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

Knowl Hill, Warren Row

Distance: 8 km=5 miles — easy walking

Region: Berkshire — Date written: 6-nov-2016

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Refreshments: *Dew Drop Inn, Royal Oak*

Map: Explorer 160 (Windsor) and 172 (Chilterns East)
but the map in this guide should be sufficient

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

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Woodland trails, green meadows, views, bluebells, remote country pub

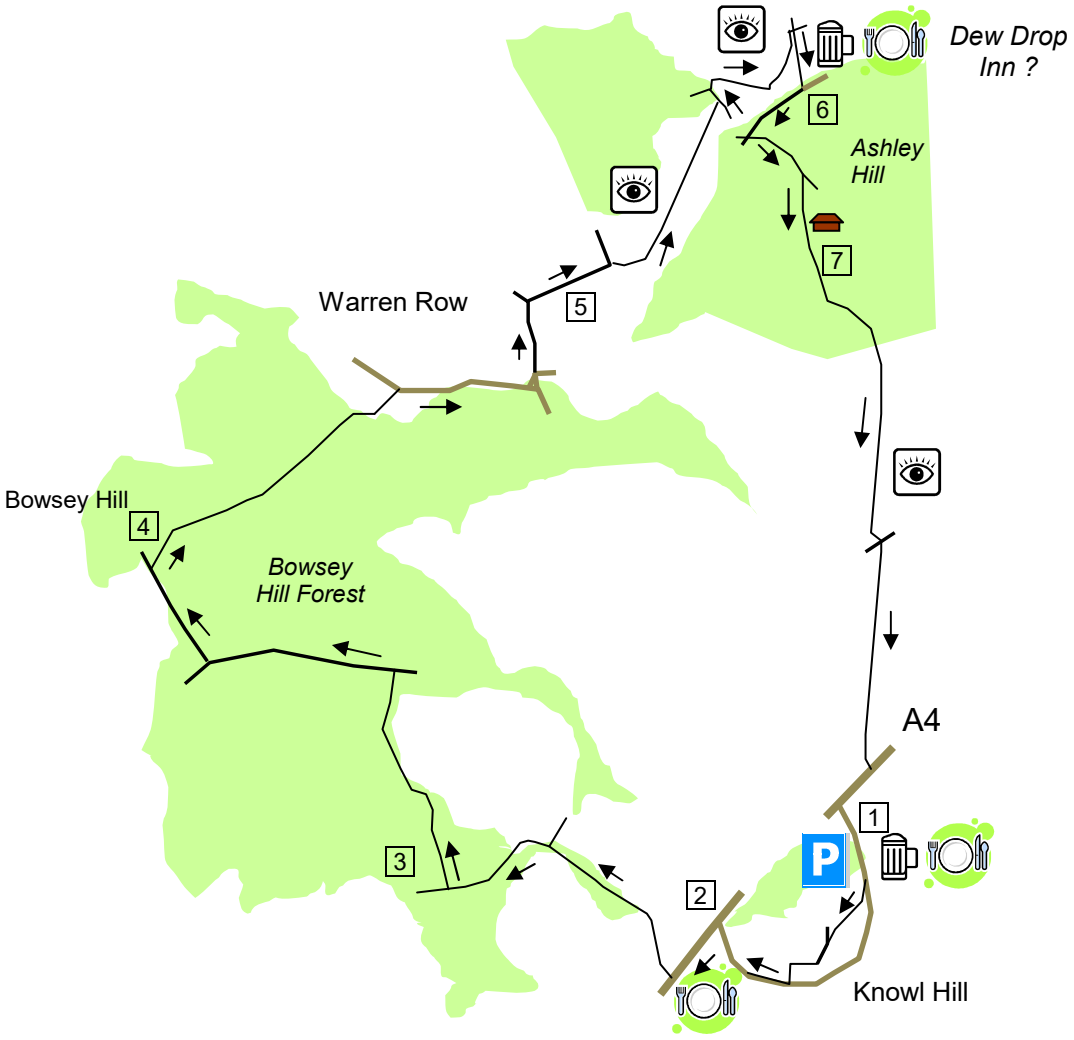
In Brief

This typical Chiltern walk has some of the most impressive beechwoods and mixed woodland you will see anywhere on these walks, all the more unexpected since it starts at a very accessible spot just off the busy A4 road. The magic begins with a short stroll “Round the Hill” and leads off on a long unbroken woodland trail to the little village of Warren Row. In late spring this area gives a wondrous show of bluebells. The crowning point before lockdown was the sudden discovery of a tiny pub* hidden in the forest which you come to almost by accident. More woodland and a glorious green meadow path lead back to the start. (* The Dew Drop inn re-opened on 5 August 2022. To enquire, ring 01628-315662.)

