Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

West Meon, Beacon Hill and Exton

Distance: 13½ km=8½ miles — easy walking

Region: Hampshire — Date written: 31-jul-2015

Author: Botafuego — Last update: 3-aug-2026

Refreshments: West Meon, Warnford, Exton

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

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

Villages, hills, views, woodland, dismantled railway

In Brief

This walk goes through Hampshire's best village (as voted once in *The Times*) and you won't argue. This is an area of prehistory, with the great bronze-age barrows of Beacon Hill, visited on the way, with high views of Old Winchester Hill and the Solent. Part of the route is along the dismantled Meon Valley Railway, giving you a very comfortable stretch. In fact, the entire walk is easy on the feet and it may seem shorter than the given distance.

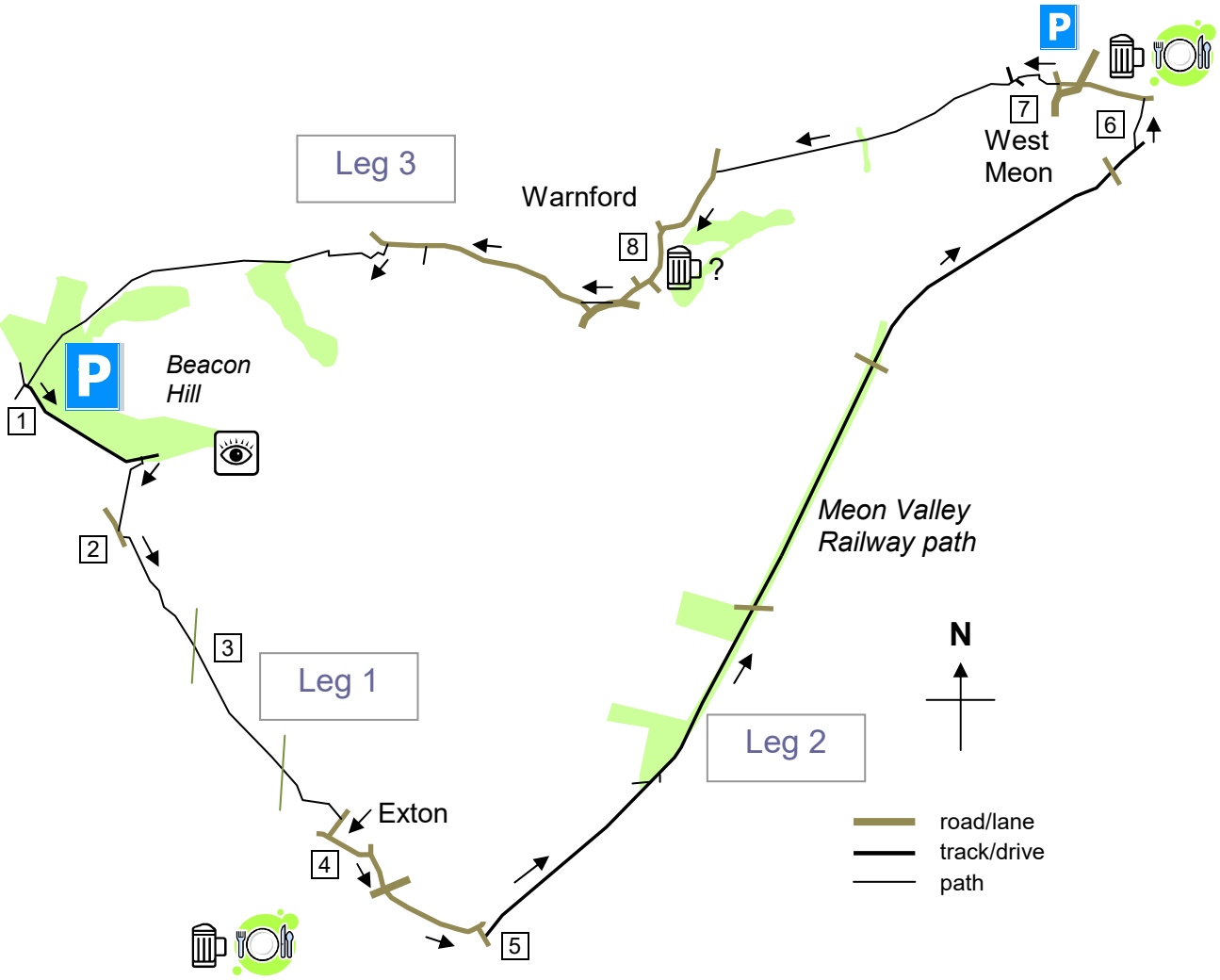
You will be walking in a region full of foodie pubs in choice locations. Booking may be necessary. For the *Thomas Lord* in West Meon, ring 01730-829244. For the *Shoe* in Exton, ring 01489-877526.

