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## SWC Walk 74d: Christchurch to Hengistbury Head

**Length:** Christchurch to Hengistbury Head Circular: 7.6km (4.7 miles)  
Christchurch via Hengistbury Head to Bournemouth: 11.9km (7.4 miles)  
Christchurch via Hengistbury Head to Barton: 12.6km (7.8 miles)

**Trains:** Christchurch is served by at least one fast train an hour from Waterloo, taking around 1 hour 50 minutes. A day return with a Network card costs around £31.

On the way back, don't get confused by the slow train to Waterloo, which sometimes leaves Christchurch just before the fast train, but arrives at Waterloo later. These trains are usually indicated (incorrectly) as terminating at Farnborough on the departure boards

### Walk notes

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.

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). 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, but depend on **ferry services** being in operation. 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](http://www.bournemouthboating.co.uk). For route #5 you need the short **Wick Ferry** across the Stour, which is operated by the same company

Using the Mudeford Spit ferry, you can do a **circular walk** of 7.6km/6.4 miles by combining routes #1 + #4 or #2 + #3. Route #2 + #3 has the advantage that you get to the Beach House Cafe for lunch and the Hiker's Cafe for tea, but in reverse, ie #1 + #4, the Hiker's Cafe does some hot food and the Beach House does do hot drinks.

## Longer coastal walks

You can start at Christchurch, walk to Hengisbury Head by routes #1 or #5, and then turn eastwards **along the coast to Barton-on-Sea**. To do this you have to take the short hop ferry across the mouth of Christchurch harbour from the jetty on Mudeford Spit (opposite the Beach House café): this goes every 15 minutes in summer at least – check [www.bournemouthboating.co.uk](http://www.bournemouthboating.co.uk) or call 01202 429119 for winter times. Fare £1.50 at time of writing. It is **6.5km/4 miles** from Mudeford Spit to Barton, making a total walk of **12.6km/7.8 miles**, assuming you get the hourly bus from Barton to New Milton station (recommended). If not, add a further 2.8km/1.7 miles to make a total walk of **15.4km/9.5 miles**.

Alternatively, you can use route #1, #2, or #5 to go **westwards to Bournemouth Pier**. The pier is **7.6km/4.7 miles from Mudeford Spit**, so assuming you start with route #2 the total walk from Christchurch to pier is 9.1km/5.7 miles. Add an extra 2.8km/1.7 miles to walk to Bournemouth station via the town centre and that makes **11.9km/7.4 miles** overall. (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 11.4km/7 miles).

## Lunch and tea places

The **Hiker's Cafe** by the Hengistbury Head car park is open every day except Christmas Day and Boxing Day and does baked potatoes, burgers and other simple hot food, as well as the usual cakes and tea items. Its summer hours are until 5.30pm Monday to Friday and 6pm Saturday and Sunday (7pm in August). Call 01202 428 552 for winter opening times

**Tuckton Tea Gardens** is just by the Stour Bridge on routes #1 and #3 (not sure of opening times)

The **Beach House Cafe** 01202 423 474 is a combination cafe/bar on Mudeford Spit that serves food, and has a nice outside terrace overlooking Christchurch harbour. It gets quite crowded on sunny days.

If you are walking to Barton, there is also a pub immediately on the far side of the mouth of Christchurch Harbour – the **Haven House Inn**

On Christchurch Quay, the **Old Mill Tea Room** is open "until about 4.30pm", depending on the weather and the level of custom. It is a useful coffee stop while you are waiting for the Mudeford Spit ferry. There are other tea options in Christchurch town centre (routes #3, #4 and #5)

## Route #1: Christchurch station to Hengistbury Head via Stour Bridge (4.9km/3 miles to Hengistbury Head: 6.1km/3.8 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 250 metres carry straight on across a major road junction
3. In 600 metres carry straight on across a large roundabout, and beyond this cross the River Stour on a bridge
4. Turn left just beyond the bridge, opposite the Harvesters Pub, onto the riverside walkway
5. You soon pass **Tuckton Tea Gardens** and the brown hut of Bournemouth Boating Services. Beyond this veer right and then left to keep to the edge of the river on a gravel path, through a park
6. In 400 metres, opposite a three-storey modern building with green windows on the opposite bank the gravel path is forced by a thicket or trees to turn away from the river. In 70 metres turn left off this path across a footbridge, passing through the thicket. In 20 metres fork right, and in another 10 metres, with the landing point of

the **Wick Ferry** on your left, turn right at a T-junction. 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 20 metres. There is a fine view of **Christchurch Priory** across the water.

