



Inkpen Beacon and Hampshire Villages Combe Gibbet, Walbury Hill, Faccombe, Linkenholt

Distance: 16½ km=10½ miles

easy walking

Region: Berkshire, Hampshire, Wiltshire

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Refreshments: picnic

Maps: Explorer 158 (Newbury) and 131 (Andover)
but the map in this guide should be sufficient

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High hills, views!!, villages, woodland

In Brief

This walk takes you from the highest of the Berkshire Downs gently down into the valley to visit three Hampshire villages of great character before returning to the heights with glorious views. If you don't know this area, you will find the views of the countryside quite unforgettable, with its little hills and so many green glades and woods, so that you will want to come back again. Don't worry that the location seems a little off-the-beaten-track: that is its great virtue, making you feel "away from it all". It greatly rewards the extra effort in getting to the starting point. The paths are all well surfaced and well marked, making walking a pleasure.



There are no nettles or brambles to speak of on this walk. Most people who walk the high hills wear boots, but in normal conditions trainers should be fine. Your dog will also enjoy this walk.

The walk begins at the **Combe Gibbet** car park, near Inkpen, West Berkshire, Grid Ref SU 369 621. This spot is completely isolated, but the postcode for Inkpen Lower Green, if you come from the north, is **RG17 9DW**. If you come from the south through Netherton, the postcode is **SP11 0DZ**. You can also start the walk on **Walbury Hill**, Grid Ref SU 379 616, accessed via Inkpen village. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

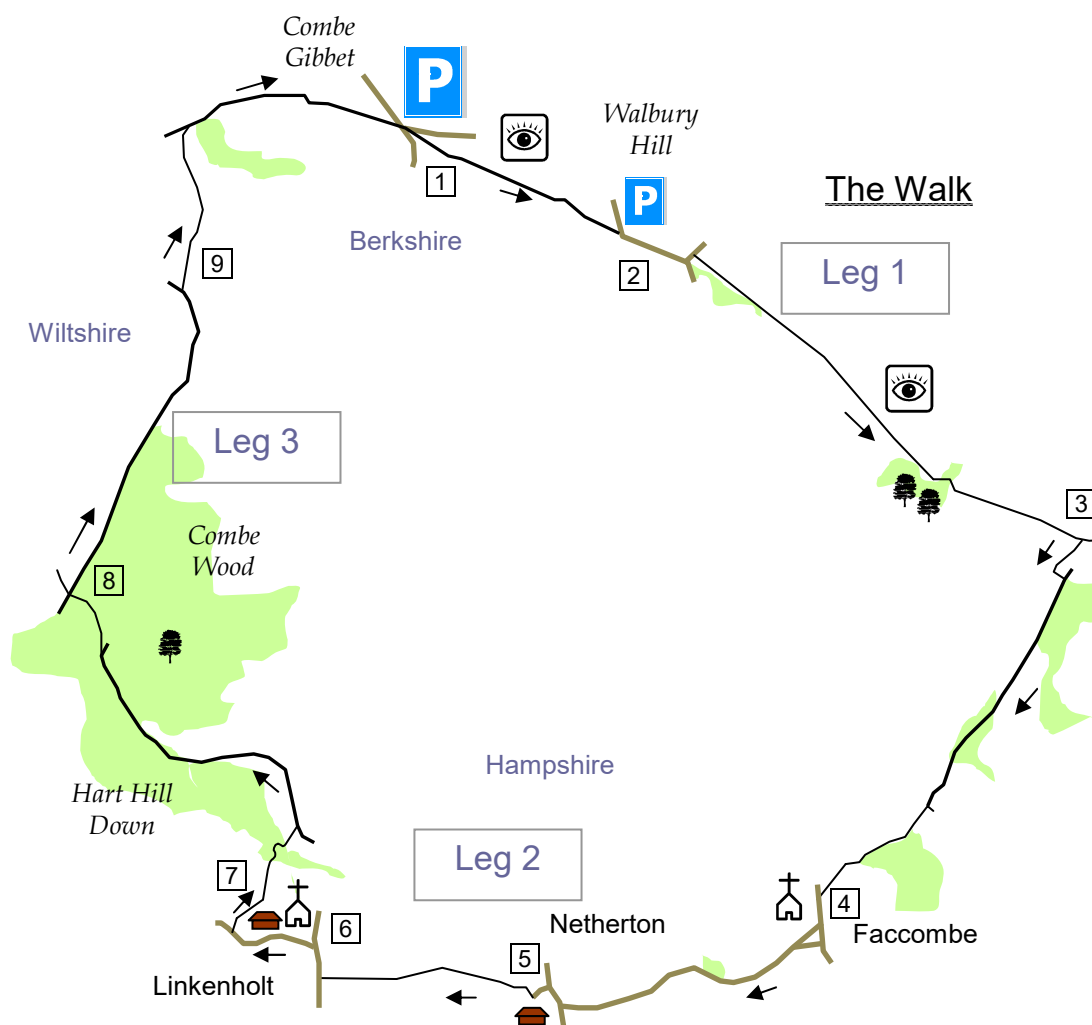
If you parked on Walbury Hill, exit to the road, turn **right**, continue ahead along the tarmac lane and skip forward to section **2**.

