



Bentley and Isington Mill Lower Froyle: *The Anchor*

Distance: 12 km=7 miles

easy walking

Region: Hampshire

Date written: 6-may-2012

Author: Botafuego

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Refreshments: Lower Froyle, Bentley

Last update: 4-mar-2023

Map: Explorer 144 (Basingstoke) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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River, mills, views, historic houses, legendary pub

In Brief

The star of this walk is the *Anchor Inn*, voted Hampshire pub of the year in 2012 and quite the place to bring a visitor from abroad if you wanted to show the ideal English pub. The pub comes $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way round so you can indulge. The *Anchor*'s car park is infamously small, to the frustration of visitors, so don't *think* about parking there. (This does serve to keep the number of visitors down to a manageable level: the pub is rather small too.) The bar is cosy and warm in winter. For the restaurant, booking is essential at weekends: call 01420-23261.

The walk takes you through some unknown gems of this part of Hampshire, with fine views from a wooded hill and some mills along the River Wey.

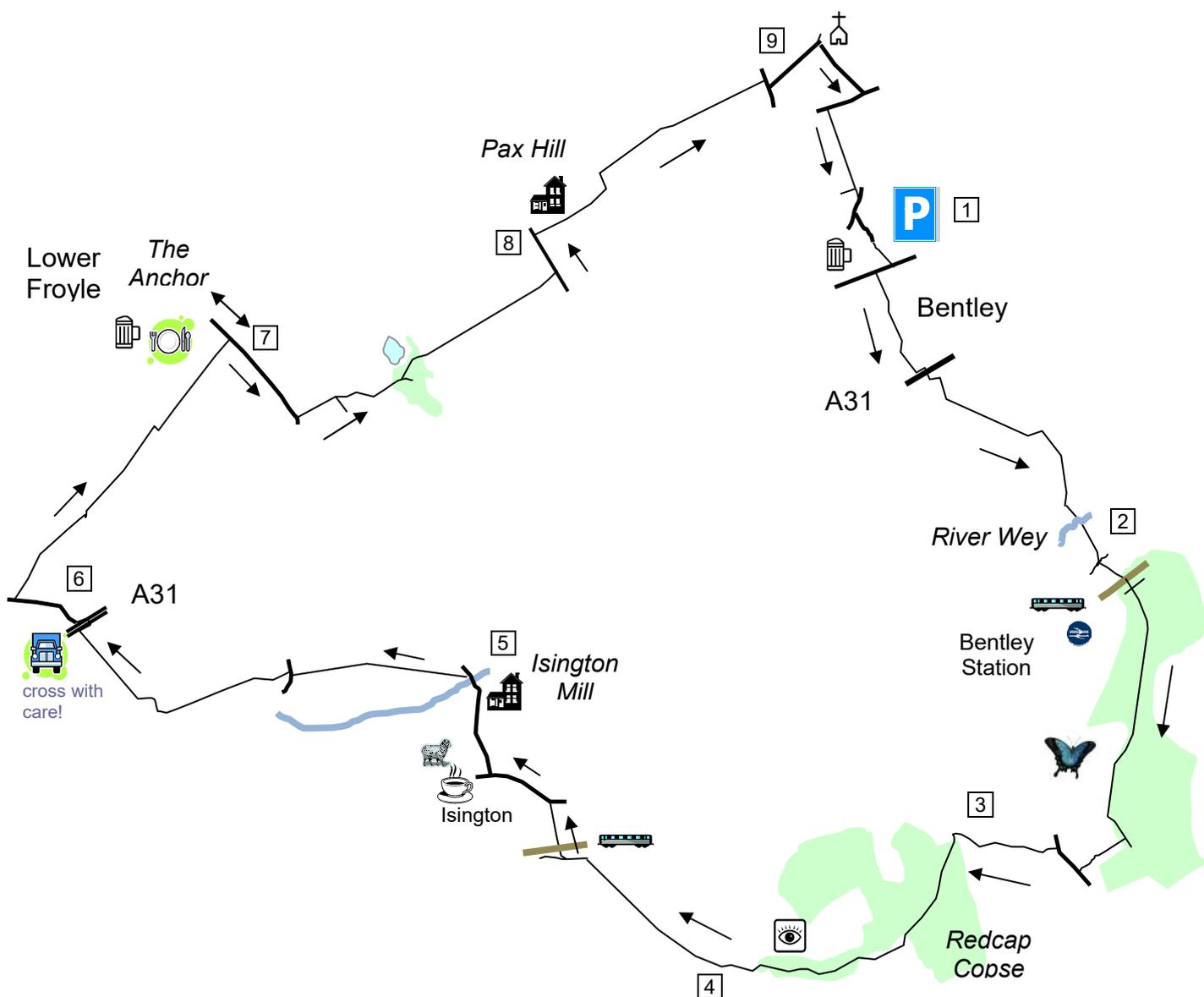


There are some thick patches of nettles en route so *shorts cannot be worn*. This walk was done in the wet April of 2012 and there were a few muddy patches, with boots providing much comfort. Small dogs are welcome but large ones will have difficulty with some of the stiles. **This walk is not suitable for young children or large groups because of a difficult crossing of the busy A31 road (see section 5).**



The walk begins in **Bentley**, Hampshire, west of Farnham, just off the A31 main road, **postcode GU10 5LW**. This walk is **ideal for rail users**, since Bentley Station is virtually on the walk. If coming by car, park considerately in Bentley village, near the *Star Inn*. You could also park at the Recreation Ground in School Lane (200m **east** on the main road, then first **left**). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



Bentley ("field of bent grass") has a shop, a good pub (see the end) and an Indian restaurant.

- 1 Opposite the *Red Lion House*, next to an industrial centre, take a signed footpath on a tarmac lane lined with horse chestnuts. At the end, go over a bridge across the A31 road. Ignore a footpath on the left and take the footpath to the right of a large metal gate. Follow this path (it may be muddy after rain), with a paddock on your right, until you come over a little metal bridge over a ditch. Ignore a stile