

Aldermaston to Woolhampton (via Stanford Dingley)			Aldermaston to Woolhampton (w/o Stanford Dingley)		
1 <sup>st</sup> walk check	2 <sup>nd</sup> walk check	3 <sup>rd</sup> walk check	1 <sup>st</sup> walk check	2 <sup>nd</sup> walk check	3 <sup>rd</sup> walk check
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## Aldermaston to Woolhampton [Midgham station] (via Stanford Dingley)

**Start:** Aldermaston station

**Finish:** Midgham station

Aldermaston station, map reference SU 601 673, is 71 km west of Charing Cross, 13 km south west of Reading and 54m above sea level; Midgham station, map reference SU 572 666, is 3 km west of Aldermaston and 57m above sea level, both are in **West Berkshire**.

**Length:** 20.3 km (12.6 mi), of which 4.7 km (2.9 mi) on tarmac or concrete.

**Cumulative ascent/descent:** 301m. For a shorter or a longer walk, see *below* **Walk options**.

**Toughness:** 5 out of 10

**Time:** 4 hours 45 minutes walking time.

For the whole outing, including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 8 hours.

**Transport:** Both stations are on the Berkshire and Hampshire line from Reading to Newbury (and on to Bedwyn and Taunton). Journey times are from 49 minutes Mon-Fri (hourly), 58 mins Sat (hourly) and 55 minutes Sun (two-hourly). Change at Reading, with the Newbury train usually departing from Platform 1. Midgham station is one stop further from London with a journey time from 58 minutes.

**Saturday Walkers' Club:** Take the train closest to 9.30 hours.

**OS Landranger Map:** 174 (Newbury & Wantage) & 175 (Reading & Windsor)

**OS Explorer Map:** 159 (Reading, Wokingham & Pangbourne) & 158 (Newbury & Hungerford)

### Walk Notes:

This walk explores a surprisingly quiet part of the commuter area that is West Berkshire, less than an hour from Central London. It is an undulating landscape with some fine views over unspoilt countryside - the West Berkshire Downs, which are part of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and consist of a mix of ancient woodlands, commons, fields and pretty villages with pleasant, historical pubs. The route passes through the chalk stream river valleys of the Kennet, the Bourne and the Pang, where you'll also find some evidence of traditional water meadows. Lunch destination is the very pretty village of Stanford Dingley in the Pang Valley.

The walk also leads through the Bucklebury Estate, one of the largest in the South, and through the elevated Bucklebury Common, one of the largest commons in Southern England. In the main this consists of a variety of woods, but you'll also walk through one of Berkshire's largest heathlands and see part of a famous Avenue of Oaks.

At the end there is a choice of finishes either along the Kennet & Avon Canal or through the landscaped Midgham Park.

### Walk options:

**Buses 101/104/105** (Newbury to Tilehurst Triangle) run through **Upper Bucklebury and Chapel Row**, two of the lunch destinations, about every two hours Mon-Sat (last bus mid-afternoon). This gets you to Theale High Street, which is a 5 mins walk from **Theale Station** (closer to London than Aldermaston). You can **shorten the walk** around lunch, cutting 4.7 km/2.9 mi and 61m ascent, **rated 3/10** (a diversion to the late lunch pub in **Upper Bucklebury** on the shortcut adds 1 km).

**For a longer walk** (which also has an option for an extension), with the same beginning and finish, but a completely different middle part, try SWC 260 Aldermaston to Woolhampton (via Frilsham).

### Lunch:

**The Six Bells** The Green, *Beenham, Reading, Berks, RG7 5NX (01189 713 368, <http://www.thesixbells.co.uk/>)*. The Six Bells pub, restaurant and inn is located – 150m off-route – 2.8 km (1.7 mi) into the walk, has been featured in the CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2016 for the 8<sup>th</sup> consecutive year and been voted West Berks Pub of the Year 2008 and 2015. Open 12.00-14.30 Tue-Sat and 12.00-15.00 Sun, as well as 18.00-23.00 Mon-Fri and 18.30-23.00 Sat. Food served 12.00-14.00 Mon-Sat and 12.00-14.30 Sun, and 18.45-21.00 Mon-Sat.

**The Blackbird Café** Chapel Row, *Bucklebury, Reading, Berks RG7 6PD (01189 712 332, <http://www.theblackbirdcafe.co.uk/>)*. The Blackbird Cafe is located 5.1 km (3.2 mi) into the walk. It offers bakes and light lunch meals as well as its delicious homemade cakes and sandwiches. Open 08.30-16.30 Mon-Fri (-14.30 Wed) and 09.00-15.00 Sat.

**The Bladebone at Bucklebury** Chapel Row, *Bucklebury, Reading, Berks RG7 6PD (01189 714 000, <http://www.thebladebone.com/index>)*. The Bladebone is a family-run, 17<sup>th</sup> century country pub, located 5.1 km (3.2 mi) into the walk and has just undergone a major refurbishment. Open 12.00-23.30 Mon-Sat and 12.00-22.30 Sun. Food served 12.00-14.30 and 18.00-21.30 Mon-Sat and 12.00-19.00 Sun.

