



River Meon and Villages, Hambledon, Old Winchester Hill

Distance: 21½ km=13 miles easy-to- moderate walking

Region: Hampshire

Written: 16-jul-2012

Author: Botafuego

Refreshments: all the Meon villages, Hambledon(?)

Map: Exporer 119 (Meon Valley) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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River, villages, views, prehistoric site, Saxon churches, pubs

In Brief

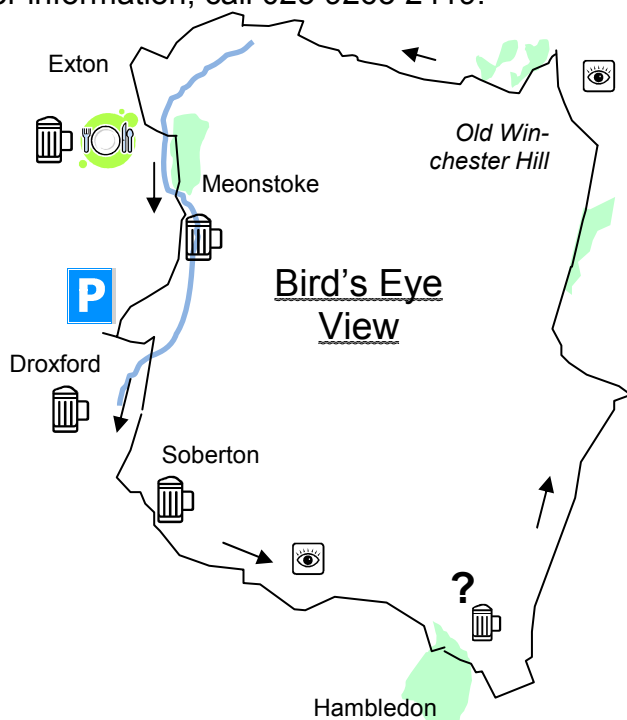
This is a great Hampshire walk showing the best of the county in two different aspects. One is the sweeping high landscape with distant views culminating at Old Winchester Hill Fort. The other aspect is the gentle chalk stream of the River Meon as it meanders through some delightful villages with remarkable churches and memorable inns. This walk was inspired by one from the book of *Adventurous Walks*.

There is a wealth of choice for refreshment in the villages near the end and also in Soberton not far from the start. Note that the only pub in Hambledon may be closed, as it was in July 2012. For information, call 023 9263 2419.



There are few nettles to irritate legs but boots are absolutely essential for this walk, preferably to a good ankle length. This is because of one stretch on the South Downs Way down from the Hill where there is always some mud. If the season is very wet, this section will be very watery and you may need wellies. Your dog should be welcome on this walk with only one or two stiles proving a challenge.

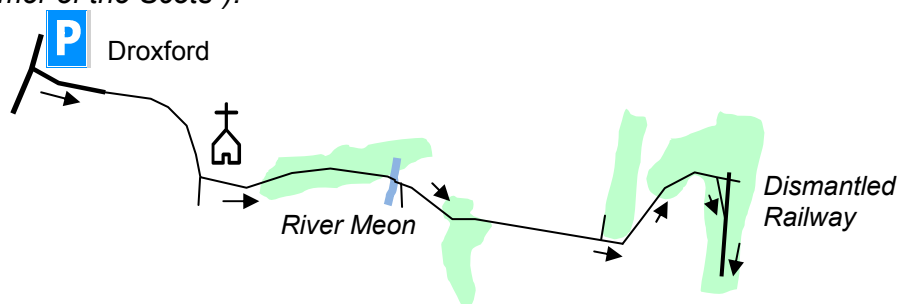
The walk begins at Droxford, Hampshire on the A32 road, **postcode SO32 3RB**, gridref SU 607 187. Park opposite Park Lane in a parking area by the white signpost for *Village Hall, Church*. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

Leg 1: Droxford to Hambledon 7 km=4 miles

A stone-age burial chamber reveals that farmers lived in the Droxford area at least 4000 years ago. The village and the river got their name from a Jutish tribe (from Denmark but not really Danish), the "Meon", who called the place "dry ford". After 1066, the Norman survey, the Domesday Book, shows the village as having two watermills, of which one still stands. A man from Droxford, John de Drokenisford, held high office under King Edward I ("Hammer of the Scots").