Leg 1: Combe Gibbet to Facombe 6½ km=4 miles

- 1** Go out of the Combe Gibbet car park to the tarmac lane and immediately turn very sharp **left** on a wide stony path. (You can take a short cut across the grass.) Follow this path gradually uphill between meadows, over Walbury Hill with terrific views all round, not hidden by the low flowering hedgerows. Your path becomes more gravelly and grassy. It goes over a crossing path at a 4-way fingerpost and reaches the Walbury Hill car park, on your left. Continue straight ahead to join a tarmac lane.



Walbury Hill stands at 297 metres=974 feet, making it the highest natural point in the Southeast (just 3 metres higher than Leith Hill in Surrey). Walbury Hill is the starting point of two long-distance paths: the Test Way (going west to near Southampton) and the Wayfarers Walk (going east to Emsworth).



- 2** Ignore several signposts and gates leading away and stay on the tarmac lane that runs along the top of the hill. When you reach a road junction on the left, turn **left** in the direction *The Woodhays* and in 10m turn **right** on a track marked as the *Wayfarer's Walk*. Immediately you have to go round a large tree trunk, and another soon after, probably left there to keep out

motorbikes. This is a lovely stretch with woodland on your right and fields and views on your left, butterflies in abundance. Several great country houses are visible in the valley, including West Woodhay House. You come out to a more open field with new views ahead, going over a low barrier. Continue on the track for 750m or so. Ignore several paths leading off: one on your left, part of the British Horse Society's 3 Downs Link, another sharp left half way along the field and one on each side in the next field. Your path enters the woodland of Upper Eastwick Copse with some of the most magnificent beech trees you will see on this walk (or anywhere). Here your path bends left and wheels right again, taking you out into the open again on a wide grassy path between fields, with a steep slope on your left. Your path runs between laurel and ash, and some red oak, bringing you into the open again.

- 3 Your vital turn-off point is in this field, about 40m before the next clump of trees. There's a marker post here and a sign for the Brenda Parker Way, which you will be following in part. Turn sharp **right** here on a footpath across the centre of the field. At the other side, the path winds its way through a copse and takes you **left** over a stile into a meadow. Keep ahead along the left-hand side and go over another stile onto a gravel track. Turn **right** on the track. This track will take you to the Hampshire village of Facombe in 2 km. Keep ahead, avoiding the tempting woodland on your left. Your track comes out into the open with a completely new set of views south. *Notice the preponderance of woodland on all the hills: the sight is quite striking as well as enticing.* A gate and swing-gate on your right soon, though not on the route, lead to open downland where deer abound, an unconfirmed freedom-to-roam area. Your track runs under trees on a lovely stretch which is also smooth underfoot. You come out into an open valley where you may see hares cavorting. Your track rises and is reinforced by another farm track from the left. At the top, your track runs through more woodland and here you meet the first houses of Facombe. Turn **left** on a tarmac lane to reach the "modern" (1866) church of St Barnabas.



This is no ordinary village. Look at the carefully swept paths and manicured lawns. In fact this village is private property. Not just the Manor on the other side of the wall in its great landscaped park, but everything in the village too. It all began in Sandhurst where a young army officer befriended Sultan Qaboos bin Said of Oman, son of the ruler. It's too long a story to spoil a good walk, but suffice it to say Brigadier Tim Landon (1942-2007) helped the Sultan depose his father, built him a huge military force to defeat the insurgents and, out of gratitude, acquired a colossal fortune. The family of this "White Sultan of Oman" still owns the village. Unique? No, you haven't been to Linkenholt yet.

Leg 2: Facombe to Linkenholt 3½ km=2½ miles

- 4 Fork **right** before the church on a tarmac lane, passing Selfs Farm on your right. This very narrow lane joins a wider lane from the left. Continue on this quiet lane, with Netherton House clearly visible in the valley. In 1 km, you pass the first house of Netherton and reach a T-junction. On your left, not on the route, is the great sweeping arc of Netherton Hanging Copse, but your route is **right** on the road. On your right is the ancient thatched barn of Netherton Farm House. On your left is Netherton House, hidden behind its vast curtain of well-manicured topiary.

