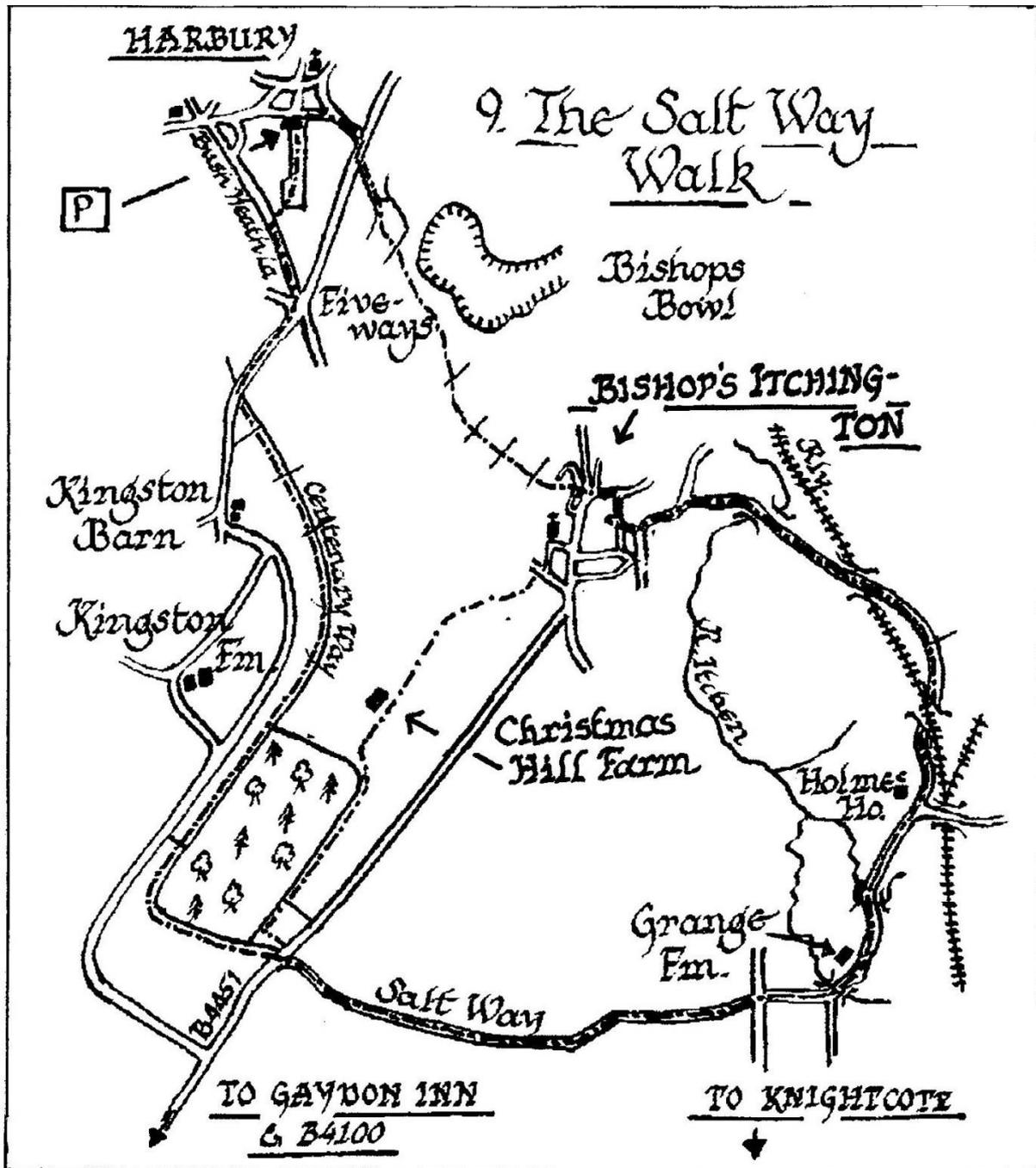


Walk Nine - The Salt Way Walk OS Explorer Sheet 206

This walk follows the line of the Centenary Way for about half of its length. There are some extensive views en route, and although the middle stretch entails walking along country roads, these are generally quiet and it is quite an event to see a car.



