



Selborne and the Zig-Zag to Newton Valence

Distance: 5 km=3 miles

easy walking with one taxing section

Region: Hampshire

Date written: 2-may-2013

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Last update: 9-aug-2018

Refreshments: Selborne

Map: Explorer 133 (Petersfield) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Village, zig-zag climb, views, woodland, church

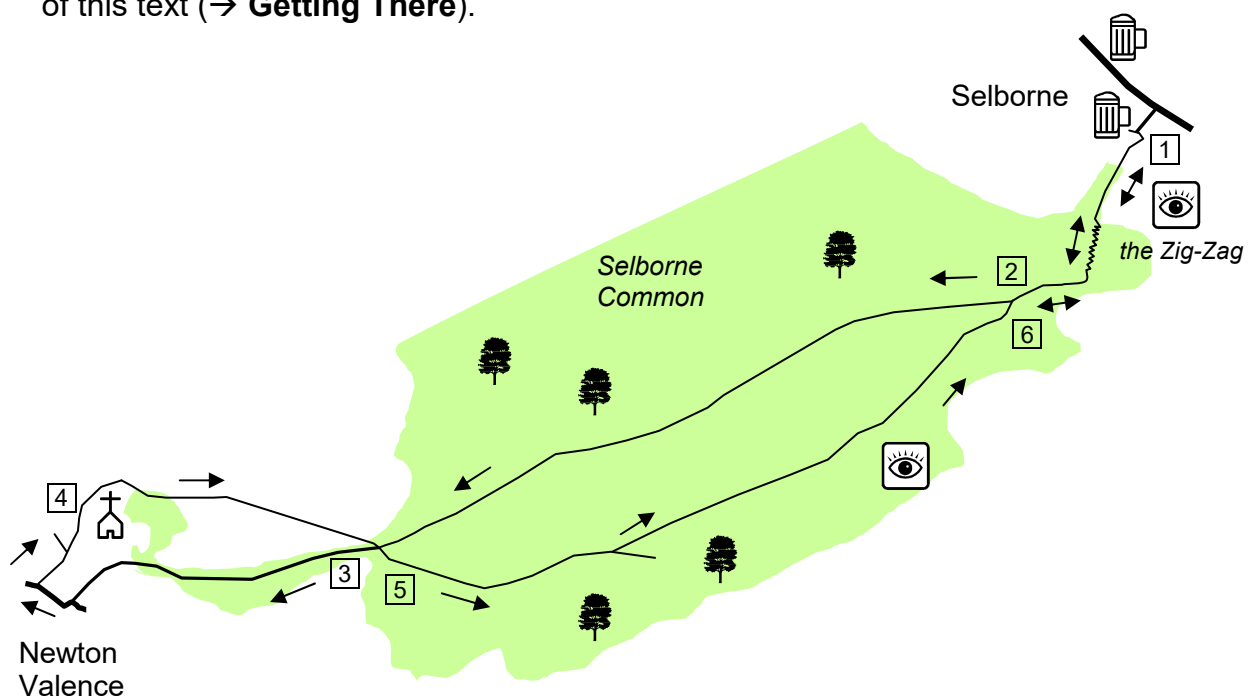
In Brief

This is a unique circular walk retracing the route often taken by naturalist Gilbert White from his village of Selborne to the quiet country village of Newton Valence where his brother lived. It climbs the steep Selborne Hanger using the zig-zag path that the brothers cut in 1753 and runs across the translucent and wonderful Selborne Common.



Any kind of sensible footwear and dress should be fine. Your dog is welcome too (except *inside* the *Selborne Arms*).

The walk begins at the **Selborne car park, postcode GU34 3JR**. This free car park is behind the *Selborne Arms* pub in the middle of the village and is clearly marked with a brown tourist sign. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

Before or after this walk, a visit to this ancient village is not to be passed over and the cottages, large houses, church and typical shops tell its story louder than words.



Selborne's church of St Mary with its Norman tower and nave dates mainly from 1180. Notable in the grounds is the Great Yew of Selborne, now nothing more than a trunk. Brave attempts to replant it failed after it was felled in the great storm of 25th January 1990. Yet, as a living tree it had a girth of 26 feet. A local man in 1778 wrote "In the churchyard of this village is a yew tree whose aspect bespeaks it to be of great age: it seems to have seen several centuries, and is probably coeval with the church, and therefore may be deemed an antiquity."

That "local man" was Gilbert White (1720-1793), curate and world-famous naturalist. His book "The Natural History of Selborne" is one of the most published books in the English language. Compiled from a series of letters, it is an account of his daily studies of the life of plants, birds, insects, worms and other animals in the countryside that he knew. Unlike Victorian naturalist world-travellers a century later, he drew all his observations from his own garden and the nearby woods and fields of Selborne. His importance comes from two leaps of genius. For the first time, he used only patient observation, rather than folklore. And, rather than describing each plant and animal on its own, he studied their inter-dependencies. So he could be described as the "first ecologist".

