



SUFFOLK DOG WALKS

Mike Trippitt is a journalist who enjoys exploring the county, especially with his clumber spaniel, Farley



Farley in the woods above the River Orwell. Photos: Mike Trippitt

UNLIKE our previous dogs, Farley is a landlubber. So, when my wife, Clare, was unable to come on our Suffolk dog walk, I decided we should have a lads' day out teaching Farley about sailing. I chose a trip to the banks of the River Orwell to walk the lanes, watch the water, admire the boats and immerse us in Arthur Ransome country. The Stour and Orwell valleys offer a huge choice for walkers looking for a stimulating walk for both themselves and their dogs.

Our day began at Woolverstone on the Shotley peninsula. With training-treats, poo-bags, extender lead, camera, mobile, and car keys all stowed in the voluminous pockets of my rather worn, and somewhat dated, green waxed coat, and Farley attached to the right end of his short lead, off we set towards the church. Farley is an enthusiastic soul. Once free from his lead, he rootled energetically through fallen leaves and looked high into the trees fringing the playing field in his optimistic, though fruitless, search for squirrels.

At St Michael's – a pleasing 15th century church of flint and septaria – part of the Stour and Orwell Walk, a 42-mile walk from Felixstowe, around the two estuaries to Cattawade and Manningtree, follows the perimeter of the churchyard before crossing a meadow and the driveway to Ipswich High School, housed in Woolverstone Hall. Signposts marking the Shotley Peninsula Circular Walk lead me southwestwards, down river, through pastures and across the hall's

We did mean to go to Pin Mill

Mike Trippitt and his Clumber spaniel, Farley, head off on a circular walk on the Shotley peninsula





Pin Mill

front aspect. The 18th century mansion, that has had various educational uses in the past 80 years, stands imposingly amid the meadows and the brown fields of the Orwell valley.

With no sign of livestock Farley enjoys time off the lead, free to walk through this rich Suffolk patchwork of lanes and greenswards dotted with solitary trees standing guard over small copses nestling in the hollows. Surprisingly, the river – the lifeblood of this area – is absent, as though too shy to make an appearance. Then, as if hiding, it peeks out through distant trees, a glint in the morning light revealing its presence for the first time.

Beyond Park Cottages and around Page's Common the bridleway forks. Left follows the edge of a wood down into Pin Mill and right leads towards Chelmondiston. Farley and I kept right, before taking the next path to the left leading into Church Lane. I was pleased to be heading towards the village. The sheep grazing and jumping friskily on the common had proved all too much for a spaniel with strong instincts to work, play and have fun. Farley had been rather unruly tethered back on his lead, hoping desperately that he could be off into the field to run with the flock. No good could have come of that.

On entering the village, off the lead and under control the placid sociable non-aggressive nature of our Clumber was soon evident. Four young children with their fathers emerged onto the path from adjacent houses. One of the children rode an electric quad bike.

Farley looked at all four, wagged his tail briefly, then walked on without bothering anyone. The boy on the quad bike, no more than six years old, raced off impressively up the path. Farley showed no interest.

We wended our way along Church Lane, around St Andrew's, across Pin Mill Road and up to Hill Farm. The equestrian centre there was swinging into life, as we ambled by. Both Farley and I were now in new territory. I have been to the Pin Mill area countless times, but have never walked to, around or through the National Trust land to the east of the hamlet.

At its most easterly point, Clamp House sits in a clearing. From here the views are stunning. Several paths run through the woods and along the foreshore.

I took the Arthur Ransome East Coast Path leading us up into the woods high above the river. Farley showed his approval by searching relentlessly once more for squirrels hiding among the leaves. His effort was fruitless, but he remained undaunted.

"I don't know what you are smiling at, you're having a bath when you get home," said one lady in a group of two couples walking towards us. A second lady smiled. Both laughed. "I hope she's talking to my dog," I said to her husband whilst faking indignation. We all laughed and looked at Farley who was panting, wet and very, very dirty.

Yes, dog walks are about dogs, but it is often our interaction with people that provide us with positive memories. When walking

HOW FAR?

