



East Meon: Low path / High path

Distance: 13 km=8½ miles moderate walking with many easy sections

Region: Hampshire

Date written: 2-may-2013

Author: Botafuego

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Refreshments: East Meon, Stroud

Last update: 7-jun-2021

Map: Explorer 133 (Petersfield) and 132 (Winchester)
but the maps in this guide should be sufficient

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

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Meadows, streams, village, woodland, hills, views

In Brief

This is a circular walk through the gentle country of East Hampshire, far from the bustle of the towns, on paths that are seldom used, giving you a feeling of peace. East Meon is the half-way destination and the main objective of this walk, with its pubs, cottages, church and chalk stream of the kind written about by Izaak Walton. The return route is over the hills with some great views that will stretch your legs a bit.

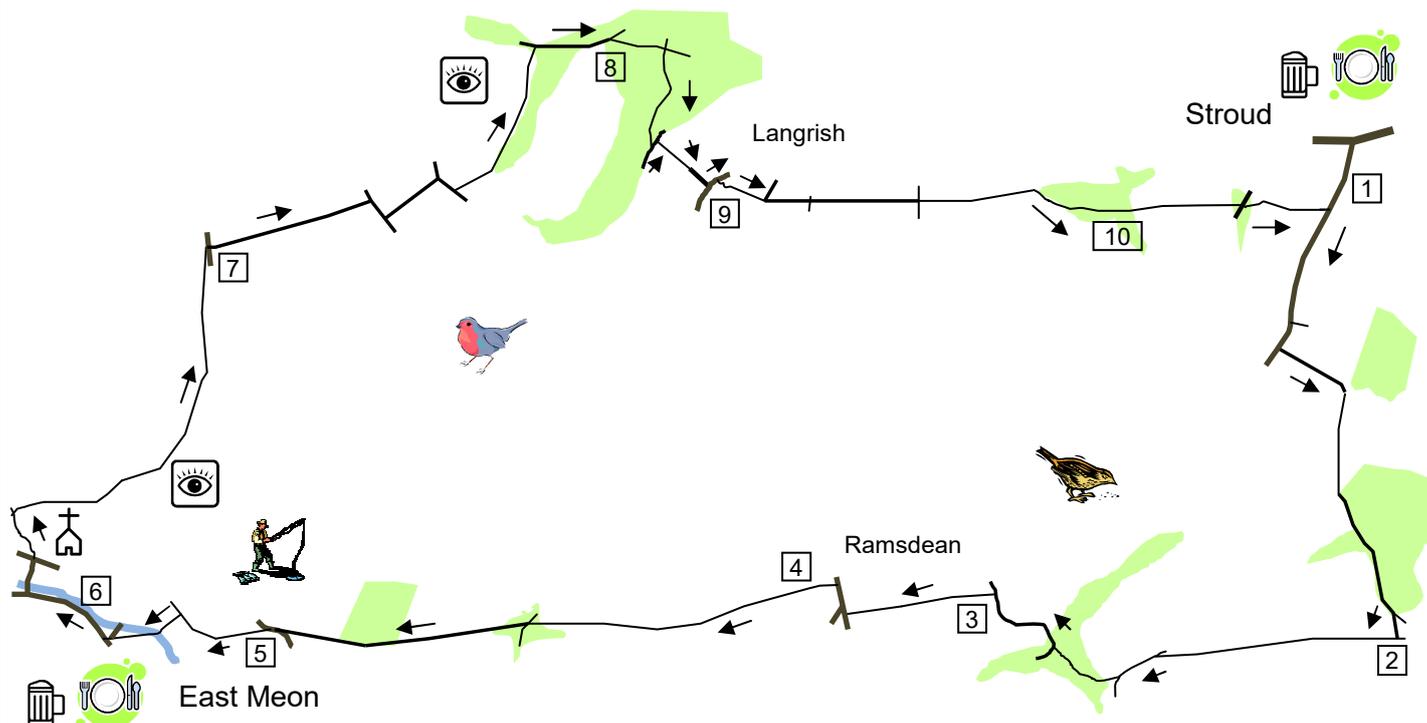
The *Izaak Walton* pub is an excellent half-way stop and walkers report the food is very good value for money. Dave and Ashley McGeorge have just (December 2013) taken over as landlords and are continuing to run the pub on the same lines. Booking is advisable: ring 01730-823-252. *The Izaak Walton is closed on Mondays but there is another pub in the village, also a rather sparse village stores.*



There are some nettles on this walk, so you will be happy in long trousers. It was *fairly* dry underfoot when planned in late spring, but in wetter months there are more muddy patches and boots are essential to avoid slipping. Although many of the stiles are passable with a dog, a large one will have some difficulty.