**The Old Boot Inn** Stanford Dingley, *Reading, Berks RG7 6LT (01189 744 292)*. The Old Boot is located 8.1 km (5.1 mi) into the full walk. It is the former local of the Duchess of Cambridge, a native of Chapel Row.

**The Bull Inn** Stanford Dingley, *Reading, Berks RG7 6LS (01189 744 582, <http://www.thebullinnstanforddingley.co.uk/>)*. The Bull is a listed 15<sup>th</sup> century country inn with many original features and is situated in the idyllic village of Stanford Dingley in the Pang Valley, 8.4 km (5.2 mi) into the full walk. Open 12.00-23.00 Mon-Sat and 12.00-22.30 Sun. Food served 12.00-14.30 and 18.00-21.30 Mon-Sat and 12.00-14.45 and 18.30-20.30 Sun.

**Woody's Café** Bucklebury Farm Park, *Bucklebury, Reading, Berkshire RG7 6RR (01189 714 002, <http://www.buckleburyfarmpark.co.uk/food/woodys-cafe/>)*. Woody's Café is open not just to paying visitors of Bucklebury Farm Park and is located 12.0 km (7.4 mi) into the full walk. Open daily (except Christmas) 08.30-17.00. Lunch served 12.00-14.30, tea 15.00-16.45.

**The Cottage Inn** 26 Broad Lane, *Upper Bucklebury, Reading, Berks RG7 6QJ (01635 864 544, <http://www.thecottageinnupperbucklebury.co.uk/>)*. The Cottage Inn is located 750m off-route, 14.2 km (8.8 mi) into the full walk and 9.5 km (5.9 mi) into the short walk. It has won a Best Community Pub award for 2012 and 2013. Open 12.00-15.00 and 17.00-23.00 Tue-Thu, 12.00-15.00 and 17.00-01.00 Fri, 12.00-01.00 Sat and 12.00-19.30 Sun. Food served 12.00-15.00 (last orders 14.00) and 18.00-21.00 Tue-Sat and 12.00-15.00 Sun (last orders 14.00).

### Tea:

**The Coach & Horses** Bath Road, *Midgham, Reading, Berks RG7 5UX (01189 713 384, <http://www.coachandhorsesmidgham.co.uk/>)*. The Coach & Horses is located 3.3 km (2.0 mi) from the end of the walk. Open 11.30-15.00 and 17.00-23.00 Tue-Sat and 12.00-17.00 Sun. Food served 12.00-14.15 and 18.00-21.00 Tue-Thu, 12.15-14.30 and 18.00-21.30 Fri-Sat and 12.00-15.00 Sun.

**Village Shop Woolhampton** Bath Road, *Woolhampton, Reading, Berks RG7 5RT (01189 712 205, <http://www.thevillageshopwoolhampton.co.uk/>)*.

Open Mon-Fri 05.30-18.00, Sat 07.00-15.00 and Sun 08.00-12.00.

**The Angel Inn** Bath Road, *Woolhampton, Reading, Berks RG7 5RT (01189 713 307)*

**The Rowbarge Inn** Station Road, *Woolhampton, Reading, Berks RG7 5SH (01189 712 213, <http://www.brunningandprice.co.uk/rowbarge/>)*. The Rowbarge is a characterful traditional pub that has undergone total refurbishment in 2012 after takeover by Brunning & Price. Open 11.30-23.00 Mon-Sat and 11.30-22.30 Sun. Food served 12.00-22.00 Mon-Sat and 12.00-21.30 Sun.

## Notes:

### St. Mary's, Beenham Valence/Beenham

Valence has never been part of the village name, but – reputedly meaning 'on the spur of a hill' – clearly refers to the position of the church itself. Beenham derives from Saxon 'Beena's Hamme', i.e.: 'Benna's Meadow'. The current church building is from 1859, after several earlier buildings burnt down (the original 12<sup>th</sup> century one did so in 1794 after lightning struck). Its peal of six bells gave name to the local pub. The UK Wolf Conservation Trust is based at Butlers Farm, along with ten wolves that can occasionally be heard howling within a 5 km radius.

### River Bourne/River Pang

The River Pang is a small chalk stream river, and a tributary of the River Thames. It runs for approximately 23 km (14 mi) from its source near the village of Compton. To the east of Bradfield the Pang is joined by the River Bourne, which has its source near the village of Chapel Row, eventually entering the Thames in Pangbourne. Rivalling theories contend that – either – the river's name is a backformation from the villages' name, or that – in contrast – the village is named after the river.

The river and its water voles are thought to have inspired Kenneth Grahame's character Ratty and his book *The Wind in the Willows*.

### Bucklebury Common/Estate

Bucklebury Common is an elevated common consisting of woodland with a few relatively small clearings, it encircles the settled localities of Upper Bucklebury and Chapel Row and is one of the largest commons in Southern England covering 350 hectares (860 acres). It includes the famous mile-long Avenue of Oaks at Chapel Row, ancient woodland at Holly Wood and one of the largest areas of heathland in Berkshire.

