



Basingstoke Canal and Dogmersfield

Distance: 11 km=7 miles easy walking
or 2 walks of 7½ km=4¾ miles and 5¼ km=3¼ miles

Region: Hampshire

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Author: Botafuego

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Refreshments: The *Barley Mow*, the *Waterwitch* in Odiham

Map: Explorer 144 (Basingstoke) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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Historic canal, towpath, woodland, open country, sheep pastures, pubs

In Brief

The prettiest sections of this historic canal are just south of Odiham, Hants and here the canal makes a wide loop, passing the *Barley Mow* pub, popular with walkers and cyclists. On this walk, you can be sure of the company of many others, with their families and dogs. There are no gradients, making this an easy walk. The canal runs through perfect woodland of mature trees with occasional views and quite a few surprises. This walk begins through a more open landscape with distant views, before finishing along the canal towpath, with some small diversions to spice up the occasion.

This walk can be divided into two shorter walks of 7½ km=4¾ miles (the Western Loop), with lunch at the *Barley Mow*, and 5¼ km=3¼ miles (the Eastern Loop), with lunch in the *Waterwitch*, by taking a short cut across the fields near the Tundry Pond.

During winter 2015-16, part of the towpath used on this walk was closed for restoration. The work now seems to be complete but further closures are *possible*. The Canal Authority has posted up the phone number 01252-370073 for enquiries, just in case. The Canal River Trust, Hampshire C.C. and the Basingstoke Canal Society provide latest information on their webpage www3.hants.gov.uk/basingstoke-canal/canal-walks.htm (click on *Latest information on winter works and stoppages*).

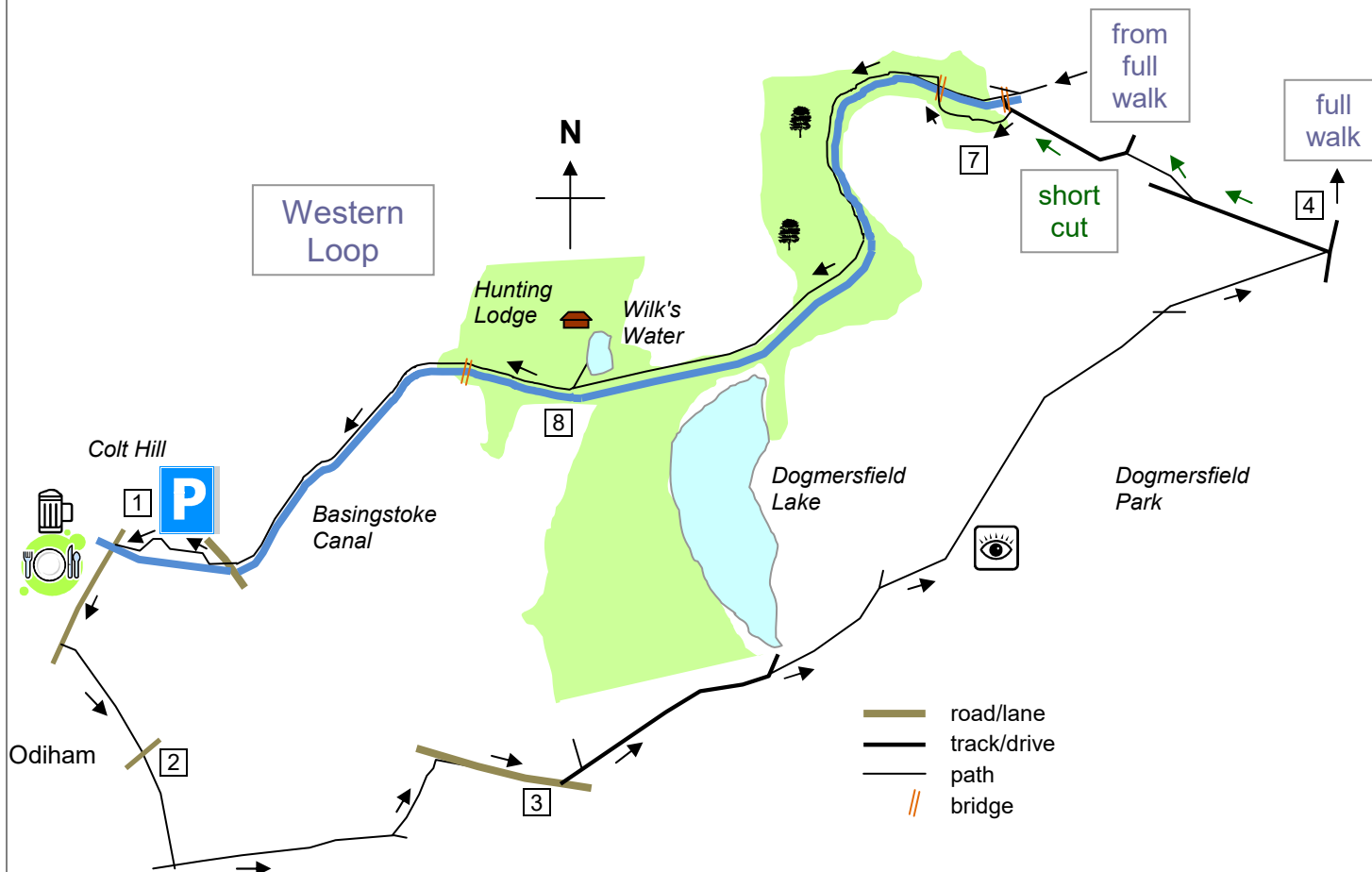
There is one section with nettles and undergrowth at the start of this walk, probably not enough to rule out wearing shorts. After the wet winter of 2019-20, there was some thick mud in the first section and one or two puddles on one part of the towpath. In the winter and early spring, mud is more prominent. These apart, this walk can generally be said to be a dry walk. So boots are recommended but not essential in dry weather. This walk is also perfect for your dog, with only 200m beside a main road needing a short lead. There is no livestock on the paths and only one easy stile.



