



Knepp Wildland

Distance: 11 km=7 miles

easy walking

Region: West Sussex

Date written: 24-jul-2023

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Last update: 11-sep-2024

Refreshments: Dial Post, Whitehall

Map: Explorer 134 (Horsham) and 121 (Arundel)
but the maps in this guide should be sufficient

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

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Wildlife reserve, storks, streams, bridges, "castle", country inns, parkland, windmill, woodland, tree platform, wilderness, villages

In Brief

This is a walk like no other, an enduring tonic to lift your spirits. It takes you round the Knepp Estate which was "rewilded" to give farm animals and wild animals freedom to roam, with no intensive farming. You also see a castle, many lakes and a windmill. One highlight is a colony of white storks.

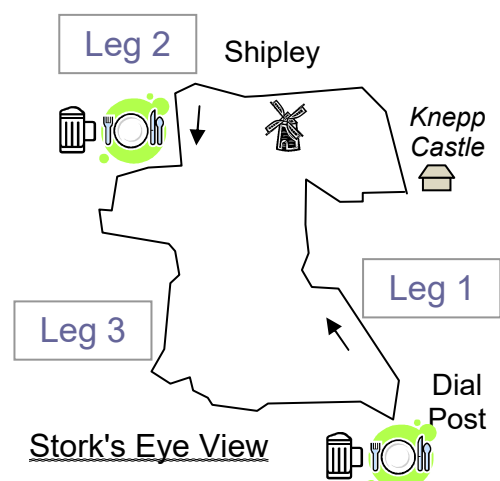
With 16 miles of footpaths, the Knepp Estate has marked out several walks, notably the "red route" and the "blue route", with colourful signs. They are hugely popular. The route of this walk is unique but it follows parts of both of those routes. It calls in at one of the best country pubs in the region, the *Countryman* (to enquire, ring 01403-741383). There is also a fine pub in Dial Post at the start (ring: 01403-710902 to enquire at the *Crown*).



There are no nettles on this walk so shorts should be ok. At the time of writing (July) it was entirely dry, but like any wealden walk it would be much damper in winter and spring. Nearly the whole route is on well-made paths, so boots are not essential in the drier months. There are **no stiles**. Do not take your dog because he might disturb the wildlife.



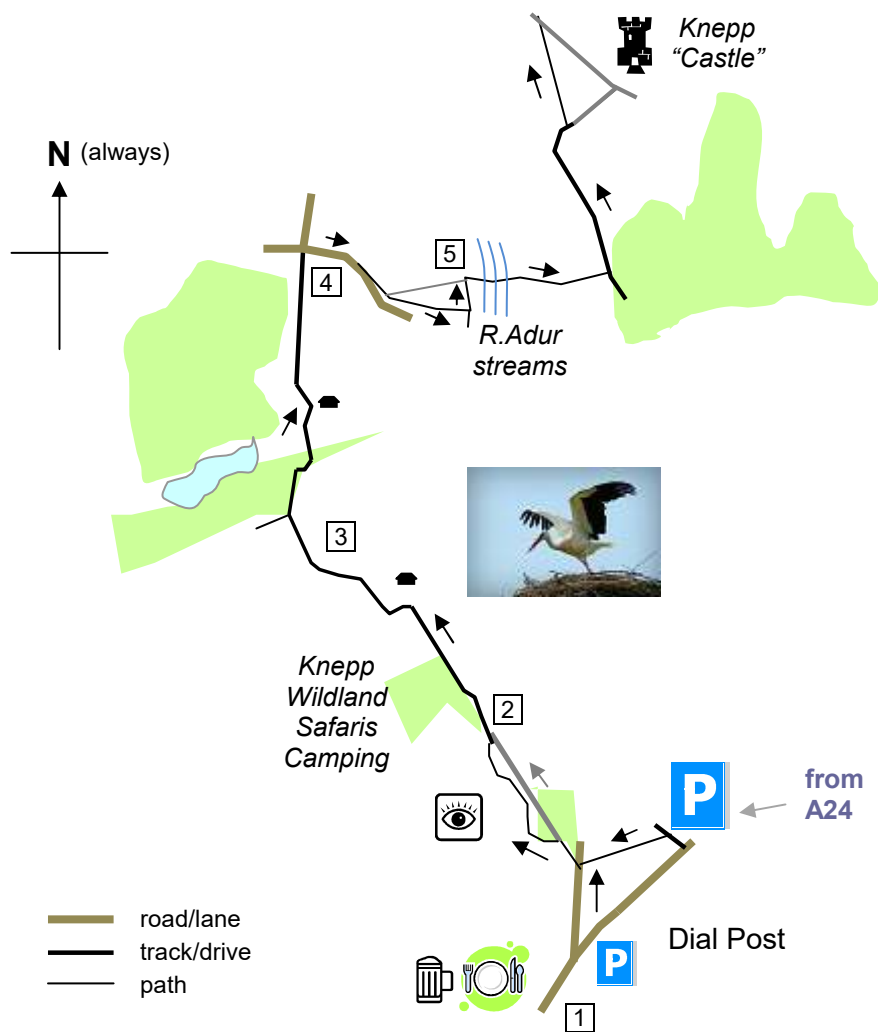
The walk begins in the hamlet of **Dial Post**, West Sussex, postcode **RH13 8NH**, www.w3w.co/synthetic.nibbles.tradition. (There is also a Walker's car park: see end.) You could also begin in Shipley, www.w3w.co/lousy.sinkhole.fortified with a lunch break at the *Crown*. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