The Avenue of Oaks is perhaps the most celebrated area of Bucklebury Common. The inner row of Oaks was planted to celebrate Queen Elizabeth I's visit to Bucklebury and the outer row was planted to commemorate Wellington's victory at Waterloo in 1815. New trees have been planted over the years.

Since the Enclosure Act the area is privately owned by the Bucklebury Manor estate, the oldest landed Estate in Berkshire and one of the oldest Estates in the country, but has public access on a network of public rights. [http://buckleburyestate.com/bucklebury\\_common.htm](http://buckleburyestate.com/bucklebury_common.htm)

### Stanford Dingley

Stanford Dingley's name is Old English and means stony ford which usually describes the site of a former Roman bridge, but here refers to the river bed at the bridge which was the site of a ford. The name Dingley comes from the family who held the manor in 1428.

### St. Denys, Stanford Dingley

The church is one of the oldest in Berkshire. There was a small church on the site before 1066, of which the present building is an enlargement. It is Grade 1 listed and one of the few such churches in the South. The heavily restored doorway is 13<sup>th</sup> century as are the impressive remains of wall paintings. The wooden bell tower was not built on the old walls, but started at ground level inside them and dates from 1400. Pairs of early churches and manor houses close to each other are the result of King Alfred in the 9<sup>th</sup> century encouraging his followers to build churches on their estates in order to spread literacy and Christianity.

### Water Meadows along Chalk Rivers

Strictly speaking, not every level grassland beside a river is a 'water meadow'. Water meadows were the high point of late medieval agricultural engineering. The idea was imported from Holland in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century as so many agricultural advances have been. It consisted of an interlocking system of small channels. One series was linked to a head leat which carried water from a point higher up the river. Water in these channels flowed along the crests of low ridges built across the field. From them the water overflowed down the sides of the ridges into the second series of ditches that took it back to a lower level channel where it continued down the valley. This irrigation did not aim to flood the ground, but to keep it continuously damp. Chalk water contains calcium and other nutrients. It slowed as it passed through the stems of the grass and deposited some of its load thus fertilising the field. Because the spring water in the river was likely to be warmer than late winter air it also warmed the grass, causing an early growth of grass. In-lamb ewes were fed on the grass to give them a boost before lambing. They dunged the grass which then produced a heavy crop of hay. Working water meadows have now largely disappeared.

### Bucklebury House

The present house gives the impression of being just a very large and comfortable farm house, but at a closer look it becomes clear that this is only part of an important complex of structures which originally made up one of the great country houses of Berkshire. The original building on the site was one of several manor houses or 'granges' belonging to the great Abbot of Reading. It is likely that there was a small semi-permanent community of monks there, as there are still five large monastic fishponds near the present house and the large manor dovecote dates from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. The first owners after the dissolution immediately tore down the old Abbey Grange and began to build a fine brick mansion in the style of a typical Tudor E-plan building (including some 'priest-holes', as the Winchcombe family remained Roman Catholic). In 1833 the Elizabethan house caught alight though and was badly damaged by the ensuing

blaze, and it took until the 20<sup>th</sup> century for the current building to replace it.

[http://www.berkshirehistory.com/castles/bucklebury\\_house.html](http://www.berkshirehistory.com/castles/bucklebury_house.html)

### **River Kennet**

The Kennet is 72 km (45 mi) long, the largest Thames tributary and one of England's most important chalk streams. It has an extensive range of rare plants and animals that are unique to chalk watercourses. One of the sources is Swallowhead Spring near Silbury Hill in Wiltshire, the other being a collection of tributaries north of Avebury near the rural settlements of Uffcott and Broad Hinton which join up with the waters from Swallowhead Springs near West Kennett Long Barrow. It flows into the Thames at Reading.

### **North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**

The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is located in the counties of West Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire. The name North Wessex Downs is not a traditional one, the area covered being better known by various overlapping local names, including the Berkshire Downs, the North Hampshire Downs, the White Horse Hills, the Lambourn Downs, the Marlborough Downs, the Vale of Pewsey and Savernake Forest.

The AONB covers an area of some 1,730 km<sup>2</sup> (670 sq mi). It takes the form of a horse shoe on its side, with the open end facing east, surrounding the town of Newbury and the River Kennet watershed. The northern arm reaches as far east as the suburbs of Reading in mid-Berkshire, whilst the southern arm similarly reaches Basingstoke in northern Hampshire. The western extreme of the AONB reaches as far as Devizes. The highest points are the 297m (974 ft) summit of Walbury Hill, situated southwest of Hungerford in West Berkshire (and the highest point in southern England east of the Mendip Hills), and the Milk Hill-Tan Hill plateau northeast of Devizes in central Wiltshire, at 295m (968 ft) above sea level.

At its northeast extreme, the North Wessex Downs AONB faces across the Goring Gap to the Chilterns AONB on the other side of the River Thames.

Beyond the town of Marlborough the downs (now called the Marlborough Downs) sweep in a semicircle to the south around the headwaters of the River Kennet, with the Vale of Pewsey cutting through these downs carrying the headwaters of the Hampshire River Avon.

