

## **Directions for Wessex Ridgeway eastwards**

**(an update in 2022 of Ray Quinlan's directions in Cicerone's 2002 guide book)**

### **Lyme Regis to Beaminster**

[June 2022]

**Maps:** OS Explorer 116, Landranger 193

**Distance:** 20.2 miles (32.3 km)

**WARNING: This is a challenging and lengthy walk, taking you up to the top, or near it, of Dorset's two highest hills, and several more as well. There are no accommodation options along it that I am aware of until Beaminster.**

The walk starts at the end of the Cobb. Turn back inland and go right along the sea front (Marine Parade). After passing various seaside shops, the Parade bends left to Bridge Street. Turn right past the Rock Point Inn and then first left along Coombe Street. Follow this road round to the left, and at the end bear right along Mill Green. Continue on a path with the River Lim to right, onto Windsor Terrace. The metalled path bends left and right past Higher Mill Flats and continues with river to left. Cross over Colway Lane, carry on along the metalled path and straight on along a gravel path (the Liberty Trail) when the road forks to the right.

The path crosses the River Lim and reaches a kissing gate. Head across the field to a gate and over a footbridge. Turn right into woods, with a thatched cottage to the left. The path rises to go through two gates. Bear slightly right up the centre of the next field along a worn grass path, and through a gap between woods. Continue straight up the next field to a gate and a metalled road. Turn left and follow the road as it bends right. After some cottages on the right, the route passes between buildings (at Rhode Barton). It then bears left and immediately right, then forks right, downhill into woodland on a rocky track. The path fords a stream and continues along a winding but clear route through woods (on Hole Common) for over half a mile. Pass a field gate to left, then walk on with hedge left into corner of field. Ignore the footbridge to left but go through a gate into woods. Take the right-hand fork, uphill. The path again winds through trees, bending left after a waymark post to cross a boggy section. Go through a gate and bear right up to the field corner. Pass through a field gate and go up to the main road (A35) where a slip road joins it.

Go left, cross the A35, admire the fabulous view, then walk down the small road opposite. Turn right just before the cottage down a drive. Just before the farm at the end, go right and through a small gate. Bear left with a fence/hedge left to the

next stile, then diagonally left down the next field to a gate near an oak tree. Cross to a gate and signpost and turn right with hedge to right. Now head towards some very rusty roofs below and go through a gate which is hidden until you reach it. Just after the rusty roofs, turn left and follow the hedge on right to a gate. Turn right onto a track which descends past a pond to right and passes to left of a barn. We are joined by the Monarch's Way at this point. Turn right in front of the barn to reach a gate into a long, narrow field. A stream joins to left in next field. Cross a concrete bridge over the river to left and then turn right. The path now goes through woods to a gravel drive.

Turn right towards farm buildings. Pass to the left of a low wall beside a lawn, then bear left up a slope away from the river into more woods. This soon arrives at a field. Go ahead across it and go through a field gate. Continue walking with hedge on left, then into next field with hedge right. After 30m, go through a gate to right. Cross the field and go through a hedge gap, but do NOT follow the obvious path straight ahead, as this is the Monarch's Way and we leave it now. Instead bear left diagonally up the field and pass to the right of a barn to the field corner. Pass through a field gate, immediately followed by a small gate, into another field. Cross a gate/footbridge/stile into a field and turn left along hedgerow. Exit onto a farm track and turn left towards the buildings of Meerhay Farm. Go through another field gate but instead of going through the farmyard, turn left to arrive at Meerhay Lane. Turn right into Wootton Fitzpaine.

Walk along the road for about 400m, bearing left at junction with another road. After crossing a stream, go left over a stile and diagonally right up through a large field to a gate in the top corner. Go through this and turn right, with hedge right, and through two field gates. Now turn left with hedge to left, but gradually bearing right away from it towards a gate in the opposite hedge, ignoring another gate away to the left. In the next field, bear half right towards the wooded hill (Coney's Castle); the farmer had left tramlines through his crop of barley where the path should have been when I walked it, but you may have to walk round the left-hand edge of the field. Go through a small gate in the left-hand corner of the field, then head half right up towards wooden gates. These give access to a road. Turn left along it, initially rising steadily and seemingly interminably, but finally flattening out just before the small National Trust car park for Coney's Castle on the right.

