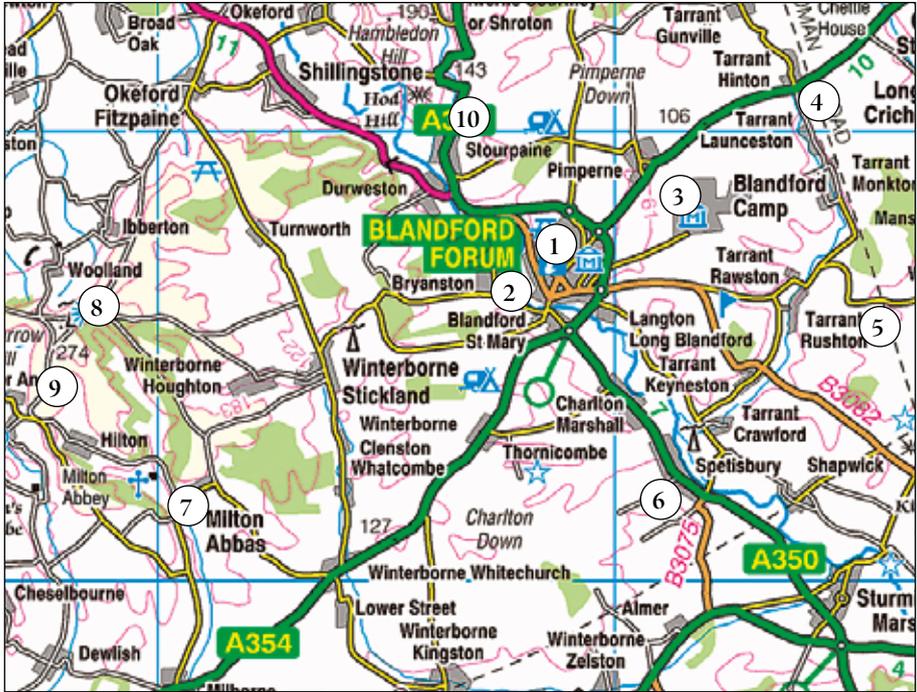


ITINERARY #11 - BLANDFORD FORUM AND AROUND



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BLANDFORD FORUM developed beside the River Stour, where it breaks through the chalk between the Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase. It was for hundreds of years a fording point on the river and an important market town in this fertile agricultural area.

Railways The Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway ran from Bath to Bournemouth from 1860 to 1964. Its closure meant that Blandford's importance as a market town was diminished. Today the town has a bypass, diverting the busy A354 and A350 roads from the town centre.

Hillforts There are four Iron Age hillforts in the vicinity of Blandford, all defending the gap in the chalk ridge. They range from the diminutive Spetisbury Rings to the gigantic Hod Hill, though perhaps Hambledon Hill is the most impressive.

The Military have been present in this part of North Dorset since the Iron Age. The Romans had a fort at Hod Hill, while later the British Army used Race Hill, northeast of Blandford for camps long before the 20th century wars. Blandford Camp remains an active Army Base, with the small, but excellent Royal Signals Museum.

During WWII there was a huge RAF base at Tarrant Rushton from which *Horsa* gliders and their tugs departed during D-Day and later WWII offensives. After the war, it was a base for the Berlin airlift and for innovative work on in-flight refuelling.

The Great Dorset Steam Fair, held annually at Tarrant Hinton has become a nationally important event, attended by over 200,000 visitors each year. This major festival started in a small way in 1967 and has grown every year since.

ORDNANCE SURVEY 1:50,000 & 1:25,000 MAPS OF

OS Landranger Map194 Dorchester & Weymouth; Map 195 Bournemouth & Purbeck
OS Explorer Map 117 Cerne Abbas & Bere Regis; Map 118 Shaftesbury & Cranborne Chase

BLANDFORD FORUM & AROUND

1. Blandford Forum (page 242, popn. 2011, 11,694), situated in a loop of the River Stour, is said to be the finest Georgian town in the country. It suffered a catastrophic fire in 1731 which destroyed most of the buildings. It was rebuilt by builders Bastard & Co in Georgian style. The centre has suffered very little 20th century redevelopment so that the 18th century look survives. The Corn Exchange and church are stone-built but most of the buildings are of brick with stone details.

Blandford Museum (page 243) has artefacts and documents relating to the history of the town.

The Fashion Museum (page 243) is housed in a grand Georgian mansion. The collections date from the early 1700s to the 1970s.

The Hall & Woodhouse Brewery (page 243) is on the south side of river; it was founded in 1777. The Brewery Visitor Centre tells the story of the company and the process of brewing.

2. The River Stour (page 240) rises at Stourhead in Wiltshire and flows for 60mi (97km) to the sea at Christchurch.

3. Blandford Camp (page 246) is situated on Race Down, 2mi (3km) northeast of Blandford. The site had been used for annual horse races and for military training for many years before a large camp was set up in WWI. It was used throughout WWII and continues to be the base of the Royal School of Signals.

The Royal Signals Museum (page 246) tells the story of army communications in a focused and interesting manner. Starting with semaphores and shutters, it covers the major changes during the 20th century. This small museum is highly recommended. Adults require photo ID to gain entry.

4. The Great Dorset Steam Fair (page 244) is held every year on 240ha of stubble fields at Tarrant Hinton, 4mi (6km) northeast of Blandford. This world class heritage show runs for 5 days at the end of August each year. Hundreds of steam powered machines, old vehicles, tractors and implements are on display. The fair has large numbers of trade stands, entertainments and a vast campsite.

5. Tarrant Rushton (page 246), 3mi (5km) east of Blandford, is nowadays quiet. During WWII a major airbase was built here during the run up to the invasion of France. Large numbers of *Horsa* gliders, towed by *Halifax* bombers, flew from here on D-Day and during other operations. All that remains is a memorial in the northeast corner of the former RAF base, together with a black T2 hangar.

6. Spetisbury Rings (2ha, page 250) is a small Iron Age hillfort overlooking the River Stour 4mi (6km) southeast of Blandford. It occupies a prominent small hill with panoramic views all around.

Crawford Bridge, below the hillfort, dates from the 15th century. It is a Grade I listed building and an ancient monument.

7. Milton Abbas (page 251) was built in the 1780s as a planned village to replace Middleton, which spoilt the view from the big house.

Milton Abbey was established in AD933, but the abbey church was burnt down in 1309. The new church was unfinished at the Dissolution in 1539. Most of the abbey buildings were demolished to build the adjacent big house, now a school.

8. Woolland Hill (261m, page 251), 3mi (5km) northwest of Milton Abbas offers dramatic views to the northwest over Blackmoor Vale.

9. Bulbarrow Hill (page 250) is home to a large Bronze Age barrow as well as Rawlsbury Camp, a small Iron Age hillfort with impressive ramparts. There are expansive panoramic views from here.

10. Hod Hill (22ha, page 248) is a substantial hillfort 3mi (5km) north of Blandford. Built on a hood-shaped hill, it has massive ramparts and deep ditches. There is a small Roman fort in the northeast corner.

Hambleton Hill (12.5ha, page 249) is to the northwest of Hod Hill. This very imposing hillfort was first constructed during the Neolithic Age, with earthen banks and wooden palisades. The Iron Age ramparts are up to 9m high and enclosed a village of over 360 roundhouses. This is one of the best hillforts to visit in Dorset. In spring and summer it is resplendent with wild flowers and butterflies.