Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Twyford, Owslebury, Marwell

Distance: 14 km=9 miles easy walking
or two walks of 10 km=6 miles and 8 km=5 miles

Region: Hampshire Date written: 28-may-2017

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Refreshments: Twyford, Owslebury, Marwell Zoo

Map: Explorer 119 (Meon Valley) *but the maps in this guide should suffice*

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

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Villages, sheep & horse pastures, woodland, zoo, views

In Brief

This is a typical country walk in the gentle hills and woodland south of Winchester. It offers a variety of terrain, from green pastures to woodland and easy tracks between hedgerows. There are very few ploughed fields along the route and the only livestock normally are a few sheep. One of the surprises along the way is Marwell Zoo and you pass close to the entrance. At the least, you may be tempted to come another day to spend more time in this conservation-oriented animal park.

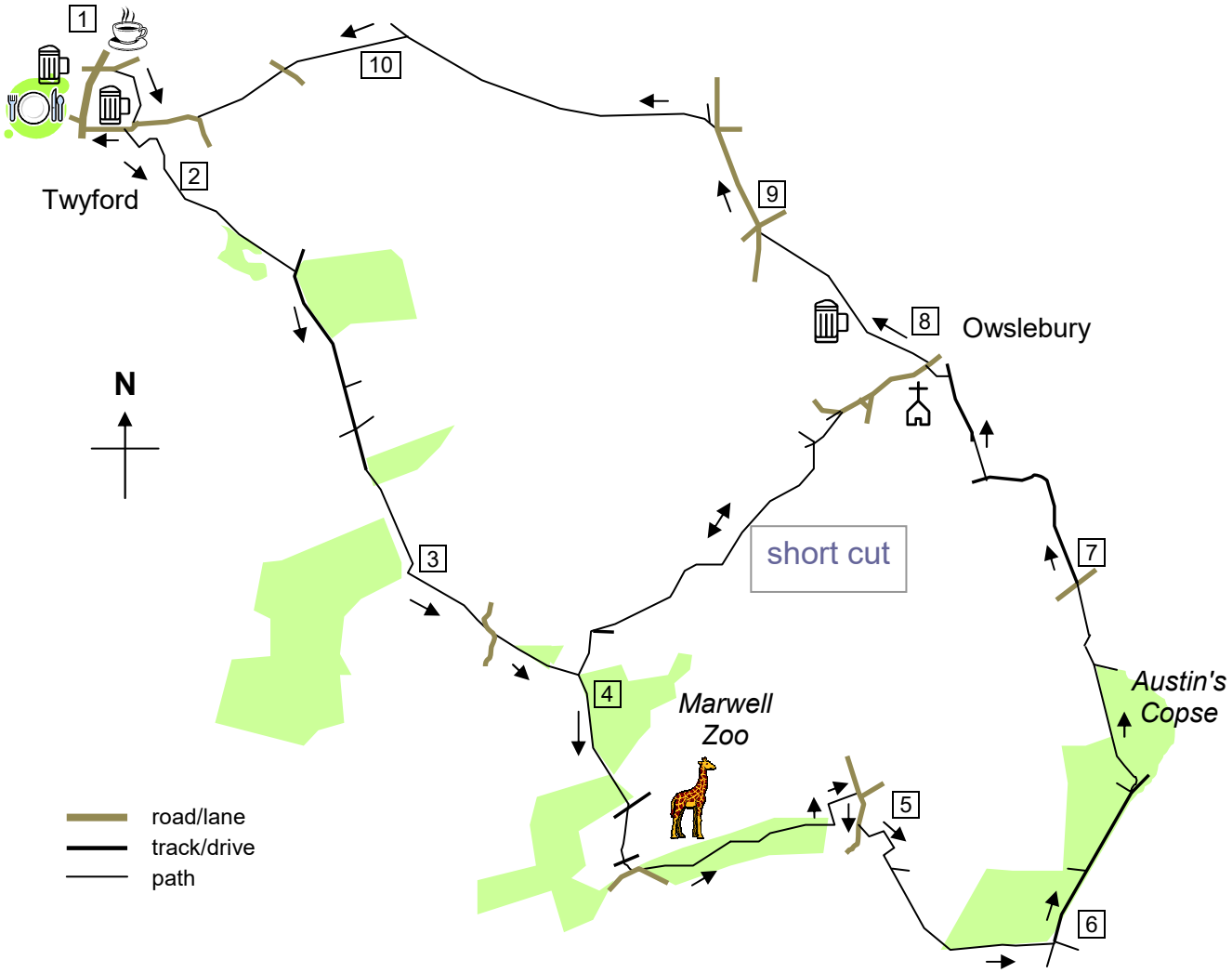
The village of Owslebury which is the centre point of the walk has an excellent friendly pub: in May 2025 it was closed "under new management" but now (2026) it is open again. (To enquire at the *Ship Inn*, ring 01962-777756.) There are also two inns and a café in Twyford.

