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

Hurley: River Thames and hills

Distance: 8¼ km=5¼ miles — easy walking

Region: Berkshire — Date written: 15-jun-2019

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Refreshments: Hurley, *Dew Drop Inn*

Map: 172 (Chilterns East) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Village, church, river, meadows, woodland, four pubs, country highways

In Brief

This walk takes you from a charming historic Thames village up into the wooded hills. The *Dew Drop inn* re-opened on Friday 5th August 2022. It then leads you back into the village, possibly for a final sojourn with two excellent places of refreshment **. Along the way, you walk along a quite heavenly green Thamesside stretch and, in the heights, through some majestic woodland. (* For enquiries at the *Dew Drop*, ring 01628-315662; ** for the *Rising Sun*, 01628-825733, for the *Olde Bell* 01628-825881.)

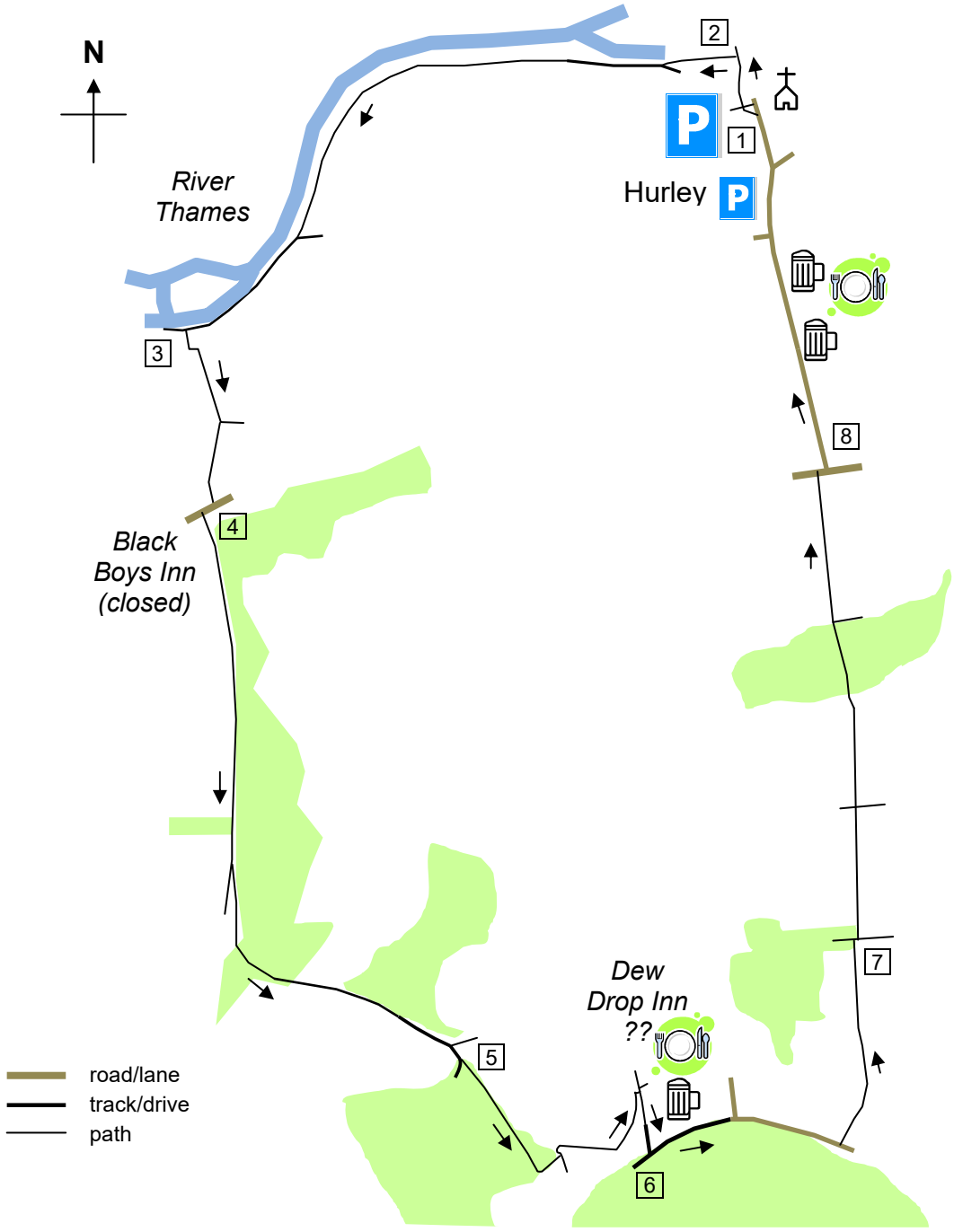
There is a short nettly section just after you leave the river where shorts will be uncomfortable. In damp weather, because of the woodland, you will be glad to be wearing boots, although the walk can be done in trainers. Your dog can certainly come on this walk, with a lead of course, because of two main road crossings, with just one stile which is a challenge for a large dog.

