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

Wendover Woods

Distance: 15 km=9 miles — easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Chilterns — Date written: 1-jul-2013

Author: Phegophilos — Last update: 5-mar-2022

Refreshments: Wendover Woods, St Leonards

Map: Explorer 181 (Chiltern Hills North)
but the maps in this guide should be sufficient

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.

Long woodland trails, hills, views, flowery meadows

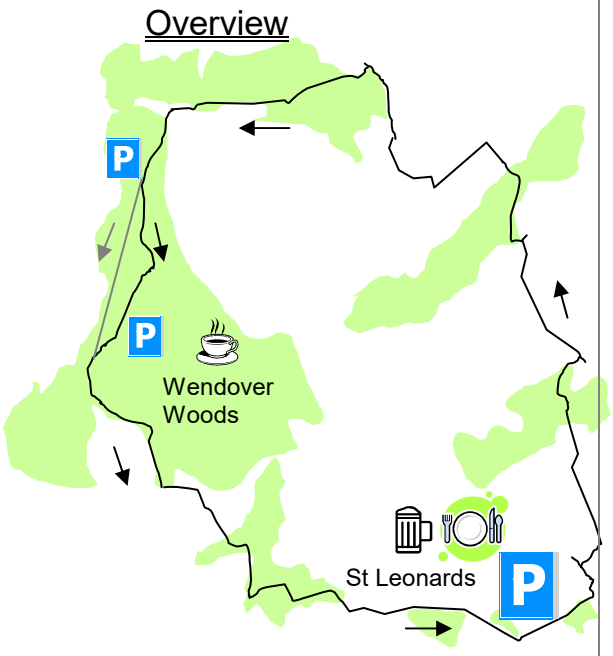
In Brief

This is an absolutely stunning walk taking you through this popular walking area and far beyond, to the surrounding forests, meadows and hills. The other woods along the route, some a local secret, are equally interesting and the beauty of the open meadows is breathtaking. This walk is perfect in any season, in winter for the views, in spring for the bluebells, in summer for the flowers and in autumn for the glorious colours.

There are a few nettles bordering the paths but we met walkers in shorts who said there was no problem. In the warmer seasons, the going is on the whole dry on good paths, so boots are best, but not essential. In winter, boots are necessary. The stile count is very low and all stiles have a gap for your dog.

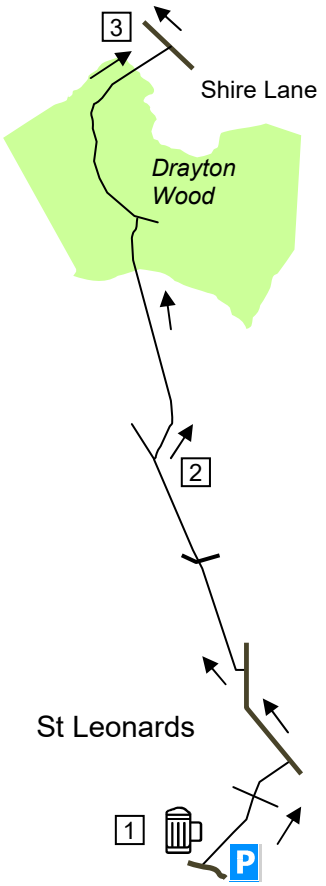
The White Lion has re-opened in summer 2021 after a 7-year campaign. St Leonards has been kept as the main starting point, now providing refreshment at the *start* and *end* of the walk, with Wendover Woods (and more refreshments) in the *middle* of the walk.
The walk begins in **St Leonards, Bucks**. There is space in the village, postcode **HP23 6NW**, w3w:nips.fevered.spotted. You can also park in **Wendover Woods**, approximate postcode **HP22 5NQ**, w3w:pink.overture.walking. This is well marked off Aston Hill, near Wendover with an all-day parking charge. An alternative (free) parking space is a little **further up Aston Hill**, just before the Aston Hill Bike car park where there is a long dirt strip off-road. (You cannot use the Aston Hill Bike car park as it is for fee-payers only.) For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Overview



