



Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common

Distance: 16 km=10 miles easy walking
or 14 km=9 miles

Date written: 14-may-2012

Region: Chilterns

Date revised: 19-oct-2013

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Refreshments: Farnham Common, Hedgerley, Fulmer

Map: Explorer 172 (Chiltern Hills East)

but the maps in this guide should be sufficient

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Nature reserve, woodland, heath, villages, great pubs

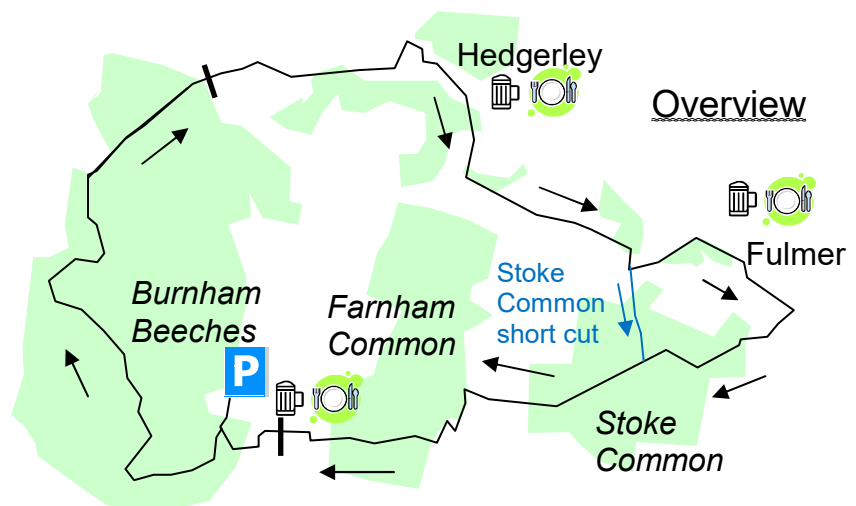
In Brief

This walk takes you through the popular nature reserve of Burnham Beeches in Buckinghamshire and makes a round trip on lesser-known paths, taking in a pretty village or two and Stoke Common, radiant with heather and silver birch. To lubricate the walk there are some excellent pubs and restaurants along the way (see text below for enquiries).



Any kind of footwear is fine but in wet or wintry conditions good boots are essential, especially from November through March. Nettles are absent except for one troublesome overgrown fringe just before *The Pickering*. Your dog should have no problem with the stiles because they can be bypassed through a gap or through a fence.