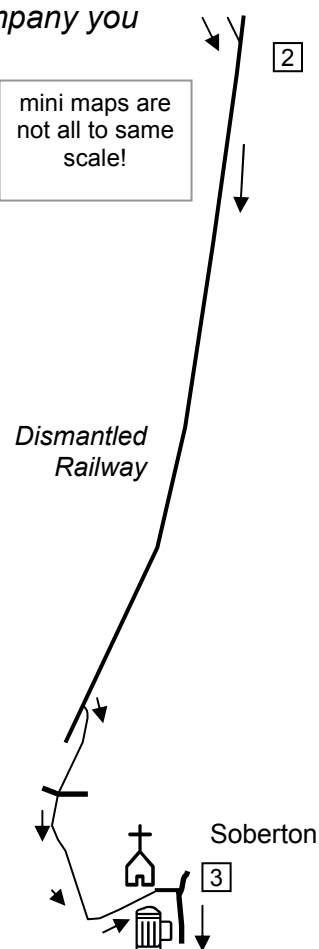


- 1** **WC** Follow the driveway past the *Manor House* and the *Village Hall* (which has a WC) and through metal gates into the grounds of *St Mary's Church*. Note that you are on the *Wayfarer's Walk*, a 70-mile walk from *Emsworth* to *Inkpen Beacon*. Turn **right** in front of the church. Droxford's bright Norman church is well worth a look inside. Go through a small kissing-gate in the wall and turn **left** alongside the hedge. The path goes under trees, through a swing-gate and over a bridge across the *River Meon*. This is a perfect spot to make a brief acquaintance with this chalk stream: it will accompany you for the last stretch of this walk.

The Meon River rises in the hills above East Meon and flows through Titchfield into the Solent. In the 1600s, Izaak Walton, author of "The Compleat Angler" came to Droxford to fish and declared that the Meon was the best river in England for trout. (The pub with his name is in East Meon, however.)

The path crosses another stream. Ignore a footpath on the right here and continue uphill. After a homemade metal swing-gate, avoid a left turn and keep ahead through a similar gate, up the left-hand side of a meadow. The path encounters yet another swing-gate and maintains its course up through trees. Just before a bridge, go **right** down steps and keep ahead along the course of the dismantled railway. Droxford station once stood nearby and it was here that Churchill, Eisenhower and de Gaulle met in a train carriage in 1944 to plan the D-Day invasion.

- 2** Follow the old sunken railway line under tall ash, oak and sycamore, later horse chestnuts, for about 1 km. When you see a steel bridge about 150m ahead, go **left** up a steep bank to join a parallel path. (Be careful not to miss this turn.) The path rises high above the old railway and reaches a lane by the bridge. Cross straight over the lane, up steps and over a stile into a

