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

Ibstone: Three Woodland Quests

Distance: 10 km=6 miles or 8 km=5 miles or 7½ km=4½ miles — easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Chilterns — Date written: 8-oct-2018

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Refreshments: Ibstone, Stokenchurch

Map: Explorer 171 (Chiltern Hills West) *but not usually needed*

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

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Long woodland trails, views, heath

In Brief

This is a walk in some of the best Chiltern forests but ridiculously easy to reach, since it begins in a village right on the M40 motorway. Don't worry about traffic noise: you tunnel under it and quickly leave it behind, entering an enchanting landscape of diverse woods, including tall Scots pines, ash, oak, maple and beech.

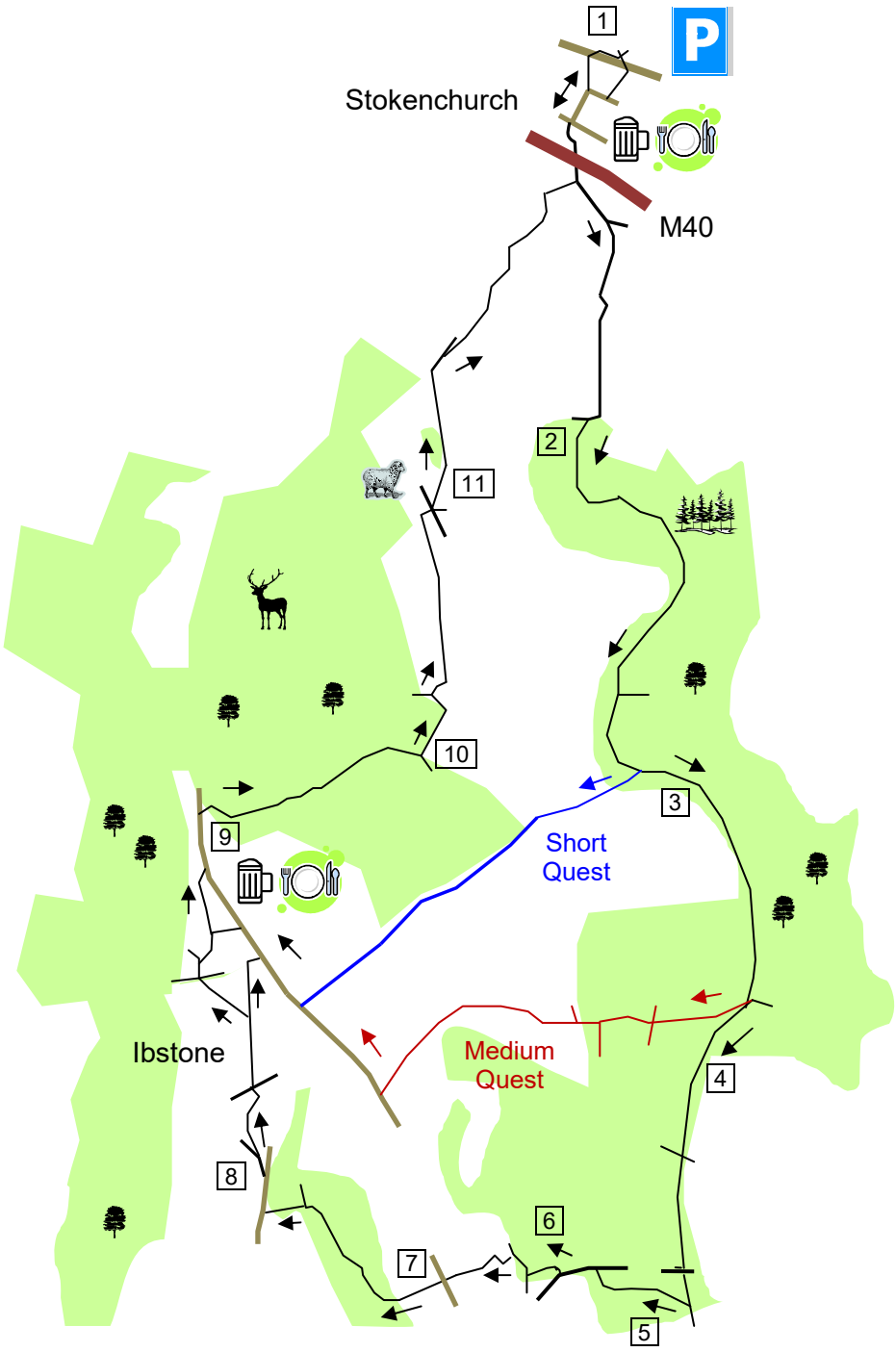
The village of Ibstone is the central feature. The *Chiltern Fox* is also a fine pub and restaurant: for enquiries, ring 01494-504264. You could also try the huge historic *Kings Hotel* in Stokenchurch (if it is ever restored – it partly burned down in 2021) or the *Nepalese Kitchen* (ring 01494-483437).