The Walk

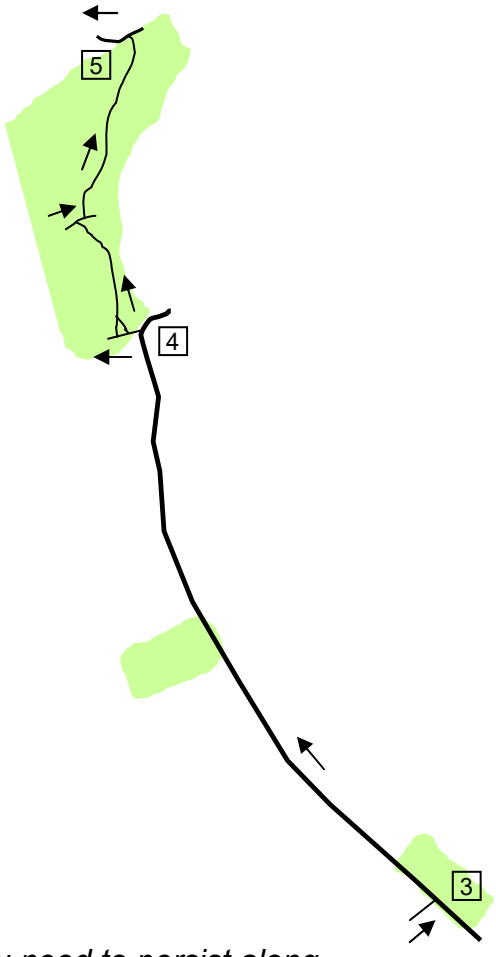
Leg 1: St Leonards to the Woods 8 km=5 miles



1 Just before the *White Lion*, turn **right** beside the car park through a metal swing-gate and straight across a horse pasture. Cross a lane with a swing-gate on each side and go across the next meadow to another swing-gate. Turn **left** on a lane Little Twye Road. *Note that you are on part of the Chiltern Way (CW).* In 150m, just after the lane curves right, go **left** through a small wooden gate on a footpath marked with a yellow arrow and keep your original direction across a wheat field, still on the CW. Your path crosses a tarmac drive, goes through a swing-gate and up the right-hand side of a grassy meadow. Go through a swing-gate into another meadow.

2 Turn immediately **right** along the edge of the meadow with a hedge on your right. In the corner, go through a gate and follow a narrow path between a wire fence and a hedge. At the far end, go through a gate into the laurels of Drayton Wood. Take the **second** path on your **left**. Follow this winding path through this enchanting mixed wood, decked with bluebells in late spring. Keep straight ahead, avoiding all paths off, signed and unsigned. As the path leaves the wood, go through a gate and along a path between fences, ending through a gate onto a lane, Shire Lane.

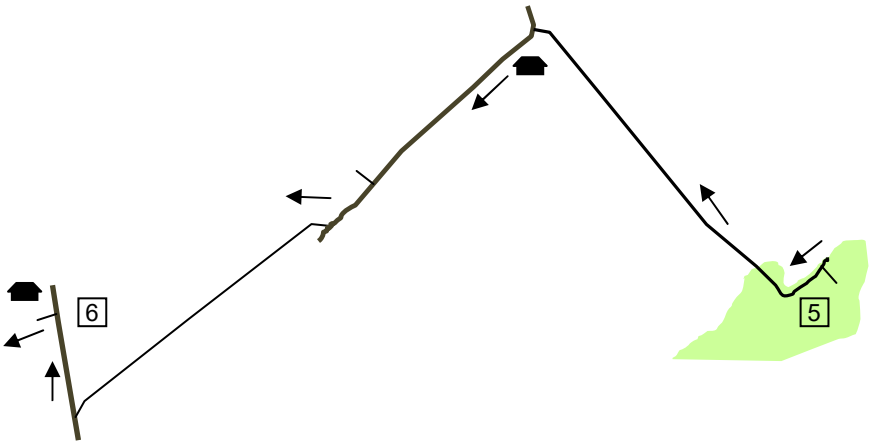
3 Turn **left** on this quiet lane. The houses on your right are in Hertfordshire as you pass a junction on the left. *The varied hedgerows along this lane are full of different bird species, like a long thin nature reserve.* After 900m on Shire Lane, just after a footpath joins from the left, the lane bends right and you meet the Ridgeway with its dark grey signpost. Avoiding the byway ahead, go **left** here through a metal gate into the tall oaks and beeches of Pavis Wood.