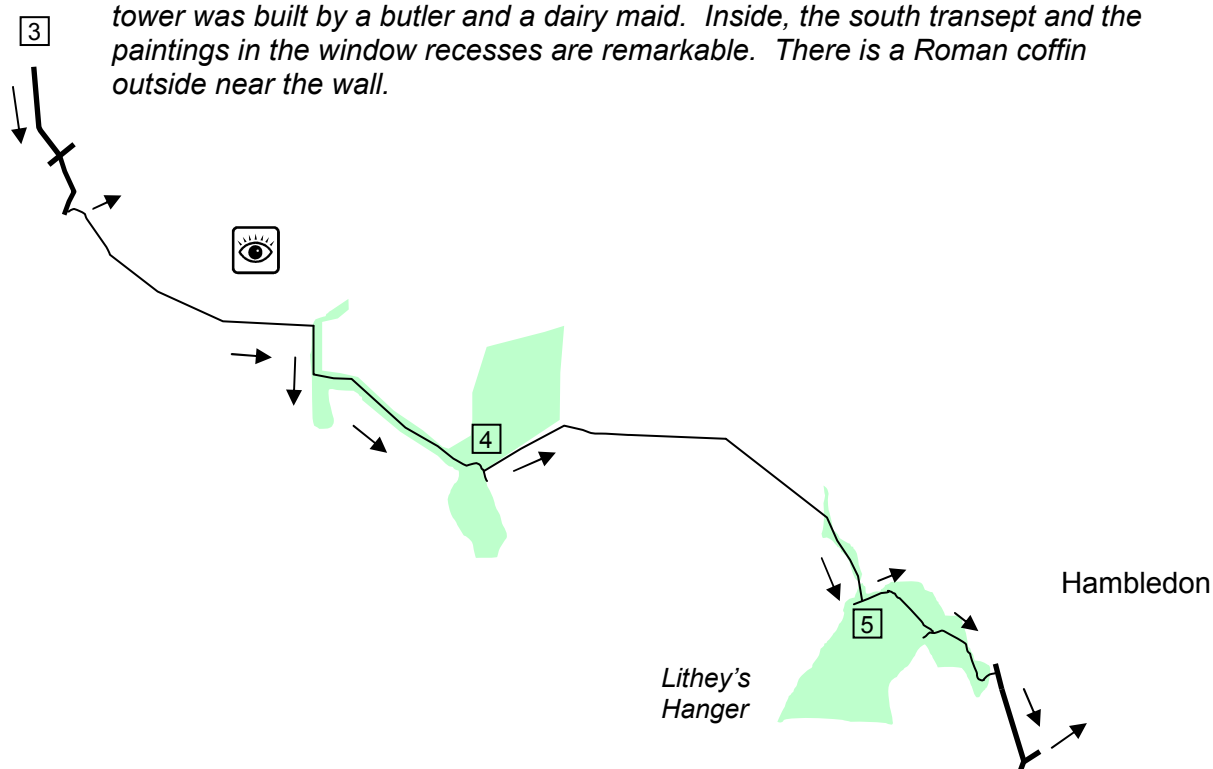


fenced path. Turn **left** in the meadow and go **right** over a stile by a large metal gate into the adjoining pasture. Keep **left**, heading for the fence that encloses the cemetery of Soberton church. Turn **left** around the corner of the fence and take a rather undefined path, taking in good views of the church, to go over a stile by a large wooden gate. *The beautiful and fascinating Soberton church is well worth visiting (see below). The church rooms, accessed through the church, have a WC.* Continue ahead on a tarmac drive and turn **right** on the road in Soberton by the *White Lion*. This is a successful conversion of the 17th-century pub into a bright bar/restaurant, retaining all the usual pub accessories. [Feb 2013 currently closed "until further notice, for essential maintenance".]

WC



Soberton was once the farm ("tun") of the South Grange ("sud bere"). The church of St Peter has an interesting tower showing a skull, two heads, a key and a purse. A tablet within the tower relates the medieval legend that the tower was built by a butler and a dairy maid. Inside, the south transept and the paintings in the window recesses are remarkable. There is a Roman coffin outside near the wall.



- 3 Follow the road, ignoring a footpath on the left, to a crossroads. Go straight over on lane opposite, signposted *Hambleton*. In 150m, turn sharp **left** at a fingerpost, still on the Wayfarer's Walk. Follow the concrete track and keep left through a large wooden swing-gate. Keep uphill, avoiding a swing-gate on the left which leads into open access land, and going through another swing-gate. Take a clear path across the centre of this large meadow. On the other side, your path goes through a hedge and along the left-hand side of two fields. At the far side, turn **right**, as indicated by a marker post. In 140m, at another post, turn **left** on a path that runs the length of a long corridor of woodland. Near the start, you pass a magnificent wide-crowned old beech tree. Eventually the path breaks into the open and runs downhill in more trees past a metal barrier, to a corner of a field and a fork.
- 4 Choose the **left** fork, through a wooden gate, still on the Wayfarer's Walk. The path runs the line of a fence and meadow on your right and meets a track. Keep **right** here along the right-hand side of the next field, then between fields, with East Hoe Manor House visible ahead. Unexpectedly,

you reach a lane. Go straight over on a path across the crops with distant views of the Solent to your right. On the other side, go through a wooden swing-gate, veer **right** across the grass and veer **left** again on a path through hollies and hawthorn. Shortly you come to a marker post. Fork **right** here through a swing-gate into a field and turn **left** along the edge.