Leg 1: Dial Post to Knepp Castle 2.15 miles

“Dial Post” was the name of a solitary farm house centuries ago. A “Dial” was a sundial, quite a common thing you see on the wall of very old houses. “Post” could simply mean “place”. (No one knows.) Just a few more houses have appeared, no shop, no church, but thank heavens a great pub. The benefit of this hamlet is that it’s a jumping-off point for maybe the best walks in the county and so easy to reach, being a slip-road off the main A24 trunk road.



- 1** Starting near the pub and the green in Dial Post, go down a side road, Swallows Lane, signed *Shipley*. In 250m, you meet a sign for *Knepp Wildland Safaris Camping*. Fork **left** here on a double concrete driveway, marked as a footpath, going through a tall gate to avoid a grid. *Note the yellow “animal” sign: more about these later.* In 50m or so you’ll see a post with a left-pointing arrow “all walkers”. This turn is *optional*, and they like you get away from the dark roadway, but you can stay on it. If you decide to turn **left**, there is a stick-lined shortcut 20m before the notice. You come into the open by a home-made sign: turn **right** here and keep **right** to join a wide grassy path that runs parallel to the original driveway, but with good views. Shortly your path diverges to the **left** to pass over a ditch, under a large oak. Keep **right** now and, when you meet a wide chalky path, turn **right** on it and **left**, back on the original driveway. You come through another tall gate beside a grid.



- 2 You pass *Newbarn Cottage* (with eggs for sale) and the parking area for the Safaris Camping. Keep straight ahead to go through the smaller of two wooden gates. Turn **left** in front of farm buildings and **right** on the tarmac. There is a colour-coded fingerpost on your left indicating a choice of paths: yours is **straight on**. You are about to enter a wildlife roaming area.

The idea for the Knepp Wildland project came from Isabella Tree and her 2018 book "Wilding: The Return of Nature to a British Farm". She married Sir Charles Burrell and lives at Knepp Castle. Since 2000, the entire grounds (3,500 acres, i.e. 5.4 square miles) which used to be intensively farmed have been converted to an area of "rewilding" where the animals are free to roam. These include both farm animals such as long-horn cattle, Tamworth pigs and wild ponies, but also wild deer, boar, bats, beavers, many bird and insect species. The most precious recent arrivals are the white storks.

This explains the tall gates: you will pass through many. The sign warns you about free-roamers, rather like in the New Forest. (Don't worry about the "Bull" sign: it's standard everywhere and if you see any, they're very cute and shy.)

Keep straight on, going through another wooden gate with those vivid animal signs. Immediately you are at the site of the White Stork Project and the adventure has really begun!

The White Stork project is UK-wide and Knepp was chosen as an ideal site. Storks were once a common sight. This group was brought over in 2016 from Poland. The sight of three on the top of the tree while three more are circling overhead with their clack-clack! sound is an unforgettable experience. The observation trailer is for volunteers only. One point: please don't make any noise or sudden gestures.

