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Christchurch to Hengistbury Head

Length:	Christchurch Circular via Hengistbury Head	7.7km (4.8 miles)
	Christchurch to Bournemouth	10.8km (6.7 miles)
	Christchurch to Barton-on-Sea	12.4km (7.7 miles)

Toughness: 2 out of 10: level apart from the short climb onto Hengistbury Head

Maps: OS Explorer OL29, Landranger 196

Features

After a suburban start in the environs of Christchurch railway station, these routes enable you to get swift access to the lovely surroundings of Christchurch Harbour and Hengistbury Head, the wild easterly end of Bournemouth's eight mile beach. This is a wonderful area with fine views, excellent beaches and interesting wildlife that is worth a whole day's exploration in itself, and can also be a springboard for longer coastal walks to Bournemouth or Barton-on-Sea.

Walk options

Two routes are described, a walking route (#1) and a 'using the ferry' route (#2). Both routes are also described in the reverse direction (#3 and #4), making circular walks possible. A further outbound route is possible - #5 - which combines the best of #1 and #2, but only when the seasonal **Wick Ferry** across the River Stour is operating

All the routes described here give you fine views of Christchurch Priory across river, marsh and harbour. Routes #2, #4 and #5 actually pass the priory, allowing you to visit it. For routes #2 and #4, you need the **Christchurch to Mudeford Spit ferry**. It usually operates from Easter to the end of October, but can sometimes come out of hibernation on sunny winter days: call Bournemouth Boating Services on 01202 429119 to check times or see www.bournemouthboating.co.uk. For route #5 you need the short **Wick Ferry** across the Stour, which is operated by the same company, from 10-5pm, Easter to October daily: Saturday to Monday in winter "weather permitting".

Using the Mudeford Spit ferry, you can do a **circular walk of 7.7km/4.8 miles** by combining routes #1 and #4, or #2 and #3. Route #2 and #3 has the advantage that you get to the Beach House Cafe for lunch and the Hiker Cafe for tea, but in reverse, ie #1 and #4, the Hiker Cafe does some hot food and the Beach House does hot drinks. Combining routes #5 and #4 is also possible. This involves going out and back by the same route through the heart of Christchurch town, but is perhaps preferable to the suburban start of route #1.

Longer coastal walks

You can start at Christchurch, walk to Hengistbury Head by routes #1 or #5, and then turn eastwards along the coast to **Barton-on-Sea** (see page 6 for directions). To do this you have to take the short hop ferry from the jetty on Mudeford Spit (opposite the Beach House café) across the mouth of Christchurch Harbour: this goes every 15 minutes, in summer at least – check www.bournemouthboating.co.uk or call 01202 429119 for winter times. It is 6.1km/3.8 miles from Mudeford Spit to Barton, making a total walk of **12.4km/7.7 miles**, assuming you get the hourly bus from Barton to New Milton station (recommended).

Alternatively, you can use route #1, #2, or #5 to go westwards to Boscombe Pier and then inland to **Bournemouth** station (see page 6 for directions). By this route it is 7.4km/4.6 miles from Hengistbury Head to Bournemouth station or 9.4km/5.8 miles from Mudeford Spit, so assuming you start with route #2 the total walk from Christchurch to Bournemouth station is **10.8km/6.7 miles**. (Route #2 is the better option here as it allows you to include a walk over Hengistbury Head without doubling back: via route #1, with a side trip to explore Hengistbury Head, the walk would be **11.9km/7.4 miles**).

Trains

Christchurch is served by at least one fast train an hour from **Waterloo**, taking around 1 hour 50 minutes.

Lunch and tea places

The **Hiker Cafe** by the Hengistbury Head car park is open year round except Christmas Day and Boxing Day until 5pm Monday to Friday and 5.30pm Saturday and Sunday. It offers baked potatoes, burgers and other simple hot food, as well as the usual cakes and tea items, all of which you will eat, if sat at one of its outside tables, watched by a greedy family of starlings.

Tuckton Tea Gardens - a small cafe with inside seating, along with outside tables in summer - is just by the Stour Bridge on routes #1 and #3. It is 9-5.30pm Monday to Saturday and 9-5pm Sundays.