The downland is part of the Southern England Chalk Formation which runs from Dorset in the west to Kent in the east and also includes the Dorset Downs, Purbeck Hills, Cranborne Chase, Wiltshire Downs, Salisbury Plain, the Isle of Wight, Chiltern Hills and the North and South Downs.

Geologically, its chalk downs, dry valleys and sarsen outcrops are of note, the last in the area around Marlborough providing material for many of the Neolithic and Bronze Age sites in the area such as Avebury Henge. Horse racing forms a major industry in the area, largely because of the good quality turf that comes with the chalk underlay, and much of the upland area is made over to gallops and other training areas.

### **St. Matthew's, Midgham**

St Matthew's church was erected in 1869 in a tall 13<sup>th</sup> century style, on a new site. The old church was in the grounds of the former Midgham House, and was pulled down when the present church was built. The site of the old chapel is now marked by an overgrown walled graveyard. From the Bath Road (A4) in the valley St. Matthew's appears to lie on the hill on its own. It is made of flint with spires.

### **Midgham Park/House**

Midgham House is a building which is not listed but which has a double 15<sup>th</sup> century red-brick former stable block with later additions and is at the top of a landscaped private park.

### **Woolhampton**

To the Saxons it was 'Wulflafingatun', and while the ending is the common Saxon suffix '-ton', meaning simply 'settlement', from which the modern word 'town' derives, the rest of the name appears to be its proper Celtic title. It was possibly something like 'Alebhion' meaning 'Ridge Place', referring to the high ground in the parish which stretches alongside the Kennet Valley. The Roman road running from Calleva (Silchester), a major provincial capital, to Corinium (Cirencester), which crossed the Kennet at Thatcham, lies half a mile to the south. Later, that same corridor was to be used for the routes of the Great Bath Road, the Kennet & Avon Canal and the Great Western Railway.

The village is served by Midgham railway station. The railway station was originally known as Woolhampton railway station but, according to local legend, was renamed (after the village of Midgham, one mile west-northwest) in order to avoid possible confusion with the similarly named Wolverhampton railway station. Because of its location on the Bath road, Woolhampton was well known for its coaching inns. Only one of these survives on the main road, the *Angel* (although this is also shut at time of writing).

Within the civil parish is the Benedictine Douai Abbey.

### **The Kennet and Avon Canal**

The Kennet and Avon Canal is 140 km (87 mi) long and is made of two lengths of navigable river (Avon and Kennet) linked by a canal (between Bath and Newbury). It links the Bristol Channel to the Thames.

In the area covered by this walk therefore, the canal itself is not technically a canal, but an improved river navigation of the Kennet River. There are many sections that are in fact the natural River Kennet, which are interspersed with man-made locks and canal sections to make the river more navigable.

## WALK DIRECTIONS

Alight from the train at **Aldermaston Station** on platform 2, cross a footbridge over to the other platform and *turn left* to walk out of the station car park, to continue along the tarmac driveway. In 150m *turn right* at a T-junction with **Station Road** and in 40m cross the busy **A4** and continue in the same direction along **Grange Lane** (with a bridleway signpost in 15m on the left). Ignore ways off and in 540m *fork right* with the lane at the entrance to **Copas Farm/Beenham Grange Business Park**. In 100m you continue in the same direction along a gravel car wide lane at a staggered four-way junction, soon passing **Wayside Cottage** on your left.

The lane ascends gently between trees, soon turning right, then left and in 200m you walk through an often open metal field gate. In another 40m you ignore a right turning track near the brow of this rise and in 165m emerge from the trees by a farm in a pretty valley on your right. In 160m **[!]** you *turn left* through the lychgate of **St. Mary's, Beenham Valence**. You reach the church entrance in 40m on its left hand side and *turn left* to leave the church yard by turning right in 40m through a wooden gate. Continue with a wooden fence on your right towards **Old Copse** (with a large mansion up on the right), which you enter in 60m through a wooden gate.

The path *veers down right* to cross a brook in 165m on an earth bridge. In 50m you leave the wood through a metal kissing gate to the left of a wooden field gate and *turn up right* along a car wide gravel byway (**Clay Lane**). In 250m you reach the top of this rise (**Clay Hill**) by the entrance to **Oakwood Farm** on the left and in 150m you are walking on tarmac. In 100m ignore a tarmac footpath turning right but in 50m *turn left* along a narrow gravel path (**unless** you want to visit **the first pub on this walk**: continue in the same direction along **Clay Lane** into **Beenham** village and in 150m reach **The Six Bells**). In 30m walk through a metal kissing gate and in 230m enter **High Wood** and continue in the same direction along the right hand fringe of it, in 20m *forking right*. In 210m a footpath joins from the left and in 30m you *turn right* at a five-way footpath/bridleway junction along a right hand – mud-prone – field boundary.

