

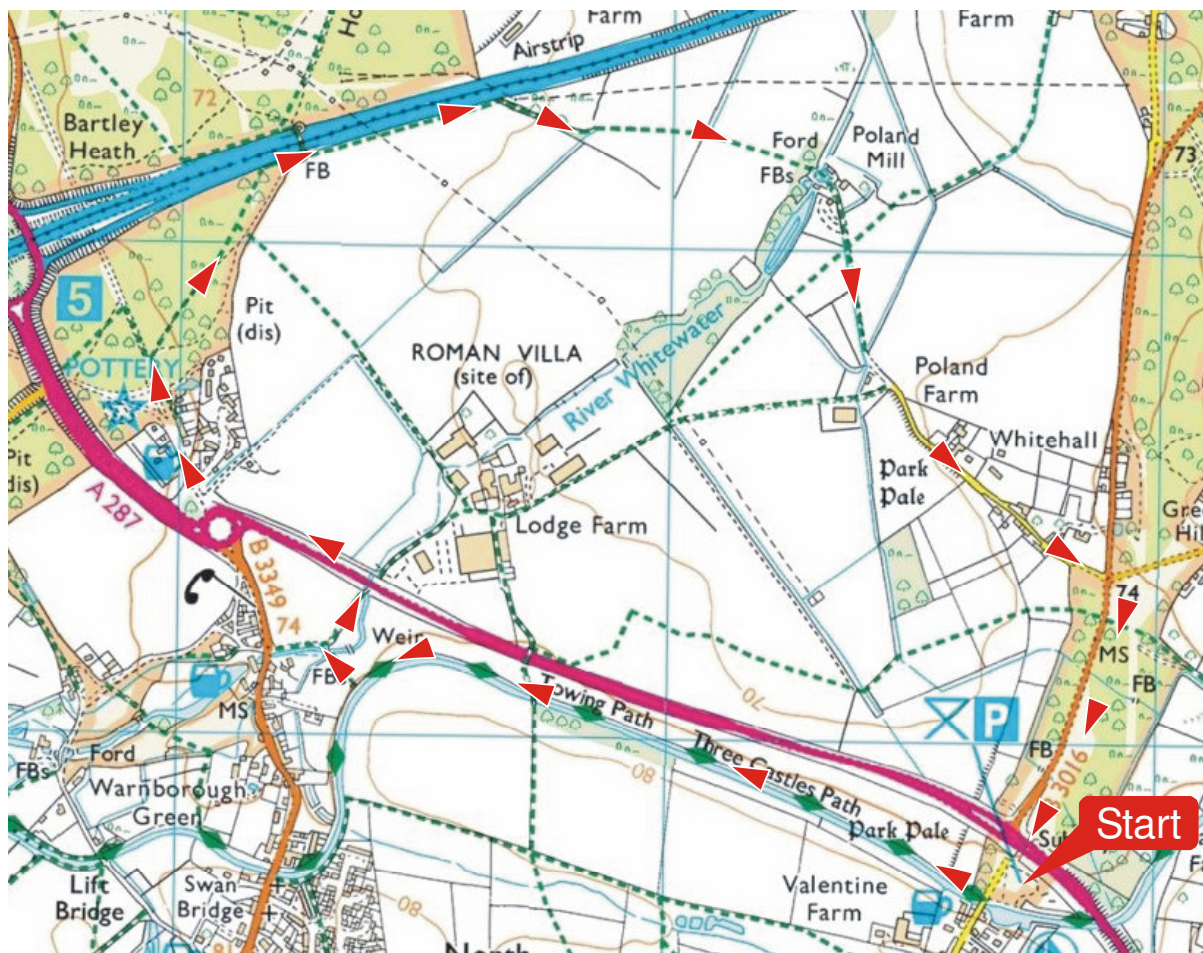
## AN AUTUMN WALK TO POLAND MILL

Allow 1½ hours

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For a circular walk with a bit of variety, why not seek out Poland Mill on the River Whitewater? This walk takes about one and a half hours at a gentle pace and includes several quite different environments and views through some of our local countryside.

Odiham Wharf car park is a convenient starting point. This, as you may know, is adjacent to the Basingstoke Canal at Odiham, and is reached by turning down towards the Waterwitch pub at the old Colt Hill and carrying on across the bridge into the car park. Take the path back to the canal tow path and turn right. This has recently been renovated by the Basingstoke Canal Society who are to be congratulated on their hard work in keeping the access along the canal easy and convenient for all to enjoy. Follow on under the road bridge you previously drove across and continue along the tow path opposite the Waterwitch pub gardens. You may note the increase in leisure traffic on the canal at this section, with barges, hire boats, canoes and other small craft all enjoying the benefits of this man-made waterway.



Go past the farmer's bridge across the canal, ignoring the footpath sign to the right and continue on and around the left hand bend until you come to a gate in the hedge on your right. This path leads across the Whitewater and the stark contrast between the man-made and natural water-course is very evident. This is a haven for waterfowl, with ducks, geese, herons and swans all sharing the available natural resources.

Once across the river bridge, turn right and follow the path down, through the gate, and under the road bridge which is the A287. The river at this point is fast and shallow, and the observer may catch sight of the darting trout which inhabit the whole of its length. Turn immediately left along the farm access road until you reach the road signed to the Pottery where you turn right. This takes you towards the Lord Derby pub, where you have an opportunity to take some liquid refreshment, but take care lest this turns into the end of your journey! Across the road is Bartley Heath Pottery and those who like to shop for hand crafted presents from a local source may like to dally a while.

Go onto the heath via the disused tarmac road on the right and about fifty yards further on there is a path into the woods just under the power lines. These woods are managed by the Hampshire Wildlife Trust and this area is nicely shaded with plenty of wildlife to be seen, including deer. About 50 yards in, take the right fork. The path is not always well defined but as a guide walk parallel to the edge of the open field to your right. This path eventually leaves the woods by the footbridge across the M3 but now you must carry on past it and continue along the edge of the fields, keeping the fence to the road on your left. At the trees there is a yellow waymark about 30 yards along and this will take you into the copse and emerge at a bridge across the ditch in front of the next field. The right of way continues over the field, slightly to the left (due east) through the gap in the next treeline and on to the other side where there is a stile and footpath sign leading out of the treeline you have now reached. However, the fields are now cultivated and if the direct route cannot be taken you can go right after the bridge, immediately left, left again at the second line of trees until you reach this stile.

Follow this path and you will emerge at the peaceful haven that is Poland Mill. Standing on the wooden plank bridge you can see the mill in its now renovated glory. Once derelict, but now a private residence this is the idyllic country scene we may all have dreamed of retiring to once the Lottery comes up. The beautiful buildings and the rush of the water into the serene pool with its resident waterfowl and trout is an artist's paradise. Linger awhile and relax in its tranquility, but please respect the privacy of the residents. If you can tear yourself away, follow the access road out and back to Odiham Common, passing Poland Farm, Poland Barn and Poland House on your left and a host of other fine cottages on your right.

Once at the road, cross and after about 20 yards turn right on to the common and make your way back to the tunnel under the A287 which emerges back at the car park at the start of your walk. The only thing left to do now is to quench your thirst at the excellent Waterwitch and congratulate yourself for completing the walk. ENJOY'.

Original walk prepared by Steve Ruckus

An attractive extension is to continue along Bagwell Lane after crossing the Winchfield to Odiham road then after about ¼ mile turn right onto the track going to Wilks Water and then back along the canal, rather than turning immediately right after crossing the road onto the footpath back to Colt Hill.