Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Goring-on-Thames
Wildwood, Riverrun

Distance: 22 km=13½ miles — easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Chilterns — Date written: 3-apr-2011

Author: MacMeadow — Date revised: 19-oct-2015

Refreshments: — Last update: 25-may-2026
Woodcote, Whitchurch, Goring

Map: Explorer 171 (Henley) and 159 (Reading) with a small part of 170 (Abingdon) *but the maps in this guide should be all you need*

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

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Great beechwoods, river, hills, stately home, villages

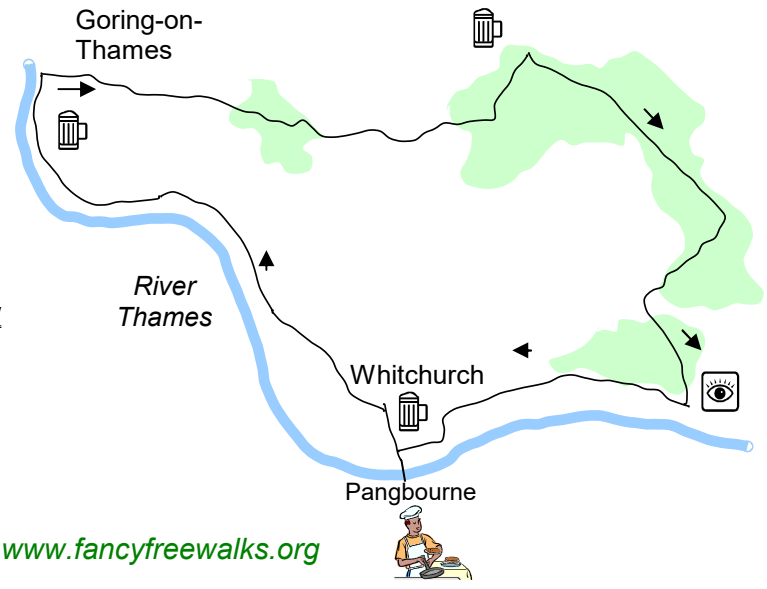
In Brief

This is a really stunning walk exploring the great beechwoods north of the Thames valley and returning along a quite delightful stretch of the river. This walk was inspired by one in the *Adventurous Walks* series.

There are no nettles and no big problems underfoot, except where horse riders have churned the ground a little. This walk seems fine for a dog too, with a lead of course.

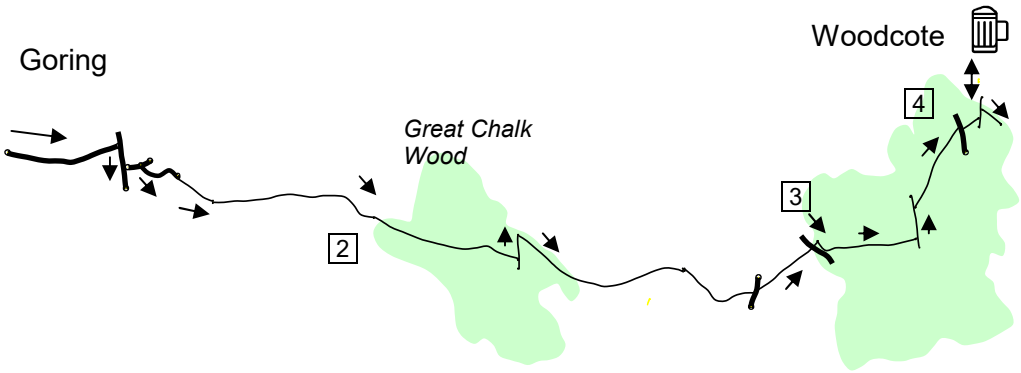
The walk begins in **Goring-on-Thames** (postcode **RG8 9AR** grid ref 600809) either from **Goring Station** or by car. If coming by car, you should park across the river in Streatley where there is plenty of parking by the roadside (w3w:gently.blacked.producers). (See the walk *Stone Giants and a Sting-in-the-Tail*.) This also gives you an excuse to enjoy two little walks over the Thames bridge. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Bird's Eye View



