Walks about Wootton

Welcome to Wootton Bridge. This leaflet is one in a series of five walks designed to help you explore some of our village’s history and beautiful surroundings. Enjoy your walk.

Distance: Approximately 3 miles.
Timing: 2-3 hours
Nearest car park: Brannon Way.
Bus route: Ryde - Newport No. 9, Ryde - East Cowes No. 4.
Recommended: Bring your binoculars and bird book!
Not recommended for disabled.
Start and finish: Brannon Way car park.
Taken at a gentle pace this walk is a little challenging. Sturdy footwear is recommended. You will cross fields and stiles.

1. The walk starts in Brannon Way car park. Leave the car park and turn right. Proceed to the High Street, turn right and walk down the hill to the Creek and Mill Pond. Stop halfway across the ‘bridge footpath’.

2. On your left is the Creek which flows down to the Solent and on your right is the Mill Pond, so named because of the 1960s and adjacent to the Sloop Inn there used to be a tidal mill, whose site is now occupied by yeatman’s houses.

The Mill Pond is a Site of Important Nature Conservation and is surrounded by Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It’s ‘brackish’ which means it is a mixture of salt and freshwater. There is still evidence of the Mill race half way across the footbridge if you look closely. Sluice gates under the bridge control the management of the water in and out of the Mill Pond. Look out over the Mill Pond for herons, egrets, swans and other wading birds.

Now retrace your steps a little way until you come to the Plane Tree opposite the Sloop Inn. This tree is held in great affection by local people and has become synonymous with Wootton Bridge. It has a girth of 13’4” and is about 160-200 years old.

Turn left at the Plane Tree into Lakeside along Footpath N1.

3. In Spring note the cloud of white blossom on your left, near the willow trees. This is a rare wild pear. The fruits are a little larger than a golf ball and are hard and bitter. Pass over a small bridge. On your right is the entrance to Fernhill Park.

On your left is the site of a former holiday centre known as Lakeside which was the location for the film ‘That’ll be the Day’ with David Essex and Ringo Starr.

Continue straight on, bear left with Fernhill Park on your right and after 100 yards proceed through the iron farm gate.

The countryside on this section of the walk is particularly lovely and is all part of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

4. After about 350 yards there is an information panel on your left which tells you about Hurst Copse. Next to the panel is a stile into Hurst Copse.

Note: Hurst Copse is well trodden and can be very sticky going, even during a dry winter.

5. Detour: If you choose, you can take a detour at this point. Walk 100 yards along the main path and take the wooden gate on the right. Pause to read the information panel. This land belongs to the People’s Trust for Endangered Species which has made the field available to the public. It has been left, with a little grazing, to revert to woodlandVording and is a site for meadow flowers that are being rapidly lost. Many varieties of butterflies can be seen here. At the top of the field is a particularly handsome oak tree with massive branches springing from low on the base. Beyond the oak tree, at the field boundary to the west and south, are what could be thought of as beech trees. They are in fact, Caucasian elms or Zeikows which are doing well.

Now retrace your steps to the stile and enter Hurst Copse. Pause and read the information panel as you pass it.

If you chose not to take the detour: Cross the stile into Hurst Copse.

Hurst Copse was purchased by the People’s Trust for Endangered Species in 1972 and is an SSSI. The Trust allows public access but asks that you observe the Countryside Code at all times. The copse has elements of ancient woodland and can be traced back to the late 17th century. In Spring, and in areas of wild bluebells can be seen on the left bank, whilst in the more open glades the pale heads of wood anemones turn to follow the sun. Note the polypody ferns growing profusely on some of the oak trees.

6. Follow the path through the copse.

Look out for red squirrels. You will come to the boardwalk which has reedbeds on either side. If you are quiet you may hear or even see reed warblers, at this point. During the summer shelduck and red shank can be seen feeding on the mudflats.

The marshland here is of ecological importance. Where the freshwater streams meet the brackish water of the Mill Pond there is a change from the tall freshwater need beds to blue/green sea couch grass to more open saltmarsh vegetation on the edge of the creek where marsh samphire, cord grass and sea plantain grow.

Cross the boardwalk into a much younger section of woodland. This is a grove of hawthorns, thought to be the only weed of such on the Island. Note the pale grey striated and fluted trunks. Follow the path through the woods which will bring you back to the bridge road.

7. As you exit the copse, on the opposite side of the track is the ice house, an egg-shaped brick building constructed in the late 17th century. The ice was brought to the island by the residents of Fernhill House. The ice came from as far away as Scandinavia and was stored in layers of straw for as long as two or three years. Ice houses became a desirable adjunct to large houses and over 3,000 of the structures still survive throughout the country today.