

BLANDFORD WALK 1

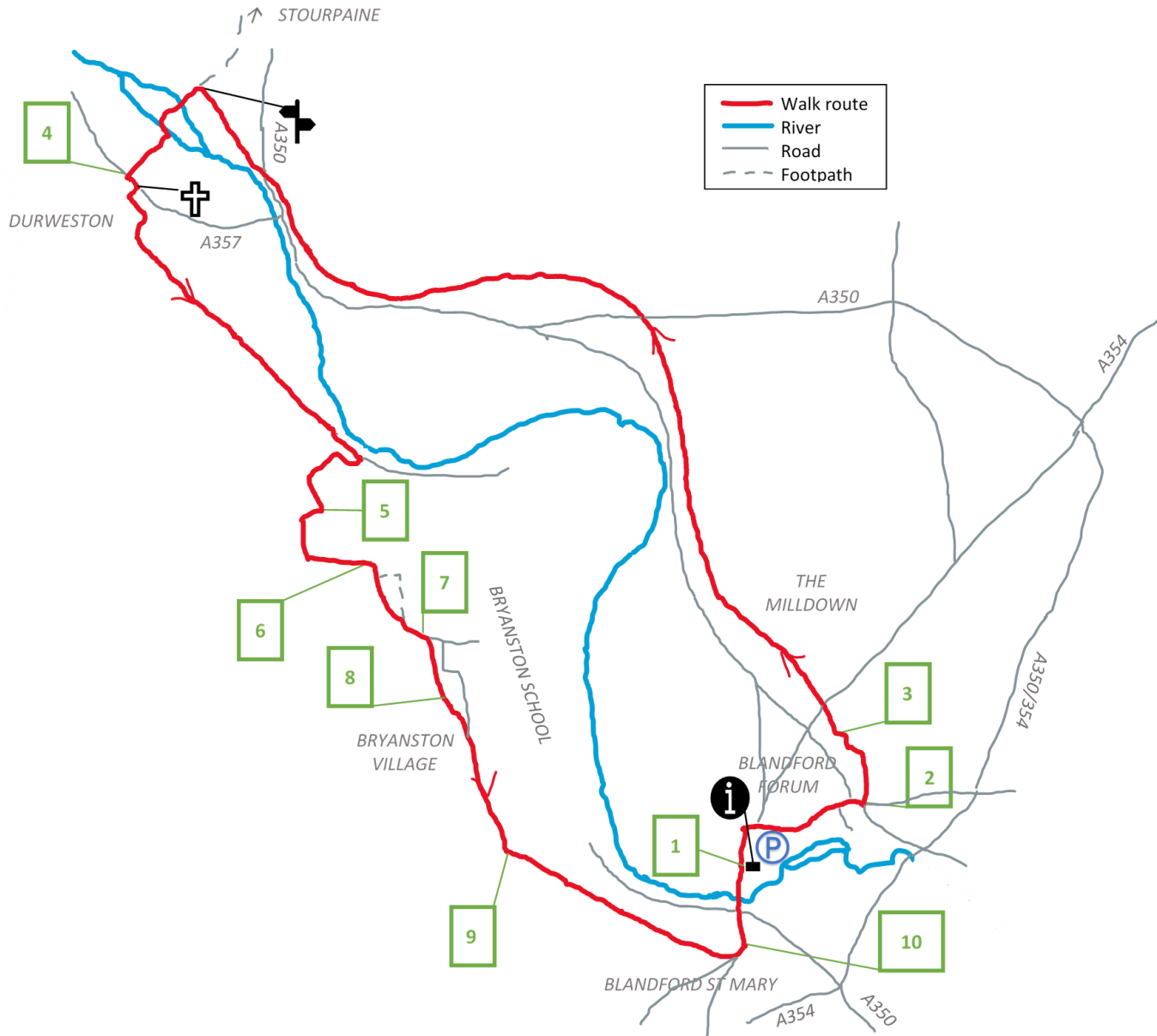


RAILWAY HERITAGE AND THE PORTMAN ESTATE




DURATION: 7¾ miles

TERRAIN: Mostly flat and easy-going, but a steepish climb up woodland steps; down gradients are more gentle. Some stiles but all suitable for dogs, steps not suitable for buggies. Three-quarters of a mile on road towards the end.




With grateful thanks to the North Dorset Rangers, Blandford Civic Society, Dorset History Centre, Blandford Library, Lorna for her IT expertise, Pat for her photos, Liz (Town Guide) for her local knowledge, Adam for his technical support and all the guinea-pigs who tried them out and improved them.

1 Leave the TIC  and turn right for about 650 yards, following the pavement, past the Market Place to the pedestrian lights at Damory Street. Cross here, continuing along the wall pausing to read the panel about the railway.