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

There are hardly any nettles to speak of on this walk but in summer you may find patches of scratchy undergrowth, making long trousers more comfortable. In the drier seasons, trainers or walking shoes should be adequate. You may find a pole or two useful for some slippery surfaces. This walk is also fine for your dog, with only one field that occasionally has livestock.

The walk begins at the **Beacon Hill Beeches** free(?) car park, near Exton and Warnford, Hampshire, w3w:conjured.mirror.string. (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**. Starting here gives you a lunch break in West Meon and the *Thomas Lord Inn*. A good alternative start is in **West Meon village**, giving you a half-way break in Exton and the *Shoe Inn*, either near the Village Hall or in the Old Railway car park. For full details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



For the Big Zipper walk, switch immediately to Leg 1 of the *Beacon Hill, Betty Mundy's Wood, Exton* walk.

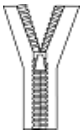
Leg 1: Beacon Hill to Exton 2½ km=1½ miles

1 From the Beacon Hill car park, at the 4-way fingerpost, follow the blue arrow as for the South Downs Way, immediately going through a small wooden gate, past an information board for Beacon Hill. Take a narrow path under beeches, parallel to the track. It soon merges again with track. *On your right you have great views of the Solent and Portsmouth, including the Spinnaker Tower.* You reach a triangulation pillar on the top of Beacon Hill. Shortly after, at a fingerpost, turn **right** as indicated. But by going straight on, 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. Follow the path round to the right, go through a wooden gate and down a straight path. It ends at a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane.

2 In 20m, go **left** through a wooden swing-gate and follow the path, in roughly the same direction as the lane you were on, down the hillside. Your path soon curves downhill more steeply and takes you through a wooden swing-gate. It then goes diagonally down to another swing-gate and through a

band of trees. After another swing-gate, go diagonally down a meadow and across a track with a stile on each side.

3 Cross a stile in the hedgerow ahead and almost immediately cross a second stile. Keep the same direction across the meadow, cutting the corner , and go over two stiles into the next meadow. Cross the meadow diagonally on a faint path, coming down to a swing-gate in the hedgerow. Sometimes you may pass cattle here; if you wish, you should be able to circumvent them in an adjoining field. Go up the next meadow diagonally. In the top corner, by a fingerpost, go straight ahead and veer **left** down the left-hand side of a field. Go through a modern kissing-gate and down a path to a tarmac lane, Church Lane, in the village of Exton. Turn **right** on the lane and, at a T-junction, turn **left**. *The small village of Exton is notable because of a nearby mesolithic flint site, the bronze-age barrows you saw on Beacon Hill and the iron-age fort at Old Winchester Hill, making it an archaeological centre. "Exton" is a contraction from a Saxon word for their "east homestead".*



The Big Zipper walk resumes here.

Leg 2: Exton to West Meon 5½ km=3½ miles

4 Continue on the lane with an old flint wall on your left. *On the other side of the wall is Exton House, late 18th century.* After a left bend, your route is **right** at a road junction. However, just ahead of you is the (very busy) *Shoe Inn*, ideal for a 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.