The **Beach House Cafe** (01202 423 474) is a bar/restaurant on Mudeford Spit which has a terrace overlooking Christchurch harbour: this gets quite crowded on sunny days. It also has a takeaway kiosk, serving teas, coffees and cakes. All this is open till 5pm daily

On Christchurch Quay, the **Old Mill Tea Room** is open until 5pm daily, at least in summer. It is a useful coffee stop while you are waiting for the Mudeford Spit ferry. Just inland, on the far side of the green, is the **Boathouse Cafe and Restaurant**. There are other refreshment options in Christchurch town centre (routes #3, #4 and #5)

If walking back to Christchurch station via route #3, the **Riverside** is a possible pub stop, just beside the Stour Bridge. Otherwise, the **Railway** pub is on the right 100 metres beyond the turning to the station and on the main road beyond it there are various fast food outlets and a convenience store.

On the **Bournemouth** ending of the walk, the seafront has plenty of cafes and bars in season, in particular around **Boscombe Pier**. If walking to **Barton-on-Sea**, there is a pub - the **Haven House Inn** - and also at least one cafe just beyond the ferry across the mouth of Christchurch Harbour. Further on **Highcliffe Castle** has a tea room at the end of the walk in Barton-on-Sea there is the excellent **Beachcomber Cafe** which serves hot meals as well as tea and cakes, and has a garden on the clifftop.

WALK DIRECTIONS

#1 Christchurch station to Hengistbury Head or Mudeford Spit via the Stour Bridge

4.5km/2.8 miles to Hengistbury Head
6.3km/3.9 miles to Mudeford Spit

1. Exit Christchurch station, veer left to go down its approach road, and turn right on the main road (Stour Road).
2. In 200 metres carry straight on across a major road junction
3. In 600 metres carry straight on across a large roundabout and 100 metres beyond this cross the River Stour on a bridge
4. Just beyond the bridge, opposite the **Riverside** pub, turn left onto the riverside walkway
5. In 60 metres you pass the brown hut of Bournemouth Boating Services and then **Tuckton Tea Gardens**. Beyond this veer right and then left to keep to the edge of the river on a tarmac path, through a park.
6. In 200 metres, where the tarmac path swings right to a car park, keep straight on along the riverside on a gravel path.
7. In 300 metres more, opposite a three-storey modern building with green windows on the opposite bank (*actually a hotel, though it looks like an office block*), the gravel path is forced by a thicket of trees to turn away from the river.
8. In 70 metres turn left off this path across a footbridge, passing through the thicket.
9. In 30 metres fork right, and in another 5 metres, with the landing point of the **Wick Ferry** on your left, turn right at a T-junction.
10. In 15 metres fork left, still with thickets to your left, and at the next junction in 30 metres carry on at a crosspaths to return to the river bank in another 30 metres. There is a fine view of **Christchurch Priory** across the water.
11. In 120 metres more, 30 metres before the very far end of the park, the gravel path curves right, away from the river, passing through a gate in 40 metres.
12. At first the path is fenced in, between fields. In 150 metres it passes through a gate into smaller field and curves right, still a gravel path
13. In 60 metres you emerge into a large open field and turn left along its edge (no gravel path here).
14. In 130 metres, at the far end of the field, go through a wooden gate and onto a gravel path between fields.
15. In 200 metres or so this goes across a marshy area on duckboards. Beyond this, ignore a gravel path to the right by information boards to keep straight on along the main gravel path through scrubland.
16. In another 800 metres you come to a road. Go right on this and in 100 metres pass through wooden gates onto a tarmac track. To the right you can see the **Hiker Cafe**.
17. **If not stopping at the cafe**, cross the tarmac track and carry on up a gravel path along the left-hand edge of an open space (or **after stopping at the cafe**, just walk in the same direction across the grass).
18. When in 250 metres you get to the seafront, turn left along the seafront path
 - If you intend to walk to **Bournemouth**, turn *right* along the seafront and see the directions on page 6, though you may like to first explore Hengistbury Head, with its fine views of the Isle of Wight and the whole bay of Bournemouth.
19. In 250 metres the path starts to climb up onto **Hengistbury Head**. Once you reach its western summit, carry on along the main seaward path, with fine views of the Isle of Wight ahead (you are looking at The Needles end on).
20. In 400 metres keep right at a major fork, still on the seaward path.
21. In another 700 metres, at the far eastern end of the headland, you come to steps and descend them to **Mudeford Spit**, with its colourful beach huts (which have been known to change hands for over £200,000).
22. Walk down the harbour side of the spit for 800 metres to come to the **Beach House Cafe** on the right, with the ferry jetty on the left opposite it. Note that **two** ferries go from here. One is the boat goes back to Christchurch Quay (see route #4 for **circular route back to Christchurch Station** using this), and the other (more frequent) goes to the other side of the harbour mouth for **Barton-on-Sea**. See page 6 for directions for this route.