All the paths used on this walk are well-trodden footpaths, so there is very little undergrowth and only one small patch of nettles to worry you. Most people encountered on these paths were wearing sensible walking shoes although in wetter months boots are usually essential. Apart from two crossings of the A4 road, this walk is perfect for your dog too.

The walk begins in the village of **Knowl Hill Common**, just off the A4 road, west of **Maidenhead, Berks**, www.w3w.co/swift.dockers.assemble, postcode **RG10 9YE**. The starting point for this walk is opposite the little church, in the side lane called Knowl Hill Common, near the *Royal Oak* pub. There is a dirt strip at the start of the lane next to the cemetery. The *Royal Oak* has a generous car park and there's no warning notice but it is probably unfair to use it on a busy day, even if you are going to buy food or drink in the pub when you return. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



1 Walk along the lane away from the main road, passing the *Royal Oak* on your left. The lane is subtitled *Round the Hill* for a good reason. Opposite *Hope Cottage*, fork **right** on a signed footpath onto the grass. Head for the top far left-hand corner of the grassy slope. At the top, turn **left** on a track and, in 15m, keep to the **right** of an end-of-line electricity pole. Your path crosses a driveway and continues directly opposite, squeezing you onto a narrow path to the right of a wooden outhouse. (If the nettles are high and you are wearing shorts, you could go round by the road on your left.) You emerge through a gate onto a tarmac driveway by *White Cottage*. Turn **right** and follow the drive until it joins the lane. Keep **right** on the lane, finally coming out to the main road.

2 Turn **left** on the main road, crossing to the other side when there is a break in the traffic. Immediately after a forsaken building (the remains of an inn) turn **right** on Canhurst Lane, marked as a byway. The lane quickly becomes a track. Where it bends left, continue straight ahead through a kissing-gate on a woodland path. *(Just before the gate, on a left-hand gate post there is a plaque saying the flints used in the posts are from the 1st Century, i.e. of early Roman origin.) You will glimpse a waste management plant through the trees on your right, part of the old quarry, which you will be skirting, mainly unseen, at a good distance.* After 300m, the wooden, then metal, fences on your right end. Ignore a footpath on the right here and continue onwards.

The path goes through a swing-gate [Nov 2024-2025: rotting on floor]. Ignore a newly-signposted path on the right here and turn abruptly **left** on an unsigned path into the woods. Your path descends into a deep valley of oaks followed by tall ash. After 250m on this path, you reach the bottom of the valley by a ditch, an old metal gate on your left and a wire fence on your right.

3 Continue ahead up the path until you reach a small gate beside a large gate. Turn **right** here onto a wide walking path with a wire fence on your left. After about 15 mins' walking, the path brings you out to a junction with a fingerpost. Keep **right**, as for *Knowl Hill* and, in 25m, keep **right** again. You pass the wrought iron gates of *Bowsey Manor* and join a tarmac drive, passing a chalet-style house and a long mossy cladded house on your left. Opposite this long house, at a signpost, turn **right** through a very large wooden gate on a footpath signed to *Warren Row*. Ignore a path to your right and keep straight ahead. *You are also on part of the Chilterns Way (CW), an awesome circular long-distance path.*

4 This wonderful long woodland path through this part of Bowsey Hill is easy to follow provided that you keep to the right on a level path and avoid veering off left downhill. Eventually the path descends to go over a brick bridge. *If you go down to look at the bridge off on the right-hand side there is a brass plaque that says "Mike's Bridge - Like Humpty Dumpty he sat on a wall, fell asleep and had a great fall - Summer 1995"; no one knows who Mike is or what happened to him or indeed why the plaque is there, but it keeps the locals guessing.* Finally the path leads you through a kissing-gate beside a large metal gate. Follow the drive past houses on your left, coming out to the road in the village of Warren Row.

