

Bournemouth Away Weekend 2021

Minstead Walk – Friday 24 September

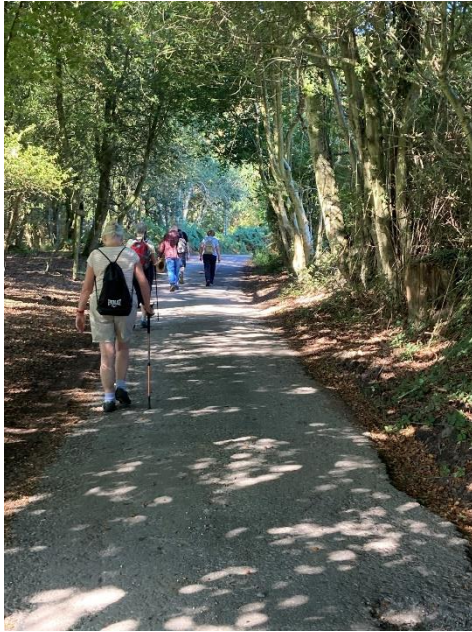
Minstead is a small village and civil parish in the New Forest, Hampshire, about 2 miles (3.2 km) north of Lyndhurst. There is a shop and a pub, the Trusty Servant. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's grave is under a large tree at the back of the 13th century All Saints' church.

We were to meet on the green in front of The Trusty Servant pub at 10.45am for our 4 mile walk in the beautiful setting of the New Forest. This meant leaving the Hotel in Bournemouth at 9.30am to avoid the heavily congested A31 and taking a more scenic route to Minstead.

It was a beautiful morning for the walk and 10 had gathered beneath the old oak tree for a group photo and a short talk by Finbarr Finn, our walk leader.



As we walked along a narrow road past red brick and white washed cottages with thatched roofs, we had to avoid wandering brown cows. We then struck out over green fields and along shady pathways. Passing under the busy A31, an expanse of gorse and heath soon gave way to the cool of a fine oak woodland.



The descent on a narrow road brought us to the Rufus stone.
The Rufus Stone has to be one of the strongest reminders of the origins of the New Forest. The iron-clad stone marks the (alleged) spot where King William II was fatally wounded with an arrow, during a royal hunting outing in the Forest, in the year 1100 AD.



With the stone behind us and the company of two New Forest ponies, the circuitous path across the heath took us back under the A31.



We passed by the sign for Furzey Gardens, which contain 8 acres of landscaped gardens containing many interesting and rare plants. Unfortunately, we did not have the time to explore this today.

On reaching Minstead again a visit to the grave of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a necessity, his daughter Jean is also buried there. Here in the shadow of the unusual brick built church of All Saints we found his grave, decked with pipe and magnifying glass at its foot. The grave stone took a photographic battering.





As the church was open we took the opportunity to have a look around. The chancel and nave, which are of stone, date from the 13th century. The rest of the building, in red brick, is of the 18th century or later date, including the tower. The font is 12th century. The church has two large galleries and a three-decker pulpit. It also boasts an unusual 'luxury' pew complete with its own fireplace.

The morning finished off traditionally in the Trusty Servant. The pub has an unusual sign of a man with a donkey's ears, a pig's snout and a stag's feet. The snout has padlocked lips to signify discretion. This implies some past link with Winchester College, where a similar wall painting of this legendary creature hangs outside the college kitchen.

Once inside and seated we gave our orders and refreshments and a light lunch were duly produced. The main supporting beam across the lounge was carved with strange Hieroglyphics. Not as suggested, a witches curse but the letters and numbers of ownership branded on each New Forest Pony.

After our delicious lunch we left Minstead to drive towards Hengistbury Head to commence our afternoon walk.

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Hengistbury Head Walk – Friday 24 September

Our afternoon walk was around Hengistbury Head Nature reserve. Starting at 3.30pm allowed time for the other group members arriving from Northampton to join us, making 14 in all.