#2 Christchurch station to Mudeford Spit via the ferry

1.4km/0.9 miles walking, rest by ferry

1. Exit Christchurch Station, veer left to go down its approach road, and turn left on the main road (Stour Road).
2. In 120 metres, at a major road T-junction, go right, following signs to Town Centre.
3. In 400 metres you come to a large roundabout. Go straight across it (an underpass on the left-hand side of the roundabout is the easiest way) and on up Christchurch's main shopping street.
4. In 300 metres keep straight on at a major road junction up Church Street and keep straight on for 130 metres to enter the churchyard of **Christchurch Priory**.
5. Immediately inside the churchyard fork right with the path to pass to the right of the Priory.
6. In 90 metres exit the churchyard in its far corner. Turn left on a road which in 10 metres turns right downhill.
7. In 60 metres, at the bottom of the hill, turn left at a road junction to reach **Christchurch quay** in another 130 metres, with the **Old Mill Tea Room** on the left just before it.
8. The ferry boat to Mudeford Spit leaves from this quay, and lands on Mudeford Spit opposite the **Beach House Cafe**.
9. Once on Mudeford Spit, turn right to explore Hengistbury Head.
 - For a **circular walk back to Christchurch** or a walk to **Bournemouth**, consult route #3 below.
 - To walk to **Barton-on-Sea** you need to take the ferry across the mouth of Christchurch harbour, which goes from the same jetty where you have just disembarked: see page 6 for more details for this walk.
3. In 80 metres this brings you to steps, which you climb up onto Hengistbury Head.
4. Walk west along the top of the headland, keeping to the larger, seaward path.
5. In 1.1km, coming off the far end of Hengistbury Head (with a fine view of the curve of Bournemouth Bay ahead), follow the tarmac path downhill until it is winding along the edge of the beach
 - **To walk to Bournemouth**, stay on the seafront and refer to page 6.
6. Otherwise for **Christchurch station**, in 250 metres, where a fence to the right ends and just past a long low ridge to the right (ancient earthworks), turn right down a gravel path along the right-hand edge of a large grass space. In 250 metres the **Hiker Cafe** is on your left.
7. **If NOT stopping at the cafe**, go through wooden gates ahead and straight on down a tarmac track.
 - **Coming out of the cafe** go round behind it and turn right on the road (*the car road on the landward side of the cafe, not a tarmac track on the seaward side*). In 60 metres, where the road ends in a turning circle, pass through a metal barrier and curve left with a tarmac track.
8. In 100 metres, just before the entrance to Hengistbury Head Outdoor Centre, **ignore** a semi-tarmac track through a fieldgate to the left but **go half left through a wooden pedestrian gate** just beyond it onto a light brown car-wide gravel path.
9. Keep on along this very clear path, ignoring ways off for just over 1km. The first section is through scrubland for 800 metres, and then you go over duckboards and on along a section with a ditch and rough pasture on either side for 250 metres or so, with a fine view of **Christchurch Priory** across the water to the right.
10. As you approach houses pass through a gate into a field and after 130 metres turn right to exit it onto a gravel path (clearly signposted).
11. The gravel path curves left to a kissing gate to the left of a fieldgate in 50 metres. Pass through this and carry on down a path between fences, with fields either side.
12. In 150 metres more you pass through a gate and come to the edge of the Stour River. Turn left here on a gravel path through a riverside park.
13. In 120 metres the path goes into some thickets. In 30 metres keep straight on at a crosspaths, to curve round an area of trees.

#3 Mudeford Spit to Christchurch station via Hengistbury Head and the Stour Bridge

6.3km/3.9 miles from Mudeford Spit 4.5km/2.8 miles from Hengistbury Head

1. Coming off the jetty at Mudeford spit, turn right along the water's edge.
2. In 500 metres, near the end of the beach huts, where the track veers left, keep straight ahead up a footpath through scrub.

