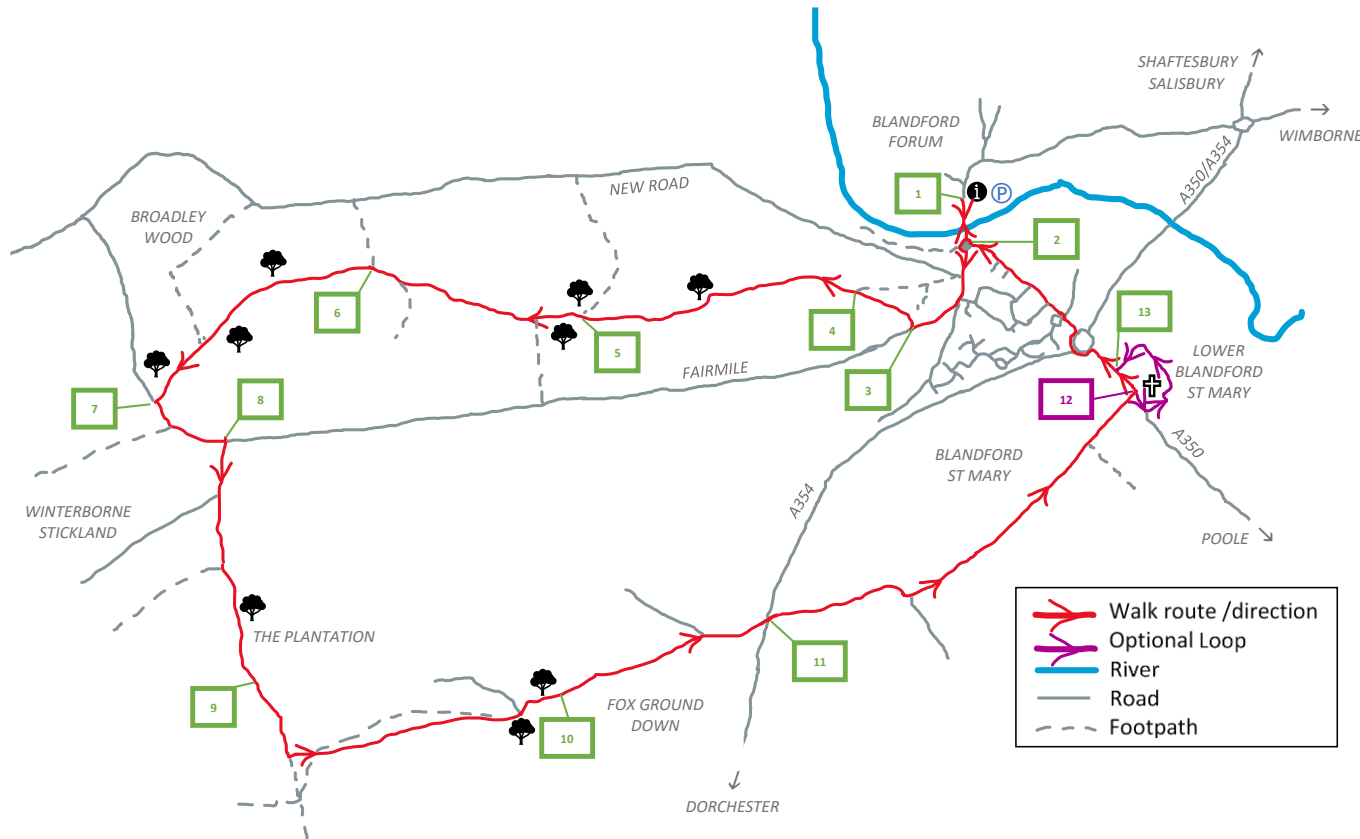


BLANDFORD WALK 4



WOODS, WOOFs AND WHINNIES



DURATION: 7 ³/₄ miles

TERRAIN: Fairly easy walking, but country tracks and fields, unsuitable for wheels. May be muddy in places so footwear needs to be appropriate. No climbs. Dogs must be on lead in some places. Most of route is on bridleways (marked clearly on OS map) but some signs are missing. Several short stretches on a minor road. Possibility of cattle at 5.

OS map: Explorer 117, Landranger 194

1 Leave the TIC **i** and turn left to cross the road bridge.

There has been a bridge here since Anglo-Saxon times explaining the siting of the town. The current six-span bridge is Georgian. As you cross it, you will see a sign threatening you with transportation if you damage it!

2 At the roundabout continue straight ahead, crossing to the right-hand pavement where possible until you get to a junction of three roads. Take the middle one (to Winterbourne Stickland) and walk carefully up the road for about 200 yards.

