

Wildlife and birds

The walk includes a variety of habitats – heathland, woodland, woodland edge and gardens. All offer good chances to hear and see common and rarer birds. In Spring and Summer, especially in the early morning, birdsong is everywhere.



Between April and June **Cuckoos** can be heard. After arriving from Africa to breed. They lay their eggs in other birds' nests, pushing out the other's eggs, and leaving their own to be raised by the nest's owners! If lucky you may see a cuckoo perched on a tree or

wire - greyish and the size of a Woodpigeon. Once they have laid their eggs they head back to Africa.

Buzzards are the commonest bird of prey nowadays. If you hear a high pitched "piu-piu" sound above, look in the sky high or low and you may see one soaring in circles on thermal currents – other birds are not too keen on Buzzards so sometimes you might see one "mobbed" by crows trying to chase it away.



The **Stonechat** is a common small bird seen on the heath year round. Its call is a harsh "chack-chack" like two stones banging together hence the name "Stonechat". Similar in size to a Robin, males have an orange-pink breast and black head and white "collar" typically calling from the top of gorse bushes.

Often closely associated with Stonechats is the **Dartford Warbler**, but it is more difficult to see. A small rusty coloured bird with a long tail that has a scratchy song and pops up and down on the gorse.



The Forest hosts varieties of **Thrush**. **Blackbird**, **Mistle Thrush** and **Song Thrush** are here year round and are easy to spot. Perched on top of a tree – the Mistle Thrush (pictured) sings from a high point, often in strong

winds, hence its country name 'Storm Cock'. **Redwings** (pictured) and **Field-fares** are also Thrushes, which migrate from Scandinavia for the winter months – holly berries are a favourite of Redwings when they arrive in autumn.



Brockenhurst and Sway

Brockenhurst Station owes its size to being on the original 1847 line from London to Dorchester via Ringwood and Wimborne. With severe gradients to the south west, this station was where heavy trains were split to enable them to be hauled up the inclines. The branch line to Lymington and the Isle of Wight ferry opened in 1858.

A direct line, and today's route to and beyond Bournemouth opened later in 1888. This is because in the 1840's Bournemouth was little more than a village and was bypassed by the railway. However by the 1880's, with the Victorian demand for seaside holidays, a new line through Christchurch and Bournemouth to Poole was built, and this included Sway and its station.

Sway Village dates back to prehistoric times. Stone age artifacts have been found by archeologists as well as Anglo-Saxon items, showing continuous occupation. The village has four mentions in the 1086 Domesday Book, when it was on the edge of the *Nova Foresta*, (New Forest) created by William the Conqueror as a hunting ground.

Later the village was largely owned by three large churches, Quarr Abbey (on the Isle of Wight); Romsey Abbey; and Christchurch Priory. After Henry VIII dissolved the abbeys Sway became part of Arnewood Manor. The village was formally established as a civil parish in 1879. The arrival of the railway in 1888 led to much enlargement to create the village you'll see today.

The original line from Brockenhurst to Ringwood was closed in 1964, but Brockenhurst station remains busy. Around one million passengers pass through, or stop for a visit and to enjoy the Forest.

As you pass through you may see flower baskets or the history displays. These are examples of voluntary work by the Friends of Brockenhurst Station. You are welcome to join our small happy group if supporting the station and railway interests you.

