Fancy Free Walks

point your feet on a new path

Fingest and Skirmett End-to-End

Distance: 11 km=7 miles — easy walking

Region: Chilterns — Date written: 18-jun-2018

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Refreshments: Fingest, Skirmett, Lane End

Map: Explorer 171 (Chiltern Hills West) *but the map below should suffice*

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

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Village, hills, views, woodland trails, orchids

In Brief

This is a walk for lovers of woodland – and there is no better place for that than the Chiltern Hills. At the centre of this walk are the two lovely villages of Fingest and Skirmett, already visited by walks in this series, but now from a completely different angle. At each end, you pass through typical Chiltern woodland of mainly beech, but also every kind of tree. Some of the paths in the woods are popular with the people of the scattered fairly wealthy homes but some are almost unknown. Consequently, you meet several surprises along the way, including sudden open views. Apart from seasonal bluebells and orchids (see below), at various times you will see plenty of early-spring daffodils periwinkles, along with violets, aconites, early wood anemones and primroses.

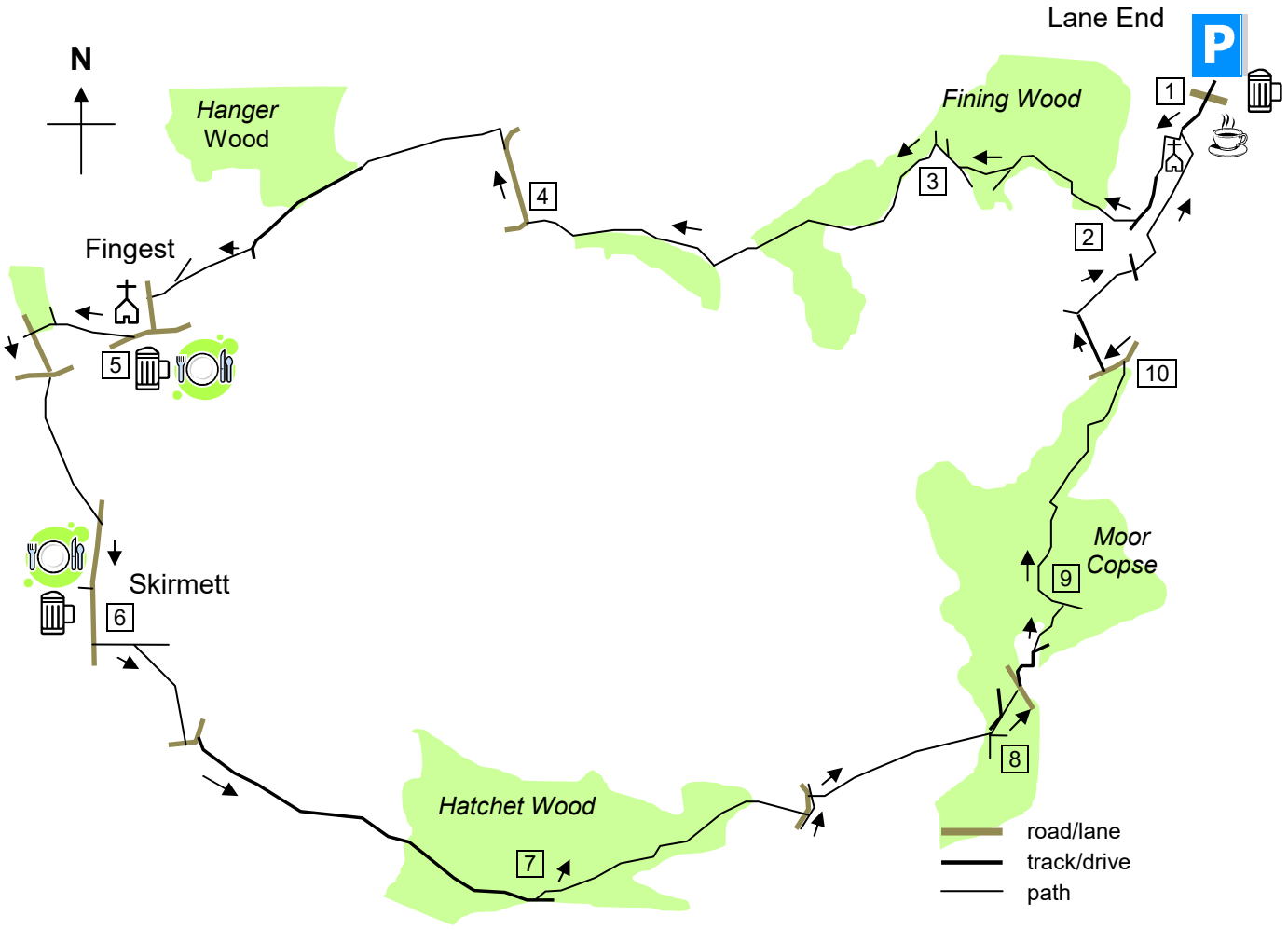
Apart from the starting village, there are two excellent hostelries in the centre of the walk. To enquire at the *Chequers* at Fingest, ring 01491-638335. For *The King's Cow* at Skirmett (open Thur-Sat and Wed eve only), ring 01491-876069.

