

Bottom Wood walk

With **Peter Towersey**

As well as being a celebration, our autumn walk investigates the evolution of the London to Oxford passage through the Chilterns. Just to the south of the start there used to be a Roman road. Henry II built a road from London to his palace in Woodstock. There are old packhorse trails, coach routes, turnpikes and now a motorway.

START: Old Oxford Road, Piddington, HP14 3BH
Grid ref. SU 807 942

DISTANCE: 5.2 miles, with c150m of ascent

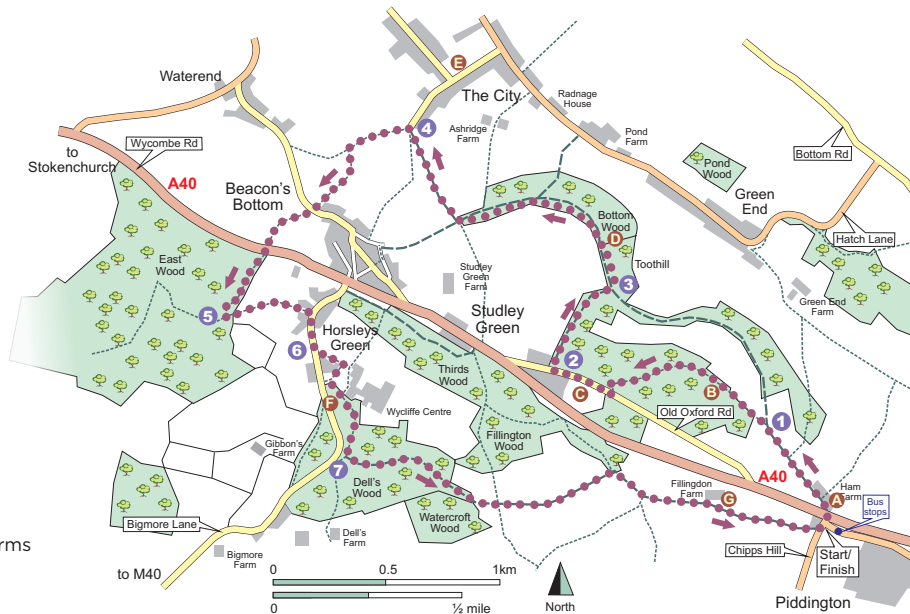
TERRAIN: An undulating walk with three moderate climbs and one steep descent

MAPS: OS Explorer 171 and Chiltern Society 7

REFRESHMENTS: The Dashwood Arms, Piddington
Tel: 01494 881488

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Bus 40 between High Wycombe and Thame Monday to Saturday, and Bus 48A between High Wycombe and Great Missenden on a Sunday

CAR: Park in the public car park behind the Dashwood Arms or by the verge in Old Oxford Road



Route

From the Dashwood Arms, carefully cross the main road and take the brideway that passes to the left of Ham Farm.

1. After c400 metres, the brideway bends to the right. Here, continue straight ahead along the field edge towards a wood. Do not enter, but look for a path on the right and climb gently up the right hand edge of it. This section becomes a hollow way which rapidly increases in depth to c3 metres. At the top the track turns sharp left to emerge at a road - another section of Old Oxford Road. Turn right along it for 300 metres to a brideway on the right beyond a house called Woodland View.
2. Follow the track down the side of the wood to the bottom. Cross the brideway and go to the information board which is on the right, at the southern entrance to Bottom Wood.
3. Take the path to the left of the board and follow it along the valley floor. Bear left over the brideway and go through the barrier opposite onto the woodland circular route.

Stay on it until it eventually rejoins the brideway at a junction of paths and a second information board. Go through the gate or over the stile to the left of the board and take the brideway up to a lane at the top.

4. Turn left, ignore the first path on the left and walk through the metal barriers. Follow the track uphill to pass through a second set of barriers at the top. Here, turn left and stay in this direction through three gates, down to a lane at the northern edge of Beacons Bottom. Bear half right across it and through a gate into a copse. Follow the waymarkers to the far side and then turn left uphill by the side of a fence to the next gate at the A40. Be sure to look back at the way the valley continues its gentle snaking rise towards Stokenchurch. Cross the A40 with great care and go over the stile opposite into East Wood. Follow the well-marked path for c300 metres to a junction of paths at a damp, grassy glade.
5. Bear left and then sharply left again to emerge through a gate into a field. This area shows evidence of intense badger activity with large scrapes in the turf. Follow the path

half left across the field to go over a stile and then onto a narrow path between gardens to a lane at Horsleys Green. Turn right along it as far as the entrance to the Wycliffe Centre.

6. Go down the driveway into the Centre and take the second footpath on the right, just past a post box. Follow this path as it swings round to the left through Dells Wood. Take care as it descends steeply to a junction of paths at the valley bottom. On the way down there are the remains of earlier quarrying.
7. At the junction, turn left along a gravelly track and proceed for over 600 metres along the valley floor through a mixture of neglected coppice, conifer plantation and mature beech. Go through a gate to emerge at the edge of a field. Continue straight ahead between two fields and then to the left of a hedgerow. At the end follow the hedge round to the right and along to the entrance to the next field. Do not enter, but keep straight ahead to the left of a hedgerow. Stay on this brideway past Fillingdon Farm and the slate roof of The Dashwood Arms should become visible a short way off, marking the end of the walk.

Points of interest

- A Piddington & Ham Farm:** The Dashwood Arms is on the Old Oxford Road, one of the many local routes that connected London to Oxford. Across the main road is Ham Farm and the track is possibly one of the most ancient of the routes and passes right through Bottom Wood. It is believed to be a packhorse trail, taking the line of least gradient from Wycombe to Stokenchurch, as can be seen at a glance from an Ordnance Survey map.
- B Hollow way:** This is part of the toll road coaching route to Oxford and is clearly man-made. A little further on, where the path veers left away from the edge of the wood, the hollow way becomes both deeper and broader, rivaling the most dramatic sections of Grim's Ditch but is not

marked on any map. It's an impressive piece of work, possibly constructed to avoid the steep ascent of the Old Oxford Road, while avoiding the hoof-churned mire in the valley below.

- C Old Oxford Road:** To improve the main road, the Beaconsfield Turnpike Trust was founded in 1718. The ascent from Piddington was known as Old Dashwood Hill and was the favourite haunt of a highwayman called Jack Shrimpton. He was eventually hanged in London.
- D Bottom Wood brideway:** This is the old packhorse trail that has continued up from Ham Farm. There are some references suggesting it could also have been a coaching route.
- E Radnage:** At this point the walk touches the village of Radnage. It was on one of the main crossing routes in medieval times.

F Horsleys Green: The village dates back to the 18th century and probably gets its name from 'Ostlers Green', a place where there were stables. The site of the Wycliffe Centre was originally a camp for disabled evacuees during WWII. It is now the UK Headquarters of Wycliffe Bible Translators. To date the organisation has translated the bible into approximately 2,000 languages. The site is due to be redeveloped in early 2014.

G Fillingdon Farm: Home to Art of Africa. All their work is original handcraft, made where possible from the natural materials for which Africa is famed, including stone, silver, cotton, clay, wood, mohair and leather. They hold two major exhibitions a year and are open by appointment at other times.