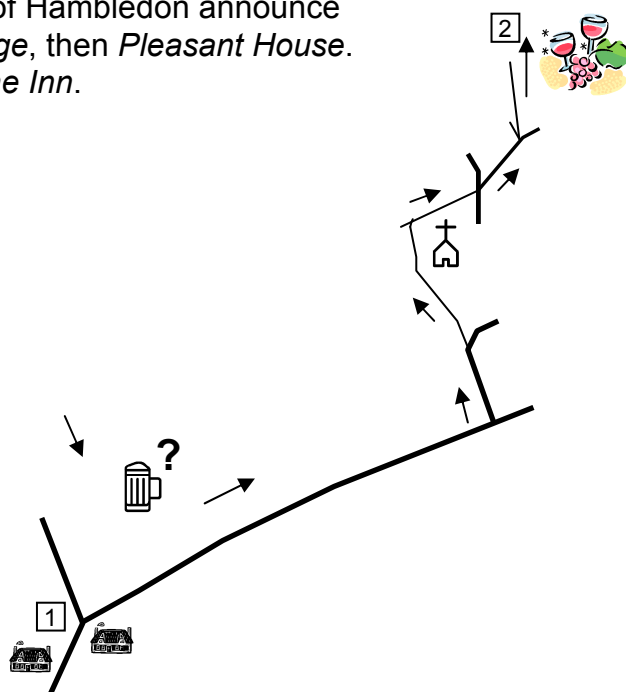
- 5 The path goes into trees and reaches a T-junction inside the dense wood of Litheys Hanger. Turn **left** here. Soon your path curves right and takes you through the centre of the wood. On meeting a path coming down from the right, go **left** downhill, following the green arrow. Keep to this woodland path, gradually descending and soon passing the first houses of Hambledon. Finally the path turns left by pigsties to reach a road. Turn **right** on the road. You pass the appropriately named *Thatched Cottage* and reach a road junction surrounded by some of the period houses of Hambledon.

Leg 2: Hambledon to Old Winchester Hill 7 km=4½ miles

- 1 Turn **left** along West Street. The houses of Hambledon announce themselves by name: there is *Tudor Cottage*, then *Pleasant House*. Continuing a little further you pass *The Vine Inn*.

Hambledon's only remaining pub was closed at the start of 2012. For such a sizeable village this was unthinkable. Adam and Alex, the new tenants, have now reopened the pub [before Feb 2013] with the help of the brewer (Marston).

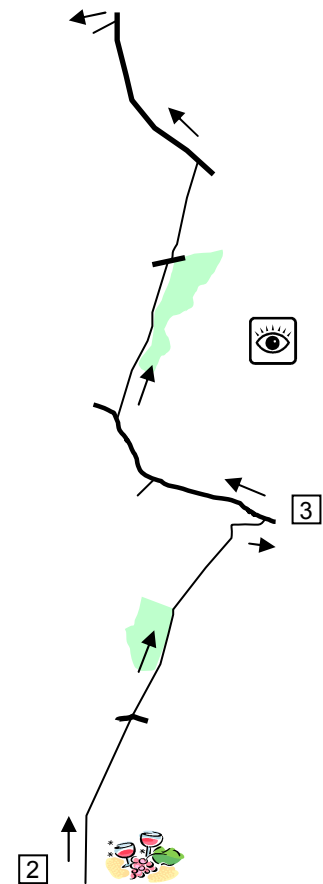
Continue to the junction with the historic High Street. At this point you find the Grocer, emblazoned with "People's Market", which is also an off license and open on Sundays. Go **left** up the historic High Street passing on the left W.H.Langtry, once a butcher's shop. *William Langtry was the nephew of Lillie Langtry the actress and royal mistress.*



Hambledon was once a large wealthy town as you can see from the size of the church. It held two fairs annually on Broadhalfpenny Down (a broad halfpenny being the usual entrance fee). It supplied a contingent known as the "Hambledon Boys" to the Roundheads at the Battle of Cheriton. (See the "Cheriton" walks in this series.) In the early 1800s it must have been in decline because the writer William Cobbet, of "Rural Rides", called it "a tumble-down and rubbishy place". Hambledon is well known as the "cradle of cricket" because it is here that the rules of the game were first laid down. It is also famous for its vineyard, which you will shortly see.

