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

Maidensgrove Common and the Chiltern Way
Greenfield Wood, Pishill

Distance: 11 km=7 miles — easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Chilterns — Date written: 5-oct-2015

Author: Phegophilos — Last update: 29-apr-2025

Refreshments: Pishill? or picnic

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

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

Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

Open commonland, woodland, conservation area, iconic pubs

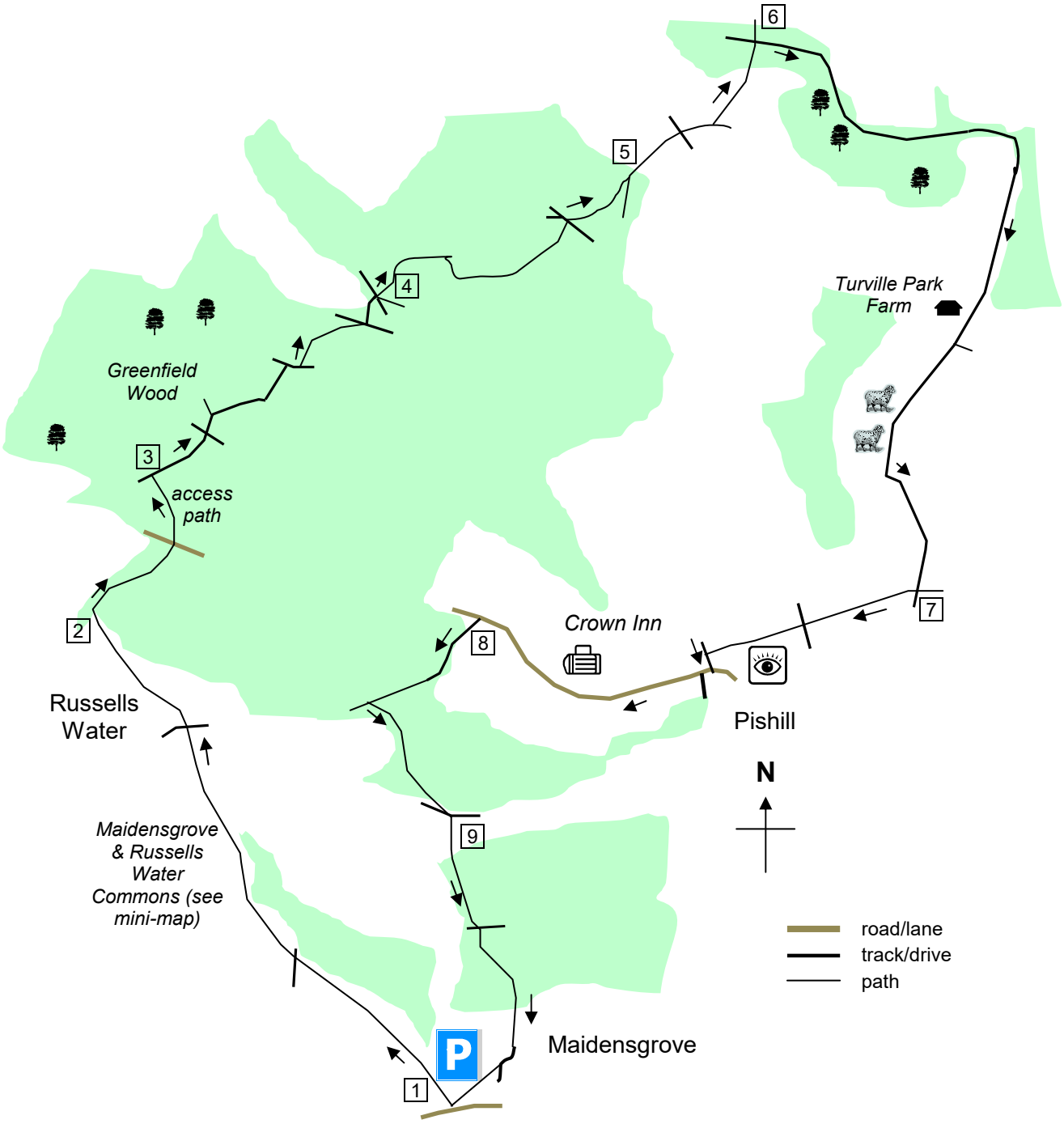
In Brief

This walk sums up all that is best in the Chilterns, with long trails through lovely leafy woodland, much of it beech, but with an ever-changing natural landscape. The paths rise and fall gently as they cross the hilly terrain, giving you a constant change of views. The walk begins with a 2-km tramp across the blissful grassy plain that borders two villages, giving you the company of others at the start and perfect solitude at the heart of the walk.

