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## Finchampstead and the Long Water

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Distance: 9 km=5½ miles

easy walking

Region: Berkshire

Date written: 3-jul-2023

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Refreshments: *Queen's Oak, Tally Ho*

Map: Explorer 159 (Reading) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*Meadows, church, rural highways, great pubs, lakes, water, birdlife*

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### In Brief

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This walk leads you on an exhilarating excursion through the wide open landscapes north of this village and then on a river path between the lakes that surround the Long Water (or Blackwater River), known for its wildlife.

This walk is one of a pair around Finchampstead and can be combined with its sister walk *Finchampstead Ridges and Horseshoe Lake* to form a terrific 9½-miler, the *Finchampstead Double*. Links are provided in the text. If you are doing the Double, start at Horseshoe Lake, as described in the other walk.

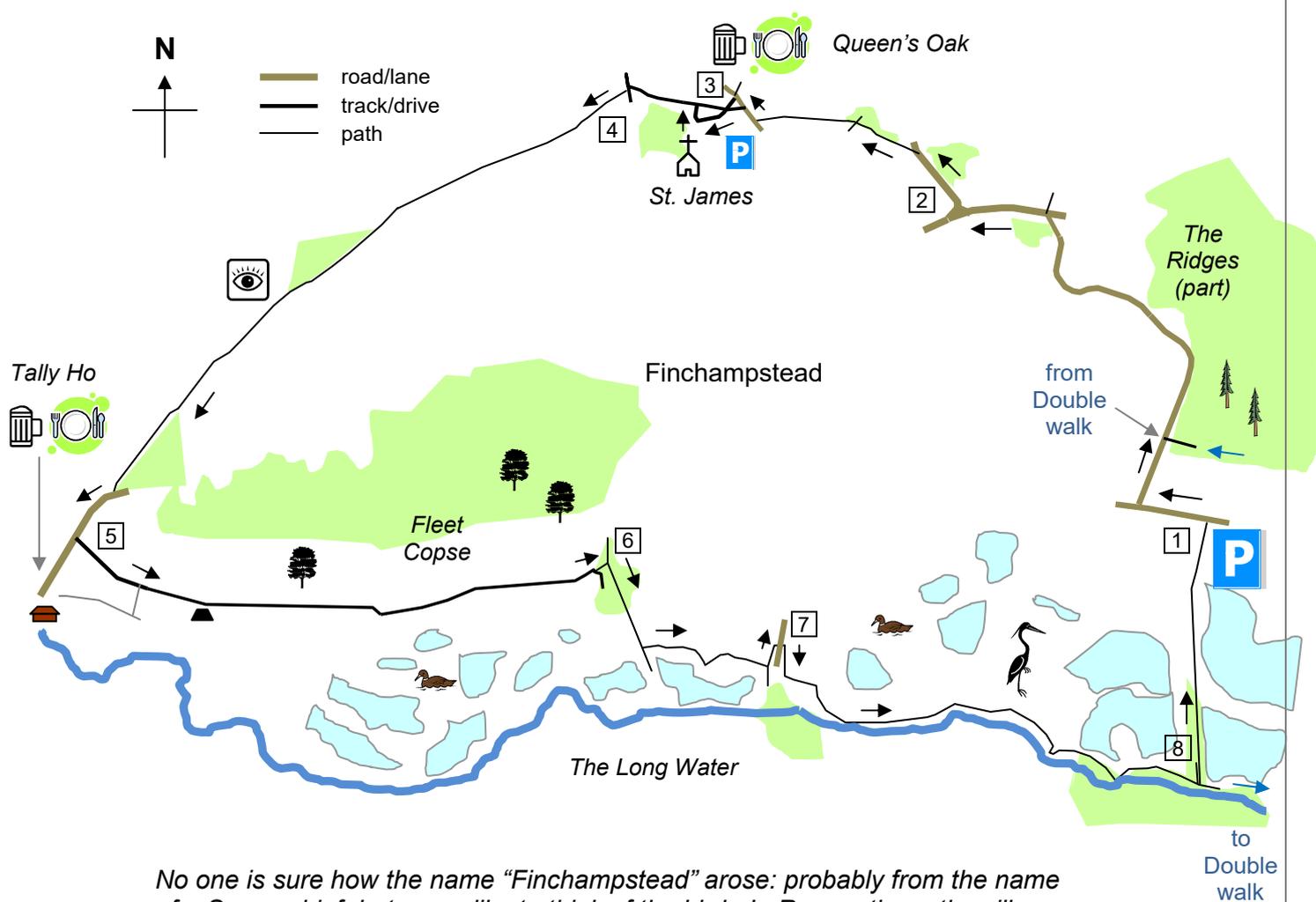
Although this walk does not enter the village, it benefits from the three pubs that Finchampstead is blessed with. (To enquire at the *Queen's Oak*, ring 0118-973-1105; for the *Tally Ho* it's 0118-973-2134.) The *Greyhound*, in the village, is a little closer to the "gastro" variety with the best facilities.



