

Ride H: Not for the Faint-Hearted

Liss • Flexcombe • Wheatham • Ashford Hanger • Rings Green • High Cross • Bower Farm • Priors Dean • Hawkley Hanger • Hawkley • Lower Green • Goleigh • Newton Valence • Selbome • Blackmoor • Bradshott • Empshott • Scotland Farm • West Liss • Liss

Distance: 27 miles
Landranger Maps: 186
Explorer Maps: 133

After struggling for a mile through deep mud, carrying rather than pushing our bikes most of the way (never mind riding them), the relief of joining a tarred surface was tremendous, but short-lived. All too soon we turned off onto another track, well-made this time, but steep and curving. Then, as we followed it round the bend, the gradient suddenly increased to an angle that would have discouraged a few walkers, never mind anyone with a bike to push as well. We toiled our way onwards and upwards, only to find that as the slope eased, so did the surface of the track. My companion, Keith Dean, turned to me: 'I've thought of a name for this ride,' he groaned.

This is, without doubt, the toughest ride in this book. It's very hard work at the best of times and after wet weather parts of it will be extremely difficult. It's certainly not for the novice rider, but for those with experience and stamina, the right type of bike, and sensible clothing and footwear, you'll enjoy some superb scenery and little-known countryside, some of the best in Hampshire. It's a marvellous challenge and to complete it will give you an immense feeling of well-being and achievement.

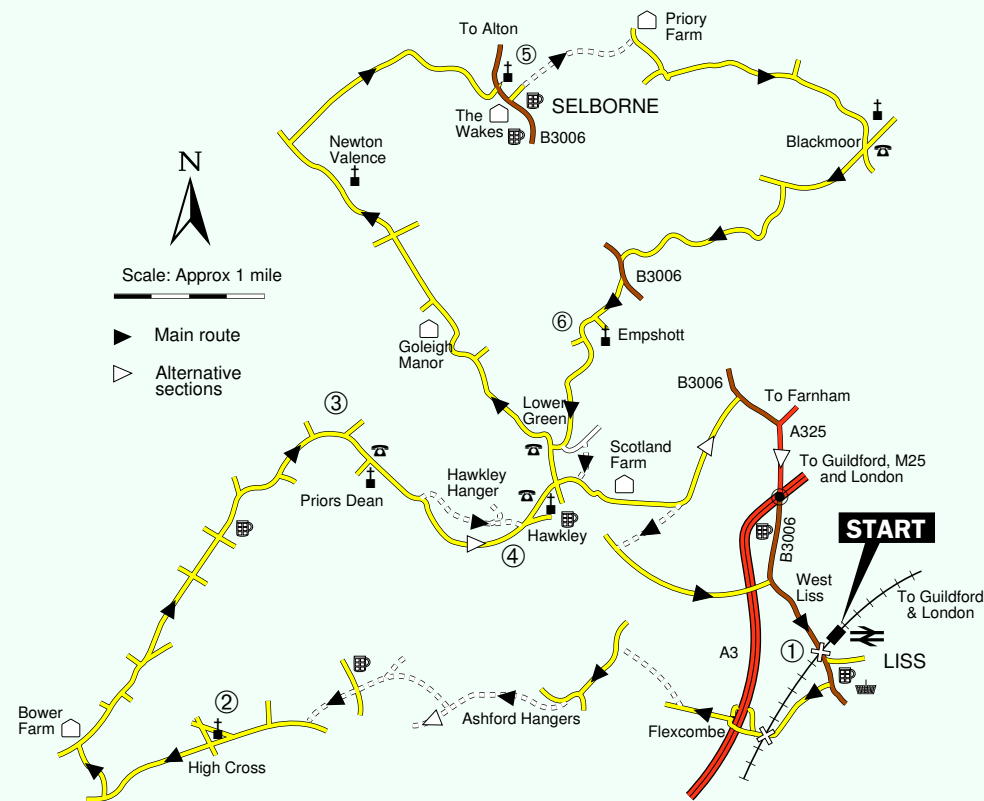
In places where conditions can be particularly difficult we've set out alternative routes, though not all of the problems can be bypassed in this way. While these diversions are intended mainly for bad weather, they may also help to make the ride a little less daunting to riders who are not so experienced.

Starting Points

The ride starts in Liss village where there are a couple of free car parks, one on Station Road (heading towards the A3 – grid reference SU 775279) and another on Hill Brow Road (the Rogate road – SU 777275). There's also a pay & display one at the railway station.

🚉 The station at Liss is served by the South West Trains' stopping service on the Waterloo–Guildford–Portsmouth route. An hourly service is provided most of the time.

Ride H Not for the Faint-Hearted



The Route in Brief

① TL outof stn approach, then R at mini-roundabout onto B3006. After 200 yds TR into Andlers Ash Road.

Follow road round to R over level crossing. At jn TL for Flexcombe. Cross A3 then TL again. Just before Woolshers Cottages TR onto rough byway.