You are now walking through the heart of the Georgian Town. The building style is so consistent because after the Great Fire of 1731 there were very few buildings left in the town centre. The old wooden buildings were replaced with stone and brick (by Act of Parliament) and here you see the Corn Exchange, the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul and the water pump on your left and many buildings including the so-called Bastard House on the right. The Bastard brothers were the architects charged with laying out and designing the new town. What were originally homes have long since become shops.


2 Continue to the second set of traffic lights where you turn left to go up Damory Court Street for about 100 yards and then cross the carpark on the left to find the entrance to the North Dorset Trailway (information panel here too). There are signs directing you to the Trailway from the traffic lights. ($\frac{3}{4}$ mile)

You are now following the route of the Somerset and Dorset Railway which, until 1966, linked Poole with Bath. The station buildings are gone now but the usage lingers on in the place names and the Station Master's House still remains, albeit as a private dwelling. This section of the Trailway, suitable for both walkers and cyclists, runs for about 11 miles to Sturminster Newton and is marked as route 25 of the National Cycling Network (NCN). Keep a look-out along the Trailway for signs of the old railway as you progress.

3 For the next couple of miles you will be walking often between hedges but also past open fields. During this section you will pass under several road bridges including the A350. There will be several opportunities to leave the Trailway to the right to gain access to the Milldown, a large open green space much loved by dog-walkers and others, but ignore these. The Trail also crosses several farm-tracks, including a staggered junction at the 2-mile marker from Blandford, but carry on along the Trailway until you come to a T-junction 

where the Trailway and CNC routes 25 and 250 are signed right but you turn left under an old brick railway bridge and then over a metal bridge across the river Stour and its weirs, past the old mill to arrive at a main road, the A357. You are now in the village of Durweston. You are now on the Stour Valley Way, a 68-mile long distance path which accompanies the river Stour from its source at Stourhead to Christchurch where it enters the sea. Indeed, the rest of the walk follows this path. ($3\frac{3}{4}$ miles)

As you undulate along the Trailway you will catch glimpses of Hod Hill, a nationally-important Iron Age Hill Fort; over to your left the chimneys of Bryanston School and in front of you the church in Stourpaine. If you are looking for refreshment, the White Horse in Stourpaine may be what you are looking for. In order to get there, continue along the Trailway instead of taking the left hand turn and once in the village turn up right to the main A350. You will then need to retrace your steps. There has been a church on the same site in Stourpaine since Norman times but the current one is mostly Victorian.

4 Turn left on the A357 and in a few yards, cross the road and continue along the lane next to the War Memorial . Continue past Durweston Farmhouse to a T-junction where you turn right and very soon left towards the Village Hall and First School. When you come to the playing field, look back to see the old station sign fixed to the wall. Continue along this minor road, past the entrance to Knighton House on the right and then enter the grounds of Bryanston School. You have right of way, despite any sign to the contrary, provided you stay on the marked footpath. Go along the tarred road for about 100 yards until you see a footpath signed up to the right. Follow it until you come to another sign taking you up forest steps to the left. Be careful not to miss it – if you come to a wide gate crossing the track you have gone too far. ($4\frac{1}{2}$ miles)

For the next section of the walk you will be skirting the grounds of Bryanston School, which was originally a manor house on the Portman Estate but which was sold off by the family in 1927 to become a fee-paying school specialising in the Arts. There will be glimpses of the main building with its distinctive chimneys above the trees at several points on this section.

5 At the top, cross a stile into a field, following the direction of the yellow footpath sign to the right, carefully crossing what looks like an electric fence, and then follow the edge of the field along a mown path to the corner of the field. Ignore the stile to the right, making a left turn to continue to follow the hedge line. At the end of the field, cross the stile and advance between two fences towards some housing.

6 At the T-junction, turn right, passing a white-barred gate, past Home Farm and Dairy Cottages at the bottom of the hill. ($6\frac{1}{4}$ miles)


7 Follow this road/ path uphill now until you arrive at a grassy triangle where you turn right into Bryanston village.

Bryanston Village was originally part of the Portman Estate, being the houses built for the estate workers.

8 Walk up through the village, and when you come to the Bryanston Club, enter the carpark and walk uphill to a kissing-gate in the fence under some large trees. Cross this field in a diagonally left direction until you come to another kissing-gate in the far corner where you regain the road next to an old red telephone box. Turn right (Forum View), passing through the rest of the village to a T-junction.

9 You are now at Cliff Lodge where you turn left, walking downhill. (7 miles)

Ahead of you and to your right you can now see the part of town which is called Blandford. St Mary, but is on the opposite side of the Stour from the main town. The fire which so destroyed the town in 1731 occurred on a day when the wind was so strong that sparks and embers were blown across the river and set fire to buildings here as well.

10 After about three-quarters of a mile you will come to a T-junction where you turn left towards the town centre, passing the entrance to Bryanston School, crossing the river and re-entering the carpark . ($7\frac{3}{4}$ miles)