



Wickham, Boxford, River Lambourn

Distance: 14½ km=9 miles

easy walking

Region: Berkshire

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Refreshments: Wickham, Boxford, Stockcross

Map: Explorer 158 (Newbury) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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Woodland

In Brief

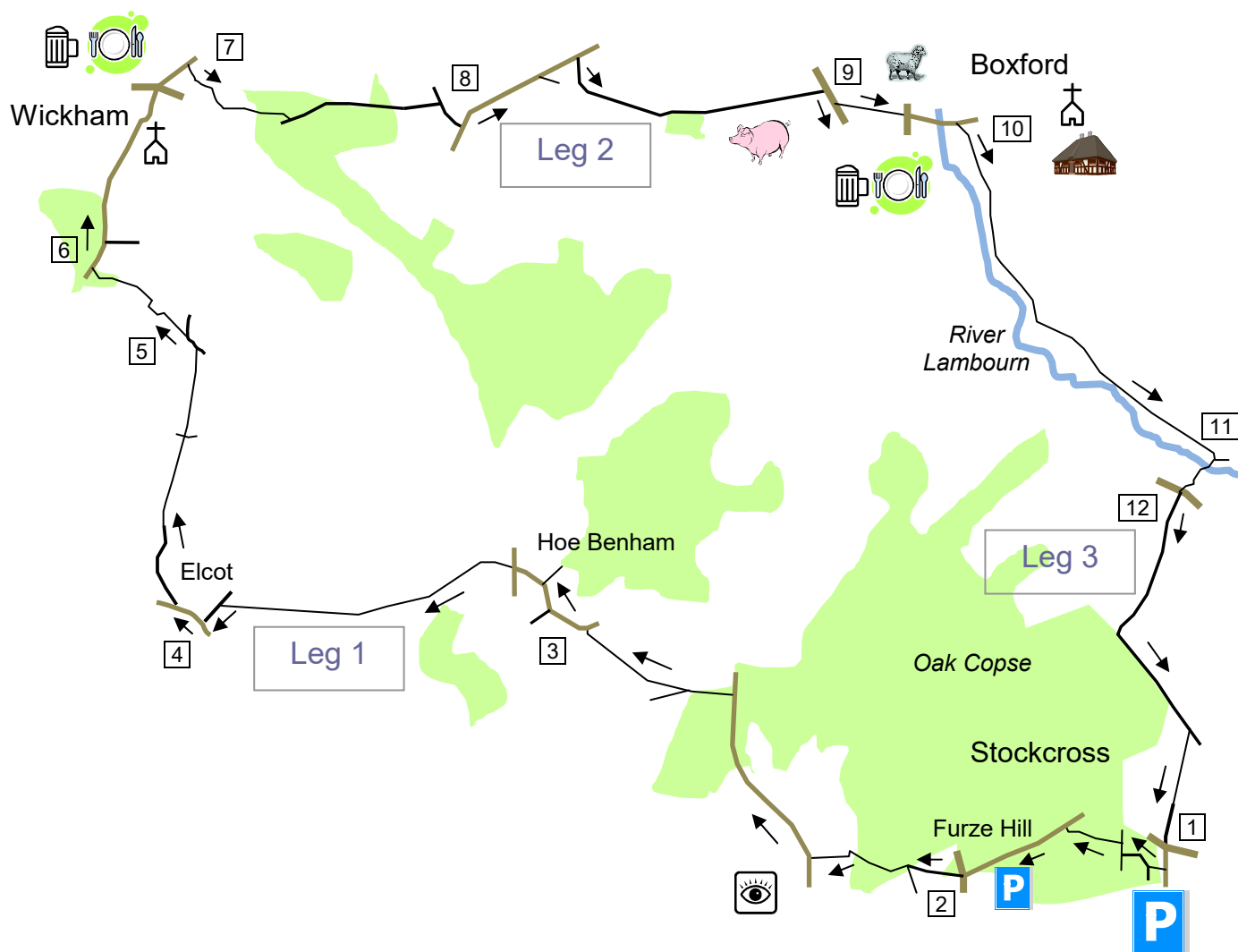
This is a walk of great variety through the gentle hilly countryside west of Newbury, visiting villages, churches, intriguing forests and meadows with views. The walk begins with a little-known stretch in lovely woods. It finishes with a short section by the River Lambourn, ending with a beautiful stretch in woodland. En route, there are two excellent pubs serving good food (to enquire at the *Five Bells*, ring 01488-657-300; for the *Bell at Boxford*, ring 01488-608-721.)