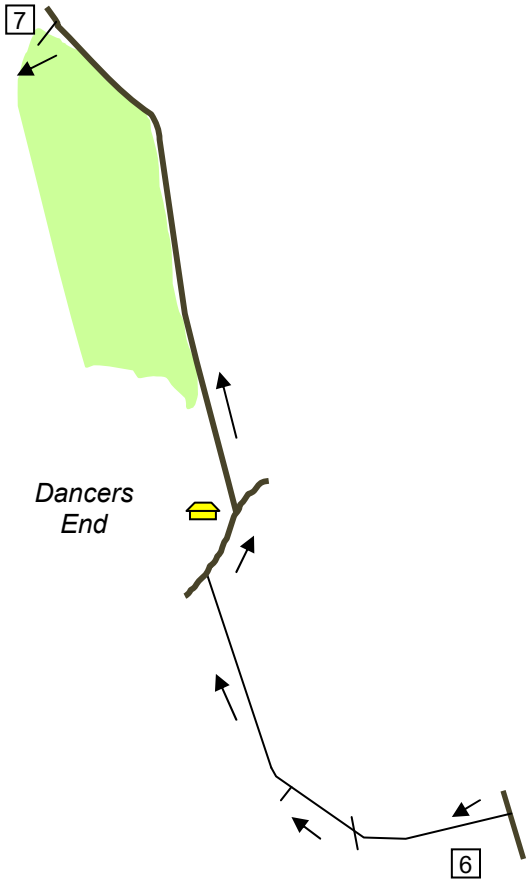
4 Immediately turn **right** opposite a one-finger post on a narrow footpath, parallel to the byway, which is quickly joined by another. Keep to this twisting, sometimes overgrown, path avoiding all paths off, especially a path on your right that returns to the byway at a kissing-gate junction. Your path soon goes steeply downhill, with the byway deep below. You reach a T-junction with a level straight path. Turn **right** here and, in 20m, go **left** up five steps following the waymarks. Your narrow path runs high above the byway, soon going under high-tension wires with views left into the valley and your next destination. Your path goes down a series of steps where you need to take care. It now levels out and runs along a rooty ridge of Dog Wood. *You need to persist along*

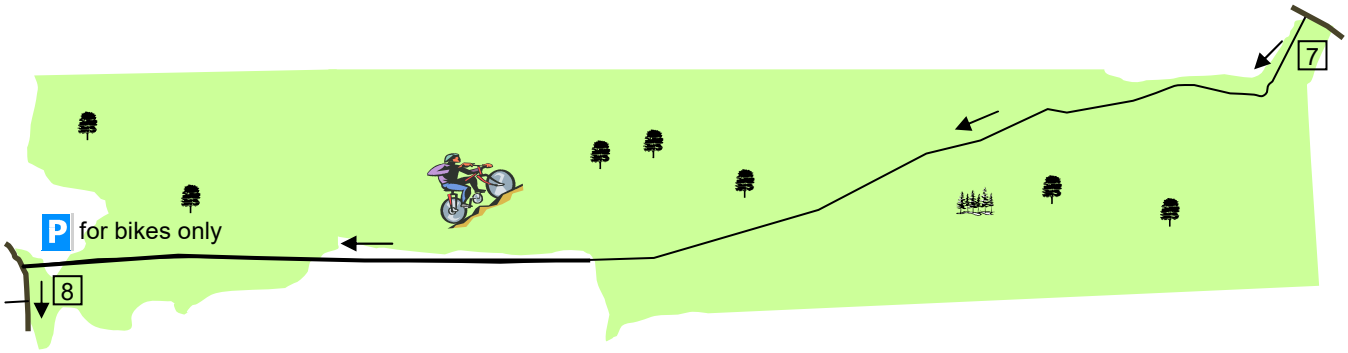
this hilarious but perfectly doable obstacle course. Finally the path takes you down steps to a junction of paths. Turn **left** on a wide path.

5 The path curves right and goes through a double wooden barrier. You are on a pleasant wide slightly raised path, probably an ancient trackway. It ends at a wooden barrier, going past a cottage *Terriers End* to a lane. Turn **left** on the lane. In 200m, ignore a footpath right just before a house *Fiddlers Green* and take a footpath on the **right** just **after** it, going through trees by an unneeded stile and through a swing-gate into a sloping meadow which in early summer is a carpet of flowers framed by the hills beyond. Bisecting the corner angle, go up the steepest part of the slope, aiming 50m to the left of a thatched house. At the far side, go through a swing-gate*, bear **left** to a lane via another wooden gate. Turn **right** on the lane. In 70m, just before the thatched house, go **left** on a marked footpath, over a stile on a grassy path.