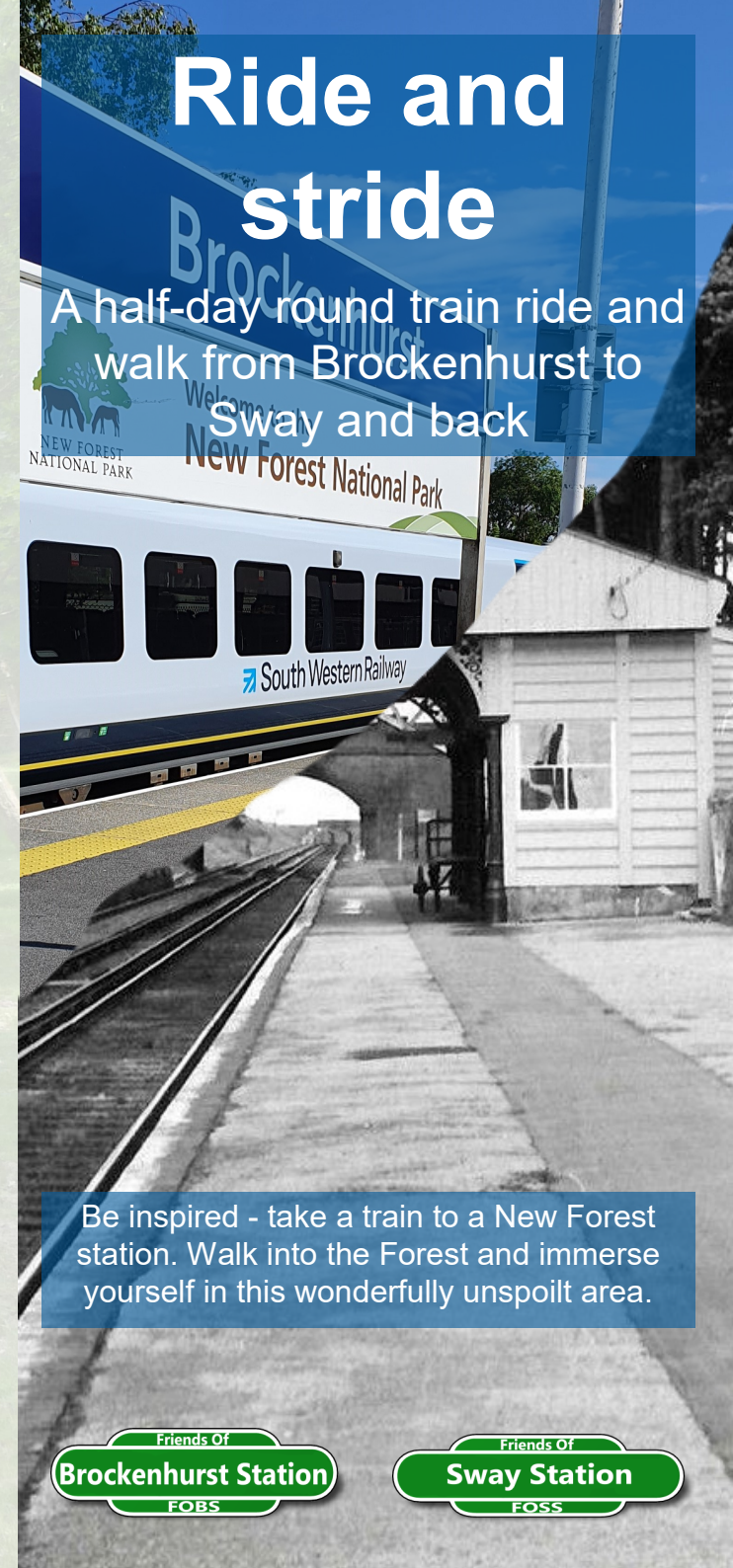
Please email us at:

friendsofbrockenhurststation@gmail.com



Ride and stride

A half-day round train ride and walk from Brockenhurst to Sway and back



Be inspired - take a train to a New Forest station. Walk into the Forest and immerse yourself in this wonderfully unspoilt area.



Ride and Stride - A two and a half hour round walk to Sway and back

Start this round trip at Brockenhurst Station, where you need a single ticket to Sway, the next stop towards Bournemouth. The train may leave from Platform One or Platform Three so check the boards. Not all trains stop at Sway, but there is usually one or two an hour and the train journey takes around five minutes.

On the journey you'll travel over embankments and through cuttings. This part of the railway was difficult to build and there were sadly a number of deaths due to accidents, often caused by mud. If you look out of the south side of the train as you cross the Forest you may glimpse Sway Tower. This is a folly built in the 19th century and to this day the tallest free standing and unreinforced concrete structure in the world. Sway Station is in the middle of this large village.