All the paths on this walk are clear and free of undergrowth, except for one tiny nettly stretch on the main route and some luxuriant bracken on the Common. So shorts are fine and boots are only de rigueur in wet or wintry weather. With no main roads to cross and some easy stiles, your dog is welcome.

The walk begins in the village of **Stokenchurch**, Bucks, just off the M40 motorway, postcode **HP14 3TA**, w3w:sisters.altitude.spouting. There is plenty of parking round the green (the public car park next to the *Kings Hotel* is closed – see above). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Before the M40 motorway, Stokenchurch (possibly "church in outlying farm") was a quiet place, until the Civil War saw some skirmishes along the Oxford road. The Kings Hotel (now out of action) once put up King Charles II and his mistress (which one is not stated). Highwayman Dick Turpin reputedly lived in the village. A century ago, the village women sat outside their houses weaving cane chairs for twopence a chair. Their menfolk were blacksmiths, wheel-wrights, butchers and bakers. The bakers cooked Sunday dinner: one dish cost a penny but meat, potatoes and batter pudding cost 1½d. There were two brass bands, one being the Temperance Band which avoided the many pubs and played outside the big ornate Methodist church. The "Royal Oak" (behind the Kings) now has a Nepalese Kitchen, a rarity worth trying. The "Fleur de Lys" has finished a major refurb. The "Back Street Café" and the General Stores always seem to be open.



1 Go over the main road opposite the Chinese fish-and-chip shop near the Kings Hotel, cross the green and go down Coopers Court Road, a small residential road. At the end, cross straight over a road to a tarmac drive which curves left and right and takes you through a parabolic tunnel under the M40 motorway. Suddenly you are out in a open landscape with views ahead of your walking route. Turn **left** on a cinder drive to go over a stile beside a large metal gate. In 50m, take the **right** fork downhill on a wide track. The track snakes its way between fields and pastures. At the end of the large field, you pass a stone picnic table as the path wheels right and runs over two bricked culverts. Immediately, go **left** over a stile (or through the metal gate with a rather stiff clasp) onto a woodland path.

2 This enchanting wood has pines on your right which have grown to a majestic height (probably an abandoned plantation) and mainly ash on your left. Ash trees dominate this walk; you will see signs of ash dieback disease causing leaves to litter the ground for much of the way. The ash gives way to beech. The footpath is marked by white arrows on trees, as is common in the Chilterns, and you will see them throughout this walk. In nearly 1 km you cross a farm track with a wooden gate on your left. In a further 200m you pass an irrelevant footpath on your left, marked by those white arrows and also by a marker post. 200m further on, ignore a footpath on your right, marked by white arrows. In another 150m you enter a lighter area where you can see a field ahead to your right. Soon you will see more white arrows indicating a junction on your right.

> **Decision point.** If you are doing the shortest option and are keen to reach Ibstone for your mid-walk break, skip to near the end of this guide and do the **Ibstone Short Quest**. For the slightly longer and (possibly) more interesting options, continue as below …

3 Continue ahead regardless, on the main path, with a large field visible on your right. After 500m through these ash woods, you pass a large metal gate on your right. In another 100m, a path joins from the left at an arrow marker. Shortly, running along the left side of your path, there is a wide grass margin. In another 100m or so, you will see an area ahead which has been cleared of trees showing just a forest of stumps. At the same time you reach a tree with a black plastic sign indicating a fork in the path and two possible destinations.

> **Decision point.** If you are doing the middle-distance option and have become impatient to reach Ibstone for refreshment, skip to near the end of this guide and do the **Ibstone Medium Quest**. This option has some interest and good views. But for the full walk, the most satisfying choice, continue as below …

4 Take the **left**-hand fork, signposted *Fingest*. The cleared area will be on your right and woodland just on your left. Your path leads through woods of young beech and ash. After 300m or so, your path goes over an oblique crossing path with a large wooden gate on your right. *Notice the large number of pheasant chicks running around in the vicinity.* The path is made pleasantly spongy by a bed of pine needles. After 150m the route turns **right**, arriving at a new wooden fence and metal kissing gate. Go through the gate and straight across a track near a farm building. Another flimsy stile (this time avoidable) leads onwards along the woodland path. In barely 100m you arrive at a marker post with white arrows on a tree. Leave the path here by turning **right** on a bridleway through the woods.

