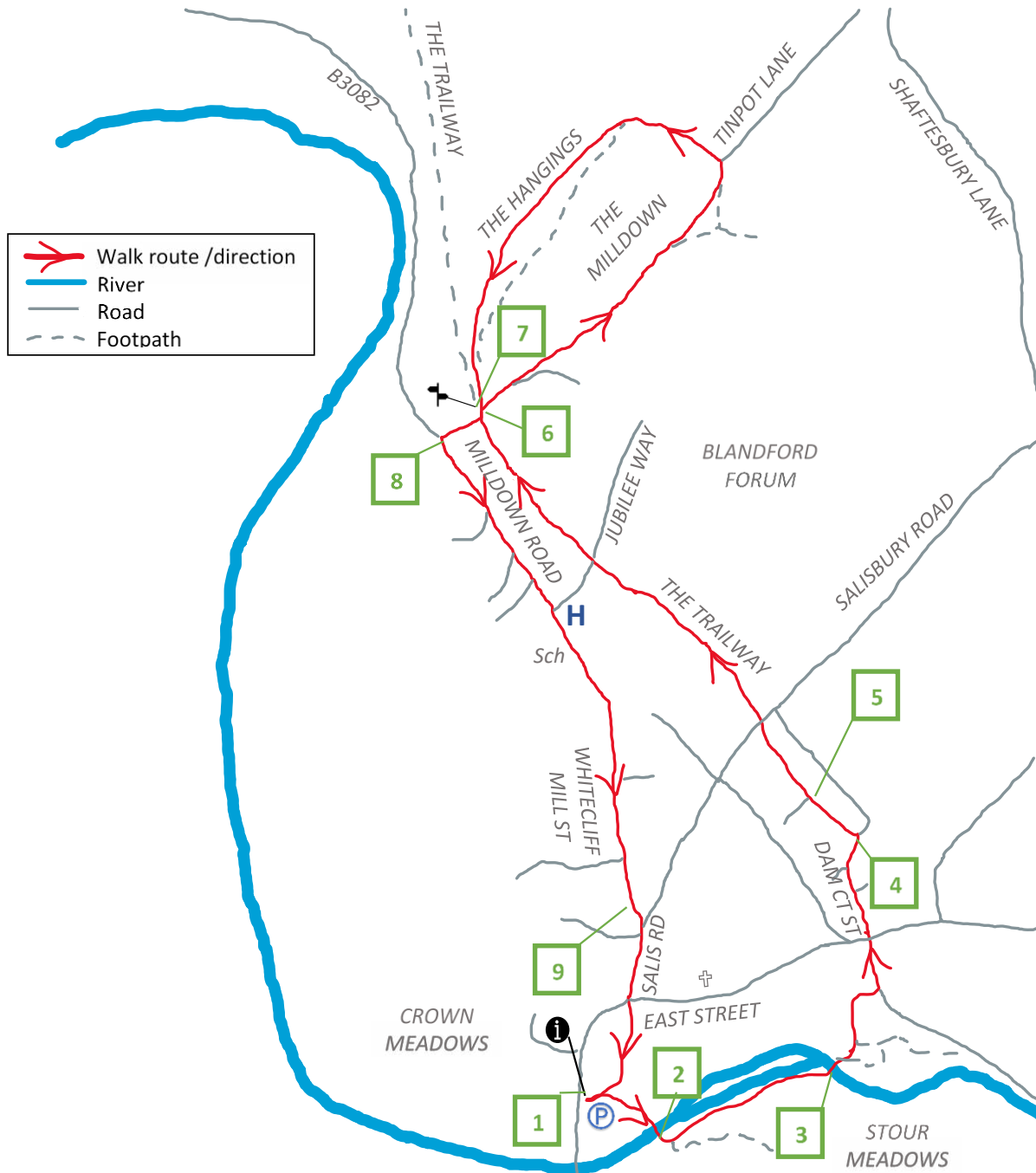


BLANDFORD STROLL 2



RIVER, TRAILWAY, MILLDOWN



DURATION: 3¼ miles (2½ miles without the circuit of the Milldown)

TERRAIN: Suitable for all users, although buggies will need to stay on the path all round the Milldown.

1 Turn left out of the TIC **i** and cross the car park towards the river, then over the Mortain Bridge (blue). *In summer there are many species of bird to be glimpsed here. As well as kingfishers, there are coot, moorhens, gulls, herons and little egrets.*

2 Take the left-hand path, along the river (NCN 253), as far as the Preetz Bridge (black).

The river Stour has its source further north at Stourhead (NT) and finishes its way to the sea at Christchurch. Here in Blandford the river is a very popular walk and there are regular sightings of kingfishers and our (non-nocturnal) otters. As environmental legislation has gradually improved the water quality of our rivers, otters are on most waterways, but the Stour was one of the earliest rivers in the south to welcome their return, their day-time habits here having gained them an early star billing on "Springwatch".