The walk begins at **Stroud, Hampshire**, near Petersfield, **postcode GU32 3PJ**, www.w3w.co/artichoke.thumps.clipboard, less than a mile from the A3 road. Park in Ramsdean Road which is next to the *Seven Stars Pub Restaurant*, signposted *Ramsdean*. On a weekday you may have competition from the school run. There is always space on one side or the other, if necessary past the entrance to the school. Some walkers park in East Meon (postcode **GU32 1NH**), although this rather spoils the idea of an excursion with this historic village as the centre. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



Stroud itself is an unremarkable village, spoilt by the busy A272 road. For this walk, it is nothing more than a very convenient jumping off point, for the magic begins immediately. In the Middle Ages, you would already be within the great parish of East Meon and this is your principal destination.

- 1 Walk away from the village along the quiet side road, Ramsdean Road, going past the school on your left. [Apr 2021: “road up”, hopefully short-term.] Table-shaped Butser Hill looms ahead (see the “Butser Hill” walk in this series). Just before a right-hand bend, **ignore** a footpath left by a metal gate. Only 70m further, turn **left** into the smart gravel drive of Stroudbridge Farm, marked as a footpath. (You need to press a button on the right, 2m before the gate, to open it.) Pass their little garden on the right with a bridge over the Criddell Stream. You now have the farmhouse on your left and the stream on your right. Go through a large wooden gate and follow the grassy track. The track veers right over the stream, taking you over a stile on the left of a large metal gate into a large rough meadow. Keep to the right-hand side of the meadow [care: do not stray!], not far from a wire fence. The meadow elbows left, becomes fenced and narrows under tall oaks, leading through a small metal gate beside a large one. In the far left-hand corner, go over a stile or through a large metal gate and continue on a wide path. The deep woodland on your left is Widow Knight’s Copse. Follow the main gently winding brick-lined path [Apr 2021: trees cut down for ash dieback] for nearly 200m. Now turn **right** to leave the main path, following a sign-posted permissive path. At a junction with blue and yellow arrows, keep **right** on the yellow-arrowed footpath. You pass a crumbling farm building on your right. *On your left you can see the vineyard of Dean’s Farm.* At the top of the slope, at a T-junction, turn **right** on a signed footpath.
- 2 Butser Hill is now prominent on your left with Lythe Hanger on your right. Your path is a wide grassy strip beside the field on your right. The next field also has a grassy strip as you approach the buildings of *New Barn*. At the corner of a small grassy field attached to the house, keep straight

ahead staying on the grass strip. The path runs near the buildings on your right and joins their concrete drive. Where the drive curves left, leave it to continue straight ahead down a grassy meadow. In only 20m, veer **right** past a marker post [Apr 2021: broken and grounded] and downhill through the woodland of Nutcombe Copse. At the bottom, veer **right** on a wide ancient sunken track that runs along the valley. Unfortunately it is muddy in parts, since it shares its course part-way with a stream, but this is easy to avoid using the bank on your right (sometimes swapping to the left). [2018: a walker met motorbikes coming this way and had to take evasive action.] The winding stony track rises between steep banks. Where it begins to come out of the trees and you see the buildings of Orchard Farm ahead, go **left** up steps (*easily missed!*) over a stile and into a large sheep meadow.

