



New Forest Fringes Breamore, Whitsbury, Rockbourne

Distance: 23 km=14 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Hampshire

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Author: Botafuego

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Refreshments: Rockbourne, Whitsbury

Map: OL22 (New Forest) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

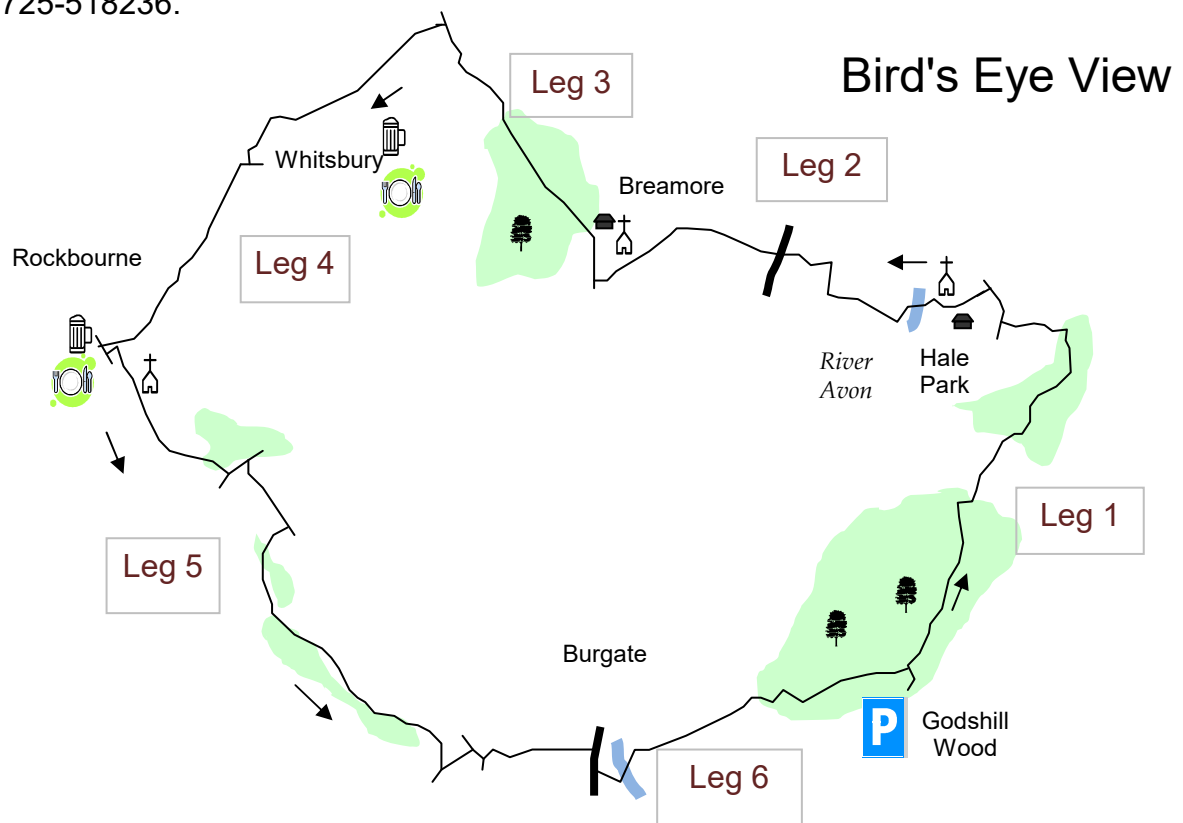
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Woods, heath, villages, rivers, views, churches, historic houses, ancient monuments

In Brief

You may ask, what is the best walk on this site? Here is a candidate. It starts and ends in the New Forest and on the way visits historic houses, a great Saxon church and two extraordinary villages. There are good pubs en route, not open all day. To enquire at the *Cartwheel*, ring 01725-518362. For lunch at the *Rose and Thistle*, booking is **essential**: ring 01725-518236.





There are some patches of nettles and brambles, so shorts are not advisable. Typical of this site, this walk uses many under-used paths, especially in the early sections, so you may find a hiking pole useful to help you over stiles and to free the footpaths and gaps in the hedgerows of undergrowth. There are no steep gradients, so any good footwear is fine. There's no reason to leave your dog at home, but you would be close to the New Forest itself which is more suitable.

