



SWASHBUCKLING

Words: Damian Hall Photos: Mark Bauer

THE WALK OSMINGTON MILLS, DORSET THE PUB SMUGGLERS INN

I like pubs me. I especially like pubs when they're warm, welcoming, mostly made of wood inside and not in city centres. I like walking too. Best of all, I like walking to pubs.

A fine country hike that ends at a public house is a reward scheme that doubles your points. The pub is, as a football manager once put it, the carrot at the end of the tunnel; a prize for your legwork, which at this time of year is often in the cold, wind and/or rain.

If I haven't done something healthy pre-drink, those initial few slurps are guilt-ridden: it's filling me with sugar, making me fatter and I'll probably try and kiss the hairy barman in a minute.

But if I've exercised beforehand then it's completely fair enough (that's the pint, rather than planting a smacker on the barman's grizzly cheek). I have health credits in the bank and the

virtuous angel is shunted off my shoulder by the cackling Tasmanian Devil on the other.

Dorset is well-known for some cracking coastal scenery. It hosts a long section of the glorious South West Coast Path that traces the World Heritage-listed Jurassic Coast (which officially stretches all the way from Swanage to Exmouth). If we may speak frankly here, there aren't many finer places to walk in the south of England.

The Smugglers Inn, in tiny Osmington Mills, on the coast between Weymouth and Lulworth, is an excellent pub that ticks all my boxes. And its location chimed with this issue's brief: the search for great pubs in great locations with great little paths leading down to them.

Moreover, it offers the adventure and whizz-bang of the heritage for which

the pub is named. You see, I like smugglers too. Sure, people more selective than I might see them as the drug-dealers of the past and potentially murderous criminals, but that seems a bit... well, you know, real.

I much prefer to fantasise them as the poor man's pirates, non-conformists and underdog entrepreneurs, courageously subverting 'The System'. Yay. Go smugglers!

In contrast, my adventure would be a little more out in the open.

I'd drawn up a circuit route which starts and finishes at the Smugglers Inn and follows the famous coastline. It also goes inland, through farms and villages, up and down the hills of the chalky South Dorset Downs. It made a pretty good claim to being one of the best pub walks the nation could offer.

I couldn't wait to get going.



The Dorset Downs: smuggling country.



Damian was so busy looking for the pub that he failed to notice King George III sneaking up on him on horseback.



It's the South West Coast Path, but not as we know it...

THE KING ON THE HILL

It's a refreshingly blue-skied morning as I park my car by the Smugglers Inn. Though the spot is right on the coast I purposefully restrain from taking the few extra steps for a look, saving the sea views as a further reward at the walk's finale. I'm soon heading inland, a skip in my step as I ascend gentle slopes through fields of long, damp grass.

I sometimes get lost in thought when out walking, letting my head drop and forgetting to appreciate my surroundings fully. Without my wife there to remind me of my unfortunate habit, a mental reminder goes off with perfect timing. As my neck straightens I stop in my tracks.

On the downs straight ahead of me is a giant on horseback; a chalk engraving, like an apparition, or something from another planet. I had included the Osmington White Horse in my route but with all the other attractions I'd forgotten about it. It's quite a sight. The figure was sculpted in 1808, a tribute to 'Mad' King George III, who used to visit Weymouth on his hols (so not that mad,

then – in fact quite a smart guy). Of all the white horse chalk-figures in Britain, this is the only one with a rider.

King George and his steed gallop out of view as I reach Osmington 'proper'. I pass The Sunray, another highly-rated pub with a fine-looking beer garden, but sadly it's too early for a tipple and I carry on down quiet village streets with wonderfully clichéd thatched cottages, happy to be invaded by joyously colourful foliage.

Back out in the countryside I pause for views of the royal rider between hedges, before the track begins to climb and they've gone again. The top of the downs is the perfect tea-break and I sit to admire the scenery now between the coast and me.

I head along a chalky track, past cows with the demeanour of nightclub bouncers. Lunchtime approaches and I get my first pangs for the liquid reward waiting at the walk's end. I pause to snaffle down sandwiches on the edge of an inviting valley. It's secluded and looks full of secrets, which the sun, blasting through gaps in the clouds, threatens to fully reveal.



That's more like it! The trail at Ringstead Bay.



Our dashing smuggler gets his reward.



