



Beacon Hill, Betty Mundy's Wood, Exton

Distance: 10½ km=6½ miles easy walking with one moderate climb

Region: Hampshire

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Refreshments: Exton

Map: Explorer 132 (Winchester) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

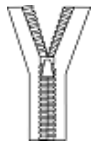
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Hills, views, woodland, village

In Brief

This is a walk of sheer pleasure over the hills and through the meadows and woods of Hampshire. There are no main roads, very few ploughed fields, some fine views, some surprises, and a fine pub backing onto the Meon River. (To book or enquire at the *Shoe* in Exton, ring 01489-877526.)



This walk can be zipped up with the *West Meon, Beacon Hill and Exton* walk giving you a 19 km=12 mile Big Zipper walk. Zip points are indicated in the guides. Omit Leg 3 on this walk and omit Leg 1 on the other walk. The Big Zipper walk also begins at Beacon Hill (see below) and can also begin at West Meon (see the other walk) or Exton.



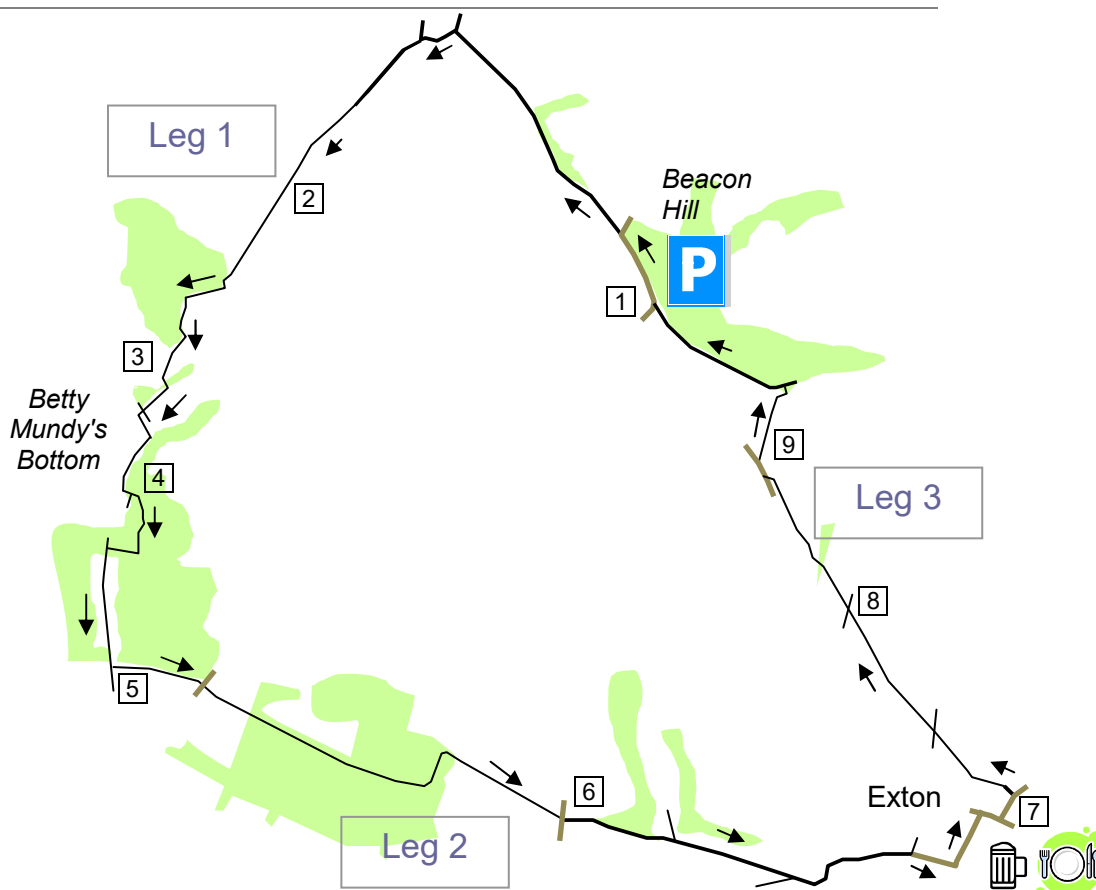
There are no unavoidable nettles or brambles on this walk, so wearing shorts is fine. In the summer when this walk was planned there was no mud to worry a wearer of trainers or stout shoes. Your dog will also be welcome since all the stiles have a dog gate, although occasionally there may be some cattle in a field after Exton.



