

Welcome to the Cross-Island Histree Trail

The Kings and Dragons Histree Trail is 16.3km (10.1 miles) long. The trail begins at Carisbrooke and ends in Brighstone. It presents a moderately challenging walk. There are stiles and gates to negotiate, some steep inclines and descents. The trail may also be muddy in places.

Getting There

Bus: 6, 38 and Medina Breezer to Carisbrooke Priory for trail's start. 7 from Three Bishops pub at the end of the trail, also stops at Shorwell.

Car: There is limited parking available on Whitcombe Road opposite Carisbrooke Priory..

Follow the text and use the map to explore the Kings and Dragons Histree Trail. Cross parish boundaries as you travel from the heart of Island to its south west coast. Meet the Green Man, see the Hairy Oak and wonder at The Dragon Tree.

The Kings and Dragons Histree Trail begins to the south of Carisbrooke Castle. Cross the road to Carisbrooke Priory to join Nunnery Lane. The first trees on the trail are the **Corsican Pine** trees to your right forming a neat row along the lane **(1)**. It is likely that they were planted as a windbreak.

Nunnery Lane has magnificent views. Pass several farms until you meet Marvel Lane. Marvel, meaning 'the pleasant open country', was first recorded in the 17th century. Turn right past Watergate Farm and join bridleway N110 towards Sandy Lane to the **Hairy Oak (2)**. This bizarre tree sits on the bank as the footpath bends. It is covered in bushy, scruffy growth from trunk to tip. This is called 'epicormic growth', when new shoots are borne direct from the trunk. The tree is best viewed once the

leaves have dropped revealing the full extent of its hairiness!

Continue past Woodlands Cottage to your left pausing to admire the mature **Fig** tree which leans casually away from the cottage. This tree is thought to date back to the early 19th century where diary entries from a visitor to the Island commented on the cottage gardens and in particular the healthy **Figs**.

The bridleway climbs and veers right. Here, to your right is a tall **Beech** tree standing within Marvel Copse, the site of an ancient woodland **(3)**. In the 1960s, significant felling occurred to accommodate a plantation of **Larch**. **Larch** wood has since fallen out of favour and the plantation went derelict. Much of the Larch and other invasive species have now been clear felled and 2000 native tree saplings planted. The towering **Beech** with its irregular boughs is only one of a handful of survivors from the ancient woods.

Pass Marvel Copse to join the ancient holloway known as Copse Lane, which once formed the main highway between Carisbrooke and Gatcombe to the south. Follow the bridleway across the open fields heading towards the red brick tower of Whitecroft. Upon meeting Sandy Lane, turn left past Whitecroft Farm. Take care on Sandy Lane as there are no pavements.

The lane peaks and then descends. At the turning to footpath G5 continue down Sandy Lane for approximately 150 metres passing several mature **Oak** trees to your left. The shorter tree towards the end of the row is home to The Green Man **(4)**. Can you spot him?

Retrace your steps to join footpath G5. As you climb, you will cross the boundary between the

parishes of Newport and Gatcombe. To your left the remains of the old bank boundary are visible. This mossy mound is populated by small, characterful **Oak** and **Field Maple** trees **(5)**. Immediately behind is a formal row of **Beech** and **Pine** trees. This area is known as Hungry Hill, taking its name from unproductive soil.

The path descends steeply through a **Larch** and **Sweet Chestnut** plantation to meet a low-lying wet area. Cross this area using the boardwalks and then continue straight ahead. This footpath will take you to Whitcombe Road.

Turn right here, taking care along the short stretch of unpaved road, then take the next turning on the left into Rectory Lane. Pass Hill Farm following the lane as it bends to the right. Along the boundary embankment of the Old Rectory you can see mature **Oak** and **Yew** trees overhanging the lane. Take the next left and descend into the hamlet of Gatcombe, which means 'the valley where goats are kept'.

Upon meeting Gatcombe Road, there is the option of visiting Gatcombe Tea Rooms located approx. 300 metres to your right. To continue with the trail, turn left and make your way along the lane towards St. Olave's Church.

St. Olave's Church dates back to the 13th century when it was the chapel to Gatcombe House. Towards the back of the churchyard, is the imposing bulk of a huge **Common Lime** tree, one of the largest on the Island **(6)**. The base of the tree trunk is completely obscured by the characteristic, spiky growth. Look closely for the balled growth on the largest limb for it is said that this is the broom of an evil witch, punished for her misuse of magic and banished to the bough of the tree for eternity.

Leave the churchyard and turn left to join footpath G11 which takes you through a young wooded area of **Sycamore** and **Beech**. In spring to early summer the ground is covered with Wild Garlic or Ramsons. When in flower, it really is a spectacular sight and smell!

