



Padworth and Wokefield Commons

Distance: 13 km=8 miles

easy walking

Region: Berkshire, Hampshire

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Refreshments: Mortimer

Map: Explorer 159 (Reading) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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Woodland, moorland, heath, historic house

In Brief

This walk near Reading, Berkshire offers you a constantly changing scene of small woods, nature reserves and heathland, some quiet and isolated, others popular with families from the neighbouring towns. En route you will pass a historic house and a good hostelry (to enquire at the *Turners Arms*, ring 0118-933-2961).

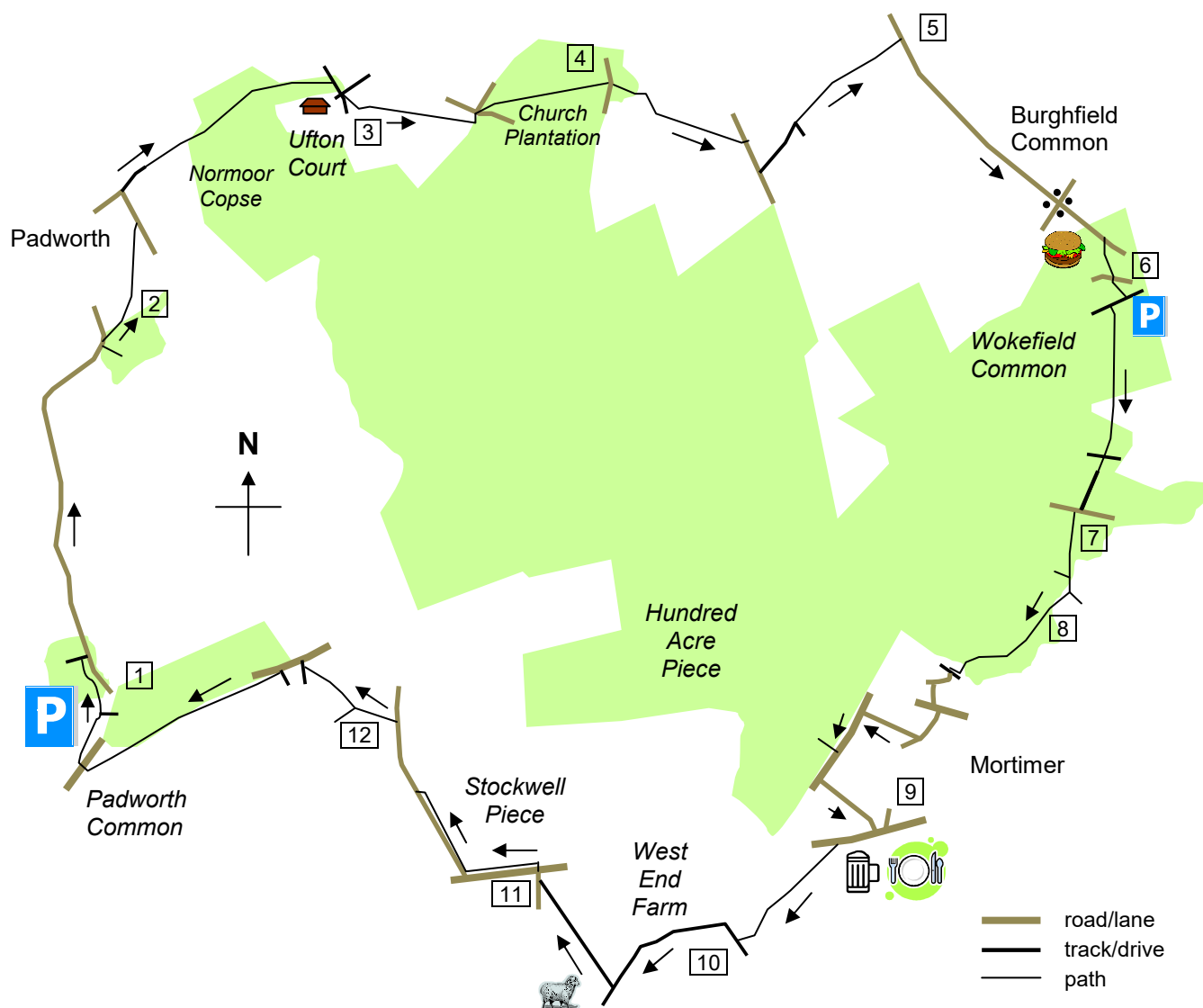


Paths are generally quite sound with little undergrowth or nettles to worry you. There are no ploughed fields to cross but you will find boots advisable in the moist seasons because of possible damp patches in the woodlands. If you bring a dog or two, they will be in good company.

There are very few gradients on this level walk, enabling a steady pace. You can divide it into three roughly equal sections of 4 km=2½ miles each. The first, a little longer at 5 km=3 miles, leads to the modern village of Burghfield Common; the second ends at a refreshment break in Mortimer.

