

6 Circular Walks in the north eastern Blackdown Hills

Walk 4 – Otterford and Otterhead Lakes

A figure of 8 walk – so you can do either one or both loops. The first loop explores typical Blackdown Hills features: the plateau cut by a river valley. The shorter loop is a gentle amble around Otterhead Lakes, ending at a picnic area.

Park at the Otterhead Lakes car park. Explorer map 128.

Grid Ref: ST 224 141. 2¼ & 1¼ miles, 3½ & 2 kilometres.

From the car park, return to the road and turn left to Otterford church, ignoring the first footpath sign on your right. The second sign directs you into the churchyard, which you leave by a gate at the top. In the field head for the top right hand corner, where a gate takes you into the adjoining field and another leads to a lane. Go straight on along the lane for just over 100 yards to a footpath sign and gate on your right. Walk diagonally across this field and go through two more gates. Cross the next field, aiming for a gate to the right of the houses.

Turn left along the road for a very short distance and take the lane on the right. You soon cross a second (often busier) road to follow the lane as it winds downhill into the Yarty valley. Before you reach the river and a house, look for a stile and footpath on your right. This path goes straight ahead, through gorse bushes and then a gate. Just before the next gate, which leads to farm buildings, bear slightly left by a single tree. Stay alongside the fence. The next gate leads you to a small field, with a stile opposite. Steps take you down to a lane. Turn right and walk up to the main road.

Cross carefully and continue ahead, with houses on your right and the Bronze Age burial mounds, known as Robin Hood's Butts, on the left. Cross the stile and stay straight ahead to another stile at the far end of the field. Keep the hedge on your left through two further fields back to the road and the car park.

Now for the second loop. Descend the steps from the car park and turn left along the wide downhill track. Ignore a path uphill to the left. Part of the old walled garden of the former Otterhead Estate is visible on your left and you soon reach the first lake, on your right. Just before the bridge take the path on your left. The River Otter will be first on your right, then on the left. This path leads to the second lake, known as Royston Water. Continue along the lakeside path to the bridge over the dam at the far end, where you can enjoy the view.

Turn around and retrace steps to the little fenced bridge about 150 yards back. Cross it and head up to a crossroads of paths, where you turn right. Walk straight through the woods, which then give way to a more open space ahead and to a kissing gate leading on to a track. Turn right, (the building opposite is the old coach house and stables) and after only a few yards a kissing gate on

the left leads into the picnic area. This is where a mansion once stood, with a delightful view across House Lake. It was built in 1845 and demolished in 1952. You may find a small number of clues as to its former existence. After your picnic, return over the bridge and up the track to the car park.