The walk begins in the village of **Hurley**, just upriver from Maidenhead, Berks, nearest postcode **SL6 5NF**. There is plenty of free parking space in Hurley, including several marked areas along the roadside. For the purpose of this walk, the starting point is the large car park opposite **Hurley Church**, w3w:hoot.dusty.shatters, which is a *must visit* (including the churchyard). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Before Hurley became a village, it was a Thames fording place and a Priory, and one of the earliest Anglosaxon churches stood here. The Priory was dissolved under Henry VIII in 1545 and passed to the Lovelaces who built a mansion called Ladye Place on the same site. Sir Richard took to buccaneering with Sir Frances Drake and, supposedly, furnished the house from "legalised piracy". John, third Lord Lovelace, was a debauchee, who allegedly drank a quart of brandy every morning, and an ardent anti-Catholic. He was jailed for complicity in the Rye House plot to assassinate King Charles II and (future

short-term king) James. He took up the cause of William of Orange, using a hidden tunnel for his fellow conspirators to use. A century later, the scene passes to a certain Mrs Williams who bought, on a once-only whim, two lottery tickets. The first won £2000 and the second also won £500! (What's the chance of that?) She bought Ladye Place with the proceeds. The place now became cursed with the darkest omens which spread to other houses. A tree in the grounds of Ladye Place withered at the same time that its owner perished with 900 souls when HMS Royal George sank in 1782. One of the Clayton East family who owned the Manor House was drowned and his brother died prematurely. Another member of the family died suddenly in 1932, aged 24, while playing with his pet mongoose. His young widow died a year later in an aeroplane accident. Not surprisingly, Hurley has its ghosts. The "Grey Lady" was Edward the Confessor's sister and, aided by séances, an investigation at the haunted spot found the remains of Ladye Place on the site of the old Priory.



1 Starting in the large car park in Hurley, go out towards the church. But, just *before* the road, turn **left** on a tarmac path, passing on your right a small triangular green with a large cedar in the middle. (If you parked elsewhere, this is a **left** fork, passing the car park on your left, 50m before the church.) Go past the gate for *Tithecote Manor* and take a narrow tarmac path. The path leads by a wall through some nettly undergrowth to the riverside where you see a bridge leading to the island, used for wild swimming and camping.

2 Just **before** the bridge, turn **left** on a narrow path beside the river. It leads over a long bridge across a creek and down to a wide open space, where they discourage picnickers (hence the "closed" sign). *On your right is the Hurley Weir, popular with kayakers.* Merge with a wide gravel path and, after a large gate, keep straight on across the grass. Now follows a perfect half-mile of mown grass, one of the loveliest riverside stretches on the Thames. You pass under ash, poplar and horsechestnut and, after a wooden swing-gate, you enter another green space. Stay beside the river, casting an eye on the immaculate chalet village on your left. Follow the stony path beside a large metal gate, coming quite close to the river, with more chalets.

> *There are two islands close together in this section of the river: Frog Mill Ait and Black Boy Island. The latter was apparently named after Charles II who was so swarthy as a child that his mother (Henrietta Maria) called him "Black Boy". The main navigation channel is on the far side and this used to cause a problem when boats were towed because the towpath is on this side, where you stand.*

3 After the last chalet, a metal kissing-gate leads you past some mock-Tudor dwellings, followed by a house called *Sungei Lalu*. Immediately after this house, turn **left** at a signpost on a narrow concrete footpath. The path turns left and right through a modern kissing-gate onto a path beside a field. The path is a bit overgrown and nettly *(Jul 2019: strimmed)* but perfectly usable. At the other side, go through a kissing-gate into a meadow. Ignore a path on your left and keep straight on. A bridge with rails and a stile lead out to the main road *(care! fast traffic)*. Turn **right**, immediately reaching the *Black Boys*, *once a Brakspear pub, now closed*.

4 Immediately before the pub, cross the road **left** and take a signposted bridleway. You come through a metal gate on a path between wild green banks. In 500m, ignore some steps on your right. In another 150m a sign-board announces that you are entering a nature reserve. There are great views to your right, where the foliage permits, as you pass the start of a permissive path (unfortunately not on your route). Shortly after, you reach a 3-way signpost *(don't miss this landmark!)*. Go **left** here on a fine woodland path under tall beeches. In 200m, you are joined by a permissive path from the right. You come up through a wooden gate onto a luxuriously wide grass path. After 300m or so, the path becomes concrete. In 150m, you reach a multiple junction near some building debris.

5 Ignore the gate and footpath on your left and keep ahead on the concrete track. In 20m, as the track curves away to the right, **leave** it by keeping straight ahead, between posts, on a path with the tall ashes of Channers Wood on your right. You come out into a lighter area as the path curves right. On your left, an abandoned garden plot has sprouted giant hogweed. Your path bends left and takes you through a wooden swing-gate to a T-junction. Turn **left**. This path leads out, by a signpost, into a large sloping meadow with views. Take a path across the top of the meadow, veering a little to the right and aiming for a large brown gabled house. At the far side,

go through a wooden swing-gate on a path between hedges, then through some sparse woodland. Finally your path bends right, over a bridge with rails, to a 4-way junction. Turn **right** here on a wide path, quickly reaching the *Dew Drop Inn*.