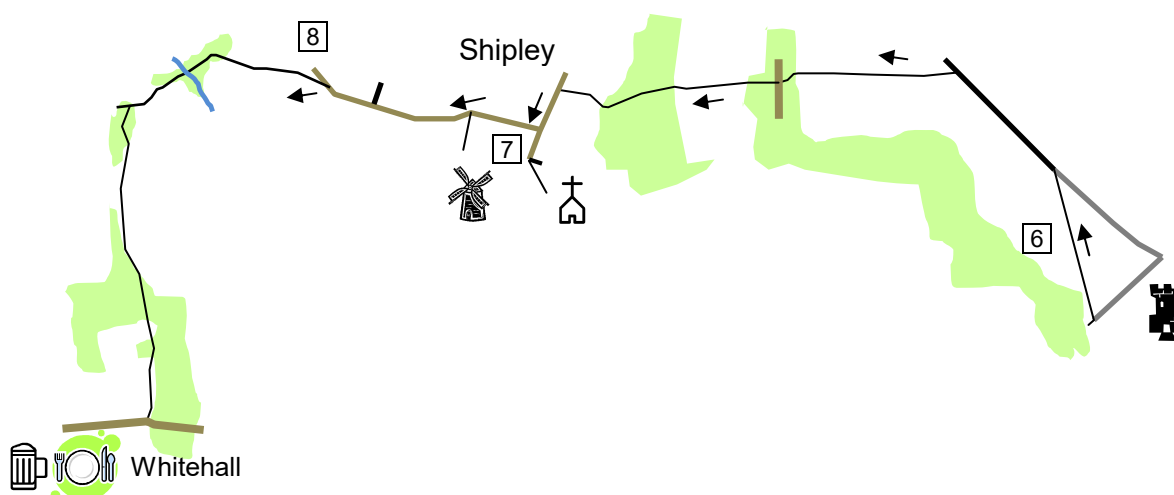
- 3 Continue ahead, going over a flat bridge, up a gentle gradient under trees, beside a meadow on your left. You reach a junction with a 3-way fingerpost. Now **leave** the red-white-blue blazed route by keeping straight on. (But turning left here is a pitifully short cut to Bentons Place Farm near the end of the walk, not researched as it is not for serious walkers. After a stretch through prim woodland, over plank bridges, you would need to cross the farm track, straight over the grass, through a tall gate to re-join the route.) Your very wide path winds and suddenly takes you out to a bridgehead with the Hammer Pond and water race on your left, worthy of a pause. After the pond and just after an electric gate, fork **right** through a tall wooden gate. Pass *Hammer Farmhouse*, staying on their concrete drive. You pass an old forge (note the weather vane) and some other florid and well-restored outhouses. Note the old ratproof grain store on legs. The area on your left is still part of the free-roaming space. The drive ends at a road junction.
- 4 Turn **right** on a quiet lane (Swallows Lane again). After 150m or so, turn **left** onto a signed footpath (don't miss!), going through the standard tall gate with its triangular notice. Turn **right** along the edge of the field. (The official route is straight across but the path may be rather obscure, although pleasant in some seasons: it seems many walkers take the perimeter path which was easier at the time of writing.) At the far corner in 300m, turn **left** along the top edge. In only 80m you reach a 3-way fingerpost (the left direction is that obscure path across the field). A slanting notice on a tree trunk describes the River Adur Restoration.

The River Adur restoration project, begun in 2011, involved reversing well-meaning 19th-century “improvements” by removing weirs (thus enabling trout to migrate), and restoring the original natural meanders and the wetlands which are now ideal habitat for wading birds, amphibians, water insects, important marsh plants and river-bank trees like the scarce black poplar. The floodplain now helps improve the water and protects downstream areas from flood damage.

- 5 Turn **right** here through a small wooden gate. The path takes you over four long bridges to cross the streams of the Adur, barely a trickle in summer. The path rises and runs along the right-hand side of a meadow. At the end, go **left** on a tarmac drive. (An optional diversion **right** will take you to the very reedy Kneppmill Pond. The old Knepp Castle ruin is near the A24 road.) You can shortly see the (new) Knepp Castle on your right across parkland. Stay on the drive as it curves right past the Lodge semis. The official route is now diagonally **left** on a grass trail across the pasture, cutting the corner of the driveways. Knepp Castle is at the end of the drive and if you'd like a closer look it's seems all right to walk up to near the entrance and turn sharp **left** on a tarmac drive. There is usually a resident herd here: either some quite magnificent large longhorn cattle or New Forest-type ponies.

Old Knepp Castle is not on this route. It was built in the 1100s and is now just a fragment on its mound (or “cnæp” from which the name comes). The new Knepp Castle is a Gothic Revival mansion designed by John Nash (of Regent’s Park fame), the home of the above-mentioned Sir Charles Burrell. There are free guided tours available (apply at safaris@knepp.co.uk).

