



Medstead and Bighton

Distance: 15 km=9½ miles

easy walking

Region: Hampshire

Date written: 1-nov-2013

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Last update: 11-apr-2017

Refreshments: Bighton, Medstead

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

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

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Villages, ancient tracks, views, quiet lanes

In Brief

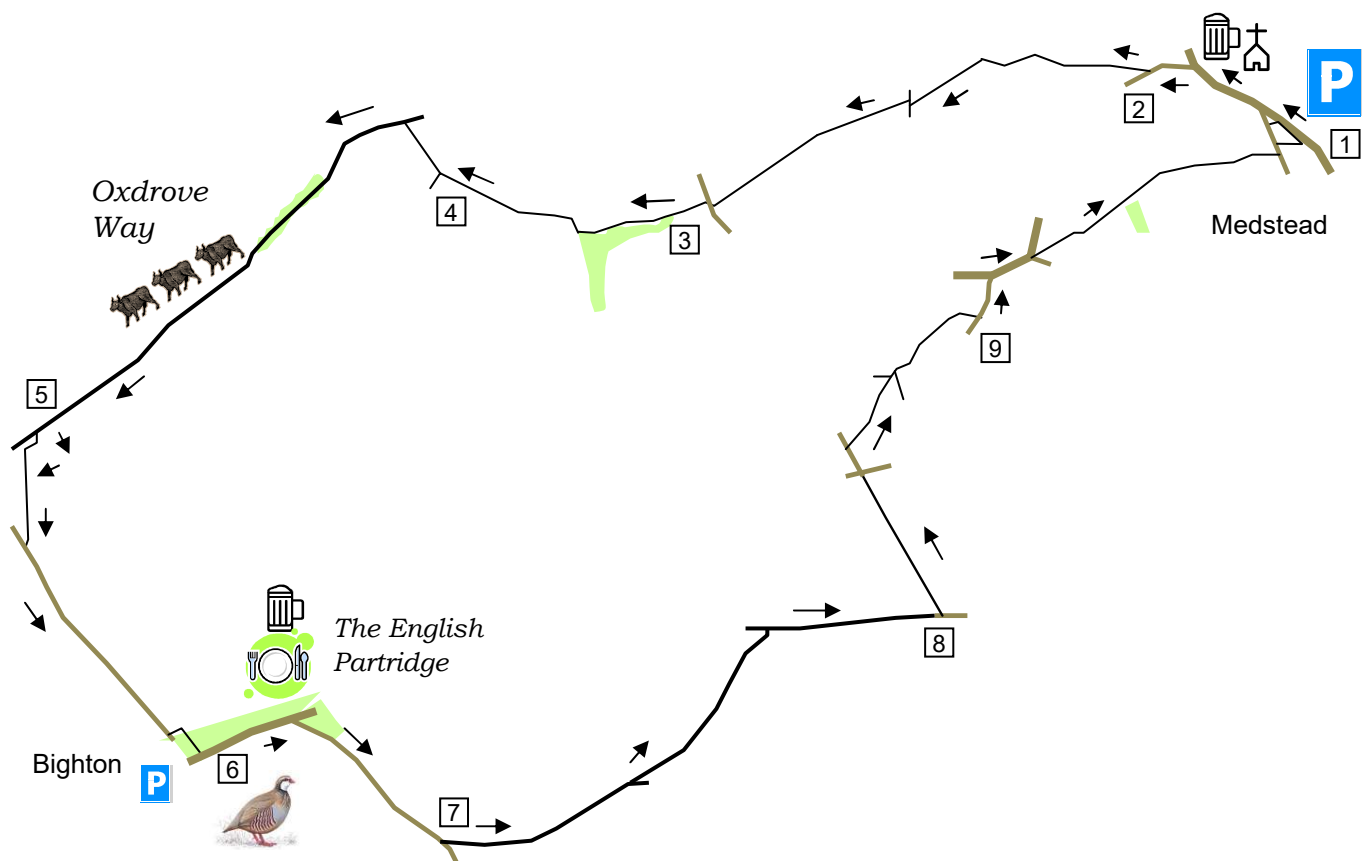
This is a gorgeous walk with magnificent views across the whole of Hampshire, an ancient track, shady lanes and footpaths. In the middle of the walk is one of the best atmospheric pubs in the district with an original fresh menu, plus an enviable range of ales. (To book – or share – a table at the *English Partridge*, ring 01962 732859.)



