

FRISTON GALLOPS  
East Sussex

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for the book *Discover Butterflies in Britain*  
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Training hurdle on Friston Gallops

Friston Forest is a huge area of mainly beech woodland that stretches north from the A259 Eastbourne to Seaford road, reaching all the way to Lullington Heath NNR (see the separate entry for Lullington). Friston Gallops are across an open area of chalk downland in the forest.

Leased by the Forestry Commission from South East Water, the total area is about 800 ha (2,000 acres). The forest is managed to provide a centre for recreation including walking, cycling and horse-riding. Friston Gallops have been used for many years for racehorse training, and have open access from 1pm daily.

**TARGET SPECIES**

Chalkhill and Adonis Blues and many other downland and forest species.

This site is very close to Lullington Heath NNR. There is woodland trail less than 2 miles long through Friston Forest from the Gallops to Lullington Heath. So the two sites could have been lumped together. But I have kept them separate because they are essentially different and each is interesting for its own sake. Friston Gallops is an open strip of downland within Friston Forest. A grassy path across it has been used as a galloping track for racehorses from stables in Jevington, and there are notices asking people to keep away from the gallop before 1 pm. However a public bridleway crosses the galloping track, and anyway this is a large area so, should horses be galloping, you can keep well away by staying at the edges of the downland.

The land is owned by South East Water Ltd which provides drinking water for the local area including Eastbourne. It works with Southern Water, who provide sewage and other services. In about 1880, the Eastbourne Water Company bought up large areas of downland to lay claim to water in water-bearing chalk aquifers below the surface. In the 1920s, they leased 800 ha (2,000 acres) to the Forestry Commission, and this has resulted in the extensive beech woodland that now covers former downland.

Fortunately the first stages of tree planting did not include the area that is now Lullington Heath NNR and that has been preserved in its original state, with chalk heath and downland mixed together. Now the management plan for Friston Forest has a wider agenda than just growing timber. Not only is there an extensive network of woodland paths open to the public for recreational use, but grazing has been introduced into the northern part of the forest to encourage diversity and provide a more varied mosaic of habitats including flowery grassland, chalk heath and scrub.

Friston Gallops is on high ground at the south-east edge of the forest. It runs from north-east to south-west, sloping towards the south-east. Except by rabbits, it had not been grazed when I was there and the flower-rich grass had grown quite long, well above ankle height, before its autumn cut. This did not seem to dissuade Chalkhill and Adonis Blues. In July 2009, there was a very large population of Chalkhill Blues. A report on Butterfly Conservation's Sussex Branch website recorded that on 31 July "...the Chalkhill Blues continue to impress. At the top of the slope as the sun went down, thousands of these butterflies settled in the long grass creating the most astonishing sight." Several weeks later, there will still be some Chalkhill Blue survivors about and also I saw a good number of second-generation Adonis Blues, again favouring the top of the sloping strip along its woodland edge.

The best place to park for Friston Gallops is the Forestry Commission's Butchershole car park on the Friston to Jevington road (details below). From there it is a short walk up through the eastern edge of the forest to the gallops. There is every chance of seeing some woodland species as you go. After searching the downland gallops, you can continue along the marked bridleway as far as you like, when you will have every chance of seeing many more woodland species.

A good, if strenuous, walk from Butchershole is to begin by following one of the paths up through the forest to the Gallops. Then walk south on the gallops, towards Friston Hill until you reach the bridleway that crosses the gallops. Turn right to take this bridleway into the forest and north towards Long Brow. Continue in a northerly direction, keeping left where the path divides, until you reach the boundary of Lullington Heath. Go north through the reserve to Winchester's Pond. Now turn right to follow the bridleway east until you are near the eastern end of the reserve. Here turn back on another path coming in from your right. This goes through the reserve in a south-westerly direction, continuing through the fenced forest grazing area until you reach the path that you used going north. Thereafter return to Butchershole by the same route as before. As well as many common species, you have a good chance of seeing Speckled Wood, Clouded Yellow, Silver-washed Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, White Admiral, Brown Argus, Small Copper, Marbled White, even some Small Blues, depending of course on when you go. Allowing for diversions, you will probably end up having walked 6 hilly miles by the time you get back to the car park, but it will have been worth it, provided you go on a fine day.

There are good facilities at Seven Sisters Country Park, immediately south of the forest, and in Alfriston, which is just to the west. Alfriston has many interesting buildings, including the Old Clergy House. This has the distinction of being the first historic building bought by the National Trust after its formation as the 'National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty' in 1894. It is a timber-framed house, dating from the late Middle Ages. There is a small garden,

overlooking the Cuckmere valley. When I was there, a list of butterflies seen in the garden had been posted. Visitors were invited to add to the list any new species they saw while visiting.



Centre of Friston Gallops, looking south



Friston Gallops, looking NE across the grass gallop



Friston Gallops, long grass cut for hay, August 2009



Friston Gallops, public bridleway across gallops



Friston Gallops, public sign



Friston Gallops, east track



Friston Gallops, cut hay looking towards Butchershole



Friston Gallops, vegetation a edge of gallops



Friston Gallops, practice starting stalls



Friston Gallops, private gallops sign



Friston Gallops, Adonis Blue (m)



Friston Gallops, Adonis Blue (m)



Friston Gallops, Adonis Blue (m)



Friston Forest, woodland walk to gallops



Star Hotel, Alfriston



Alfriston, the Old Clergy House



Friston Gallops, Adonis Blue (m)



Narrow main street of Alfriston, looking north



Horse paddock at Jevington



Horse paddocks at Jevington



Friston Forest, information for horse riders



Friston Forest, Butchershole car park entrance

## LOCATION

Explorer Map 123: Eastbourne & Beachy Head  
Landranger (pink) Map 199: Eastbourne & Hastings  
The Forestry Commission's Butchershole car park  
is at TV556995

Butchershole car park is on the minor road from Friston to Jevington. From the A259 Eastbourne to Seaford road, turn north at East Dean. The car park is about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile on your left.

From the car park, take one of the forest paths west to walk uphill for about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile to reach open downland. The middle of the racehorse gallop is around TV546995. I found that the best areas for Chalkhill and Adonis Blues were at the top of the sloping down, towards the forest edge near where the bridleway from Lullington comes out of the forest.

There are no facilities at Butchershole, but these and refreshments are available at Seven Sisters Country Park to the south-west, and at Alfriston and other villages nearby. Wheelchair access to Friston Gallops is impossible, but there is a short, smooth easy-access circuit at Butchershole and a longer one at the Forestry Commission's other car park at Litlington Road on the other side of the forest. The Seven Sisters Country Park has an easy access trail of about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles (return) from the Visitor Centre to the beach along the Cuckmere valley. There are wheelchair accessible facilities at the Seven Sisters Visitor Centre.

Buses running between Eastbourne and Seaford pass along the A259 road and stop near Seven Sisters Country Park.