The walk begins in the large free car park at the end of **Colt Hill**, Odiham, Hants, postcode **RG29 1AL**. Another good starting point is the car park opposite the *Barley Mow* (postcode **RG27 8DE**), cutting the section along the canal into two parts, with a break in Odiham, also your start for the Eastern Loop. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

The Basingstoke Canal was planned in 1776 and finished in 1794 as a means of transporting goods (flour, timber, building materials, etc.) from central Hampshire into London, where it joins with the Wey Canal just before meeting the Thames. Maybe there were distant thoughts of extending it further to the west country, but it was ill-conceived and was never a success, even before the railway came along to deal a death blow. It wasn't until the 1960s that enthusiasts formed the new Canal Society to restore it for leisure purposes.



1 This walk begins with a short retreat, back over the bridge and across green fields, for the purpose of avoiding the roads and delivering you to the start of a perfect trail across the Dogmersfield Estate. It will all become clear! From the Colt Hill car park, go back in the direction of the road by which you arrived, but fork **left** on a gravel track and turn **right** on the towpath. Fork **right** just before the bridge up to the lane and turn **left** over the little Colt Hill Bridge. You pass the *Waterwitch* pub, a cheerful prospect for your return. Go past Linden Avenue on the left and, 60m later, turn **left** into the drive of a house called *Tomkins*. (As a guide, there is a track on the other side, and a 2-way signpost.) Take a narrow path between garden fences. On your left, new houses are being built and some time in the future walk there may be back gardens here. A gravel path leads by an unneeded kissing-gate into a small meadow. Keep ahead along the path to a kissing-gate and a road.

2 [Winters 2017-20: the route over the meadows may be waterlogged or iced up. In this case, it is better to turn **left** on the road, keep **right** at the roundabout, joining the main road and follow it, using the verge, as far as the thatched cottage described below.] Cross the road to go through a metal kissing-gate and head along the left-hand side of a horse pasture with new houses on your