The Walk

Leg 1: Goring to Woodcote 6½ km=4 miles



1 If you are parked in Streatley, cross the long bridge viewing as you go the weir, the riverside houses and perhaps colourful craft. Continue up the main street of Goring-on-Thames, past the *Miller of Mansfield*. At the end of the road, cross the railway bridge and turn **right** on the road. Take the next road **left**, Reading Road, and, in 100m, turn **right** into Whitehills Green with its splendid new houses set in a patchwork of front gardens and ornamental trees. Stay on the road as it bends left and at a T-junction turn **right**. Continue to a signed footpath between hedges. Go **diagonally left** across the playing field, go through a gap in the far corner and turn **left** uphill with fields on your right. Continue through a gap and along the left-hand side of the next field. Just before the corner, ignore a swing-gate on the left and at the corner veer right downhill. At the next corner, go through a swing-gate followed by another that takes you into the great Chalk Wood.

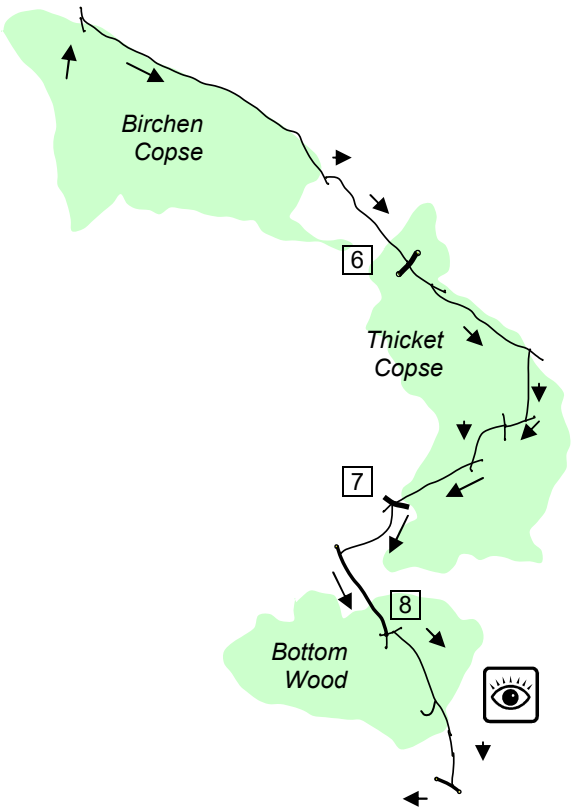
2 Continue on this path amidst conifers and silver birch in woodland which in late spring is decked with bluebells. After 650m, at a crossing path, keep straight ahead as indicated by the yellow arrow. You are joined by another path coming from the right at another waymarker post. *Note that you are now on the Chiltern Way, a long-distance circular path of around 200 km=125 miles.* After 50m, at a T-junction, turn sharp **left**, thus saying au revoir to the Chiltern Way. In 100m, at a junction by a meadow, veer **right** between a meadow on your left and light woodland on your right. The path goes through an open gate welcoming you to Bottom House Farm on a carpet of wind-fall apples, followed by another gate and you join a shingle path going past the house and later its fine garage, fashioned from a barn. Continue on the track for another 350m and ignore a footpath left. The track becomes tarmac: avoid a footpath right. This is the hamlet of Blackbird Bottom. Continue to a road. Turn **left** on the road and, in 20m, turn **right** on a footpath through a swing-gate. The official path goes diagonally **left** across a meadow, just to the right of an electricity pole. You pass sports pitches and a line of cypresses on your right. Now head for the far corner where you can see a wooden barrier. Go through it and cross straight over the road into the woods on the other side.

