

Now prepare yourself for what is probably the hardest section of this walk. Plunge into the eeriness of the Arish Mell Gap, a small sealed-off cove sadly still out of bounds, and take a deep breath at the near-vertical grass wall of Bindon Hill. As you stagger up this short sharp cliff you should notice the “tank cemetery” to your right, littered with rusting hulls of burnt-out tanks. Also beyond the bleakness of this valley look for Lulworth Castle. It was built before 1610 for the third Viscount Bindon and the interior was still unfinished when it was sold to the Weld family.

Lulworth Cove now beckons and at the 9-mile mark is an ideal spot for a short break. Keep on the top track until you are overlooking the Cove and a large car park — possibly already filling up with day-trippers. Drop down off the hill by following the track to the right. This will eventually bring you out on to the road. Turning left, a short walk will soon have you in the Lulworth atmosphere where you can get drinks, ice cream, toilets, etc., and a close-up of the Cove itself.

Leaving Lulworth, retrace your steps up the hill until you reach a fork in the road. Take left, passing a small general store, continuing up past the church on your right until you rejoin the road leading out of Lulworth. At Newlands Farm continue west along a track marked to Ringstead Bay. This is the alternative inland route to the coastal path and very soon you can see why the coastal path is called “The Roller Coaster”.

Keep to the inland route and follow the path close to the fence. Eventually it takes a sharp right angle turn and at the top of the rise a large stone with an inscription to the memory of Llewelyn Powys, a local poet, is placed. Continue along this track and head for a style in the far left-hand corner of the field. By exiting at this style you will be back on the coastal path once more. You may wonder what the two tall obelisks were for. Well they were known as transit points and erected in the days when the Royal Navy had a Grand Fleet. The idea being for the ships to line up in a straight line for such an occasion as a Review of the Fleet in Weymouth Bay.

Follow the path past Whitenoathe Cottages and down the hill towards Ringstead Bay. Exit by a style, cross the track that leads to Holworth House and immediately over another style to continue down to the Bay. As you emerge out on to a tarmac road a few yards further will bring you to Holworth Church, a completely wooden building. This is a must to visit and sign the visitors book. Also just behind is what must be the most

peaceful garden of remembrance that I have ever sat in. After this time of reflection continue down to the Bay where you can take time out for another short rest and over 15 miles under your belt. Toilets and cafe are on site — seasonal opening.

Leaving Ringstead Bay take the path right along the sea front passing a few houses with extremely close sea views and being careful not to walk down the drive of the last house, but to exit through a “hole” in the hedge. After about a mile this path will bring you out overlooking the Smugglers Inn at Osmington Mills. Descend towards this picturesque hamlet, the path taking you right through the pub garden (a quick detour into the bar to exercise your right arm may be too good to miss), then up the steps and out on to the road where after approx. 150yds - just before the bend - a track will take you up and over into Osmington. On reaching the main A353 turn left for a short walk before taking first right down into the village. Osmington has won many awards for being the prettiest Dorset Village. Follow the road through and turn right at the only junction. Continue downhill passing delightful cottages until eventually you reach a track that will take you up the slopes of White Horse Hill. A glimpse of the huge chalk figure of George III cut in the turf in 1808 riding away from Weymouth can be spotted from the bottom. At the top continue north west with superb views over Weymouth Bay until you reach the road. Continue along this road until reaching the corner of Came Wood — famous for concealing invasion forces in 1944. Follow the tarmac road for approx. 2 miles (sorry

about that) — ignoring signpost “Inland Coastal Route” across Bincombe Down — cross over the main A354 (the original Roman Road) and pick up the track that will lead you westwards to Hardy’s Monument. At this point don’t be disheartened that the sight of the ugly grey 22-metre-high tower erected to the memory of Admiral Thomas Hardy in 1844 doesn’t seem to get any nearer! I could never get to grips with that phenomenon either.

Fine views now abound over Maiden Castle to Dorchester and the Isle of Portland that has given such inspiring views in front during the day, soon becomes behind. You are now on the last leg (or your last legs) moving from Ridge Hill to Bronkham Hill and side stepping some of the greatest concentration of tumuli in Dorset. Ejecting at Smitten Corner you now have only the final hill climb to the finish.

A pat on the back and a deserved well done! Soak in the atmosphere from the viewpoint and look back on what should have been a fantastic challenge and a fantastic day.

FACT FILE

Distance

27 miles

Time

Allow 10/11 hours

Maps

OS Outdoor Leisure 15

OS Pathfinder 1332

Start/Parking

Corfe Castle Layby - Grid Ref. 959824

Finish/Parking

Hardy’s Monument - Grid Ref. 612875

Terrain

A long but easy walk on good paths, tracks and quiet roads

Refreshments

Pub/Hotel/Cafe at Lulworth

Seasonal Cafe at Ringstead Bay

Pubs at Osmington Mills and Osmington

Toilets

Lulworth, Ringstead, Osmington Mills

Accommodation

Hotels, and B&B’s at Corfe Castle,

Swanage, Lulworth and Weymouth

Youth Hostels at Swanage and Lulworth

Tourist Information

Swanage (01929) 422885

Weymouth (01305) 785747