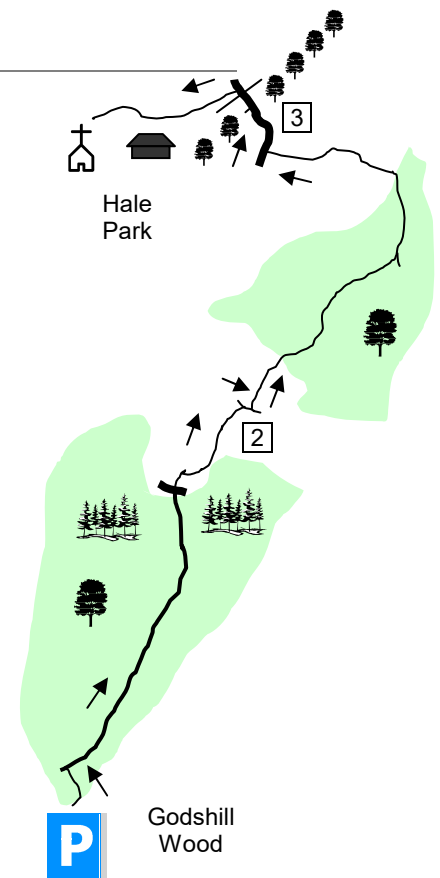
This walk is a tribute to the *Adventurous Walks* books and follows the same route as one of those walks.

The walk begins at the **Godshill Wood car park**, near Fordingbridge, Hampshire (postcode **SP6 2LP**, map reference SU177161). Another good start is near the *Rose and Thistle* in Rockbourne, postcode **SP6 3NL**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Leg 1: Godshill to Hale Park 4¼ km=2¾ miles

- 1 Begin at the far end of the car park (furthest from the entrance) and go through a small wooden gate on the left of a barrier onto a path through the woods. You soon meet a wide gravel track. Turn **right** on this track. Continue for some distance avoiding all turnings off. The pines and larches become beautiful mixed woodland. Eventually you reach a wooden gate beside *Godshill Wood Cottage*. Go through this gate and cross a lane to a stony track opposite. Go over a cattle grid ahead and veer **right** on a drive. Pass the florid iron gates of a house on the left and continue between wire fences and over two 2-plank bridges. At the top, go over a stile into a meadow. Follow a faint path across the centre, over a stile on the other side and down to a track. Turn **right** on the track.
- 2 In 30m, turn **left** at a fingerpost onto a bridleway. On your left soon is a fine old cottage, nicely extended at the back, called *The Homet*. Keep **right**, avoiding the drive to the cottage. Just after the cottage, at a marker post with a yellow arrow, turn **right** uphill. Follow this path for some distance, between rhododendrons on your left and a wire fence. You go under a pylon where the path narrows and after this pass through much wider forest. You come to a byway under magnificent beeches. Veer **left** on the byway, a wide track slightly downhill. This fine high path has a stream down on the left and later crosses it. You join first the drive from *Hemmick Court*, then a tarmac drive. Turn **left**. Soon you pass the black dragon gates of that house. Pass the *Old Rectory* and a pair of cottages. The wall on your right belongs to the Hale Walled Gardens. *They were made in the 1790s but in recent years were grassed over as a paddock. Now they are being restored.* You reach a T-junction with a lane. Turn **right** on the lane.



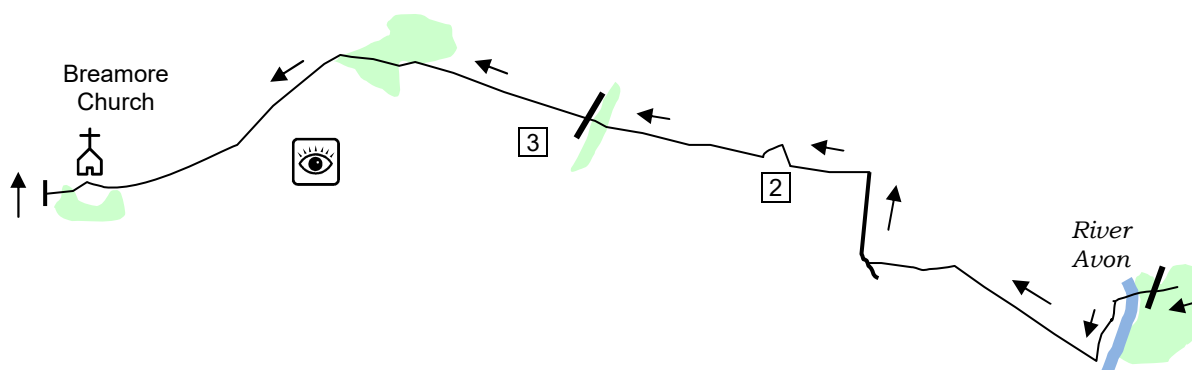
- 3 Ignore the footpath on your left into the parkland of Hale Park. Soon, you pass its sweeping lime avenue left and right. Just after the avenue, turn **left** at a small fingerpost onto a path, just inside the fence, that runs parallel to the central drive, also marked as the Avon Valley Path. *The Avon Valley Path is a 34-mile (55-km) trail from the cathedral city of Salisbury to Christchurch Priory and the sea.* Deer may be seen in the meadow on your right. On your left soon is the house itself.