There is one patch of nettles on this walk. With long socks and maybe a stick to swoosh the undergrowth, shorts should be wearable. The walking is mainly in woodland with no claggy soil, so boots are optional except in the wet seasons when they may be necessary to keep out any damp. Your dog should enjoy this walk too, since the few stiles have a wide gap and there is no livestock directly on the route.

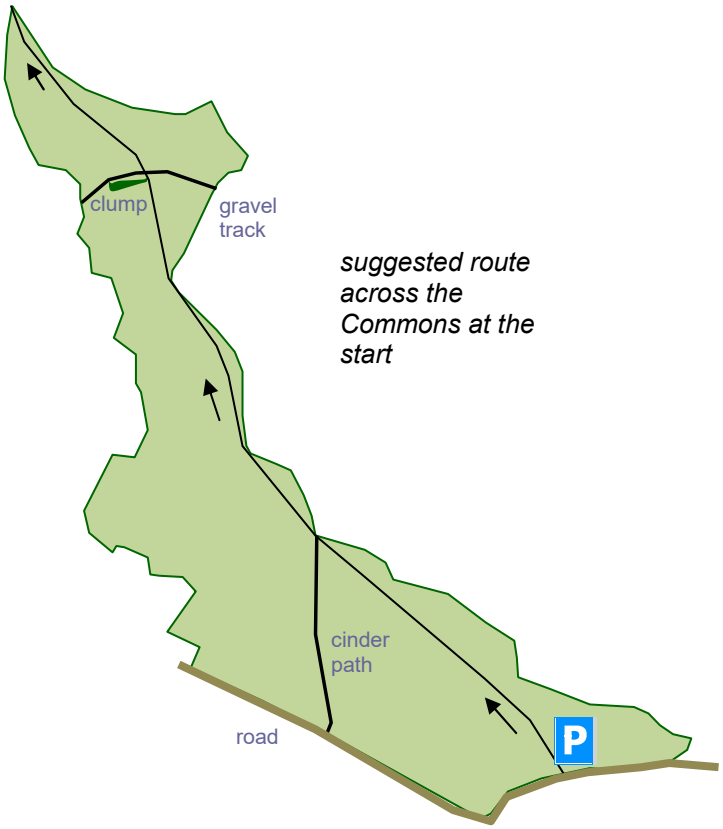
The walk begins at the car parking area on the eastern edge of **Maidens-grove Common**, w3w:megawatt.coasting.part, postcode **RG9 6EX**, south Oxfordshire, easily reached from London. If you came on the narrow lane direct from Stonor, this is soon after you come out of the woods onto the open common. You will see two or three large patches on the right used for parking. If you came through Russells Water village, the parking areas are *after* the (now closed) *Five Horseshoes* pub and after a bend. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



The people of Maidensgrove and Russells Water are especially blest with one of the finest stretches of green grass in the country. These two commons are joined as one. Looking from the air, they're in the shape of a diving whale. You're parked near the "nose" and your first action is to walk to the "tail". *See the mini-map overleaf.* A local farmer mows them each summer for hay, so the height of the grass should make it comfortable to walk on. There are paths round the edge, but if conditions are right you can just strike out, free as a bird …

1 From the parking areas, set off across the grass westwards, towards the furthest extent of the common. You will probably be accompanied by all the dogs of the village and their owners, young and old. Not every-one walks the full length however. It is nearly 2 km to the far corner. You will find a path already marked but, depending on the state of the grass, you can make a beeline of your own. Your route is generally along the right-hand edge, so aim for the corner of woodland on your right. You need to get round a jutting piece of the wood, so you could steer a more central course. As you pass the projecting edge of the woodland on your right, you go through a gap and over a cinder path. At this point, your course is along the right-hand side where there is a path. You go down a dip and up again, under some flimsy wires. The perimeter path curves gradually left with the edge of the wood and suddenly turns right at a corner, where you can see farm buildings and a house over on your right. Now you can save a lot of walking round the edge (see the mini-map), either by switching to the left-hand side or (as the author did) by improvising a course across the centre. Pass to the left or right of a small clump of trees and shrubs, going over a gravel track. The woodland on the right and the line of trees on your left gradually converge to a distant pointed corner and it is here that you pick up your next path.