- 3 Cross straight over the sheep meadow keeping roughly 50m from the houses on the right and going past a field maple in the centre. Aim just to the right of a group of tall trees which conceal dwellings, where you can see a yellow round (broken) disc on the fence. Go through a metal gate here and follow the tarmac drive past a bungalow *Nutcombe View* and *Ramsdean House*. At the end, turn **right** on a lane which is joined by another lane. Shortly, just before the first house of the hamlet of Ramsdean, turn sharp **left** through a metal swing-gate on a signed footpath. (First however you may like to take a breather by going a little further to the triangular green where there is a bench seat.)
- 4 Keep to the right in the meadow, across another small meadow, over a stile and up the right-hand side of a larger pasture. *The hill visible on your right is Barrow Hill*. Your route from here to just before East Meon is almost dead straight all the way. At the top, go over a pair of stiles [2015: one broken] and along the left-hand side of the next crop field. Your way is now through a gap next to a redundant stile and straight across a crop field (or, if not clear of crops, depending on the season, **left** and sharp **right** at the corner). At the other side, keep directly ahead along the left-hand side of the next field. *Sir Williams Hill, which you will be traversing later, is visible on your right*. The path crosses a rough meadow and a diagonal crossing path, and follows a path straight ahead by willow banks. [2018: more motorbikes sing this narrow path!] The path widens to a track. *Ahead to your left is Old Winchester Hill (see the other walk in this series "River Meon and Villages")*. After nearly 500m, this ancient track leads you past a metal barrier onto a dirt drive (wet in some seasons). 250m later, you reach a tarmac lane at a bend.
- 5 Cross straight over the lane and go through a new small wooden gate into a sheep meadow [Apr 2021: a sign "temporarily closed" for less than 30 days "some time between April and September 2021" but walkers found it open and used it with no trouble]. *The houses and church of East Meon now come into view with Park Hill standing guard to its north*. Go across the centre, just to the left of a small enclosure, and go through another new wooden gate at the end of the meadow. Veer **right** on a grassy path towards the village, through a new small wooden gate. You reach a bridge on the left with the infant Meon flowing under it by a house. *There are many ways to explore the village from here, with numerous gates and bridges: the way suggested here takes you via the "back door"*. Turn **left** over the bridge, follow the path past some attractive houses, across a gravel track and finally through a gate into the cricket pitch. Go straight across (or round if a match is in progress) and through yet another new small wooden gate. Avoid a lane sharp right but

turn **right** on a major road by *Forge Cottage* (dating from 1600) and so into the village to the High Street, with the Meon running along it, and the *Izaak Walton* pub.

East Meon (like its sisters West Meon and Meonstoke and the chalk stream) is named after a Jutish people, the "Meon", who came from what is now part of Denmark. They settled here as early as the 500s, only a century after the Romans left. By 1086, according to the Domesday Book, East Meon had a population of 450. (In 1986 it was chosen as the representative Domesday Village by the BBC.) The Bishop of close-by Winchester, the old Wessex capital, owned the manor of East Meon and built his courthouse there. Reputedly, both sides in the Civil War fought a skirmish here in 1644 before the battle of Cheriton (see the walk in this series "River Itchen and Villages: Cheriton, Tichborne"). The population of East Meon is now about 1200.

The River Meon fed the villagers to a large extent, with six watermills in the environs. As a perfect chalk stream for fishing it attracted anglers for centuries, such as Izaak Walton (1593-1683), author of "The Compleat Angler", who died in Winchester. The pub named after him offers a reliable menu and Ringwood ales but closes on Mondays and sometimes hosts a private party. The other pub "Ye Olde George" is more sophisticated. (NB "Ye" is pronounced the same as "The" – it's just an older spelling.) In Easter 2013 a thatch fire gutted three cottages next to the Izaak Walton. The ancient walls were intact and the repair was completed by 2015.



- 6 After possible refreshment, continue along the High Street and turn **right** on Church Street past the village well, with its 1857 wellhead, on to the church which is definitely worth visiting.

The sheer size of All Saints church shows how large and important the village was in its time. The "latest" building dates from the 1100s! (According to legend, King John married his "vain, capricious, and troublesome" Isabella of Angoulême here.) The church has a Tournai font and a great deal of wonderful embroidery: on the cushions and kneelers, and especially an absolutely charming large tableau of the village.

Go through the lichgate and pass to the left of the church. Keep ahead over the grass and veer **left** at a fingerpost (which is well hidden in an elder bush and nettles), skirting the graveyard. The path bends right uphill, soon by a garden fence. Just before a wooden swing-gate, go **right** up concrete steps, through a swing-gate and straight up the hillside parallel to a line of maples on your left. At the pointed corner of a field, keep **right** with a wire fence on your left. *You now have an excellent view of the whole village and, beyond it, the rolling South Downs – a classic view.* Your path curves left by the fence and then runs along the contour, and, once you are round the hill, heads for a white house, the modestly named *Park Cottage*. Go over a stile beside a farm gate and keep on down the right-hand side of the meadow. Go through a kissing-gate in the corner, along a grassy strip and through another kissing-gate onto a lane next to a pond.