Hale is a parish, an estate, a manor, a park and a church. The manor goes back at least to the 1300s. An Elizabethan house stood here until in 1715 the courtier and architect Thomas Archer bought the manor and built the present-day Georgian mansion in its place. The plain comfortable Palladian style was a new venture for him.

Pass near a well and a long hut. After these, keep to the **right** on a narrow tarmac path by a fence and, at a post, keep straight ahead, passing railings and a deep ravine and pond, soon reaching the Church of St Mary Hale.

There was always a church here since pre-Norman times but the present one was built along with the manor by Thomas Archer. Not one for false modesty, he designed a magnificent memorial to himself, carved by Sir Henry Cheere. The baroque style was much more his territory and you would not be surprised to see this church in London or Bath – but out here in open country? As well as cool white marble, there are several brass plaques. The Latin motto on the brass grave says “I once was what you are, and you will be what I am”. Vivian Ridley’s “History of St Mary’s Church” paints a vivid picture of the families whose church this was at different times: the rebellious Penruddocks, the May family who made a huge fortune on the Portuguese wine trade, the three Joseph Mays (“the Good”, “the Weak” and “the Wicked”) and the Goffs from Ireland.

Leg 2: Hale Park to Breamore 3 km=2 miles



- 1 Continue down the tarmac path and exit via a redundant kissing gate to a road. Cross straight over the road onto a track leading across a bridge over the River Avon. Surprising as it may seem, this quiet place is the site of a battle between Saxons and Britons in the year 519.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle tells us how the Saxon prince Cerdic and his son Cynric led a force upstream on the Avon to seize land from the Britons (Celtic people related to the present-day Welsh). The Britons had their hilltop fortresses but had to give way here at Cerdicsford. This successful campaign resulted in the Kingdom of Wessex. But here lies a puzzle. Cerdic, Cynric and Ceawlin (the next king) are all Celtic, not Saxon, names. Were the Celts divided? Read more in “Celtic Twilight” (www.celtic-twilight.com).

Go over a stile on the **left**, over one wide bridge and then another. Before you reach a third bridge, turn **right** along the left-hand side of the rough pasture. At the far side, go **left** over an unneeded (2019: and completely hidden) stile and a bridge with a rail. At the other side of the meadow, go over a bridge across a wider stream, over a stile [Aug 2020: careful: broken !] and through an area of tall wild plants. Go over a V-stile and another bridge over a water channel. Keep ahead on a track and shortly veer **right** with the track. When you reach a junction, turn **left** into a pasture. (You may need to lift the ring hinges on one of the gates. Replace them carefully!)

- 2 At the other side, veer **right** and **left** past the fine old farmhouse and between farm buildings, leaving them by the main track. The track ends at a pasture. Keep straight ahead here, going through a metal kissing-gate and across a small crop field, through a metal swing-gate and a band of trees, followed by another swing-gate, a kissing-gate, another pasture, another kissing-gate, a long bridge and a kissing gate. Go over a stretch of tarmac and up a bank to reach a main road, the A338, Salisbury Road.
- 3 Cross the road carefully, go through a kissing gate and across a cereal field. At the other side, go through a modern kissing-gate, straight on across a hayfield and through another kissing gate, taking you to the edge of woodland. Turn **left** along the edge, then continue through woodland on a rather ill-defined path to emerge into open meadows. Turn **left** through a kissing gate and continue along the right-hand side of this extensive parkland. On the left you can enjoy the views of the New Forest fringes and your previous route. On the right, Breamore House and its turreted belltower come into view. Go through one more kissing gate and across a meadow, heading for a large grove of trees. Go through a swing-gate into a churchyard, where suddenly the amazing Church of St Mary, Breamore stands in front of you.