There are nettles along some of the paths, so wearing shorts is not advisable. This walk is relatively dry but there is some mud along the horse paths near Owslebury; so boots are recommended except in a very dry period. This walk should be fine for your dog because all the stiles are "dog friendly".

You can divide this walk into two shorter walks using a tree-lined path which you can take in either direction.

The main walk and the Northern Walk begin in Twyford village, near Winchester, w3w:rate.term.pipe, postcode **SO21 1QT**. Park in either of the side roads at the traffic lights. There is also space in the vicinity of the starting point, near the Post Office. The Southern Walk begins in Owslebury, near Winchester, postcode **SO21 1LU**, where there is plenty of roadside parking, or in the pub car park if the pub is still disused. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



If you are doing the shorter **Southern Walk**, omitting Twyford, go immediately to the **Owslebury Traverse West** near the end of this text.

Twyford's name derives from the "two fords" over the River Itchen but to see the river you would need to go to the northern end of this rather divided village where you will find the neo-Elizabethan Twyford House, the church of St Mary the Virgin and several historic houses. Separating the village from the City of Winchester, 3 miles to the north, are the water meadows and Twyford Down which was controversially sliced up by the M3 motorway. This walk takes you in the opposite direction.

1 The walk starts nominally at the crossroads with the traffic lights. There is a small post office and stores here on the corner, and a café beneath the shop (the *Bean Below*). Take the Hazeley Road, with the shop on your left, signposted *Owslebury, Morestead*. Just after a dental surgery, turn **right** on a shingle lane called (interestingly) Roman Road (much pleasanter than the narrow footpath on its right between tall garden fences). At a T-junction, turn **right** on a lane and, in 20m, turn **left** by a rather hidden ivy-covered wooden marker, to the left of a gate, into allotments. Follow the path down the right-hand side and, at the end of the trained raspberries and bean poles, go through a metal gate and turn **left**. Your path makes a

semicircle to avoid the cricket pitch: wheeling right through a car park, either side of a sports pavilion, to the right of a children's play area, onto a footpath, as directed by a yellow arrow on a fence post. (If you see a flock of friendly black woolly lambs on the footpath, they may take to you and resist all attempts to shoo them back into their field: the only way may be to go into the field with them and sneak out, closing the gate.)

2 The path runs between open fields and a recently-harvested tree plantation on your right, with views of meadows (sometimes with horses or alpacas) down on your left. Ignore a permissive footpath on your right and stay on the path gently uphill alongside the fence. At the top, veer **right** on a farm track and **left** along the left-hand side of a crop field. At the next crop field, continue along the left-hand side, passing under power lines. As you go, ignore a permissive footpath on your left and another footpath on your right. The path becomes grassy and runs between fields with a mixed hawthorn hedge, at first on your left, then on your right. As the crop field on your right ends, ignore a gap in the hedge and stay beside the field on your left. The path soon leaves the edge and runs down into a woodland of yews and oaks. Go over a stile into a large meadow.

3 Turn **right** in the meadow and **left** at the corner, staying on the edge. In the far corner, go over a stile, down the left-hand side of a small meadow, over a stile under a large ash, down the left-hand side of a shallow valley of horse paddocks and through a wooden barrier. *Hensting Farm with its 15th-century thatched barns can be seen on your left.* Go straight ahead over a stile into another meadow and, in 40m, go **left** over a stile to turn **right** on a tarmac lane. Almost immediately, as the lane bends right, keep straight ahead on a wide track marked as a bridleway. In 10m, **ignore** a flight of steps on your left. The track rises steadily along a band of woodland. In 200m or so, at a junction with a metal gate on your right, ignore a track on your right and keep left. In a further 120m, you meet a second 3-way junction, this time with widely separate left and right branches.

> **Decision point.** If you are doing the shorter **Northern Walk**, skip forward in this text and do the section called **Owslebury Traverse East**. Otherwise …

Take the **right** fork.

4 Follow this narrow path, passing regardless a signed bridleway in 50m and a crossing path with steps in another 150m. In a further 200m or so you reach a wooden gate on your left and a junction of paths. Ignore all paths leading off and keep ahead on the main path. You will be aware of the proximity of Marwell Zoo from the signs for nature trails. You meet a tarmac drive with car parks for the zoo on either side. Go straight over on a path which may be muddy at the start. Soon you meet the entrance road into the zoo on your left. There is a café at Marwell Zoo that is now accessible to everyone; it is before the entrance gates and is open without the need to buy an admission ticket - they serve an excellent flapjack.

