more westerly valley. Turn left onto the drive and then fork right just before a set of entrance gates. Follow a grassy path along the valley bottom until a private sign prevents further access and you have to turn right onto another path. Follow the path uphill and into woodland where it bears left sloping upwards across the slope until a flight of 66 steps leads to the top edge of the wood.
- 9 Enter a field, soon reaching the top of the ridge and maintain direction, heading towards a point roughly halfway along the left boundary where two adjacent tracks exit. Take the right exit and immediately cross a track that leaves a field on the left. Follow the path through woodland along the ridge top to a junction. Fork right and start a fairly long quite steep descent.

*To the right is Preston Hill Country Park. Managed by Kent County Council this is an important chalk grassland site, with an intriguing history and features of its former rifle range can still be seen. There is a waymarked circular route to explore the site and interpretation boards.*

- 10 At the bottom of the slope, the path leaves the woodland and crosses the front of a private garden. It then runs through another smaller patch of woodland and across a field to arrive back at the main road (A225). Walk left a short distance along the verge and then cross with care to an enclosed path on the far side. This leads to a railway crossing (watch out for passing trains). Continue ahead from the crossing, following the field boundary to a junction then turn left to walk across the bottom of the field and then left again up Station Road to Shoreham station.



The Darent Valley Rail Trails have been created by the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme. DVLPS is led by the Kent Downs AONB, working throughout the Darent Valley to conserve the area's rich heritage landscapes and encourage people to enjoy, explore and connect to them [www.darent-valley.org.uk](http://www.darent-valley.org.uk)

A selection of the Rail Trails are available to use on the Darent Valley Trails app, available free of charge on the App Store and Google Play. With special thanks to Alan Dyer for devising this route.



EUROPEAN UNION



Co-financed by the European Union and the European Regional Development Fund

# Ridges and Valleys

**A 5 mile circular walk around stunning countryside to the east of Shoreham, through a network of dry valleys and woodland with panoramic vistas across the landscape from the valley tops.**



Photo credit - John Miller photography.com and Andy Valler

**Start / end point:** Shoreham station

**Length:** 5 miles / 8km

**Terrain:** Fields and tracks with some on-road sections. Undulating path. Some steep slopes up and down. Two busy road crossings

**Accessibility:** Two long uphill flights of steps (138 and 66 steps), kissing gates and stiles on this walk

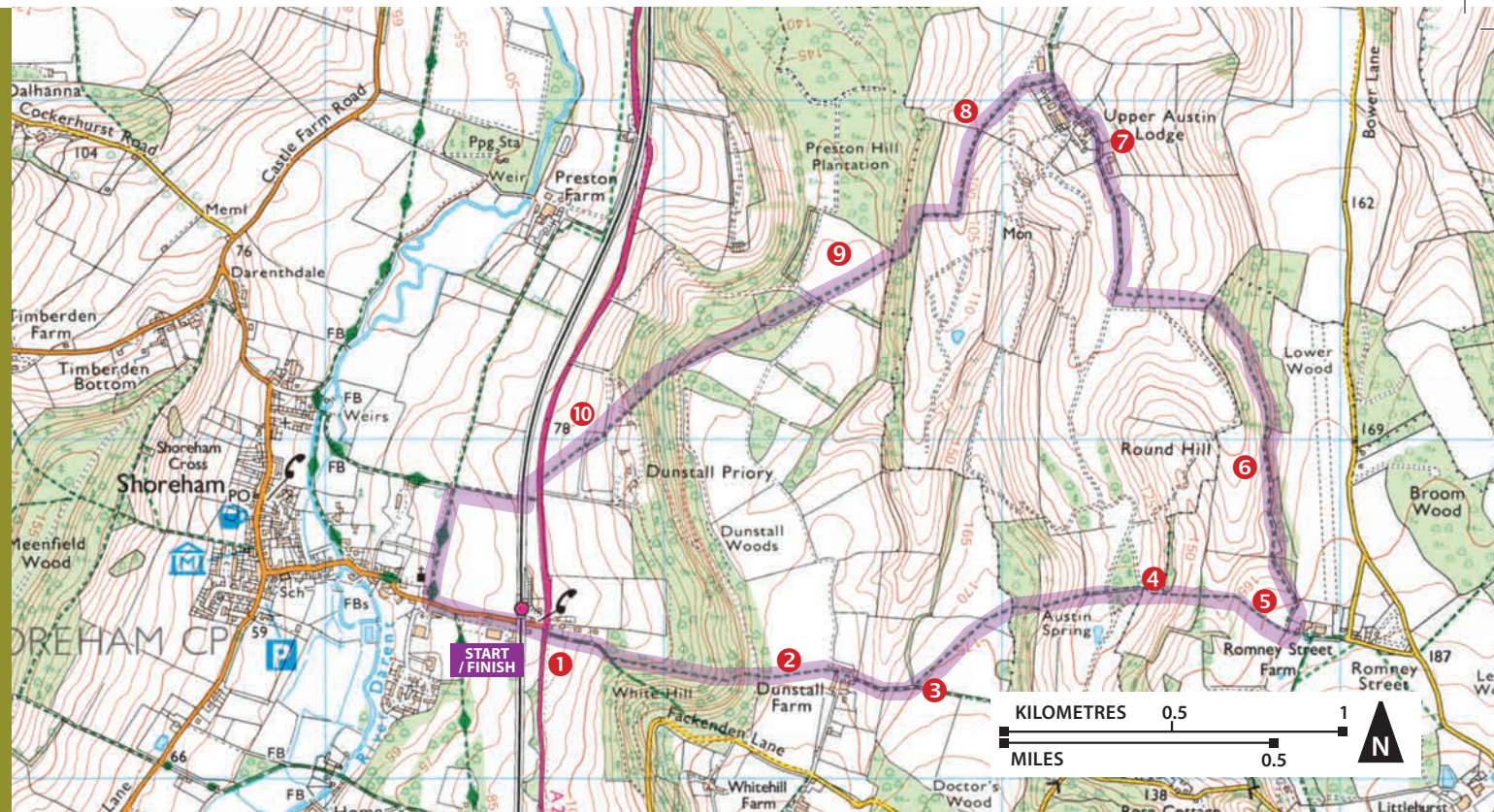
**Toilets/refreshments:** In Shoreham village