2 In the sharp corner, take a good path leading away into trees, passing a white arrow on a tree. *These white arrows* ⬆ *are a feature of the Chiltern woods and you will be following them at many points along this walk.* Continue downhill through an oak forest. After 300m, you reach a tarmac drive and a road. Cross straight over the road as indicated by discs on a marker post. This is a permissive path, established through the Conservation Area, which serves as a short cut to Greenfield Wood. Follow the steep path uphill with a wire deerproof fence on your right. Near the top, the path veers away from the fence and, 200m from the road, reaches a T-junction with an official path, also part of the Chiltern Way (CW), that formidable 214 km=134 miles circular national trail. Turn **right**. A 2-km-long woodland walk now begins.

3 Your path through Greenfield Wood is at first an easy double track with a good surface made for foresters [Nov 2019: now churned up]. After 200m, you go over a wide crossing path. Just after that, ignore some arrows on a tree indicating a left fork and stay on the main path [Nov 2019: avoid a right-branching path shortly after the crossing path: follow the white arrows]. You descend into a valley, where your path crosses a diagonal path, and rise out of it. [Nov 2019: avoid some paths marked with "Private" signs.] In less than 200m, you reach the corner of a wire-fenced enclosure with some old pig pens. Veer **right** here and immediately **left**, back on course. You are now

following the fence of the enclosure on your left. After about 250m, you come down to a wide track, with another marker post on your right. Cross straight over on a wide path. In 40m, you reach a 5-way junction where there is a field visible on your left.

4 Veer **right** here on a shingle path uphill as pointed to by a disc with blue arrow on a marker post. The path passes through a beautiful area of silver birch, bends right and levels out. This is the most beautiful section of this woodland trail. Keep following the main path as it twists and turns through lighter areas and back into deep woods. About ¾ km after the 5-way junction, you reach an open area with a wide crossing track which forks on your left. Care! the path here is easily missed. Go across the open area, heading slightly left of straight ahead, and go up a narrow path which has the symbols **PS8** and **CW** visible on a tree. Your path goes steeply up through College Wood and rises beside a long trench valley down on your left. You reach an oblique T-junction just before a field. (Turning sharp right would lead through the wood and across fields direct to Pishill, saving a little time, but - trust the text! The route ahead is worth the small effort.) *The next short section is shared (in the other direction) by another walk in this series "Fingest, Christmas Common".*

5 Veer **left** at the T-junction and go through a new, green metal gate into a meadow. Keep straight ahead, slightly uphill. At the top go through another green metal gate (beside a large metal gate) and cross straight over a track, following the yellow arrow (and still on the CW) along the right-hand edge of a field (crops or in 2024 grass), soon passing a tree-shrouded pond on your right. 100m after crossing the track, almost at the end of the pond, your path veers a little to the **left** and goes straight ahead across the centre of the crop field on a faint path, as directed by a yellow arrow on a post. On the other side, your path enters the dramatic landscape of Longhill Hanging Wood and goes steeply down into the valley. At the bottom, you meet a wide crossing path running in the valley by a flurry of arrows.

6 Turn **right** on the valley path. You are (just) in Buckinghamshire and will be following the Bucks-Oxon boundary until the next turn-off. In 250m or so, go straight over a crossing track on a sandy path. The path goes through a wide gap in fencing, indicating a change to farming country. Your path is now much narrower, running beside conifers. After a large open space caused by much tree-felling, soon there are livestock pastures on both sides. Your path takes a wide arc to the right, round the side of the pasture and passes the buildings of Turville Park Farm. Ignore a footpath on the left here and continue on the track, passing a small holiday centre. Your path is now grassy between sloping pastures. Go over a stile or through the large metal gate. You are now on a generous grassy verge along the left-hand side of a large field. After 400m beside this field, your path snakes into the adjoining field, keeping the same direction but on the other side of the hedge. You meet another field and, 100m later, come to a crosspaths indicated by arrows on a tree in the hedgerow, just before an old metal barn.

7 Turn **right** at the crossing and take a path up the left-hand side of a field with great views to your left. This path will soon be the Jubilee Lime Walk when the saplings, planted by the Straceys of White Pond Farm, are fully grown. At the top, pass through a gap to the left of a padlocked farm gate. Cross a tarmac lane and take a narrow path downhill beside a large field on your

right. You go between fences and gardens as you near the village of Pishill. At the end, go through a small wooden gate, turn **left** on a track and turn **right** on the road in Pishill. Ignore a tarmac drive on your left* and continue to reach the *Crown Inn*.

