Monday 28th March: OUTLINE of SHORT ROUTE 45 km (28miles)

This route leads you through Ringwood and up the Avon Valley to Fordingbridge and the

village of Breamore, returning via the pretty Western Escarpment of the New Forest.

* On a clear day the descent of Braggers Lane offers fine views as you drop into the Avon Valley.
* Continuing northwards to Crow you pass the New Forest Raptor and Reptile Centre on your left before diving west into the Forest market town of Ringwood, home to the Ringwood Brewery. A short walk the wrong way along a one-way lane leads to the town centre. Plenty of nice teashops and cafés here.
* After dodging round the outskirts of Ringwood, you cycle north along Highwood Lane

catching glimpses to your left of lakes, which were formerly gravel workings. Some are used for water sports, others as wildlife reserves.

* Pass the Alice Lisle pub on your left. Dame Alice sheltered John Hickes at her home here after the battle of Sedgemoor. He and his men were arrested the following morning. Lady Alice was tried by Judge Jeffries at the Bloody Assizes in Winchester and was sentenced to be burnt for treason. This was commuted to beheading by James II as being more fit for her station.
* Continue thro’ the ford at Moyles Court. There will probably be water here. There is a

footbridge if required. Moyles Court School was the seat of the Lisles, one of whom, Col. Lisle, was one of the judges on the trial of Charles I. In a short distance on the corner as you turn left is the RAF Ibsley airfield information memorial.

* After crossing the A338 (where the Old Beams on your right offers refreshment opportunities) you come to a picturesque stone bridge over the Avon at Ibsley, where you can usually see a tranquil scene with swans on the river or in the fields.
* Before Fordingbridge you pass the Augustus John pub, the favourite watering hole of the controversial painter who lived here. There is a statue of him near the George Inn on the banks of the Avon, by the medieval seven-arched bridge. The town offers café stops and shops as well as more pubs.
* Crossing the River Avon you take small lanes through Stuckton, a hamlet with several Victorian buildings that was once home to the Stuckton Iron Works, which closed in 1908, before climbing up the Western Escarpment of the Forest to Hyde.
* After cross roads beside the school you go past the Stables Tea Room café on your left beside a garden centre.
* Dropping down across yet another ford, you approach an area called Ogdens, a hamlet named after Ogden Rooke, a local landowner who possessed Ogdens Purlieu in the latter half of the 17th century. Purlieu is a Norman-French word meaning "the outskirts of a forest" – a place free from Forest laws.
* As you approach a large grass triangle at South Gorley you pass on your left the Cuckoo Hill miniature steam railway at the Avon Valley Nurseries which is open at Easter.
* Passing back down the Gorley Road towards Ringwood, you cross the A31 towards

Hightown and Crow and retrace your route to return to Avon Tyrrell.

Monday 28th March: OUTLINE of MEDIUM ROUTE 49 miles (78 km)

This route drops into the Avon Valley to head north through Ringwood before crossing the Forest via Linwood to reach Lyndhurst. South from Lyndhurst takes you to Beaulieu before heading west again through large estates in the south of the Forest to Burley.

* From Avon Tyrrell to the Avon Valley, then head north to Ringwood and cross the A31.
* A short run along the foot of the western Forest escarpment and then turn east on the Linwood road to climb steadily away from the valley into the Forest.
* Pass the Red Shoot Inn on your left. The pub has its own on-site brewery making beers appropriately named, such as “Muddy Boot” and is a regular meeting place for bikers.
* Continuing you leave the trees to reach the central Forest heathland plateau. A dip down under the A31 flyover and up again leads to the Canadian war memorial cross on the left and then Bolderwood car park. There are picnic benches and toilets at this car park (and quite often ice creams for sale too).
* The road from Bolderwood loses height through Holmhill Inclosure. On your right you pass the Portuguese fireplace, which is the site of a camp used by the Portuguese army during the 1st World War.
* The road ends at Emery Down village beside the New Forest Inn. Through the village with almshouses on left and a short up and down on a single track road brings you to the A337 into Lyndhurst.
* Lots of cafés in the High Street (the Lyndhurst Tea House on the right does a reasonably priced coffee and tea cake). Just off the route at the upper end of the High Street is St Michael’s Church. Built in the 19th century it has Pre-Raphaelite windows by William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones and a fresco by Frederick Leighton. Alice Liddell (Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland) is buried in the churchyard. Beside the church is Queens House, now used as offices for the Forestry Commission, and the Verderers Court, the ancient Forest court of Swainmote, in which the New Forest Verderers still meet to administer Forest Law and hear Presentments. The New Forest Visitor Centre and Museum is in the car park.
* Leaving Lyndhurst on the Beaulieu Road on your left is a mound topped by yew trees

known as Bolton’s Bench after the Duke of Bolton, an 18th century New Forest Master

Keeper.

* The railway through the Forest takes a very circuitous route (Castleman’s Corkscrew)

leaving stations such as Beaulieu Road in the middle of nowhere. Just after the hump back bridge over the railway you will see the New Forest Sales Yard on your left, where Forest pony sales are held 5 times a year.