7. 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.
8. 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
9. In about 60 metres you emerge into a large open field, and turn left along its edge (no gravel path here)
10. In 120 metres, at the far end of the field, go through a wooden gate, and onto a gravel path between fields.
11. After some while 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.
12. In another 800 metres you come to a road. Go right and in 150 metres you come to another road. To the right you can see the **Hikers Cafe**.
13. If not stopping at the café, carry on up a gravel track along the left-hand edge of an open space (or after stopping at the café, just walk in the same direction across the grass). When in 200 metres you get to the seafront, turn left along the tarmac seafront path, which will take you up onto **Hengistbury Head**. You can also walk around the headland on the beach. (*If you intend to walk to **Bournemouth**, turn right along the sea front, unless you want to explore Hengistbury Head first*).
14. Walk across Hengistbury Head and descend to Mudeford Spit, with its colourful beach huts (which have been known to change hands for over £200,000). On the spit, the ferries leave from the jetty next to the Beach House Cafe. One boat goes back to Christchurch Quay (see route #4 for **circular route back to Christchurch Station** using this), and the other goes to the other side of the harbour mouth for Barton. *More details of the route to Barton can be found under Free Walk 74: Bournemouth to Barton on this site.*

## **Route #2: Christchurch station to Hengistbury Head via the ferry (1.5km/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 100 metres, at a major road T-junction, go right, following signs to Town Centre.
3. In 350 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 mini roundabout up Church Street and into the churchyard of **Christchurch Priory**.
5. Immediately inside the churchyard, fork right with the path to pass to the right of the Priory and exit the churchyard in its far corner. Turn left on a road which in 10 metres turns right downhill, and then go left at the bottom of the hill to reach **Christchurch quay**.
6. The ferry boat to Mudeford Spit leaves from this quay, and lands on Mudeford Spit opposite the **Beach House Cafe** (see Lunch and Tea places).
7. Once on Mudeford Spit, turn right to explore Hengistbury Head. For a **circular walk back to Christchurch** or a **walk to Bournemouth** from Hengistbury Head, consult route #3 below

## **Route #3: Hengistbury Head to Christchurch Station via Stour Bridge (5km/3 miles)**

1. Coming westwards off the headland (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
2. **To walk to Bournemouth**, stay on the seafront until you get to the pier (6km/3.7 miles). Otherwise **for Christchurch station**, just past a long low ridge to the right

- (ancient earthworks), turn right across a large grass space towards the car park and the **Hikers Cafe**, a possible tea stop (see Lunch and Tea places).
3. Carry on past the cafe, and beyond it turn right on the road (the *car* road, not a tarmac track just before it). In 60 metres, where the road ends in a turning circle, pass through a metal barrier and curve left with a tarmac track
  4. In 100 metres, just before the entrance to Hengistbury Head Outdoor Education Centre, **[!]** *ignore a semi-tarmac car-wide track beyond 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.
  5. Keep straight on along this on a very clear path, ignoring ways off for about 1.3km. The first section is through scrubland, and then you go over duckboards and on along a section with a ditch and rough pasture on either side, and a fine view of **Christchurch Priory** across the water to the right.
  6. As you approach houses pass through a gate into a fenced field, and after 120 metres turn right to exit it onto a gravel path (clearly signposted).
  7. The gravel path curves left to a kissing gate to the left of a fieldgate in 40 metres. Pass through this and carry on down a path between fences, with fields either side.
  8. 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.
  9. In 120 metres the path goes into some thickets: in 20 metres keep straight on at a crosspaths, to curve round an area of trees. In 30 metres 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.
  10. In 400 metres, as you approach the road bridge over the river, you come to **Tuckton Tea Gardens**, a possible tea stop. (It takes 15 minutes from here to the railway station, incidentally, and if you think you are going to miss a train, this is the last nice place to stop: beyond here is suburbia). 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. In 100 metres you come to the road, and turn right across the bridge.
  11. Keep straight on at the large roundabout a little way beyond the bridge.
  12. In another 600 metres cross a major road junction (with a dual carriageway) and keep straight on.
  13. In 250 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 is a **fish and chip shop** and a number of other takeaways immediately on the left.