NEAREST VETS

(according to Any UK Vet www.any-uk-vet.co.uk):
Riversbrook Veterinary Group, Ellenbrook Green, Ipswich, IP2 9RR. T: 01473 686845

Orwell Veterinary Group, Hartree Way, Grange Farm, Kesgrave, Ipswich, IP5 2BZ. T: 01473 333677

DISTANCES

1. Woolverstone to St Andrew's Church, Chelmondiston
1.5m
2. St Andrew's to Hill Farm, Chelmondiston
0.3m
3. Hill Farm to Clamp House
0.9m
4. Clamp House to Pin Mill
1.0m
5. Pin Mill to Royal Harwich Yacht Club
1.0m
6. RHYC to Woolverstone
0.4m

Total distance 5.1m



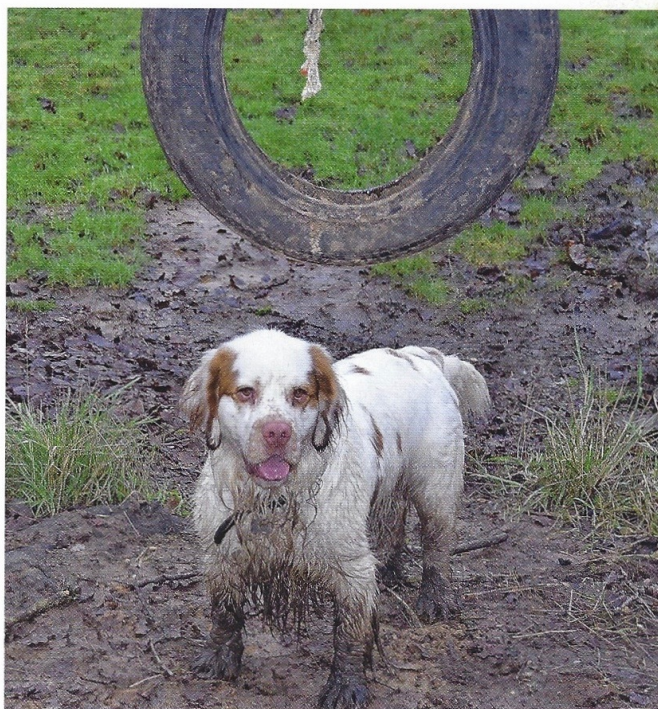
in the countryside we see like-minded folk who want to say 'Good morning', to smile, to engage. They often comment on the dog, the weather, the location – they are in good spirits. Our rapport with other walkers is important.

From high in the woods, wooden steps descend steeply to the village of houseboats that gives Pin Mill its unique, timeless character. Muddy mooring lines and chains hang between vessels and jetties. Houseboat names – Adrianto, Exuberance – adorn both ship and shore.

At low water, seaweed and slime paint posts and piles rich shades of green. Rowing boats, tenders, barges and hulks sit motionless, as if sleeping before the work of the next rising tide. It was from here that the little sailing boat Goblin set sail down river in Arthur Ransome's seventh *Swallows and Amazons* book, *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*. Ransome's 1937 book, written whilst he lived and sailed here, tells of the adventures of the Walker children who accidentally sailed to Holland whilst holidaying at Alma Cottage, close to the famous, and very real, Butt and Oyster pub.

Ransome could never have known that his book would immortalise Pin Mill for generations of readers and sailors, and that 80 years on the Pin Mill that he knew and loved would have changed little. Even Harry King's boatyard, where Ransome had his beloved yacht Selina King built, looks resistant to the passage of time.

Farley waded in the stream whilst I walked by the boatyard, and on towards the old coastguard cottages and sailing club. A photographer fired away, capturing images of



Farley enjoys a swing at Woolverstone

"Rowing boats, tenders, barges and hulks sit motionless, as if sleeping before the work of the next rising tide"

youngsters on the hard, their wellies splashing in the muddy pools. Photographers, writers and artists flock here, to express and capture the moods and emotions of this charming place. It has an appeal far beyond sailing and dog-walking.

Veteran Suffolk marine artist Anthony Osler, now 80, has been coming to Pin Mill since he was seven years old. When he visits he still gets a feel for how it used to be, and admires the increasing numbers who live aboard the houseboats.

"They enjoy the life of two tides a day lifting them up and then sitting them down on the mud for another 12 hours. To me, there is something quite romantic about that. I know most of the east coast area very well and there isn't a place that has quite got that sort of magic. Pin Mill has got the magic. The whole place just reeks of the east coast as it was 60 years ago."

By the time Farley and I returned to Woolverstone, across fields, and past The Royal Harwich Yacht Club and intriguingly named Cat House, we had walked just over five miles through Suffolk's fields, lanes and woodlands, through 60 years of maritime history, and through 80 years of Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* tales. Few places can offer walkers and their dogs such a journey. ♦

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