* Re-entering trees leads to the Beaulieu Estate (3 red diamonds on the gateposts) and past the entrance to the National Motor Museum. You enter Beaulieu beside the mill pond (this is a tide-mill at the head of the tidal Beaulieu River) with a view across to Palace House. The High Street has shops and a cycle-friendly café (The Old Bake House).
* From the café you can return to the B3054 and continue a short way to see the tide mill, river and church. Then return to and continue along the High Street.
* From Beaulieu village the route stays in the Estate to reach Bucklers Hard situated on the Beaulieu River. Originally built by the second Duke of Montagu as a port to trade with the West Indies, Bucklers Hard became the shipbuilding yard for the 18th century navy, using Forest oak to build the fleet. Various ships that fought at Trafalgar were built here, including Nelson’s favourite, HMS Agamemnon. You can look down through the village to the Hard and the river from the roadside. If you want to have a drink and lunch or a drink and eat your picnic on the grass by the river, you will need to cycle down the entrance drive to the Master Builders House Hotel. Wheel your bike in through the covered way with the sign above it ‘Hotel Reception, Restaurant and Bar’. On the right is a grassy patch with bike stands and a fence suitable for leaning tandems again. Walk into the bar – you can walk out the other side onto the grass and there are tables too. Alternatively, to go to the café stay on the road, enter the car park and follow the path towards the museum entrance. You will reach the café before you have to pay to continue into the museum and village, and can lean your bike in various places there. To walk down the Hard from the café without paying to go in, return on foot to the top where the view to the river is, and there is a pedestrian gate there.
* Leaving Bucklers Hard the route continues within the Beaulieu Estate. Some of the houses that you pass along here were the top-secret home to the World War II “School for spies” where the Special Operations Executive (SOE) trained French resistance and British agents before flying them out of one of the eleven Forest airfields to parachute into occupied France.
* The large ruined barn (64m x 21m) served St Leonards Grange run by the Cistercian

monastery in Beaulieu until the dissolution under Henry VIII.

* Leaving the Beaulieu Estate the route continues through Sowley and Pylewell Estates along the southern fringes of the open forest, then through Norleywood, Pilley and Boldre.
* A short detour down the road in Boldre beyond where you turn right into Church Lane is the Fleur de Lys Inn with records of having served ale since 1086 and a full list of landlords from 1498.
* Continuing along Church Lane, Boldre Church on your right was built in 1130 from

stone brought from the Isle of Wight. Inside the church is the memorial to HMS Hood (sunk by German battleship Bismarck) and a splendid modern etched window by Tracy Shepheard.

* Through Sandy Down and across the A337, then across the Forest to Burley and Avon Tyrrell. The section of straight road, which goes under the A35, was built on the former Brockenhurst to Ringwood railway line hence the Station Tearooms on the left.

Monday 28th March: OUTLINE of LONG ROUTE 108km (67miles)

This route takes you out of the Forest and into the Western Downlands in Wiltshire, through

the villages of Broad Chalke, Cranborne, Whitsbury and Breamore.

* On a clear day the descent of Braggers Lane offers fine views as you drop into the Avon Valley.
* Back lanes take you to the edge of Ringwood where you use a short stretch of the Castleman Trail, a gravelled disused railway track with two former railway bridges, to cross the flood plain south of this market town.
* Fordingbridge offers cafés for early elevenses plus shops. The town’s most famous resident was the controversial painter Augustus John. There is a statue of him near the George Inn on the banks of the Avon, by the medieval seven-arched bridge. As you leave the town westwards you pass the Augustus John pub, said to be his favourite watering hole when he lived here.
* You now follow the Allen River through the village of Damerham, passing the Compasses Inn, to Tidpit and Martin, soon climbing over Knowle Hill and descending steeply into Broad Chalke in the valley of the river Ebble. Here a short diversion can take you to the Queen’s Head pub in North Street. Notable local residents past and present include Sir Antony Eden, Sir Cecil Beaton, Terry Pratchett and Toyah Willcox.
* Turning southwards you follow the little river Chalke to Bowerchalke, where novelist William Golding is buried. After climbing back over Woodminton Down, you enjoy a long, long descent.
* The charmingly named Sixpenny Handley has a pub, the Roebuck Inn, which is a short distance along the B3081 to your right.
* Wimborne St Giles lies on the chalk plateau known as Cranborne Chase and you will pass the Bull Inn on the route.
* Just before Cranborne village you pass the Cranborne Manor Garden Centre on your left with an excellent cafe and toilets - a good lunch stop.
* The route then crosses itself to take you to the village of Rockbourne (whose Roman villa is off the route) and thence to Whitsbury, known for its race horse stud and training. Here you pass the Cartwheel Inn.
* Narrow lanes lead you to the village of Breamore (pronounced Bremmer), in the Avon valley. There may be geese on Breamore Common. The magnificent Elizabethan manor house, completed in 1583, is an interesting visit worth a short detour. It also has a café open to the public on the left of your route with a countryside museum. Breamore church, just beyond the café, is a Saxon building dating in part from the 10th century. After circuiting the Common using a short length of gravel track, you start your homeward route along the edge of the Avon valley to Fordingbridge again.
* Leaving Fordingbridge you briefly retrace your route before following more small lanes through the Avon valley and across water meadows to a stone bridge over the river at Ibsley (watch out for many swans in the water meadows). Zig zag across the A338 passing the Old Beams pub/restaurant.
* At Mockbeggar you pass on your right RAF Ibsley, a former WW2 airfield. There is a memorial on your right just as you turn right. There are plans to restore the abandoned control tower.
* Cycling south towards the outskirts of Ringwood you may catch glimpses to your right of lakes which were formerly gravel workings. Some are used for water sports, others as wildlife reserves.
* Near Crow you pass the Liberty Owl, Raptor and Reptile Centre on your right and then retrace your route back to Avon Tyrrell.