At end of byway TL, then TR at next TJ, signed Oakshott. After short climb TL onto track by sign for Ashford Hangers. Follow main track straight ahead then round to R. Continue past top of hill then take second turning on R (signed Old Litten Lane).

At jn with narrow lane bear L and continue to road. Cross road onto bridleway opposite. Through gate and veer to R across paddock. Exit through gate then TL along driveway.

At road TR and keep straight on to High Cross.

② Keep straight on over small x-roads, pass Bydean Fram then take next on R by tall pylon. At far end TR again. Keep straight on ignoring all side turnings, but when road forks bear L.

At turnpike keep SA over x-roads then take next on R, signed Priors Dean & Hawkley. At following jns follow signs for Priors Dean.

③ Keep straight on following signs for Oakshott & Hawkley. At top of steep hill veer L onto bridleway. Follow BW into a field (follow Hampshire Cycleway sign). At corner of field follow path to L, then TR out of field halfway up slope.

Follow BW to junction of tracks. Keep SA but then TR along side of field towards village. Pass Homefield Cottages then TL at the road into the village centre.

④ FL at the village green for Empshott, then at the TJ at the far end TL. Continue SA through Lower Green for Newton Valence, passing Goleigh Manor. At staggered XR TR then L into Hullam Lane.

Opposite Shotters farm TR for Selborne. At B3006 TR into village.

⑤ TL immediately after Queen's Hotel into Huckers Lane. At end of lane pass cottage to join unsurfaced byway. Follow through to Priory Farm then TR onto lane.

At TJ at top of hill TL into Honey Lane (sp Oakhanger). At jn after Albury Dairy keep straight on for Blackmoor.

At Blackmoor TR just after church, then keep SA for Bradshott & temple (Sotherington Lane). After ½ mile TL for Bradshott.

At B3006 TL for 150yds then TR for Empshott.


⑥ Continue through village and down steep hill. Keep straight on, sp Hawkley. Cross river then climb hill.

At top TL onto No Through Road signed Hawkley Hurst. 50 yds beyond the crest of the rise from the jn, take steep worn path up bank on R. Follow BW sign along edge of field and round to R at corner of field. Exit through gate onto road and TL.

Head downhill past Scotland Farm, then at bend at bottom TR onto track. At far end TL onto road, pass Lyss Place and cross A3 to reach B3006. TR into Liss.

The Ride

① Liss to High Cross

 *The first part of the ride involves a bridleway which can, at the least, be hard work and at the worst can be a quagmire through which it's difficult to walk, let alone ride. If you would rather avoid it, there's an alternative at the end of the route.*

Turn left out of the station approach and head towards the mini-roundabout by the Whistle Stop pub. Turn right, following the signs for the B3006 to Rogate. There's a free car park on this road, just beyond the garage. After 200 yards or so, when you come to some allotments, turn right into Andlers Ash Road. One side of the road is lined by houses but on the other is a tree nursery, giving a more rural prospect.

Follow the road as it bends to the right and crosses the railway by a level crossing then, when you come to the junction at the end of the road turn left, following the signs for Flexcombe. Cross the A3 bypass (1 mile) and turn left, still for Flexcombe.

Continue along the lane until immediately before the entrance to Woolshers Cottages. Turn right onto an extremely rough byway which runs alongside the drive to Woolshers, separated from it by a hedge.

In all but the best weather, the byway is likely to be very muddy and you'll probably find it difficult, if not impossible, to ride. Indeed, there are parts where you may be better off carrying your bike than trying to push it through the mud. Make sure you're wearing footwear which is waterproof and has a good grip.

After about half a mile of this struggle, the track begins to climb more noticeably and, with the better, gravelled, surface the

going eases a little. When you come to the end of the byway (2 miles), turn left onto the road which continues the climb. All along this road there are some wonderful views back over Liss and the surrounding Rother Valley. At the crest, on the right, is the attractive house of Wheatham Farm, built of the local malmstone (here a chalky-grey colour), with some Elizabethan or Jacobean mullioned windows.

From Wheatham Farm there's a short run down to a junction. Turn right, following the sign for 'Oakshott & Priors Dean'. After a short climb, turn in at the entrance on the left by the sign for Ashford Hangers, a national nature reserve. The hangers are beech woods which clothe the steep chalk escarpment at the western edge of the Weald of southern England.

From the gate into the hanger a byway, called Old Litten Lane, climbs the steep hillside. There's a fork just inside the gate; keep to the well-maintained main track going straight ahead at first, then curving gently to the right. Don't be in too much of a hurry here – not that the gradient will allow you to make rapid progress – but take the opportunity to enjoy the views to the left which gradually open out as you slowly climb the hill.

As you continue round the curve the slope steepens further and the hillside falls away from the edge of the track in an almost sheer drop into the valley below.

You'll do very well to stay in the saddle here – the track climbs 275 feet in about a quarter of a mile – so save your energy and enjoy a walk instead. You'll also have more of a chance to spot the wildlife which inhabits these woodlands and to enjoy the ever-broadening views.