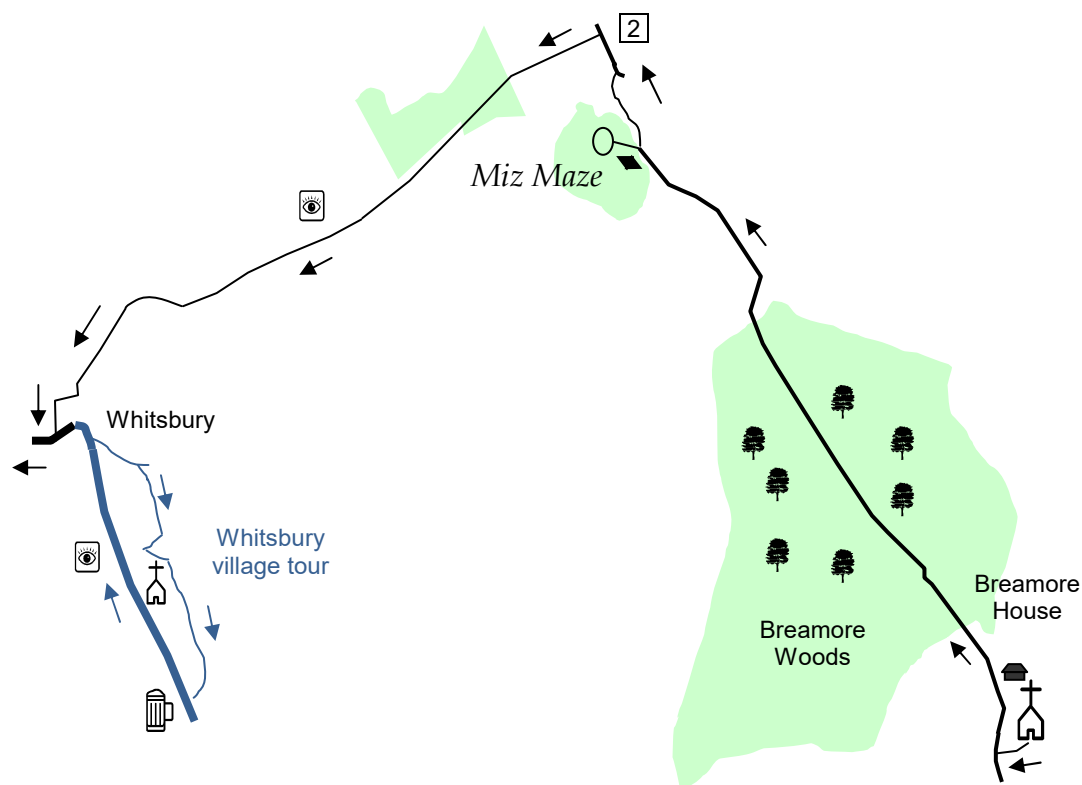
Breamore Church is one of the most important Anglo-Saxon monuments in the country. These massive flint walls are over a thousand years old, with the great square tower, the porches and nave jutting from it like points of a star. As you enter by the Tudor-topped porch with its little sundial, you see the solidness transmitted to the interior. Inspect the Saxon writing over the arch, with a fragment on the wall beside it, the central tower with its massive roof and carved stone corbels. Family crests are displayed in the centre but they all share only two mottos.



Continuing, with the church on your right, go across the grass and through a gap in the brick wall under yews. [2016-2020: still padlocked!: leave by the main entrance and turn **right**; press the electronic Breamore house gate on the right to enter the drive into the Breamore estate, parallel to the main drive.] Go over a stile across the grass to a drive and turn **right** on it. The path passes close to Breamore House. The name, by the way, is pronounced "Bremmer".

This great Elizabethan manor house was built of rose red brick in 1583 and is almost completely unspoilt by modern usage. The first owner was William Dodington and it remained in his family for nearly a hundred years. The house was sold in 1748 to Sir Edward Hulse, whose descendants live there today. The Clock Tower was built in 1860. Water was pumped here from an underground stream to provide a water for a newly-installed bath. Inside you can see the panelled Great Hall and historic rooms full of paintings, tapestries, period furniture and porcelain. The house is open to the public most days in the warmer months but closed Saturdays for events and weddings. If in doubt, ring 01725 512 858. There is also the Countryside Museum close by.