The walk begins at the **Beacon Hill Beeches** car park, near Exton and Warnford, Hampshire, grid ref SU 598 227 (£3 all-day fee??). **Warning!** **isolated car park: leave car visibly empty - see Guidelines.** (Note that there is *another* Beacon Hill in Hampshire.) If you come via Warnford on the A32, a postcode 1½ miles before the car park is **SO32 3LG**. Another possible start is the roadside, e.g. Church Lane, in Exton, postcode **SO32 3NT**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk



Leg 1: Beacon Hill to Betty Mundy 3 km=2 miles

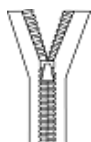
- 1 From the Beacon Hill car park, turn **right** on the tarmac lane. In 250m, before the road curves right, leave the lane by going straight ahead through a small wooden gate beside a large metal gate by a fingerpost marked *South Downs Way*. Follow this easy wide sheltered track for about 700m where a farm track joins you from the right. *This is the site of Lomer, one of Hampshire's lost villages. On your left is the Meon Valley Studio, makers of jewellery.* You are approaching the building of Lomer Farm. On reaching it, at a signpost, turn **left**. *Note that you are following part of the Monarch's Way, a very long historic walk from near Worcester to near Brighton.* Keep straight on past two cottages and, at a T-junction still in the farm, turn **left** (ignoring both fingers of the signpost), passing a weatherboarded converted barn. *You have left the South Downs Way and joined the Wayfarer's Walk, a long-distance path from Walbury Hill to Emsworth.*
- 2 Follow the track out of the farm, between fences, for about 500m. Your track takes you through a large metal gate and out into a big open field. Go straight ahead down the centre. As you near the bottom, where you pass a fingerpost, just continue on the white flinty track, rising up to a stile or an open pair of metal gates. Keep following the main track, curving right uphill. *Preshaw Wood on your right contains an earthwork, some iron-age or Romano-British enclosure, documented by English Heritage.* At a 3-way junction, turn **left** on a slightly narrower track, gently downhill, embellished in summer by harebells. Immediately after passing the wood, look to your **right** for a simple block stile beside large metal gates. Turn **right** over the stile into a meadow.
- 3 Begin walking the length of the meadow but, in about 40m, as the meadow opens out, veer **left** towards the woods over on the left-hand side. Here you will catch sight of a stile. Go over the stile and through a narrow piece

of woodland to reach an unusual stile with a double bar. (You can lift the latch on the left and slide the top bar out, replacing it afterwards.) Turn **right** in the field and follow a path along the edge. At the end, go through a metal gate, go over a grassy crossing track and over a stile. In 10m, turn **left** down the left-hand side of the next field. In the bottom corner, turn **right** with the field edge in a wooded valley known as Betty Mundy's Bottom [Mar 2021: trees now cut down, but re-planted with saplings]. Her "cottage" is the large house on your right. At the next corner, go **left** through a small wooden gate. The path turns left into the fascinating wood of King's Copse. The official footpath turns right here but Betty Mundy has mapped out her own slightly longer walk which the author followed in preference, in order to linger in this delightful wood.

Did Betty Mundy really exist? One contrary idea comes from a Roman legion who named this valley "Beati Mundaе" because it was the most blessed place in the world. But her name appears on the Exton Tithe map of 1839. Around that time it was said that she robbed sailors discharged from the Napoleonic Wars. Another story relates that she was in paid league with a press gang and would lure farm labourers into the wood before they were pounced on. Yet another story makes her out as a kind of witch who cursed a herd of cattle. This was a pretext for burning her house down in search of a hoard of gold which was never found.