on your right and follow the path **left** which runs beside a large field on your right, bends left and reaches the corner of another field. Stay on the path as it turns **right** and runs between hedges. The path eventually leads you over a long bridge across a shallow section of the River Wey and straight across a meadow, heading for the modestly-named *Walnut Tree Cottage*. Continue up a drive. Avoid a residential road on your right, ignore a footpath left and go over a stile straight ahead.

 **2** Your path leads upwards through ivy-clad trees and over a stile. Cross the railway lines taking special care. Go over the next stile to arrive at a wide crossing track by a fingerpost. **On your right is Bentley Station.** *On your left is Alice Holt Forest, subject of another walk in this series. The track is also part of the Shipwrights Way long-distance path which runs from here to Portsmouth.* Go straight over and through a swing-gate into Bentley Station Meadow. *This is an important butterfly reserve, with 21 species listed, designated a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest). The field is herb-rich and you can count numerous species of wild flora as you go.* Keep to the main path which bends right to go over a small flat bridge, rising gently. In 250m, your nature trail exits through a swing-gate. Continue ahead on a wide path, passing on your right an extension to Bentley Hall, presumably a conference centre. As you come out to a yard, keep ahead on a narrow path to the left of a paling fence. Follow the path beside a meadow (or through woodland on a parallel path) to reach a 4-way fingerpost. Turn **right**, staying next to the meadow, go over a stile and along a drive to a road. Turn **right** on the road and, in 80m, turn **left** at a signpost (which may be obscured in summer by vegetation) along the left-hand side of a large meadow, which at the time of this revision was a vast blanket of green grass.

3 Follow the edge round the first corner to arrive at a marker post. Turn **left** here, entering woodland via a flat bridge and going gently uphill through Redcap Copse. At the top, veer **left** for a brief respite of level ground until the path ascends again. Finally at the top, go over a stile into a meadow and straight ahead. Half way along, ignore a stile on the right. You now have fine views left to the rest of the county and to the South Downs. In the corner, go over a stile (large dogs not catered for) and along the right-hand side of a field. At the far side, keep **right** and exit in the corner near the remains of a stile, passing one corner of Bottom Copse.