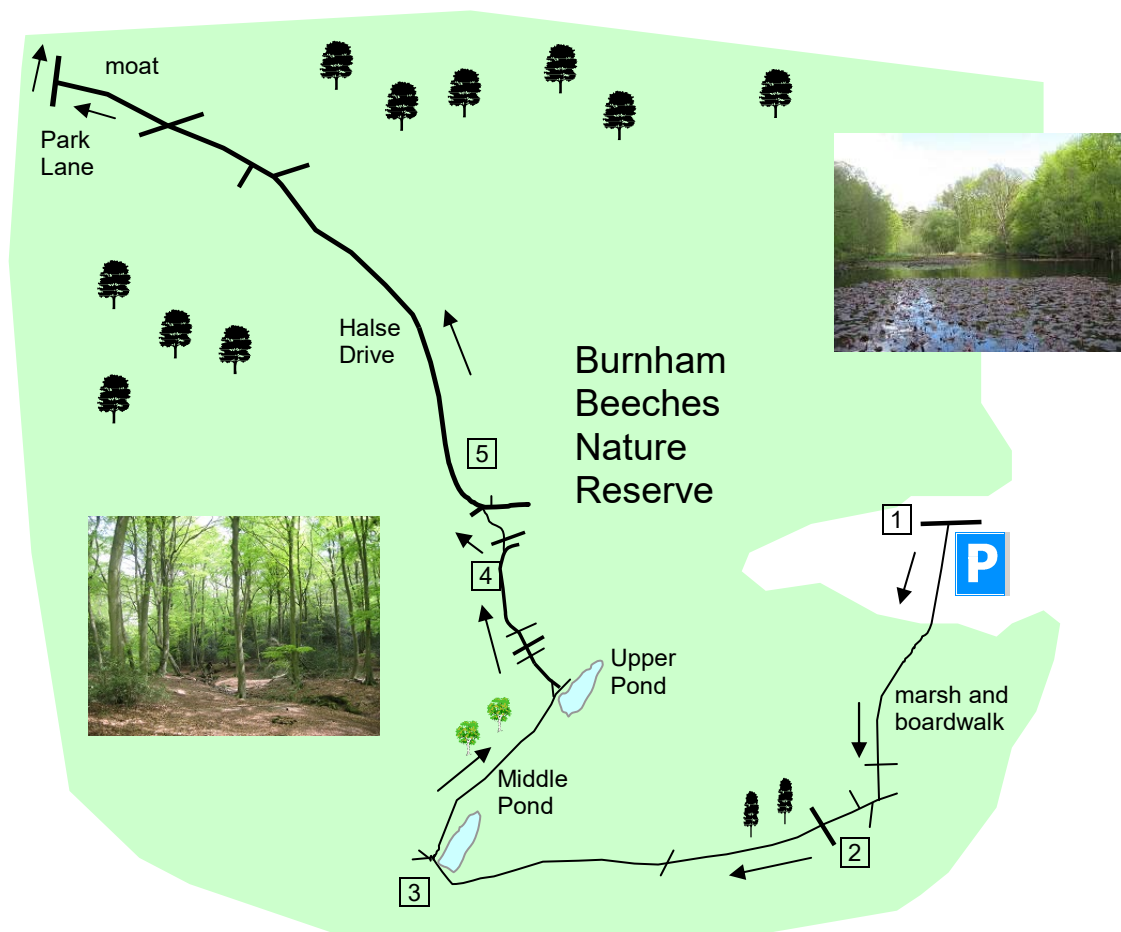
The walk begins at the **Burnham Beeches** main car park, postcode **SL2 3LB**, all-day charge (optional weekdays) £3 (as 2022). You can park by the roadside at many other points along the route. Another possible start is **Fulmer** village, postcode **SL3 6HD** (park considerably opposite the *Black Horse*, far down Hay Lane.) For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

Leg 1: Around Burnham Beeches 2¾ km=1¾ miles

Look around and imagine if Burnham Beeches had not been saved in 1879. You might soon be walking past Beeches Close by Beeches Lodge to Beeches Pond Hotel. The saviour was Miranda Hill and the Kyrle Society that she founded in 1875. Her famous sister Octavia Hill co-founded the National Trust. Burnham Beeches is a Nature Reserve and a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), owned by the City of London. The site covers 220 ha and contains many kinds of ancient woodland and, as you will see, varied terrain. Because Pinewood studios are near by, the Beeches have been used for TV and films and have stood in for Sherwood Forest and Harry Potter's magical forest on various occasions.