In 160m *turn right* again to walk along the fringe of **Greyfield Wood**, ignoring permissive paths into the wood. In 340m, after following the path left and right, you *turn left* with a footpath marker on a medium high post along a narrow forest path at a three-way junction, with an electricity substation now on the right. In 70m ignore a faint path forking right – at the corner of a fence on the right – and in 100m *veer left* at a three-way junction of footpaths (260°), now with **Withy Copse** on your right.

In 120m and in another 30m you cross brooks on a two-railed plank bridge and then continue in the same direction through **Ironmongers Copse**. In 230m go along a two-railed boardwalk over a boggy stretch and in 50m leave the copse through a metal gate by a two-way footpath signpost into a field. *Turn left* along the field boundary and in 80m – in the field corner – *turn right before* a metal field gate to continue with the boundary hedge on your left. In 120m you get splendid views in every direction from the brow of this field over the undulating landscape and in 80m you *turn left* through a metal gate into the neighbouring field and *turn right* along the boundary hedge, down towards the bottom of this field.

In 50m walk through a metal gate to the left of a metal field gate and cross the **River Bourne** on a concrete bridge, in 25m *turn right* along a concrete lane (with a sewage works on your right hand side). The lane turns to gravel in 35m and in 235m you **[!]** *fork left* at a three-way footpath junction by an electricity pole (the right fork turns toward a nearby road). In 25m the now narrow path leads through trees and in 20m you continue in the same direction diagonally across the village green in **Chapel Row**. In 200m reach the main road through the village (**The Avenue**) at a three-way

junction, opposite a bus stop (services to Theale) and in the middle of a small section of a famous mile-long **Avenue of Oaks** (see the 'Notes' on **Bucklebury Common**). The recommended early lunch stop **The Bladebone at Bucklebury** is on your left across a road, with the also recommended **Blackbird Café** just to the left of it.

Continue past café and pub along the pavement and in 35m *turn right* to cross a set of roads 35m apart at this triangular junction at the bottom of **Chapelrow Common** and continue in the same direction along a grassy area to the left of the right hand road.

### **In 50m you have a choice:**

**For a shortcut**, cutting out Stanford Dingley, continue in the same direction and pick up the directions at the end of the main walk directions under **Shortcut**.

**For the main walk** *turn right* across the road and walk along a car wide gravel bridleway, in 350m pass **St. Crispins Farm** and soon afterwards the track becomes earthen and starts to descend through trees (this stretch can be very muddy, but the first 400m of it can be circumvented by following a narrow path on the left through the trees). In 525m you ignore a bridleway turning left and in 80m you walk through a wooden gate into a large pasture. *Turn right* along its right hand boundary (**unless** you want to cut out an ascent through a beautiful wood, in which case continue in the same direction (initially along the left hand field boundary, then between trees) for 600m until you reach a road at a T-junction and pick up the directions three paragraphs down).

In 165m in the far right field corner you go through a wooden kissing gate to enter **King's Copse** and continue down to a railed wooden bridge across a stream 25m away. On the other side ascend through the wood on a clear path, helped by various markers on posts and wooden barriers where private paths fork off. In 270m go over a stile to the left of a wooden field gate and continue uphill. You emerge in a large clearing at the top of the rise and in 80m continue in the same direction along the gravel driveway of a large red brick house on the right. In 80 you *curve left* where another driveway joins from the right and in 40m continue along the driveway at a multi-path junction.

In 30m you ignore a double metal field gate a little to the left but in another 50m **[!]** *turn left* with a footpath marker on a post along a narrow path into trees, just before reaching some houses in **Clay Hill**, and where a byway turns right. In 60m you leave the wood by *turning right* over a stile and continue along a left hand field boundary, with **King's Copse** on your left. In 150m walk through a wooden gate and descend steeply through trees, which you leave in 50m over a stile into a grassy field's corner.

In 15m *turn left* at a fence corner on the left – at the end of King's Copse – and cross the field diagonally to a (not initially visible) three-way footpath signpost (300°) at the bottom of this drop. In 50m you go past a footpath marker on a pole and in 170m you *turn left* at the signpost to continue along a right hand barbed wire fence. In 65m you walk through a wooden kissing gate into a large grassy field with a row of very tall trees on its far left hand side. Continue in the same direction and in 100m *turn right* through a redundant metal field gate to go along a track between trees. In 180m you reach a road at a T-junction.

*Turn right* along the road towards the village of **Stanford Dingley**, in 400m you pass by **The Old Boot Inn** on your right and in 50m *turn left* along a narrow gravel path to the left of the red brick **The Garden House**, about 50m before reaching a three-way road junction. In 65m cross the **River Pang** on a wooden bridge with **The Mill** house on your right and *turn left* with the path and in 80m you reach a small green with benches opposite the recommended lunch pub **The Bull Inn**.

After lunch continue in the same direction (i.e.: *turn right* out of the pub) along the road through this picturesque village (notice the cascading stream in the garden on your left, for example). In 150m you pass the **Manor House** on your right and in 30m you *turn left* over a stile into a meadow, just before **St. Denys', Stanford Dingley** church on your right (which is well worth a visit), with its white wooden tower cladding.