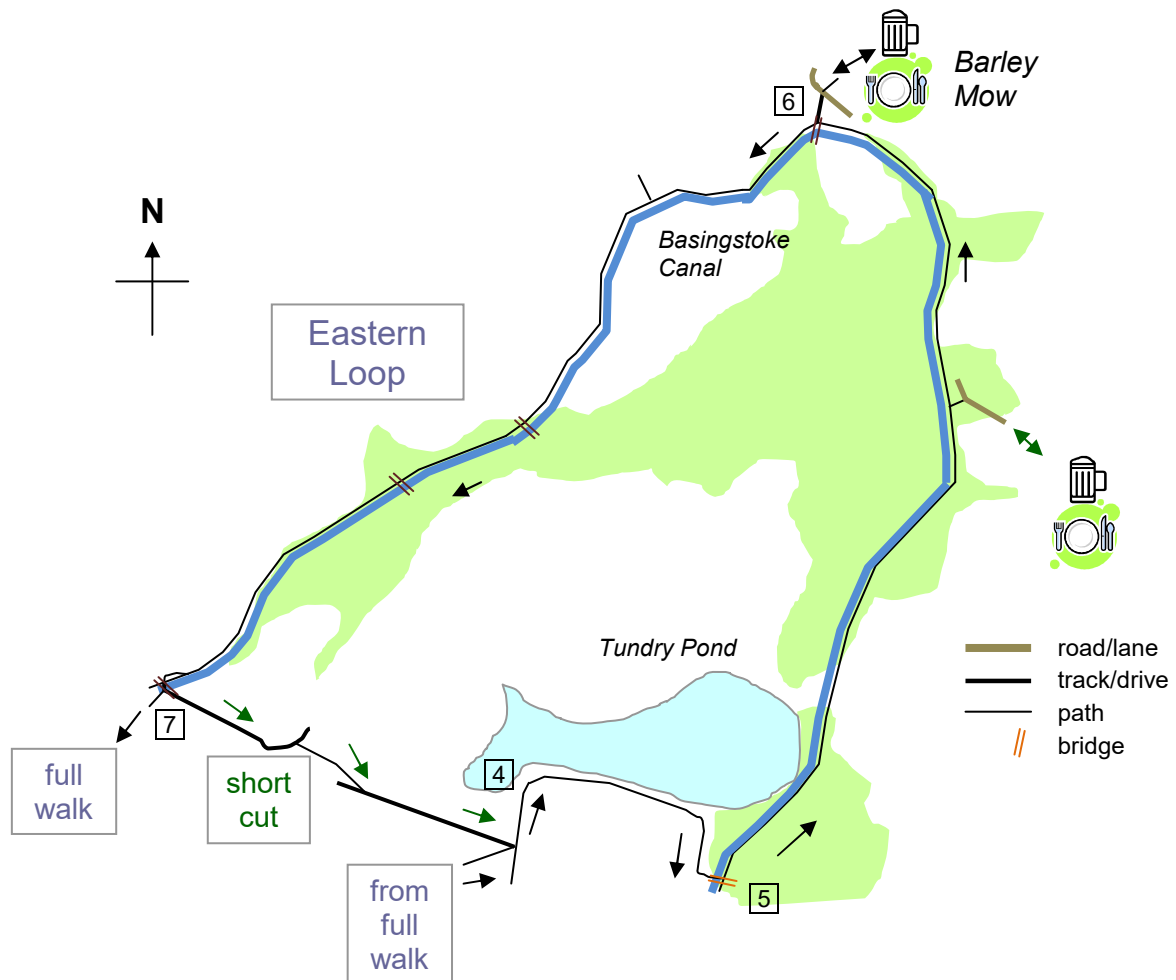
right. Continue straight ahead on a new gravel path. In 150m, where the path ends, go through a metal kissing-gate and turn **left** onto a path running beside a large meadow on your right. In 250m, at a marshy section by a stream crossing, your path runs on a boardwalk, leading into a grassy meadow. The rather faint path now veers a fraction left away from the hedge on your right, heading for the right-hand end of a hedgerow across your path 200m ahead. When you reach the end of the hedgerow, go past it and immediately turn **left** alongside the hedge. In 50m, this path leads you over an easy stile (the only stile on this walk). Continue along the left-hand side of a crop field, with a large thatched house visible. In the corner, keep ahead past a large metal gate and turn **right** on a driveway, going past the front of the thatched house. You seem to meet a dead end, but in fact it's quite easy to part the undergrowth and make your way a very short distance up to the main road. Keep **right** along the main road for an unavoidable 200m, using the narrow grass verge.

