

Odiham, Greywell Moors and Basingstoke Canal – 5.6 miles

A lovely country walk mixing farmland, a riverside nature reserve and boardwalk and some of the most undisturbed Basingstoke Canal.

Getting there

By car

Park roadside on High Street at RG29 1FU (1) where it is free at the time of writing. There is a low-cost car park in Deer Park View RG29 1LJ, off the High Street. Alternatively use the large, free Basingstoke Canal car park, London Road, RG29 1DH ().

By public transport

Stagecoach bus 13 (Basingstoke to Alton) connects Hook railway station to Odiham (Crownhills bus stop) - roughly hourly timetable (not Sundays). Hook station connects to Fleet and Farnborough.

Step by Step guidance - Clockwise

(1) Head west, to the mini roundabout at the end of High Street and carefully, cross into West Street. ***(From the bus stop at Crownhills go down to the mini roundabout and turn left past the barrier posts)***. A small rookery is on the right close to the roundabout. Go down West Street to the bottom and continue left passing the school on your right. After the second school entrance look for the footpath up the steps on your right.

(2) Follow this path for about 20 yards, climb the stile on the left crossing the field where cattle graze towards the right-hand opposite corner. Keep left of the isolated small tree and look for the right-hand stile.

(3) Cross the stile and carefully, cross the road to the path opposite through the hedgerow. Head diagonally to the right across the field, through a hedgerow, across a fallow field (on my visits), through another hedgerow turn sharp right and exit onto a quiet lane.

(4) Turn left a few yards looking for a footpath sign on the left but pointing right. Take this path across a large field (muddy after rain but generally quite solid). At the bottom go through the gate in the next hedgerow. (Birds like blackcaps, garden warblers and chiffchaffs, maybe yellowhammers.) Go through the hedge.

(5) Turn left to Greywell Moors Nature Reserve via the side gate often muddy after rain. Various times of year you will find birds, butterflies and plants like sedges and rushes here, southern marsh orchids (flower in May, June and July), purple loosestrife (June to August) - a major nectar source for brimstone butterflies, red-tailed bumblebees and elephant hawk moths. Yellow loosestrife, flowering June to September can attract the yellow loosestrife bee. Wet woodland with alder being the predominant tree has some nice deformed trees including oak and willow. A conservation herd of cattle is often here. Springs feed pools surrounded by reeds and hold various duck, maybe geese in winter. Exit the reserve via a path gate, the path turns right down to a gate and T junction.

(6) Turn right. This beautiful stretch has the marsh on your right with birds and aquatic plants and the river Whitewater on your left. The river has phragmites reeds with reed warblers and reed buntings in summer. Sparrowhawks may be seen above, you may be alerted by the sound of crows, rooks or jackdaws challenging them. Soon reach and pass the picturesque mill!

(7) Turn right here. Here is a real chalk stream with clear waters, watercress and possibly a kingfisher perched hunting for fish over the water. The path becomes a boardwalk.

Eventually, reach St Mary's churchyard with its yew trees.

(8) Exit the churchyard and cross into the field opposite, heading in the same direction, look for the first stile which may be hidden by a tree half way across (sometimes the fence is open). Cross the stile and head towards the far-right corner. Climb the stile there and follow the path to the narrow lane.

(9) Turn left. There's no footpath but traffic is quiet. Just before the T junction take the path up the steep slope on the right. This goes over the entrance to the Basingstoke Canal's Greywell tunnel, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its bat colonies. Natterers, Daubentons, whiskered, Brandts and brown long-eared bats, even a greater horseshoe bat have been recorded. Cross over the tunnel entrance.

(10) Turn right and join the canal towpath. This stretch has little grebes and many moorhens. There will also be good butterflies and aquatic plants in the undisturbed water – boats are prohibited. Soon reach Odiham Castle just off the towpath. Worth a brief visit being a free, important, historical site also known as King John's Castle, connected with the signing of the Magna Carta.

(12) Rejoin the Canal towpath. Pass a lift bridge serving a lane, then under a busy road and continue along the towpath. Soon another farm track bridge appears. Continue to the next road bridge. ***(If you started at the Canal car park go under the bridge to the car park).***

(13) Turn right. Pass The Waterwitch pub, follow the lane up to Odiham High Street. Keep right, passing coffee shops etc and at the end is (1) the car park or your roadside car. ***(The bus stop is at the end of the High Street and turn left a short distance to Crownhills.)***