Continue through a gate into the churchyard. The big church of St Peter and St Paul is definitely worth a visit. *Hambledon church contains so many beautiful features: the chancel ceiling, all the stained glass and the ornate organ poised centrally over the nave.* Pass to the left of the church and turn **right** on the other side of the churchyard on a gravel track. On reaching a lane, turn **left** but immediately turn **right** on a tarmac lane beside a school.

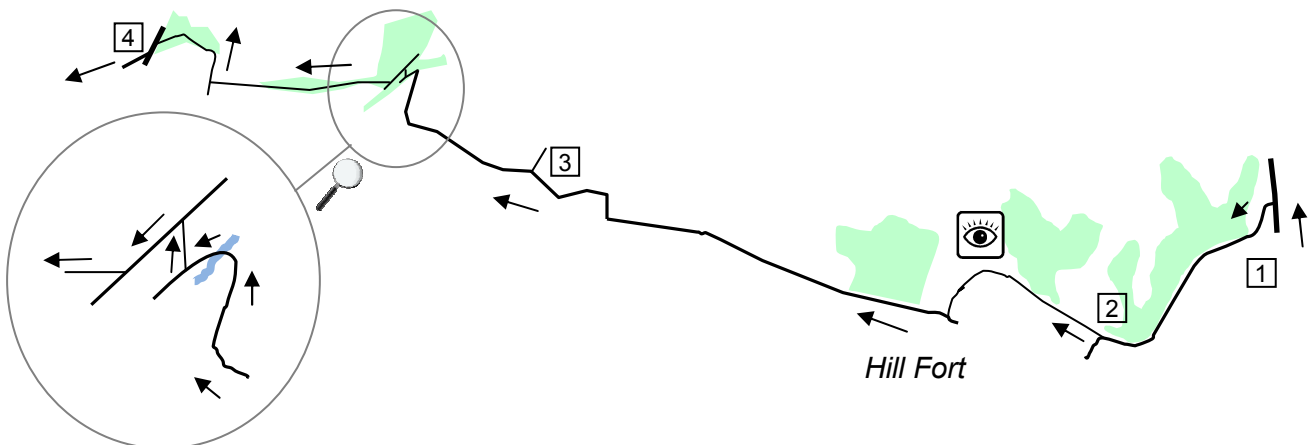
2 Go over a stile by a metal gate ahead and diagonally left across a vineyard between lines of stakes. *Hambledon Vineyard is England's oldest of modern times, going back to 1964. They now grow three grape varieties (chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier) used in making sparkling wine, the equal of French champagne.* On the other side, continue straight ahead along the right-hand side of a large crop field (barley in 2012). This takes you over a high point where you have great views all around. At a lane, cross straight over on a track signed to "Beckless Farm" but, in only 20m, fork **right** on a narrow path across the field, heading for the right-hand corner of a wood. Continue beside the wood until you reach a wooden gate. Slip past the gate and resume your direction on a wide path running inside a belt of trees. Soon your path joins an even wider path and, as you come out into the open, it bends right and reaches a lane. Turn **left** on the lane.



3 Stay on this extremely quiet lane passing a house on your right and, when it goes down a shallow dip, avoid a lane on the left. After just over 1 km, where the lane takes a distinct left bend, fork **right** on a track. (The fingerpost may be obscured by brambles in the summer months). This wide track runs between fields and, in just over 1 km, reaches a lane. Cross the lane and go through a small wooden gate into the farmyard of Little West End Farm. Keep straight ahead through a large metal gate and along the right-hand side of a pasture. Ahead to your left are views of Old Winchester Hill. After two more fields and stiles you reach a road. Turn **left** on the road. *(There is a route for purists to avoid the road, taking you down to Whitewool Farm and up again. However, the gradients are taxing and the farm tracks are slurred, ruling out that option for this site.)* After about 900m, admiring the views to the east, just before the road enters trees, you reach some wooden gates on your left with a sign for Old Winchester Hill.