- 3 Cross the busy road carefully and fork **left** at a fingerpost, by a sign for Aragon Hall, onto a driveway. In 50m, at a fingerpost, avoid a footpath on your left and keep straight ahead between two houses. Follow this lovely gravel drive passing a redundant stile, coming out into the open and heading into trees again. After 500m on this driveway, it curves left through the private gates of Piller's Park. Leave it here to continue straight ahead on a wide grassy path, from where you have good views of the Dogmersfield Lake. *Note the statue of a crouching snarling lion.* Your route is now a straight woodland path with a meadow on your right. After an unneeded kissing-gate, your path runs under power lines. Keep straight on now on a path between wire fences and open fields. **Don't worry about the "Bull" notice: all the fields on this walk are fenced-off.** After 250m, ignore a metal gate on your right. On your left now is a view of the farm in Dogmersfield Park, almost a little village. Ahead you can see the Tundry Pond, your next destination. You arrive at a junction of paths and a private driveway coming from the farm. Ignore the drive and cattle grid to the right and take a narrow path straight ahead between pastures. You come to a junction of tarmac drives. *Sharp right is a track leading to Dogmersfield Park.*

Dogmersfield Park includes most of the land covered on this walk. The manor goes back long before the Normans and after the Conquest it was valued at 100 shillings. Where the house now stands there was once a palace, much visited by Henry VI and successive monarchs. The current house was built and enlarged during the 1700s as a family home, falling into neglect in the 1900s and now restored as a hotel. The hotel grounds are open to visitors, should you wish to stroll. The reason why the canal runs in such a wide loop is because the law protected country estates from the canal builders.

Decision point. If you are doing the shorter **Western Loop**, omitting the north-eastern section of the canal and the *Barley Mow*, skip to near the end of this text and do the *Sprats Hatch Traverse* (west). Otherwise, continue as below.

Avoid the drive sharp left and continue ahead, veering **left** on a shingle drive.



4 In 130m, go through a metal kissing-gate to the shore of the big Tundry Pond. *There is a local legend that Dogmersfield Village was originally sited where the pond is now and it was moved brick-by-brick to give the landowner a better view.* Turn **right** along the grassy bank (straight on is private). In 350m, just before a wood, turn **right** on a path that runs alongside the wood. In 100m, your path turns left and takes you through a white gate (or over a stile). Go ahead over the Blacksmith's Bridge across the Basingstoke Canal and immediately turn **left** on the towpath.

5 Ahead of you lies an easy 6½ km=4 mile walk along the towpath, although there are several digressions to add spice to the adventure.

You may see fishermen on the bank, not for fish but for crayfish: these are the American variety which ousted the native species, sold as "langoustines". For the non-sophisticates they are bred as "scampi".

In 250m, you cross under power lines and pass a pill box on your right. There are now mature woods on both sides and soon you will get a glimpse of Dogmersfield school playing fields. Press on and eventually you will reach a restored section of the canal bank. In about another 350m you will notice an unmarked path on your right



An excursion here leads to an admirable country pub, the *Queens Head*. Turn **right** on this path, turning **right** on a road by a house with the hilarious address of *Gossips, Chatter Alley*. The pub and the village are a delight with timbered cottages and a little green by the pub. However, the distance of 650m each way will make it of arguable benefit to some walkers.

After another 350m, a “milestone” made from a tree trunk gives the distances to Fleet and Odiham with a fetching poem. You are now on a particularly lovely stretch of the canal and houses appear on your left, one of them a restored mill. You pass a small creek on your right and just ahead is the Barley Mow Bridge. But, for a refreshment break, or if you parked here, fork **right** before the bridge and turn **right** on a lane (Sprats Hatch), leading to a road junction. Just across the way is the *Barley Mow* pub. *The “Barley Mow” is hugely popular and you will be competing with many cyclists for the large range of pub classics and bar food which may be eaten al fresco. The pub is closed from 3 or 3.30 to 5.30 except on Sunday and from 3 onwards on Monday.*



- 6 After your possible break, return to the towpath and continue. The canal curves left. In 350m, ignore a stile and footpath on your right. After 500m in more open terrain, you go under Stacey's Bridge, like all the bridges on this section, built originally in 1792. In nearly 250m under trees comes Baseley's Bridge. Another 700m of wooded canalside leads to Sprats Hatch Bridge, another fine brick-arched bridge. *If you are doing the full walk, your route now makes a diversion onto the other side of the canal where the path is quite different; you can of course stay on the towpath.* Fork **right** just before the bridge and turn **left** over it.