Leg 2: Betty Mundy to Exton 5 km=3 miles

- 4 Keep straight ahead through the wood following *Betty Mundy's Walk* on a beechnut path which turns right by a wooden fence. Keep following this wood-chip path beside the fence on your left in this lovely wood. The path turns right again and comes down to meet the footpath again. Turn **left** on it and go through a small wooden gate beside a large one. Now take a nice clear path across the centre of a crop field. At the far end there are two crossing paths. Turn **left** on the footpath on the **far** side of the hedge, thus leaving the Wayfarer's Walk.
- 5 Your path runs up the left-hand side of a crop field and continues beside woodland on your left. Finally, at the corner, keep straight ahead on a narrow path through a wooden barrier to a tarmac lane. Cross the lane, over a stile, and follow a straight path ahead, sheltered by slender trees. Your path goes over a farm track and into the more mature shade of Corhampton Forest / Littleton Copse. After some conifers, the path crosses some farm tracks. As you come into a more open area with a small crop field, keep straight ahead and ignore a right turn at a marker post. At the top of the field, turn **left** in the corner. At the end of the path, turn **right**. On emerging from the wood, keep ahead along the left-hand side of a crop field. At a gap in the hedge, your path zigzags left-right and resumes on the other side of the hedge. At the end, go past a metal gate to a tarmac lane.
- 6 Cross straight over the lane onto a shingle track, slightly to your right. Follow this rather stony path down under trees. The surface gets easier as a footpath joins from the left. As you meet another footpath, this time from the right, your path curves left and veers right again, becoming tarmac. Continue, passing various properties of Exton village. On meeting a lane at a bend, go straight on. Stay with the lane where it bends left by Exton Farm. The lane bends right passing *Sunrise Cottage*.



For the Big Zipper walk, switch now to Leg 2 of the *West Meon, Beacon Hill and Exton walk*.

Your route is next **left** on Church Lane. However, by keeping straight on, by the wall of Exton House and rounding the corner, you reach the *Shoe Inn* for a pleasant break.

The "Shoe" is not just a perfect place for a pint, with its garden on the Meon riverside and a view of Old Winchester Hill. It is also a notable gastropub. No ordinary menu this, with Stornoway black pudding and crab and rocket risotto. The "Shoe" is open every day.

Leg 3: Exton to Beacon Hill 2½ km=1½ miles

- 7 Having turned left on Church Lane (that is, **right** if coming back from the *Shoe Inn*), go 100m and, just after *Bramcote House*, turn **left** on an ascending track signed as the South Downs Way. The track leads through a metal kissing-gate and along the right-hand side of a field. At the first corner, go **right** into the adjoining meadow and, at a fingerpost, take a path diagonally across the meadow, avoiding a footpath on the left. **Sometimes you may pass cattle here; if you wish, you should be able to circumvent them in an adjoining field.** The path descends to go through the hedgerow via a wooden swing-gate and continues, a fraction right, up the centre of the next meadow. Two stiles close together are followed by a path to the **right** in the next meadow, cutting the corner to a stile and a stile in the hedgerow.
- 8 Continue in the same direction and go over two stiles either side of a track. Continue diagonally up the next meadow. At the top, go through a swing-gate, up through a band of trees and through another swing-gate. Go diagonally **right** in the next meadow, up to a wooden swing-gate, and veer **left** up the hillside. The path gradually levels, with great views behind if you turn round for a breather, to reach the Exton Beacon brazier at the top. Go **left** through a wooden swing-gate onto a tarmac lane and turn **right** on it.
- 9 In 20m, turn **right** at a waymarker for the South Downs Way on a straight path uphill. At the top, go through a wooden gate by an information board for Beacon Hill Nature Reserve. Wheel left to a fingerpost and turn **left** on a grassy track, passing a triangulation pillar. **But by turning right, through a kissing-gate, you can make a quick trip to Beacon Hill Nature Reserve. The extensive ancient earthworks, the views, the flowers and birds (this is a RSPB site) make for a rewarding diversion. You need to retrace your steps afterwards.** *Beacon Hill Beeches are on your right whilst on your left there are great views of the Solent and Portsmouth, including the Spinnaker Tower.* When you reach some tall beeches, there's a parallel path on your right under the trees. Finally, you pass an information board and go through a small wooden gate beside a large metal gate into the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: if coming from the London area, take the A31 over the Hog's Back, through Farnham. After passing Alton, at the big roundabout, turn **left** as for *Droxford, West Meon, Farringdon* on the A32. Continue through West Meon to **Warnford**. Immediately after the village, turn **right** onto an unsigned road, actually Wheely Down Road. (*This turn is easy to miss: it is just after a small triangular green on your right where the flint wall of Warnford House curves away.*) After nearly 2 miles, at a 4-way signpost, keep straight on (the lane on the left being too narrow) and continue to a staggered crossroads. Turn **left**. The car park is ⅔ mile on the left.

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