> *Marwell Zoo began in 1972 in the grounds of Marwell House, putting an emphasis on conservation and special breeding programmes. It came into the national news in 1977 when a giraffe was unable to stand up, and died. From that time the zoo has become a huge family attraction.*

Cross the road, a fraction left, to a path opposite. This path leads to a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane, staying on this side. In only 10m, fork **left** at a blue arrow [May 2025: missing; don't miss this quick turn!] on a path which runs through an overgrown space and then through trees with a high

metal fence on your left. This section may be muddy but there is a path on the right which loops round to avoid the mud. After 500m on this path, you arrive at a tarmac drive. Cross straight over, a fraction left, onto a wide path opposite. In 400m, you reach the edge of a meadow where your path turns left. It takes you close to one corner of the zoo where you can see the "rail station" and the baboon enclosure. The path turns right and leads to a road.

5 Turn **right** on the road, Whaddon Lane, immediately avoiding a side turning (Lower Baybridge Lane). In 150m, just after the entrance to the 18th-century *Marwell House*, fork **left** on a shingle drive. Follow the drive round to a arrive at a wooden gateway belonging to the house ahead. Turn **right** just **before** the gateway on a narrow path beside a hedge. Keep **left** in the corner, ignoring a small wooden gate. As the garden gives way to sheep pastures, ignore a stile on your left and stay on the straight path ahead between meadows. (This route is slightly longer than path on the left but much pleasanter.) Your path has been nicely planted with saplings and will be tree-lined in a few years. At the end, go over a stile and across a narrow crop field, aiming for a gap in the trees ahead. At the other side, after the gap, turn **left** on a farm track through the wood, running beside farmland on your right. You emerge past a large wooden gate to a lane at a bend.

6 Turn **left** past a metal barrier on a wide path into woods. In 300m, a foot-path joins from the left. Avoid a track on your right immediately after, staying on this straight wide woodland path, very gently uphill. In another 350m, you reach a junction of tracks. Turn **left** and immediately **right** through a tall kissing-gate. You are in Austin's Copse, a protected parcel of woodland, partly wild, partly managed, one of the fascinating secrets of this area. The path winds a lot through unexpected glades and copses and then runs beside a field on your left. You come out through another tall kissing-gate. Ignore a footpath on your right and continue straight on. *You are on part of the Monarch's Way, the route supposedly taken by the future Charles II after the Battle of Worcester. You are also on the Hampshire Millennium Pilgrim's Trail, another long-distance path from Winchester to Portsmouth.* The path is now narrower, taking you through bushes and a wooden swing-gate into a large flowery meadow. Take the path along the right-hand edge. In 100m, the path goes through a swing-gate to join a farm track. Turn **left** on it. In 150m, a stile (or an open metal gate) leads onto a tarmac lane.

7 Cross straight over the lane, a fraction right, and turn **left** through a metal kissing gate. After just 5m, turn **right** on a wide track heading uphill. At the top of the incline, in an area strewn with hewn timber keep straight ahead through a wire fence, lifting the hook if necessary. The village of Owslebury dominates the ridge ahead. Stay next to the fence on your right and follow the track as it bends left. *On your left is the motocross course used by the Winchester Motorcycle Club.* Stay on the track, using the comfortable grass if you like, for 200m. The track soon goes uphill. After about half-way up, turn **right** on a footpath beside a hedge (care! easily missed), going through a (tight) metal barrier. The path runs between hedges and becomes a wide farm track. Proceed straight ahead on this track for 300m. Continue through a small wooden swing-gate beside a large gate, on a concrete drive. At a crossing path and a 4-way fingerpost, go **left** up steps into the churchyard of St Andrews.

Owslebury's church dates from the 1100s and has six bells. But its most famous feature is the beautiful early Victorian windows which depict William

Carnegie's wife and daughter as the Virgin Mary. The 23-year-old Vincent Van Gogh saw the design for these windows and wrote to his brother Theo of the profound impression they made on him. A display case in the church shows a "serpent", a strange wind instrument which was apparently used to reinforce the bass during services. The church is often closed but a key is quickly available from lay minister Barbara on 01962-777887.

Continue past the church to an old kissing-gate and the road in Owslebury.