3 This section is tricky and you may need to concentrate so as not to stray. Turn **right** on a woodland path parallel to the road. Your path crosses a foresters' track after 20m and then a tarmac track after 50m. It then narrows and veers left deeper into the woods. Keep to this twisty path for 300m, following the occasional white arrow on trees, avoiding all minor turnoffs. *The woodland here is coated with bluebells in late spring.* You meet a wide crossing track. Go straight across, over a low bank, and in 70m go through a wooden swing gate, still following the white arrows, now in a fine beechwood. In 120m you reach a T-junction with white arrows pointing left and right. Turn **left** here on a wide forest path. In nearly 150m, you come to a definite fork indicated by more white arrows. Take the **right** fork. Follow this path through beechwoods, aided by more white arrows. In nearly 250m, you will notice a large shallow hollow on your left and a wire fence with a small gate over on your right. Veer **right** to meet the fence. Do not go through the (locked) gate but continue next to the fence on your right. Finally, leave the wood through a swing-gate out to a road opposite a converted chapel.

4 Turn **right** on the road going past the "chapel" and, in just 30m, turn **left** up a bank to a signed footpath. This path is a little unclear and curves first **right** and then, after about 50m, **left**. Now keep generally straight ahead, roughly at right angles to the road you just crossed. About 100m from the road, a path joins you from the left. Shortly after, veer **left** at an oblique T-junction on a wide path. In 50m more, you reach a gravel crossing path on the outskirts of Woodcote.

If you would like refreshment, the *Black Lion* pub, a simple free house, can quickly be reached as follows: turn **left** at the crossing path, fork **right** past a thatched house and follow the drive past a transmitter to the road. You need to backtrack to rejoin the walk. The *Black Lion* is the only pub until Whitchurch.

Leg 2: Woodcote to Hardwick 5 km=3 miles



5 Turn sharp **right** at the junction on a wide woodland path, staying close to the fields on your left. Follow this path and the white arrows for 650m until the field ends and your path goes over an unusual barrier and a crossing path and enters deeper into the wood. Keep the same direction, following the white arrows. After 450m, the path goes over another crossing path and curves a fraction right, following a wire fence on your right, enclosing Tillys Wood. In 200m, avoid a footpath right. 100m further, turn **left** into hollies, as directed by a white arrow. *(Don't miss this turn!)* Your path joins a path coming from the left and, after ½ km, descends to a road known as Deadman's Lane, which you will obviously cross with trepidation.

6 This section is also tricky and you need to concentrate [2021: care! walkers went astray in this section, possibly due to forestry work obscuring the paths; further feedback invited]. Take a bridleway on the other side signed *Nuney Green ¾* and follow the path through woodland. In 250m, you have a field on your left. In 350m, at the end of the field, you meet a gate and stile on the left with white arrows on a tree. **Ignore** this left fork and keep straight ahead. In just over 100m, your path reaches a junction of paths. Turn **right** here and, in 15m, fork **right** on a permissive path passing a cheerful sign *You are Welcome to Walk in these Woods*. Follow this lovely straight path through woodland until, after 300m, just after another *Welcome* sign, it ends at a T-junction. Turn **right**. In only 50m, you arrive at a junction with forestry tracks to the left and right and a wide track ahead going downhill. Take this wide track downhill and stay on it as it curves left uphill. In 200m, at the top of the rise, your path winds to and fro a couple of times and, after a further 100m, arrives at a very definite crossing path, actually an official footpath. As a guide, straight ahead (not on your route) is a very wide path through tall beeches. Turn **right** on this winding footpath and follow it through more woodland to arrive at a road after another 400m.

7 Cross over the road and go through a wooden swing gate into a horse meadow. This charming country is a tonic after so much woodland. Cross the horse meadow, heading diagonally **right**, towards the far right-hand corner to pass through another wooden swing gate. Keep to the path alongside a sheep meadow on your right. *On your right is a stile (not on your route) leading to Collins End Community Orchard.* Go all the way to a crossing tarmac drive with an avenue of cherry trees on the right. Turn **left** here and follow the drive past *Briar Cottage*. On your left is a rustic picnic table. Soon you reach the delectable *Holly Copse* and its tasty neighbour *Holly Copse Cottage*. Keep to the **right** of the cottage on a grassy path downhill through laurels. Note that you are now back on the Chiltern Way. Near the bottom, your path is joined by a permissive footpath coming down from the left and, 40m later, you reach the bottom of a wooded valley.