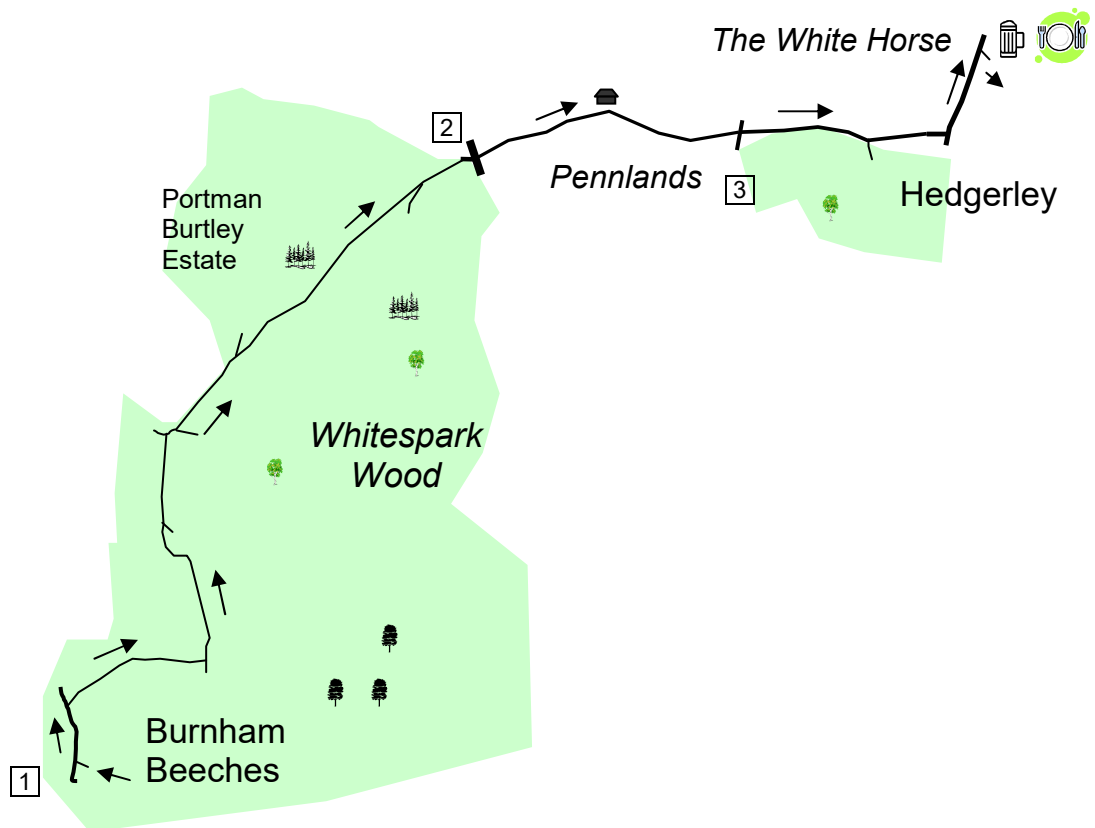
- 1 The walk starts with a short tour to show you some of the diverse features of the Burnham Beeches Nature Reserve and perhaps tempt you to repeat your visit later. From the tarmac drive that brings visitors into Burnham Beeches, turn **left** into the first parking section (the one nearest the road). Passing a ticket machine, a waste bin and some notices, continue **straight** across the grass with the car park behind you. On your left you pass an isolated clump of trees and two benches, and you join a wide path ahead leading into trees to a large wooden gate. Go through a small wooden gate beside it and continue ahead on a board walk that takes you dry-shod over the wetlands. Avoid the small board walk branching off on the right, which is only open seasonally, and continue to the end of the board walk. Go

straight over a wide crossing path and, in 40m, turn **right** at a T-junction on a wide path, avoiding a junction on your left and all other paths leading off.

- 2 In 80m, cross straight over a tarmac drive. On your right is an area of open grassland and tall pines where you will often see the white cattle that graze the enclosed part of the Nature Reserve. Your path quickly becomes a well-made sandy shingle path lined with wooden branches. The trees are now denser as you pass several junctions, always keeping ahead on the main path. The path runs along another board walk. It now bends right by a fence and takes you to the top of the **Middle Pond**.
- 3 Walk along the head of the pond, next to a wooden fence, and turn **right** at the next corner on a wide path following the **longer** side of the pond. The path veers away from the pond through beechwoods and reaches the **Upper Pond**. At the **near** corner of the pond, immediately **after** a bench seat, turn **left** to join a wide cinder path leading away from the pond. Your path goes over a crossing path, over a tarmac drive and over another wide crossing path. Stay on the main path as it bends **half right** past a hollow beech to reach the border fence of the enclosure.
- 4 Go through a small wooden gate and bear **right** with the main path. In 50m, at a T-junction with a wide path, turn sharp **left**. In only 30m, turn sharp **right** on a narrower path that runs steeply downhill. Your path skirts a steep hollow on your left. Stay on the path till you are at the far side of the hollow where the path turns **right**, away from the hollow, towards a tarmac drive visible below. When you meet the main drive (**Halse Drive**), turn **left** on it, **ignoring** Victoria Drive on your left.
- 5 Halse Drive is a highway that spans the entire Nature Reserve. It takes you through a deep wide area of beechwoods. After some time, the forest becomes lighter and you pass Dukes Drive on the right and Woods Drive (now grassy) on the left. Soon after, you reach an oblique crossroads by a shelter in Tower Wood. McAuliffe Drive is sharp right and Morton Drive forks left. Ignore both by keeping dead straight ahead between bollards on a wide but relatively rough path. *Soon, over on your right is a diamond shaped protective earthwork known as Hardicanute's Moat. It is speculation whether it was built by the Viking king since the artefacts found here are 12th-13th century.* Your driveway leads by a green metal barrier to a lane, Park Lane.