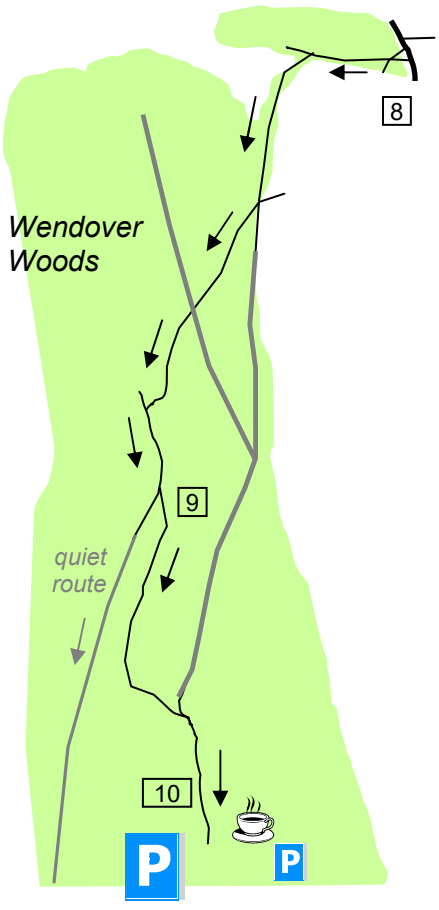
6 On the right you have a view of the cottage's handsome garden, with a smaller thatch beside it. Shortly after, your path goes under a quite magnificent beech tree. You emerge at a farm track beside a barley field. Cross the track a fraction right taking a narrow path across the field, heading for the right-hand corner. Go through the corner hedge and turn **right** into another field. Cross the centre of the field uphill towards a big house *Dancers End*. Continue to meet a tarmac lane and turn **right** on it past farm buildings. Shortly, as you pass the house, fork **left** uphill on Dancers End Lane. *Grand as the house is, it is humble enough to offer free-range eggs to callers.* Follow this quiet lane, passing a garden fence and then woodland of Badgers Wood on your left. After 500m, just before the end of the wood look for a signpost on your left. *The sign is rather hidden, so if you pass a white gate on the right between brick posts with curlicues, you need to go back 10m.*





7 Turn **left** at a signpost onto a footpath. Keep straight on through a wooden barrier on a wide path uphill just inside the wood. A break in the trees gives you views north to Aston Clinton. Another wooden barrier takes you deeper into the woods. Keep to the main path, keeping fragments of a wire fence and a bike trail on your right. Half way up you pass through another wooden barrier. At the top, your path goes through a final wooden barrier beside a wooden fence on your left, under tall beeches, and comes out to a track by *Long Meadow Farm*. Keep ahead on the track with woods on your right. As you near a car park, ignore a path forking right and stay on the main track. *The car park is for the use of subscribers to the Aston Hill Bike Park.* You come out to a road, Aston Hill. Turn **left** on the road.

8 In only 10m, fork **right** at a signpost on a footpath and turn **right** on a crossing track, ignoring a stile into a field ahead. The track leads to a gate of *The Chalet*. Keep **left** alongside the fence and go through a rather tight tall metal gate beside another gate on a more open path. In 50m, you reach a marker post with a path on both sides. Fork **right** here on a narrower path down into woods. Your path crosses the entrance driveway used by visitors to Wendover Woods, via a wooden barrier on each side. It then curves down by a flint wall [Jun 2021: scrambling through a fallen tree] to meet a horse track.



9 Turn **left** on the track, avoiding a narrow path ahead between walls. In about 100m, you come to a major fork.

> The **right** fork, the more level option, highly recommended by some walkers, will take you on a long forest path, avoiding the crowds and the car park, for nearly 1½ km, to rejoin the walk at the *multiple junction of trails* mentioned in section 10 below. If you did not park in Wendover Woods, do not need the facilities and do not like crowds, you could take this route. Otherwise, continue as below.