 **4** Go over another stile and through a metal barrier into a pasture and follow a path cutting across the left-hand part, heading for a metal gate in the far corner. Go through a kissing-gate and along a farm track between a hedge and a fence. As you go, avoid kissing-gates on the right and left, part of a Food and Farming Trail, a walk for young people, associated with the organic farm. After passing farm gates on each side, continue ahead on a track which veers left. In 50m, go **right** through an arch under the railway (in winter avoiding as best you can a rather deep puddle). The farm track runs between pastures to a metal gate and a road. Turn **left** on the road, passing the smooth topiary of *Vallenders*, into the village of Isington. The route is **right**, opposite *Eggars Cottage* on Isington Lane. However, only 50m further is the farm shop which is worth a look. *Mill Farm Organic (2023: now possibly closed) sell the produce from the various herds that you have probably seen in the fields here. They also serve hot drinks and snacks; open Wed-Sat.*

 **5** Soon you pass various historic buildings ending in Isington Mill itself.

Isington Mill was the last home of "Monty" (Viscount Montgomery of Alamein) who restored it from a ruin after the last war. He was commander of the 8th Army in North Africa, known as the "Desert Rats".

Immediately after the bridge, turn **left** at a fingerpost on a track, giving you more views of the *Miller's House*, finally entering a field. Your destination is a pylon and farm buildings that you can see in the distance. Your initial route is on a long diagonal path which runs from corner to distant corner across the length of the first field. (In practise, you may need to turn right and left at the start to avoid a strip of weeds.) When you reach the far corner, continue ahead along the left-hand edge of the crops. You leave the field via a small

wooden gate leading to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane, passing *Froyle Mill Cottage*. In only 20m, immediately **after** the driveway of the cottage, go **left** on a concrete track, beside some large farm sheds, through two small metal gates (one usually not needed). [Mar 2022: walker found them locked and had to climb over: this is a public footpath!] Now go immediately **left** through a kissing-gate and **right** again to continue on the other side of the fence. Down on your left are more views of the River Wey and the remains of another ancient mill. Follow this pleasant grassy path, going through a large metal gate (undo and replace the chain). More than 300m from the farm, just before a large metal gate, go **right** up steps with rails. (Nettles are plentiful here, as they often are in fertile or agricultural land, hence the advice at the start of this guide *not* to wear shorts.) Go along a narrow path, through a small metal gate, over a rudimentary stile, across a farm track, up a grassy path between fences and through a metal gate into a meadow. Turn **left** in the meadow for about 40m to a flimsy fingerpost (broken in 2017-18). Turn smartly **right** at the post and head directly uphill under the high tension wires on an unclear path. Your destination is revealed as you go over the brow of the hill: a signpost on the other side next to a wooden fence. The author met some friendly young beef cattle just before they were rounded up by the farmer; they paused for a photo. When you reach the signpost, go straight down to cross the main A31 road.



Although the carriageways are narrow and separate, this is a potentially dangerous crossing and patience and care are needed, so take plenty of time, using ears as well as eyes. It is best to shift **right** at least as far as a small lay-by to cross the westbound carriageway to a gap in the central strip. Crossing the eastbound carriageway needs especial care and attention because of the limited view. Keep in mind that traffic may approach at more than 70 mph!!



- 6 Take a narrow lane on the other side. *Treloar College up on the left is a school for the physically disabled*. In 200m, turn sharp **right** through a kissing-gate onto a path that runs along the right-hand side of a field. At the far side, go through another kissing-gate and continue to the next corner. Go **right** over a 2-plank bridge. In the next field, ignore a path across the centre and instead turn **left** along the edge of the field. In 300m you reach a lane with the *Anchor Inn* on the left.



The Anchor Inn successfully combines the cosy English pub, with its array of local characters, seamlessly joined to the restaurant side with an executive chef, plus luxury accommodation above in case you can't stagger home. The resourceful high-end menu changes by season. The pub is open all day every day. Andwell's, Tripple fff's D&C and Alton's Pride will keep you more than happy if you stay on the bar side. Mind your head on the beams!

