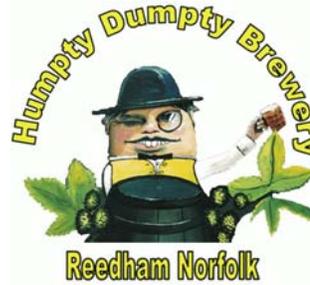


The Wherryman's Way – A Walk in Humpty Dumpty Country

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*Craig Fermoy and Stephen George
Norwich Station, 7:30AM
(The first pint was coffee)*

With Britain's pubs under pressure as never before and sterling in retreat against the euro, this summer is the perfect time to get out in the country, drink some cracking real ales and support our local pubs. The Wherryman's Way, a long-distance footpath that runs from Norwich to Great Yarmouth, provides an excellent opportunity to enjoy beautiful Norfolk Broads scenery and visit the numerous real ale pubs that dot the trail at convenient intervals, making it a tough call as to whether this is a long walk with pub stops or an excellent real ale pub crawl that can take two, three or even more sessions to complete. It is certainly possible to approach it from either perspective.

Our head brewer Craig Fermoy and I set out to cover the 35 miles of the Wherryman's Way on a bright March weekend. With the days being relatively short, we set out early to give us enough time to cover the entire trail in one weekend. It is easy enough to start the walk from Norwich station, proceeding through the pedestrianised district along the river, past the entertainment district and the trail's first pub, the Wetherspoon's Queen of the Icen.

The walk heads out of Norwich through the riverside Whitlingham Country Park and along Whitlingham Great Broad, then crosses under the A47 and passes by the smelly Anglian Water sewage treatment works – an interesting low point of the walk, soon behind you. From there, the walk descends into Bramerton and reaches its first pub stop – the Woods End Bramerton. The pub was closed when we passed by at 9:30 AM, but we could see through the window that they had Adnams Broadside on the handpump, and they regularly stock our Swallowtail. At Bramerton you also pass the first sculpture on the trail, which celebrates Billy Bluelight, a local character who used to run races against the riverboats heading upriver to Norwich.

From Woods End Bramerton, the trail follows the river to Surlingham, where the Surlingham Ferry pub awaits. As we passed by, the pub, which opens at 11AM, wasn't open yet, but landlady Sonia told us their ales on the handpump seasonally include Wherry, Broadside and GK Abbot.

A short walk through the village of Surlingham brings you to Coldham Hall, which we were told had closed at Christmas and sadly showed no signs of life when we arrived. It would be a shame if this popular riverfront pub didn't manage to re-open for the 2009 season. Another bronze statue outside shows the only fellow to get a pint at the Coldham the day we walked by.



Billy Bluelight, Norwich-bound



Last Orders at Coldham Hall

Rockland St Mary

After Coldham Hall, the walk proceeds along country lanes, past the Ted Ellis Nature Reserve at Wheatfen Broad and then through farm fields to arrive at Rockland St Mary and a very friendly welcome at the New Inn. Landlady Jayne is celebrating her first anniversary at the New Inn and had Wherry, Broadside and Black Sheep on. We were too early for lunch but reckoned we'd earned a second pint, having been on the hoof for four hours by now.



Craig at the New Inn, Rockland St Mary

This raises a question of timing. Perhaps on a summer's day, a later start and more opportunities to stop along the way would enhance the first part of the walk even further. If you left Norwich around 9:30, you would hit Bramerton at opening time and all the following pubs should just slot into place.

From the New Inn, the trail proceeds along Rockland Staithe and through the Rockland Marsh RSPB reserve and then follows along the River Yare for a mile or so to arrive at The Beauchamp Arms. New landlady Adelle filled us in on her plans for the busy season ahead. While we struck out on lunch, she said that they would be starting their kitchen up at Easter.

This would have been an ideal lunch stop for us, but instead we settled for a packet of crisps and a pint or two of Wherry. Adelle assured us that there would be more real ales on tap come the busy season, and you are likely to find Humpty Dumpty ales there.