- 7 Cross straight over the lane, past a large metal gate, to a footpath opposite. Follow the sandy track directly uphill, between two fields. On reaching the far side, in 500m, turn **right** with the track and, in 60m, turn **left** at a marker post on the far side of a hedge on a wide cinder path downhill. In 200m, at a T-junction at the bottom, turn **right** and, in 30m, turn **left** at a fingerpost on a grassy path between fields. You soon reach a Y-junction at the corner of a wood: fork **left**, keeping the wood on your right. *As you near the top, the steeple of Froxfield Church is visible a fraction to your left.* The field on your left ends as you reach a T-junction with a wide track in 400m. Turn **right** on the track,

between tree plantations. As you descend, you pass a line of trees on your left known as *Scaffold's Row* and arrive at a wood called *Sheep Walk* by a marker post.

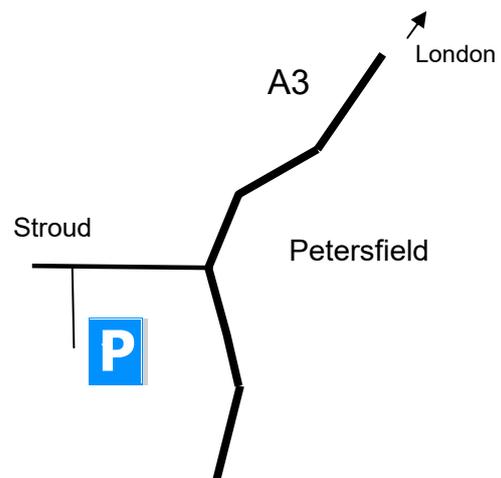
- 8 Follow the wide track downhill through the wood, soon following overhead wires. You pass an electricity pole and quickly meet a wide, gravel crossing path with a yellow marker on the left and a *Private* sign on your right. **Ignore** this crossing path and continue down the track for more than 100m till you reach a smaller crossing path. As a guide, this is just before a plain electricity pole and by another yellow marker pointing in the opposite direction. (If you pass another electricity pole with a small transformer, you have come too far. Turn **right** on this crossing path (defying the direction of the arrows). The path goes uphill, bends right under a yew tree and goes downhill fairly steeply (*careful!*) on a path cut into the sloping hanger. At the bottom, you come to an oblique T-junction. Turn sharp **left** on a level wide path. In only 20m, turn **right** on a narrow path down a slope and through a new swing-gate. Continue down the left-hand side of a grassy meadow towards some modern houses. A new metal kissing-gate and a path by a fence and garden lead you to a residential road. Keep straight on and turn **left** on the main road opposite *Home Farm Cottage* in the pretty village of Langrish, its steepled church just visible to your left. Turn **left** here, crossing the road with care.
- 9 In only 20m, go **right** up some steps on a signed footpath, **left** on the grass and immediately **right** at the corner. You are in the garden of the cottage with its manicured hedges but you need to make a respectful exit in 20m, **left** through a small kissing-gate into the adjoining very weed-cluttered pasture. Go diagonally **right** and through a wooden gate under a tall oak by a large metal gate. Keep ahead to join a track coming from the left. Your path runs between fields and meadows and has a grassy central strip. Follow this track for about 500m and, when you reach a crossing track, pass to the left of an unneeded stile and go along the right-hand side of a meadow. At the top, veer **left** and **right**, through a gap in the hedge next to a broken stile and into the next field. Continue across the centre. On reaching the jutting corner of the field, veer **right** with the woodland of Mustercombe Copse on your left, perhaps with a last look at Butser Hill. About 20m before the next corner, fork **left** on a narrow unmarked path into the wood.
- 10 This lovely little wood makes a memorable end to the walk. At the other side, go over a stile to cross a meadow with Stroud now visible ahead, keeping to the right of an oak in the centre. (On one occasion there were beef cattle in this field which the walker avoided through the woods.) Go over a stile in a fence, followed by another and a third stile with a bridge over the Criddell Stream, and through a strip of woodland to meet a tarmac drive. Go straight over the drive and through a swing-gate. Veer **left** across a small meadow which is part of a private tree garden with a small fenced-off paddock designed to house an adorable miniature pony. Go through a wood-and-metal kissing-gate in a hawthorn hedge and round the edge of a paddock, through another metal swing-gate, over a V-stile, across another pasture and through a final metal kissing-gate to the road where the walk began.



The main road and the "Seven Stars" Pub Restaurant (H&W) are on the left. The pub is open all day every day and, unlike most other pubs, serves food out-of-hours. They boast "unpretentious, seasonal dishes from talented chefs (not microwave technicians!)."

Getting there

By car: Stroud is just off the A3 road, west at an exit near Petersfield, on the A272 Winchester road.



By bus/train: **bus 67** Petersfield station to the *Seven Stars* at Stroud, also Winchester to East Meon, not Sundays. Check the timetables.

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