Not being tempted, due to the long queue, to buy an ice cream the first stop was the interactive information centre. Unfortunately, it was closed. Undaunted, a circuitous route was plotted and all set off with the toot of the Land Train, conveyance for those less able well behind us. It was very busy at the Reserve with families enjoying the late summer weather, but was large enough for everyone to enjoy.



The asphalt road took us along the north side overlooking Christchurch Harbour. We walked through wooded areas and alongside the salt marsh and pool. This was once quarried for iron stone but now fringed with extensive reed beds gives shelter to a multitude of water birds. Little Egrets and a Heron or two probed the muddy flats where they were joined by a variety of Gulls.



Reaching the furthest extremity where expensive multi coloured chalets overlooked Christchurch Harbour, we decided to return via the beach to the south side. As it was a very warm afternoon, this would avoid the need to climb up to Warren Hill.



The edge of the braking waves was firm sand and easier than the sand dunes further inland. It was a very pleasant walk back to the car park and we also took our usual group photo again the beautiful cloudless blue sky.

Back at the carpark the queue had gone, so a 99 was called for. We then returned to our hotel to freshen up before dinner.

Bournemouth Away Weekend 2021
Shell Bay Walk – Saturday 25 September

The morning was a bit misty and murky, but 18 expectant travellers stood clutching their bus passes to take the No 50 bus from the bus stop a few yards from our hotel in Priory Road to Shell Bay.

The journey through the backstreets of Bournemouth eventually brought us to the peninsula of Sandbanks. In spite of the overcast misty weather there was a good number of body boarders out on Pool Harbour. We didn't pass Harry Rednapp's House as it is well away from the ferry crossing on Panorama Road.

The No 50 bus waited patiently for the ferry's arrival. Buses have priority over other vehicles so we went on first. The journey only took a few minutes whilst we stayed on board the bus.



On the far side was our stop for Shell Bay, so we disembarked and gathered together for instructions. We were to walk the three miles along the beach to Studlands. Rather than walk through soft sand, we assembled at the edge of the briny, occasionally having to dance away from a larger incoming wave to avoid wet feet.



The beach stretched away in the distances to Studlands and we could just see Old Harry Rocks in the mist. The walk along the beach was uneventful. A litter of green seaweed, mixed with what looked like toilet paper and plastic, decorated the gently breaking waves. Everyone on the beach seemed to have a dog, all sizes and breeds, and this was still the case at the National Trust café where a welcome coffee and perhaps a sandwich reviver was taken.

We now moved inland in search of the Banks Arms pub. Food and drink could only be ordered via an app on the internet. Some of our group were brave enough to order food, which duly arrived in good time before our afternoon walk to Old Harry Rock.



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Old Harry Rocks – Saturday 25 September

Having gathered together at the Banks Arms pub in Studland at 2pm, we took the gradually ascending path to Old Harry Rocks. Our destination is deemed the most popular walk in England and it certainly had its share of walkers and bikers.

Breaking out of a leafy start onto open gently sloping chalk downs, we saw our destination before us. Standing tall on Handfast Point at the southern end of Studland Bay, it is one of the most famous landmarks on the south coast.



The chalk formations are popularly known as Old Harry Rocks, but the name Old Harry actually refers to the single stack of chalk standing furthest out to sea. Until 1896 there was another stack known as Old Harry's Wife, but erosion caused her to tumble into the sea, leaving just a stump.

Thousands of years ago, Old Harry and The Needles (another chalk rock formation) on the Isle of Wight were linked by a line of chalk hills that eroded away during the last ice age. On a clear day you can see The Needles from Studland Bay.

There are a number of theories about where Old Harry got its name. It is reputedly named after either a famous local pirate (Harry Paye) or the devil. The top of the cliff nearby is known as Old Nick's Ground, which is another name for the devil.

After taking a while for photographs and a chance to admire the views, there was a choice to be made. We could either a return the way we had come, or a further ascent along the Purbeck Way to the peak at Ballard Point for magnificent views to either side of the peninsular.



