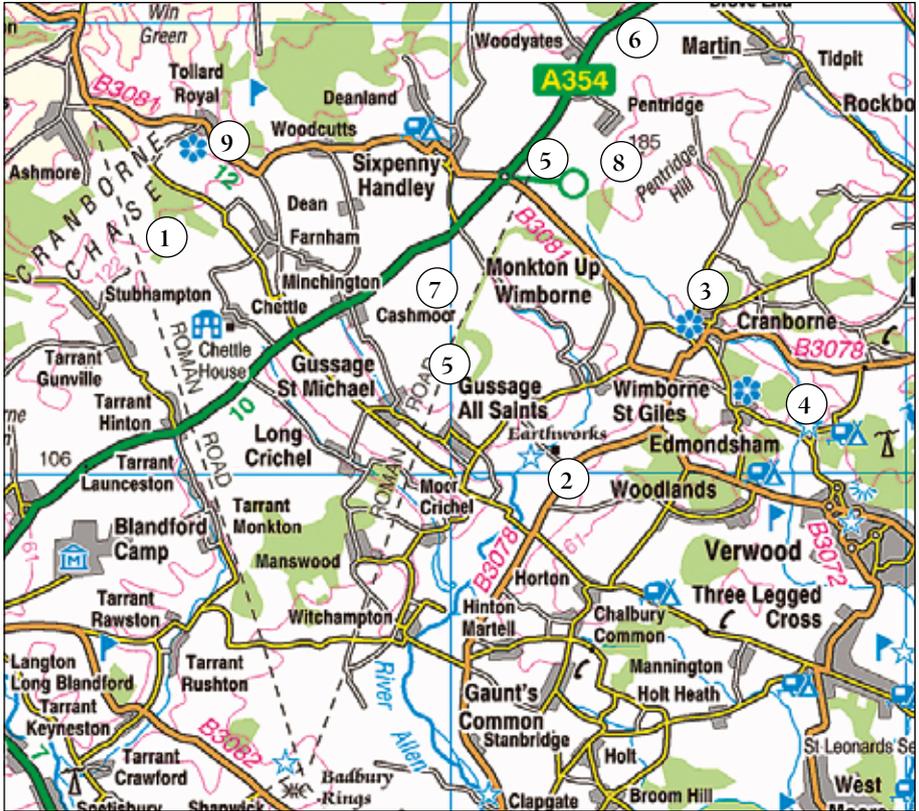


ITINERARY #13 - CRANBORNE CHASE



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CRANBORNE CHASE is a complete contrast to most of the rest of Dorset. There are no towns, only pretty little villages, many with interesting names. Examples include Biddlesgate, Cripplestytle, Gussage All Saints, Sixpenny Handley and Witchampton.

The countryside is gently rolling chalk downland, with huge skies and distant views from low hills and ridges. Unlike in the rest of Dorset, there are few hedges, while the lanes tend to be straight. The only watercourse of any size is the River Allen, a tributary of the Stour.

Exploration of this area of East Dorset is greatly facilitated by the lack of busy main roads. Only the A354 and B3082 are unsuitable for

cyclists or walkers. Visitors are spoiled for choice by the many quiet side roads, tracks, byways and footpaths.

Augustus Pitt Rivers was a 19th century ethnologist and archaeologist who revolutionised the way museums displayed human artefacts. In 1880 he inherited nearly 13,000ha in Cranborne Chase and for nearly 20 years he excavated Roman, Saxon and other sites here.

Pitt Rivers was the first person in Britain to take a scientific and methodical approach to archaeology. His legacy was a flowering of methodical, painstaking excavations, rather than mere casual treasure hunting. Many of his artefacts can be seen at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and in Salisbury Museum.