5 The bridleway quickly crosses a farm track and leads up through pines. There are more white arrows to guide you although the winding path is clear enough to render them unnecessary. After 300m you reach a wide straight track. Turn **left** and follow the main track uphill heading for Twigside. *Twigside was once a modest farmhouse, now replaced by a mansion and outhouses owned by the Getty family.* As you near the buildings, you will see a notice asking you to divert off the drive by forking right up a dirt track. *This attempt to move the bridleway has been slated by a campaign led by conservationists, riders, ramblers and cyclists who argue that the rather vulgar neo-classical mansion could have been built further from the drive if the occupants were so concerned for their privacy.* Take the **right** fork as per the notice. (There is a good reason: this also happens to be the footpath, as used by this walk.)

6 As you come into woodland, go straight ahead for 10m, then wheel **left** under beeches. The house is visible on your left: note too the statue of Winged Victory (Nike). You pass a bench seat on your left and reach a T-junction. Turn **right** on a woodland path gouged by vehicle tracks (the opposite direction from the diversion which returns to the drive). In 30m, at a white arrow on a tree, fork **left** uphill. The path goes past a redundant stile into a long meadow. Cross the meadow diagonally in the direction of some houses, passing a fenced-around young oak. Go **left** through a wide gap under a spreading ash tree into a beautiful open expanse of grass. Turn **right** to regain direction up the side of the grass, with a wooden fence on your right. In the top right-hand area take a narrow rather nettly path over a multi-stage stile, on a path between wooden fences and out to a road.

7 Cross straight over the road to a small wooden gate opposite. Your path goes down between wooden field fences with views left over a line of pastures. *Red kites populate the trees here, as on most of this route, giving out their characteristic call.* The path leads down into woods by white arrows. Avoid a path left and keep **right** on a curving path through Parsonage Wood. Keep following this very clear, fairly straight woodland path. When you see a large metal gate on your left, go past it for about 10m and turn **left** on a narrow path uphill, following white arrows. This steep path runs through hollies. At the top, turn **right** on a tarmac drive and **right** on a road.

8 Just after blackboarded *Ibstone Cottage*, fork **left** on a signed bridleway and immediately turn **right** on a narrow unmarked path through the bracken [Oct 2022: overgrown, walkers continued up the road about 40m from *Ibstone Cottage* where it was easy just to cross through the sparse hedge back onto the common]. This path leads you onto the wide space of Ibstone Common. Go ahead along the left-hand edge. Where the edge curves right after 200m, go **left** on a narrow path to cross a tarmac drive and reach the other side of the Common. Take a faint path across the Common, gradually getting closer to the line of houses along the road on your right. Soon you see ahead of you a large standing stone, of the kind Astérix's friend Obélix would have carried on his back. *This sarsen boulder was placed here to mark the Millennium.* The walk now heads for the *Chiltern Fox* and there is a short stretch along the road. If you do *not* want to visit the pub, take the coloured section below, the **Ibstone Woodland Route**. Aim to pass the stone about 20m on your **left** and keep straight on between three isolated oaks, heading for some redbrick houses. The path leads out over a plank bridge to the road, with the *Chiltern Fox* on your left.

"Ibstone" is a contraction of "Hibestanes", meaning "Hibba's boundary stone" after an Anglosaxon chief, marking the boundary with Oxfordshire. The village was granted by King Henry III to Walter de Merton, Bishop of Rochester and founder of Merton College Oxford. Ibstone encompasses two famous landmarks seen on other walks in this series. One is the Cobstone Windmill, seen on the hill above Turville. The other is St Nicholas church dating from the 1100s.

The Chiltern Fox is a rather stylish venue which also offers afternoon tea. Food is main favourites (such as local venison) but you can order superior nicely served sandwiches. Note: Food is ***not available*** *on* ***Monday*** *and* ***Tuesday****.*

After your break, continue along the road, passing some superior houses of Ibstone. *Take care at the blind corner!* Just after the last house, *Mile House*, opposite a CW sign, turn **right** through a small wooden gate. Skip the following blue section.