There is some mud on the trackways which you can usually skip round. However, boots are essential in the damper months. Outside the winter months, the walk may be completely dry with only some caked mud. In high summer nettles and brambles tend to proliferate along the narrow paths in the final stages, making it advisable to wear long trousers (and to bring a stick to swish away any stubborn nettles and brambles). Your dog can come too provided he is not too large, in view of one or two stiles in fences.

The walk begins in a layby off Roe Downs Road, nearest **postcode GU34 5LG**, grid ref 657370. An alternative start is Bighton, postcode **SO24 9RE** (but not behind the village hall which is for users only). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



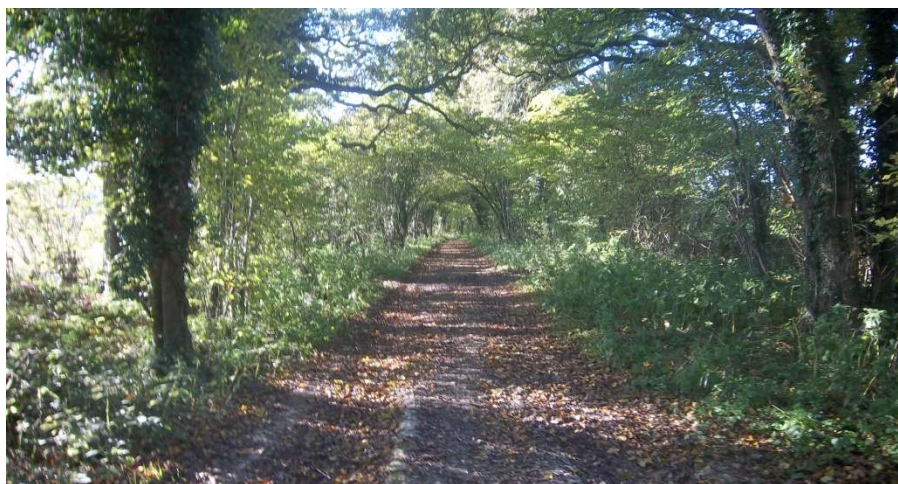
- 1 From the layby, with your back to the road, turn **right** on the gravel footpath parallel to the road. Follow the path as it curves left to meet South Town road, turn **right** on it and in 20m turn **left** into High Street. After a short distance you pass a handy store and the post office on your left and you come to another crossroads. Keep ahead here passing St Andrew's Church (which is worth a visit when not locked) and Castle Street on your right. *In Castle Street is the "Castle of Comfort" Pub, worth remembering for final refreshments at the end of the walk. But note that in the winter this pub is usually closed on weekdays.* Pass Castle Street and go straight on until the next crossroads. Fork **left** here alongside a small green and **left** on the road, Common Hill.
- 2 In 20m take a footpath on your **right** crossing over a stile into a small meadow. Follow the path across the field to a wooden kissing gate and continue across the grass and through a gap in the hedge into another small patch of grass. Ignore any crossing path and carry on straight ahead. You pass a bench on your right and go through a metal gate into a field. Follow the path straight on for some distance ignoring any turn offs, with magnificent views on the left all the way. At the end of the first field, go through a tall metal kissing gate into a vineyard belonging to Hattingley Valley Wines. *This firm makes sparkling English wine on soil similar to that of the Champagne country.* At the other side of the vineyard go through another tall metal kissing gate and follow the path straight ahead. The houses on your right belong to the small hamlet of Hattingley. *From here on a clear day the whole of Hampshire as far as the sea is spread out before you. At night the light from lighthouse on the Needles can be clearly seen. (It is automated these days.)* At the end of the field you arrive at a tarmac path. Turn **right** on the path and quickly **left** again, before a wooden gate, along

the edge of another field beside a hedge on your right. At the other end of this field ignore a left fork and keep **right** on the footpath between a fence and the hedge. Soon you pass another vineyard on your right, and the footpath goes gently downhill towards the road with a wire fence on your right. At the end of the field cross a stile in the corner onto a tarmac lane.