There are very few nettles or other undergrowth on this walk, so shorts are wearable. Most of the paths are popular with families who would not wear boots except in wintry or wet weather, when there are some short deeply sodden patches. There is one crossing of a small clumpy field and 150 metres of busy road. All the other paths are along hedgerows or on popular wide paths beside the Long Water. This walk is not ideal for your dog because of the short stretch of main road and the narrow verge in case you want to visit the *Tally Ho*.

The walk begins at the **Moor Green Lakes** car park, just off Lower Sandhurst Road, Finchampstead, near Wokingham, Berkshire, postcode **RG40 3TH**, [www.w3w.co/banana.foggy.radiating](http://www.w3w.co/banana.foggy.radiating). This is a neat, spacious car park where cars can form two lines, parked at rightangles. It closes at dusk, e.g. 8pm in July (the time is always clearly marked). Another possible start is near the *Queen's Oak*: but avoid the church car park on a Sunday. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

## The Walk



No one is sure how the name "Finchampstead" arose: probably from the name of a Saxon chief, but many like to think of the bird. In Roman times the village stood on the Devil's Highway, a road from London to Silchester (see that walk in the Hampshire section of this series). Another straight road is the Nine Mile Ride which runs from the village to Bracknell and was built for King George III to access his hunting grounds. Just north of the western end is the hamlet of California (no relation!) and its own Country Park.

- 1 Beginning the walk at the Moor Green Lakes car park, go out to the road and turn **left**. After 170m, just before a huge fruit farm, turn **right** on a tarmac side lane, Dell Road. This very quiet lane runs straight for 300m where it meets the bridleway from Finchampstead Ridges.



**Link point.** In case you are doing the Double walk, the *Finchampstead Ridges* walk meets the route at this point.

Stay on the lane, now becoming curvy and leading past a series of historic and modern houses. The lane rises and dips a bit and finally, after 1km in total, ends at a T-junction with a major road, which grants its residents use of the enviable postal address "The Ridges". Turn **left** on The Ridges using the footway to reach a road junction in 200m. (*More information about The Ridges will be found in the sister walk.*)

- 2 Carefully turn **right** at the junction for an unavoidable 150m along busy Jubilee Road with the verge quickly disappearing. Look left now to see the white spikey gate of *Castleton*. Turn **left** here onto the lawn and take a diagonal path across the lawn, past a willow. Go over a stile and walk along the top edge of a rough meadow, weaving your way through the grass (which may be tall or recently mown), keeping close to the fence on your left, looking for the path under leaf litter if necessary. After 150m, go over a stile, cross a tarmac drive and go through a swing-gate into a large square grass pasture. Cross it diagonally, heading for the opposite corner where there are houses (you may need to walk gingerly over the clumpy ground). At the other side, go through a swing-gate beside a large metal gate and turn **right** on a lane, quickly reaching a triangular junction and the *Queen's Oak*.



*Of the three village inns, the historic Queen's Oak is most like a locals' pub. It is also a walkers' pub as it proudly advertises the excellence of the local walks. The pub is open from noon and all afternoon. Beer is Brakspear Gravity plus two guests. Food prices are in keeping with the affluence of the area however, but you'll find some interesting dishes such as calves liver, falafel cakes and Thai salad. They can be eaten in the big garden where you might prefer the BBQ. The name, by the way, is unique in the country. After all, it wasn't Catherine of Braganza who hid in the tree!*

- 3 After your possible break, turn **left** on one of the tarmac lanes beside the green towards the church (that is, **right** if coming back from the pub). Take the left-hand tarmac drive that passes close to the church entrance, not missing the chance to visit.

*Huge and dominating from its hilltop site, the 1720-era brick tower of St James' church sits alongside the medieval body of the church, entirely Norman, dating from the 1120's. The interior shows several Norman features, such as the tall basin called a "pillar piscina", also the round recess or "apse". Outside, note the carvings by the 1590-era side door from 1703 and 1707. Rolling down several layers of hillside is the cemetery, crowned by a huge oak and yew. The original St James' church building was created with the help of monks from Reading Abbey. The whole site was originally Roman, with earthworks and a temple.*

Pass the church car park on your right and the Manor House and turn **right** at a T-junction, leading to a T-junction with tarmac on your right. Turn **left** on a gravel drive, passing houses, with great views on your right. Your track continues on a dark sunken path. It leads through a swing-gate, straight across a tarmac drive, and through another swing-gate.



- 4 Ahead of you now is a serene excursion on an easy path between hedge-rows. A long straight path between hedges begins the ramble, with a view to your left at the end. You arrive at a 4-way crossing of footpaths: keep ahead here, through a wooden barrier. You glimpse some views of the countryside through gaps in the hedge. After about 700m the scene changes to woodland and wire fences give you views on both sides. The path ends after a total of 1½ km at a modern kissing-gate. Cross a private tarmac drive to a kissing-gate opposite and follow a path beside a wire fence on your right. This path finally leads you through a modern kissing-gate, down to a road. Turn **right** on the road using the verge, passing the ornate gates of *Bannisters House* on your right. In only 120m further, just after *Fleet Hill Cottage*, your continued route is **left** on a semi-tarmac drive.