There are nettles and brambles on the paths, mainly on the edges, but you might get caught, so long trousers are necessary. In high summer, even long sleeves may be necessary for one patch. The paths are generally firm and dry, but there are one or two brief patches of dense undergrowth which could make boots necessary in damp conditions. Your dog could certainly come on this walk but if he is large he will find one or two of the stiles challenging.

The walk begins in the village of **Stockcross**, just west of Newbury, West Berkshire. There is plenty of roadside parking but the village hall (Sutton Hall) has a car park which seems to be available to visitors as long as no 'event' is in progress, **postcode RG20 8LN**. This car park is used here as the nominal start of this walk. There is also space for cars in Furze Hill. To find it, go west along the road from the village, till you leave the 30mph zone and take the first road left, signed *Marsh Benham, Hamstead Marshall*. There is space for parking 300m along the road, which is on the walking route. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



Leg 1: Stockcross to Wickham 7 km=4½ miles

- 1 Beginning in the car park of the village hall, go to the back of the car park, furthest from the road, and take a narrow path into the woods of Oak Copse. (This is a popular route for dog walkers.) Turn **right** immediately on a wide woodland path. In 100m, at a T-junction, turn **right** and, in 15m, turn **left**, regaining direction. Keep ahead, avoiding side turns. After 200m, your path veers right to meet a tarmac lane, Furze Hill. Turn **left** on the lane (passing the alternate parking spaces mentioned in the introduction). After nearly 450m, at a T-junction, cross Milkhouse Road and take a gravel track opposite, marked as a footpath.
- 2 A redundant stile gives you space to pass a large metal gate. In 150m, you go by a red-tile house on your left and your path enters Common Wood. At a 3-way fingerpost keep straight on. You come out into a field with great views of Inkpen Hill. Turn **left** and follow the path as it wheels right. At the bottom, go through a large metal gate and turn **right** on Nalderhill Road. You pass the house *Nalderhill* on your left. 300m after the house, at the top of a slope, turn **left** at a fingerpost on a footpath, going over a stile beside a large metal gate. Follow this wide path and, in 20m, take the **right** fork downhill. When you come to a field, veer **left** a fraction and then veer

right along the right-hand side of a field. At the end, go through a gap and along the right-hand side of the next field. When you reach the far side, veer right a little to go through a large metal gate onto a lane in the hamlet of Hoe Benham. Turn **left** on the lane.

- 3 You pass a weed-bedecked cottage with poultry. At the top of a slope, ignore a signposted byway on the left and shortly avoid a footpath on the right. At a T-junction with a major road, Hoe Benham Lane, cross the road, a fraction right, and take a gravel track opposite. The track curves right downhill into a field. Keep ahead on a good path along the left-hand side of the field. After the first field, keep straight ahead along the left-hand side of the next crop field. *Wickham Heath transmitter is visible on your right.* After a gap, your path goes along the left-hand side of the next crop field. *Hundreds of partridges hide in the undergrowth and you may hear them launch themselves with a throaty squawk.* At the end, your path continues on a cinder track. At the top, turn **left** on a byway known as Lip Lane, quickly leading to the hamlet of Elcot.
- 4 Turn **right** on the lane in Elcot. In 140m, just before a redbrick house, fork **right** on a drive for Lower Farm. After houses, the tarmac disappears and the route narrows radically to a rather uneven rural path. The vegetation here may soak your feet if you are not wearing boots and in mid summer it can be very high. Fortunately this section is short and, after 220m, you reach a 4-way crossing. Keep straight ahead now on a more wooded path. After another 320m through mixed terrain you come out to a wide farm track by a junction. Veer **left** on the track. In only 50m, on your left is a yellow arrow. Fork **left** here, as directed, and over a stile into a horse pasture.
- 5 **This section is intricate and requires some extra attention.** Proceed along the left-hand side of the horse pasture. Before the first corner, go **left**, as directed by a yellow arrow, and over a stile leading out into a field. Turn **right** in the field, keeping close to the tree hedge on your right. In only 25m (*important!*) go **right** between two poplars and immediately **left** so that you are walking in the same direction but on the other side of the hedge. After a hump and a lot of ground ivy, your path leads you over two stiles. You are now walking along the left-hand side of a charming green field used for horse grazing. You reach a patch of woodland (part of New Copse) which juts out to the right into the field. You will find a stile just ahead, about 5m from the **right**-hand corner. Go over the stile into the woodland. Keep straight ahead on a rather unclear path, not far from the field on your right, crossing some untidy forester's tracks, until finally you emerge by an old wooden fence onto a lane, Church Hill.
- 6 Turn **right** on Church Hill, with the main part of New Copse on your left. In 500m you enter Wickham with the remarkable church of St Swithun on your right, definitely worth a visit.