The walk begins at the **Padworth Common** car park, nearest postcode **RG7 4JB**, just off Baughurst Road and Rectory Road. You could also start at the Wokefield Common car park (*very approximate* postcode **RG7 3JB** grid ref SU653662), although that would place the pub too near the start. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 From the Padworth Common car park, facing the road, go to the far left-hand corner, under a tall pine (*not* the corner by the noticeboard) and take a path into the woods. In 30m, the path goes over a wooden bridge. 20m later, take the **right** fork, turn **right** on a shingle drive and **left** to join Rectory Road. Follow this tarmac lane for about 800m, passing various houses, including *Old Rectory Cottage*. Ignore a byway on the left and follow the lane as it elbows right by Upper Lodge Farm. Just before a left bend, ignore a bridleway on your right but take a footpath on your **right** 30m later.
- 2 Your path goes along the right-hand side of a pasture beside a rope fence. As you reach the corner of a pasture on your right, keep **left**, going past a wooden pylon. Your path now runs between paddocks and widens as it heads for the redbrick houses of Padworth ahead, with the little school belltower (now a nursery) to the left. At the far end, go through a metal gate on the **right** and **left** on a tarmac lane. Where the lane bends left, in 100m or so, at Old Farm, turn **right** and keep **right** beside the farm buildings, ignoring a footpath on the left. Keep straight on along a narrow path between hedges. Your path becomes shingly or stony and enters Normoor Copse, going over a brick bridge. As the path rises you will see

on your right a string of deep ponds, at first hidden and then clear and limpid. You pass a wooden barrier and arrive at an open grassy space on the outskirts of Ufton Nervet. Turn **right** on a track, immediately passing on your right the entrance to Ufton Court.

If you ever lose your way in these woods, you may need to reward the villagers of Ufton Nervet for rescuing you. This happened to Lady Marvyn who bought Ufton Pole (as the house was then called) in 1568. The annual Dole is still paid and the current owners (an educational trust) dare not break the tradition for fear of a curse. The original house was owned by Viscount Francis Lovell, one of the henchmen of Richard III. "... Lovell the dog ruled all England under the hog" ran a satirical piece (the boar was Richard's emblem, the author was hung-drawn-and-quartered for his cheek). Still in disfavour, the house was owned by the Perkins family in the 1700s. They were catholics and several "priest holes" were found there, the occupants having fled into the woods. Francis Perkins was luckier, marrying a famous beauty, Arabella Fermor, subject of Alexander Pope's "Rape of the Lock".

3 Ignore the grand tarmac avenue on your left and go straight across, keeping to the grass beside a hedge on your left. At a signpost, turn **left** through a wooden swing-gate and take a diagonal path across a large grassy meadow. At the other side, go through a wooden swing-gate and on a track to a tarmac lane, via a metal barrier. Turn **right** for 20m and then **left** past a log barrier on a shingle track. Keep **right** on the main track, avoiding a path to the left that runs parallel to Green Lane. Your path quickly becomes grass and runs beside a pine plantation on your right, with birch scrub on your left. In 400m you reach a tarmac lane, Camp Road.

4 Cross straight over the lane to a track opposite, a fraction right, going past a house, and keep straight on along a narrow path, through a large metal kissing gate into a pasture. Keep **right** along the short end and go through another kissing gate on a narrow path through a brief patch of woodland, keeping **right** in 60m by a fence post. A wooden swing-gate leads you into a field of rough grass, used as a rather higgledy-piggledy fir plantation. Always keep to the main cinder path, guided by a few pairs of short wooden fences. As you near another tarmac lane, veer **right** and immediately **left** to reach the lane and turn **right** on it. In 100m, by a signpost, turn **left** on a bridleway, going over a redundant cattle grid. Where, in 200m, the track bends right to Firlands Farm, **leave** it by continuing straight ahead on a narrower path. It leads out to a track through farm buildings, then a passage between fences, finally arriving at a road in the modern village of Burghfield Common.

5 Turn **right** along this straight residential road, using the tarmac path beside houses if you like. *The Willink School, on your left, is a co-ed comprehensive.* Continue all the way to some traffic lights where, in the corner, you will find a Tesco which is always open. Continue straight over, using the footway on your right. After the footway ends, continue along the roadside for another 70m, and fork **right** at a signpost on a bridleway across Wokefield Common.



Wokefield Common is one of West Berkshire's wildlife heritage sites, known for its various dips and gullies and small ponds which encourage dragonflies and reptiles such as slow worms, grass snakes and adders. You may need to be wary of the latter, although they are supposedly shy creatures!

In 150m you come out between two metal posts to a road, Goring Lane. Cross straight over the road, between more posts, onto a much wider