Leg 3: Breamore to Whitsbury 4½ km=2¾ miles



- 1 Avoid the track on the right leading to the gardens and the octagonal bell tower and keep straight ahead, gently uphill into Breamore Woods. After a long pleasant walk, you finally come out into an open wild meadow. At a marker post, fork **left** heading uphill towards trees. At the top, follow the arrow pointing left into the woods for the Miz Maze.

A Miz Maze is cut as a single line of turf. (The turf, not the ground between, forms the maze.) So it is not a puzzle maze (as at Hampton Court) but a kind of ritual object. The Breamore Miz Maze is romantically enclosed within a grove of yew trees. There is a Bronze Age barrow nearby which gives a clue to its antiquity. The Miz Maze itself is now fenced off and in need of restoration, scheduled as an ancient monument.

Return to the path and resume your original course. Your path runs close to the trees and then veers right, down to a hedge. It then veers left to join a path running beside the hedge. In only 80m, turn **left** at a fingerpost marked "footpath to Whitsbury" through a metal swing-gate.

- 2 The path goes along the left-hand side of a field and joins a wider track as you enter woodland. After a barn, ignore a track forking left and keep straight ahead on a grassy path. At the other side, go over a stile, ignore brideways left and right and continue ahead uphill. This path ascends gradually under hazels and the occasional apple tree with views to the north. Near the top, the tip of the spire of Salisbury Cathedral can be seen. At the top, go past a metal gate and join a sandy path coming from the farm. Soon you reach a thatched stable block. Turn **right**. This is the Whitsbury Stud, the upper part of the village. *The Stud, the stables and the wooded parts over to your left make up the hillfort now known as "Whitsbury Castle". Bronze Age, Iron Age and Anglo-Saxon remains have been found by*

excavation. There are several tumuli in the area of Whitsbury. At the far corner of the stable block, turn **left**, passing the horse exerciser and soon the gates to the manor with its thatched well. You immediately come to a T-junction. The route continues by turning **right** on the road. But before you do, why not take a charming tour of the village first?

Whitsbury was ruled in the middle ages by the Sheriff of Wiltshire and was in Wiltshire until 1895 (it is still under a Wiltshire parliamentary constituency). The top part is the Whitsbury Manor Stud and Racing Establishment. The true village is down the hill.

Decision point. The following optional section is a short tour of Whitsbury which is strongly recommended as it offers views, a charming small church, a pub / restaurant and a return through the village. You may find some short cuts to the next place on the walk (Rockbourne) by looking at the map, but we recommend that you stick to the route described because the next section of the main walk is a true delight.

The Whitsbury Village Tour. Turn **left** on the lane and in 20m turn **left** on a tarmac drive which runs alongside a ferny ditch. Where the lane bends left, keep ahead on a track following a sign for the Church. The footpath zigzags round a meadow, from which, through a metal gate ahead you have a fine view across the valley to where until 1825 a hog fair used to be held. After another bend, turn **right** through a wooden gate into St Leonard's churchyard. The entrance to the church is on the far, west side.

You enter the endearing little 14th-century church of St Leonard's going down steps into the central part with its barrel ceiling, then up more steps to the chancel whose ceiling has carved leaves.