As you arrive at the bridge you will see, on the opposite bank, the old railway arch, the only remaining piece of railway architecture in Blandford. This was where the Somerset and Dorset Railway (Poole-Bath) crossed the Stour. It was closed down in 1966 and the other arch(es) in the town where it crosses East Street were dynamited in the 1970's. Much of the old railway now has a new life as the North Dorset Trailway which runs from Spetisbury (south) to Sturminster Newton (north) and is much used by walkers and cyclists – although there are plans to extend it further. (An information leaflet with further information is available from the TIC).

3 Cross the bridge and follow the left-hand path up a gentle slope into the car park. Cross the car park, turn right past the supermarket and turn left onto Langton Road, right-hand pavement. At the traffic lights, cross the main road and continue up Damory Court Street. You will find yourself following signs to the Trailway.

4 After about 150 yards, at Station Court, enter the car park on your left and cross it in a diagonal fashion, making for the entrance to the Trailway.

As you go along the Trailway you will see signs of the old railway as it was, and though all the platforms are gone, the buffers and the Stationmaster's house remain. There is an informative sign-board and the

more imaginative may be able to recognise the original water-tower (from the time of steam), now converted to a different use. You are now near the (now unknown) site of the Damory Oak, a huge and ancient oak tree of girth 68' and diameter 12' when it was finally cut down. It had been hollow for many years and at one time used as an ale house!

5 Now follow the Trailway for about 900 yards ignoring all exits/entrances until you come to a fork where the Trailway is signed to the left **T**, but you take the right-hand fork through a small car park up onto the Milldown. If you don't want to walk around the Milldown, turn left over the bridge, out on to the road then continue from **8**.

The Milldown is a favourite place for picnics, dog-walking and bird-watching, with a children's playpark. It was originally much larger but it was divided in two by the building of the railway line in the 1860's. This parkland was originally part of the Portman Estate, having had a short but previous existence as a POW camp in WW1. Surrounded by armed guards, the public was supposed to keep away. When the estate was put up for sale in the early years of the 20th century it was bought by the town as a leisure area for its citizens. From the top of the Milldown you can glimpse the old Portman family house which is now Bryanston School.

6 Take the path to the right-hand side of the Milldown, walking anti-clockwise around it. Between trees, where the path appears to go straight ahead, keep left and carry on around the perimeter. After a main exit right and then a bench with bird-feeders behind it carry on for about 100 yds until you come to a minor track going off to the right. Take this track onto the "Hangings" and walk along the slope, then down some forest steps back to the Trailway.

7 Turn left and return to the Trailway/Milldown junction, then turn left at the same earlier fork **T**. Go up to the car park again, turn left onto the road and cross the old railway bridge out on to the main road.

8 Turn left here and walk along Milldown Road. Just after passing the hospital **H** on your left and the

Blandford School on your right, take the right fork and walk down Whitecliff Mill Street.

You will pass Eagle House (one of the original Georgian houses built for the Portman estate's doctor and still a doctor's surgery, along with the first hospital for the well-being of their staff and the town in general); a house with diamond-paned windows, built by the Portmans for the training of their staff. This quarter of Blandford can be more realistically thought of as belonging more to the old estate than to the town; Bryanston Street (just after the King's Arms) was originally built as housing for estate staff and pensioners. When you arrive at the King's Arms – then a soap-boiler's – you will be standing at the place where the Great Fire of Blandford broke out in 1731. This fire, fanned by a strong wind and fed by wood and thatch, destroyed most buildings in Blandford. The Bastard Brothers, local architects, were commissioned to design and rebuild the town centre (in stone and brick by Act of Parliament) shaping the current Georgian town. In the later 18th and early 19th centuries this new, elegant Georgian town, coupled with the attractions of its own race-course up on the hill, made Blandford a honey-pot for wealthy "tourists", which explains the location of three extremely up-market inns here at this period: The Crown is now in 20thC. form, on the site of an inn since the 15thC., when it had it's own wharf, the Stour being navigable from Christchurch to Sturminster Newton; the Greyhound had a wine-house catering to the gentry (Wellington dined here before reviewing his army pre-Waterloo), and an ale-house for the servants and ordinary folk – the latter is now the Greyhound pub; the Red Lion no longer exists.

9 Carry on down the hill (Salisbury Street) and at the bottom cross the road and go under the arch of Greyhound House, past the pub, across the car park **P** and return to the TIC.

As you pass through the arch, look up to your left and see the plaque regarding Trafalgar Way (1805). In 1805 this coaching inn, The Greyhound, was on the Dorchester-Salisbury turnpike, the 12th stage on the route from Falmouth to London.