Netherton was always just the “lower settlement” of Faccombe which was called “Faccombe Upstreet” to distinguish it. Faccombe Court once stood here (see the embedded note below). Netherton House was built in the early 1700s but a medieval Anglo-Saxon manorial complex once stood here.

- 5 Turn **left** on a tarmac lane around the side of the house. Thatched *Netherton Cottage* is on your right. The tarmac breaks up and straight ahead is a gate into the Old Orchard (not on the route but open to view). *This meadow, still revealing classical columns and other traces of a large building, marks the site of the old manorhouse, Faccombe Court, now a cemetery and arboretum.* A quick diversion **left** along the drive will give you a view of the back of Netherton House with more topiary and some sculpture. Veer **right** before the cemetery to the little thatched *Keeper's Cottage*, turn **right** in front of the cottage and, before a wooden gate, turn **left** over a stile. Follow a path diagonally uphill under ash trees, go over a simple stile and pick up a narrow path through trees. Another simple stile takes you into a field. Go ahead along the right-hand side. In the next field, continue in the same direction, soon passing a large barn of Manor Farm on your left. On meeting a tarmac lane, turn **right** uphill into the village of Linkenholt.

The name “Linkenholt” comes from Old English “Hlincenholt”, a “hinca” being a “terrace” or “bank” and “holt” meaning “woodland”. It goes back to the Bronze Age and a section of Grim's Ditch is just south of here (see the walks of the Chiltern series on this site). The population of the parish is 58. The early Tudor manor house was rebuilt in Edwardian style and has passed to millionaire owners along with the entire village, most recently Stefan Persson the Swedish billionaire owner of fashion giant H&M. It was the childhood home of author Rose Tremain.

- 6 At the little green with a circular seat, turn **left**, checking your watch against the turreted *Clockhouse*. On your right is the unusual Church of St Peter with its timbered spire, followed by the *Old School House* with a bell to summon the scholars. The road veers left past the entrance to Linkenholt Manor and follows the boundary of the garden. As the hedge ends, turn **right** on a tarmac drive opposite a marker post with a sign reminding you that you are on part of the Test Way. At a junction, keep straight ahead on a footpath as indicated by a fingerpost.

Leg 3: Linkenholt to Combe Gibbet 6½ km=4 miles

- 7 A track under a canopy of dark sombre laurels takes you into a field. Leave the farmer's track here by keeping straight on along a path between two fields. At the corner, keep ahead over a stile down into dense dark woods with a sudden change in atmosphere. The mossy path meanders down through trees to meet a track near a small building. Turn **left** on the track to come to a T-junction in front of a large field. On your right is a Countryside Adventure camp but your route is **left** along the valley. In 250m, ignore a track uphill on your right and stay on the main track as it curves left and runs close to Hart Hill Down on your left. Finally the track enters Combe Wood. You are back in Berkshire and still on the Test Way. Stay on this main stony path, avoiding all turnoffs. After 400m in the wood, you come to a clearing and a 3-way fingerpost. Take the **left** fork, the greener option, a path in the valley. After 300m, the path enters trees again and shortly comes out into a wide open valley at a junction of paths.

8 Turn **right** on a track steeply uphill close to the woodland on your right. You are now in Wiltshire, this path marking the border. Near the top, avoid a stile on your left and a bridleway on your right. After the first long meadow, there are two small fields and another long meadow, eventually passing through a large metal gate. Press on until finally your path dips down curving left. Here, after 1700m on this path, you come to a junction with a waymarker and metal gate on your right. Turn **right** on a bridleway through the gate, back into Berkshire. The path runs beside a field on your left whilst the heights of Inkpen Beacon beckon. As the field curves left, you reach the start of a hedge by a 3-way fingerpost. Avoid a bridleway right here across a field and continue along a path on the right-hand side of the hedge. You arrive at the top of Inkpen Beacon opposite Wigmoreash Pond (a noted habitat for rare birds).



9 Turn **right** on the wide track, ignoring a bridleway straight ahead. You are still on the Test Way. Follow the track up past Combe Gibbet, passing the Thames Valley Hang Gliding Club, as you will see from the many colourful craft silently swooping over the hillside. Go past the gibbet itself and continue on the wide chalky path to reach, after just over 1 km on this high path, the tarmac land and the car park where the walk began.