- 1** From the car park, take the wide path that runs to the left of the toilet block towards the steep Selborne Hanger, signposted *Selborne Common*. This path is used by large numbers of tourists and weekend crowds. At the end, avoid a path on the left, go straight ahead through a swing-gate and bear **left** up the zig-zag path. *The zig-zag path was cut by Gilbert and John White by 1753 to make it easier for them to climb the steep Selborne Hanger.* After nine zigs and nine zags, you have the chance for a breather with two seats and a rail where you can admire the view. Five more zig-zags take you finally up the top and another vantage point. Continue on a path on the **right**-hand side of a house. Finally a wooden swing-gate beside a larger wooden gate takes you into the ancient Selborne Common.
- 2** Your route is straight ahead. *You will notice on your left several ornamental club-shaped trees: they will mark your **return** path.* Always follow the main path through the wood, avoiding side paths, however tempting. The ground is generally firm with marks from horses hooves and some vehicles. The wood is mixed with oak dominating, some quite ancient since this wood has survived from times before history was written. The route is more-or-less straight ahead. Where, after 700m, you pass a more open area, keep it on your right so you do not lose the path. After just over 1 km, you reach a fingerpost. *In fact there is a **second** fingerpost on the left: this one will play a role in your return journey.* Keep straight ahead through a wooden gate beside a larger one onto a wide bridleway.
- 3** There is one stubborn muddy patch which you can avoid using an escape path on the right. After 400m, your path curves left past the first houses of Newton Valence. You come out to a lane by an old signpost in the village centre. (Yes, the village really is as small as it seems!) Turn **right** on the road, passing the village pond and a bench. In only 30m, turn **right** again on a gravel drive between pillars leading to the church. In early spring the banks beside the path show a golden display of daffodils. *Here the village*



stocks were originally fixed between two ash trees and were still in use within the memory of one of the oldest inhabitants of the village. Ignore a footpath left and continue to reach the church with the huge 17th-century Manor House to the right. The first church of St Mary appeared in the 1100s but most of it was built in the 1200s, with a great deal of Victorian restoration. Note the Virgin and Child outside on the west wall, rare for an Anglican church.

- 4 Keep **left** through the churchyard, with the church to your right. In the far left-hand corner you will find a little path hidden behind a couple of trees. This path takes you past an old broken turnstile and over a stile into a meadow. Keep **right** in the meadow, passing the garden of the Manor on your right with its sculpture, but veer away from the edge to go through a large wooden gate in the far side (or over the stile beside it). Now follow a narrow path, a fraction right, across the field. At the far side, enter woods via a metal swing-gate. Veer **left** through a familiar wooden gate back onto Selborne Common.
- 5 *For your return route, this guide suggests a different path, although you could of course retrace your outward journey. Fork **right** to the second of those 4-way fingerposts and keep straight ahead. You are on another beautiful path across the Common, but this time with some views right into the valley. Keep to the main path, avoiding all branches off. In about 400m, you come to a fork. The right-hand fork is a narrower path going gently downhill. **Ignore** it and instead take the **left** fork, the wider and more level path. After some distance, the path becomes grassy and you have a clearing on your left. Soon after, you have good views right where the foliage permits. When the white house comes into view, keep **left** past those club-shaped trees and turn **right** on the familiar wide track to go through the same large wooden gate.*
- 6 Keep ahead down the path, using either forking path to the top of the zig-zag. Your final descent is the same way, down the zig-zag and ahead through the gate at the bottom, along the wide path and back to the car park where the walk began.

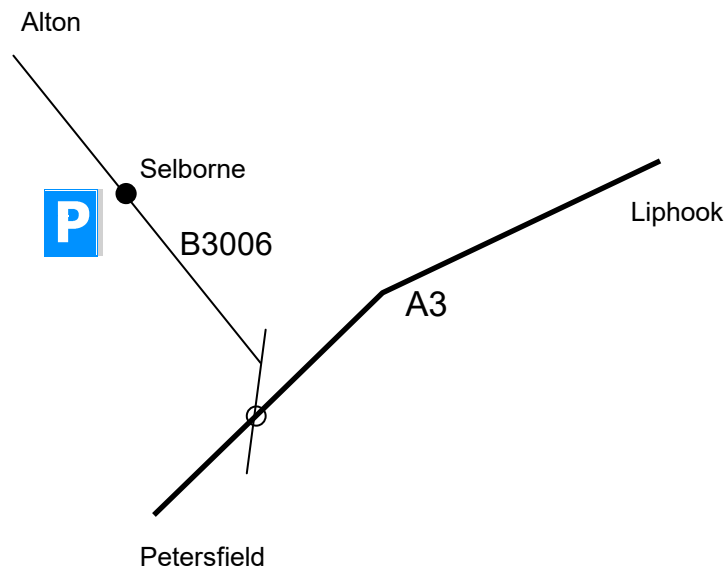


For refreshments, the Selborne Arms is accessible from the car park. It is open all day at weekends and all the meat in its good reasonably-priced menu is locally sourced. But there are rules “no dogs, no muddy boots and no muddy shoes”! They stop serving food at 2 pm. (For information, ring Nick & Hayley Carter on 01420-511247.) Just around the corner there is a tea room serving sandwiches, cakes and tea.

Gilbert White’s house is on the left a little further along. The church and the famous Selborne Yew are a must-see.

Getting there

By car: Selborne, on the B3006 road, is easily accessed in 3 miles from a roundabout on the A3 road just north of Petersfield, from where it is clearly signed. It is also accessed from Alton.



By bus/train: bus 38 from Alton station stops outside the pub, not weekends!
Check the timetables.

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