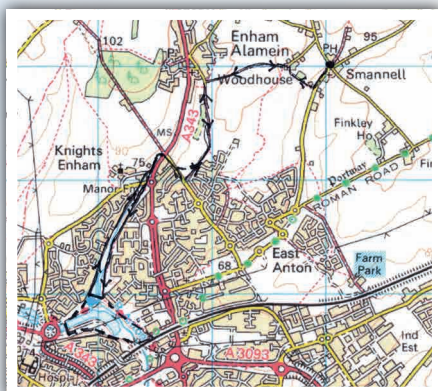


Discovering new tracks from Smannell



This month's walk takes a trip to the North of the Test Valley to a small village just 3 miles North East of Andover, in Smannell. The suggested parking is at The Oak Pub (photo 1), Stoke Road, Smannell, SP11 6JJ, a popular haunt for walkers around the area.



This walk gives the option of a simple 4.5 miles (7km) with the luxury of extending it by almost a further mile, if energy levels permit this extra piece. The first 1.5 miles (2.5km) involves an out and back journey, but with plenty of variety to view along the way.

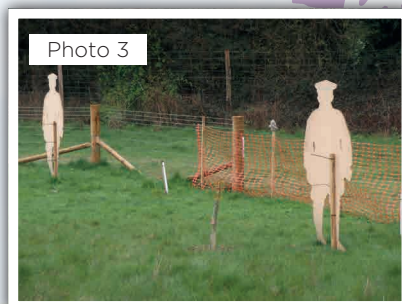
Leaving the car we should head directly South, which should result in the pub disappearing



behind us. In about 200 metres we pass Christ Church on the left, that has a history back into the 19th century. While a little further down the road we meet and take the footpath on the right (photo 2). This path leads us up a slight incline and soon emerges beside a house with a pea shingle access drive. Take a good note of this section as this will be part of our later return route.

At the end of this drive we turn left, up towards a very distinct footpath junction where we select the left hand option and weave our way alongside the edges of two fields.

At the end of the field path we meet a large wooden gate, along with a security style fence. Passing through this gate we turn right, following the mown tracts across the open grassland. Over to the left is a large Memorial Garden with tributes and sapling trees to 215 local residents who died in the World War 1 conflict (photo 3), while further still beyond that is the outer edge of the current housing development to nibble at the Andover countryside.



Once across the fields beside the memorial area, we pass through a line of trees and drop down a set of steps into a gully which formed a farmer's drovers trail many years ago. Here we turn left and begin a one kilometre steady climb towards the outskirts of Andover, finally emerging on the Icknield Way and the perimeter of the housing estate.

Turning right at the tarmac road we pass through a set of metal bollards, which block vehicle through traffic, and aim our way downhill until reaching the main road to Newbury (A343). Taking great care with fast moving vehicles, we need to cross this road

and aim left for a further 200 metres whence we are greeted by a tarmac path leading to a short tunnel/ bridge under the road.



Once under the bridge we have a choice of paths (photo 4), where we should select the left hand 'Town Centre' option. This tarmac path mirrors the route of the River Anton below us on the right hand side. After a while the path veers up to the left, offering us the 'Enham Way' on marker arrows. Please avoid the left slope and keep to the right with the fence line, along the grass section, and continue along this way until reaching a large wooden gate on the right (photo 5) which we now take.



** At this point comes decision time for the energetic walker, by turning left after this gate it is possible to follow the towpath of the Anton as far as Anton Lakes, turning right over a footbridge, then right again beside the lake until reaching a small car park. Shortly after that point we take the next right across a footbridge and work back up to the detour point of 1.5 kilometres ago.

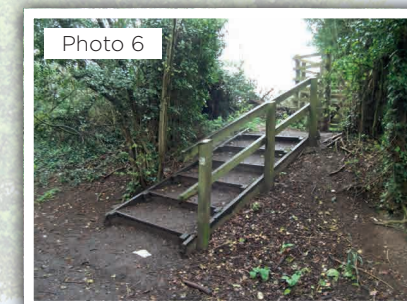
** For the walker taking the 'shorter' walk, it is a stroll over the duckboards and a right turn through the field gate; but for the longer walk it is a straight path up to this gate and joining the original trail again.

In wet weather part of these meadows can be very wet and muddy, but once at the top end of the park we cross a gate, appearing right beside the blue footpath signs just before the

road tunnel and we are once again in the dry.

We are now commencing the return section, doing all the previous route in reverse; starting by aiming under the road bridge, then following the A343 Northbound for 200 metres, crossing over into Icknield Way and climbing the road for approximately 500 metres, as far as the metal bollards, then taking the left hand trail beside a red bin (dog waste) which brings us back down the Drovers Trail once again.

Nearing the bottom of this trail we turn right up the steps (photo 6), the only ones on this track and work across the grassland beside the Memorial Gardens. From here we turn left through the large wooden gate and follow the prescribed path through two fields as far as a metal 'kissing' gate. We take a right turn here and after 100 metres look for the right hand across the pea shingle mentioned earlier.



Now with just a gentle stroll back down to Smannell Road we are ready to turn left along the road, passing the church and finally returning to The Oak, where a warm welcome is doubtless awaiting the intrepid walker.

It's always good to be prepared. Here's some tips for your walk...

- Remember high visibility clothing, vest or sash are ideal. Be seen at all times.
- Robust footwear, walking boots, good sturdy trainers - normal house shoes not recommended.
- A torch (for gloomy days), mobile phone and a whistle (personal protection and safety).
- Make sure you take your rubbish home to keep our countryside clean and help the environment.
- Dog walkers - take a supply of poop scoop bags and for hot days water & portable bowl.
- Be 'Tick Aware' when enjoying the countryside. For more information please read Public Health England booklet here - [https:// assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/694158/PHE_Tick_Leaflet.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/694158/PHE_Tick_Leaflet.pdf)