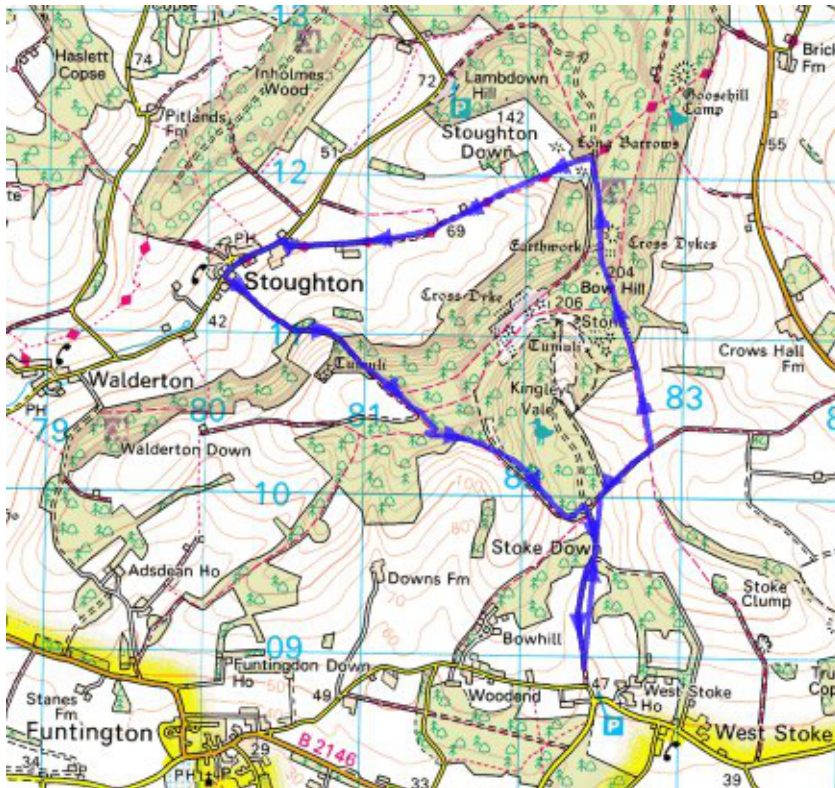

Favourite Nature Rambles Around Chichester

by David & Lynda Thornley

Around Kingsley Vale To Stoughton



Kingsley Vale is a wonderful place to walk but being so well known it's popular so gets busy, even early in the morning, mid week. Fortunately there are plenty of bridleways close by and it's easy to get away from the crowds at least for much of the time.

The advantage of taking the bridleways is that I can let our dog, Bonnie, off her lead for more of the time; they are (rightly) quite strict about dog control in the reserve.

It's convenient to use the car park just south of the reserve at the start of a pretty lane leading north to the main entrance. Here, I like to turn right for a short stretch until you reach the main bridleway leading north out of West Stoke which passes through open fields as it rises up to the summit at Bow Hill.



In early May many of the fields are bright yellow, with well developed crops of Rape, it certainly brightens up the landscape! As you rise the vista opens up across the vale of Kingsley to the left and the downs around the Trundle to the right with Bow Hill straight ahead.

On entering the woods you skirt round the nature reserve with it's characteristic Yew trees all gnarled and misshapen; this soon changes to a pine forest with it's tall trunks all fighting for daylight. Even in bright sunlight the forest here has a sombre feel.



It's a pleasant woodland walk with a gentle climb and descent from Bow Hill, a welcome change from downland. It's possible to shorten the walk here by taking one of the paths to the left which lead to the Devils Humps, across the top of Kingsley Down but the longer path down to Stoughton is well worth a bit more effort. and time.

A clearing on the left marks the top of Stoughton Down and the Monarchs way, which descends down the chalk land to the farm and the valley bottom. There are fine views here across to the pretty hamlet of Stoughton and, if you are lucky, deer come out of the reserve to be seen in the fields on the left.



Monarchs way is the path that King Charles II (apparently) took to go to Brighton after being defeated in Worcester, why Brighton nobody seems to know. Whatever, the path is a pleasant descent past a dairy herd and farm down to the bottom where there is an excellent pub, the Hare and Hounds. Here they welcome walkers, tolerate dogs & boots, have some splendid real ale and good food.



There's not much to the hamlet, in a blink of an eye you've passed through it and are on the path rising up the hill back to Kingsley Vale. The ascent starts gradually but soon becomes steeper, it's fortunate that it's only typical downland and just rises a couple of hundred feet.

The birds seem to be particularly active along this path, the hedges seem to be attractive to them; as well as the ubiquitous sparrow there are tits and even yellowhammers to be seen. Once into the woods again the path leads around some clearings where buzzards can often be seen quite close by soaring above the hillside. The view here across to the south west has to be one of the best of the harbour with each arm clearly visible as is Thorney and Hayling Island.



After a few twists and turns it descends back down to the main entrance of Kingsley Vale where you can join the many other walkers that seem to congregate there. It's pleasant to stroll around but that's for another day,;this time its the short hop back to the car park and home. This six and a half mile walk can be fitted into a couple of hours but if you've got the time it's pleasant to stop for lunch on the way round.