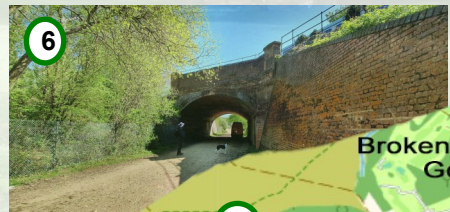
From the station gate on Sway's Platform Two, exit by the gate. Walk up the hill past the car parking to the main road (Station Road) where you should turn left (1). Walk over the rail line bridge, and after 200 metres take the next right by the butcher's shop into Middle Road. Walk on, past the village hall to the end of this road, and turn right again into Manchester Road. Many of the roads have place names here and it's believed these relate to where the navvies came from when building the railway. Many lived in Sway.

Walk along Manchester Road to the brick rail bridge overhead which you pass through. On your right under the bridge you'll spot a water culvert. One of the problems building the railway here was the amount of water and a lot of engineering works were needed to divert it. In fact local folk became interested in how long the railway was taking to build that they asked why. The navvies explained they were mining treacle (their name for the mud), and to this day the legend of the 'Sway Treacle Mines' carries on.

On the road directly opposite the culvert, right by the rail bridge, is a small green gate. Go through this, into the Forest, and walk up the hill. Keeping the rail line on your left you'll come to a footbridge (2) you need to take, again back over the tracks. The bridge is called White Shute bridge (the sign is half-way across). Carry on the track, keeping to the right whenever the path separates.

You are now in open Forest, and surrounded by gorse. The path should remain dry as it is elevated. Behind you you'll see Sway Tower again, about a mile away, and also distant views of the Isle of Wight. Often there are New Forest ponies, deer or cattle here. The ponies are wild and should not be approached. They are owned and gathered in 'drifts' once a year to be health-checked and marked, some going for sale often as riding ponies. Cattle are also owned by New Forest 'Commoners', who use their right to graze animals (including pigs in autumn) on the Forest.

In about half a mile you'll come to Wilverley Road. Straight ahead (3) is the track down to Longslade Bottom. Cross with care, and take this route. 'Slade' used to mean a large grassy area, and you'll reach this at the bottom. The rail bridge (4) of the disused Brockenhurst to Dorchester line is ahead of you.



Go up the path on the right hand side of the bridge and onto the track - the disused rail line. This was the original rail route (5) to Dorchester, built in 1846. The project was championed by a solicitor called Charles Castleman and went via Ringwood and Wimborne. On the map it had lots of loops, so was nicknamed Castleman's Corkscrew. Occasionally you'll see railway relics, such as concrete bases for signal posts, and after a mile or so you pass the 'Gatekeeper's Cottage'. You can see the original posts for the gates at the far end of the cottage to allow the track which crosses to be used.

Carry on, and under the mainline bridge (6) which you travelled over earlier and turn left onto the main road. Beware for the next half a mile, there is little or no pathway as you follow the road, under the rail again, then turning left into (7) Brockenhurst, and again over the rail line.

If possible walk on the side facing the traffic, as the Highway Code recommends. After the Brockenhurst sign you'll see a small timber and tiled building, actually an electric substation. Cross the rail bridge, and down the slope where the pavement (8) restarts after about 200 metres.

This is Sway Road, one of the main routes into Brockenhurst, and on your left is Brockenhurst Manor Golf Club. It's not a spelling mistake as 'Brokenhurst' was the name of the village until 1846, when a railway engineer misspelt the name (adding the 'c') when ordering the first station signs. The longer name stuck but some places, like the golf club, still use the traditional spelling.

Along Sway Road, originally called 'Wide Lane' (you'll see why) you pass four roads on your right until you reach Highwood Road. Go down this, past the doctors surgery and the village hall, and at the end is a footpath on your left. Take this, continue over the next road (Partridge Road) and straight ahead at the end. Brockenhurst Station is now on your left through the car park. You're back where you started!

Note

This six kilometre / four and a half mile walk is mostly flat, on paths and tracks throughout and within the capability of anyone who is reasonably fit. It will take a leisurely 2½ hours, plus stops. Dress according to the weather, and if you need to, take a drink or snack. Part of the route is on road without a footpath and care should be taken. If you have a dog, you'll need a lead.

Disclaimer: The authors cannot take responsibility for the state of the paths. This is a natural environment and you may encounter obstacles such as fallen trees, which you should navigate around with care. Some areas may be wet. In spring there are ground birds nests in some areas, so keep to the path, and have dogs close or put on a lead. Hazards such as Forestry work should be signposted. Please follow the guidance.