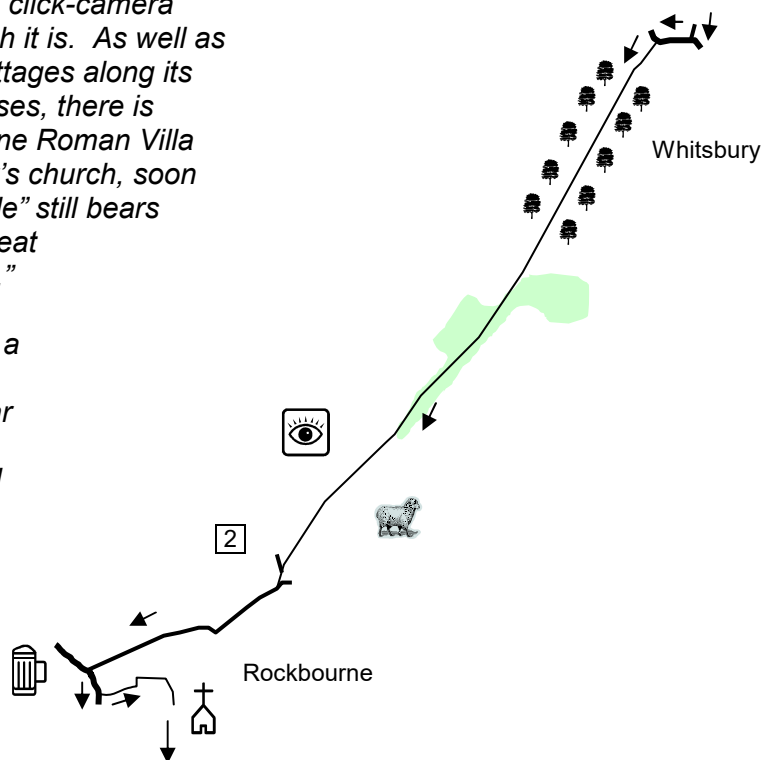
After visiting the church, go back to the east side (the way you came) but veer off **right** down some steps and through a metal gate to resume your original direction down the horse pasture. Aim roughly for the centre of the houses ahead. As you get nearer, a small wooden gate in the hedge comes into view. Go through the gate and down to a lane in the village. *On the left is a thatched cottage with an amusing dummy "Ron the Thatcher" climbing his ladder to mend the roof. On the right is the "Cartwheel" a fine gastropub with a small garden and charming pergola serving the Ringwood range and holding its own beer and cider festival.* Turn **right** on the lane past the pub, returning to the start of the little tour. Now continue straight ahead on the road by the stud to continue the main walk.



Leg 4: Whitsbury to Rockbourne 2 km=1¼ miles

- 1 **See map overleaf.** Where the road bends right, go **left** by a house, past a small green and through a white gate. You are in a superb avenue of copper beeches that give this part of the walk a noble atmosphere. At the end, go through a wooden gate, along a path by a fence, through another small wooden gate and descend under tall beeches. The path now runs between sheep pastures and leads you through small, then a large, metal gate and into a admirable large grassy meadow with scattered trees.
- 2 After a spirited walk towards a farm in the distance, you join a track coming from the left. Turn **right** to go through a gate or over a cattle grid. Veer **right** round the side of the farm onto a tarmac lane running by a long wall on your left. Soon a gate reveals the venerable farm buildings of Rockbourne. Continue on the lane, ignoring, for now, a track to the church and turn **right** on the road at the end. Passing some delectable thatched cottages, you soon reach the *Rose and Thistle* in the centre of the village.

Rockbourne is much more than a click-camera village, obviously charming though it is. As well as the historic farm, the thatched cottages along its single road and the manorial houses, there is nearby the remarkable Rockbourne Roman Villa (not on this route) and St Andrew's church, soon to be seen. The "Rose and Thistle" still bears the large-lettered name of that great Romsey brewery "Strong and Co." that would have been so familiar here until 1969. The pub is quite a gem with its lovely little front garden, rose bower, long cosy bar and good home-cooked food. Recommended are the steak and kidney pud and the fish platter. (Note: they do not serve food all day.) Palmers Copper Ale and Timothy Taylor are available to wash them down.



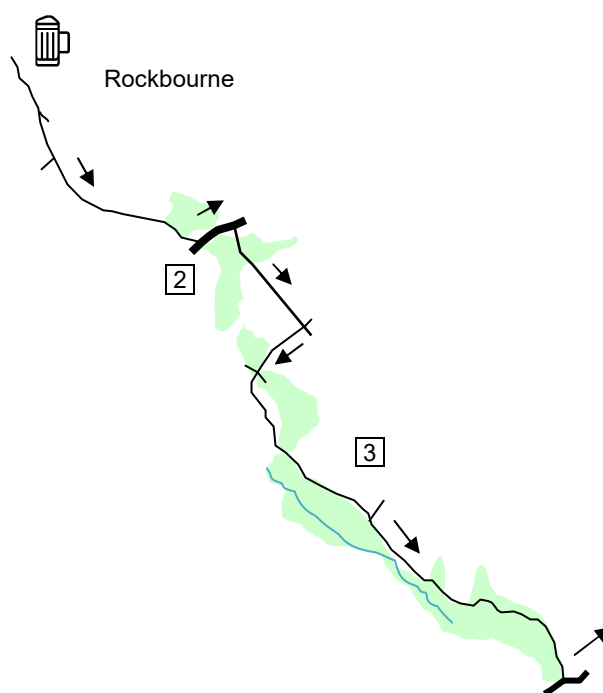
- 3 After possible refreshments retrace your steps back to the main road and turn **right**. You soon pass the lane where you came in. In around 50m, turn **left** on a track over a brick bridge. Go past the front of a house, along a path in the far left corner and round the side of a shed to reach a wide area of gravel in front of a white house. Head towards the house and veer **right** near some topiary by the wall of the house. Here, follow a path up steps. The way is straight ahead but first you will want to turn **left** to visit the church. *St Andrews church is perched high and you can obtain a fine photo shot from the other side. Inside, the atmosphere is created by the thick walls of plain stone and the wooden beams, offset by the brilliant east and west windows.*