3 Cross the lane and go over another stile into a field, and keep along the edge, with a hedge on your left and a newly planted hedge on your right, passing two chicken runs and a clay pigeon shooting area, till you arrive at the other end of the field. Go through a gap in the hedge into the next field and follow the path ahead with a small wood on the left. At the corner of the wood ignore a field opening with a *private* sign and bear **right** to continue along the hedgerow to the corner of the field ahead. At the corner cross a narrow stile into a field. Keep close to the woodland on your left for about 100m and then, as the edge of the woodland veers slightly left, **leave** it by veering off to your **right** at about 45 degrees on a diagonal path across the centre of the open field. **This path is perfectly clear when cereal crops are present; otherwise just note your direction is WNW but you may not see your destination until you are over the crest.** Head for a metal gate in the farthest corner.

4 When you reach the corner of the field there is a complex of 2 wooden gates and a metal gate. Negotiate the gates any way you can and veer right uphill along the left-hand side of a field, ignoring the footpath on your left. At the top you reach a narrow stile, a finger post on the left and a metal gate leading onto a track. Turn **left** on the track, thus joining the ancient Ox Drove Way which was used in olden times to drive cattle to the markets. *The modern Oxdrove Way is a 26 mile=40 km circular trail running through the Candovers, Alresford and the Wields: ideal for a marathon!*

Oxdrove Way



Continue past Upper Lanham Farm. Where the tarmac turns right to the white farmhouse, keep ahead on a track which soon becomes grassy. The track widens and becomes overhung with trees. Follow this track passing, after 500m, an open-sided barn on your right and then another barn 400m further on. After this second barn, continue another 750m, passing two more fields on your left where you will find a patch of woodland on your left and, incidentally, a field entrance on your right with a yellow arrow. **(As a guide, Nettlebed Lane and Nettlebed Farm are just over 200m ahead. If you overshoot this point, you can simply turn left on Nettlebed Lane.)**

- 5 **Leave** the Oxdrove Way here by turning **left** on an unmarked track that leads into the woodland. Immediately swing **right** with it to enter a field with a house visible ahead. In 15m go diagonally across the centre of the field to the opposite corner where there is a fingerpost. (If there are wet or dense crops, you can go right-left round two sides.) Enter the trees and exit onto a tarmac lane Nettlebed Lane. Turn **left** on this very quiet lane with great views ahead over Hampshire. In 600m you pass *Bighton Manor* on your right and some playing fields on your left to a 30 mph limit sign and into the village of Bighton. Shortly you see a T-junction ahead. Just before it turn **left** on a narrow tarmac path with a metal rail. Follow the path past some new building works till you see a redundant stile ahead and some yellow arrows. Turn **right** here on the wider path to emerge into a large car park behind the Village Hall. (Alternative start.) Walk down to the road and turn **left**. Soon you reach *The English Partridge* pub.



*You know you're in the right place when you see the sign "boots ok". The "English Partridge" was taken over in September 2013 by a couple who have very successfully blended its rustic roots (wooden floors, wooden benches and tables) with an unmistakable nose for good food. The result is an inn, not a restaurant (dartboard, menu on chalkboard). But romantic enough (one or two candles) without discomfiting the casual drinker (or rambler). The menu, which changes often, is imaginative but heartening with rarities such as homemade baked beans on toast. One small bar is devoted to Urquell on tap with the larger bar cycling rare microbrews (Pressed Rat and Warthog, Flowerpots, Rosie's Pig cider) with locals like Alton's Pride. One warning passed on by walkers: this is Hampshire and prices are high, even for soft drinks: **ask the price before you order!** The Partridge is open for lunch during "normal" times, later on Sunday. Ring 01962 732859 for information.*