Leg 2: Knepp Castle to The Countryman 1.85 miles



- 6 If you used the official route over the grass, turn **left** at the end on a tarmac drive. Continue on the drive for 250m admiring the open parkland. Just after you come under a large oak with spreading branches, look for a fingerpost and fork **left** on a wide path across the grass. Note that you are on the popular walker’s Red Route; this walk follows it for much of the way. After 250m or so, go through a tall gate, through a band of woodland and out to a road. Cross straight over on a shingle drive, across a small private parking area, onto a narrow path. Go through the smaller of two metal gates into a horse pasture. Continue straight ahead along the right-hand edge, through a wooden gate

into woodland, soon passing on your left the first houses of Shipley. When you emerge onto a lane, turn **left**, quickly reaching the village.

Shipley's name comes from "sheep" but it's the River Adur that made it so important as a staging post between London and the south coast. (In fact it was larger and more important than Horsham.) The parish of Shipley is the largest in West Sussex and much of your walk today is within the parish. In the 1100s Shipley may have been the first military monastery (or "preceptory") of the Knights Templar, an order founded to protect travellers to the Holy Land. (See the London "Temples and Terraces" and the Hampshire "Alresford" walks in this series.)

- 7 Your route is **right** shortly on School Lane to avoid the cul-de-sac. But by continuing ahead for a quick there-and-back, and keeping to the right of a house, you reach the church.

The church of St Mary the Virgin was built shortly after the Norman Conquest of 1066. It soon passed to the Knights Templar (see above). The sheer size of this church gives some idea of the historic importance of Shipley. You can normally enter by the West door. Inside the church there is a delightful pictorial map of the large Shipley parish.

- P Having turned right on School Lane, after passing a parking strip and the long *Hall Cottage*, on your left is a bridleway. No one who comes to Shipley could pass up this chance for a quick there-and-back look at the windmill.

Shipley Windmill (correctly known as King's Mill or Vincent's Mill) was built in 1879. It is an octagonal smock mill, i.e. wide, in two sections, with a platform, four stories high. The mill was bought by Hilaire Belloc who lived in the adjoining house. After his death in 1953, the mill was restored as a memorial to the writer. The mill was open to the public until 1986 when major repairs became necessary.

*Hilaire Belloc was born in 1870 in France to a French father and English mother. He grew up in England, went to Oxford, travelled rough in the US, served as MP and took up sailing. An extremely controversial and combative man, Belloc wrote 150 books on every subject. Everyone now knows him for the *Cautionary Tales* ("There was a boy whose name was Jim" etc.). He is buried nearby in the Catholic cemetery of Our Lady of Consolation (see the "West Grinstead and River Adur" walk in this series).*

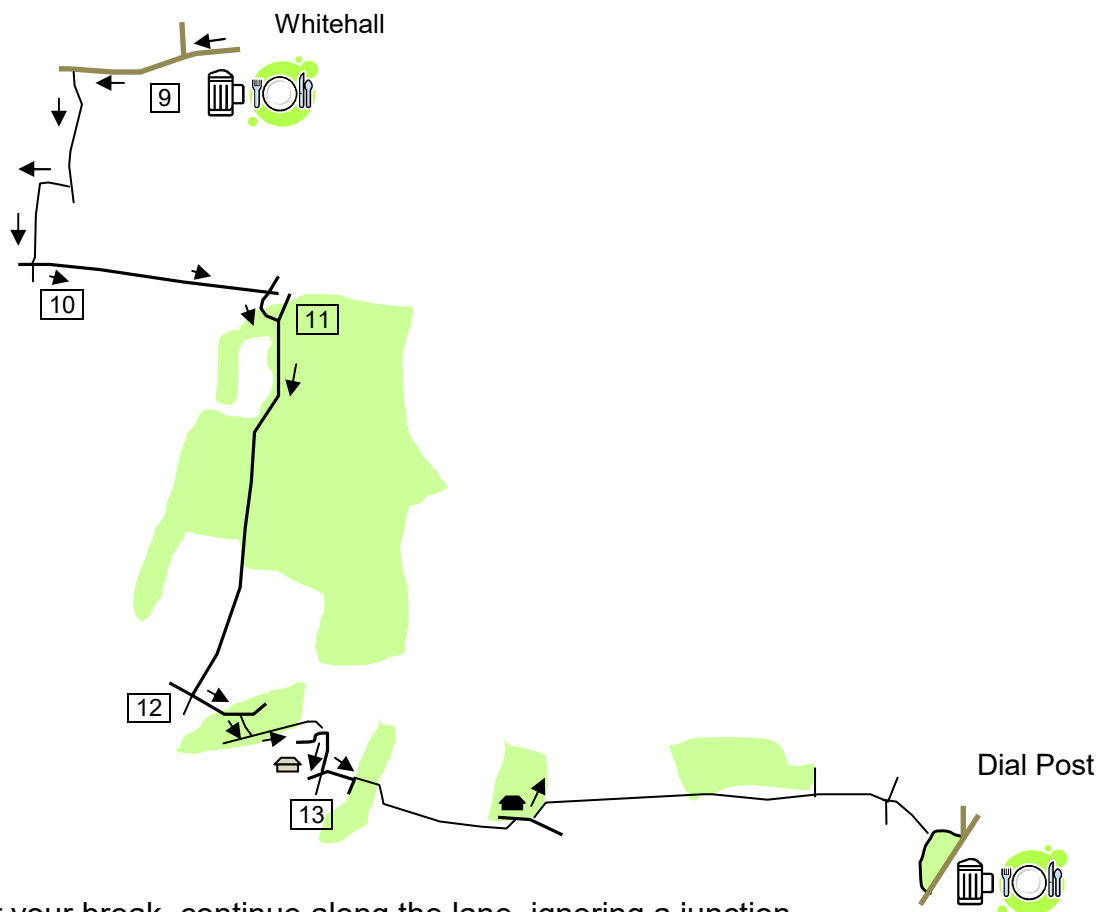
Continue along the tarmac lane, thus leaving the Red Route. After 250m or so, by a house, where the lane veers a fraction right, **leave** it by going straight ahead through a large wooden gate.