The walk commences at the Village Hall Car Park. Walk up to the top of the Playing Fields and leave via a gate in the right hand corner. Cross an arable field and go through another gate into Bush Heath Lane. Turn left to reach Five ways. Turn right and take the metal road (signed Kingston Farm) over a cattle grid. Walk past the

copse on the right and on a clear day, stand at the white metal gate on the right and admire the view over open countryside to the Malvern Hills some 40 miles away. Leaving the view behind, go through the hunting gate on the left into a small copse. The bridleway, with an old hedge line on your left leads pleasantly through several hunting gates to Itchington Holt.

The Holt is mixed woodland about half a mile and it is private. Go at the right time of year and admire the wild spring flowers (cowslips, violets, bluebells and celandines) along its edge. At the main entrance into the wood, stand with the wood at your back and a view over to Chesterton Windmill with Leamington Spa further in the distance.

For the next mile, the peace and quiet are destroyed the intrusion of M40 traffic noise. Despite this, the walk is worth the effort! Continue along the footpath and at the end of the wood, turn left. The views of Burton Dassett and Edge Hills are rewarding, particularly on clear day when you can almost reach out and touch them. This can be a good spot for a picnic (but only prepared to put up with the M40's noise) as the temperature can be a degree or two warmer and the wind less strong in the shelter of the wood. Keeping the wood and the hedgerow on your left, follow the path to the B4451, the old Southam to Kineton turnpike road. (For a shorter walk to Bishops Itchington see alternative Route A at the end of this walk).

Cross to the unmarked metalled road opposite. This is the line of the Salt Way, the old packhorse track from Roman Salinae, modern Droitwich. Proceed due east along this minor road. Eventually, the Centenary Way leaves us when it turns right, crossing fields in the direction of the Burton Dassett Hills. Our way continues along the minor road, crossing another minor road between Bishop's Itchington to Knightcote, after about 2 miles, and reaching a T junction beside a small bridge over the infant River Itchen. Turn left and follow the road, crossing a bridge over a tributary of the Itchen, to Holmes House. A short detour at this point adds about 100 yards to your walk - so turn right to the railway bridge. Look north from the bridge at the railway line the old GWR Paddington to Birmingham line - although you are more likely these days to see a Chiltern Railways Train. The line curves away left in the direction of Leamington Spa - but a line of rough ground to the right is all that remains of the original alignment.

There are two stories as to how this change of plan came about. The first tells how the Railway Company was unable to buy the land that it wanted along part of its original intended route, perhaps because the people of Southam did not want the railway. In the second version, the Great Western had intended to join the London and North Western line at Rugby and use a shared route to Birmingham. The realisation that the two companies would compete and bring down profits resulted in a sharp change of direction to the left at Holmes House giving the Great Western an independent line to Birmingham through Leamington Spa and Solihull.

Come back to the road and turn right passing through three gates in the next mile to continue your journey to Bishop's Itchington. After a steep descent to cross the River Itchen and a steep ascent into the village you may feel that a drink is deserved. There is no longer a choice of pubs to be had - the Malt Shovel has been converted to houses, so it is the Butcher's Arms, or if you are a member, the British Legion or the Greaves Club.

After refreshments, re-cross the B4451 and walk up Mount Pleasant. A path at the top leads into an arable field via a stile. Soon the route back to Harbury via Bishop's Bowl Quarries (the route of Walk 7, in reverse) can be taken.

### **Alternative Route A – 7.25miles**

**On reaching the B4451 the Southam to Gaydon Road turn left and walk for 50 metres along the pavement. Turn left and go through metal gate and follow the track straight ahead, keeping the hedge to your left. As you approach Itchington Holt wood and the double gates turn right and follow the path keeping the woods on your left. Go over a stile and you enter a lovely secluded glade. Keep straight ahead beside the woods until you come to a gate and stile.**

**Take the farm track straight ahead which runs between a hedge and the field boundary. Go through the next gate and walk in front on Christmas Hill Farm and its adjoining cottage. Stay on the farm track straight ahead. Shortly the track comes to a field. Follow the hedge round to the right to continue on the farm track. Go through 3 metal gates (often open) to arrive in a field, keep straight ahead going over the stile into another field. Keep straight ahead until you reach a stile where the footpath enters a small copse. Once through the copse take the footpath which goes diagonally to the right across a field. At the far end there is another small copse with stiles on each boundary.**

**Walk past the old brick barn towards the metal gate in the far corner. Follow the track to Plough Lane and cross straight over into Manor Road. At the end of Manor Road turn left into Gaydon Road after a short distance turn left into Mount Pleasant to pick up the path back to Harbury. Alternatively for refreshments you can turn right into Fisher Road for the Butchers Arms.**