** This drive leads in only 200m to the little flint-and-stone church which was open at the time of writing. Unusually, the church has no dedication. Its tranquil churchard has three seat-benches and mossy grass: a pleasant alternative for walkers who might need to rest or picnic, whilst the Crown Inn remains closed (see below).*

Pishill (pronounced to rhyme with "official") is named after the many pea farms that once existed in the area. The history of Pishill, especially of its various manors, is described in a fascinating account in the British History Online website (www.british-history.ac.uk). The Crown Inn is still ***closed*** *(2024-25). Text retained in the hope that it will re-open.* *The Crown Inn is a 15th-century brick-and-flint coaching inn with origins that may go back to the century of the Norman Conquest. It has been winner of the South Oxfordshire CAMRA Summer Pub of the Year. Walkers using this guide often lunch there and declare great approval. Accommodation is available in the 200-year-old stable block which was recently converted to a pretty self-contained cottage overlooking the valley, with a four-poster bed. Note: the Crown is closed Mondays* ***and Tuesdays****. In 2024 the pub was closed, having being purchased by controversial comedian / activist and Covid denialist Russell Brand who wants to convert it into a recording studio.*

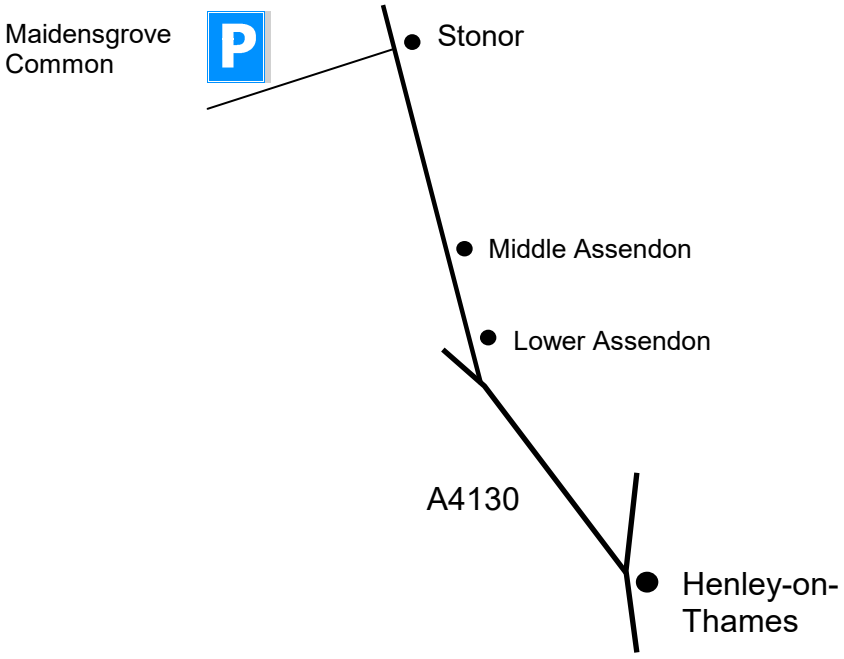
After your break, continue along the road, using the grass verge wherever possible, passing several vineyards. Where the vines on your left finish, turn **left** on a tarmac lane, Pishill Bank.

8 The lane is paved, passing attractive cottages, until the last of them, *Walnut Tree Cottage*. Here, your route continues through an arbour on a narrow path. You are now walking through a beechwood on a shallow sunken path with tree-trunk steps. Immediately after the last step, look for a white arrow on a tree and turn **sharp left** on a narrow footpath. *Don't miss this turning!* Follow this attractive woodland path, with a meadow visible on your right. It curves right under tall beeches, directing you with those white arrows which are hardly needed. After 400m or so, you reach a wide path crossing diagonally.

9 Go straight over the crossing path, through a gap in a broken fence (all that remains of a previous wooden gate) into a meadow and follow the right-hand edge down into lovely Doyley Wood, fringed on the left by a plantation of young trees. At the bottom of the valley, your path goes over a farm track and rises again into dense woods. After a short rather steep climb through more handsome woodland, you reach some fenced horse pastures. Follow the narrow path between timber fences [Feb 2024: one fence was broken and collapsed, blocking the path; so it was necessary to walk alongside to the right of the path]. Your path takes you over two stiles and straight across the shingle yard of Maidensgrove Farm. Turn right-left through the white gate and immediately go **right** across the grass, quickly reaching the parking area where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Maidensgrove Common is easily reached from **Henley-on-Thames**. Take the A4130 *(Wallingford, Nettlebed)* road out of the town. At the end of the Fairmile, fork **right** at a sign for *Assendons, Stonor*. After nearly 3 miles, in Stonor village, turn **left** on a narrow lane signposted *Maidensgrove, Russells Water*. In just over a mile, as you come out of the trees into the open common, look for some dirt parking strips on the right of the lane. They are not marked but are very obvious and there are usually some cars already there.



*fancy **more** free walks?* www.fancyfreewalks.org