

The View review

Dia Newland heads to the New Forest and ends her year on a high note



**The Drift Inn • Beaulieu Road • Beaulieu • Hampshire • SO42 7YQ
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Coming back from visiting family on the Isle of Wight, full of bonhomie and fuller still of fine food, we were looking forward to punctuating our drive home with a stop in the New Forest. The influence of a walk in this ancient woodland on an overindulged body had to be good.

From Southampton we headed through Ashurst to Lyndhurst and immediately before the town turned left onto Beaulieu Road. From there on the grass looked as if it had been mown to perfection by the forest ponies and there were many areas to park up and stroll or stride out enjoying the views.

Later, when we were suitably revitalised and, unbelievably, hungry again, we headed towards The Drift Inn. We chose to sit in the snug and enjoy the atmosphere created by a log fire and cosy chairs while debating our choices for lunch. Food is available all day, which is great for walkers, cyclists and the locals who, like us, were taking advantage of eating a late afternoon meal.

We weren't looking for a three-course meal, although one of the starters of bubble and squeak, topped with a hen's egg and mushroom sauce, sounded right for my mood that day, which was leaning toward homespun dishes.



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I know I should have opted for one of the salads and light bites. They did sound tempting. Fresh flaked salmon and prawn salad with sour lemon and basil dressing, or warm goats' cheese and walnut salad with a blue cheese mayonnaise dressing would both be great antidotes to my recent immoderate eating. But my eyes strayed to the specials board where I found local New Forest 8oz rib eye steak with a bowl of chunky chips, onion rings, mushrooms and tomatoes. How good did that sound?

Looking back at the menu I could see there were even heartier dishes on offer; home-cooked ham; local sausage with mashed potato; chilli; or perhaps Thai-style green vegetable or chicken curry with jasmine rice and flatbread. Good pub food: the menu told me they were all freshly prepared on the premises and local where possible. Anyway, it was too late. My heart was set on the rib eye.

John cheerfully ordered char-grilled gammon steak with chips, grilled pineapple and salad garnish. No thought of temperance there, then. Plenty of time for that, apparently – all of 2012, in fact.

The steak did not disappoint. I asked for medium rare and it was. It was simply cooked (certainly no need for a sauce, just the heat from some English mustard), tasty and tender. The accompanying chips were dry and crunchy, the tower of battered onion rings light, and the tomatoes and

mushrooms juicy. Perfect.

The grilled gammon steak looked equally appetising and the alacrity with which it disappeared might have set a record. It was reported to be a superior dish of meat with the salad sharply dressed; a pleasing pairing.

Sitting back enjoying the warmth from the fire I was quite content to end the meal with a coffee, but my husband had already spotted the pudding blackboard and taken a liking to the idea of a rhubarb and custard cheesecake served with fruit coulis. Aided and abetted by the young man at the bar, who obviously rated the puddings himself, he had made his decision, though white chocolate mousse served with honeycomb, or dark chocolate and hazelnut brownie served with chocolate sauce and vanilla ice cream were also contenders. When I finally tucked into my choice, the tartness of the rhubarb was tuned down by the creamy cheese base and lifted again by the fruit coulis. A clever concoction.

What a very enjoyable diversion before returning home to prepare for the new year to come. **V**

Our meal, without drinks, came to £32.50