There has been an inn on this road for over 450 years, but the Stour Inn and the cottages nearby are all late 18th to early 19th C. Bryant's House (now three houses) was one of the few here to survive the Great Fire of 1731 as it had a slate roof.

3 At the entrance to Lower Bryanston Farm, take the bridleway sign through the grounds following the signs left through a gate and onto a concrete track which ends at the hedge-line.

4 Go straight ahead onto a wide grassy path, walking to the left of the old hedge. Pass an arable field, then Beech Clump on the right. At the end of a field continue through a gateway passing several houses and a barn.

5 At the trees, go right through a gate then left to enter the woods, going straight through on the bridleway. At the end go through the gate following the track across a field, diagonally left (about 45 degrees), past a redundant gate in the middle of the field, next to several trees. Stay on the track, making for the field edge. As you meet the track round the edge of the field, turn left onto it and then right between the farm buildings up the hill, between barns.

Further up this road to Shothole is Diana Lodge, from the 1880's the site of the kennels for the Portman hunt.

6 At the end of the farm buildings there are 3 gates on the left; the first and third gates lead into fields but take the middle one which is a grassy track. Carry on along here for about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile through Broadley Wood.

7 Exit the wood onto a road, turn left, ignore the first bridleway sign on the right, pass a post-box and some houses on the right.

8 Turn right along the track to Canada Farm. Go round the gate marked Canada Farm Only to take a grassy track ahead, ignoring a field entrance on the right, to the Plantation.

In these woods stood The Down House, built in 1781 as part of the Pitt estate. The first Pitt here was a physician from Blandford but the family fortunes were changed forever by Governor Pitt who returned from his post as the Governor of Madras as a "nabob". He owned the Pitt diamond (in its time as famous as the Koh-I-Noor), so valuable it took him nearly 20 years to sell it! His grandson was Prime Minister Pitt (Pitt the Elder), later Earl of Chatham. The house was largely destroyed by fire in 1941 and pulled down completely in 1954. Traces of the estate are found in the Inside Park camping site, and in names on maps such as South Lodge (see later).

9 After the Plantation, keep on along the grassy track with the hedge to your right. At the end of the field, go through a gateway and turn left along a grassy track with the fence to your left.

10 After about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile, at a gate, ignore the two tracks to the right and carry on straight ahead through Fox Ground Down. In under a mile you will come to a T-junction with another track. Near a house to the left, turn right and continue until you arrive at South Lodge on the A354.

11 Cross the busy road and continue straight ahead along the bridleway, a well-defined path between hedges. After a redundant stile, a house and a barn, carry on up the hill. As you crest the hill, you will see Lower Blandford St. Mary church. Ignore the Trailway/NCN 50 to your right and keep going. After some houses on the right you will find yourself on the A350.

12 Turn right. In about 50 yards cross the road then turn left to Lower Blandford St. Mary and Parish Church. Walk round the village. (To omit the Lower

Blandford St. Mary loop walk left back along the A350, picking up your route at point 13.)

This oldest part of the village is part of the estate built up by Governor Pitt, who was responsible for much necessary renovation work in the church from 1711 onwards. This is the only part of Blandford St. Mary to escape the Great Fire of 1731. The fire was so intense and the wind so strong that there was extensive damage on both banks. The Church is, sadly, not open but has a long history; the oldest parts are 14th C but with later additions. Of its 3 bells, one is thought to date from the mid-17th C and the other two are pre-Reformation. Just after the church, Clerkenwell House's name suggests that it was the farm held by the Priory of St. Mary Clerkenwell pre-Dissolution (the nuns were given it in 1152). On the right three cottages were once four; they were built for horse-carters by the railway company around 1860. Inexplicably, the first railway here was from Wimborne to Blandford St. Mary and stopped short of the main town. Continuing round the loop you will come to the Old Rectory (1732) on your left then Lower Farm House dating back to Tudor/early Jacobean times. Finally, the Manor appears ahead and to the right. This beautiful Jacobean Manor House dates back to at least 1618 when it was bought by Sir James Hussey. Although it has later additions it is still an excellent example of 17th C domestic architecture. In winter, look through the field gate on the right to see the tower of Langton Long church through the trees.

13 Walk back towards town on the A350 (left hand pavement), crossing the A354 at the Badger roundabout. At the 2nd roundabout follow the road-sign to the right for the Trailway and Stour Meadows. At the 3rd roundabout, go straight on (between Homebase and Tesco's) downhill to enter a car park. Take the metalled pathway to the right; with a play park to your left follow the path round to the left, bringing you to the Mortain Bridge (blue) across the Stour, then through the car park **P**, back to the TIC.

The river is a very popular walk, with regular sightings of kingfishers and otters. The Stour was one of the earliest rivers in the south to welcome the return of the latter, their day-time habits gaining them an early star billing on "Springwatch".