THE PUB

The Smugglers Inn dates back to the 13th-century. Then known as the Crown Inn (its current name might have given the game away somewhat), it was once home to a notorious gang of smugglers. Their leader was Emmanuel Charles, who imported brandy so appalling none of the locals would touch it; thus it was taken further inland to supply the less finicky types. Another smuggler, Pierre Latour, known as 'French Peter', was a regular here in the late 1700s. When a Preventive Officer came looking for French Peter, he was instructed to hide up the chimney and wait for Peter to return. But the double-crossing landlord tipped off the officer and the smuggler was soon being smoked out, literally. French Peter would later retire and marry the landlord's daughter. Nowadays, we're pretty sure all its ales and tipples are legitimate. And they are also fantastic.

Loved by 'The Good Pub Guide'

Main beers Badger Ales, Fursty Ferret

Sample bar meal Burger and chips, £8.25

Contact 01305 833125



Five and twenty ponies
Trotting through the dark -
Brandy for the Parson -
Baccy for the Clerk -
Loose for a lady letters for a spy -
And watch the wall my darling while the Smugglers go by



The crowning glory: arriving at the Smugglers Inn.

I hit a lookout spot with a surprising amount of cars parked up, mostly for dog-walking it seems. It's a little disappointing to suddenly have company, but I can't really blame them. My first clear views of the coast are well worth the effort to get here as the sun brings a sweeping arch of coast to dazzling life.

As I tumble down the hill, white cliffs tower above me to the east. They seem

too handsome to act as a defensive border for the country, like members of a boy band who've joined the army. But nevertheless there's something heroic about them.

Following the coast towards the pub, which I'll soon find tucked into a cosy fold in the coastline, is my favourite part of the walk. The hard work's nearly done and I'm rewarded with awesome views in either

direction, coloured by the soft sun of late afternoon.

The landscape seems much too pretty to have been the backdrop for illicit economies and skulduggery. But soon enough I'm sitting where countless smugglers have sat, in the welcoming, thatch-roofed Smugglers Inn, with my well-earned pint of ale. Slurp. Wipe mouth with hand. Ahhhh. Now, where's that barman? **walking**

WALK HERE: SEE ROUTE 3

MORE GREAT PUB WALKS



Simon Carey

PLUMPTON, EAST SUSSEX
THE PUB HALF MOON
THE WALK SEE ROUTE 5

The South Downs take on a whole new life in autumn and winter: the crisp air above the low hills makes those fabulous views across the weald even more spectacular. See them at their best on this walk, which starts and finishes at the 200-year-old Half Moon and climbs up to the stunning viewpoints of Ditchling Beacon, Balmer Down and Blackcap. Great food from an award-winning chef and Harvey's legendary ales await at the end.

Loved by 'CAMRA Good Beer Guide'

Main beers Harvey's, including Best Bitter
Sample bar meal Half Moon beefburger, £10

Contact 01273 890253,
www.halfmoonplumpton.com



LEWKNOR, OXFORDSHIRE
THE PUB THE LEATHERN BOTTLE
THE WALK SEE ROUTE 6

Unchanged for over a century, the Leathern Bottle (variously spelt as 'Bottel') is a regular entrant in the best pub and beer guides. With numerous walks within a stone's throw of the bar, it's hard to know where to begin, but we've chosen a route which samples the classic Chilterns combination of rolling wooded hills and far-reaching views, and offers a terrific stretch of the Ridgeway National Trail to boot.

Loved by 'The Good Pub Guide'

Main beers Brakspear Bitter,
 Marston's Pedigree

Sample bar meal Ham, egg and chips, £8.95

Contact 01844 351482,
www.theleathernbottle.co.uk



HORNDON ON THE HILL, ESSEX
THE PUB THE BELL
THE WALK SEE ROUTE 7

As the author of several books on pub walks in Essex, Len Banister is a man to trust, and The Bell is his shout. The walk ventures from the historic village of Horndon into the beautiful wooded tops of Westley Heights, to be greeted by views across the Thames Estuary to Kent. The Bell is fabulous. Just watch out for the strange collection of ancient buns hanging from a beam: the landlord will explain.

Loved by 'The Good Pub Guide'

Main beer Crouch Vale Brewer's Gold
Sample bar meal Slow-roast pork shoulder with Stilton, £8.50

Contact 01375 642463,
www.bell-inn.co.uk

