

ENSBURY, MERRITOWN AND THROOP via the Stour Valley Way.

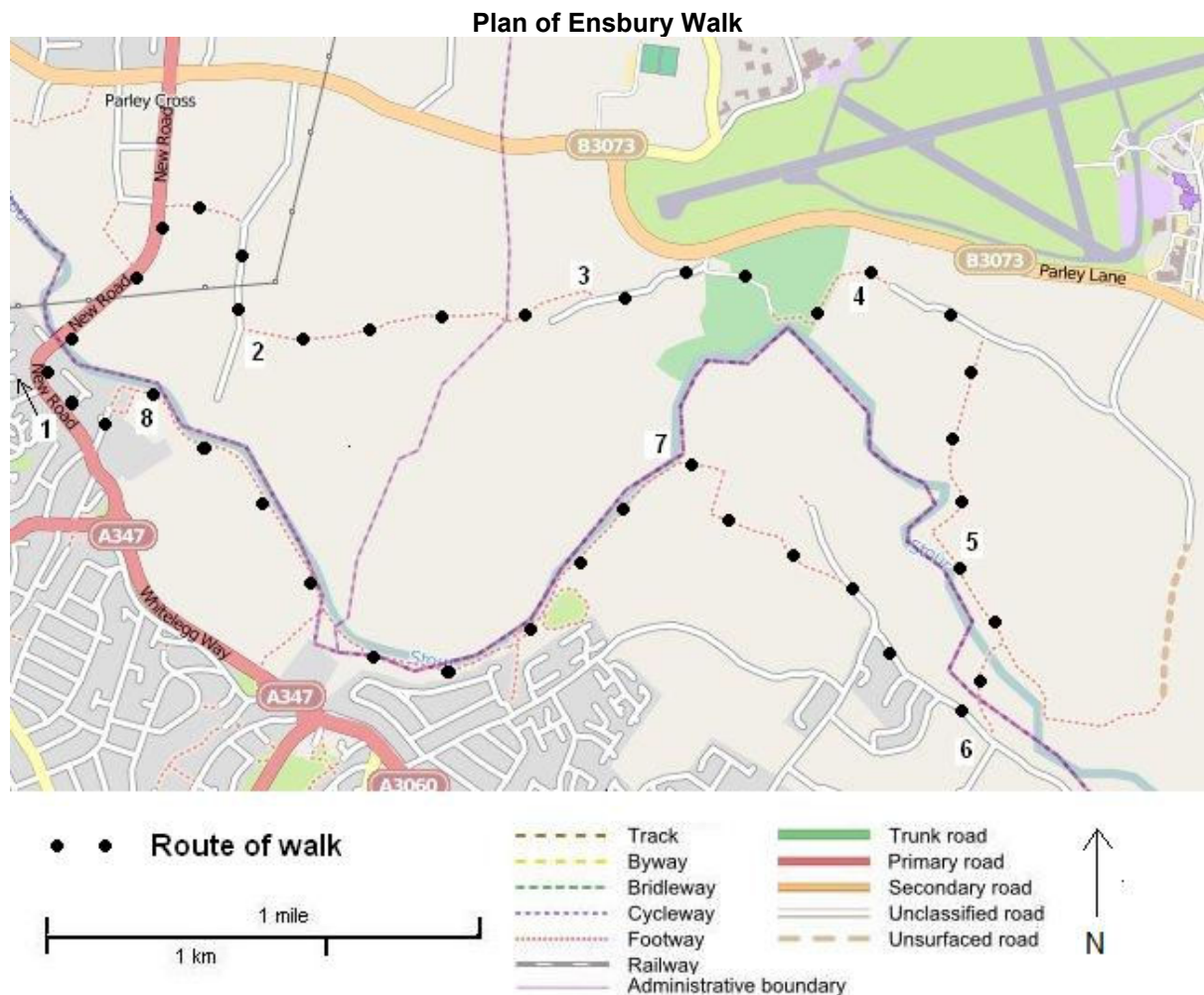
Start: SZ 080 969 New Road, Ensbury, Bournemouth

Distance: 6 mls, flat with easy walking, some stiles, allow 3 hours.