After a short while the slope eases, but so too does the surface. If the weather's been bad you'll soon find yourself faced by some

very sticky clay and mud, but you can sidestep most of the very bad patches.

When a bridleway goes off to the left down the hill keep straight on. A short way further on there's another Ashford Hangers sign, facing the opposite way (3 miles). Along this stretch there are yew trees bordering the track, as well as beech, as it begins to level out. Soon the woods give way, on the right-hand side at least, to open fields, and the extra light helps to keep the surface drier. Another bridleway goes off to the left and then the track passes through another gateway.

☞ *Just ahead, another track goes off through a gate on the right. If you're short of time and want to take a short-cut to Hawkley, turn right here and follow the track down the hill. (It's steep and very rough in places.) At the bottom turn left onto the road and follow it through Oakshott to a T-junction with the Priors Dean to Hawkley road.*

Continue straight ahead until you come to another turning on the right, signed Old Litten Lane.

☞ *The main route turns to the right here (there's a pub in that direction, the need of which you may well feel after your recent exertions). However, it does involve another length of potentially-muddy byway. For an alternative, see end of route.*

Turn right into the continuation of Old Litten Lane, which is in much better condition than the previous part. The track is level at first, then descends gently. After a quarter of a mile it becomes a tarred lane serving as the drive to a thatched cottage. Keep straight on until you come to a junction with another narrow lane, then bear left (4 miles). This is the delightfully-named Honeycritch Lane (to the right it leads to the equally wonderful Happernapper Hanger.) Continue until you come to the road. The

pub is a short distance to the right. Take care, because this road can be busy.

🏠 *The Trooper Inn, Froxfield. Free house. 01730 827293. Food G*

Cross the road onto a bridleway opposite the end of Honeycritch Lane. Most of it's in good condition, although there are some soft patches. The track leads through a gate and then veers to the right across a small paddock. Leave it through another gate and turn left along the tarred drive of Rings Green Farm. Watch out for the speed bump near the end of the drive.

When you come to the road, turn right. There's a gentle uphill climb as far as South Dean Farm, from where the road runs down past The Slade (5 miles), an impressive Georgian-style house on the right. After the stiff climb of Ashford Hanger, the gently-undulating landscape of this plateau comes as quite a surprise and, no doubt, quite a relief.

The road climbs briefly into the village of High Cross. St Peter's church is on the right, just after the turning to Privett; a Victorian building built of flint, with an unusual octagonal tower. There's a phone box on the left just as you leave the village.

🏠 *Froxfield Stores & Post Office, High Cross Lane.*

② High Cross to Priors Dean

Keep straight on over a small crossroads, after which there's an easy run downhill. Pass Bydean Farm (approaching 6 miles), then take the next turning on the right, almost half a mile further on. It isn't signposted, but you can recognise it by the tall pylon immediately beside the junction.

The narrowness of the lane can deceive you into thinking you're unlikely to encounter any traffic. The author made that mistake and came nose to nose with a police car, remembering that he had

meant to adjust his brakes before setting out.

At the far end turn right onto another indistinct lane which bends to the right by Bower Farm. Here you join the route taken by William Cobbett on one of his Rural Rides in November 1822. He stayed overnight at Bower Farm, which he described as 'in about as lonely a situation as I ever saw. A very pleasant place however. The lands dry, a nice mixture of woods and fields, and a great variety of hill and dell.' It's little different today.

Cobbett rode from Bower to Hawkley along the very lanes you'll follow on this ride. His delightful description of that journey and of how this countryside looked almost 200 years ago is well worth reading and is reproduced in the panel.

From Bower Farm the lane climbs gently for a short way (7 miles) then falls a little more steeply. Ignore all the side turnings, but when the lane divides take the left-hand fork. A mile of climbing follows.

Keep going over a crossroads (8 miles), after which the climb steepens as the lane approaches the Petersfield to Winchester turnpike mentioned in Cobbett's record of his ride. Today its role has been taken over by the A272 further to the south, but a fair amount of traffic continues to use the old route, so be careful in crossing it.

Continue on the other side of the turnpike in the direction of East Tisted. By the junction is a pub sign without a signboard. The pub itself can be found by taking the second entrance on the right; a smaller version of the sign stands by the entrance.

The Pub with no Name at Priors Dean is more properly but less prosaically known as the White Horse Inn. The alternative name commemorates the local poet Edward Thomas, for whom this was a favourite haunt. In his

poem *Up in the Wind*, written in 1914, he described the pub and its lonely surroundings, and related how the signboard was stolen and thrown in the pond.

🏠 *The White Horse Inn, Priors Dean. Gales. 01420 588387. Food G GPG*

Pass the entrance to the pub and then take the next turning on the right, signposted to 'Priors Dean & Hawkley' (a little under 9 miles). The lane immediately begins to plunge downhill, steepening as it goes, but all too soon you're in the bottom of a dip and facing a sharp climb up again.