At the second of a pair of road junctions close to each other, leave the road and continue straight ahead up a stony path which soon arrives at a farm gate which gives access to Lambert's Castle Hill. Continue ahead on the obvious path, ignoring all paths to right and left, to the top of the hill where there are stupendous views to the right over Marshwood Vale and Lyme Bay. Maintain direction, with glimpses of the view through a line of trees on the right. Pass a trig point to left, and towards the end of the open grassy area on the crown of the hill, bear left to reach a gate into woods. Follow the path right, then left at the bottom, to arrive at a road. Cross over and take the path downhill signposted as an unmetalled road

(Hawkmoor Hill), which becomes metalled at the bottom and leads to a road. Bear left to a road junction.

Continue ahead towards Thorncombe, and after approx. 200m, go right through a gap and over a stile into a boggy field. Walk on with hedge to right to a stile by a field gate. Keep to the right-hand side of the next field to another field gate. Again keep to the right up a small rise in the next field, but when you reach yet another field gate, do not go through it but turn left to walk to the next corner, with hedge right. Go through the gate and on with hedge again right to a gate, soon followed by a footbridge. Bear right to arrive at the farmyard of Gashay Farm, and walk right then left through it. Follow a stony track out of the farmyard into a field with hedge, then woods, to left. When the track turns hard left, follow it, ignoring all tracks to left and right. It eventually turns left just before a pair of field gates to go between farm buildings and drop down to the drive to Grighay Farm.

Turn right down the concrete drive. Just before it turns left, go right into a field and follow the wide path created by two sets of wooden posts connected by ropes uphill until they come to an end. Turn half left and aim for a kissing gate hidden in the top left-hand corner of the field (not the gate over to the immediate left). This gives access to a road. Turn left, and after 50m, turn right and walk with woods left, then passing an old oil depot to left. Access to the next field is gained by joining the track to the oil depot and walking away from it through a gap in the hedge. Continue, with hedge still to left, then follow hedge as it bends left along a short section of enclosed (and often overgrown) path. Emerge into another field and follow the left-hand hedge past an earthy track to left all the way to a stile in the bottom corner. Cross it and turn right downhill to exit the field at the bottom to right, but at once take the bridleway which curves left downhill. Ignore a path to left and pass through a field gate at the bottom to arrive at Yew Tree Farm's farmyard. Bear left through this and follow the metalled drive to a road.

Turn right and walk for almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile through the village of Synderford and steadily up Venn Hill to a T junction by an old chapel. Go right for 15m, then left through a gate up a slope on an enclosed path to a meeting of paths at the top of the field. Here turn right, then bear left past a redundant stile to a kissing gate in the top corner of the field. Walk along the left side of the next field to a gate, then continue through next field in the same direction, but inset from left hand side, to another gate. In the next field walk on just to the right of a pair of pine trees, then on along the ridge of Blackdown Hill with fine views on both sides. When the hedge to right ends, go through the gate on right and walk diagonally down to a gate to the right of a small wood.

Turn right here and pass two road junctions. About 250m after the left-hand turning, go left up a track with a grassy middle, then left through a field gate into the next field to follow the hedge up its left-hand side. The path bends to right in top corner, along with hedge. Pass through a hedge gap, and 120m later arrive at

another one. Do NOT go through it into the vast area at the top of Pilsdon Pen, but turn left for a few metres, then right into a field and walk along its right-hand edge along a permissive path which is waymarked as such. Continue to two pedestrian gates at the end of the field, then strike out half right over the next very grassy field to a heavy field gate in the right-hand field border towards its far right corner.

Pass through the gate, descend to an arrangement of gates in the field corner, pass through it, then turn sharp left uphill through another gate, with fence/hedge to left, into the Pilsdon Pen hill fort. Soon reach two wooden barriers, which are easily walked round, to bring you up to the outer rampart of the hill fort. Walk along this for perhaps 150m to reach a cross track into the centre of the hill fort, where you turn left towards a fence corner. Follow the fence to left downhill to a gate. Turn right and walk to the end of the fence to left. Go through another gate then turn left steeply downhill to cross a stile somewhat to the right of the centre of the hedge below. Continue down through the next field to a field gate by a road.

