

Crondall and Bentley

Farmland, hedgerows and woodland delights via two lovely villages

1. Park in Pankridge Street where there is plenty of street parking. Walk along Pankridge Street west towards the Plume of Feathers pub and turn left into Church Street. Many house sparrows and collared doves may be seen here. At the top of the road take the footpath between the school and the churchyard.
2. As you progress behind the houses, you may see starlings that nest in some of the roofs. At the next path junction after the houses, go through the gap, stepping over the log into the open field and continue down the field-edge to your left following the hedgerow. The farmland has many skylarks in spring and the hedgerow has yellowhammers and linnets. (In spring 2023, you will pass over the route of the new Southampton to Heathrow oil pipeline - the land is currently being restored.) Continue along this hedgerow path in the same direction through another hedgerow junction staying left of the fields. You find yourself following a farm track and when this turns right into the middle of the field, continue on the grass keeping left straight up over the top of the hill. There are chiffchaff's, chaffinches and song thrushes. You will soon pass a little patch of bluebells in the woodland at the side of the path. At the end of the path you will meet a lane.
3. Take the steps down and turn left. Take the first turning right and follow this lane. After a while you pass farm buildings and you may see swallows over the nearby fields. They nest in the stables at the back of the main farm buildings. I went to have a look. Keep following the lane to the right until the next right-hand bend.
4. Take the footpath on the right-hand side across the field. You are now on St Swithin's Way. When you reach the first hedgerow, you may see a black poplar tree immediately on your left, and in spring, you may see the large red catkins laying on the ground. Continue through the hedgerow and follow the narrow path at the side of the field straight ahead. The tall tree on the right at the woodland corner is full of the parasitic mistletoe. Carry straight on across the next field and down the hill following the St Swithin's Way signs until you reach the bottom and cross a small footbridge.
5. Turn right, then quickly left onto the wide woodland track. In spring you may see some bluebells, red campion in the open woodland here. In May I heard cuckoos. Ignore the track crossroads and continue on following the track around to the left until you reach a gate and a lane.
6. Turn left, and then right at the next lane. This has a footpath marker post. Continue along the lane bending around to the right. At the crossroads cross straight over and look for the footpath gate on the right-hand side.
7. The path crosses a horse paddock to a gate just to the right of the garden. After exiting, keep to the right and enter another field by another gate and continue through two more. You are still on St Swithin's Way. Cross the next big field. As you reach the next hedgerow look carefully for the St Swithin's Way sign on a pole pointing off to your right and follow this to the bottom of the hill and the small bridge.
8. Follow the diagonal path up across the field towards the big metal gate. Go through the gap in the hedge and follow the path in the same direction until you reach a lane. You can see the village of Bentley ahead of you.

9. Exit onto the lane and turn left. Proceed to the next road junction and turn left. Pass the school and turn right at the private driveway sign (also a public footpath).
10. Passing some houses, there is a picnic place over to your left and some benches to sit upon. Follow the path to the road and turn right. You will now pass the Village Shop and post office and the Star Inn and reach the crossroads with Bentley Memorial Hall opposite.
11. Turn right. Keep going until the footpath runs out and look across to your left where a small gate to a footpath passes through the hedgerow. Now keep right of the allotments. Re-join the lane briefly before again, stepping up to the parallel footpath. Primroses adorn this path in the spring, then stitchwort, bluebells and herb robert. Continue under the private footbridge up to the next junction.
12. Turn right along the narrow lane towards the church - on the left behind the trees. Turn left at the postbox. Now enjoy the walk past the church along this lovely beech tree-lined track, rich in flowers. You soon reach Bury Court house. Continue in the same direction through the gate and on the lane. Stay on the lane and head up the hill between the cottages to the gate and stile.
13. Enter the field and continue up the hill on the left-hand side of the hedgerow. (You may cross more of the Southampton to Heathrow pipeline excavation here.) Continue to the lane via the stile.
14. Turn right and stay on the lane. Listen for skylarks. Pass several tracks and houses, including Oast houses and ascend the next Hill. At the crossroads continue straight over. Soon you see a road junction directly under some overhead power lines and turn off to the right until you reach Swanthorpe House.
15. Take the track to the left, a public footpath. We now follow this path for approximately 1 km. After the last house enter woodland that has a lot of spring woodland flowers. There will be lots of common birds including goldcrests and coal tits as you pass a fallen log and emerge into a field.
16. Turn left along the field edge and the path enters Lee Wood, a flower- rich woodland following a farm track. (When I walked it at the end of March, I found a great deal of lesser celandine and also carpets of wood anemone, later some early purple orchids, bluebells and wood spurge). In the woodland, ignore the first footpath sign to your left and keep going. Look out for bullfinches, blackcaps and garden warblers until you are emerging from the wood.
17. Immediately before exiting the wood turn left at the footpath signpost just inside the trees. After just a few yards exit the wood to your right and follow the path along the newly planted line of hedgerow trees. Ahead of you, in the distance to the right, you can now see Crondall. You may be able to listen to the skylarks as the footpath curves around between the large fields. At the farm buildings, keep following the path to the left until you emerge onto a lane. Keep going towards the houses until you find a footpath sign on the left.
18. Take the right-hand footpath, a few steps up on the left, via a gate and cross diagonally to the other side of the cricket field and a bench under the trees. Keep along the line of trees, pass the play park and turn left and drop down to the road.
19. At the road turn right along the lane, past the village pond, back to the village and the Plume of Feathers.