Leg 3: Old Winchester Hill 3 km=2 miles

- 1 Go **left** through the small gate and take the path ahead. Keep to the upper left-hand section which is signposted "hill fort". *Note that you are also on part of the South Downs Way, a long-distance path (and bridleway) from Eastbourne to Winchester.* When you reach a 3-way fingerpost, go straight ahead through the large wooden gate into the hill fort. You need to pick up the South Downs Way on the other side of the hill and one option is over the highest part where you can gain an impression of the ancient hill fort. However, the way suggested here is round the perimeter.




Old Winchester Hill Fort is a confusing name because Winchester is 11 miles away. The burial mounds date from 4500 to 3500 years ago but the western ramparts of the fort were built around 2500 years ago, obliterating some of them. From that time, it was a Celtic settlement with a pattern of prehistoric fields visible underfoot and the fortified part made of a bank and a ditch with evidence of huts in the hollows. The hill fort is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) with several types of orchids, resident butterflies and other rare insects, and some rare flowers. The Hill is also listed as an excellent place for astronomy, being relatively far from towns and street lights.

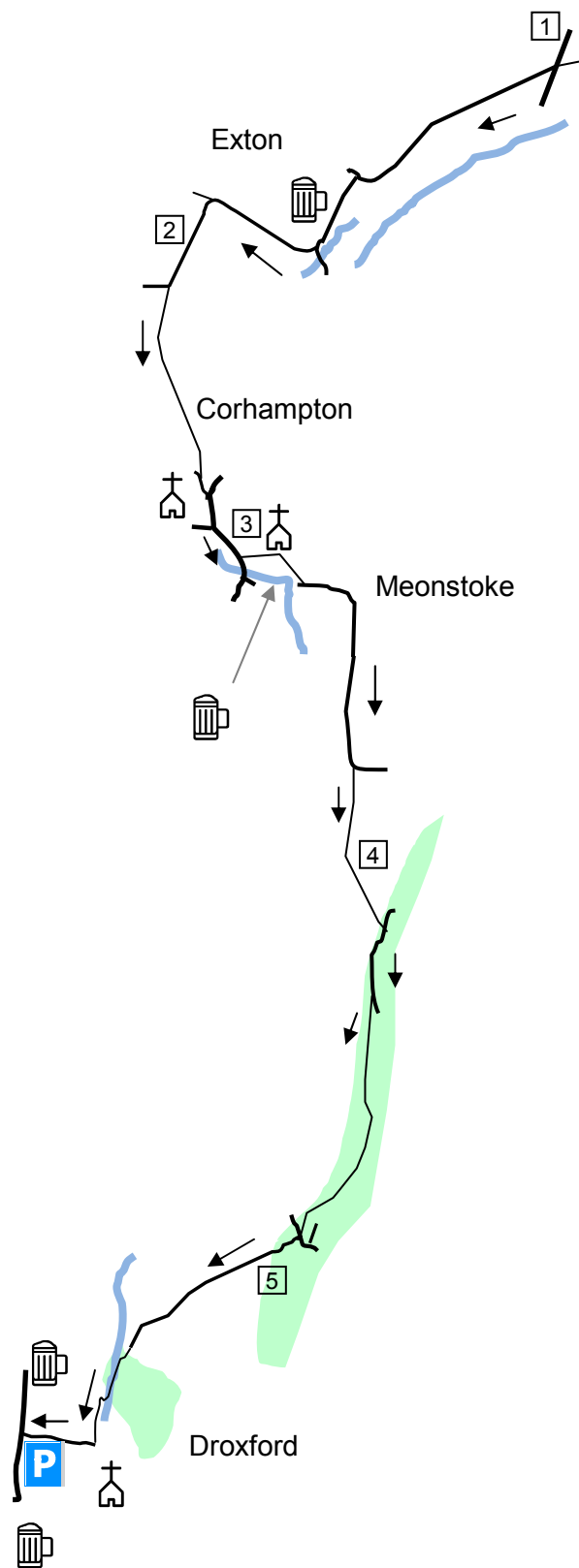
- 2 Keep straight ahead with the fort on your left and the steep edge of the hill on your right. The great views here and the wild flowers make this a memorable part of the walk. The path curves left around the hill fort, widening the views. You reach a T-junction with the South Downs Way. Turn **right** here towards a small wooden gate. Ignore the gate, keeping to the right of it and continue downhill. The path takes you through a wooden swing-gate and downhill through yew trees. It winds through more woodland, runs beside a meadow on your left and then between wire fences.
- 3 You reach a 3-way fingerpost. Keep straight ahead avoiding the right turn which is incidentally part of the Monarch's Way. The path bends right and then left. This part can be increasingly muddy in inclement seasons making boots essential for this walk. After some distance, your path bends **right** by a line of trees. It now doubles back **left**, crossing a bridge over a stream (an ideal place for washing mud off boots). Turn **left** now, still on the South Downs Way. In just 20m, turn very sharp **right** on a bridleway with wooden railings. Shortly, at a T-junction, turn **left** on a wide straight track, part of the dismantled railway. In 40m, just before a brick bridge, turn **right** down some steps. This is a very rooty path running beside the stream on your left. At the end, where the path crosses a bridge, turn **right** at a T-junction.