- 8 The path leads onwards between wire fences and through a large old metal gate, curving left into woodland. Two ancient stone bridges takes you over the streams of the River Adur. About 100m after the wood, as you pass under a large oak, look to your right for a 3-way fingerpost. Turn **left** here through a modern kissing-gate on a footpath, leading to a woodland path which comes out into a large grass meadow. Keep ahead alongside a wire fence. At the other side, your path takes you through more woodland and across another stream via a long wooden bridge-with-rails. Now you are walking beside another meadow bristling with wild flowers on your right, then more woodland, some scrubland and finally a kissing-gate leading out to a lane. Turn **right** on the road to reach the hamlet of Whitehall and *The Countryman Inn* in just over 150m, a pleasant prospect for a rest and refreshment.



*The Countryman Inn is rather like a little village of goodies. As well as being a perfect country pub, it is also a shop and café, so you can have afternoon tea here. Serving such a remote community, it has, as well as a car park, a horse park. In the same vein, the main beer is Kicking Donkey, but there is also Sussex Ale. Grub, served 12-2, is Light Bites, Ciabattas (for a light lunch) and roasts which include the largest Yorkshire puddings you have seen. The Countryman is **closed** Mondays and Tuesdays.*

Leg 3: The Countryman to Dial Post 3 miles



- 9 After your break, continue along the lane, ignoring a junction on the right, for a further 300m. As you go under some wires and pass a driveway on your left, go another 25m to a fingerpost. Go **left** here over a 2-plank bridge-with-rail, through a tall wooden gate with the usual signs. Go straight ahead along the left-hand side of a meadow, continuing on a wide grass path. In 250m or so, as you come over a flat bridge into the next boundary of wild fields, turn **right** as indicated by a big blue arrow. This wide grass path wheels left and, in just over 250m, ends at a multiple junction of paths. Go straight ahead through a gap in the hedge, over a 2-plank bridge, out to a join of large open fields. Turn sharp **left** here following a big blue arrow.
- 10 You are now on a wide grass path along the left-hand side of a wild meadow. The grass fades and the path may be muddy here in the wet season. After 400m you pass a line of oaks on your right. Continue ahead for a further 150m, with a fresher-looking green meadow now on your right, to meet a wide raised crossing bridleway. Turn **right** on this bridleway, immediately going over a small flat bridge. The bridleway quickly bends left, passing a pond on your right, and comes to a T-junction with a wide path which has a pristine prepared surface. Turn **right** on this path.