Head for a wooden kissing gate to the left of a rusty metal field gate about 50m to the left of the far right field corner, and a little set back on the fringe of a wood 450m away. Go through this ancient wood (first mentioned at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century) and in 75m leave the wood over a wooden plank bridge across a ditch and through a wooden kissing gate to continue parallel to the right hand boundary but ultimately heading for the left hand corner of the right hand narrow extension of this field (260°).

In 300m you leave the field through a wooden kissing gate to the right of a metal field gate (ignoring a footpath turning left inside the field as well as a byway turning left just beyond the field along a green lane), and *turn right* along a fenced car wide track. In 90m you walk through a metal field gate and *turn left* through a metal kissing gate to continue along a left hand grassy field boundary with a fence on your left. In 150m you have the **Pang** on your left and in 200m walk through a boundary gap into the next field. In 350m you now have a wire fence on your right and a paddock behind.

In about 75-100m – around where path and river turn left – you have some concrete and red brick structures on the river bank. These are remnants of hatches (floodgates), sure signs of the traditional setup of traditional **water meadows along chalk rivers** like this one (see 'notes'). In 100m *turn left* over a two-railed concrete bridge across the Pang and continue in the same direction across an arable field on a usually clear path (5°), i.e.: ignore both the left turning footpath along the field boundary as well as the fording route on your right.

In 180m leave the field over a stile in a hedge gap and go over a two-railed wooden plank bridge to continue in the same direction along a usually well-trampled path through the next arable field, which you leave over a two-railed wooden plank bridge. *Turn right* at a four-way footpath junction to cross a ditch over an earth bridge and follow a right hand field boundary until – in 370m – you leave the field over a stile to the left of a double metal field gate and *turn right* at a T-junction with a road, by **Manor Farm House** (on the OS map) in **Bucklebury** village. In 150m *fork left* at a staggered triangular road junction (signposted Upper Bucklebury and Midgham) and in 165m ignore a right turning drive to **Bucklebury Farm Park**, an animal park.

In 15m – opposite the left hand wrought iron entrance gate to **Bucklebury House** – you **[!]** *turn right* along a signposted footpath through a high wooden kissing gate into a deer enclosure and cross it on a bearing of 220° towards the bottom right corner of a distant wood. In 200m leave the enclosure through another high wooden kissing gate and walk through the Park's car park to its left hand corner 50m away. There follow a yellow marker on a fence post along a grassy path to the right of the driveway. In 20m *turn left* through a high metal gate in the deer fence on your left and continue in the previous direction along the driveway, in 25m crossing **Oli's Brook**.

In 60m you walk through a metal gate to the right of a metal field gate and in 20m through a wooden gate to the right of a metal field gate, where on the left you find **Woody's Café** and a **farmshop**, and in 20m continue in the same direction at a four-way junction of driveways. In 15m walk through a metal field gate into a grassy slope and follow its left hand boundary uphill. In 50m continue uphill through the left of two metal fieldgate and to the right of some animal sheds halfway up the slope (210°). In 150m go over a stile to the right of a metal field gate (wonderful **views** are to be had from here back **across the Pang Valley to Hawkridge Wood**).

After another stile (in 10m) you *veer left* with a wire fence on your right and in 75m ignore a high metal gate on the right, continue between fences and in 20m go through a high wooden kissing gate (*before* reaching another high metal gate) and *turn left* at a T-junction with a restricted byway between trees. In 55m this continues as a gravel driveway (with **Vanners** on the right – on the OS map). In 180m you **[!]** *turn right* at a four-way junction along a footpath into trees, where a bridleway joins from the left. This is the shortcut.

**\*)** Follow this path through a dip and *veer right* with it and in 320m *turn right* at a T-junction with a byway. Pass **Osgoods Holding** in 50m on your right, cross a stream on the driveway and in 100m *turn up left* along a byway at a staggered four-way junction just before **Sadgrove Farm** (on the OS map). In 320m you walk past **Oak Barn Cottage** on your left and in 60m ignore a track turning left. In 30m a footpath joins from the left and a bridleway turns right at a four-way junction. Continue in the same direction with the byway **unless you want to walk past the late lunch stop The Cottage Inn, Upper Bucklebury**, or to a **bus stop for services to Theale**, in which case revert to the end of the walk directions under **Diversion to Pub in Upper Bucklebury**.

In 30m you emerge from the trees and continue in the same direction along a driveway with red brick timber-framed houses on the left. In 140m you cross a narrow tarmac lane and continue in the same direction along a byway through trees. In 150m you cross a road and walk into a small concrete car park area. In 15m **[!]** *turn left* along an unmarked and indistinct narrow path into trees. In 40m ignore a right fork and 110m emerge in open heathland and *continue in the same direction* – on a clear path – towards a right hand plantation (105°). In 50m *veer left* where another path joins from the right. This is the diversion to the pub.