Cross the road and go down the metalled drive to Lower Newnham Farm. On reaching the first building go right then left. Go through a field gate with a permissive path waymark and through a small field to another field gate. Turn left along a track, follow it round to the right and ascend gradually through two hedge gaps between fields. In the top left-hand corner of the third field, turn right into Sheepwash Lane (a bridleway). This can be very boggy in the winter, and overgrown in the summer, and its surface changes frequently. It eventually reaches a concrete, then tarmac, lane near Courtwood Farm, and ascends to meet the B3164.

Turn left along this for a short distance. Turn right in front of a corrugated iron-roofed shed, then immediately left up a footpath, Lewesdon Hill Lane, which is invisible from the road. This takes you gently up to the northern flank of Lewesdon Hill, the highest one in Dorset, where you remain about 35m from its summit at the route's highest point. There are glimpses of spectacular views on this section through occasional gaps in the woods and hedges on both sides, including of Golden Cap to the south (right), the highest point on the South West Coast Path. Soon after an information board about a Belgian Spitfire pilot who crashed on the hill in 1942, with the forgettable name of Jean Verdun Marie Aime de Cloedt, the path begins to descend and reaches a road.

Cross over and walk past Stoke Knapp Farm (to right). Soon fork right uphill, diverging from a bridleway, and enter a field through a field gate. Continue with hedge to left, walking parallel to Waddon Hill, and pass through a series of field gates. You get your first view of Beaminster from here. Arrive at a field gate giving access to the front of a house, and go through the pedestrian gate on its left. Walk down then up the field in front of the house, thus bypassing it, and go through a squeeze stile and over a standard one just beyond it. Walk up to the

beech-tree-clad top of Gerrard's Hill, with fence to left, from where there are more magnificent views all around.

Continue on along a worn grass track that goes downhill to the far left-hand corner of the field. Walk down the centre of the next field to a stile over a wooden fence half way down. Cross the stile and walk down a very steep slope past a redundant stile in the middle of the field to another stile at the bottom. Cross it and turn left over a sturdy footbridge. Follow the path through a wood, then up a slope to a pedestrian gate. Turn right and left round a field, then right again at a corrugated-iron-roofed barn with 30 solar panels on its roof. Go through a small metal gate, then half-left to the far corner. Pass through a narrow squeeze stile to reach a road. Turn right, and at a T-junction turn left.

Just before a more major road, go right into a long, thin field. Walk the length of it and on along a gravel path through a tunnel of foliage. This leads to a metalled lane between houses. Keep roughly straight on to reach the church right, and follow Church Street as it bends left to reach the square at Beaminster.

### **Beaminster to Sydling St Nicholas**

[August 2022]

**Maps:** OS Explorer 117, Landranger 193

**Distance:** 14 miles (22.4 km)

Starting in Beaminster square, take the street to the left of the Greyhound pub (Fleet St, which becomes Newtown). Very soon after passing Beaminster Secondary School (to left), fork right (straight on) onto a street called Hurst, which becomes Bowgrove Road. This starts ascending, and not long after the turning to Meerhay Farm the tarmac disappears. The track gets ever steeper, and the surface ever more uneven, and it is a relief to arrive at a road at the top. Turn right for 500m, and immediately after the drive to Higher Meerhay Farm on the right, turn right through a field gate. Walk on with hedge to right. Cross a road and bear slightly left to continue along a sandy track.

Ignore a footpath going off to the left and continue on the sandy track which eventually reaches a bend in a metalled lane. Continue ahead to a junction with a main road (B3163). Turn left along it, and just after the entrance to Pipsford Farm, turn right through a field gate. Follow a grassy path downhill to pass through a pair of gate posts, then another field gate, over a short, stone-strewn section onto a metalled drive. Very soon turn right down a slight incline with the small church of Toller Whelme (which means the source of the River Toller, now called the River Hooke) to left (which can be hard to see). The metalled lane becomes a gravel

drive, passing houses to left and right, then a metalled road again as it passes a small lake to right. At a T junction with a road, turn left. Just before the road bends left, go through a field gate and turn immediately right, with hedge to right (although there is a well-trodden and more accessible route into the field some 20m beyond the gate, which goes over the low bank to the left).