Leg 2: Hedgerley via Pennlands 4 km=2½ miles

- 1 **See map overleaf.** Turn **right** on the lane. In 100m you pass one of the big black signs for Burnham Beeches. Just 30m further on, go **right** over a stile beside a metal gate on a permissive path through Nine Acre Wood in the Portman Burtley Estate. After 400m through magnificent woodland, you reach a junction with a marker post. Turn **left** here, as indicated, entering Whitespark Wood. On meeting a shallow valley, your path veers left, then right again. You pass a post on your right [May 2021: missing] with three waymarkers: keep straight ahead here through Staplefurze Wood, avoiding the sharp right turn. Soon you reach a T-junction by a field. Turn **right** on this footpath and immediately take the **left** fork, staying close to the field on your left. As the path enters woods, keep straight ahead, ignoring a rising path left. After some time, a permissive path joins from the right and, soon after, the path takes you over a stile [2020: easily avoidable!] to a road. Turn **right**, immediately reaching the main road.



- 2** Cross straight over the main road on a tarmac driveway to Pennlands Farm. Soon you pass a large grainstore and a stream runs parallel down on your right. *The name of the house, "Pennlands Kiln", recalls the brickworks that were here until 1936. The old raised granary is from the 1700s.* Ignore footpaths right and left and continue ahead between woodland and rich pastures, finally reaching a lane.
- 3** Cross the lane to a narrow lane, Kiln Lane, passing several brick cottages. Ignore a footpath on the right and continue into the village of Hedgerley. At a T-junction, turn **left** on the main road through the village.