What Are We Doing Out Here?

After the Beauchamp Arms, the real ale pub crawler is faced with a tough choice - to stick to the trail proper, which involves perhaps 10 miles of walking along the meandering of the rivers Yare and Chet, or to follow a more direct course over country lanes direct to Chedgrave, home of the next pub, The White Horse. Craig and I opted to stick to the river.

The walk continues on the road for about a mile before returning to the river and passing by the village of Cantley on the opposite side of the river. You can see the Reedcutter pub, but "you can't get there from here". The walk also passes right by the British Sugar works at Cantley, offering a seldom seen aspect of the area's largest industrial facility, visible for many miles in all directions in the flat marshland. Rumour has it that the refinery may shortly be open for year-round operation and may even import raw materials by river.

From Cantley the trail continues along the riverfront to the moorings at Hardley Staithe, where you (usually) have the choice of taking the road direct to Chedgrave or following the footpath along the river past Hardley Cross. The day we walked, the footpath was closed owing to maintenance of the flood defences. By this time we were thirsty, tired and not terribly disappointed to have to cut the corner, though a look at Hardley Flood is certainly worth taking the long way around.

At Chedgrave you find the excellent 2009 GBG-listed White Horse pub. Simon and Karen run a lovely operation here. As the pub is tied, you struggle to find local beers, but we came across regulars Timothy Taylor's Landlord, Deuchars IPA and several others – a decent enough haul after several hours on the trail. Having reached the pub about 5 PM, we found our hosts very accommodating; they found us a little bit mad for having walked all the way from Norwich.

Chedgrave is only just across the river Chet from Loddon, which means your next options, and there are three, are a very short walk up the hill! Loddon is also, conveniently, a good place to break the journey, offering plentiful B&B accommodation, public transport (bus) back into Norwich and the only curry house between Norwich and Yarmouth. We stopped in at The Swan, where you can usually find a pint of one of our session bitters. Other options are The Angel and the Kings Head, both of which stock real ales.

Heading For Reedham



The Chain Ferry at Reedham

After Loddon, you have the pleasant chore of walking back to the River Yare, which you rejoin at the Reedham Ferry after a gorgeous four mile stretch on country lanes. A foot crossing on the chain ferry at Reedham costs 50p. It is the only way across the Yare between Norwich and Yarmouth.

If you've stopped at Loddon the night before, the 2009 GBG-listed Ferry Inn is a perfect first stop and the first of the three Reedham pubs you'll pass on the journey. David Archer and his team ensure a

warm welcome, and the quayside is a wonderful place to bask in the sun and watch the ferry ply its trade. On our journey, we found Adnams Bitter, both Woodforde's Wherry and Nelson's Revenge and our own Little Sharpie on offer. Naturally, we chose our own CAMRA-designated "Beer of Britain 2009".

The footpath between the Ferry Inn and Reedham was shut when we passed, and is probably going to be shut for the whole of this season, but the road into Reedham is still quiet and pleasant and takes you past both the Garage Café and Cupcakes, where you can grab a cuppa and a slice of cake if you are so inclined.



Bill at the Lord Nelson in Reedham serves up a gorgeous pint of Broadland Sunrise

Following the footpath along the Reedham Riverside will soon bring you to the Lord Nelson, at the heart of Reedham. Bill and Ros extend a friendly welcome and always have a Humpty Dumpty beer on, as well as offerings from Wolf and regular guests from outside the region. Ros runs the kitchen, with a short but satisfying menu. The Ship, just down the Riverside, also offers a good selection of real ales, with three or four choices from the Adnams and Greene King range.

Reedham is home to the Humpty Dumpty Brewery, and we encourage all walkers to pay us a visit. We are located about half a mile from the riverfront, following a signposted footpath to Pettitts Animal Adventure Park.

We are open daily from Easter through October from 12 noon to 5 PM. Call us if you're coming and we'll let you know what you might find in terms of draught beer, tours and other activities.