At the end of the field, cross into the next one and turn left to walk on with Horse Moor Coppice to left. Go through the gate in the field corner, then another directly ahead onto a road. Turn left and soon bend right into the village of Hooke, passing to the left of Hooke Court. After a large, green pond to left, when the road turns right, bear left towards a house. Just before reaching it, bear right onto a narrow path through vegetation, with a noisy stream to left. The path gradually ascends as the vegetation drops away, and its surface resembles a river bed, which it indeed becomes in winter. Cross straight over a road and continue along a green track, with the masts of Rampisham Down (apparently pronounced Ransom by those in the know!) looming on the left.

Go through another field gate and on with hedge to right. Follow the hedge down to yet another field gate in the bottom right-hand corner. Now aim towards the second of two jutting hedge corners, directly in front of one of the masts, climbing again. Go through a pedestrian gate into another field and walk up its left-hand side. Ignore a field gate giving access to a green lane to the immediate left of the mast, and continue up to the field corner, where a field gate gives access to another green lane ahead. Pass through it and continue to a road. Turn right down the road and go through a wooden field gate to left at the bottom. Walk across two fields in the valley bottom, then another with Kingcombe Coppice to the left.

At the field end, go through a bridle gate onto an enclosed bridleway. This is another public right of way which becomes a stream in winter, and its surface reflects this. Soon reach a road and turn left along it into Lower Kingcombe. As the road bends right, go straight on along a gravel track. At a fork, go left, then immediately right towards some farm buildings. Before reaching them, go through a field gate and walk roughly straight ahead to pass to the left of an oak tree (a good place to rest in the shade!) in the middle of the field. This leads to a gap into the next field. Immediately turn left to negotiate your way through an often overgrown path through brambles and nettles, relentlessly going uphill in the same general direction as in the previous field. Eventually arrive at a pedestrian gate into a third field. Cross this and another in the same direction, but in the fifth field veer half left to go through a pedestrian gate onto a road (A356).

Cross this with great care and turn left for about 150m. Turn right onto a quiet road signposted "Public route to a public path" and follow this for approx. 1½ miles (2.5km) past Lancombe Farm. Towards the end, with Cattistock to left, the road bends sharp right. Here bear slightly left along a stony lane. On reaching a part-metalled road, turn sharp right down it into Chilfrome. Turn left at a crossroads,

signposted Cattistock. When the road bends left in front of a thatched cottage called 'Greenings', go straight on past a 1953 coronation bench, with church to right, to a signpost which promises Maiden Newton in  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile. Go through two small meadows, then a gate at the end of a footbridge, and turn left along the edge of a field, then turn right as directed along the bank of the River Frome (to left). We join the Macmillan Way at this point.

Pass through a railway bridge with an extremely uneven surface, then bear left, however do not go over the brick bridge by sluice gates, but bear right with the river still to left. Soon go over a sturdy footbridge, then veer left and up away from the river to the church. At the church wall, go left to a gap by a gate onto Church Road. Go right along this to the war memorial. The town's shops and pubs are down to the right if you need to use them, but our route takes us to the left along Station Road, leaving the Macmillan Way. At the fork soon after this, bear right towards the station. Do not bear right onto the road up to the station, but pass under the railway line via a short tunnel.

There is then another seemingly relentless ascent up a green lane. The route bends slightly right, then evens out briefly where there is a fork. Our route is to the left and out onto open farm land. Continue through a field gate, then veer right past some barns (New Barn) to walk up a long farm drive to reach a road (A37) on the appropriately named Break Heart Hill. Cross with care and continue through the pedestrian gate opposite. Immediately turn left through another, then turn right along the field edge, with hedge/fence to right. In the next field, the route descends to the field corner and passes through a gate and along a path through a copse. The path soon becomes an open green lane, which bends right then left uphill, to re-enter a copse. At a junction of paths, bear right, with a high brick wall to right. Arrive at a metalled road and turn left (or right through double gates if you wish to see the church) to arrive at the stump of the old market cross and the Dorchester Road in central Sydling St Nicholas.