Keep to footpath G11 until arriving at an old **Ash** tree nestled in the hedgerow to your left as you near Sheat Cottages. Once past the cottages, bear right to join bridleway G8 which provides uninterrupted views of the landscapes to the south. Ahead you will see Tolt Copse rising on the hill, the next destination. Bridleway G8 becomes G6 for a short distance and upon reaching the fork, take the left footpath G9 through the grove and gate. As the path begins to climb more steeply you will enter Tolt Copse **(7)**.

Tolt Copse takes its name the Old English word 'tot' meaning 'isolated hill'. This exposed copse feels almost precarious in places as you make your way along the elevated, winding path. This is ancient woodland meaning that it has been wooded since at least the 1600s. The trees in the copse are mainly **Ash** with an understorey of **Hazel**.

Cross the boundary stile to leave Tolt Copse, then the nearby stile to join Chillerton Down and head towards the television mast. This area is open access land and managed by the National Trust. Livestock sensitively graze the chalk grassland, a rare habitat supporting many plant and insect species of note. The remains of the Island's only Iron Age hill fort can be found here.

Continue across Chillerton Down in a westerly direction. The climb may be hard going in places but is certainly rewarding with breathtaking panoramic views of the Island's rural landscapes

from Culver Cliff to the east towards Blackgang in the south.

After crossing the second stile, the mast should now be to your right. Look for the disused quarry and begin your descent to join footpath G12a, becoming footpath G12 as it follows the hedgerow at the foot of the down.

Standing in the old hedgerow to your left marking the boundary between the parishes of Gatcombe and Shorwell is an old **Field Maple (8)**. This is a multi-stemmed tree which indicates that it may have been laid in the past. Hedgelaying is a traditional practice of partially cutting and laying small trees and shrubs to provide a stock proof barrier. This often produces multiple stems where regeneration has occurred.

Pause at this tree to gaze southwards and try to imagine Elme Farm – recorded as 'The elme place' in 1507 and later as 'Elm' on Andrew's map of 1769. There is now no evidence of Elm, though curiously it still features on Ordnance Survey maps. The elm trees which once stood here must have been impressive, local landmarks.

Crossing the parish boundary means that this footpath has now become footpath SW15. As you make your way towards Shorwell, New Barn Farm should appear to your left nestled in the valley bottom. There is a short climb and then descent to join the hard surface footpath SW50 north of New Barn Farm. Standing alone in the pasture is a magnificent ancient **Ash** pollard **(9)**. Traditionally, pollarding involved regularly cutting trees at heights of around six feet to prevent livestock browsing and damaging the new growth each year. As with coppicing, pollarding too can greatly extend the lifespan of a tree.

This isolated old **Ash** with its gnarled trunk and much younger, healthy growth on top was possibly once located in a hedgerow. It has such great character that would not look out of place on a film set.

Nearing the top of the path, turn left to join footpath SW14. Once through the gate, the footpath descends passing remnants of old **Hawthorn** and coppiced **Ash** hedgerow trees. Ranging views towards the southwest coast of the Island can also be enjoyed.

Head towards the top right corner of the field and upon meeting the upper gate, pass through. Immediately to your right, a towering **Beech** tree stands with its straight trunk and silvery-grey bark **(10)**.

Cross the wooden road bridge ahead over Shorwell Shute - you should make a wish as you cross the bridge. Once used by promenading ladies from North Court Estate, the bridge was rebuilt by villagers in the 1970s. The private estate contains an impressive collection of ornamental trees in particular **Horse Chestnut** and **Common Lime**.

Turn left to descend the path and cross the stile. An impressive **Horse Chestnut** tree stands on the opposite bank. Join Shorwell Shute taking care where there is no pavement. Keep to the right until past the thatched cottages, then cross to the small green on the left. A small **Common Lime** tree stands in the centre of the green.

From the green, continue down the High Street, crossing back over to view the milestone set into the wall and proceed to St. Peter's Church. On the roadside opposite stand several **Common Lime** trees **(11)**. This was once the entrance to North Court with large coach gates which

opened onto the road. The entrance was later relocated, the gates were dismantled and the **Common Lime** trees planted after World War II. Just beyond the mini-roundabout ahead is The Crown Inn, and an opportunity for some refreshment.

Shorwell has several wells, and takes its name from 'the spring or stream by the steep slope'. From The Crown, continue on the main road as it climbs slightly to become Walkers Lane. Join footpath SW3 here at stile on the left, just beyond the final house.