Decision point. *If you are doing the shorter Eastern Barley Mow Loop, omitting the southern section of the canal and the Waterwitch, skip to near the end of this text and do the Sprats Hatch Traverse (east). Otherwise, continue as below.*

Immediately after crossing the Sprats Hatch Bridge, turn **right** on a narrow path into trees.

- 7 This woodland path runs through an old chestnut coppice where in late spring bluebells are abundant. You are now high above the canal on your right and can see it from this new high vantage point. In just over 150m, your path turns **right** over the next bridge, Sandy Hill. Turn **left** on a path down to re-join the towpath. In 400m, you pass on the other side a small landing stage used by the Dogmersfield Park estate. You are now in another beautiful stretch of canal under a canopy of mature trees. In 400m you can see a large open meadow on your right. In 250m, the path is once again shrouded by woodland and soon you will glimpse a pond on your right. Shortly after, look **sharp right** for a very distinct and knobbly path. This path leads to the banks of Wilk's Water, a short absolutely unmissable diversion with an extra surprise.



Wilk's Water was here long before the canal was built. It is famous for its calm filmy water, its orchids and willows, ash and poplar trees, where wildfowl thrive. Here you can pause on a bench and even walk all round the pond. But on your left is the strangest building, the Hunting Lodge built around 1730 in a kind of Dutch three-gabled style. It probably housed the gamekeeper of the Dogmersfield estate but the very eccentric façade acted as a kind of folly, or point of interest viewed from the estate, before the tall trees (so much favoured later by the Capability Brown style) were planted to obscure the view.

- 8 Continue along the towpath. In 200m you pass under the Broad Oak Bridge. Another 150m offers you a bench seat for a brief rest. Finally, after 500m, you go under the main road. In 30m, fork **right** on a path through trees leading to the Colt Hill car park where the walk began.

Sprats Hatch Traverse (east) 0.8 km=½ mile

Follow this section if you are the shorter Eastern Loop.

After crossing the Sprats Hatch Bridge, veer **left** on a bridleway between meadows. The track veers left by a house and reaches a pair of iron gates on your right. Just to the left of the gates, go through a modern kissing-gate onto a path between wire fences. In 170m, keep ahead on a tarmac drive coming from another pair of iron gates. In 300m, at a junction of drives, turn **left** on a shingle drive.

Now re-join the main walk at section [4](#).

Sprats Hatch Traverse (west) 0.8 km=½ mile

Follow this section if you are the shorter Western Loop.

Turn sharp **left** on a tarmac drive. In 300m, just before some iron gates, fork **right** on a path between wire fences. In 170m, go through a modern kissing-gate and veer **left** in front of a house on a wide track. Just before the track veers right over Sprats Hatch Bridge, under a large chestnut tree, go **left** on a marked narrow footpath into the woods.

Now re-join the main walk at section [7](#).

Getting there

By car: Odiham is reached from the M3 at the Hook exit (exit 5). Follow the directions *A287 Farnham*. In 0.4 miles, at a roundabout, keep **left** on the A287, ignoring signs for *Odiham*. In 1.5 miles, at the next roundabout, turn **sharp right** for *Odiham*. In 0.5 miles, as you enter the picturesque town, turn sharp **right** on London Road, marked as a cul-de-sac. Keep going, as far as you can for 0.4 miles, passing a pub, going over a small canal bridge, and turn **right** with the tarmac into the car park.

For the **Barley Mow**, begin the same way but, 1 mile after the first roundabout, turn **left** for *Winchfield* and follow signs for *Winchfield Church* and then for *Dogmersfield*. Do not use the pub car park: use the free car park on the other side of the road, marked *Basingstoke Canal Barley Mow Carpark and Slipway*.

By bus/train: bus 10 runs from Hook Station to Colt Hill. Check the timetables.

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