The Greyhound Inn approx. 120m to the left up the village's main street offers accommodation

## Sydling St Nicholas to Shillingstone

[Updated in August 2023]

**Maps:** OS Explorer 117 & 118, Landranger 193

**Distance:** 19.2 miles (30.7 km)

**This is another lengthy stage which does not go through any villages for its whole length. It is also arguably as demanding as the first stage from Lyme Regis to Sydling St Nicholas.**

Go up East Street at the southern end of the village and pass to the left of a square grassy area. Turn right at a junction, with the grassy area now on your right, and continue on a concrete drive at the end. Just after passing a style to right, turn left along a green lane that goes uphill. When the lane bends right, go straight on through a field gate. Follow the obvious path with embankment to right, then go through two more field gates, still going uphill, to arrive at a bridle gate in the fence. Go through this and bear half left, aiming for a telegraph pole in the middle of the field. Continue to the field corner to join a farm track, which immediately turns right (you can go through the hedge gap to the left as an alternative). The track takes you to a bridle gate giving you access to Higher City Farm. Turn left past two large barns to a road. (If staying in Cerne Abbas, turn right along this road for just over one mile (1.8 km)).

Cross the road to join a clear waymarked track. Walk along this for 2 miles (3.2 km), with hedge continuously to right, and fine rural views to the left. Pass a telecoms mast to right after some 500m, and a stony farm track which comes in from the left after 1.6 miles (2.6 km). Around 150m after bypassing a field gate, fork right off the farm track for 15m to a prominent signpost, then turn sharp right through a gap in the hedge. Cross a vast field by heading towards the left-hand edge of a clump of trees. When you reach the trees, continue ahead along a dirt track, which at once starts to descend, with trees to right. The track goes along the crest of Wether Hill, passes through a hedge gap and descends to a T junction with another track. Turn right, noticing that the surface soon becomes metalled. Up Cerne Manor comes into view over to the right, crops permitting, but is soon hidden by trees.

At the T junction just before the Manor entrance, turn left and walk up to the A352. Cross it with care and take the short bridleway on the other side (in preference to the road, which is the official route). This soon arrives at the quiet road to the hamlet of Minterne Parva, where you turn right. (The round building on the right as you arrive in the hamlet is thought to be an eighteenth-century cockfighting ring. The remains of the old village cross are just in front of it.)



Walk past Minterne Parva Farmhouse, and when the tarmac runs out, go right on a farm track, with hedge to left.

Go through a large gap in the hedge on the left and continue with the hedge now on your right to a gap into the next field. Bear slightly left to walk up through it (a path is normally left by the landowner through any crops). At the top, go through a bridle gate, then veer right, still climbing, through an area of scrub. Soon after the path levels out, fork right along the hill's contours, but quickly resume climbing through gorse and brambles to come out at a small gate at a cross track. Go through it, then bear half right towards another gate in the hedge ahead. In the next (very flinty) field bear slightly left to arrive at a pedestrian gate next to a double field gate by a road. Cross the road and enter the Giant's Head Caravan and Camping Park.

Go past the office and straight on, passing to the right of a clump of conifer trees, and aim for a gap to the left of some deciduous trees ahead. Turn right through this and along the boundary of the Park, with hedge to left, to a small gate. This takes you back into open country. Walk on with hedge left to go through a gate to left in the far left-hand corner of the field. Continue with hedge right to go through a field gate and on, passing through another field gate to reach a point where there are barns (Black Barn) to right. Walk on with hedge to right on a clear track, with crops or open fields, and some very pleasant views beyond them, to left. The track steadily descends, then becomes enclosed and passes some farm buildings. Join a farm road and bear right along it to reach a road.

Turn left for approx. 40m, then right through a partly hidden gate (the right one of two) into a field. The route is straight ahead uphill through an enclosed section close to the left-hand hedge, however this is somewhat unpleasant in the summer due to considerable quantities of animal faecal matter, and therefore flies, and intrusive vegetation. It is therefore recommended that you walk round it. Go through a gate into another field, and continue on a barely discernible path, through long grass and nettles in the summer, with hedge to left. In the corner of this field do not go through the gap to left but turn right, with hedge to left, and follow a grassy path uphill past an EE phone mast on your right to join a stony track.

The track goes round a barn, then through a field gate and continues with fence to left. After another field gate, walk through a very long field (Church Hill), gradually veering away from the hedge to the left, to arrive at a third field gate. This gives access to a track between Hill Wood (to left) and Watcombe Wood (to right). This then emerges onto more open land, namely the top of Ball Hill; our route is along the hedge to left to reach a field gate. Go through this, and continue steeply downhill. After passing through two more field/pedestrian gates, arrive at a road, and Folly Farm.