Having turned **right** before the pub (that's **left** coming back from the pub), follow the road over the River Meon *(look right and left at the little private bridges)* and continue to the main road. Cross carefully straight over the main road and take a lane, Stocks Lane, directly opposite, next to a thatched house, soon ignoring a turning on the right, Rectory Lane. In a further 350m, the lane curves right to a junction. Now follow a new sign on the left "Permissive footpath avoiding flood". This new path ascends the bridge embankment (as the South Downs Way does on the opposite side), and joins it at the top. Turn **left** on a gravel track.

5 This section gives you an easy 4 km walk along the route of the old Meon Valley Railway. The course of the railway changes constantly from embankment with good views and cuttings.

The Meon Valley Railway was opened in 1903 (very late for a main-line type railway) to join up with the (present) West Coastway Line at Fareham and the main Alton Line. It was built to a high standard with dual tracks, smooth curves and gentle gradients. A viaduct was built north of West Meon, taking the railway over the River Meon, and a tunnel at Fareham. The passenger service was closed in 1955, long before the Beeching cuts.

Old Winchester Hill is on view on your right. After 1 km you pass fingerposts where the South Downs Way crosses. In ¾ km you enter an area of tall horsechestnuts and cross a tarmac lane. In another ¾ km the path goes over a disused bridge. Shortly after, your path runs through a cutting and passes under the arch of the Old Winchester Hill Road. The

track now curves right and, 1 km from the arch, you come through a wooden gate. This is the site of West Meon station and much of the platform structure is still present, extending beyond the road arch. Fork **left** before the platforms into the car park and follow the car park exit track down onto Station Road. Turn **left** on the road and, in only 10m, turn **right** on a signposted footpath by a flint wall.

6 Follow the path between two low walls for 200m. It takes you over a side stream of the Meon via a bridge with rails, then another shortly after, leading to the High Street in West Meon. Turn **left** on the road, soon passing the *Thomas Lord Inn*.

Thomas Lord (1755-1832) was a cricketer and shrewd buinessman whose Yorkshire family had been impoverished for supporting the Jacobite rebellion. He was employed as groundsman by the White Conduit Club in Islington but engaged the support of wealthy clients to establish grounds near central London for the recently-formed Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC). The St John's Wood site was the last of several relocations, now known throughout the world as Lord's Cricket Ground. Thomas Lord died in West Meon and is buried here in the churchyard.

The Thomas Lord Inn is simply one of the best foodie pubs in the region, and for that reason always bustling. Start your meal with Portland crab, brown crab custard, treacle bread and kohlrabi remoulade and move on to a truly superior dry aged beef burger, but all at Kinghtsbridge prices! If you just want to quaff, there is a winsome garden and the Thomas Lord welcomes muddy walkers.

Along the road there are *Cuppacheeno* (favourably reviewed), the Village Shop and Harriotts butchers and deli (which has tasty treats to take away). Cross carefully over the main A32 road (certainly a blight on such a pretty village) and go straight on along The Cross, passing a master thatcher and some of his works. At a T-junction, continue straight ahead along a tarmac path next to the thatched *Benhams Cottage*. It leads into the churchyard of St John The Evangelist. Veer **right** on a path towards the church which is well worth a visit.

You may remember from history books of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes arriving after the Romans left. Well, the Meon valley is where those elusive Jutes settled. Coming from Jutland (northern present-day Denmark) after the year 500 and called the "Meonwara" or "Meon folk" they gave their name to several villages and the lovely glassy river. The Meonwara still stage a regular meeting! West Meon is one of the most peaceful places in the country, seeing only a few skirmishes in the Civil War at the time of the battle of Cheriton (see the "River Itchen" walk in this series). East Meon is 4 km=2½ miles east (see the "East Meon" walk in this series). St John's church was completely rebuilt in Victorian times.

Just north of the church tower is the grave of the father of Guy Burgess, one of the "Cambridge Five" spy ring (see the "Latimer" walk in the Chilterns section of this website) whose ashes are in the same plot. The villagers did not want the son's name on the stone.