Leg 5: Rockbourne to Puddleslosh Lane 5 km=3 miles

1 After visiting the church, continue on the footpath by which you came, now a narrow path first between hedges and then beside a wall. At a fingerpost, keep straight ahead by a wall. (At the time of writing, both pointers are irrelevant.) Ignore a footpath on the right and generally keep ahead at all times by fences and hedges. At another fingerpost, keep ahead between various fields and meadows, then through a small metal gate, over a track, through a small metal gate opposite and on a rather overgrown course between fields. Suddenly you are walking between open fields. Veer left on a faint path. *The column you can see on the other side of the valley is the monument in West Park to Sir Eyre Coote, hero of Plassey and Wandiwash and capturer of Pondicherry.* At the corner, keep ahead along the edge and then across the centre of another part of the field, as directed by a fingerpost. Finally, go over a stile to a lane. Turn **left** on the lane.

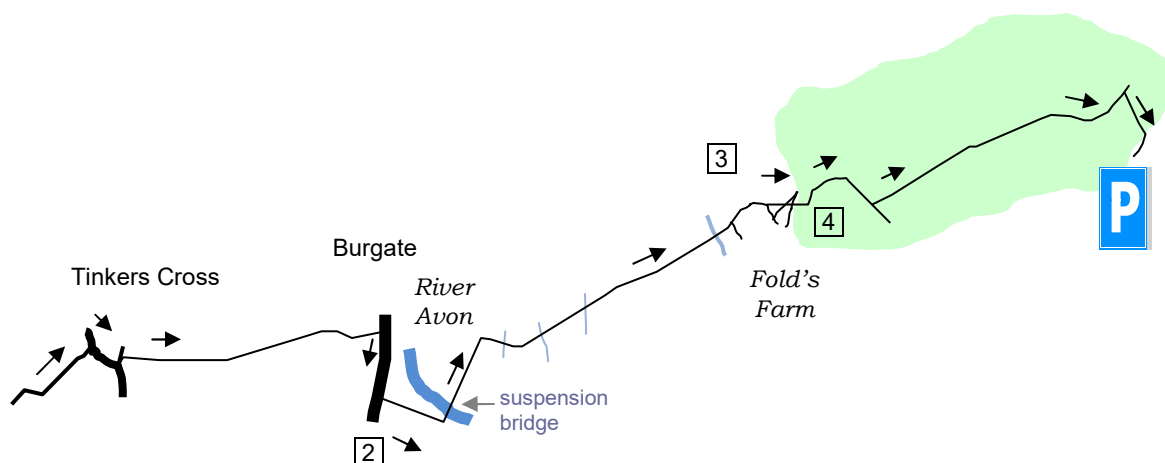
2 In 150m, at the top of a rise, turn **right** on a footpath, bypassing a metal gate. Stay on this track for around 500m, avoiding all turnings off, beside hedges and fields. There is a central strip of grass for your comfort. As you reach the start of woodland on your left, turn **right** over a stile by a (broken) fingerpost into a large meadow. Bear **right** on a faint path aiming for a fingerpost, just visible 30m to the left of a galvanised metal gate. On reaching it, keep along the right-hand edge of the meadow. In the corner, go over a stile and steeply down some natural steps to a 4-way fingerpost. Keep straight ahead. The track curves left, soon arriving at a stile beside a metal gate. Once over the stile, continue ahead by a line of trees on your right and walk the whole length of the meadow. When the hedge on the right ends, continue ahead along the left-hand side of a pasture.