Cross the road and continue on a stony track, which soon begins to rise. At a fork near the top, bear left to a field gate. Do not take the tempting track across the field ahead which follows the telegraph poles, as this is not a public right of way. Instead turn right and follow the hedge to a farm gate, then turn sharp left across the field, aiming for a small breezeblock building by an oil tank. Just past these, turn right and follow the path down the middle of a field, with what looks like temporary fencing to left, in the direction of the masts on distant Bulbarrow Hill. Go through a bridle gate at the bottom and follow the green path right and left to the entrance to a wood. Go through the field gate and immediately turn half left along a well-trodden path. This loops round to the right, drops down a bit, then veers left to a confluence of paths. This is the Dorsetshire gap.

Turn right to go uphill slightly, through a field gate and continue on along a hollowed path. This passes along a ridge with views to both sides, to a double bridle gate. Maintain direction in the next field to arrive at a field gate in the corner. Now walk down through the farmyard of Melcombe Park Farm, and then along the farm drive. When this turns sharp right, continue ahead into woodland. At a fork, bear left to stay close to the left edge of the woods. This leads to a field. Walk on with hedge close left. Ignore the wide path (through crops) to right after 50m or so, but take the narrow path (through crops) to right after approx. 150m. Continue across two fields in roughly the same direction towards a barn, then walk along a concrete driveway past the Crockers Farm farmyard (to left).

Arrive at a road. Cross it and continue along a green lane. At a fork, bear left down an incline then right along a stream to cross it. Continue on an enclosed path to emerge into a field. Walk up it without straying too far from the hedge to right, then go through a gap in its top right corner. Bear left to ascend a large field, aiming for a gate in its top left-hand corner. Once through this, go up the steep slope in front of you, making use of an area of exposed chalk to the left beside a small quarry if desired. Go through a field gate at the top and follow the broad green path slightly to the left, then round to the right when it reaches bracken.

You can now see the ramparts of the Iron Age Rawlsbury Camp in front of and to the left of you; you may wish to explore these, but our route is round the outer rampart, through a gate, then up to another gate onto a road. You are now on top of Bulbarrow Hill, 275m (902 ft) above sea level, and the second highest hill in Dorset. Here turn right and walk along roads for 2 miles (3.2 km), soon passing a turning to left, continuing ahead at the second junction and bearing left at the third. In the process you pass the two masts on top of the hill which have been in your sight line for the past hour or two, and for practically the whole way you can enjoy the panoramic views over the Blackmoor Vale to left.

Pass a turning right up to the Ibberton Hill car park, then another left down to the village of the same name (where there is accommodation). About 120m further on, the road curves to the left but we go right up a short stony track, then through the

left hand of two field gates to continue on the track, which is now fenced on both sides. The track passes to the left of two successive telecoms masts. Shortly after the second one, take the enclosed path which forks right off the main track. This passes Ringmoor Turnworth Down (National Trust) and continues with occasional glimpses of the beacon on top of Okeford Hill ahead. Finally arrive at a road with the Okeford Hill picnic area to the left.

Cross the road and go straight on. At a Forestry England sign, continue ahead through a wood, then bear left to walk with wood now to left. On the right is a large field which was full of sunflowers when I walked the route. Soon after these are replaced by trees, descend a little to a cross roads of tracks. Turn left here, plunging down into Eastcombe Wood on a track which quickly narrows to a path, with plenty of opportunity for twisting your ankle on its stones! Near the bottom, it lurches right, then left, to arrive at a narrow road. Turn left along this to arrive in the outskirts of Shillingstone. After a short distance, arrive at a junction with a slightly larger road. If you wish to visit or stay in the village, continue ahead here. Otherwise a recent route diversion requires you to turn right down the slightly larger road. After 40m or so, just past a couple of farm cottages, turn left into a field and walk diagonally down it to a gate onto a road (A357). The stage ends here.