There are one or two brief patches with nettles, enough to vex anyone in bare legs. Although the author walked in summer with boots, there was no point where trainers or walking shoes seemed unwearable, if the weather is not too wet. But in winter, or after prolonged rain, good ankle boots will be needed as a minimum, with the possible advantage of absence of nettles. With only one easy stile and just a pair of small sheep fields, this walk is ideal for your dog too.

The walk begins in the village of **Lane End**, Bucks, postcode **HP14 3ES**, grid ref SU807918, w3w:geek.surprises.note. There is a free village car park, but note that the spaces closest to the road, near a doctor's surgery, have a lightly-enforced 2-hour limit. You can park elsewhere in the village, e.g. on the grass verge near the church. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

*Your starting village could not be more modestly named: the "place at the end of the lane". In centuries past it was almost forgotten: no fine houses, just one dusty road, no famous residents. In fact this area should really be called the "village of **five ends**". As well as Lane End, there are the outlying hamlets of Wheeler End, Cadmore End, Bolter End and Moor End. Lane End made a living from several small industrial yards. To serve the thirsty workers, the vilage once had at least four pubs. The "Grouse and Ale" still operates as a reincarnation of the Clayton Arms, the "Osbourne Arms" is now a curry house and the "Sun" is now a private residence. The "Jolly Blacksmith" is now a cottage. Lane End has a good shop, McColls, which never seems to close.*



1 Starting in the car park in the village of Lane End, cross the main road and take the gravel track, Church Path, through a small parking area, leading towards the church. Keep to the **right** of the church, on a driveway past houses. At the end, take a narrow path between hedges. This leads you through a small metal gate, between old and new cemeteries and out through a kissing gate. Keep straight ahead on a track, leading to an industrial yard, site of the old blacksmith's forge. Keep **right**, passing a house which still has the old *Jolly Blacksmith* pub sign. Immediately turn **right** at a small signpost indicating a footpath, taking you through a kissing gate, past a small pond on your right.

2 You are now in the wonderfully complex Fining Wood. Your path leads over a long plank bridge, down steps aided by a handrail, and over a steel bridge. Follow this twisty path through mixed woodland for another 300m. Just after a left bend, you come to a fork in the path where the left branch

runs under beech trees. Instead, take the narrow **right** fork which is more open and straight and runs slightly downhill. In 150m, your path is joined by a narrow path from the left, just as you catch sight of a green meadow on your left. In 30m your path splits again. Avoid the path straight ahead and instead take the path that branches **left** into trees. Immediately keep **right**, as directed by a white arrow on a tree. (These white arrows are a charming feature of the Chiltern woods and you will rely on them many times today.) For 100m your path snakes its way to a T-junction with more white arrows. Turn **left**, immediately going through a wooden swing-gate into a crop field.

3

The welcome open landscape now gives you some fine views. In the corner of the field, keep straight ahead through a wooden swing-gate and along the right-hand side of the next field. In the far corner, a small wooden gate takes you on a fenced path through hollies and then under tall beeches. As you exit the wood through a wooden gate you are once more in an area of open fields. Go straight ahead with a hedge on your left and a large meadow on your right. As you reach the corner wheel **right**. to follow the field edge. The path leads down to a wooden swing-gate in the next corner. After the gate, keep straight on under trees, on a rough fenced track. This wide farm track finally leads down through a wooden swing-gate. The village of Fingest is now in sight. Continue down through a wooden swing-gate to a tarmac lane.