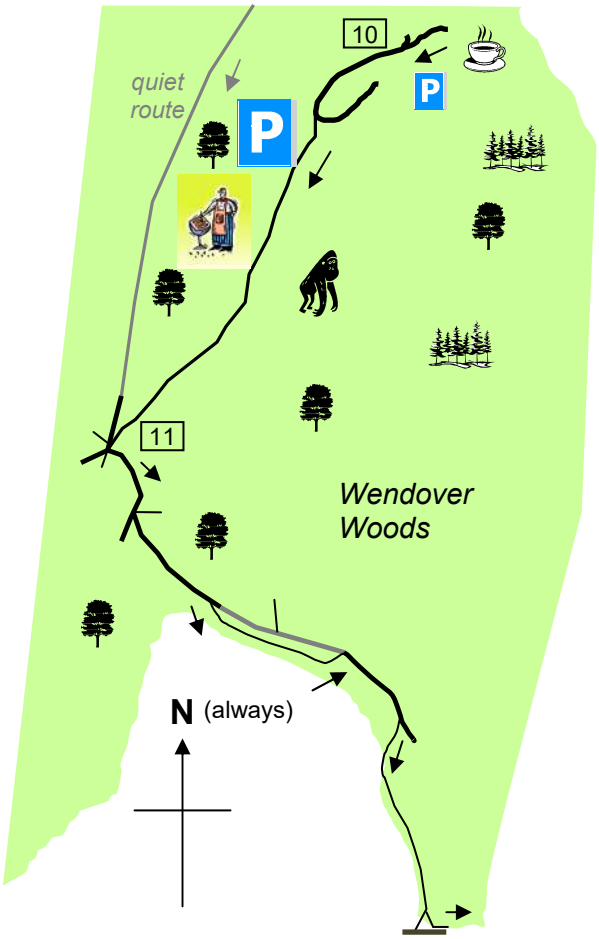
Take the **left** fork uphill. At the top, turn **right** on the drive leading to the visitor centre and the car park.

Leg 2: The Woods to St Leonards 6½ km=4 miles

Wendover Woods are owned by the Forestry Commission, although mainly for conservation not timber. They are a huge draw for families, walkers, cyclists and riders and offer a number of woodland trails, all worth exploring if you have time, or perhaps encouraging a repeat visit. One trail, over Haddington Hill, has a stone marking this as the highest point on the Chilterns.

10 WC

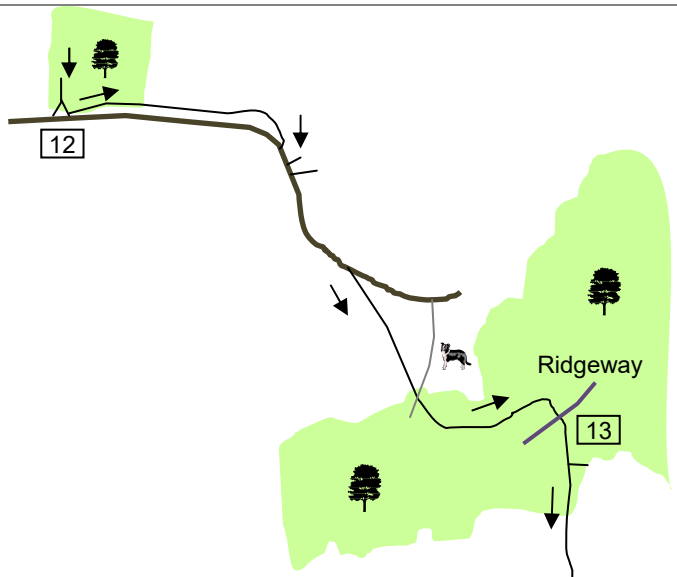
Go past the café and toilets on your left, past the main exit on your left, and keep ahead on the main track that runs to the left of the main car park past a sign *Barbeque area*. Your path passes several BBQ sites and, on your left, a "Go Ape" area. Finally, a one-bar barrier marks the limit for parked cars and you continue on a dirt track, passing picnic areas. Finally, almost 700m from the main car park, you reach a multiple junction of trails next to a fitness trail. (The "avoiding the crowds route" – see end – rejoins the walk here.) Straight ahead is an interesting trail over Boddington Hill Fort. Just to its left is a footpath into the woods. **Ignore both** and instead turn **left**, soon passing a marker post with a yellow top. In under 100m, you reach a major fork. Take the **left**-hand option, downhill, a wide track.