- P** section of the common. You pass a filmy pond on your right and, soon after, the main Wokefield Common car park (an alternative start) and a wide crossing path.
- 6** Opposite the car park, by a signpost, turn **right** on this wide path with the filmy pond on your right. In 50m you reach a junction of paths. Take the first path, **sharp left**, a narrow path into trees. In 100m or so, you pass an irrelevant marker post. In 150m more, your path takes you through a metal gate, going steeply down. Your path passes a piped stream, crosses a wide shingle track and continues uphill. It levels out, goes over a crossing path and continues on a very wide forestry trail. At the end, in 150m, go out beside some large metal gates to a tarmac lane.
- 7** Turn **right** on the lane and, in only 10m, turn **left** beside a metal gate on a footpath [2016: with the signpost missing]. After running straight for 200m, the path descends into a beautiful beech glade. Keep dead straight, going up a bank, avoiding all side paths, and over another bank, until the path ends at a 3-way junction in front of a grassy meadow.
- 8** Go straight across the junction, keeping the meadow to your left. After you pass the end of the meadow, you are joined by another path coming in from your right. The path soon goes steeply down and up the sides of a stream gully. You pass a *private* sign on a tree urging you to keep right on the main path. At a T-junction at the end of the path, go **left** to pass immediately through a large metal gate. Go **right** to a residential road, **left** past garages and keep **left** past houses to reach a main road, Victoria Road. Turn **left** and, in 20m, **right** on Stephens Firs, another residential road. In 100m or so, fork **right** in front of a small green with a clump of trees. In 200m, turn **left** at a T-junction with a major road, St Catherine's Hill. Go 250m, ignoring two cul-de-sacs, and turn **left** on Ravensworth Road, a posher residential road. This road elbows right after 200m to meet the main road, West End Road. For refreshments, go **left** on the road a short distance to the *Turners Arms* in Mortimer.



The Turners Arms (never mind "Ye Olde") is a real locals' pub, basically Brakspear although it also dispenses Banks and Ringwood. It has a very pleasant dining room on one side, with two cuisines. You can eat English standards, including a choice of baguettes. Or, very tempting is the Thai lunch with starter and main for £8.50 (as 2016).

- 9** After possible refreshment, retrace your steps along the main road, past the junction with Ravensworth Road. (If you did *not* visit the pub, simply turn **right** on the main road.) In 100m or so, just after two redbrick semis, go **left** by a metal barrier and veer **right** on a path diagonally across a rough grass field. You are now in Hampshire for a stretch. At the end, go through a small metal gate beside a large one (replacing the chain) and follow a wide grassy path between a wood on your left and a crop field. Keep straight on downhill, through a similar small gate and down to a T-junction.
- 10** Turn **right** at the T-junction on a grassy farm track. The track curves left and runs straight uphill giving you good views across pastures on both sides. As you reach the buildings of West End Farm, keep straight on along a semi-tarmac track. Shortly after the farm you reach a 3-way junction with a fingerpost. Turn sharp **right** on a slightly narrower semi-tarmac track. The track becomes a stony path running beside oaks and later a cricket pitch on your left. It joins a gravel drive and comes out to a

road. Turn **right**, immediately reaching the main road again. Cross straight over the main road on a path into the forest.

- 11 Immediately turn **left** on a path which runs parallel to the road. (The path now goes round the edge of Stockwell's Piece, giving way to a large quarry.) In 200m or so, your path approaches a road junction. Turn **right** here with the path, now running parallel to the side road, Ramptons Lane. (If the undergrowth is thick, you can simply walk on this fairly quiet road – but you must do this at the start because of the deep ditch.) On your right is the sand quarry, now a large pond. After 300m, your trail reaches the end of the path and continues along the road. You pass a quarry entrance with some traffic lights. 100m after the traffic lights go **left** on a footpath into the woods. (The signpost is broken but you are unlikely to miss this obvious turn, given the faint blue mark and the yellow arrow.)
- 12 After 150m along the woodland path, you reach the corner of a horse pasture where the main path seems to bend left. Ignore this left turn by keeping straight on, going over a 2-plank bridge and through a metal barrier. You are on a narrow woodland path between pastures on two sides. In 50m, you go over a farmer's path, back into Berkshire, then past a house to join its shingle drive. Turn **right** to the main Baughurst Road, and turn **left** on it. In 50m, fork **left** across the entrance to *The Manor House* to join a woodland path. In 80m, your path goes past the entrance to *Birch Cottage*. Continue straight ahead on a path parallel to the road on your right and into woodland. Your path runs over a mixed heath of gorse and birch, audibly close to the road. 300m after the cottage, it passes under power lines. In another 300m, your path passes a yellow arrow and veers right to meet the road again. Cross straight over the road, between posts, onto Padworth Common. Your path immediately curves **right**. Keep straight on across this beautiful heath until, after about 250m, suddenly you reach the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: the easiest approach to Padworth Common car park for people coming from the direction of London, the M25 or the M4 corridor is to take the M4 as far as the **Reading (C & S) Basingstoke** exit 11. Turn onto the A33 in the direction *Basingstoke*. In just over ½ mile, turn **right** and then **left** at a mini roundabout for *Mortimer, Burghfield, Grazeley*. In ½ mile, turn **right** in the direction *Grazeley Green, Burghfield*. In ⅔ mile, immediately after going under a railway bridge, turn **left**, still in the direction *Grazeley Green, Burghfield*. Stay on this road, avoiding all minor turnings and keeping straight on at every crossing, for nearly 5 miles, until you pass a welcome sign for **Padworth Common**. In ½ mile, take a **right** fork for *Padworth*. This is Rectory Road. The car park is 100 yds on the **left**, at a Y-junction. You have to cross a dirt patch to reach it.

By bus/train: bus 2/2A from Reading Station, including Sundays. Check the timetables.

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