At the top of the rise, and again at the following junction, keep straight on in the direction of Priors Dean. Open fields line the road now, making a pleasant change after riding for some way through tree- and hedge-lined, sunken lanes.

③ Priors Dean to Hawkley

Priors Dean: You come across the tiny hamlet of Priors Dean all of a sudden. "Priors Dean is so concealed one seems to be coming to the end of all things when suddenly the brown-tiled grey church, with its wooden bell turret and old porch, is found by the roadway opposite the old manor farm and one cottage, which is all of a village to be seen! There is something at once peaceful and pathetic about the solitariness and simplicity of the little Norman and Early English church, that stands in its grassy plot by the few tombstones and many mounds of forgotten dead, unrecorded except in that Book which never has an error."

So wrote Arthur B Connor in 1908, in his *Highways and Byways of Hampshire*. Not a great deal has changed except for the red telephone box by the entrance to the three-storey, manor house. You can see how the house has been extended at its left end. Its front is of red brick, but at the back malmstone has also been used.

The entrance to the little church is a few yards up the turning opposite the manor house.

Rural Ride to Hawkley Hanger

in the words of William Cobbett

At Bower I got instructions to go to Hawkley, but accompanied with most earnest advice not to go that way, for that it was impossible to get along. The roads were represented as so bad; the floods so much out; the hills and bogs so dangerous; that, really, I began to *doubt*; and, if I had not been brought up amongst the clays of the Holt Forest and the bogs of the neighbouring heaths, I should certainly have turned off to my right, to go over Hindhead, great as was my objection to going that way. "Well, then," said my friend at Bower, "If you *will* go that way, by G—, you must go down *Hawkley Hanger*," of which he then gave me *such* a description! But, even this I found to fall short of the reality.

I went through green lanes and bridle-ways till I came to the turnpike-road from Petersfield to Winchester, which I crossed, going into a narrow and almost untrudged green-lane, on the side of which I found a cottage. Upon my asking the way to *Hawkley*, the woman at the cottage said "Right up the lane, Sir: you'll come to a *hanger* presently: you must take care, Sir: you can't ride down : will your horses *go alone*?"

On we trotted up this pretty green lane... it was between highish banks, so that we could see no distance from us, and could receive not the smallest hint of what was so near at hand. The lane had a little turn towards the end; so that, out we came, all in a moment, at the very edge of the hanger! And, never, in all my life was I so surprised and so delighted! I pulled up my horse, and sat and looked; and it was like looking down from the top of a castle down into the sea, except that the valley was land and not water. Those who had strenuously dwelt on the dirt and dangers of this route, had not said a word about the beauties, the matchless beauties of the scenery.

...Even the *contrast* in the view from the top of the hanger is as great as can possibly be imagined. Men, however, are not to have such beautiful views as this without some trouble. We had had the view; but we had to go down the hanger. The horses took the lead, and crept partly down upon their feet and partly upon their hocks. It was extremely slippery too; for the soil is a sort of marl, or, as they call it here, maume, or mame, which is, when wet, very much like *grey soap*. In such a case it was likely that I should keep in the rear, which I did, and I descended by taking hold of the branches of the underwood, and so letting myself down.


...After seeing Hawkley, every other places loses in point of beauty and interest.

Sunday, 24 November, 1822

Not for the Faint-hearted

The sign proclaims the building to have Saxon origins, but the doorway is Norman. Beside the gate is a massive, gnarled yew tree, which may well have been there since the church was built.

Keep straight on, following the sign for 'Oakshott & Hawkley', past the tiny telephone exchange (10 miles). Just ahead a sign warns of an impending steep hill (1 in 5). As you get to the very brow of the hill veer left onto a narrow track. It's signed as a bridleway.

 *The clay surface of the track which leads down through Hawkley Hanger (Cobbett's 'grey soap') makes for hard and slippery work after wet weather, and to make things more interesting it also includes two stretches along the side of ploughed fields. To compensate for this you'll enjoy some spectacular views but, if you prefer, you can continue along the road until you come to Hawkley.*

The bridleway cuts along the side of the hill, which falls sharply away to the right. After a short way it goes into a field (there's a Hampshire Cycleway sign to guide you.) At the corner of the field follow the path to the left; halfway up the slope the bridleway turns right out of the field back onto the wooded slopes of the hanger. (Once again, there are signs to guide you.)


After a short distance watch out for an indistinct path heading off to your left. It leads out onto the promontory of Hawkley Hanger and may have been the original route followed by William Cobbett.

Leave your bike near the main track and follow the path. Soon you'll find yourself on a rounded ridge, with the hillside falling away on both steep, tree-lined sides. Look to the right and you'll see the view described by Cobbett: "The hills that form cross-valleys run out into the main valley, like piers into the sea. Two of these promontories, of great height, were the


first objects that struck my sight when I came to the edge of the hanger. Their ends are nearly perpendicular, and their tops so high in the air, that you cannot look at the village below without something like a feeling of apprehension."

