

A Walk (for a drink), from West Dean

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This short walk is in the western part of Hampshire, close to the Wiltshire border and nearer to Salisbury than Southampton. There are several reasons for choosing this walk, apart from the pleasant countryside itself. Chiefly, it takes you to a cracking pub; and there is a very good train service that gets you close before the leisurely stroll to give you a good thirst on arrival.

A few years ago the train service to West Dean was abysmal. Just a few First Great Western Bristol-Southampton trains stopped there, and there were strong moves to reduce even those. Then Southwestern Trains stepped in and created a new hourly service that stopped at all stations on the Salisbury-Romsey-Southampton-Eastleigh-Chandlers Ford-Romsey route. I have difficulty believing it makes any money, except perhaps the Chandlers Ford-Southampton part of the route; but long may it continue. This walk would not be feasible without it: here it is.

Alight at West Dean station. If you turned left on leaving the platform you would immediately be in the centre of West Dean. The village is split north and south by the River Dun, slowly flowing eastwards through the village. The county boundary between Hampshire and Wiltshire also splits the village. By the river an old inn sign marks the sadly demised **Red Lion**, a well-used pub that closed in the 1990s, early victim to the trend to buy pubs as private houses. The pub was unique in having two bars divided by the boundary and requiring dealings with two licensing authorities!

However, turn right on leaving the platform, onto Rectory Hill. This road leads directly to West Tytherley, and is a perfectly reasonable and easy way to reach the village; though I think there are better options. The road climbs gently out of the village. Look out for small green and white footpath signs pointing both left and right. Take the right one along a narrow drive closely bordered by tall slim trees. Just before a white house, turn left along a path in a band of woodland, and then immediately turn right with the white house on your right. Go gently uphill, then downhill across a large field (probably full of vegetables). Good to note the farmer has respected the right of way and left a band of grassland for walkers, though albeit possibly muddy. The path ends at a stile giving access to a bend in a small country lane.

This is Frenchmoor Lane, from hereon the navigation is easy. Turn left up the narrow, winding lane; traffic is almost non-existent, because the lane ends at a pedestrian-only level crossing a short distance down on the right. The lane climbs, then drops gently, and climbs again. A few isolated houses border the lane. Gradually the houses increase in number, providing an unexpected example of between-the-wars ribbon development in the heart of the country. But the lane is never less than a delightful, peaceful walk. And so it goes on. Soon dark woods on the left add a slight touch of drama; just carry on and enjoy the peace.

At a cross-road continue ahead into Red Lane (Note this cross roads, you will return to it later). Red Lane is also an attractive, quiet, winding lane, bordered by a succession of well-kept houses. Bend slightly left where Pugs Hole comes in from the right. At the next junction continue ahead where the road from East Tytherley comes in from the right. Continue a short distance to a main road, and here turn right downhill into North Lane. The **Black Horse** is just around the bend on the left.



This pub last changed hands about four years ago, possibly more. It soon made a name for itself, and became an essential part of the village. It gained an entry in the *Good Beer Guide* in 2011 and is again in the current 2012 edition. Beers on when visited recently were two from Flowerpots and one from the Stonehenge brewery. The pub is a strong supporter of local ales and is in CAMRA's South Hants branch LocAle list. This year it was also short listed for the branch's 'Pub of the Year.' The pub's 'phone number is 01794 340308 and website is:

www.theblackhorsepublichouse.co.uk

Most times, when I am constructing these walks, I rely on my own knowledge. For this walk it was somewhat different, I was outside my sphere of experience. Almost without realizing it, I found a solution. The Black Horse is such a friendly pub, that when two gentlemen came to the bar to pay for their lunch, I simply asked them for their opinion on the best way to walk back to West Dean station. After a little hesitation they described their choice. I made a couple of suggestions, just based on looking at the map; these were given short shrift. Gentlemen, thank you: a five-minute conversation with you saved me hours of frustrated walking. Their suggestion is the return route to West Dean.



Turn right on leaving the pub, and retrace your steps, up North Lane, left into Coach Road and straight on into Red Lane, to the already noted cross roads. Here turn left into Bulls Drove, bend right, then follow a long curve left on a small but good tarmac road. When the tarmac ends, follow an earthy track ahead with woods on the right. After a few houses, there are open fields on the left, and the track improves. After nearly half a mile, turn right onto a good tarmac lane (this is Pugs Hole again), and go downhill, curving right, with woods on both sides. The countryside hereabouts has a neat, cared-for feeling; this is an area of large well run estates – no impoverished smallholdings strewn with barbed wire and rusting machinery in this area!

When the road and woods end, with good views of the downs ahead, turn right over a stile to follow the edge of the field with woods on your right. Cross a double stile over a ditch and continue ahead. At the next stile continue straight ahead, with a hedge on your right, and a single oak tree in the distance ahead of you. Go slightly downhill, then uphill to pass the oak tree on your left. Then bend left and right alongside the hedge, downhill, and then right and left past a shooting tower towards a green metal gate. Do not go

through the gate, but veer left, to cross a stile leading to a grassy path.

Bend right to join a concrete drive, with parallel power lines. Soon, ignore a footpath sign to your left; instead make a sudden bend right, still on the concrete drive. The route is now straight and climbs gently. Just before Park Farm, bend right along the field edge around the farm buildings. At the field corner follow a small path diagonally left across the next field to a gap in the hedge and steps down into a small lane.

This lane should look familiar: the stile ahead is the only one crossed on the outward journey. If you are short of time then your best option is to follow the outward route back to the station. However, there is another pub just a few hundred yards away that is well worth a visit. Turn left around a bend in the lane, then bend right, and immediately after crossing the River Dun you will reach a pedestrian crossing over the railway. Take care crossing, this is a straight and fast part of the line. Continue up the small lane to reach the West Dean to East Dean Road, and on your left is the **Old Brewers**.



The Old Brewers is an unusual pub. The original pub was an old thatched house, which was burnt down,

allegedly by arsonists sometime in the 1960-70s to be replaced by a 'tin shack', which served as the pub. The tin shack was extended and extended, and grew to become the present building. It is now lavishly decorated with pictures, especially the toilets. The illustration is the patio area. The Old Brewers is listed by Stonehenge as one of their permanent outlets, when visited Pigswill was the beer on. Note that if intending to eat, evening meals are only Wednesdays to Saturdays with Sunday lunchtime roasts. Further info: tel: 01794 341596, website:

http://sp5.info/old_brewers

Now all you have to do is get back to West Dean station. Again there are two choices. Either retrace your way back over the railway and along Frenchmoor Lane to the stile, then across the vegetable field. Or turn left along the East Dean to West Dean Road. Unfortunately this road has no footpath, but it is a quiet road, and has a flat verge in places. Both routes are about a mile. I hope you enjoy the walk in this quiet Hampshire backwater, plus the train journey and of course the beer.

Maps: Maps are not absolutely necessary for this walk, the routes are fairly straightforward. However I always feel happier with a map; the relevant OS 1:25,000 Map is Explorer 131 Romsey, Andover & Test Valley. The walk is also covered by OS 1:50,000 Landranger sheet 184, Salisbury and The Plain.

Seasons: A walk for all seasons, except after heavy rain. In spring there are spring flowers, in summer the trees will not be overbearing, because much of the walk is in the open. Autumn colours may well make that the best time of all.

Distances: The outward walk is about 2½ miles, the walk back about 3 miles, plus an extra ½ mile to visit the Old Brewers.