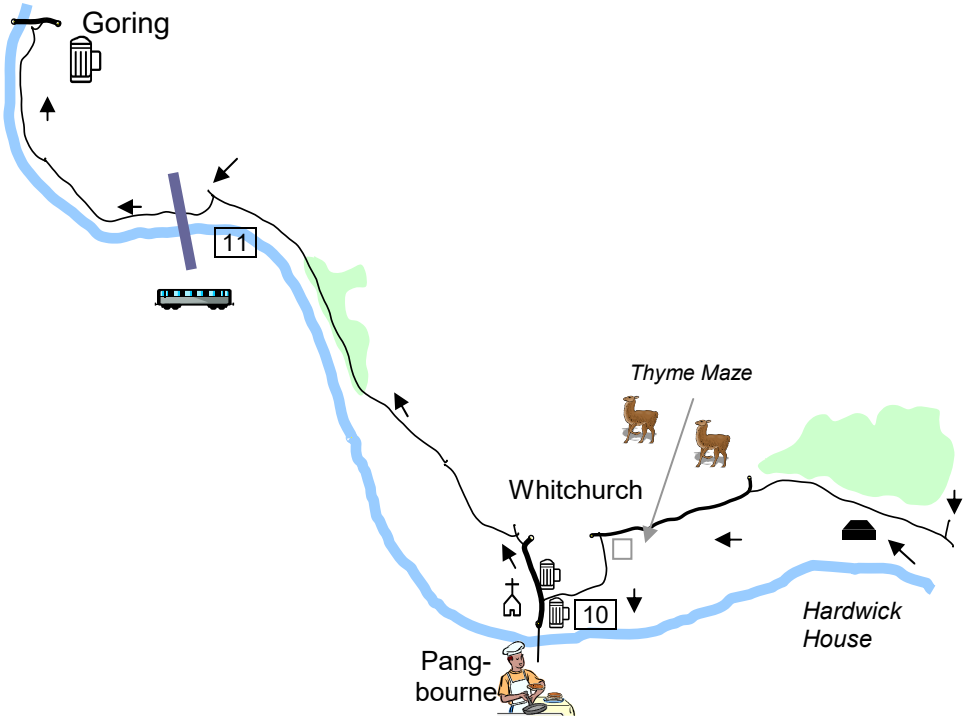
8 Avoid a permissive path straight ahead uphill and turn **left** on the valley bottom. In 25m you pass on your left a broken post [Sep 2018: lying on the ground] and, shortly after, arrive at a triangle of paths. Fork **right** here, uphill on a wide path with white arrows, also marked as the *Chiltern Way*.

You shortly have fine views left over the valley. After 400m, near the top, at a post with yellow arrows, keep straight ahead, ignoring the right turn. You are now in the Hardwick Estate and are greeted by bluebells in late spring. At the top, go through a metal kissing gate onto the open hillside. Suddenly you have a spectacular view of the river valley – one of the most delightful surprises in the Chilterns.

Immediately ahead is the small town of Purley-on-Thames. Reading is far to the left and you can just make out the giant wind turbine at GreenPark by the M4. Closer down to the left is Mapledurham House and weir (see the "Mapledurham" walk in this series).

Walk down the grassy hill ahead to a metal kissing gate at the bottom and turn **right** on a bridleway.

Leg 3: Hardwick to Goring 10 km=6 miles



9 Soon the bridleway passes through wrought iron gates of the Hardwick Estate and soon after, on your left, is the noble redbrick Hardwick House itself.

To comprehend the splendid aspect of Hardwick House, you really need to come again on a river boat. From the land side you can make out the walls, Tudor chimneys, crest and, in particular, the eccentric clock tower. The Manor of Hardwick was given by William the Conqueror to his favourite, Robert D'Oyley. The oldest walls date from Richard II's reign. The house was bought by Richard Lybbe in 1526 and Charles I stayed here and played bowls. The main building dates from around 1650 when Anthony Lybbe restored it after much desecration caused during the Civil War. See http://thames.me.uk/s01200.htm for pictures, an account of daily life and a description of the surrounding area.