14. In 30 metres more you are heading towards the river with the landing area of the **Wick Ferry** ahead: take a path to the left here, and in 30 metres, just after a footbridge, turn right at a T-junction to return to the river bank in 70 metres. Turn left here on the gravel path, with the river to your right.
15. In 500 metres, as you approach the road bridge over the river, you come to **Tuckton Tea Gardens**, a possible tea stop. Turn right and then left around a dock, to pass to the **right** of the tea gardens and the brown hut of the boating company. *(It takes 15 minutes from here to the railway station, and if you think you are going to miss a train, this is the last nice place to stop).*
16. In 100 metres you come to the road (with the **Riverside** pub on its far side) and turn right across the bridge.
17. Keep straight on at the large roundabout a 100 metres beyond the bridge.
18. In another 600 metres cross a major road junction (with a dual carriageway) and keep straight on.
19. In 200 metres more look out for the station approach on the left.
 - If you miss a train, the **Railway** pub 100 metres further on along the road on the right is a possible refreshment stop, and if you turn right on the main road beyond, there are various takeaways and a convenience store.

#4 Mundeford Spit to Christchurch station via the ferry

1.4km/0.9 miles walking, rest by ferry

1. Ferries to Christchurch Quay go from the jetty by the **Beach House Cafe** (call Bournemouth Boating Services on 01202 429119 to check times or see www.bournemouthboating.co.uk). Be careful to get the ferry to **Christchurch Quay**, not the more frequent one across the mouth of Christchurch Harbour, which goes from the same jetty.
2. Once at Christchurch Quay walk straight ahead inland on the road, passing **Old Mill Tea Room** on the right in 40 metres and then the Boathouse Cafe and Restaurant on the left in 70 metres.
3. In another 20 metres, at a road junction turn right uphill.
4. In 60 metres follow the road round to the left and in another 10 metres veer right to go diagonally across the churchyard of **Christchurch Priory**.
5. In 90 metres leave the churchyard and carry on down a paved road.

6. In 130 metres veer slightly left at a major road junction to carry on down the High Street.
7. In 300 metres, at a roundabout, keep straight on down the road beyond (an underpass to the right of the roundabout is the easiest way to cross).
8. In 400 metres, just before the road crosses a bridge, turn left up Stour Road, with the **Railway** pub on the corner.
9. In 120 metres the station approach is on the right.

#5 Christchurch station to Hengistbury Head and Mundeford Spit via the Priory and Wick Ferry

4.5km/2.8 miles to Hengistbury Head 6.3km/3.9 miles to Mundeford Spit

1. Exit Christchurch Station, veer left to go down its approach road, and turn left on the main road (Stour Road)
2. In 120 metres, at a major road T-junction, go right, following signs to Town Centre.
3. In 140 metres you come to a large roundabout. Go straight across it (an underpass on the left hand side of the roundabout is the easiest way) and on up High Street, Christchurch's main shopping street.
4. In 300 metres keep straight on at a major road junction up Church Street and keep straight on for 130 metres to enter the churchyard of **Christchurch Priory**.
5. Immediately inside the churchyard, fork right with the path to pass to the right of the Priory.
6. In 90 metres exit the churchyard in its far corner and turn left on a road, which in 10 metres turns right downhill.
7. In 60 metres, at a road junction at the bottom of the hill, go left to reach **Christchurch quay** in 130 metres.
8. Turn right along the waterfront, passing a park/open space on the right.
9. In 250 metres, at the far end of the park, there is a children's padding pool to the right. In another 100 metres you pass the Christchurch Rowing Club building.
10. In 70 metres more, just before a three storey building with green windows (a hotel), the **Wick Ferry** across the River Stour is on your left.
11. Getting off the ferry on the far side of the river, you initially find yourself on a path through scrub. In 40 metres, at a fork,

curve left and in another 30 metres keep straight on at a crosspaths to emerge onto the riverside (with the river to your left).

