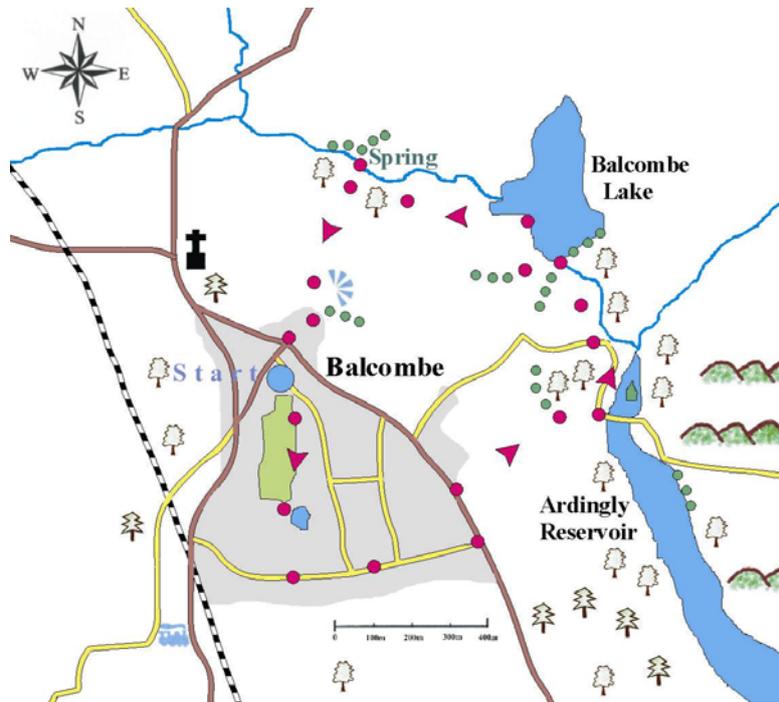


BALCOMBE VILLAGE WALK

This is perhaps the most rural – and muddy - of our village walks and is best enjoyed during a spell of dry weather.

Distance: 2¼ miles. Allow 1¼ hours.



With your back to the entrance to Balcombe Victory Hall turn right up Stockcroft Road and in 50m turn half right between a wooden bench and the Parish Church Room on a tarmac path.

The origin of the name Balcombe has long been subject to conjecture and it's fun to decide your own interpretation. Coombe certainly refers to the steep sided valley where the old mill was. 'Bal' could be the old Celtic word for 'sun' (or a ball of hot iron?) or more likely an abbreviation of the Saxon Tribe 'Bealda' - all pretty names for a pretty place!

In 50m this path opens out onto the Recreation Ground provided by Mid Sussex District Council. Follow the path to the left of the field. At the far corner of the field the path narrows into a 'twitchen' to pass behind bungalows to a public road. Continue straight ahead along the road to a T-junction and turn left into what becomes Oldlands Avenue

Follow the path on the left side of this very pleasant avenue, ignoring all turnings to left & right.

The predominant tree here is the Lime Tree, much beloved by honeybees for their sweet scented flower clusters. In June & July the flowers produce rich, sticky nectar that the bees delight to feed on. What a pleasure to see these trees in our villages.

When eventually you pass a tennis court on the right you will come to a T-junction. Here turn left heading slightly downhill on the left side of the road. In just 150m opposite Barn Meadow cross the

road carefully and take the bridleway to the right- passing through the gate or over the stile. There is a stone plinth at ground level to indicate the 'right of way'. In a further 50m pass through a small metal gate and continue ahead across the open field. Pass to the right of the tree line, following the fingerpost downhill, and in a further 100m, reach the corner of this field.

Ignore the bridleway going left through a metal gate and continue half right following the 'footpath' fingerpost to pass through a kissing gate. There now follows a flight of nearly 100 steps down through the woods.

Just over half way down there's a millstone to remind us that we are nearing water. The stone and seat were put here over 10 years ago by the Balcombe Footpath & Countryside Association and are a welcome sight to those going uphill!

The steps lead onto a narrow public road where a right turn will take you past The Mill to view the lovely Ardingly Reservoir from the bridge.

This reservoir was created in 1979 by the damming of the Shell & Ardingly Brooks. It can hold nearly 5,000 million litres of water – our most vital commodity. Man can last nine weeks without food but less than one without water and it's good that we can provide and conserve this resource so attractively.

Now retrace your steps carefully past The Mill, keeping on the outside of the bend.

This was a gristmill for grinding corn. It had an overshot wheel –sadly no longer to be seen- and it was used commercially until the 1920's

Now walk past the steps and continue up the road. Cross when you can and pass besides the beautiful gardens of The Mill House and follow the road as it swings sharp left. In 50m, as the bend straightens, turn right off the road following a footpath fingerpost going uphill into the trees. At the top of this small rise cross a stile and follow the tree line on your right to a second stile. This leads over a plank bridge into the next field where, in 50m, a kissing gate opens onto the road besides Balcombe Lake.

The lake is quite natural and was much larger at one time. It is now a delightfully peaceful place enjoyed quietly by anglers and country walkers.

Across the road is a 4 fingered post and our route now follows the footpath going half left through the kissing gate across a muddy field. In 75m at a plank bridge over a little stream turn right, staying level and following the tree line on your right. Pass through a metal kissing gate and turn left to follow a delightful path through the trees besides the lake. After crossing an open meadow – where, in mid summer, you may be lucky enough to see the lesser-spotted orchid - the path re-enters the woods over two footbridges and then crosses a further two plank bridges. Soon after a sharp left turn you will reach a T-junction of paths. Here turn right to walk down a flight of fifteen steps to the duckboards

On your right, protected behind the 'half-round' fencing, is Chalybeate Mineral Spring, which is rich in iron salts – as you can see from the red iron oxide deposits in the surrounding streams. It was much prized in the past for its medicinal properties although we are told it tasted awful!

Retrace your route now up the steps and at the path junction continue straight ahead uphill to leave the trees through a wooden kissing gate. Walk gently up the meadow ahead following the tree line on your right.

The large house to your right is Balcombe House, built in 1760 as the Rectory at a cost of £1,400. Within 50 years, however, it was becoming too expensive for the rector to maintain and was sold as a private house. It has since been much enlarged and is now well cared for by the owners as a Grade 11 Listed Building.

The path leaves the field besides a metal gate onto a broad gravel track.

The cricket field is down to your left and, if there is a match being played, it may tempt you to idle away a pleasant hour or so.

To return to the village, however, turn right to pass between houses and in 50m follow the road left to the village crossroads besides the Half Moon Inn. Across the road are the Post Office and The Victory Hall and, a few metres along Bramble Hill the welcoming Tea Rooms.

For those who wish to explore further there is an excellent guidebook to the village available from the store next to the pub. The book gives a wealth of information about St Mary's Church and other buildings which merit spending more time in this delightful Mid Sussex village.

This walk was researched and written for Mid Sussex District Council by Footprints of Sussex who lead local guided walks throughout the year. www.footprintsofsussex.co.uk

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