St Swithun is really a "chapel of ease", i.e. not a fully-fledged parish church. The first thing you notice is that tall Saxon tower, dating from the 1000s and probably some sort of defensive structure. Entering the church, note the two small heads on the door pillars. Now look up: eight angels are flying on the hammer beams. Cross into the side aisle and, even most remarkably, looking up, you see eight elephants with their white tusks and curved-up trunks. The quaint organ stands in three separate pieces, the pipes seemingly stacked carelessly like a box of fire crackers. All this was the vision of that Gothic Revival architect Benjamin Ferrey who rebuilt the church in the 1840s. Behind

the church is Wickham House, remodelled in the 1850s by rector William Nicolson, and its quite marvellous garden, open for charity one day a year.

Follow the lane down, ignoring a footpath on your left, passing thatched cottages, down to the main Baydon Road. Your route is straight over the main road onto a minor road, Welford Road. But first you will want to turn **left** to arrive quickly at the *Five Bells* inn.



The “Five Bells” is one of the best foodie pubs in West Berkshire. The menu, which is all home-made, is exemplary. If you’re not into guinea fowl supreme, you can order a pizza at a price below Pizza Express. Sandwiches include “Organic Speedy Sausages with Colston Basset Stilton Mayo” at £5.45 (2014). If you prefer to drink lunch, note that the pub was Camra Berkshire Pub of the Year (again) in 2014. Real ale pumps stand in two rows, too many to list.

Leg 2: Wickham to Boxford 4 km=2½ miles

- 7 After your break, after continuing straight over the main road (or turning left if coming back from the pub) and just after passing a school on your left, turn **right** at a fingerpost on a track but immediately go **right** through a wooden swing-gate into an attractive meadow. Go straight up the meadow, passing a fenced enclosure on your left and a horse chestnut on your right. Immediately after that tree, veer **right** up the grass where you will see a wooden swing-gate at the edge of the woodland. Veer **left** through the gate into the woods. Keep dead straight through the wood on a clear path, later passing a marker post. At a fingerpost, veer **left** on a wider path coming in from the right, taking you through more woodland. At a marker post, your path veers left down into beeches. Soon you pass a smallholding with pigs and a tiny cottage as you come out of the wood. At a T-junction, turn **right** on a track.
- 8 At the end of the track, turn **left** on a tarmac lane, Easton Hill, lined with oaks. At the end of the first field (more pigs), ignore a 2-way fingerpost and continue on the lane. 170m later, turn **right** at another fingerpost on a wide track that runs along the left-hand side of a field. The track curves left at a fingerpost. Keep straight ahead at the next fingerpost passing more piggeries on your right. Continue following the main track, ignoring a path on the right into the woods. Your wide path now leads between piggeries. At the far end, keep straight ahead along the left-hand side of a crop field. At the bottom, go through a gap in the hedge and (*careful!*) down to a road, Rood Hill.
- 9 Turn **right** on the road, using the footway on the opposite side. In 100m, go **left** through a wooden swing-gate. However, by staying on the road for another 300m, you reach the *Bell* pub / restaurant / inn; the eccentric and sometimes chaotic interior hides the fact that the cuisine, which is available all day, is really inventive and the service conscientious; walkers endorsed this recommendation; booking is advised (ring 01488-608-721); after the pub, you can turn left on a side road to re-join the walk. Go diagonally across the sheep pasture to a swing-gate visible on the other side. Your path goes next over the course of an old railway, down steps, between sculpted hedges and down more steps to a lane in the village of Boxford. Continue straight over, joining the main road. The road passes some thatched cottages and crosses the River Lambourn, a bright picture! On your left soon is the converted mill house and, behind it but not on view, the weir. Your route is **right** through a large metal kissing gate. However, a very short excursion



further along the road will enable you to see one of West Berkshire's prettiest and most unspoiled villages.

