



The Downs Link

The south-east's roads are busy but there's an excellent traffic-free alternative between Guildford and Shoreham-by-Sea. **Sam Jones** is your guide

The Downs Link ranks as one of the best beginner- and child-friendly routes in the south-east. Starting in the Surrey Hills National Landscape, it passes through the Low Weald, then under the shadow of the South Downs before arriving at the coast.

It's an example of how to use disused rail lines (the Cranleigh and Steyning lines) to the benefit of locals and visitors. This green highway is largely flat and traffic free, with much of the northern half seeming more like a track through a wilderness corridor, while the southern half begins to open up to vast views of the South Downs and the lure of the sea beyond.

It's also an example of the fractured way our cycle highways

are managed. While it is all rideable, some sections are noticeably better cared for and more weather resistant. If the plan is to take younger riders, then you'll have a better time in the summer months when the winter muck has dried up.

In theory it starts at St Martha's Church on top of the North Downs Way. Unless you enjoy steep starts and technical descents, start in Guildford and join the Downs Link in Peasmarsh.

Over the years, more and more cycle-friendly cafés and businesses are opening along its length, proving the benefit of the pedalling pound in rural communities. This makes it a delightful and easy day ride or short tour. Just don't forget your towel and costume for a dip at journey's end!