11 After about 200m, when you see a field on your right, you will notice a path on your left marked *short cut* and, opposite it, a path on your right leading into trees marked with a "no cycles" symbol. Take this **right**-forking path. It runs parallel to the track, passing a bench with views, and winding through trees on a more interesting course. After about 200m, it bends left to re-join the track. Turn **right**, back on the track, ignoring a path opposite. The track, now more a wide path, comes out into the open. Just before it curves left downhill, **leave it** by going straight ahead on a narrow path through a wooden barrier, marked as a footpath with a yellow arrow. The path runs under trees, then with a field on your right and terminates at a junction of tracks. Keep ahead, staying next to the field on your right. In 30m, fork **left** leading to a tarmac lane next to *Forestry Cottages*.

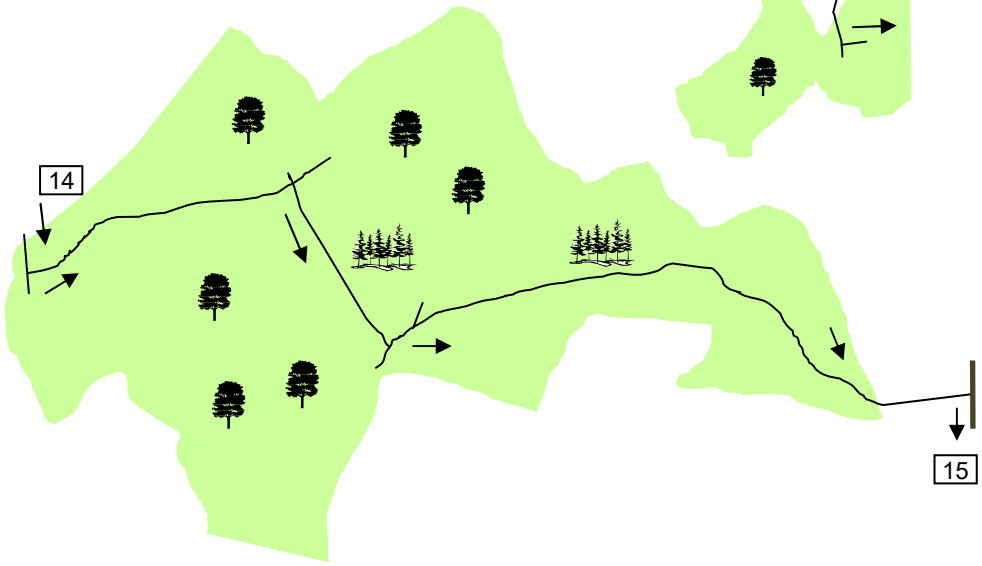
12 Turn **left** on a narrow footway running parallel to the lane on the other side of a hedge. The path takes you through a small metal gate and leads through trees. It then goes through a wooden gate and along the right-hand side of a striking grassy meadow. Before a wooden gate and a private garden, turn **right** through a gap and **left** on the lane. Stay on the lane as it bends right, ignoring footpaths on your left and passing *The Hale*, a fine country mansion, and its farmhouse. 20m after the end of a flint wall, go **right** * through a large metal gate, diagonally across a meadow, over a stile and up into the woods, ignoring a waymarked junction on your right. (* If you have a large dog, to avoid the stile, do as follows. Stay on the lane for another 100m, turn **right** on an unmarked sunken path and, in 100m, turn **left** at a waymarked junction of footpaths.) Continue uphill on what turns out to be a