Continue to the very end and you're at the top of the slope so vividly described by Cobbett – his top of the castle – down which he went with his horse.

You, however, are best advised to make your way back to the main track. Reclaim your bike and continue along the track. Keep straight on when you come to a junction of tracks (about 11 miles), but a few yards beyond this turn right along the side of a field, heading towards the village of Hawkley. Continue past some houses (Homefield Cottages) to the road and turn left.


 *If you decided to continue along the road through Hawkley Hanger, you'll rejoin the main route here.*

A few yards further on is the village green, where the road forks. The ride continues to the left, signed for Empshott, but the village pub can be found a short way along Pockocks Lane to the right.

 *The Hawkley Inn, Hawkley. Free house. 01730 827205. Food (not Sun eve) G C Rest (GPG)*

④ Hawkley to Selborne

Pass the church, built in the neo-Norman style in 1865. It's constructed of chalk with an unusual top to its tower. The lane is lined with houses of varying styles, and at the far end, just before the T-junction, is the old village forge, now a private house, facing onto a small pond. Turn left at the junction; the sign for Lower Green had been broken off when we passed this way.

 *If you want to cut the ride short at this point, turn right at this junction to head*

straight back to Liss, or turn right and then immediately left to join the final stage of the ride.

A level stretch of road brings you to Lower Green, with its small pond and a cluster of houses, with the beech-clad slope of Hawkley Hanger providing a backdrop (12 miles). As you leave the village keep straight on, following the sign for Newton Valence. Pass the green itself and follow the road round to the left past Lower Green Farm.

There's a steady downhill run from Lower Green, at the bottom of which the road can be pretty wet at times. A sharp climb out of the dip leads to Vann, with its farmhouse and a couple of cottages by another small pond. Beyond the junction with the little lane to Empshott the road climbs gradually through woodland (just under 13 miles).


When you emerge from the woods at the top of the hill, look to the left to see the truly-magnificent Goleigh Manor. Much of the timber work has been dated to 1466, but the central part was rebuilt in 1646, although it has been suggested that it could include 14th-century parts.

The scenery opens up again from this point and the road runs between fields. Continue straight ahead at the next junction, and half a mile after that, at a crossroads, turn right then immediately left, following the signs for Newton Valence in both cases.

There's a long uphill climb from the crossroads along Hullam Lane, during which the 14-mile point is passed. The approach to Newton Valence is marked by the pond and war memorial; beyond them are the few houses and cottages which comprise the village, and finally the village hall. About 400 yards further on, take the turning on the right signposted 'Selborne', opposite the turning to Shotters Farm.

The lane passes the substantial, modern Newton Valence Farm (just over 15 miles). Behind it are the massed woodlands of Selborne Common, beautiful at any time, but particularly so in autumn when the leaves turn an infinite variety of golden colours.

The road runs downhill, skirting the northern slopes of Selborne Hill. A sharp bend to the right (almost 16 miles) is followed by a winding stretch through the outskirts of Selborne. Eventually you come to a T-junction with the B3006 at the end of Gracious Street. Turn right here, taking care because of the traffic.

 *If you want to link with Ride F, turn left here and follow the B3006 for just over half a mile to the junction with Hall Lane.*

The heart of the village is just around the corner. If you want to pause, as you surely will, you can pull in to The Plestor, the open space behind which the church, with its curiously squat tower, is tucked away.

In the middle of this space there once stood a massive oak tree, short but with branches that spread to fill almost the entire area, surrounded by stone steps with seats above them, making a favourite gathering place for the young and old of the village alike. Sadly, it blew down in a storm in 1703 and, despite great efforts to set it back in place, it did not survive.

Selborne is famous as the birthplace and home of Gilbert White, from time to time curate of the village and author of 'The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne', published in 1788.


White was one of the first naturalists, as we would recognise them today, and his book has become a classic. He loved the countryside which surrounded his home and the wildlife it contained, a love which comes through clearly in his delightful prose.


Equally fascinating are his descriptions of the local countryside, much of which has


changed in the last 200 years although, remarkably, once you're off the beaten track, a great deal remains unaltered. In contrast, his tales of village life and farming practices reflect a scene which has long vanished.


White's home, The Wakes, is now a museum which celebrates his life and work and the local countryside. Also housed in the building is the Oates Museum, which commemorates Captain Lawrence Oates, a member of Scott's ill-fated expedition to the Antarctic in 1912, as well as his uncle, Frank, a Victorian naturalist and explorer of Africa and South America.

The Wakes is open daily from 11–5 from Mid-March to Christmas, and at weekends during the winter. Admission £3.50 adults, £3 concession, £1 children. Access to the shop and tea room is free. ☎ 01420 511275.