> *Warren Row is one of "The Five Villages of Hurley", along with Knowl Hill. Burchetts Green and Littlewick Green, the title of a rare published pictorial history. On your left is a beautifully kept "tin tabernacle" church, one of thousands built cheaply in the mid-1800s. To your right along the road, as you will see, there is an old chalk mine which was developed as a government nuclear bunker in 1961, now used by a wine merchant for storage.*

Turn **right** along the road, ignore all paths leading off until the road bends sharp right. Leave the road here by turning **left** on Pudding Hill, marked as a cul-de-sac and a bridleway. Where Pudding Hill bends right, keep straight ahead on Hodgedale Lane, a concrete track, going through a small wooden gate beside a large (usually open?) metal gate. On your left is a horse pasture, one of many you will see in this bloodstock breeding country. At end of a row of houses go through a wooden gate with a chain lever latch on the left of a new wooden gate. In 150m or so, you reach a junction. Ignore the small metal gate ahead and turn **right** on a tarmac drive, going uphill.

5 In 250m, avoid a private drive on your left and keep **right** on a wide grassy track. You have great views to your left over the Thames to the Chiltern hills, explored by so many other walks in this series. At the next signpost, avoid a footpath on your right and keep **left** between fences and more lustrous horse pastures. At the end, go through a wooden swing-gate near a house. Turn **left** away from the house and, in 10m, avoid a swing-gate on your left and keep **right**. This path quickly leads out onto a wide open hillside. Veer **right** on a path across the top of the hillside, heading for a large brown-coloured house, with more views to your left. *The brash white faux Georgian mansion in the valley is Quelm Park, a very private residence.* In the far top corner, go through a swing-

gate and follow a path between tree plantations. In 150m, your path turns right over a wooden bridge-with-rails and meets a crossing bridleway. Turn sharp **right** on the bridleway, quickly reaching, as if by accident, the *Dew Drop Inn*.

*The "Dew Drop Inn" is like a highwayman's hang-out, hidden in the woods, although in the present century the whole of the car-owning neighbourhood seems to have discovered it. There should be an "I trekked all the way here!" badge which guarantees you a bench seat. This is a Brakspear pub with reliable ales. Food is of the comfort variety and sometimes the kitchen staff break off to join in the celebrations. The pub's own garden provides vegetables and herbs; and they cure bacon, make sausages and keep chickens. On a summer's day you may be entertained by Morris dancers. On weekdays, the pub closes in the afternoon. Note that the pub is **closed on Mondays** except on a Bank Holiday, in which case the inn closes on the **Tuesday**.*

6 After possible refreshment, resume your direction along the tarmac drive and, at a T-junction at the top, turn **right** (re-joining the Bridleway Circuit). Where the drive shortly bends right, keep ahead, past a large wooden gate, on a wide woodland path. In 200m, you meet an oblique crossing path with a fingerpost on your right. Turn sharp **left** here on a stony path uphill between posts, the start of a long ascent through the woods of Ashley Hill. Keep straight on upwards, going over a crossing path. *You have re-joined the Chilterns Way (CW) for a short spell*. After 150m the gradient gets easier and you reach a fingerpost under a beech tree. Fork **right** here, thus leaving the CW.

7 You pass the modestly-named *Keepers Cottage* on your left. Just after the house, ignore a signed footpath on your right and continue ahead, on a wide path, going gently down under tall pines. Your path crosses a rutted forestry track and finally comes out, through a wide gap, onto a green hillside with distant views. Keep straight ahead down the right-hand side. Part way down, your path passes through two metal gates, continuing along the left-hand side with the open meadow on your right. At the bottom, keep **left** to go through another large kissing gate. Veer **right** across the gravel drive and go through the left-hand of two metal gates into a horse paddock. Cross straight ahead on a clear path, passing through a metal gate into a second paddock, aiming for the little church steeple of Knowl Hill. At the far side, go through a large kissing gate and cross a smaller meadow diagonally to go through a gap onto a minor road. Turn **left** to the main road and cross to the other side. (The footbridge is compulsory for the schoolkids but rather a palaver for normal adults who can nip across easily.) Turn **right**, passing the school and a side of the church, then **left** into the side road, near the *Royal Oak*, where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Knowl Hill is on the A4 trunk road. The route most people will use is via the M4. Come off at exit 8/9 as for *Henley* and follow the A404, still for *Henley*. In 2½ miles, turn **left** onto the A4 as for *Reading*, soon going over a roundabout. In just over 2 miles in total, you pass under a long tall footbridge. Immediately after, just past a small church, turn **left** on Knowl Hill Common.

By bus/train: bus 127 runs between Maidenhead and Reading, stopping at Knowl Hill, not Sunday. Check the timetables.

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