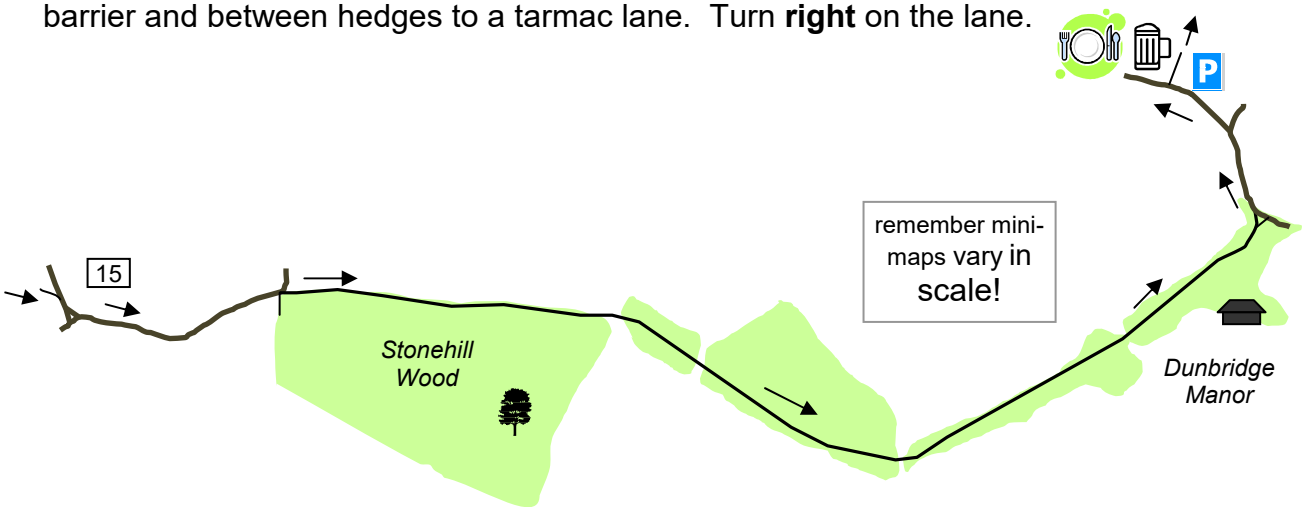
long climb through the Hale Wood. At the top, you meet the Ridgeway Path with its familiar dark grey four-way fingerpost.



13 Go straight over the Ridgeway and shortly, at a marker post, go straight ahead on a path fringed with stone, passing a house on your left and entering a crop field. Keep ahead along the left-hand side of the field and, at the corner, continue ahead across the centre. You enter a thick band of trees by a long depression in the ground. *This is Grim's Ditch, an iron-age earthwork that runs across much of Berkshire, Hampshire and the Chilterns, whose purpose is still a mystery.* (See the *Streatley* and *Ashridge* walks.)

14 Just 15m into the trees, turn **left** at a marker post, and follow the path through this beautiful secret bluebell Baldwin's Wood. After 250m, at a marker post and crossing path, turn **right**. Follow this magnificent path under tall pines for 150m to a T-junction with a marker post. Turn **left** here and, in 15m, avoid a marked path that forks away left. This unknown wonder of a path runs its winding course under more tall conifers and dense leafy foliage for nearly 500m. It finally comes out past a wooden barrier and between hedges to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane.





remember mini-maps vary in scale!

15 **See mini-map on preceding page.** Fork immediately left and turn **left** on a road signposted *St Leonards*. Soon after a 40mph sign, the road ahead bends left. Ignore a footpath right but keep straight on on a bridleway beside *Stonehill Cottage*. Keep ahead, ignoring footpaths on the right. As Stonehill Wood ends, stay on the main wide woodland path, passing regardless a field on your right and a gate and track on your left. Where the path forks, take the **right** fork, the drier option. A footpath joins you from the right as you continue on this wide woodland path through Ashen Grove. A concrete track joins from the right and you pass a double wooden gate. On your right now is the historic moated *Dunbridge Manor* with its drawbridge.

A manor has stood near here since Saxon times but the current house dates from Tudor and Stuart periods. The house was owned first by the Montagus and then by Welshman (and hence Tudor champion) Sir Richard Pole. The house passed to his widow Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury and catholic martyr (see also the "Arundel" walk in this series). She was first cousin to Elizabeth of York (Henry VIII's mother) and niece of Edward IV (and his wife Elizabeth Woodville, the "White Queen"). Two misfortunes arose: first, the land on which the Manor stood was owned by Missenden Abbey and, as we all know, Henry VIII (or really Thomas Cromwell) dissolved the monasteries, resulting in the Manor being "seized". Second, Margaret Pole opposed Henry's betrothal to Anne Boleyn, for reasons of faith not politics. Unfortunately, her son Cardinal Reginald Pole launched a blistering attack on Henry's divorce. Henry's anger was directed at mother Margaret since Reginald was safe in exile in Italy. After nearly three years in the Tower, she was beheaded, aged 68, without a trial, "a tragic and hideous execution", on Henry's orders. For a semi-fictional account of these events, read "The King's Curse" by Philippa Gregory.