Leg 3: West Meon to Beacon Hill 5½ km=3½ miles

7 As you approach the church, just before the fence into the church precinct, turn **left** beside the fence, past graves, to a stone wall by a yellow arrow. Cross the wall using a stone step or two and take a narrow path by a garden fence. Flint walls lead you onto a shingle and tarmac drive. Turn **right** and, in only 30m, leave the tarmac drive to continue straight ahead up a wide grass path as directed by a fingerpost. The grass path veers right and left uphill

between fields. *A glance back gives you more views of the church. The Meon River is down on your left. The old railway line, on this walk, is betrayed by a line of trees.* Your path goes through a band of trees and enters a large crop field by means of a stile. *Beacon Hill, your destination, is visible ahead.* Keep to the right-hand side, following a fence on your right to reach a stile in the far corner. After the stile, turn **left** on the lane, passing Beaconsfield Farm and some houses of Warnford. *The River Meon is on your left just beyond a public meadow.* The lane winds its way down into the village. Keep straight on passing a junction on your left. *However, by turning **left** over the river to the main road, you will find the "George and Falcon" (Marstons), a pub with a unique name, serving excellent food; in 2024 unfortunatley closed and for sale.*

8 Continue on the road, ignoring a footpath on the right, passing old watercress beds. When you reach the main road, turn **right** on it. In only 100m, at a triangular green fork **right** on a path and turn **right** on a tarmac lane. *Note that you are following part of the Monarch's Way, a very long historic walk from near Worcester to near Brighton.* Follow this lane for 700m towards some farm buildings and ignore a track here on your left. In another 150m you reach Wheely Down Forge. *Charles Normandale is a sculptor and blacksmith, who has provided every kind of forged steel fittings for famous tourists sites like the Tower of London, and churches and cathedrals. His "shark" is on view and, in the yard, other samples of his work. Note the ornate field gates on your left.* Turn **left** here at a fingerpost and follow the track uphill beside a field on your left. In 200m, where some tarmac begins, go **right** through a gap in the hedge, up and down steps over a barbed wire fence, and immediately **left** on a grassy path. Follow this pleasant path uphill with a flowery meadow on your right. If you meet another wire fence across the path, turn **right** after the gap in the hedge and, at the end of the wire fence, turn **left** and follow the path along the edge of the meadow. The path goes through a small wooden gate beside a large one and continues on a level route, with the deep valley down on your left, part of Beacon Hill which you will have the option of exploring soon. The path rises gently between fields again, veering a fraction left, and runs up a gentle slope. If you meet cattle and their calves directly in your path, veer over to the **left** of the meadow to climb over a large metal gate on the left-hand side; this gives access to a fenced-off footpath along the left-hand edge of the field. You reach a small wooden gate beside a large one. Go through the gate onto a level woodland path. It leads through a small wooden gate into the Beacon Hill Beeches 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. If starting in **West Meon**, just before entering the village, turn **right** at a P sign for Village Hall. Park there or turn **left** into Headon View and **right** at the top into the large village hall car park, postcode **GU32 1LH**, w3w:casino.paradise.outbursts, where there is oodles of space. To start the walk, go back to the main road and turn **right**.

Alternatively, for the Old Railway car park, turn **left** on Station Road and, after a bend, fork **right** onto an unsigned gravel track leading to the old station, w3w:burst.flying.bedspread, which is on your route.

If starting at **Beacon Hill Beeches**, continue to Warnford. Immediately after the village, turn **right** onto an unsigned road (actually Wheely Down Road). 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, w3w:invisible.clip.truly, grid ref SU 598 227.

Warning! isolated car parks: leave car visibly empty - see Guidelines.

By bus: bus 67 runs between Petersfield and Winchester, stopping in West Meon, including Sundays. Check the timetables.

fancy ***more*** *free walks?* www.fancyfreewalks.org