*Boxford was settled by Saxons and named after the box trees. King Cadwalla of Wessex granted the village to Abingdon Abbey in the 680s (yes, the **six** eighties!). Boxford saw action in the Civil War, before the Second Battle of Newbury in 1644, when the Roundheads circled the town to avoid the guns of Donnington Castle. (See the other walk "Donnington Castle, Bagnor, Winterbourne".) The church of St Andrew is one of the oldest in Berkshire. Its wooden shuttered Saxon window is the oldest working window in the country.*

Leg 3: Boxford to Stockcross 4 km=2½ miles

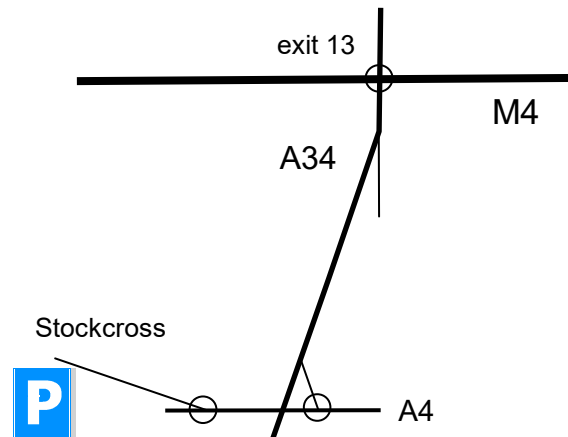
- 10 You will be following the Lambourn Valley Way for a short distance. *This 19½ mile=31 km path runs from Whitehorse Hill to Newbury.* After the first meadow go through another large metal kissing-gate, clearly signed as the official footpath, ignoring gates on either side. At the far end, go up past a large metal gate and straight ahead along the right-hand side of a field. *The clear-as-crystal Lambourn is occasionally approachable through a gap in trees on your right.* Keep to the left of a dark barn and some tumbledown farm buildings. The grassy path soon runs beside another field on your left. After the first long field, you have a pleasant green path beside the next field. Finally, in the far corner, go **right** past a small bench and over a bridge across an arm of the river.
- 11 The return from here to the start of the walk is especially memorable. Turn **right**, as directed, before a wooden gate and follow a wire fence on your left. You pass a weir and go over a bridge, worthy of a photo. A wooden swing-gate is followed by a boardwalk and a fenced path through wetlands with willows, then over the course of the old railway to a road. Cross straight over the road on a track for Priddles Farm.
- 12 The path goes uphill on a widening course through trees and then runs level for an exceptionally pleasant sheltered stretch. The path bends left uphill on a wide woodland track through beautiful mixed woodland. When you join a shingle track, keep straight on. In 75m, go **right** through a small wooden gate and thence along the left-hand side of a plantation, destined to be the new Jubilee Wood. A small wooden gate leads you straight along a drive which yields to a tarmac lane, going past a school. At the main road in Stockcross, go straight over the main road to Church Road and the village hall where the walk began.



There are limited opportunities for final refreshment in Stockcross. The 'Rising Sun', only 50m west on the road, seems to have 'risen' again, albeit with restricted opening times.

Getting there

By car: Stockcross is just off the A4 trunk road. The usual approach for outsiders is via the M4 and A34. Take the M4 and come off at exit 13 (Newbury). Go south on the A34 Newbury Bypass, avoiding the turnoff for Newbury. After 3½ miles, exit as for *Donnington, Speen*. Turn **right** on the A4, direction *Hungerford*. At the next roundabout, take the second exit, as for *Wickham, Stockcross*. In nearly 1 mile, park in the village. The Village Hall, if available for parking, is near the end on the left and is signposted.



By bus/train: bus no. 4 runs from Newbury station to Stockcross, not Sunday.
Check the timetables.

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