Despite weary legs we chose the latter, and with encouraging cries of "it's not too far or steep" the trig point on the top of was at last reached. We were rewarded with spectacular views of Swanage Bay and the English Channel.



The way back to Studlands was then all downhill. We then waited patiently at the bus stop for the No 50 bus to return us to our Hotel. We were fortunate to get on where we did to get a seat, as a couple of stops further up there was standing room only.



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Arne Nature Reserve – Sunday 26 September

The Arne RSPB Nature reserve is on the Arne peninsular, about a 45 minute drive from Bournemouth, and the access road is both narrow and long. The carpark was quite full by the time we arrived at 10.30am but, having assembled and decided on a route around the reserve, our party of 16 were soon lost in the expanse of the beautiful natural habitat.



Consisting of mainly oak and silver birch trees, open heathland of gorse and heather, a circular path was chosen to take in these habitats as well as a wild flower meadows.

Heading westward, following the yellow, red and green marker posts of our chosen route, we climbed up the many steps to the Shipstal viewing point. This gave us fantastic views across the Wych Channel to Long Island and sister Round Island. Beyond these was the well-known Brownsie Island in Pool Harbour.



Continuing the walk through shady glades of Big Wood with its mysterious ponds and pools, it was suddenly noticed some members were missing. Although it was not a requisite that we stayed together on this walk, a little backtracking was needed to find them, plus a couple of phone calls. They had been looking at Puffballs and were lost in a world of Mycology, so had slipped behind.



Arriving back the RSPB shop and simple café, well appreciated refreshments were taken. The afternoon walk was not far away at Wareham so, suitably fed and watered, we set off there.

Bournemouth Away Weekend 2021 Wareham Walk – Sunday 26 September

Wareham is a walled market town situated between the River Frome and Piddle. The banks of the Frome were busy with boat hire and day trippers on the river.

A rather smart café overlooked the proceedings and was the place where some of the group took in the view whilst consuming their lunch prior to the afternoon walk.



The walk started at 2.00pm outside the town hall and museum. Both were shut as it was a Sunday. Leaving the outskirts of the town Finbarr pointed out remnants of the town wall, now just a broken fifteen foot high earth bank originally built by Arthur the Great in 9th century.



There was a town wall walk but our walk took us on the Pool Harbour trail, a circular walk around what is known as Wareham Country Park.



The initial wooded track soon broke out into open countryside and followed the winding route of the River Piddle before joining the River Frome. The path had been narrow between overhead high reeds, so we were glad when the designated return path was a wide grassy track leading finally past well-tended gardens and the central town.



Just before we arrived back into the town, a tyre on a rope was spotted which proved too tempting for certain members of our group. Fortunately, no bones were broken!

Bournemouth Away Weekend 2021 Tolpuddle Walk – Monday 27 September

The weather forecast for this morning had been strong wind and heavy rain, which was evident during the night. However, at breakfast everyone was pleasantly surprised to see the sun shining with a just brisk breeze.

Most people were heading for home, but five people were staying around to walk with Finbarr on the final route from Tolpuddle at 10.30am.



Walking from the pretty thatched village of Tolpuddle, we followed the River Piddle through some fields with livestock, catching a fleeting glimpse of a deer in the distance.





A short stretch of road took us to Affpuddle, where we strolled through the churchyard, stopping to admire the craftsmanship of the War Memorial.

We then continued along a narrow farm path where we had the unusual experience of being followed by a farmer in his horsebox going to check his stock. After exchanging pleasantries with the farmer at his yard, we continued through some rough woodland until reaching the Hardy Way.



This we followed until turning on to a track for Southover we walked along a country lane back to Tolpuddle. We stopped on the village green to admire the historic tree commemorating the Tolpuddle Martyrs.



A nice walk with lovely scenery and fine weather to complete a wonderful Shamblers' weekend.