Walk across the field, over a small footbridge then cross another stile, Here this footpath converges with SW1a and can be boggy underfoot. Cross the second footbridge and you will pass an area of **Alder** carr or wet woodland to your right. This is known as Troopers Wood and local legend states that a Civil War trooper once set out to make the short ride by horse from Shorwell to West Court, which lies just beyond the trees. He was never seen again. It is said he sank to his death in the dangerous wetland and that his heavy footsteps can occasionally be heard nearby.

Continue ahead, then turn right to join footpath SW4 where a small grove of **Ash** trees lies just beyond the gate (12). These trees are the remnants of an old boundary, perhaps of Wolverton Manor located just beyond the moat to your right. This moat and the original house were constructed in the 14th century. The present house was built in the 16th century, laid out in a letter 'E' shape in honour of Queen Elizabeth I.

At Wolverton Lane leave footpath SW4. Immediately to your left, the hedge has been traditionally laid. This quiet, meandering lane

links up with Yafford, a tiny hamlet to the southwest of Shorwell. Pass by the junction with Doctors Lane towards Yafford. Yafford means 'the ford with a hatch or grating'. The grate was likely to have either prevented animals straying or collected floating debris in the stream. As the lane bends to the left, join footpath SW10 to Brighstone via the stile to your right. At the next stile, you will be crossing another boundary between the parishes of Shorwell and Brighstone. Here the footpath becomes footpath B105. A ditch marks this boundary, trace this towards the south and you will see the next tree on the trail.

This mighty **Willow** is best viewed a short distance along the footpath, once over the footbridge (13). It is an ancient, hollowed out **Willow** pollard, one of only a couple on the Island. Its trunk measures over five metres and was likely to have been significantly fatter, but through decay, has lost a large chunk from one side. **Willows** are fast growing and fast decaying due to their close proximity to water. Being a pollard, this tree is extremely difficult to age but it could be up to 500 years old. The withies or small shoots of **Willow** were cut to make traditional lobster pots for use by local fisherman off the coast.

Continue on footpath B105, which follows the stream with many smaller coppiced **Willow** trees, through Common Mead Withey Bed. 'Withey' is a local name for **Willow**. Further along the path **Oak** and **Ash** trees have re-colonised the drier land.

Cross the stile to exit the withey bed to join Muggleton Lane before joining footpath B21 to your right, across open agricultural fields towards the village of Brighstone. In spring and summer these fields are a stronghold for the

skylark. Listen out for the continuous, flutey song as the bird ascends beyond sight. Keep to the field margins towards the village of Brighstone and exit onto Broad Lane. Turn right and, at the main road, turn left towards St. Mary's Church.

Parts of St. Mary's Church date back to Norman times. Just outside the porch stands a **Yew** tree (14). **Yew** trees tend to be a common feature of churchyards and have much associated folklore. It is common to find Victorian dignitaries of a parish buried beneath the tree's shady canopy, but traditions associated with the **Yew** pre-date this by many centuries. The **Yew** was believed to repel evil spirits and protect the dead, as well as having qualities of longevity and regeneration - the drooping branches of old **Yew** trees can root and form new trunks where they touch the ground. It is also believed that the wood from the **Yew** was superior and used to make medieval longbows and providing protection when required.

Pass through the churchyard and exit onto New Road where the Coronation **Oak** stands a short distance ahead within iron railings (15). Its plaque states that the tree was planted by Elizabeth Fisk of Brighstone Mill in 1911 to commemorate the coronation of George V and Queen Mary.

Proceed down New Road past the barns until reaching footpath B23 on your left. This footpath crosses and runs alongside the stream which would have powered Brighstone water mill to the south. It is on the banks of this stream where you will find the final tree on the Kings and Dragons Histree Trail. Initially you will spot the serpent-like bough extending from the tree and arching across the stream to rest on the bank upon which you stand. It is from this feature that

the wonderful tree takes its name of The Dragon Tree **(15)**.

The Dragon Tree is an ancient **Oak**. Its unusual shape arises from being blown over as a mature tree after which its wide, spreading branches acted as supports whilst the roots re-anchored. This special, much celebrated tree is a local landmark. It is a right of passage for local children to successfully cross the stream over the Brighstone Dragon (picture on previous page).

Returning to New Road will take you back to the centre of the village where you will find refreshments and the nearest bus stop.

Thank you for walking the Kings and Dragons Histree Trail. There are seven more trails in the series for you to explore.

Kings & Dragons Histree Trail

10.1 miles / 16.3 km



- Main route
- Route on roads/paths
- Route on tracks
- Footpaths
- Bridleways
- Start
- Public house
- Tea rooms
- Parking
- Toilets
- Bus stops