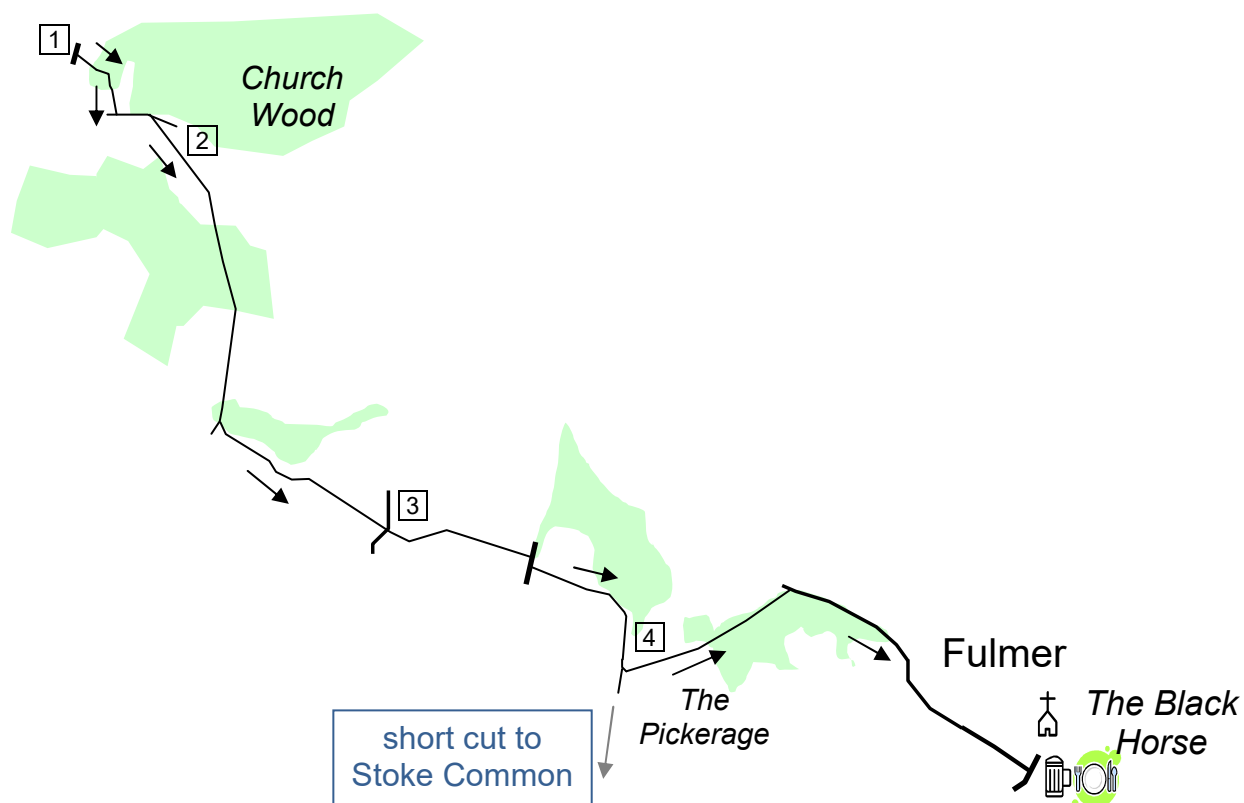
Hedgerley has won the Bucks best-kept village title six times recently and almost every feature here is a gem, from the Nursery House on your right before the junction, to the immaculate Court Farm House just before the pond and Old Quaker House just after the pub on the left. The weeping willows and copper beeches frame the picture perfectly. The name is made up from the familiar "ley" meaning "clearing" and the name "Hycga". The only notable resident of this sleepy place was the notorious Judge Jeffreys who presided over the "Bloody Assizes" during the reign of James II and lived in nearby Bulstrode Park.

Continue along the road to the *White Horse*, one of the great pubs of the county.



The White Horse is a magnet for real ales and famous for serving at least seven straight from the barrel. The florid exterior is matched by a lovely flagstoned public bar and a larger cosier lounge with old photos on the walls. The White Horse puts on an outstanding Beer Festival over the summer Bank Holiday where there are around 130 beers to try. Walkers found the food and service here better value than the Black Horse in Fulmer (if not quite matching its standard). For reservations, 'phone 01753-643225.

Leg 3: Fulmer via Colley Hill 4 km=2½ miles



- 1 From the *White Horse* in Hedgerley, retrace your steps just 10m or so and turn **left** at a sign for the church. (If you did not visit the pub, this is a **right** turn.) Ignoring a swing gate on your left, follow the drive to the end and go through the gates into the churchyard. *The church of St Mary was rebuilt on this grassy mound in Victorian times and is worth visiting if it is open. The porch offers a chance to stop for repose.* From the church door, turn **right** across the grass, go through an old kissing-gate, across the meadow, through a wooden gate and **left** on a wide path. Shortly, your path goes through a swing-gate. *Immediately on your left is Church Wood, a RSPB nature reserve, well worth visiting, although not strictly on the route.*
- 2 Immediately after the swing-gate, branch off **right** on a rather faint path diagonally across the grassy meadow. Keep to the centre, aiming for the far distant corner at the edge of the trees ahead. The path finally enters the woods through a kissing gate about 20m to the right of the corner. Go uphill on a woodland path through Hanging Wood, taking either option at a fork as they join up again. Following the yellow arrow, continue straight ahead between two green pastures where, on your left there are sometimes gentle Highland cattle grazing. The path takes you over a 2-plank bridge in a woodland strip. 30m after the bridge, at a post with yellow arrows [2019-20: disappeared], turn **left**, avoiding the path ahead across the meadow. The path runs along the side of another meadow, heading for Hedgerley Farm. It takes you beside a yard and over a stile under a tall cedar. Cross the field, Colley Hill Meadow, in the direction of an electricity pole. Go over a stile, then a (squeezeable) stile in the hedge, down to a lane.
- 3 Cross the lane, going round a long steel barrier, to a tarmac drive opposite. A wide grassy path runs between fences and through a wooden gate. You now follow another pleasant wide strip of grass which finally leads you over a stile to the main B416 road. Cross the road carefully, turn **right** on it for