- 6 After possible refreshment, continue on past some cottages on the left and some lovely old houses then a charming thatched cottage till you reach a road junction. Turn right here following the sign for *Ropley*. Carry on down this pretty little road for nearly 1 km until you arrive at another road junction. Turn **left** here by a low sign post in the direction of *North Street*. Follow this road for about ½ km. Just after the road passes two pedestrian signs and before it bends sharp right, leave it by going straight ahead past a red brick house, *Takoma*.
- 7 The track may soon becomes quite muddy in the wetter seasons. Soon you pass an opening into a field on your right: carry on straight ahead on a small footpath ahead. After about 200m another track joins you from the right. Your track soon becomes wider and, in winter, quite a bit drier. Always carry straight on avoiding any turn offs. Finally your path bends left to a T-junction. Turn **right** here on a horse track known as Stancomb Broad Lane. The track becomes stony and after 600m or is joined from the right by a tarmac drive.
- 8 In 40m turn **left** on another path marked with an orange, possibly hidden, byway arrow. **If this path is very muddy it is possible to avoid the mud by going into the fields alongside, first on the left and then across the path to a field on the right.** In 650m the path comes out to a road junction. Cross straight over the junction and proceed along West End Lane. In 150m, go **right** by a fingerpost through a gap in the hedgerow. Follow a diagonal path to the left across the field, go up steps in the hedge and diagonally across the next field. After a stile, go diagonally left across the next meadow, over another stile and across a very small meadow to a 3-way fingerpost at a junction of tracks. Go over a stile here above a large sign

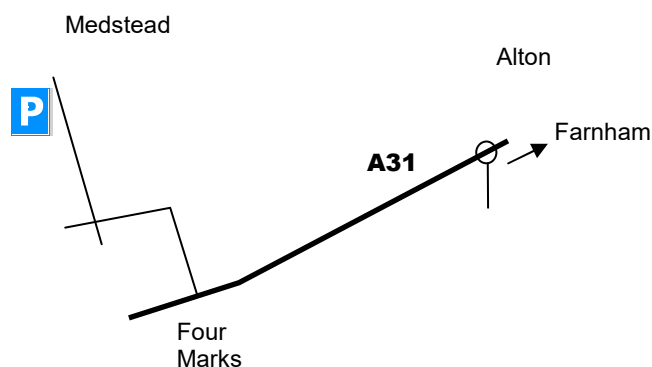
for *West End Lodge*. Bear **right** here on a wide track, avoiding a track sharp right. The track passes some houses and shortly brings you to a T-junction with a road by a wooden post in the centre of a small triangle of grass.

- 9 Turn **left** on the road and follow it to a T-junction. Turn **right** here following the signs for *Medstead, Bentworth*. On the right is the beautiful thatched *Three Ways Cottage*. In about a 100m the road bends left at a junction. Turn **right** here into Homestead Lane but immediately, just under a sign saying *Bridleway no Unauthorised Access for Motor Vehicles*, turn **left** onto a small path. Follow this path past houses and through several small fields and a small patch of glorious bluebell woods, always keeping straight ahead. There are several stiles, some redundant or avoidable. [Summer 2015: the following path was totally overgrown with brambles and nettles; as an unresearched bypass route, instead of taking the small path under the bridleway sign at the Common Hill junction, just carry on along Homestead Lane until you hit the Medstead/Four Marks road and then take the bridleway on the right just before reaching the road.] Your path runs between a hedge and a fence, going past two crossing paths with stiles and horse pastures, finally reaching a cemetery on the right. Here you can either continue on the path to the road or walk through the very pleasant cemetery and exit onto the road through a pair of metal gates. Turn **left** on the road, using the footway opposite. After 40m there is access to a playing field on your right. You can cross this or if necessary go round the edge to arrive at the layby where the walk started.

Getting there

By car: If coming from the London area, take the A3 to Guildford, then the A31 over the Hog's Back, through Farnham and follow it towards Winchester. The dual carriageway ends at the village of Four Marks. Continue for about half a mile and just past a new housing estate is a sign on the right for *Medstead 1½*. Turn **right** here and follow the road until you come to a cross roads with a sign for Medstead on the right. Turn **right** here into Roe Downs Road and continue for 0.8 mile=1.3 km till you pass a school and reach some playing fields on either side of the road. Here on the left is a large layby where you can park the car, your only competition being the school run.

By bus/train: bus 28 runs from Alton station to Medstead, not Sundays. Check the timetables.



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