 *The Wakes Tea Parlour. Open same hours as museum. "Delicious fare based on 18th-century recipes".*

 *Queen's Hotel, Selborne. Ushers. 01420 511454. Open all day. Food G C Rest Acc*

 *Selborne Arms, Selborne. Free house. 01420 511247. Food G C Rest*

 *Selborne PO & Stores. Open 7.15–6.00 (7.30 on Sat)*

⑤ Selborne to Empshott

By all means explore the rest of the village, (on a practical note there's a car park further along the road – busy at popular times – and public toilets), but the ride turns left into Huckers Lane immediately beyond the Queen's Hotel. The lane heads sharply downhill; before long a stream joins it and stays alongside until the lane comes to an end at an idyllically-situated cottage (17 miles). Cross the gravelled area in front of the cottage and join a unsurfaced byway on the far side.

The byway leads through the beautiful valley called the Long Lythe, through which runs the Selborne, the stream which gives the village its name. The track runs along the hillside on the south of the

valley, the other side of which is largely owned by the National Trust. Fallen trees seem to be common on this track so you may need to lift your bike over them.

After a while you'll come to a gate at the end of the woods. Pass through it onto a rough track which runs along the side of a field. This stretch can be extremely muddy after wet weather, although it's possible to sidestep most of the particularly bad spots.

The track comes to an end by Priory Farm, built on the site of Selborne Priory. Indeed, the track probably came into being as the link between Priory and village. It was a house of the Augustinian order, founded by Bishop des Roches of Winchester in 1233 and suppressed by Pope Innocent VIII in 1486. Little remains of its buildings, though doubtless many of its stones have been incorporated in houses, farms and roads throughout the area. Its site has been excavated to reveal the foundations of the church, 205 feet long, chapels, and cloister.

Turn right onto the road at the end of the track and climb the hill past Rhode Farm (18 miles). At the T-junction at the top turn left into Honey Lane, signposted 'Oakhanger'. If you look to the left you can see the 'golf-ball' radar installations of RAF Oakhanger.

The lane runs downhill and passes Selborne brickworks, with its tall chimney, still in operation and one of the few left in the county. Once a local activity serving local needs, brickmaking has become a mass-production industry carried out in a small number of massive works. The distinctive look of local bricks, which give older buildings a regional character, has been replaced, sadly, by today's national uniformity.

A little further along the lane is Albury Dairy. Keep straight on for Blackmoor at the junction just beyond it (19 miles).

After Old Albury Farm there's a steady climb to the village of Blackmoor, with its ornate church, village hall (once the school), and a most unusual cloistered war memorial.

Blackmoor: the look of the buildings – from the church, extravagant for such a small place, to the uniformity of the cottages – immediately suggests a village dominated by the local estate.

Blackmoor House and the church, were designed by Alfred Waterhouse for Sir Roundell Palmer. Palmer a barrister by profession, became an MP, first for Plymouth in 1847, when he was 35, and later for Richmond, Yorks. His 'keen and subtle legal mind', as it has been described, won him promotion as Solicitor-General in Palmerston's administration, with a knighthood, in 1861, and as Attorney-General two years later.

When Gladstone won the election of December 1868 it was expected that Palmer would become Lord Chancellor, but he declined over the issue of the disendowment of the Irish church. By 1872 the situation had changed and he accepted the office, being created Baron Selborne.

He was out of office during the period of Disraeli's government, but returned as Lord Chancellor when Gladstone became Prime Minister again in 1880. Two years later, on the occasion of the opening of the new Law Courts in The Strand, he was created the first Earl of Selborne. He served as Lord Chancellor until 1885, but his opposition to Irish home rule meant that he would not join Gladstone's third administration. He died in May 1895 and was buried in St Matthew's church in Blackmoor.

In 1865 he purchased the 1,800 acres of the Temple and Blackmoor estates, and commissioned the building of Blackmoor House on the site of the old farmhouse. He also procured the formation of Blackmoor as a separate ecclesiastical parish from Selborne, and contributed a large sum of money towards its endowment. He also commissioned the building of the church, parsonage, and schools.

The church was built first, in 1868. The house, built 1869–73 in the Tudor style, is said to have cost £25,000, a fantastic sum for the time. Even so, it was extended only 10 years after being built.

Gilbert White was impressed by the quality of the oak trees grown in Blackmoor. Along with those of nearby Temple, they stood high, he said, in the estimation of purveyors and furnished much naval timber.

He records that on the Blackmoor estate there was a small wood called Losel's which contained some remarkable oak trees that grew very tall, like firs, and straight, without large branches. In about 1770 a bridge near Hampton Court needed replacing. The timber for the job had to be 50 feet long without boughs, and at least 12 inches in diameter at the small end. Losel's provided no fewer than twenty such trees that met this requirement, and even exceeded it.

Continuing from the church the lane passes a couple of estate cottages, with a tiny nurse's cottage on the end. By the road junction, a short way ahead, is a converted oast house. Turn right at the junction, by the red phone box, signed to 'Bradshott & Temple', then keep straight on into Sotherington Lane. Blackmoor House is to the left (20 miles).