4

Turn **right** on the lane and shortly shift **left** (at a commerative QE2 platinum-jubilee bench with a fine view to Fingest), onto a hidden path running parallel to the lane through the belt of shrubbery. (If this path becomes overgrown again, simply stay on the lane and go **left** at a signpost through a gap in the hedge as the lane begins to bend right.) At the end of the path, turn **left** through a wooden swing-gate into a crop field and proceed ahead along the left-hand side. Turn **left** in the corner of the field, staying on the edge, ignoring a footpath across the centre of the field on your right. In the next corner, go over a stile and straight ahead along the left-hand side of a sheep pasture. In the next corner, go through a large metal gate (closing it after you!), avoiding the feeble stile. Continue on a farm track through four (usually open) farm gates. Where the track bends left, leave it by keeping straight ahead on a footpath, following overhead wires. A wide path joins you from the right by a large wooden hut. The towering woodland on your right is Hanger Wood. At a crossing track, keep straight ahead up a very narrow , overgrown path, through a kissing-gate and along the left-hand side of a sheep pasture. A kissing-gate and a fenced path bring you to a junction with a footpath on your right coming down from Hanger Wood, leading past a garden fence to a lane in Fingest. Turn **left** to the unique church, the pub and the village.

If Fingest were not in the Chilterns with all their uncanny place names, it would be called "Thinghurst" which is plain Anglo Saxon meaning "council on a wooded hill". Fingest was once grouped with Lane End as a parish; it is now part of Hambleden parish.

St Bartholomew's church is unmistakable because of its massive Norman twin-gable tower, dating from the early 1100s. It is Grade-I listed as a medieval treasure of architecture. Inside is some fine stained glass. Outside are the brick and flint walls, lined with ancient lime trees, placed in that wonderful setting.

The "Chequers" looks tiny from the road but it has a massive garden. They sometimes build a marquee to add to the service. The pub is efficiently run by Jaxon and Emma. The menu is short (a good sign!), non-gastro but fresh and well-chosen. Beer is Brakspear plus a guest. The "Chequers" is ***closed on Monday****, open all day at weekends.*

5 Turn **right**, with the *Chequers* on your left and the church on your right, and follow the road for 100m to where it curves left. Fork **right** here by a small signpost, through a wooden gate, onto a footpath running by a flint wall. The path leads up to a beechwood with a marker post. Turn **left** on a wide path leading through a wooden gate down to a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane. At a T-junction with another road, go straight across, through a wooden gate, down two steps, on a path across the centre of a meadow where orchids peep out in June. The great domed hill of Combe Wood looms up ahead to your right. A wooden gate leads you across the centre of the next meadow, succeeded by another wooden gate and a smaller coarser meadow. You come out through a wooden gate to the road just before the village of Skirmett. Bear **right** along the road, using the grass verge and parallel path where possible. You reach a group of pretty cottages with the *King's Cow* inn just ahead.

Skirmett (Norse for "Shire meeting place") has all the vestiges of a once-complete village, now a setting for comfortable homes. The "King's Cow" is the third inn to serve the community and the many visitors in recent times. The inn is a free house and rather classy eatery with a cosy little bar and a fine restaurant all of which are favourably reported by walkers in terms of cost, quality and service. The garden looks out onto a meadow with quite lovely round wooden tables where a group can sit. Beer includes the local Rebellion. The "King's Cow" is ***only open Thu-Fri and Wed evening****).*

6 Just before the inn, turn **left** on a shingle path, signed as a footpath. Keep ahead through a wooden gate and, in 20m, veer **right** at a junction on a grassy path running under wires. At the end, go through a wooden gate to a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane. In only 30m, go **right** on a signed bridleway leading up under trees. This sunken path gets narrower, with a meadow on your right and views across the valley. After 700m, your path enters woodland and forks at a marker post. Keep straight on, staying on the bridleway through Hatchet Wood, still uphill. After 400m, your path is met from the right by a private track, just as you approach the edge of a crop field. **Leave** the bridleway here by turning **left** on a narrow footpath into the woods. (There are faded white arrows on a tree here.)