20m and go **left** between bollards on a signed footpath. The path runs beside a plantation on the left and a large meadow on the right. At the end of the meadow, your path turns right at the corner and reaches a concrete track by *The Pickering*, now blighted. You now have a choice.

Decision point. If you want to continue the Full Walk, onwards to the pretty village of Fulmer with its equally attractive *Black Horse* pub, continue with the next section. If you prefer to go direct to Stoke Common, omitting Fulmer, skip to the end of this text and do the **Stoke Common Hop**.

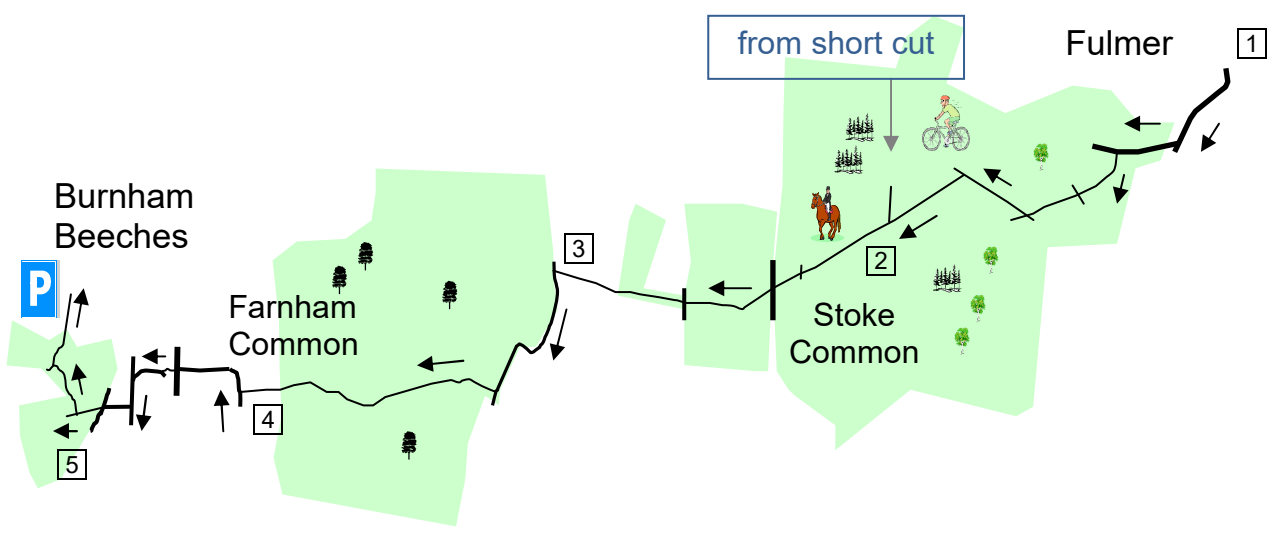
- 4 At a 3-way signpost, turn sharp **left**, crossing over the concrete drive and take an obscured path between hedges. After 10m you pass an old finger-post pointing to *Fulmer Village*. This sandy path has attractive woodland on the right. The M40 motorway is also visible (and audible!) up on your left. The path bends right through a (redundant) metal gate. Keep **right**, joining a bridleway coming from the left and passing through more woodland. The path takes you through dense thorn bushes and a metal kissing-gate and past various meadows and a pond on your left. On the right soon is mixed woodland and a low hill. Finally you go through a modern kissing-gate, then right and left on a drive, Hay Lane. You pass various houses and arrive in Fulmer opposite the church and the *Black Horse* pub.