#### **Route #4: from Hengistbury Head to Christchurch Station via the ferry (1.5km/0.9 miles walking, rest by ferry)**

1. From Hengistbury Head, descend to Mudeford Spit with its picturesque beach huts (which have been known to change hands for over £200,000) and find the **Beach House Cafe** on the harbour side.
2. Ferries to Christchurch Quay go from the jetty by the cafe (if they are running: call Bournemouth Boating Services on 01202 429119 to check times or see [www.bournemouthboating.co.uk](http://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.
3. Once at Christchurch Quay, head inland, passing the **Old Mill Tea Rooms** on your right (see Lunch and Tea places), and in 70 metres the Boathouse Cafe and Restaurant on your left.
4. In another 50 metres, at a road junction turn right uphill.
5. 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**.
6. Emerge on the far side of the priory into Christchurch's shopping centre. In 100 metres veer slightly left at a mini roundabout to carry on down the High Street.
7. In 300 metres, at a major roundabout, keep straight on (an underpass to the right of the roundabout is the easiest way to cross) and carry straight on down the road beyond

8. In 350 metres, turn left up a major road, with the **Railway** pub on the corner.
9. In 100 metres, the station approach is on the right

### **Route #5: Christchurch station to Hengistbury Head via Priory and Wick Ferry (4.9km/3 miles to Hengistbury Head: 6.1 miles/3.8km to Mudeford Spit)**

1. Exit Christchurch Station, veer left to go down its approach road, and turn left on the main road (Stour Road)
2. In 100 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 High Street, Christchurch's main shopping street.
4. In 300 metres keep straight on at a mini roundabout up Church Street and into the churchyard of **Christchurch Priory**.
5. Immediately inside the churchyard, fork right with the path to pass to the right of the Priory, and exit the churchyard at the far end. Turn left on a road, which in 10 metres turns right downhill, and then go left at the bottom of the hill to reach **Christchurch quay**.
6. Turn right along the waterfront, passing a park/open space on the right.
7. In 500 metres or so, look out for the tiny **Wick Ferry** across the River Stour on your left.
8. On the far side of the ferry, 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 into a riverside park.
9. 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 another 40 metres.
10. 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.
11. In about 60 metres you emerge into a large open field, and turn left along its edge (no gravel path here)
12. In 120 metres, at the far end of the field, go through a wooden gate and onto a gravel path between fields.
13. After some while 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.
14. In 800 metres you come to a road. Go right and in 150 metres you come to another road. To the right you can see the **Hikers Cafe**.
15. If not stopping at the café, carry on up a gravel track along the left-hand edge of an open space (or after stopping at the café, just walk in the same direction across the grass). When in 200 metres you to get to the seafront, turn left along the tarmac seafront path, which will take you up onto **Hengistbury Head**. You can also walk around the headland on the beach. *(If you intend to walk to **Bournemouth**, turn right along the sea front, unless you want to explore Hengistbury Head first).*
16. Walk across Hengisbury Head and descend to Mudeford Spit, with its colourful beach huts (which have been known to change hands for over £200,000). On the spit, the ferries leave from the jetty next to the Beach House Cafe. One boat goes back to Christchurch Quay (see route #4 for **circular route back to Christchurch Station** using this), and the other goes to the other side of the harbour mouth for Barton. *More details of the route to Barton can be found under Free Walk 74: Bournemouth to Barton on this site.*