**What3Words:** ///dined.pens.cools

**OS Explorer map:** 147

### On The Way

- Explore hidden dry valleys that cut deep into the Downs and enjoy fine views of rolling countryside
- Pass through an abandoned golf course reverting back to nature
- A chance to visit a monument to the aviation pioneer, Percy Pilcher
- Pass through a former military firing range



© Crown Copyright. All rights reserved 100019238 2023

*Chalk dry valleys are landforms left over from the ice age. Chalk is a permeable rock which means that water drains through it, but in the ice age, the ground froze into permafrost that was impermeable. During the summer months, meltwater would carve a valley while the underlying ground remained frozen and water couldn't go through it. After the ice age, the permafrost melted and the chalk became permeable again so the surface water drained away leaving a water-carved valley that is now dry.*

- 1** Leave Shoreham station and walk out to the main road. Cross with care to a track to the right of a house and follow it uphill. Just past the end of a garden fence, fork left onto a woodland path which initially goes around the hillside. Go up the long flight of 138 steps followed by a short gap of four more. Go past a crossing path and climb a little further to the top where the path emerges onto a level field.
- 2** Cross the field to Dunstalls Farm. Enter the farmyard, turn right then left, passing between farm buildings before leaving the farmyard on a track heading downhill. Drop into a shallow depression which forms the top end of the first dry valley encountered with long distance views down the valley to the left.

- 3** At the top of the far slope, fork left leaving the main track to head diagonally across a field. At the far side, enter woodland and descend fairly steeply around to the left near the bottom of the wood. Go through the kissing gate and emerge onto open downland.

- 4** There is an excellent panoramic view here. The main dry valley is laid out below with a ridge beyond and the vista extends down the valley

to the left and up to the right where the more enclosed upper section of the valley is known as Magpie Bottom. Descend the valley side and at the bottom, enter a corridor of hazel trees.

*This area forms part of the former Austin Lodge Golf Course which closed in 2014 and has since been gradually reverting to nature. It is still possible to see former features of the golf course in some places such as bunkers.*

- 5** Cross the valley bottom and make the steep climb up the far side. The slope eases towards the top. Cross the path and climb over a stile. Continue ahead across another dry valley until reaching a stile to the right of the house.

- 6** The route now descends the right side of the valley. Follow the upper edge of fields until a short ascent leads temporarily back into woodland. When leaving the woodland, the path turns left