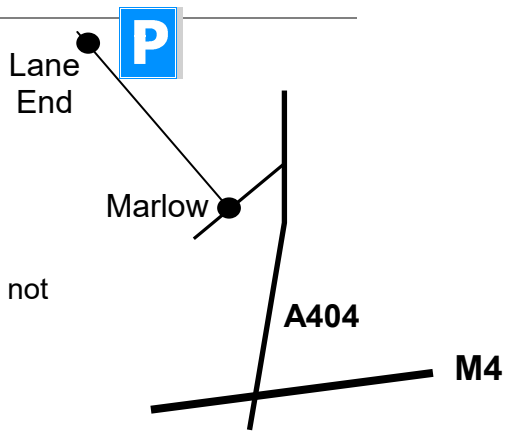
7 This woodland path is a hidden delight of this area. Soon you pass through a space dominated by tall ash trees which lighten the atmosphere. Avoid any side paths as you continue this lone woodland trek. Finally you come through a barrier onto a path between fields. The path leads out by an unnecessary stile to a tarmac lane. Cross the lane to a footpath opposite and immediately turn **left** through a kissing-gate. You pass a farmyard with a large green barn. Ignore the stile on the left side (alongside the small metal gate and metal fieldgate) and instead turn **right** through the metal kissing-gate on the right and follow a grassy path out into a large meadow. Walk the whole length of this meadow along the left-hand side, avoiding a kissing-gate on your left after 250m. As you pass the corner of a field on your left, keep dead straight on, heading for woodland ahead. Ignore a kissing-gate on your right just before the corner and go through a different kissing-gate in the corner.

8 You are now in a wooded area with various paths leading off. Turn **left** on a wide track but immediately filter **right** into the wood onto a path that runs parallel to the track, as indicated by white arrows on a post and a tree. The path stays near the track till the track curves away and now you need to look out for more white arrows on trees. A small metal gate leads to a tarmac lane in the village of Frieth opposite *Moor Gate Cottage*. Turn **left** on the lane and immediately fork **right** on a surfaced drive, signed to *Underwood* and other properties. Follow the drive till just before *Moor Pen*. Fork **left** here at a marker post on a path across the grass. This beautiful flowery meadow is ablaze with orchids in early summer but in a soggy winter it may be waterlogged: so it's best to divert around it. Follow the path into woods, crossing under wires. Just after you enter the woods, you come to a wide fork.

9 Turn **left** at the wide fork, following the white arrow on a tree, going over a 2-plank bridge. 10m later, ignore a minor path on your right, still following a white arrow. You are on a fairly wide path through Moorend Common. The route is clear but there are some twists and false turnings. For example, 150m after the fork you need to ignore a minor left fork, looking out for a white arrow to your right. In another 200m or so, you come to a driveway with a house on your right. Go straight over, past another white arrow. Your path rises through a narrow clearing and enters more woods. Nearly 200m after you crossed the driveway, you approach a grove of yew trees. **Leave** the official foot-path here by keeping straight on through the yews (this choice is more attractive). The curvy path leads to a T-junction by a garden fence. Turn **left** into a driveway by a row of cottages and follow the drive out to a road.

10 Turn **left** on the road, using the footway, and in only 70m go **right** at a signpost on a shingle drive signed to *Chiltern View* and other properties. Before the entrance to that house, keep **right**, walking beside a meadow on your left with some good views. At a 3-way junction, turn **right** past the remains of a wooden swing-gate. Your path goes past allotments and leads to a track with a terrace of cottages on your right. Cross straight over the track to a faint unsigned path across the grass, angled slightly left. As you enter woodland, veer **left**, keeping to the main path. Your path goes up through grass, veering right where it joins another path. Cross straight over a wide diagonal track and walk along the left-hand side of a hay meadow. Your path crosses a tarmac drive leading to the church. Bear **left** across the grass in front of the church and **right** on a cinder track, leading to the road and car park in Lane End where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: You can reach Lane End via the M40 and High Wycombe or Stokenchurch. But the easiest route is via **Marlow** which you can reach from the M40 or the M4. Lane End is signed at a junction in the centre of the town.

By bus/train: bus 28 or 48 from High Wycombe station, not Sunday. Check the timetables.