12. In 120 metres more, 30 metres before the very far end of the park, the gravel path curves right, away from the river, passing through a gate into a field in 40 metres.
13. At first the path is fenced in, between fields. In 150 metres it passes through a gate into smaller field and curves right.
14. In about 60 metres you emerge into a large open field and turn left along its edge (no gravel path here).
15. In 130 metres, at the far end of the field, go through a wooden gate and onto a gravel path between fields.
16. In 200 metres or so this goes across a marshy area on duckboards. Beyond this, ignore a gravel path to the right by information boards to keep straight on along the main gravel path through scrubland.
17. In another 800 metres you come to a road. Go right on this and in 100 metres pass through wooden gates onto a tarmac track. To the right is the **Hiker Cafe**. **If not stopping at the cafe**, cross the tarmac track and carry on up a gravel path along the left-hand edge of an open space (or **after stopping at the cafe**, just walk in the same direction across the grass).
23. When in 250 metres you get to the seafront, turn left along the seafront path
 - If you intend to walk to **Bournemouth**, turn *right* along the seafront and see the directions opposite, though you may like to first explore Hengistbury Head, with its fine views of the Isle of Wight and the whole bay of Bournemouth.
24. In 250 metres the path starts to climb up onto **Hengistbury Head**. Once you reach its western summit, carry on along the main seaward path, with fine views of the Isle of Wight ahead (you are looking at The Needles end on).
25. In 400 metres keep right at a major fork, still on the seaward path.
26. In another 700 metres, at the far eastern end of the headland, you come to steps and descend them to **Mudford Spit**, with its colourful beach huts (which have been known to change hands for over £200,000).
27. Walk down the harbour side of the spit for 800 metres to come to the **Beach House Cafe** on the right, with the ferry jetty on the left opposite it. Note that **two** ferries go from here. One is the boat goes back to Christchurch Quay (see route #4 for **circular route back to Christchurch**

Station using this), and the other (more frequent) goes to the other side of the harbour mouth for **Barton-on-Sea**. See below for directions for this route.

Hengistbury Head to Bournemouth

9.4km/5.8 miles from Mudford Spit

7.4km/4.6 miles from Hengistbury Head

1. Having crossed Hengistbury Head from Mudford Spit, keep to the seafront, at first on a path across dunes and then after 1.6km along the seafront promenade.
2. After 2km or so, it is possible to vary the walk by taking a path along the top of the escarpment. In another 2km you come to **Boscombe Pier** (good **tea** options here).
3. After the pier, ignore a zigzag path up the cliff immediately ahead of you, but in another 700 metres turn right up another zigzag path up the cliffs.
4. At the top, cross the coast road and carry on up a path. This emerges at a roundabout: go straight on down the leafy Derby Road.
5. In 150 metres cross a main road (Christchurch Road) and keep on up the road beyond (still Derby Road, later Gardens View) for 400 metres more until it ends at a T-junction. Here turn left - Southcote Road, though not named here.
6. In 300 metres, at the end of the road, turn right into St Swithun's Road, which brings you in 70 metres out opposite the entrance to **Bournemouth station** (with ASDA and a multi-story car park to its left).

Mudford Spit to Barton-on-Sea

6.1km/3.8 miles from Mudford Spit

1. Take the ferry across the narrow harbour entrance to **Mudford Quay**. On the far side is the **Haven House Inn** and a cafe or two. Continue east along the coastal path.
2. In 1.6km, at Steamer Point Nature Reserve (signposted **Highcliffe Castle**), climb up to the cliff top path, which goes through a pretty forest with sea views.
3. In 800 metres you come to **Highcliffe Castle** and its tea room. Afterwards, descend to the beach again and carry on along it for 1.3km to Chewton Bunny (a valley running down to the sea).
4. The next 2km of beach has no proper path due to landslips. The only alternative is to turn inland up Chewton Bunny.

5. In 1km this brings you up to a main road, where you turn right, with a caravan park on your right.
6. In 600 metres turn right down Western Avenue and follow it for 800 metres to emerge again onto a seafront road. Turn left on the grassy clifftop strip beyond.
7. In 800 metres you are forced back onto the road by buildings ahead. In another 130 metres you come to the **Beachcomber Cafe** on your right, the end of the walk.
8. To get to **New Milton** station (2.5km/1.5 miles inland through on suburban streets) get a bus from the stop about 100 metres before the cafe on the landward side of the road.