Fulmer vies with Hedgerley for the title "Best Kept Buckinghamshire Village" and won it in 2011. The name is a shortening of "fowl mere" i.e. lake of birds. The famous Pinewood Studios are close by and a £200 million "Project Pinewood" was launched to build replica streetscapes of Paris and Amsterdam on Green Belt land here, plus 1400 new homes inside "live-in" film sets. In 2012 the villagers were cock-a-hoop when the project was turned down. The church of St James was re-built in 1610. Opposite the pub, the white house bears the Kay-Shuttleworth family motto "Kynd Kynn Knawne Keppe" meaning "kind (= children) and kin known keep" i.e. "keep your family close".



The "Black Horse" is the most consistently praised gastropub in this area but it still keeps its "village local" atmosphere. The signature dish is bubble and squeak with bacon, poached egg and hollandaise sauce which sounds mundane but is supposed to be quite delicious. The pub was constructed out of cottages that had housed local craftsmen who were re-building the church in the 1600s. The "Black Horse" is open all day every day. For reservations, ring: 01753-663183.

Leg 4: Stoke Common and Burnham Beeches 5¼ km=3¼ miles



- 1 After possible refreshment, turn **right** along the main road (i.e. **left** if you are coming out of the *Black Horse*). In 200m, turn **right** at a road junction past the heron-crested entrance to *Fulmer Hall*, onto the Stoke Common Road. In 200m, **ignore** a large white wooden gate on your left and continue another 50m. Roughly 100m after a large house, *Stoke Common House*, ignoring a 5-bar gate, go **left** at a signpost through a smaller wooden gate into Stoke Common, also marked as the *Beeches Way* (a local 16-mile route), on a path which bends right. Stay on the main path, going over several small crossing paths. In 350m, next to a small seat carved from a tree trunk, your path forks. Veer **right** here, staying on the main wide path, passing a modern bench seat, thus leaving the much narrower signed *Beeches Way* which is straight ahead but sometimes very marshy. In just over 200m, by another modern bench seat, turn **left** on a sandy raised crossing path across the open Common. After 300m, you pass on the right a carved seat, shaped like four fingers.

The **Stoke Common Hop** short cut rejoins the main walk here.

Like Burnham Beeches, Stoke Common is a proud possession of the City of London. This rare heathland used to be extensive in Buckinghamshire and this is the largest remnant, thankfully preserved. The infertile acidic soil, combined with animal grazing, kept it clear and it now provides a habitat for some rare plants and animals that are quite distinct from those of grassland and woodland.

- 2 Keep straight ahead for another 350m, passing another artistic bench seat and going straight over a wide crossing path, onto a grassy path ahead. In 100m your path goes through a wooden gate to the main B416 road. Cross carefully straight over the road to go through a small wooden gate beside a larger one opposite. Keep ahead, veering a fraction left, on the very wide grassy path between gorse and birch. In 100m, just after another artistic wooden seat, you meet a path crossing diagonally. Take the **second** turning on your **right**, going through an open area of gorse. Keep going straight ahead, aiming for a wooden fence and gate which soon become visible. Go straight ahead through the swing-gate onto a narrow path between fences. You quickly pass a post with yellow arrows indicating that you are once again on the *Beeches Way* and *Shakespeare's Way* ("twixt Stratford-Upon-Aon and the Globe"). A modern kissing-gate leads you across a lane, through a new wooden swing-gate and along the left-hand side of a pasture. At the other side, go through a swing-gate and turn **left** on a wide path, still on the *Beeches Way*, with pastures on the left, Brockenhurst Wood on the right.