Ibstone Woodland Route. To avoid the pub and most of the road: veer **left** away from the road when you see the standing stone to pass it on your **right** and head for the far left-hand corner of the Common. Here you will see a marker post with blue arrows. Keep straight on into woods. In 30m avoid a new metal gate on your left and veer **right**, in the direction of a white arrow marked *CW* ("Chiltern Way"). At a junction with a number of white arrows by a small pond on your left, take the **left** fork, passing another pond on your left. Your path curves right and left through a thicket, still following white arrows, and curves right to meet the road. Turn left on the road. In 100m or so, just after the last house, *Mile House*, opposite a *CW* sign, turn **right** through a small wooden gate.

9 Keep **right** in a grassy area to take a path by a wattle fence and through a small wooden gate. Cross straight over a track in the direction of some yellow arrows and follow this lovely wide path down through beechwoods, following more white arrows. Stay on the path as it weaves left and right. The path gets narrower and runs under ash trees parallel to some electric wires on your right. It descends to run along the bottom of the valley. As a field comes in sight, your path veers right under the wires to a modern kissing-gate.

10 Go through the kissing-gate and turn immediately **left** along the generous grassy edge of a field. Just before the top of the field, go **left** at a post on a narrow path through woods. In only 20m, you come to a wide fork. Take the **right** fork. This path leads you up a bank to a T-junction by a marker post. Turn **left**, go through a large metal gate and go straight up the wide left-hand verge of a crop field. At the top, go through a small wooden gate and keep ahead along the right-hand side of a meadow to a large metal gate. Follow a path along the grass to another large metal gate leading into a sheep meadow. Turn **right**, go through another large metal gate and cross a tarmac drive, going diagonally **left** to a small metal gate into a crop field.

11 Cross the field on a faint path (forged by other walkers rather than by the farmer), heading for the right-hand corner of a copse. Follow the edge of the copse on your left and, where it turns away, keep straight ahead on a faint path, heading for a fingerpost and a metal gate visible ahead, roughly 20m to the right of the edge of a wood. In the far corner pass to the side of the metal gate and onto a cinder track. In only in 15m keep to the **right** of a hedge on a narrow grass path. At the bottom of the field, go through a small metal gate, down into woods. At the other side, go up a wide path next to a fenced horse pasture and then along the left-hand side of a crop

field. *The M40 motorway is now in full view and very audible.* At the end of the field, go ahead through a small metal gate which turns you **right** on a path between fences. Go through a metal gate onto tarmac. Keep ahead and wheel **left** under the M40. Follow the tarmac, cross straight over to Coopers Court Road and cross the green in Stokenchurch back to the Kings Hotel where the walk began.

Ibstone Short Quest 1½ km=1 mile

Take this route if you are taking the shortest option, direct to Ibstone.

Turn sharp **right** at the junction. A wide woodland path leads into a field. Follow the left-hand grass verge. On reaching trees at the top, continue straight ahead on a wide (unmarked) path through woodland. Your path starts to rise, gets steeper and, after 500m in the wood, comes out into a crop field. Continue beside the field, to slip past a metal gate at the end, coming out to the road in Ibstone. Turn **right**, passing *Yew Cottage* and quickly reaching the *Chiltern Fox*.

Now resume the main walk from the "pub stop" near the end of section 8.

Ibstone Medium Quest 2 km=1.3 miles

Choose this option if you are taking the medium option, almost direct to Ibstone.

Take the **right** fork to Ibstone, as directed by the black plastic sign, thus staying on the main surfaced track with the cleared area to your left. In 100m, leave the track by forking **right**, as directed by a white arrow, through the wood. This wide grass path runs gently uphill. In 150m or so you go over a grassy crossing path and in another 150m a forestry track joins from the left. Continue uphill, entering a sloping meadow and going over a chalky crossing path. Continue straight on up the right-hand side of the meadow. Near the top, you reach a chunky wooden seat next to a memorial to a fellow walker "gone to ground". Here there are great views south over fields and forests towards Turville Heath. Keep **right** just before the memorial on a path into trees. The path rises gently under maples with meadows visible on your right. After a left curve you pass beneath wires. Finally you pass close to a converted barn, one of the blackboard-cladded buildings of *Barley House*, and come out to a road. Turn **right** on the road, reaching the *Chiltern Fox* after 500m.

Now resume the main walk from the "pub stop" near the end of section 8.

Getting there

By car: Stokenchurch is within a stone's throw of **Exit 5** of the M40 motorway. Follow the sign into the village, go past the Kings Hotel and park in the car park which is public. There is also plenty of room around the green.

By bus/train: bus 40 from High Wycombe station, Sundays included . Check the timetables.

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