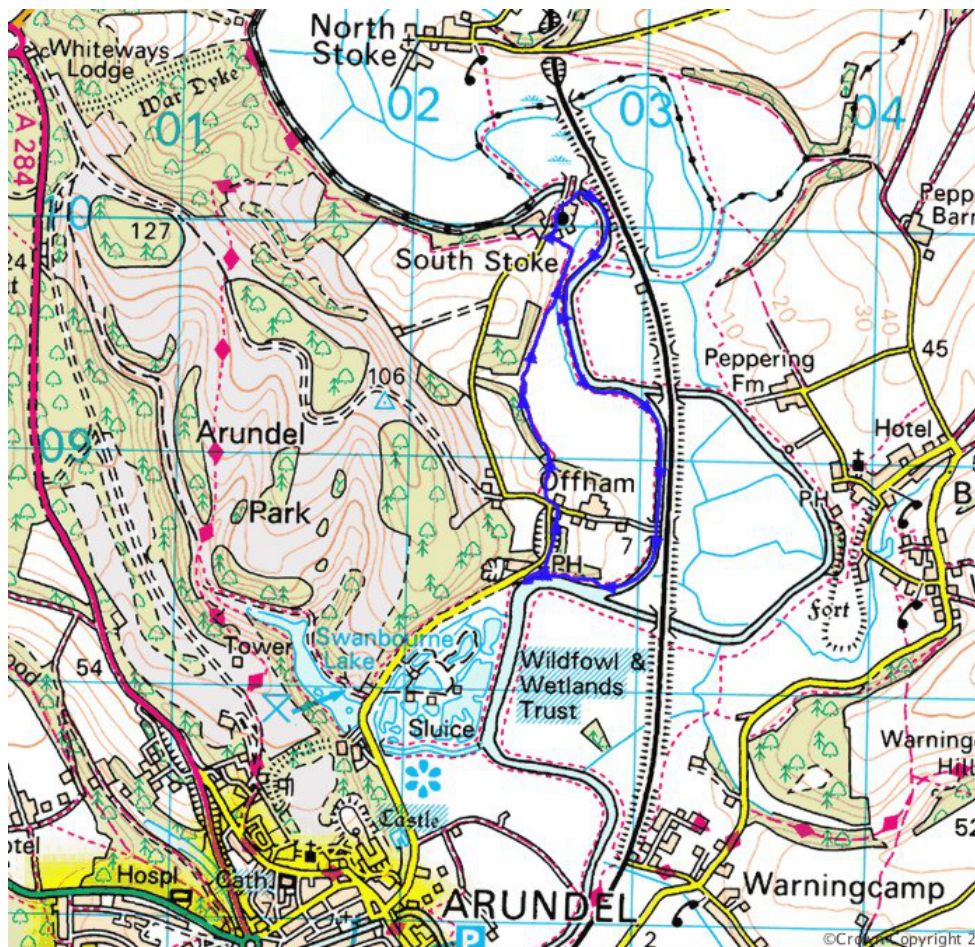

Favourite Nature Rambles Around Chichester

by David & Lynda Thornley

A Pub Walk to South Stoke

This is unashamedly a pub walk, starting and finishing at the very popular Black Rabbit which is just north of the Wetlands Centre. It's only 3 miles but in February when the land is still saturated with water and the mud is thick and sticky, it's enough to build up an appetite for lunch.



Unsurprisingly the walk starts in the car park by the pub and leads up the lane to the little hamlet of Offham where a bridal path leads to South Stoke. It's good to get way from the lane and amongst the woods leading down to the flood plain of the Arun which soon spreads before you as the path unfolds across a meadow.

At the end of a rather wet few months the ground was still saturated although most of the flooding had drained away, leaving many splashes for wildfowl. There were so many pairs of Mallard enjoying the water that they were constantly taking to the air as we walked alongside the ditches. This was clearly their preferred roosting and feeding ground, much more attractive than Chichester Harbour where there were few Mallard about at the time.

There are wonderful views of the downs across the Arun on the right hand side as it snakes it's way south. It's a view that can hardly have changed over hundreds of years, a landscape managed by man but with little habitation to detract from it's natural form.



On the opposite side of the path, to the left there are woodlands rising sharply that are punctuated by chalk quarries where lime could be obtained for land improvement and easily transported along the river.

South Stoke comes into view as the path leads slightly upwards towards the church of St Leonards which is still lit by candles apparently even though the hamlet was connected to electricity in 1950. It still feels to be in a rather peaceful and enjoyable time warp.



At the bridge the path can be taken south back towards Arundel. It's an earth bank built to retain the waters of the Arun and provides a grid view of the flood plane. The reed beds and splashes provide an ideal environment for so many birds, it's a joy to see them flying about. Apparently the collective description of plovers is a "Wing"; whatever it is we saw several of them wheeling about in unison looking so elegant compared with the relatively cumbersome duck dashing about.



High tide was in the early afternoon and it was springs so there was an impressive volume of water flowing upstream as it was a couple of hours before high water. Somehow it just looked wrong seeing the rafts of reeds floating the wrong way and rather surprising as we were so far inland.

In winter, this path requires good boots, it's heavy going and rather wet in places but well worth the effort and well before it had become a chore the path turned west and the pub with it's moorings was in sight.

Thoughtfully, the landlord had set up a boot cleaning area complete with hose pipe; of benefit to walkers and pub cleaners alike! After a quick clean it was into the bar for some of the time honoured favourite of a pies and a pint, an appropriate end to a pub walk.