Only 150m further along the road is the *Tally Ho* pub, a fantastically popular family pub with an outdoor atmosphere, BUT to reach it you have to walk along a *very narrow* verge, tight against the fence, with traffic passing you from behind - so be very careful! Return the same way. If you have a dog or a child, or have any worries, you should return later by car - it's worth it. But see below for an alternative route (which can also be used *after* the pub visit).



*The Tally Ho is a converted farmhouse and a freehouse. On a typical day you may find on tap: Three Castles Saxon, B&P's Original, Flack's Catcher and Vale's Best. They also have a special (long) line in gins. Food is pub favourites, but the menu is redoubled by an extensive BBQ menu which is posted up in the garden. The atmosphere on a summer's day is captivating, with the sound of children running over the little bridge and playing in the adjoining meadow. You can eat outside even in the rain because of a large awning. Dan, the chef de parti, sometimes doubles as band leader/drummer. The Tally Ho is open daily from 11.30.*

- 5 Having turned left (that's **right** if coming carefully back from the pub), follow this wide dusty drive. You pass woodland and some houses and a hidden reedy pond, after which the drive becomes decent tarmac. *Note that you can safely reach the Tally Ho by turning right after 200m on a driveway opposite the last house and right again in 100m. You are on part of the Blackwater Valley Path but the river (called the Long Water or Longwater here) is about 300m away at this point.* You reach Fleethill Farm: keep **left** past their metal gates and go through a modern kissing-gate, beside a large possibly open metal gate (you may need to zigzag), to continue onwards on a track. You soon pass a manège and several large paddocks on your right. *The extensive deep dark oak wood on your left is Fleet Copse.* Your track kinks right-left past a large metal gate, now on a sandy surface. (There's a parallel path on your left under the trees.) A new tree plantation on your right will make this a shady path in future years. About 800m or so after the farm, you meet a sharp right turn in the track.
- 6 **Leave** the track here by keeping **left** on a narrow path into the woods. Your path goes through a modern kissing-gate and over a (dry) plank bridge to reach a T-junction. Turn **right** here. (The path on the left goes to the village.) This narrow woodland path ends after 120m at a modern kissing-gate. Keep straight on over a bridge-with-rails to cross a side stream and keep ahead, now on a wider path. In 100m look for a footpath sign opposite a bridge-with-rails on your left (*don't miss this turn!*). Turn **left** over this bridge onto a path that takes you between the lakes. The Long Water is 150m away to your right but you are close to a lake on each side where you may see or hear water fowl. After 350m the path ends at a wooden barrier and a T-junction. *[2025: the path may be overgrown: some walkers had to backtrack and find a clear passage to rejoin the path.]* Turn **left** on a woodland path and, in 70m, after a wooden swing-gate, turn **right** to each a road.
- 7 Cross the road, a fraction right, to take a footpath opposite. *You may need to take care in rainy conditions to avoid any temporary deep water and mud.* The path immediately bends right parallel to the road and shortly turns left away from it. Keep following this main twisty path, keeping the same general direction, soon passing a water treatment plant on your right. The Blackwater River is now a close companion on your right. The first lakes of the Moor Green Nature Reserve are now close enough to be viewed through binoculars but far enough for wildlife to remain undisturbed, so you will pass groups of twitchers who are content to spend many hours

scanning the lakes. You cross the entrance to a quarry with a box girder bridge on the right. In a further 350m, immediately after a wooden bridge with rails, you finally reach a junction with a double path on your left.



**Link point.** If you are *not* parked at the Moor Green Lakes car park off Lower Sandhurst Road, because you are doing the *Finchampstead Double*, switch now to the *Finchampstead Ridges* walk, from section [2](#). Otherwise ...

- 8** Turn **left** on the right-hand of the two paths. You get a good view of the Colebrook South Lake before passing through woodland. There is a bird watching station along the way. Your path soon gives views of the Colebrook North Lake. Finally you arrive at the Moor Green Lakes car park where the walk began.

## Getting there

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By car: If coming from the M3: come off at **Exit 4** (*Guildford, Farnham, Aldershot*); at the first roundabout, keep **left** for **A331 Camberley**, going under the M3. Immediately, at the next roundabout, bear **right** on **A331 Reading, Wokingham, Camberley**. In 1.3 miles, at the next complex roundabout, keep ahead on **A321 Wokingham, Sandhurst**. Go straight over the next small roundabout and, in 1.2 miles, at the next traffic lights, turn **left** on **A321 Sandhurst**. The road twists through the town and in nearly 1 mile runs parallel to the railway on your left. Shortly after you pass the *Village Inn*, turn **left** under the railway, staying on the main A321. In ½ mile, at a major junction, keep **right** (ignoring the left turn for Yateley). In 100 yds, take the first turning **left** *Lower Church Road* (signed for the Primary School). In 0.4 mile you reach a T-junction. Turn **right** on Lower Sandhurst Road. Follow this lane for 1¼ mile, keeping **left** at a junction. The Moor Green Lakes car park appears unexpectedly on your **left**.

By bus/train: bus 125 runs from Wokingham Station to Finchampstead. Check the timetables. Wokingham lies on the Waterloo-to-Reading line and also on the North Downs Line from Dorking and Guildford.

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