- 11 You will be following this wide trail for 1km. It is used by both standard walks, so you will be seeing red and blue blazes. At the halfway point there is a tree lookout spot where you can climb (carefully!) to a platform in the branches to observe the immediate landscape of forest and wetlands. (You may encounter some other wildlife on the platform - the canoodling variety.) This area is the favourite haunt of the beautiful red Tamworth pigs. You pass a pond on your right. Keep constantly to the main path. Finally you reach a 4-way crossing with a fingerpost.
- 12 Ignore the grassy path ahead and instead turn **left** here on another wide path. In 120m you meet a marker post and more red-and-blue blazes. **Leave** the main path now as it winds away to the left and instead turn **right** on a dark and leaf-strewn path into trees. In 70m, where the path bends left, **leave** it by going straight ahead through a tall wooden gate and over a bridge-with-rails, taking you once again out of the Rewilding Area to meet a wide straight woodland path. Turn **left** on this path. In 150m the path ends at a curve in a gravel drive belonging to *Bentons Place Farm*. Keep ahead and follow the drive round to the right. The cinder track goes past the farmhouse* on your right, with a lily pond on your left, and comes to a crossing track by a fingerpost (partly hidden in a thorn bush). (*A once beautiful house and grounds, now unoccupied and derelict and in sad state, inside and out.)
- 13 Turn **left** at this crossing. In 80m avoid a dead-end track on your right and keep ahead, going over the Lancing Brook, now on a much narrower path. You quickly come through another tall gate into an open area. On your left is a no-go area where the storks sometimes roost, tolerating only the quiet deer as intruders. So keep straight ahead on the dusty wide track (known as Bentons Lane), avoiding all green turn-offs. In 300m the track zigzags left-right to go past a house (*Wickwood Cottage*) with its stash of old cars. Immediately after the house, at a 3-way fingerpost, turn **left** on a footpath.
- 14 The path bends right, so that you are heading in the same direction as before. If you expected the last stretch to be a predictable traipse back to the village, you will be surprised: a unique landscape is here to deliver the farewells. You enter a spacious wilderness dotted with thorn trees and carpeted end-to-end with ragwort: a fine sight at the end of the day. Keep ahead across the centre on a wide green highway. In 350m, at the far end, go past a 2-way fingerpost into a band of trees, known as *Tory Copse* for reasons no one can remember. You come out into another green space. Continue along the left-hand edge. You enter woods, but forming three lines of young oaks on the right margin. You can walk between the lines. Ignore a footpath and plank bridge on your left. At the end of the path, go through a tall swing-gate to arrive at a junction. Keep straight ahead through a modern kissing-gate and keep to the right-hand side of what appears to be a single practice golf link.

At the time of writing two curious warning signs were stuck in the ground at both ends saying DANGER MINES. No clue has been found as to their meaning. They are too well-made and purposeful to be an overnight ruse. The field backs onto the garden of a house with no fencing. It's probably a joke by the house owner to keep walkers from straying onto the practice links. (A few days after writing this there are now some upturned Wellington boots.) Please send feedback if anything more appears!

The "mines" prompted the author to write this personal thought after seeing newsreels of war-ravaged places like Ukraine: How fortunate we are to have this inspiring countryside all around where we can walk where we choose. Imagine living in a country where the children cannot step outside and people

cannot walk without fear for themselves and their loved ones. Or here in an earlier century when we might have been enslaved, or bound for a lifetime to the Manor for our every movement.

A kissing-gate and a short gravel drive lead out onto the Green opposite the *Crown Inn* and the centre of the village where the walk began. Or, if you parked in the Walker's car park, the entrance is 350m along the Worthing Road.



The "Crown Inn" is a freehouse owned and run by Penny and James, with a patio overlooking the Green and a beer garden. Home-cooked food is modern favourites raised a level or two, with daily specials. If you are staying over, or simply can't struggle home after the food and drink, this may be the place because the stylish bedrooms are a headline feature. The "Crown" is open from 12 till 3pm, re-opening at 6pm, except Sunday when it is open until 4.30. Lunch is served till 2pm (2.45 on Sunday).



Getting there

By car: Dial Post is clearly marked just off the A24 London-Dorking-Worthing road, about 10 miles from the Crawley junction and about 12 miles from Worthing. (In fact, the village is on the old Worthing road and the new A24 bypasses it.) The author parked easily on the roadside just before the Green.

Because of the popularity of this area, walkers are encouraged to use the *Walker's Car Park* to prevent cars clogging the village. It is signed shortly before you enter the village. The author did not check this out and there has been conflicting feedback about its location and the short cut from the car park to the *Knepp Wildland Safaris Camping* entrance in Swallows Lane (www.w3w.co/thickens.moral.bathtubs). If you park here, please ask someone, or follow signs for *Knepp Wildland Safaris*, or look at the w3w map. Given precise feedback, this will be added later to these guide notes.

By bus/train: Bus 23 from Horsham Station. Bus 74B from Horsham Station to Shipley. Check the timetables.

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