Two ghosts haunt Dundridge Manor. One might even be that of Margaret Pole herself. She walks on a warm summer afternoon along a short corridor upstairs then up a couple of steps onto a landing outside a bedroom. You can hear her skirts rustling, hence her nickname "Silkie". The second ghost makes its presence known in winter, not far from where Silkie walks, with a sound of creaking steps, a latch ratting and a door banging. According to an elderly tenant, a small boy (sometimes seen in early Victorian clothes) was killed by a playmate on the stairs.

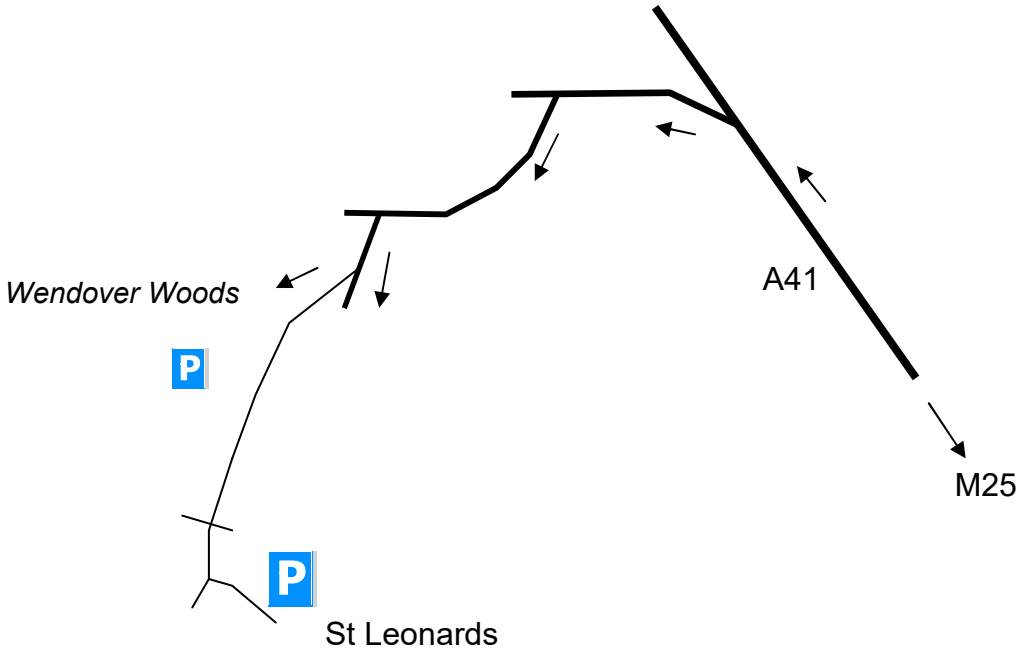
Follow the fine beech avenue and, at the end, fork **left** to meet a tarmac lane. Turn **left** and, at a road junction, **left** again, quickly reaching the *White Lion* in St Leonards where the walk began.

St Leonards is named after the chapel dedicated to the saint Leonardi de Blakemere (1250). It is usually linked with neighbouring Cholesbury as Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards.

The White Lion has been the subject of a long campaign. It won an appeal against re-development in 2016. The new owners are Mandy Grinwood and Kevin "Jogger" Franklin who have spent a great deal of time and money renovating the pub with the help and encouragement of the local community. The pub re-opened in summer 2021.

Getting there

By car: Wendover Woods can easily be reached from the motorway-standard A41 road. If coming from the M25, take the A41 north-west, signposted *Aylesbury*. Turn off at a sign for *Wendover, Dunstable, Tring*. At the roundabout, turn left, signposted *Halton, Wendover*. In ½ mile, turn **left**, signposted *Halton, Wendover*. In ¾ mile, after entering woodland, turn **left** at a sign for *St Leonards* with a brown tourist sign for *Wendover Woods*. The entrance to the Woods, if you decide to park there, is signed on the **right** after ¼ mile. Or, for free off-road parking, continue past the golf club and after ⅓ mile, park on an off-road strip on the **left** before a sign for the Aston Hill Bikes car park. For the village of **St Leonards** *(the new recommended starting point)*, continue on the road for another 3 miles=5 km, always following signs for to *St Leonards*, reaching the *White Lion* on your left. Continue, turning sharp left, then left again onto Bottom Lane, then turn right and park near Little Twye Road, where there are some spaces around the green.



By bus/train: bus 194 or 149 from Chesham (for Underground !) or Tring to St Leonards. Check the timetables.

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