Join a drive coming from the House and ignore a bridleway right. Soon you pass Hardwick Stud with its many fields of horses and old stables. Continue through more wrought iron gates and join a lane ahead. *On either side are fields of alpacas belonging to Bozedown who have bred them since 1989.* Pass *Bozedown Farm*, with *Chalk Hills* farmhouse beside it.

Chalk Hills has an ammonite embedded in the drive, a large humorous scare-crow in the garden and on the wall a tablet showing the Equation of Time. The figures depicted here are the number of minutes you have to add or subtract to get the "true" time after reading a sundial (one coming shortly). For example, on the 11th and 16th June a sundial gives the "true" time to the minute.

Just by the house you can use a footpath that runs parallel to the lane. After a driveway, the footpath continues and rejoins the road just after the welcome sign for Whitchurch. Just before a footway starts on the left, turn **left** on a signed footpath. In 30m on the left is a picnic area and the Thyme

Maze. *This is the brainchild of a local man, based on an Ancient Greek pattern and surrounded by symbols that have a supposedly magic significance. In the centre is a human sundial where the gnomon (the rod) is yourself standing at the marked spot.* Continue along the footpath and, at the end, turn **right** on a residential road with many houses of individual character leading into the village of Whitchurch-on-Thames by the *Greyhound* pub.

Whitchurch takes its name from the Saxon flint church "Hwitcurke", centuries before the Normans. It prospered from its commanding position on the Thames despite its proximity to the estates of Hardwick and Mapledurham which demanded exclusive access by land. As you will see, the village has several attractive flint cottages, Edwardian villas and Georgian town houses. The village is connected to Pangbourne on the Berkshire side by a toll bridge, first built in 1792 and now an iron structure dating from 1902. St Mary's church is accessed by a lane that runs past a walled garden. The dense and profuse stained glass gives it a dark atmosphere which eventually reveals a large number of tombs on the floor, including that of Anthony Lybbe of Hardwick.

The "Greyhound" serves 5 local ales and "street food" (most days). The "Ferryboat" is a little nearer the river, opening hours are a mystery. Fortunately you can quickly cross the toll bridge (free for pedestrians) to Pangbourne which has a wide range of eateries, such as the highly-rated Ada Meyhane (Turkish).

10 Turn **right** on the main road through Whitchurch, passing many interesting houses, including the Manor House and an art gallery, and keep straight ahead at a junction. Just before a 40mph sign, turn **left** on a tarmac lane marked as the Thames Path. Follow the lane past farms and fields for about 1½km where it ends. Here go through posts with blue arrows and descend very steeply between pastures and ascend equally steeply. The winding path now enters a lovely stretch of woodland high above the Thames which curves below you. Gradually the path descends and runs beside a large meadow. About 40m before the meadow ends, look for a sign for the Thames Path and turn **left** here. The path takes you over a little bridge to the river. Turn **right** on this particularly peaceful section of the river.

11 From here it is an easy task to stroll along the river path back to Goring-on-Thames. You pass through two metal gates and go under the four-arch railway bridge. There are then two more metal gates and pasture, with a view left up to Streatley Hill on the other side. You next go through a large kissing gate and over a flurry of little bridges on an enclosed path. Ignore footpaths right as you approach the village. The main bridge comes into view as you round a bend and go over a creek, followed by another creek by the millpond with Goring church in the background – a beautiful sight. Turn **right** before the bridge, passing Goring Mill on your right and the swan rescue station. If you parked in Streatley, turn **left** just after the Mill, going up steps to turn **left** again and over the bridge back to where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: (a) from Reading, take the A4074 north and turn west on the B4526. (b) from the M4, exit at junction 12 (Theale). Follow the A40 west to the **second** roundabout and turn **right**, all the time following signs for Pangbourne. Go through Pangbourne and take the pleasant riverside road until you arrive at Streatley. Turn **right** at the traffic lights and park at the far end of the village of Streatley from where you can walk over the bridge to Goring.

By train: Regular service to Goring station.