**\*\*)** You are on **Bucklebury Common (Nature Reserve)**, it is Open Access land. You can chose any route through it to its far right corner, but here is the recommended one: You head towards a prominent wooded hillock – which looks like a Neolithic burial mound, but isn't one – 150m away. Walk up the hillock and at the top take the left of three indistinct descent routes (20°). In 30m cross an indistinct path and continue *veering right* without a clear path through the heath on a bearing of 65° towards another wooded hillock (the left – and higher one - of two) 200m away. Walk along the hillock on its right hand side (still without a path) and in 50m *turn right* along a narrow path towards a solitary (if not very tall) tree 40m away, standing about halfway between the two wooded hillocks.

Continue in the same direction at the tree at a four-way junction of paths to pass the other wooded hillock on its left hand side. In 140m enter some trees and *veer left* with the path. Ignore all ways off and in 240m emerge on a road at a crossroads with a gravel track from the right. You *turn right* along the road and *veer right* in 40m where the road turns left (and where another gravel track joins from the right along a row of white cottages) to continue along a tarmac driveway to the right of **Fireside Cottage** (signposted **Wootten's, Park House, Hideaway...**), and with a footpath signpost.

In 400m you pass the entrance to **Hideaway** on the left and in 30m **[!]** *veer right* through a wooden gate to the right of the car wide gate leading to **Wootten's**. You follow a fenced path, which in 40m widens out, revealing splendid panoramic views out over the **River Kennet Valley** to the Hampshire part of the **North Wessex Downs**. In 100m you go over a stile in a fence and continue in the same direction (170°) down a pasture, to the left of a house at the bottom of the field. Half-way down you can spot the church tower in **Midgham** on the right, where you are heading next.



In 300m you walk through a wooden kissing gate to the left of a metal field gate and *turn right* along a road. In 220m a footpath joins from the right, in 130m you reach the bottom of this drop and re-ascend along the road, which in 200m levels out at the three-way junction of **School Hill** and **Birds Lane**. You continue in the same direction and in 60m a footpath joins from the left through a car wide gate by **West Lodge**, with the entrance to the church yard of **St. Matthew's, Midgham** right next to it.

**Here you have a choice** (but first you could have a look at the church and enjoy the views from the churchyard across the plain):

**For a finish through Midgham Park** (cuts 1.3 km but adds 25m ascent) pick up the directions at the end of this text under **Park Ending**.

**For the recommended route** (this involves 300m of road walking amidst fast traffic), you continue in the same direction down the road and in 600m reach the **A4**. You have **The Coach & Horses** on the right. Cross the road and continue in the same direction along a car wide gravel path to the left of a red brick wall. In 30m you walk through a kissing gate and then a grassy area in the same direction. In 75m go through another kissing gate onto a road and *turn right* along its pavement. In 100m the pavement discontinuous and you have to walk on the road. In 250m the road crosses the railway tracks on a single lane bridge. In 50m you cross the **Kennet and Avon Canal** on a road bridge and *turn down right* on the other side with a signpost.

*Turn right* again at the canal to go under the bridge and continue with the water on your left hand side. In 900m you *turn left* with the towpath across **Cranwell** (Swing-) **Bridge** and continue in the same direction on the opposite canal bank. In 800m you *turn right* across **Oxlease** (Swing-) **Bridge** to then:

- **either** *turn left* with the towpath, in 500m cross the **River Kennet**, which flows into the canal from the right, and in 90m reach **The Rowbarge Inn**;
- **or** continue dead ahead to the left of a metal field gate, away from the canal. In 25m you *turn left* at a T-junction with a car wide track to continue with a lake on your right hand side. In 140m you cross the **River Kennet** and then *turn left* at a T-junction, with the river now on your left and another – larger – lake on the right hand side. In 330m you ignore a footpath turning right between trees and in 140m reach a road with **The Rowbarge Inn** on your left.

From the pub you *turn left* long the road, cross a swing-bridge over the river navigation and in 150m reach the level crossing by **Midgham Station**. London-bound trains depart from the far platform 2, the entrance to which is 35m to the left through the car park **[!] on the other side of the barrier. There is no footbridge across the tracks and the barrier can shut very early, sometimes close to [!] 10 minutes before departure**, as plenty of non-stopping trains run along this line.

## Shortcut

(cut 4.7 km (2.9 mi), 61m ascent/descent and 610m tarmac)

**Cuts out the pretty villages of Stanford Dingley and Bucklebury as well as a stretch along the Pang River; lunch is in Chapel Row or Upper Bucklebury)**

**Toughness Rating: 3 out of 10**

In 50m pass an octagonal bench around a tree on your left and in 70m *turn left* at the end of the grassy area along a car wide gravel track into trees with a byway signpost. In 300m this turns briefly left by some farm buildings before you *turn right* at a T-junction of tracks. In 40m you *turn left* at a three-way byway junction and continue to the left of the red brick **Brittons Cottage**, ignoring a byway turning right. In 60m – at a five-way junction of three byways, a bridleway to the right and a footpath from the left – **[!]** *turn hard right* down the narrow path (the bridleway) into trees (335°). [i.e.: along the edge of the wood, **[!]** NOT along the car wide track turning half right.]