- 7 After possible refreshment, turn **right** on the lane. In 300m, you pass a line of houses. Turn **left** after them on a track. As you pass some farm buildings, go straight over through a wooden swing-gate next to a large wooden gate. On your left now is the historic Coldrey Farm. On your right is a pleasant sheep pasture dotted with trees. As the semi-tarmac path bends right, leave it by continuing straight ahead past a fingerpost, on an embankment with a large pond visible on the left and a willowed pond on your right. Continue into a field and across the centre. At the other side, continue beside a garden. Go over a stile to a tarmac drive and turn **left** on it. The drive leads to Pax Hill. *Note the flower basket bicycle.*

Pax Hill was for 20 years the home of Robert Baden-Powell, hero of Mafeking, founder of the Scout movement, originator of the motto "be prepared" and

author of "Scouting for Boys". After his death, Lady Baden-Powell gave the house to the Girl Guide movement. It is now a care home for the elderly.

- 8 Just **before** the drive bends right, turn **right** at a fingerpost on a footpath. Go through a kissing-gate and continue straight ahead on a grassy path between a fence and a hedge. At a T-junction, turn **left** and, in 40m, just after a fingerpost, turn **right** along the right-hand side of first one field, then another. *On the right is the Jenkyn Place vineyard, established only a few years ago and growing classical varieties of grape used in making champagne.* Go through a wooden gate into a new vineyard and straight ahead. [2018: the new vineyard and a building were under construction. A temporary diversion goes left, round three side of the area and left again.] Your path runs beside some cottages to reach a lane. Turn **right** on the lane. *Harold Sanderson, owner of the White Star Line, was living here in Jenkyn Place when he heard about the sinking of the Titanic.*
- 9 In 20m, turn **left** on a lane leading to Bentley church. (You can save a little time by skipping this left turn and keeping straight on back to Bentley, but the church is worth seeing.) *St Mary's church Bentley dates from the 1100s but what impresses you as you approach is the avenue of great yew trees, one stretching its elbow-shaped branches over the graves like protecting fingers. The sheer size of this church tells you how important the village was in past centuries.* From the church, turn sharp **right** on a lane passing an orchard. At a T-junction turn **right**. (If you parked at the Recreation Ground, instead turn **left** here and in, 150m, turn **right** on School Lane.) Just before a 30mph reminder, turn **left** on a signposted footpath. Go over a stile and continue ahead, crossing the next stile on a narrow path. As you pass the end of a cul-de-sac, go straight across on a tarmac path and turn **right** a little later on a residential road. Turn **left** at the next side road, Broadlands Close, and, at its end, continue on a tarmac path and a driveway to the main road in Bentley where the walk began.

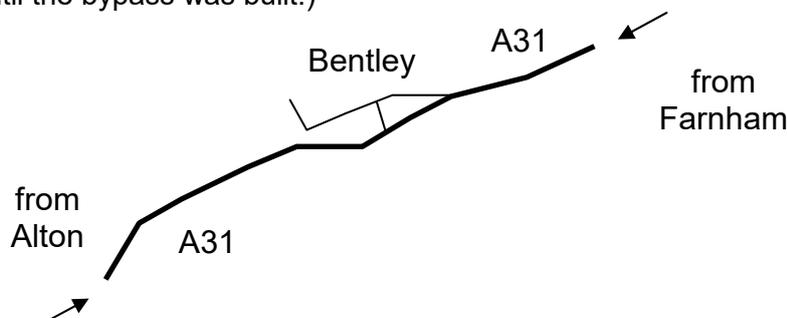


For final refreshments, the Star Inn has a pleasant dining room and three ales on tap. There is a beer garden at the back.

Getting there

By train: regular service every day from Guildford, Farnham and Alton to Bentley Station (150 metres from the walk). Take the exit opposite the ticket office, using the footbridge if necessary, and turn **left** on a wide path, joining the walk in section **2**.

By car: Bentley is signposted just off the A31 about 4 miles west of Farnham, Surrey and about 5 miles east of Alton, Hants. (The A31 used to run through Bentley until the bypass was built.)



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