ORDNANCE SURVEY 1:50,000 & 1:25,000 MAPS

OS Landranger Map 183 Yeovil & Frome; Map 184 Salisbury & The Plain
 Map 194 Dorchester & Weymouth; Map 195 Bournemouth & Purbeck
 OS Explorer Map 118 Shaftesbury & Cranborne Chase; Map 129 Yeovil & Sherborne

CRANBORNE CHASE

1. Cranborne Chase (page 261) is a chalk plateau which extends across the northern part of East Dorset. To the west, deep valleys have been incised into the chalk while to the south, the chalk dips and is overlain by clays and sands. Eastwards, the landscape is of vast, rolling hills and woodland. In former times the "Inner Bounds" were mostly forested, and were a prized royal hunting ground. Much of the area is given over to immense wheat fields.

2. Knowlton (page 268) is a uniquely evocative site about 3mi (5km) southwest of Cranborne on the B3078. A roofless 12th century Norman church sits in the middle of a Neolithic henge 106m by 94m with a wide ditch and bank. There are other less distinct circles and over 30 barrows in the vicinity. The Great Barrow, with its copse of trees is surrounded by a double ditch 120m in diameter. An Anglo-Saxon cemetery adds to the sense of romantic mystery here.

3. Cranborne (page 269) is a small village in the centre of Cranborne Chase. It is a good base from which to explore this interesting area. La Fosse is a first class restaurant with rooms in the centre of the village. The food and service is simply excellent. **Cranborne Manor** was originally a royal hunting lodge, and mostly dates from the early 17th century. The Manor Garden is open on Wednesdays only, from March to September. The Garden Centre, Cafe and Gift Shop are open all year.

4. The Heavy Horse Farm Park (page 260) is between Cranborne and Verwood. It offers a "unique day out for all the family" with a huge range of things to see and do, including wagon rides, and plenty of things for children to do.

5. Ackling Dyke (page 266, 270) is a Roman road which runs straight as a die from Old Sarum to Badbury Rings. Its course can be followed for most of its length; it can be walked from Bokerley Junction to near Gussage All Saints. Good places to inspect the road are from the B3081, near Wyke Down or Pentridge Hill. Other sections may be walked from Badbury Rings to Witchampton.

6. Martin Down National Nature Reserve (342ha, page 271) has a carpark off the A354 near Woodyates Hill (124m) where Dorset, Wiltshire and Hampshire meet. This chalk grassland reserve is famous for its wild flowers, including up to 12 species of orchids and butterflies. The star bird species is the rare and elusive Nightingale. Parts of both Bokerley Dyke and Grim's Ditch are included in the reserve.

Bokerley Dyke (page 270) forms part of the north-east border between Dorset and Hampshire. It was probably built in the Iron Age as the Ackling Dyke Roman road drives straight through it. It was rebuilt in c.367, probably by the Romans, to defend against a concerted invasion by Saxons and Picts.

Grim's Ditch (page 270) is also thought to have originated in the Iron Age. It is about 14mi (23km) long and may have enclosed 16mi² (41km²) in this border area.

7. The Dorset Cursus (page 270) runs northeast for over 6mi (10km) from Thickthorn Down to Bokerley Down. The largest of its type in Britain, it has two parallel banks 80m apart and associated ditches 1m deep and 3m wide. It is aligned to the midwinter sunset. The southwest terminus at Thorncombe Down is perhaps the best preserved part. The monument can be best discerned with a low winter sun as it is largely ploughed out.

8. Pentridge Hill (185m, page 271) offers a panoramic view from a small fort at its summit. It can be included in a visit to Martin Down and is a good viewpoint for both the Cursus and Ackling Dyke.

9. The Larmer Tree Gardens (page 261) are near Tollard Royal, about 2.5mi (4km) westwards along the B3081. They were created by General Pitt Rivers in 1880 and, "Recognised by English Heritage as a Garden of National Importance, they were first privately owned gardens to be opened for public enjoyment." The gardens are open from April to October. The flowers are best in high summer, while the autumn colours are magnificent. Ornamental birds, including Macaws and Peacocks add to the scene.