After a little more than half a mile, turn left, following the sign for Bradshott. The quiet lane leads past Brockbridge Farm and Dairy. Big, modern barns dominate the scene, but a superb half-timbered cottage compensates for the intrusion. In contrast, there's a startling modern house on the left, a few hundred yards on, just as the road bends to the right (21 miles).

There's a long, steady climb from this point to Bradshott. Pass the entrance to Bradshott Hall, with its farm, on the right. The road runs along the hillside now, and there are extensive views to the right. Some converted oast houses are tucked into the hillside below the road and as you

approach the top of the climb the hillside drops steeply away from the road.

The road bends sharply to the right by the entrance to Le Court, one of the Cheshire Foundation homes. Once again, you're in open countryside. When you come to the B3006 (just over 22 miles) turn left for about 150 yards, then take the turning on the right for Empshott.

The prominent hill by the junction is Noar Hill, the twin of Selborne Hill, and now a nature reserve. Two streams rise on the hill, within a few hundred yards of each other. One, the Selborne stream, flows east to join the River Wey and thence into the Thames and the North Sea. The other becomes the River Rother and, having joined the Arun, flows into the English Channel at Littlehampton.

⑥ Empshott to Liss


Empshott is a tiny village. The 13th century church can be found along the lane which branches off to the left at the top of the 1 in 10 steep hill. The unusual bell-turret, with its glazed upper part, was added in late Victorian times.

The ride continues straight ahead down the hill. The road curves to the right, runs through a cutting, then bends to the left. At the bottom the road surface is rather rough, so take care. There's a climb out of the dip which steepens as it nears the top at the junction with a lane to Empshott Green. Keep straight on in the direction of Hawkley.

To the left you can catch a glimpse of a lovely valley, but it's soon hidden as the lane runs downhill into another cutting through the Greensand. When you emerge you're rewarded by beautiful views along the valley of the River Rother. The road descends to cross the river by the old mill cottage (23 miles). Watch out for some more rough spots on the road

surface in the bottom of the dip. There's a short but steep climb from the bridge before the road levels out for a brief while and runs along a shelf on the side of the valley. However, it's not long before the climbing resumes, steepening as you approach the top.

When you come to the top of the climb, take the turning on the left, a no-through-road, signed 'Hawkley Hurst & Mabbotts'.

 *The next stretch includes a section of bridleway along a field edge, which may be very muddy, although generally passable, if only on foot. If you prefer to avoid it, ignore this turning and keep straight on to the T-junction at Lower Green, then turn left. (You've already been along this next length of road in the other direction.) Take the next turning on the left to reach Uplands, where you rejoin the main route.*

Be very careful here; it's very easy to miss your next turn. From the junction the lane rises to a crest; about 50 yards on the other side, just as the lane begins to bend to the left, look for a steep, worn path leading up the bank to the right. It's criss-crossed by tree roots and you'll almost certainly have to carry your bike up it. When you get to the top of the bank you'll see a bridleway sign pointing along the edge of a field, heading towards a large house on the horizon.


The track is grassy but a bit bumpy, and it can be squelchy in places. Behind the hedge on the left the hillside falls steeply into another valley, along which there are some more superb views. Follow the track to the right round the corner of the field to reach a fieldgate which leads onto the road beside a pond.

Turn left and pass Uplands, from where the lane climbs steadily for a couple of hundred yards. At the crest (24 miles), the lane bends to the left as it descends a 1 in 6 hill, then, as the gradient eases, it curves


to the right. As you follow the road round, look to the left to see the site of the great landslip which took place in March 1774 (see panel). Even today, two hundred years later, you can still see how the ground of the hillside is twisted and deformed. It was caused by the chalk sliding over the wet Gault clay beneath it.

The cottage mentioned by Gilbert White in his account of the event was rebuilt and is now called, appropriately, Slip Cottage. The farm, Scotland Farm, is further down the hill. A long, straight, but gentle descent ends as the road bends to the left by Primmers, a cottage built of ironstone.


If you still haven't had enough off-road cycling for one day, turn right onto a narrow track just before the bend.


 *If you want to avoid this track, see the alternative route described at the end.*


At the far end of the track, turn left and then keep going past Lyss Place and over the A3 until you come out on the B3006 by the Spread Eagle at West Liss, then turn right.


 *The Spread Eagle, West Liss. Friary Meux. 01730 999999. Closed Mon lunch. Food.*


Liss station, and the end of the ride, is half a mile further on. If you've completed the entire ride you'll no doubt be ready for a spot of refreshment at one of the village's pubs.

 *The Crossing Gates, Station Road. Ushers. 01730 999999. Food G Acc*

 *The Whistle Stop, Station Road. Ushers. 01730 999999. Food (including breakfast)*


 *Café 57, Station Road: café and licensed restaurant*

 *The Sensible Bicycle Company, Station Road. 01730 894884. Open Mon–Fri 12–7 (until 8 on Thu), Sat 10–5.*

 *There is a good selection of shops in Liss*

Alternative sections of route

① Liss to High Cross


 *This alternative start to the ride bypasses the very difficult track from Flexcombe.*

From Liss station entrance turn right over the level crossing and head out of the village. There's a slight rise as you head through West Liss. At the T-junction at the end of Station Road, by the Blue Bell pub (see main text for details), turn right, signposted 'Farnham & Liphook'. Follow the road round to the left and then, at the next junction, by the Spread Eagle pub, turn left for 'Hawkley & Priors Dean'.