The stream is now on your right. Soon the path crosses a long bridge over the River Meon – a welcome reunion. The path leads out finally to the A32 road. The village tour begins!

Leg 4: Meon Village Tour 4½ km=2 miles

 **1** Cross directly over the main road, a fraction left, to a tarmac lane. With the Meon accompanying you close by on the left, follow the lane into the village of Exton. Turn **left** on Shoe Lane by the first houses, quickly arriving at the *Shoe Inn*. *This pub, with its unusual name and pub sign, serves a range of dishes chalked up on the board (usually a good sign) as well as several Wadworth ales. The garden is across the lane by the banks of the Meon.* Passing the pub, the road to the left will give you a good view from the bridge. However, the route is straight ahead on a minor road, going past the gates of *Exton House* and some attractive cottages.

2 Stay on the lane as it bends left, avoiding the tarmac drive ahead and passing more large houses. Where the lane bends right, leave it by going straight ahead on a grassy path by a wire fence. Go through a wooden swing-gate onto another path by a wire fence. The path goes left through a small wooden gate and continues into a meadow. Keep ahead on the left-hand side, where the Meon greets you briefly. Go over a stile beside a wooden gate and along a grassy strip beside the wall of a house and out to a drive beside the ancient walls of the church at Corhampton. At the main road, turn **right**. The church can be accessed by a path on the right. *If you see no other church today, do not miss this great Saxon church.*



Unusually, this church has no dedication: it is simply "Corhampton Church". It dates from 1020, before the Normans, and indeed it does have unmistakable Saxon features: the partly circular churchyard, relatively thin walls, the long-short arrangement of the stone quoins and the pilaster strips (or "lesenes"). The only additions have been a part-Norman font and repairs, including those done recently by local friends of the church, and electricity. The church is therefore a precious thousand-year monument. The wall paintings inside and the great yew outside add atmosphere. A full history can be found at: www.bridgechurches.org.uk/downloads/Corhampton_church_history.pdf.

- 3 Continue along the main road and, at a road junction, turn **left** with the main traffic. Only 10m **before** a road junction that you can see ahead pointing left to Meonstoke, turn **left** on a narrow path over a bridge across the Meon. Another bridge follows and on your left, accessible through the lichgate, is the church of St Andrew Meonstoke.

St Andrew's church Meonstoke (until 1830, St Mary's – a rare change of dedication) is Early English with some Norman influence, making it two centuries younger than it's cousin 200m away across the river. (The Meon was much wider in those days, so they must have dominated two opposite banks.) Meonstoke was the principal settlement of the Jutish Meon tribe and they were converted to Christianity by St Wilfred in the 600s, so it is probable there was a wooden church for centuries on this site.