- 3 The path bends right and left and you pass a chalet-type house. Immediately, at a 3-way fingerpost, turn **right** on a gravel path (avoiding the first path on the right which is private). In 100m, at *Hornbeam Cottage*, fork **right** through a modern kissing-gate. The fence on your left ends and your high path passes a sunken area as you go through a luminous area of young beeches. The path descends, crosses a stream, rises beside another fence, with Ingrams Copse on your right, and finally runs between wooden fences to a residential road.

- 4 Turn **right** on the road and follow it as it bends left. The "*Victoria*" pub on the right (*Greene King*) is a basic watering hole, open all day from noon every day. You reach the main A355 road in Farnham Common. The "*Foresters*" on your right is a more up-market bar-restaurant offering a bistro menu. There are shops and more restaurants in the high street, plus another pub the "*Stag and Hounds*" (*Greene King*), also open all day. Go straight over the main road,



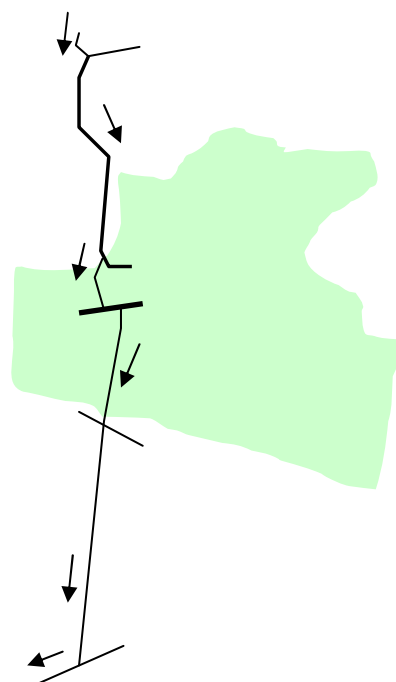
past a little green on your left, on a tarmac path, soon continuing beside a road. Turn **left** with the major road, Green Lane, and **right** again at the next junction into Hawthorn Lane, leading to a T-junction.

- 5 Cross straight ahead, shifting a bit right-left to pick up the newly-made path, into the Burnham Beeches Nature Reserve, staying on the main path, soon going through a wooden gate. Turn immediately **right** beside the boundary fence. In 40m, the path veers away from the fence, goes over a 2-plank bridge and bends left by the boundary fence to meet a wooden gate in the fence on your right with a board walk on your left. (This will be familiar from the start of the walk. But, if you did not start here, you could immediately go **left** over the board walk and rewind back to just after the start of this guide.) Go **right** through the gate and take a wide path away from the fence, a fraction right, leading across the grass to the main car park where the walk began.

The Stoke Common Hop ¾ km= ½ mile

Do this section if you want to take a more direct route from The Pickeringage to Stoke Common, omitting the village of Fulmer.

Keep ahead on the concrete track and stay on it as it curves left-right. As the track bends left again, keep straight ahead on a narrow woodland path. This path leads out to the Stoke Common Road. Turn **left** for 20m, then **right** through a wooden gate onto Stoke Common. In 100m, go straight over a crossing path. After another 250m, you reach a T-junction with another wide straight sandy path across the Common by an interestingly carved seat. Turn **right** here.



You have re-joined the main walk; your route now continues from Leg 4 section 2.

Getting there

By car: The easiest way is via the **M40**. Exit at junction 2 **south**, signed A355 *Slough* and follow this road for nearly 3 miles. Approaching the shopping street of Farnham Common, just before an Indian restaurant, at a brown sign for *Burnham Beeches*, turn right. Go straight over a crossroads onto the common and park in the main car park on the left. If coming from the **M4**: exit north at junction 6, signed A355 *Slough Central Beaconsfield*. Keep straight ahead following the A355, with the occasional brown tourist sign for Burnham Beeches, until you pass through Farnham Common. After the shops, turn left at a brown sign.

By bus/train: bus 74 from Slough station to Farnham Common. Check the timetables. Burnham station is not suitable, being 5 km from the walk.

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