## **Shillingstone to Ashmore**

[August 2022]

**Maps:** OS Explorer 118, Landranger 193

**Distance:** 9.3 miles (14.9 km)

If leaving from the centre of Shillingstone, walk along the A357 towards Blandford and take the lane which forks left after the Willow tearooms (Holloway Lane), opposite where you finished the last stage (if applicable). This goes under an old railway bridge and past Holloway Farm to right. When the lane turns sharp left into woods, go straight on through a field gate. Go half right to cross the field to another gate which leads to a solid bridge over the River Stour. At the end, turn left and walk with river to left to a gap in the hedge ahead. Just inside this gap, go left through a pedestrian gate onto a path which winds to and fro through woodland to eventually reach a gate. Go through this and walk on with fence to left.

In the far corner go through two field gates in quick succession, then bear slightly right and left to walk through Hanbury Farm, with hedge (and vehicles) to left. Continue through two more field gates close together; these can be difficult to open and might require you to climb over them. After a short grassy track, go through a final gate onto a road and turn left. The road soon bends right to reach

two tracks on the right. Go through the field gate giving access to the right hand one, signposted Hambledon Hill ½ mile. The track rises to another field gate. Continue in the next field with fence/hedge to left. This is a steep haul as far as the gate-sized gap at the top of the first field, but thereafter the gradient eases. At the top left-hand corner go right, with fence to left. Very soon pass a gate to right, but take the next one, a bridle gate. This leads to an enclosed path which rises steadily to the top of the hill.

Should you wish to visit Hambledon hillfort, go straight on, otherwise turn right and walk down the spine of the hill. The path descends steadily, with views of Iwerne Courtney (also called Shroton) ahead and to the left but getting ever closer. Eventually reach a wall at the bottom. Turn left and walk down towards a cricket pavilion and turn left along the road. When the road bends sharp left, bear right (straight on), signposted to Frog Lane, on a track with a field to left and garages and the backs of houses to right. Arrive at a confluence of roads. For the centre of Shroton, the Cricketers pub and bus stops to Blandford or Shaftesbury, turn sharp right. To continue the walk, bear right along Frog Lane. Cross the busy A350 with care and walk up the left-hand side of three fields, crossing three stiles in the process; the second field requires a stiff climb, and the third field is vast.

Cross a fourth stile to continue ahead on a farm track which comes up from the right. This next stretch to Ashmore is a personal favourite because of all the woodland we go through. The woodland starts after the first field is left behind. Walk along this track for exactly a mile (1.6 km), ignoring all turnings to left and right, but making sure you bear right at a fork later. When the track bends sharp right, continue ahead on a grassier version. This is not signed, and if you find yourself at a notice which proclaims “Ranston Estate. Private, no rights of way” you will know you have gone the wrong way.

Cross a minor road (which is surprisingly busy as it provides a better alternative to the A350) and continue on the other side on a field edge path. When this disappears into a wood, bear right, still on the field edge but with the wood now to left. Go gently downhill to a T junction of paths and turn left through the wood you have been tracking, which is called Heth. At a road, turn right and walk for almost ½ mile (800m). Turn left and walk through or next to more woodland (with the wonderful name of Great Peaky Coppice), mostly to the left. The path bends left to go through a gap between woods. Just beyond a field corner enter the wood and go down a path, which can get very muddy, to reach a junction of paths.

Go through a pedestrian gate and turn right for a few paces. Just before a barbed wire fence, turn left, with said fence close by on the right, and steadily ascend on a path just inside the wood (this is now Ashmore Wood). Eventually arrive at a point where a view opens up to right through some birch trees. Here turn left along a clear woodland track. Finally leave the woods behind with some barns to the left and continue ahead on a stony track with fields on both sides, ignoring turnings to

left and right. After just over 1 mile (1.6 km) arrive in Ashmore. Bear right past the war memorial to left and its pond to right. Turn right along the lane just beyond the pond, and after 25m turn left on a track signposted “Tollard Royal 2 miles”. Proceed down a grassy path with fence to left and hedge to right to arrive at a prominent signpost commemorating Priscilla Houstoun, who designed the route, and the official opening of the Dorset section of the Wessex Ridgeway on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1994, which indicates ‘Lyme Regis 62 miles’ (100 km).

This stage ends here. For directions through the Wiltshire stage of the Wessex Ridgeway, refer to the Long Distance Walkers Association website.