

Walking to The Sun Inn.

Turn left as you leave The Casterbridge and walk a few yards east to Swan Bridge, the bridge over the Mill Stream. On the far side of the bridge take the footpath along the river to the left (N).

After a minute's walk the view widens and, on the right, there is a small nature reserve. You might like to take a short detour around the circular reserve footpath, most of it is boardwalk. Wheelchair users please note that steering may be tricky.



Continue along the riverside path past allotment gardens on the right and then a small, long overgrown, orchard. The stream and the path turn sharply here at the site of an old corn-mill, the mill once occupied by Henchard, Thomas Hardy's Mayor of Casterbridge. Long before that the mill may have been attached to Dorchester Friary which was established in this quarter of the town. The high bank on the far side of the stream was the site of a mediaeval castle, now it is surmounted by Dorchester Prison. The wooded area on your right contained allotment gardens until the 1970's.

In a little while the path you have been following meets another. Here you will turn to the right, past the small circular pond known locally as 'John's Pond', however you might like to detour over the three arched bridge to look at the adjacent, thatched, 'Hangman's Cottage', where, at one time, the County Hangman lived conveniently close to the jail. The bridge was once called 'Glippath' but nowadays is usually named after the adjacent cottage.



John's Pond once formed part of the complex watermeadow control system and two of the sluice hatches remain in place although one of the carrier channels was filled in in the 1970's. From here you walk away from the

town alongside a meadow until the tarmac path appears to end, to the left is a wooden footbridge and a small sign indicating the way to the Sun Inn.

Cross the footbridge and follow the path, which here is also a cycle route. As you near the Old Sherborne Road at Mohun Bridge turn to the right and follow the path parallel to the road, marked Charminster on the finger post.

As you cross the first footbridge on this path pause and look upstream to the three arched, road bridge. This is the main channel of the River Frome although it seldom carries more than half the river's water as so much is dispersed into water meadow carriers and mill streams. Look a little higher: on the horizon is the distinctive form of a prehistoric hillfort, this is the true Poundbury after which HRH Prince Charles's modern village style development is named. For those taking the circular walk there will be a better viewpoint later.



This is not the first path to follow the road. A much older path exists, it lies on the far side of the road and is raised on a causeway above winter flood levels. Adventurous walkers may like to take it but it is narrow and the surface is now uneven so that caution must be exercised. Anyone can see it however, one good vantage point is where a driveway crosses the modern path, divert to the roadside

for a moment and look back towards Dorchester, on the far side of the road is what looks like a wide, low, stone wall. The worn flagstones on its surface betray its true nature.

Return to the path and continue northwards over another bridge, this time a mill stream, which, on the far side of the road, still passes under what was Burton Mill but is now a private house. The stream is the main channel of the River Cerne but here is augmented with water from the River Frome. The Sun Inn is in sight now; even if you are intending to follow the circular route it is worth stopping here a while.



Returning:
Wheelchair users should return by the same route. Those who are able to negotiate field paths and steps may prefer a circular walk.

Completing the circle:

Leave the pub and continue north, away from Dorchester. Almost immediately the paved footway crosses the road, now called Westleaze. DO NOT cross but instead walk a few yards along the grass verge to a field gate and a finger post indicating the path to Slyer's Lane. Take the path, it crosses a field which may be under cultivation.



As you reach the crest of the field pause for a moment and look back. On the horizon, seen above the Lower Burton Farm buildings, is the prehistoric Poundbury hillfort. Notice two sharply defined horizontal lines, later than the hillfort, on the face of the hill. The lower is the Great Western railway line to Bristol and the higher is the remains of a Roman aqueduct. The water supply for Durnovaria, Roman Dorchester, was sourced from the upper Frome valley and carried in a canal-like channel that followed the contours of the land and entered the town at the Western end somewhere near the West Gate, close to the current Top o' Town Roundabout.

The path leads to a small gate by a wire fence. A flight of steps leads down to the entrance to a water board pumping station, the path crosses here and continues up the bank and alongside the fence opposite.



Soon the path meets Slyer's Lane; turn right. (*If you are following a map you may be confused by the name "Slyer's Lane" as it is applied to interconnected lanes all the way to Piddlehinton.*)

Keep a wary eye out for traffic here but also look at the hedgerows. The lane-banks here are full of wild flowers, fungi and ferns in season and rabbits the year around.

In a quarter of a mile a farm track on the right is marked, on a stone, Yalbury Park and Frome Whitfield Farm, this is our route but here you have some choices:

- You may detour, briefly, along the track opposite to the Yalbury Park track. At time of writing the banks of this track were tunneled by hundreds of rabbits.



- The extent of the warren illustrates just how much farmers can lose to rabbits. Return to this point.
- You may abandon the rest of this walk and join the later stages of the Dorchester Loop.
- Or you may continue this walk south along the Yalbury Park track.

Follow the track to a junction where another, less well used track, turns off to the left. Take this track to a shallow ford and a low footbridge. The ford may be dry at some times. (The gate here is another chance to leave this walk and join the Dorchester Loop.) The track beyond this is shaded by trees until another ford and footbridge; this too might be dry but according to local

children the very pretty stone footbridge almost certainly harbours a troll...



Stand on the bridge for a moment and look west, across the track, to the semi-derelict water meadow channel that feeds the ford. It is raised above the level of the field in a low aqueduct. This was a top carrier, a main, supplying water to drive the water meadows behind you. The aqueduct was required to maintain sufficient head of water to drive the system.

Follow the track a little way to Blue Bridge.



Three streams converge here. Looking upstream, the River Cerne enters from the right, the River Frome is the central channel and the water on the left comes from what is now a flood relief channel from the Mill Stream.

Beyond Blue Bridge the path runs between the water and a meadow until it meets the tarmac path at the bridge we crossed on the outward journey. Continue by retracing your steps to Hangman's Cottage Bridge, then turn left and follow the Mill Stream Path back to Swan Bridge, a few yards from the door of The Casterbridge.

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You are responsible for your own safety. The route shown is only a suggestion. Follow the countryside code and take due care when walking on roads and alongside water, especially so after wet weather. Information here was checked at time of writing but the countryside changes continually. Neither Derek Moody nor The Casterbridge are liable for loss or injury incurred on this walk.

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The Sun Inn at Burton is a pleasant country pub providing excellent meals just an easy walk from The Casterbridge.