Legend has it (and it appears defiantly on the village crest) that the name of the village comes from the word "ousel" an older word for "blackbird" (cf "ring ousel" and German "amsel"). You need to pronounce the name right to avoid mirth from the locals, although they are not all agreed. Officially it's like "Oss'lbury" (don't pronounce the "w") but the older folk will say "Nah – it's Owzz'lbury!". The village is famous for its connection with Jane Seymour, third wife of Henry VIII. She lived in nearby Marwell House and it's possible that, according to custom, the king would have come to declare his hand in her father's house.

The Ship Inn is a cosy friendly typical village local with a wood fire in winter and good ales. There's speculation about the origin of the name, since the low oak beams seem to come from a ship. In May 2025 it was temporarily abandoned "under new management": but has modestly re-opened (2026).

Decision point. If you are doing the shorter **Southern Walk**, turn **left** on the road for 300m to the *Ship Inn* and do the section called **Owslebury Traverse West**. Otherwise …

Your route is **right** for 10m and **left** on a fenced path, but first you may like to take refreshments at the *Ship Inn* which is 300m on your left.

8 Having turned left on the narrow path between a wall and a fence, you quickly come out through a kissing-gate to a field corner with great views. In 10m, go past a barrier on a narrow path across pastures between fences. At the bottom, cross a cinder track and go through a kissing-gate onto a descending woodland path. You come out into a large field: continue along the right-hand side. In the bottom corner, go ahead into the next field and take a good path across the centre of the crop field, going under power lines. You come out through a gap onto a tarmac lane.

9 Turn **right** on the lane and keep straight ahead at a crossroads in the direction *Morestead, Twyford*. At the top of the slope, ignore a side lane on your right. In another 15m, fork **left** on a dirt track, ignoring a permissive path on your right and passing under a horizontal bar. Follow the path very gently downhill with more views on your right. After 350m you pass a junction on your right *(part of the Twyford Kingfisher Trail).* Continue straight on through mixed hedgerows (indicating their antiquity) and finally, almost another km further, the field on your right gives way to conifers as your path begins to descend.

10 **Leave** the path here by turning **left**, as indicated by a marker post adorned with five arrow-bearing discs. Follow a path beside a field on your left and, in the corner, keep straight ahead on a path up the centre of the next fallow field, passing a marker post in a pile of stones. At the other side, go past a redundant stile to a lane. Cross straight over the lane, thus leaving the Monarch's Way, onto a dirt driveway opposite, Love Lane, which leads to a road in Twyford. Turn **right** on this lane and stay on it all the way to the main road, ignoring the junctions where you may have turned on the outward journey. Soon the *Bugle Inn* is on your right. Turn **right** on the main road, passing the *Phoenix Inn*, soon reaching the traffic lights and village shop where the walk began.

Owslebury Traverse East 2 km= 1¼ miles

Take this short cut if you are doing the shorter **Northern Walk**, going direct to Owslebury.

At the 3-way junction, take the **left** fork. The mud here should clear in a short distance. You reach the edge of a field by a large metal gate. Veer **right** and immediately keep **left** on a narrower path through trees, avoiding the parallel track on your right. This is Water Lane, hopefully misnamed. Your route is long woodland walk, possibly meeting a number of horse riders. After more than 1 km, a garden fence signals the start of the village. Join a drive leading to a road and turn **right** on it, quickly leading to the *Ship Inn*. After a possible break in this attractive local, continue along the road, keeping left, for 250m. Just after an entrance to the church, turn **left** at a small fingerpost on a narrow footpath between a wall and a fence.

Now re-join the main walk at section 8.

Owslebury Traverse West 2 km= 1¼ miles

Take this short cut if you are doing the shorter **Southern Walk**, omitting Twyford.

With the *Ship Inn* immediately on your right, go a little further along the lane. Opposite a large cream-painted house (*Boyes Farm*), fork **left** on a rough track marked *Longfields*. Take the path furthest on the **left**, marked with a blue arrow. Very shortly, at another junction, again choose the **left**most path, still following the blue arrow. Your path becomes a long woodland path, known as Water Lane, hopefully misnamed. After more than 1 km, your path merges with a farm track from the left, into an open area with a large metal gate ahead. Veer **left** on a woodland path. The mud here should clear soon. In 200m, turn **left** at a 3-way junction of tracks.

Now join the main walk at section 4.

Getting there

By car: Twyford is easily reached from the M3 Motorway. Come off at Exit 11, *Winchester*, and follow the signs. For Owslebury, turn left at the traffic lights in the centre of Twyford.

By bus/train: bus E1 or 69 runs from Winchester Station to Twyford, not Sunday. Check the timetables.

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