Maps: Explorer OL22 or Landranger 195. (Note: not all the paths used are on these maps.)

Buses: To start, Wilts and Dorset 13 from Bournemouth or Wimborne or Transdev Yellow buses 4c from Bournemouth or West Moors to Greenacres Close bus stop. (See also first paragraph of instructions.)

Parking: Side roads off New Road eg Greenacres Close.



1. Walk north (away from Bournemouth) along the pavement of New Road for about three quarters of a mile, until you come to a finger post on your right labelled Stour Valley Way. (You can reduce most of this road walking by starting by getting off the number 13 or 4c one stop further away from Bournemouth, ie New Road, Dudsbury Gardens bus stop. In this case the finger post is just north of the stop.)

Cross the stile and go straight on, emerging onto Church Lane. Turn right and follow the lane for about 300 yards.

2. Turn left along a path nestling in a gap just before Snooks farm.

Pass through two and a bit fields with the field boundary on your left and then go through a gate ahead of you so that the field boundary of the next two fields is on your right.

Emerge onto a lane going towards Parley Court, avoiding a path going away sharply on your left.

Follow this lane for a few yards until it begins to widen. There is a large field to your left and the path, possibly overgrown, is along the left of the hedge ahead of you.

3. Go straight on across a lane and onto a scrubby area. Soon you come to a stile into a field. Cut across the corner on your right to another stile and turn left onto the lane.

Bearing left, pass the ornamental ponds on your right and continue straight ahead avoiding the lane on your right.

Soon the path curves round to the right and goes through a golf club passing by the river on your right. Follow the wire fence of the golf club another hundred yards.

4. After the golf club ends, the path takes you through a shrubby area and then curves round the top, left hand side of a field, outside it at first, and then crossing a stile into it.

After the stile on your left out of this field, pass the Alice in Wonderland Family Park on your left.

Avoid the lane on your left and pass through a farmyard, coming to Merritown, where, after passing a few houses, you take a path into a small wood on your right, waymarked Hurn Link. After the wooded area the path continues between two fields.

5. After a gate, the path then crosses three fields along their edges, following the curve of the river.

At the weir, turn right and cross two bridges and walk alongside the river and mill ponds up to Throop Mill. Keep the Mill on your right.

6. Go up to the road, onto which you turn right.

Follow the road past the pub and through the village to a T-junction where you take the minor road down to the right.

Approaching the water treatment works, go into the bushes along the waymarked path onto the well-trodden, winding, muddy path. Follow it through several bends to the river.

7. Turn left onto the path along the river. The path follows the river for just over 2 miles often dividing into 2, a higher one and a lower one.

8. Eventually, after a boardwalk, and just before a wooded area, a left turn away from the river brings you into the Brecon Close car park.

Go through the car park and back out on to New Road. Turn right. The bus stops are ahead of you and Greenacres Close is shortly on your right.

NB The area from just south of Merritown to Throop Mill can be flooded after rainy weather and so can some of the edges of the river on the southern part of the walk. If you see floods at the start of your walk near the bridge you cross when walking along New Road, it is possible that the whole walk will not be possible. If you proceed, all will go well at first but you may in fact have to turn back shortly after Merritown and retrace your steps.

At the end of instruction (1) you might like to continue along Church Lane for a few hundred yards to have a look at All Saints Church. Parley, now only a few houses, is a very ancient settlement, mentioned in the Domesday Book.

Throop Mill, see (5) above, was mentioned in the Domesday Book, but there has probably been a mill on the site since Saxon times. Ancient stone foundations have been discovered in the existing mill, along with coins from the reigns of George III and IV, as well as Spanish and Portuguese coins. The present building dates from the turn of the 20th Century and, although now disused, contains some fine early 20th Century milling machinery. A fire a few years ago (believed to be due to vandalism) made the interior unsafe so it is no longer open to the public.

South of the river, from (7) above, there are often up to 4 Shetland cattle, scratching their own living from the area and allowed to roam free. They have nasty looking horns but are said to be gentle.

Also south of the river, there is a small arboretum up on your left, between the river and the road which is worth exploring if you have time and also, further on, the Stour Valley Nature Reserve.