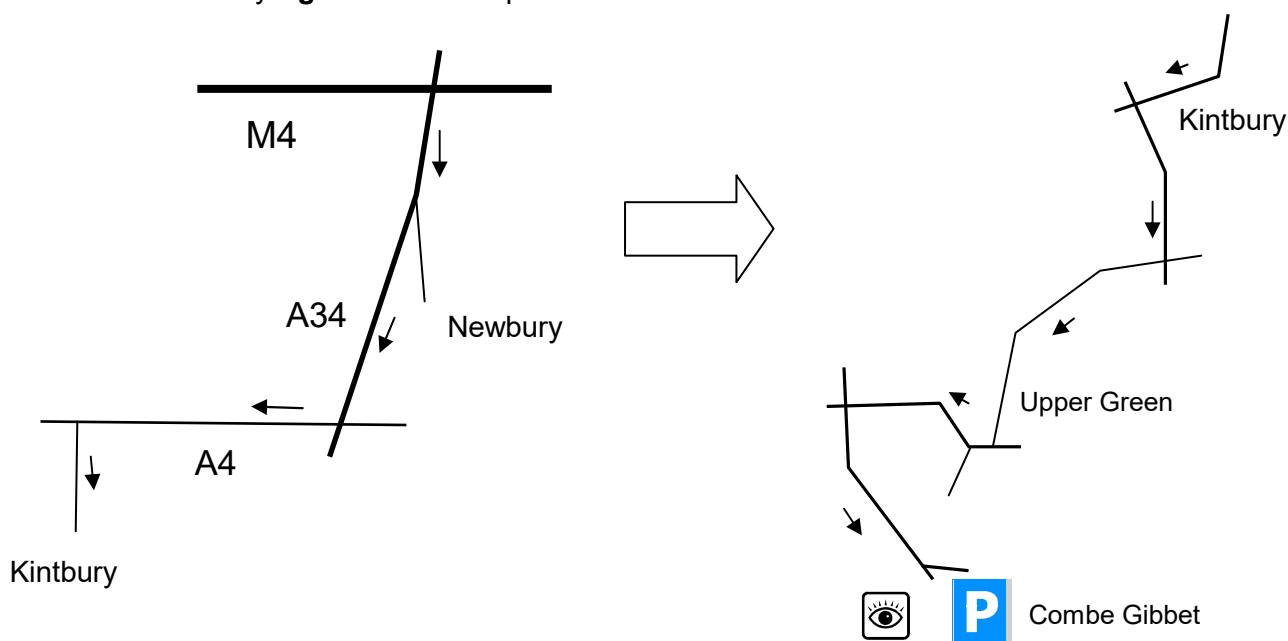
Combe Gibbet, named after the local village, had just one function: to hang the bodies of two illicit lovers in chains. They had already been hung in Winchester in 1676. George Broomham of Combe and Dorothy Newman of Inkpen had killed George's wife and son when they caught them near here on the Downs. The barefoot idiot "Mad Thomas" had witnessed the crime. Now, typical of local authority pettifoggery, the two parishes disputed the considerable expense of erecting this rather superior double gibbet (Combe was then in Hampshire), plus the cost of the chains, and ended up sharing the budget. It stood as a warning, maybe against "getting caught by a village idiot". The most remarkable feature of the hill now, which you must have noticed, is its use by the Thames Valley Hang Gliding Club, offering as it does both good up-currents and a soft landing.



For final refreshments, the "Dundas Arms" in Kintbury, next to the Kennet-Avon canal is a perfect place to end the day. The nearest pub is the "Swan Inn" in Lower Green, Inkpen, which you may have passed on the way here.

Getting there

By car: the best way is from the M4 and Newbury. Go south on the A34 as for *Newbury* but after 1 mile keep **right** on the A34, bypassing Newbury. After 2 more miles, exit the A34 and turn **right** on the A4 in the direction of *Hungerford*. After 4 miles, turn **left** for *Kintbury*. Follow the road past the railway station, over the canal, into the village, curving right through the village. In the village centre, turn **left** as for *Inkpen*. Follow the road for just over 1 mile to a staggered signposted crossroads next to a large churchyard. Turn **right** here as for *Inkpen*. In 1½ miles you reach the hamlet of Upper Green and a T-junction. Turn **right** here as for *Lower Inkpen*. Shortly after, avoid Bell Lane on your left. (On the map, it's a short cut but in practice it's alarmingly narrow.) Follow the curving lane for ¾ mile to a major road crossing. Turn **left** as for *Combe Gibbet*. In 1¼ miles you reach the top of Inkpen Beacon. Turn **left** and immediately **right** into the car park.



You can also reach Combe Gibbet from the south, from Andover, Hurstbourne Tarrant and Netherton. You can also reach Newbury from another direction, e.g. from Basingstoke, and follow the A4, as above.

By bus/train: there is a bus stop for bus C6 in Linkenholt which may be non-running, needing investigation.

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