3 Go over a stile by a metal gate into woods and bracken. Keep to the narrow path through brambles and ignore a footpath left. Your path curves right-left to take you over a stile and out into a meadow. Keep along the right-hand side of the meadow. In the corner, go over a 2-plank bridge and stile [Aug 2020: careful: broken !], then straight ahead along the right-hand side of the next meadow. Go through a gap into the next meadow and keep to the right-hand side again. In the far corner, follow a narrow path and go over a stile on the **right** into woods where you finally meet your hitherto unseen companion, Sweatland's Water. Turn **left** beside the stream. After a yellow arrow, your path runs beside a new fence along the right-hand edge of the meadow and takes you back into the woods in the far corner. You are now in a different kind of woodland of tall poplars. Go over a small bridge and cross a clearing, bright with yarrow, cross a



driveway and continue beside tall oaks. Traverse a rather marshy strip and then more handsome woodland. Another marshy area reveals that this is an area full of springs under your feet. After walking through undergrowth, continue beside more woodland until finally your path enters the woods. You soon exit the woods onto Puddleslosch Lane. Turn **left**, immediately passing an electricity relay station.

Leg 6: Puddleslosch Lane to Godshill 4¼ km=2¾ miles



- 1 At the top of the lane, turn **right** on the road in Tinkers Cross, going past some bide-a-wee style houses. When the road soon bends right, side left slightly on a minor road and go straight over on a signposted track marked *Newton House*. Where the track curves right into a house, keep straight ahead on a rather dark path which soon runs between hedges. As you come out into a more open space, ignore a footpath right and continue on a hedged farm track. Finally, you go through a farm and come out to a main road, the A338 Salisbury Road. Turn **right** on the main road in Burgate, passing a day nursery. *This large thatched timbered building used to be the Tudor Rose pub. It dates back to the 1300s and is famous for having few doors thanks to a resident ghost, a phantom cavalier, who had the annoying habit of knocking on a door before entering, then slamming it violently behind him.*
- 2 Continue a little further and turn **left** across the main road, opposite an "Indian" restaurant, into a concrete drive. Just after some farm buildings, turn **left** at a fingerpost, marked as part of the *Avon Valley Path*. Go over the River Avon by a suspension bridge – quite unexpected if you are not familiar with this stretch and worth pausing to reflect. Go through a metal gate and keep straight ahead across pasture. The path is slightly elevated with small humps to take you over the channels. Finally the path goes over a concrete bridge with a new metal rail and bends right on a grassy route, then through a new kissing gate. Now come three bridges over tributaries of the main river, a kissing-gate and an enclosed path. You pass various gates, plus a stile, and two bridges over wide streams. Continue on a sandy track between hedges. Go over a stile by a large metal gate. Continue straight ahead. The buildings now herald your entry into Fold's Farm.

- 3 You enter the farm beside a metal gate. Avoid a footpath right and keep ahead under a weeping willow and over another stream. The surroundings here leave a pleasant memory with the ornamental trees and old-fashioned garden. Go over a cattle grid or through a metal gate and immediately leave the track by going over a bank on the **left** and along the left-hand side of a grassy area. Cross the track you were on, then a tarmac drive, aiming all the while for two wooden gates you can see on the edge of the forest.
- 4 Go through the smaller gate into deep woods. This wide path leads you gradually up Castle Hill. Near the top, you come to a fork. Take the **left** fork, avoiding the narrow path that goes straight ahead. The track becomes more prominent and passes a stand of tall pines. Ignore paths off, both left and right. You are in a fine mixed wood with oaks predominating. Finally, go through a small wooden gate beside a large one and cross a very straight lane to go through a similar set of gates on the other side. Shortly afterwards, the track curves left. Before it curves right again, at a crossing path, turn **right** through trees, quickly arriving at the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: if coming from the London direction, take the M3 until, near Southampton, you see signs straight ahead for **M27 West**. Near the end of the motorway, veer off **left** at a sign for *A337 The New Forest, Lyndhurst*. At the roundabout, turn **right**, signposted *Fordingbridge*. Be careful at all times for animals in the unfenced road! At the **Bell Inn**, fork left, still following signs for *Fordingbridge*. Follow this road across one of the most beautiful parts of the New Forest. Eventually, you reach the **Fighting Cocks** pub on the outskirts of Godshill. Turn **right** just after the pub, signposted *Woodgreen*. After about 1 km=0.6 mile, where the road curves sharp left, turn **right** into the car park marked *Forestry Commission Godshill*. Park near the far end of the car park.

By bus: service X3 runs every 30 minutes from Salisbury bus station: check the times. Start the walk in Burgate, by the *ex-Tudor Rose*.

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