

WALKING AND DRINKING (11)

Linwood to North Gorley

The first walk I wrote for *Hop Press*, five years ago, was in the New Forest – a very easy gravel track walk from, and returning to, the **Royal Oak** at Fritham (then, as now, a *Good Beer Guide* entry). For this more difficult walk I return to the Forest, not that far from Fritham, and involving another pub of the same name. This walk is between two other *Good Beer Guide* pubs, the **Red Shoot Inn** at Linwood, going across Ibsley Common to the **Royal Oak** at North Gorley, and then returning.

A mild note of caution: this part of the New Forest is about as remote as Hampshire gets, so expect the navigation to be more tricky than usual. Just enjoy the challenge and the walk.



Leaving the Red Shoot Inn, walk down the narrow lane (Toms Lane) outside until you come to a sharp right bend. Note: there is very limited car parking here at the side of the lane. Cross over a stile at the bend onto a grassy path between wooden rail fences. Continue

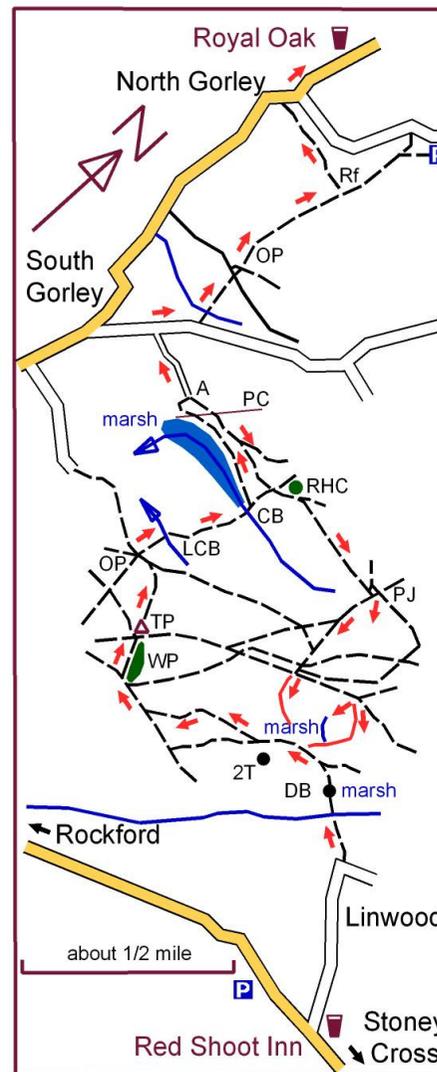
through a V-gate in a fence and over a stream onto the open moorland beyond. This stream, known variously as Dockens Water or Linwood Bog, is very marshy for most of its almost straight route from near Fritham to the Avon Valley. You are fortunate here; this is one of the very few bridged crossings.

Once on the moorland (Great Bottom) go straight ahead on a small path, soon to cross helpful duck-boarding (DB on the map) over some marsh. Unfortunately the wooden walk is too short: there are always patches of marsh at both ends. In the driest of weather these are just about crossable in walking shoes, otherwise boots or wellies are required.

Head slightly left of the main valley in the hillside ahead. The small but easy to follow path soon curves left, to merge with a larger path coming in from the right. Continue uphill on this good path. As the climb eases two isolated trees (2T) can be seen on the skyline, and soon you reach the crest of a hill near these trees. As you begin to descend, take a right fork along a small path, aiming for a distinct line of trees (Whitefield Plantation: WP). The plantation was an experimental planting of Scots Pine; it now forms a very useful landmark on the otherwise empty plain that is Ibsley Common. The small path descends and climbs, and soon the plantation is visible again. Eventually you meet and turn right onto a large path that leads to the left end of the plantation.

Go around the plantation, and walk the length of the wood with the trees on your right. At the far end cross a large path to the white trig point (TP) ahead. Continue on a small path towards a couple of distant local power cable posts (PC). The path bends left, joining a larger path going left. Soon turn right at a path

junction just before the corner of an old gravel pit (OP). The path curves, goes steeply downhill into Little Chibden Bottom (LCB), climbs, and drops even more steeply into the large valley that is Chibden Bottom (CB).