The narrow lane crosses the A3 bypass, then heads towards the hills. The entrance to Lyss Place, parts of which date back to the 14th century, is a little way along the road (1 mile), but apart from this there are only the occasional cottages to be seen.

A short downhill run is followed by a more undulating stretch. To the left is the tree-cloaked Wheatham Hill, which we will soon be climbing. To reach it, take the next turning on the left, signposted 'Wheatham & Steep Marsh'. There's a level run from the junction but then the lane starts to climb. To compensate for this, ever-more distant views begin to unfold as you make your way up the hill. At the 2-mile point the track from Flexcombe emerges on the left and you rejoin the main route.

① Liss to High Cross

 *This alternative avoids the often-muddy bridleway through Rings Green Farm.*

From the junction of Old Litten Lane continue straight ahead into Cockshott

The Great Landslip of Hawkley Hanger

by Gilbert White

"The months of January and February, in the year 1774, were remarkable for great melting snows and vast gluts of rain; so that by the end of the latter month the land-springs began to prevail, and to be near as high as in the memorable winter of 1764.

"The beginning of March also went on in the same tenor; when, in the night between the 8th and 9th of that month, a considerable part of the great woody hanger at Hawkley was torn from its place, and fell down, leaving a high free-stone cliff naked and bare, and resembling the steep side of a chalk-pit.

"It appears that this huge fragment, being perhaps sapped and undermined by waters, foundered, and was engulfed, going down in a perpendicular direction; for a gate which stood in the field, on the top of the hill, after sinking with its posts for thirty or forty feet, remained in so true and upright a position as to open and shut with great exactness, just as in its first situation. Several oaks also are still standing, and in a state of vegetation, after taking the same desperate leap.

"That great part of this prodigious mass was absorbed in some gulf below, is plain also from the inclining ground at the bottom of the hill, which is free and unencumbered; but would have been buried in heaps of rubbish had the fragment parted and fallen forward.

"About a hundred yards from the foot of this hanging coppice stood a cottage by the side of a lane, and two hundred yards lower, on the other side of the lane, was a farm-house, in which lived a labourer and his family; and, just by, a stout new barn. The cottage was inhabited by an old woman and her son, and his wife. These people in the evening, which was very dark and tempestuous, observed that the brick floors of their kitchens began to heave and part; and that the walls seemed to open, and the roofs to crack. The miserable inhabitants, not daring to go to bed, remained in the utmost solicitude and confusion, expecting every moment to be buried under the ruins of their shattered edifices.

"When daylight came they found that a deep rift had opened under their houses, and torn them in two, and that one end of the barn had suffered in a similar manner; and that a pond near the cottage had undergone a strange reverse, becoming deep at the shallow end and vice-versa."

Lane, which is slightly better surfaced. Further along, when you reach some houses, it becomes tarred.

Cockshott Lane: *look out for the Red House, designed by Alfred Powell, one of the leading lights of the Arts and Crafts movement. It was built for the poet Edward Thomas and his wife to rent, but they found it rather isolated and depressing, and soon moved into Steep village below the hill.*

The Red House was built by Geoffrey Lupton, whose own house and workshop occupy the same plot of land. Lupton was an old boy of Bedales school in Steep, and built several houses in the neighbourhood for masters at the school or for parents of children attending it. He also built the Hall and the Library at the school, paying for the former out of his own pocket.

Lupton's house and workshop were taken over by Edward Barnsley in 1923, who became one of the finest cabinet makers in the country. Much of the furniture in the Bedales Library is by him.

At the far end of Cockshott Lane turn right onto the main road, then take the next turning on the left, signposted 'High Cross & Privett'. Continue straight ahead at the next crossroads. The main route joins the road about 400 yards further on.

⑤ Empshott to Liss

After the bend at Primmers there is another straight stretch. Walpole Cottage, a little further along, is built of a different material, malmstone (25 miles). After a small group of houses the lane crosses a bridge over the River Rother and climbs a slight rise to a junction with the B3006.

Turn right onto the main road. Take care, because it can be busy at times. At the junction with the road to Greatham follow the main road round to the right, in the direction of Liss. Almost half a mile further on (during which you pass the 26-mile

mark), you come to a roundabout on the A3. Take even more care at this major junction, and dismount if you feel unsure about crossing the constant flow of traffic.

Once over the A3 follow the B3006 on towards West Liss and Liss. Continue to the junction by the Bluebell Inn (27 miles) and turn left into Station Road, following the sign for Liss.

 *The Blue Bell, Farnham Road. Free house. 01730 892107. Food.G Rest*