*The "Dew Drop Inn" is a gem of a pub, hidden in the woods – and for that reason a favourite excursion for the car-owning neighbourhood. This is a Brakspear pub with reliable ales. Food is of the comfort variety with chicken, vegetables and herbs from the pub's own garden plot and even home-cured bacon and homemade sausages. Note that the pub is **closed on Mondays** and in the afternoon on weekdays.*

6 After your break, with the inn on your left, continue along the approach driveway and turn **left** at a T-junction on a tarmac lane (Pudding Hill, unnamed at this point: the road sign isn't evident till later). In 250m, ignore a road junction on the left and keep straight ahead. In a further 300m, just before a house, at a small signpost, go **left** through a modern kissing-gate. This field is used for show jumping on certain days and you may see a notice about "fast horses"; what this really means is: watch out for riders who might appear unexpectedly; make yourself visible. Follow the right-hand edge of the field. In 150m, ignore a large gate into the adjoining field and veer **left** along the edge of the same field. Look out for a horse jump in the hedge! In the far corner, go through a kissing-gate, down steps and onto a woodland path with a pleasant woodchip surface. You come over a 3-plank bridge and a bridge and kissing-gate into a fresh grassy meadow. Take a central path the length of the meadow, passing more jumps (which double as sculptural creations). At the far side, go through a wooden swing-gate and up steps to a concrete path.

7 Turn **right** on the concrete path and immediately **left** on a fine straight grass "ride". (The *No Entry* notice applies to the big gate and farm on your right, not the path you are on.) After an easy and breezy 300m or so, with the sound of skylarks, your path crosses a track. Ignore the permissive path right and keep straight on for another 300m with great views to enter High Wood via a kissing-gate. Continue straight ahead ,ignoring the path immediately to your right. You soon emerge from the wood through two modern kissing-gates onto a fenced path with views of Hurley below in the valley. The spire of Marlow church is visible to your right; down in the valley on the left is the Horizon Building providing "inspirational views", though not for us! Continue downhill, quite steeply, through a pair of metal gates, between pastures, finally under trees, through a bypassable kissing-gate to the main road.

8 Cross the main road carefully, directly to a tarmac path which shortly merges with Hurley High Street. *Thatched "Merlins" is over to your right while the historic "Traddles" (Grade-II listed), complete with well, is on your left.*

Continue along the road into Hurley. You reach the *Rising Sun*, a very well-regarded pub with a clean Nordic interior and a comprehensive reasonably-priced menu. Shortly thereafter comes the *Olde Bell*.

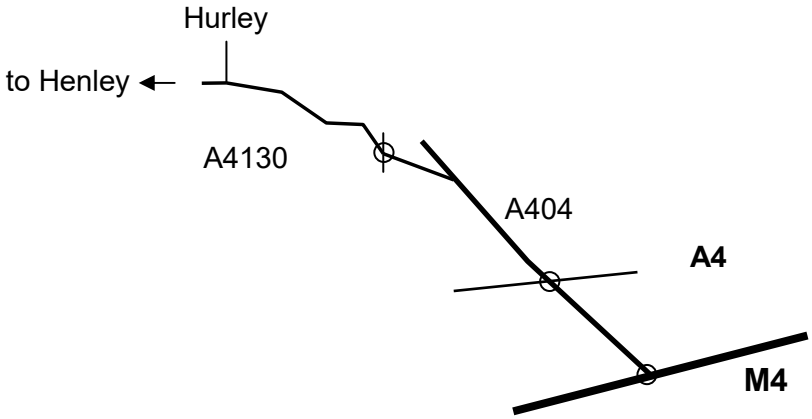
The Olde Bell hotel is dated 1135, partly because it once served as the guest house of Hurley Priory. The "old bell" was apparently rung to summon the Prior when persons of distinction came seeking hospitality. Investigators with dowsing rods apparently found a tunnel leading from a cupboard in the bar to the River (see under "Lovelace" above). The back entrance to the Olde Bell was used by Edward Prince of Wales to smuggle in his mistress Lillie Langtree. The whole village gained a colourful reputation and the Olde Bell hosted celebrities (including Princess Margaret) and their wild parties. In 1933, the

Daily Mirror ran a centre page spread about nude midnight bathing at Hurley lock which had people flocking to the village. The inn is respectable now and you can eat and drink there without fear of the paparazzi. The menu is short (a good sign) and the service good, a little more pricey than the average, and another good thing: the inn never seems to close.

After a possible break, continue on the road, keeping left opposite the *Old Vicarage* to arrive at the church where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Hurley is easy to reach from the A4130 (Henley Road). From the M4, come off at junction 8/9 and follow the A404 and signs for *Henley*. Look for a right turn, about 1 mile after the roundabout at the start of the Henley Road.



By bus/train: bus 239 from Maidenhead. Check the timetables.

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