Reedham Marshes and The Berney Arms

If you detour up to see us, you follow a quiet country lane back to the Wherryman's Way at the edge of Reedham and head out over the marshes for a winding walk through the reeds to one of Norfolk's most iconic pubs, the Berney Arms. Greeted first by the English Heritage restored windmill, the settlement at Berney Arms is now reduced to just the pub, but once it was a small village.

The Berney is a holdover from the days when much of the trade in the region was done via the rivers that crisscross the Broadland region. Pubs used to sit at bends in the river, where wherries, the typical trading ship of the region, could tie up and wait for favourable tides (or the departure of the exciseman!). The Berney still sits at its vantage at the confluence of the Rivers Yare and Waveney at the head of Breydon Water. What makes it iconic – you cannot drive there. Come on foot, come by train or come by boat, but the Berney Arms, situated in the heart of an RSPB sanctuary, is so remote that you cannot arrive by public thoroughfare. What a godsend!



Landlord John pulls a pint of Little Sharpie at the Berney Arms

If the Berney is in the "middle of nowhere", you will find you are not alone on your journey there. John and Tracy run a cosy house that caters to the many walkers, birders and boaters that pass by. They also keep an excellent range of Humpty Dumpty beers, as well as Woodforde's Wherry at busy times. The temptation at the Berney is to linger longer. One more for the trail? Why not...you have five miles to go to the finish.

After the Berney Arms, you follow the northern edge of Breydon Water past more signs of former activity on the marshes, and even a small spit of sandy beach. The low land between Burgh Castle (across the river from the Berney) and Caister, 4.5 miles northeast, is all reclaimed. Much of it is actually below sea level.



You follow along through the Berney Marshes wetland RSPB sanctuary where, depending on the season, you will see owls, lapwings and redshanks as well as the many ducks, geese and swans that make their homes in the marshes.

The walk finishes just on the outskirts of Great Yarmouth. The finish, passing by a superstore and then arriving at the dilapidated Great Yarmouth railway station, is something of an anticlimax, but you are rewarded with the choice of numerous real ale outlets within walking distance, including The King's Arms on Northgate Street and four 2009 GBG-listed

pubs: The St John's Head on North Quay, The Red Herring on Havelock Road, The Gallon Pot on Market Place and The Mariners Tavern on Howard Street. With good luck, you'll find our beers on at all of these pubs.

Practicalities

The Wherryman's Way passes by at least 12 real ale pubs as it crosses its 35 mile course, with excellent options in Norwich and Great Yarmouth as well. The trail is well signposted once you reach the Whitlingham Country Park on the outskirts of Norwich. An indicative map is available from the Wherryman's Way homepage at <http://www.wherrymansway.net>. We would recommend you use the OS map Explorer OL40 – "The Broads" as a more informative and detailed guide.

Apart from pubs, there are no other shops between Norwich and Chedgrave. If you're not planning to stop at pubs, make sure you are well provisioned. Loddon is probably the best break point (<http://www.norfolkbroads.com/accommodation/norfolk/loddon>) if you plan to complete the journey in two days, though there is also B&B accommodation in Reedham (<http://www.reedham-thepyghtle.co.uk/>).

The chain ferry at Reedham only operates from 8AM through 10PM. Camping is available at the Archers Touring Park facility (<http://www.archerstouringpark.co.uk/>) which is part of the Reedham Ferry Inn complex.

Humpty Dumpty Brewery is on Church Road in Reedham, right next to Pettitts Animal Adventure Park, NR13 3TZ, (01493) 701818, www.humptydumptybrewery.co.uk. CAMRA members receive a 10% discount in our shop with current membership card.

Reedham is on the Wherry Lines railway (<http://www.wherrylines.org.uk/>) between Norwich and Lowestoft. Trains also run infrequently between Reedham and Great Yarmouth, calling at the Berney Arms halt. Be sure to alert the guard if you want to stop at the Berney. Make sure you check the timetables if you are counting on the train from the Berney, as the last request service calls unnecessarily early.