*On the other side from the church is the Church Green, an open-access meadow donated by a parishioner. It is just an excuse to wander over to the Meon and spend a few quiet moments under the willows before returning through the wooden gate. Continue along the lane, ignoring a footpath on the right and passing Church Cottage, to reach a T-junction where, on the right, is the Bucks Head Inn. The Bucks Head (Greene King) is made from a terrace of cottages and has two gardens, one enclosed and one set beside the River Meon. It serves "traditional home-cooked food" but sets plenty of space aside for those who just want a drink. It is also a B&B. Turn **left** on the road (away from the pub) and, at the little triangular green, turn **right** with the road, passing several pleasant houses along the way. Where the road bends left, keep straight ahead on a tarmac drive, passing a school.*



- 4 Your path narrows, running beside a fence, and suddenly you are in an avenue of beeches between wooden fences. *Meonstoke House* is on your right. When the path exits to a lane, turn **right** on it. After the lane curves left and just before it levels out, fork **right** on a wide stony drive signed to *Long Meadow House*. Where the drive bends right, leave it to continue ahead on a narrow path through woodland. The path crosses a concrete driveway and resumes its winding course through trees. Before a small wooden gate, your path turns left uphill and runs close to the tarmac lane. It comes down to a road at a junction. Take the tarmac lane opposite, Mill Lane, between two houses, signed as a dead end.
- 5 Follow Mill Lane to its end and continue over the Meon by a concrete bridge. *The Adventurous Walks book relates that this crossing is haunted by a coach and horses which overturned, drowning its passengers, and which reappears each year on the anniversary of the accident.* Continue on a tarmac, then dirt, path which turns right and left at Droxford Mill, going over the mill race, to follow the river's course. *Mill House has a hut near the entrance that sells produce and clothing on a self-service basis.* Go through a gate or over a stile ahead and along the right-hand side of the final small meadow. Before the end, go **right** through a swing-gate into the church-

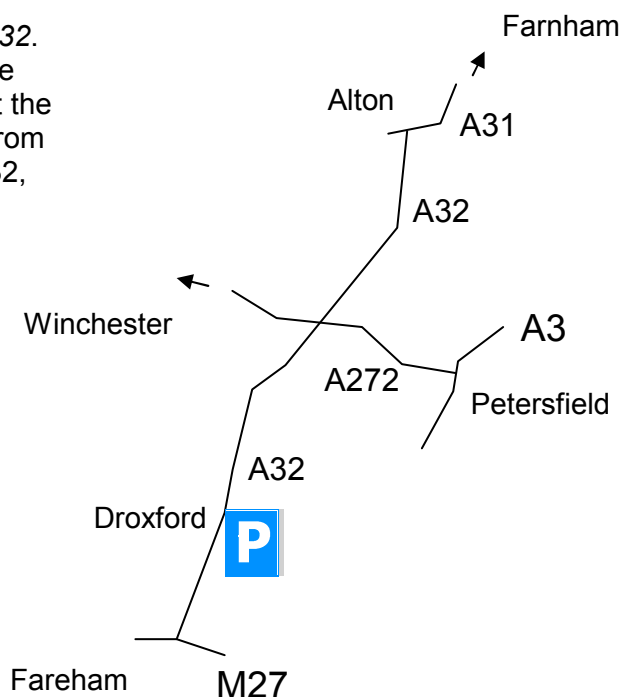
yard and keep **right**, arriving back at the parking area where the walk began.



For final refreshments, the “White Horse Inn” (Greene King) is a short distance, **left** along the road. This is an inn with a difference, in that, as well as acting as a perfectly traditional pub/hotel, it is also an innovative Indian restaurant. The “Bakers Arms”, 200m **right** up the road, is a traditional free house with a comprehensive menu.

Getting there

By car: Droxford is on the A32 Alton-Fareham Road. From the M27, turn off North at Junction 10, signposted *Alton* A32. From the A3, turn off at Petersfield on the A272 West and turn South on the A32 at the crossroads and traffic lights. If coming from Farnham or Alton, follow the A31 and A32, signposted *Fareham*.



By bus/train: bus 17 from Petersfield to Corhampton and Droxford (not Sunday). Bus 45 from Portsmouth to Hambledon (not Sunday). Check the timetables.

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