In 150m some houses can be spotted through the trees on the left, in 80m you walk through a mud-prone area at the bottom of a dip and in 50m *turn right* where a bridleway joins from the left. In 65m you pass some cowsheds on your right and continue with a brook on the right. In 180m you cross that brook where another bridleway joins from the left and *veer right* with a barbed wire fence and some trees on your right. In 120m you emerge from the wood at a bend of a tarmac lane and with a driveway turning left. *Veer up left* along the tarmac lane and in 90m *turn left* over a stile to the right of a double wooden field gate, opposite **Browns gate** house on your right.

Continue in the same direction for 620m, for 50m along a fenced path, then over a stile to the right of a double metal field gate and along a couple of fields' right hand boundaries (and with a beautiful sloping valley off to the left), then along a wide path with a garden hedge on the right (the house behind the hedge, **The Manor**, is owned by **Mr. & Mrs. Middleton**, parents of a now rather famous set of two daughters and one son) and finally over a stile to the right of a double metal field gate to *turn left* along a road at a T-junction (**Pease Hill**).

In 260m *turn right* along a car wide bridleway into trees, soon descending and in 140m cross a stream and re-ascend. In 200m you ignore a bridleway joining from the left but **[!]** in another 10m you *veer right* at a four-way junction along a path into trees (280°), with the wood's fringe now about 30m to your right and in 75m continue in the same direction at a four-way junction along a footpath into trees. The restricted byway from the right is the main walk. Pick up the directions in the main walk at the asterisk \*).

## **Diversion to Pub in Upper Bucklebury (add 1.0 km and 390m tarmac)**

*Turn right* with the bridleway, in 50m cross a narrow path and in 5m *fork left* to soon continue between trees. In 190m you *turn right* at a T-junction with a tarmac lane by a bridleway signpost. In 30m you *turn left* along a gravel driveway towards some houses by a '**Bucklebury Quiet Lane**' sign on a wide wooden post. In 40m *turn left* just before the cottages and in 30m – at the end of the cottages on the right – enter **Byles Green** in **Upper Bucklebury** through a wooden kissing gate to the left of a wooden field gate.

You follow the left hand boundary and in 90m walk through a wooden gate in a hedge 50m to the right of the corner of the meadow to continue in the same direction through another meadow which you leave in 160m through a wooden kissing gate and continue along a fenced path with a meadow on the right, in 75m between garden fences. In 40m

you reach the main road through the village at a T-junction, with **The Cottage Inn** 30m on your right and a bus stop further along the road.

*Turn left* at the road T-junction, in 250m ignore a left turning byway down a car wide gravel lane and *veer right* across the road and then along a narrow path into trees with a bridleway signpost, just before the road veers left. In 230m cross a tarmac lane to continue in the same direction along a narrow path through trees and in 40m cross a gravel car wide track and in 135m emerge in open heathland. You now follow a clear narrow path through the heath (65°), in 25m ignore a right fork and in another 15m you continue in the same direction, where another path joins from the left.

This is the main walk. Pick up the directions in the main walk at the double asterisk\*\*).

### **Park Ending (cut 1.3 km and 390m tarmac)**

*Turn left* along the gravel footpath past **West Lodge** into **Midham Park**. In 35m walk through a metal gate to the right of a metal field gate along a car wide track, which veers left then right and in 280m through a hedge gap (a missing field gate) to continue with a fence and a hedge on your left and with **Midham Park Farm** on a hill on the left. In 300m you cross the driveway to **Midham House**, via gates on either side of it. Continue along a clear path through a meadow on a bearing of 95°, i.e.: slightly further left than the signpost indicates.

In 100m you pass an overgrown walled graveyard on the left, the site of the original church before St. Matthew's was built in the 1860s and in 100m – by a summer house by a pond and views of **Midham House** through the foliage up on a hill on your left – you walk through a gap in a metal gate and *veer left* uphill through a grassy slope without a clear path, passing either side of a small clump of trees. In 180m you walk through a metal gate to the left of a metal field gate and continue with a fence on the left. In 130m you go through a horse-blocking barrier, then a metal gate to the right of a metal field gate, and continue in the same direction. In 65m you pass the ha-ha of a white house on your left (**East Lodge**) and in 50m go over a stile to the left of a metal field gate to *turn right* along a road.

In 800m *turn left* in the village of **Woolhampton** at a T-junction with the **A4**, in 75m *turn right* by a road coming down from the left to cross the road and continue along a narrow gravel track between houses with a footpath signpost on an electricity pole (**unless** you want to go to the **Village Shop Woolhampton** 50m further along on your left or **The Angel Inn** a little further still. Follow this path over a railed concrete bridge and around to the left and in 190m *turn right* along **Station Road** to reach **Midham station** in 20m. London bound trains depart from the near platform 2, the entrance to which is 35m to the right through the car park.

The recommended tea stop **The Rowbarge Inn** is on the other side of the tracks though through the level crossing, 140m along the road and then across a swing-bridge over the **River Kennet Navigation**. If you go there, be aware that **there is no foot-bridge across the tracks and that the barrier can shut very early**, often close to **[!] 10 minutes before departure**, as plenty of non-stopping trains run along this line.