After crossing the small stream or marsh in the valley bottom, turn left along a small path just above the broadening

marsh. The local power cables (PC) are visible ahead again. Climb gently, with the marsh curving away on your left, and pass under the power cables. Climb more steeply to a ridge, and bend right across a grassy area towards a fence. Turn right by the fence, going downhill. The path soon curves left and joins another (point A) to form a rough track downhill between fences. Bear left onto a gravel road that soon leads to the tarmacked South Gorley to Furze Hill road.

Turn right along this quiet road, and then turn left at a footpath sign, to go across a field to a concrete bridge over a small stream (Huckles Brook). Cross a second field on a small path between barbed wire fences to another skeletal stile. Climb steadily between fences to a third stile and cross a gravel road beyond. Continue straight ahead, and immediately cross a drive and a path. Then climb steeply through light woodland to reach a plateau (Gorley Hill), and the corner of a large grassy path with a very large old shallow gravel pit beyond (OP).

Continue straight ahead, keeping as high as possible, with the old pit on your right, and the land falling steeply on your left. Look out for the roofs of houses on the left (Rf); drop down towards them and go steeply downhill with a field on your left and houses on your right. Continue steeply downhill on an old rough shady track. This track looks like it could get very muddy in winter, see later for an alternative. After a short scramble over some farming debris the track joins a much better house drive and immediately joins a tarmac road at North Gorley. Look right for the welcoming sign of the Royal Oak in the distance.

Should you miss the house roofs, don't worry, just continue, still keeping as high

as possible with the land falling steeply on your left and the pit always on your right. Eventually you will either come to a small lane or a small car park. Go through the car park and along its access track to the small lane. Do not be tempted to use the route opposite, shown by green circles on the OS map. Although it leads directly to the pub, the second part of this old byway is little more than a wet marsh. Instead turn left, downhill along the small lane, bend right, join the larger road, and look right for the Royal Oak sign.



For the return journey, there are several options. Firstly, you can retrace your steps exactly, or you can use the end of the route out that you didn't use going. When you get back to point A, you have a chance to be adventurous. Consider continuing straight ahead steeply uphill, and follow the return route shown on the sketch map.

This route keeps high above Chibden Bottom, with fine views down into the valley on your right. Soon you will pass Robin Hood's Clump (RHC), a small copse of pines covering an obvious disc barrow. Keep on the main path just above the valley, eventually reaching a complex path junction (PJ). Turn right here, either along the large marked path, or half right to strike out across the heath. The sketch map shows 3 possible routes

down across Great Bottom: 2 vague paths shown in red, and a third indication to find the head of a very distinct marsh and follow it downhill. Whichever route you choose, there should be no real difficulty in identifying the outward leg route below you, and returning to it. When the walk is complete, I hope the beer is an adequate reward.

Maps: The OS 1:25,000 are the best maps for walkers. The relevant map for this walk is **Explorer OL22** (New Forest). **Be aware though that this OS map does contain errors in the area of Great Bottom.** Unusually, it shows extra footpaths in this part of the New Forest in green. I think this is a relic from when this land was privately owned. Some of these paths do not exist now; I believe my sketch map to be better in the Great Bottom area.

Seasons: Being a predominantly open exposed area, this is really a walk for any time, except in hot sun or very cold or rainy weather. Autumn is always a good time in the Forest: late October is usually best.

Times: Each half of the walk is about 3½ miles, so allow about 1½ hours each way for the walking part.

Transport: There is no public transport to the Red Shoot Inn, but the Royal Oak is close to the X3 Ringwood – Fordingbridge bus route.

Car Parking: Both pubs have somewhat limited car parks. Please get permission before leaving your car there. There is also a Forestry Commission car park in Appleslade Inclosure, just down the main road from the Red Shoot Inn. Also there is very limited roadside parking just after the start of the walk.