



Beechwoods and Bledda's Rest Bledlow

Distance 16km=10 miles moderate walking

Region: Chilterns

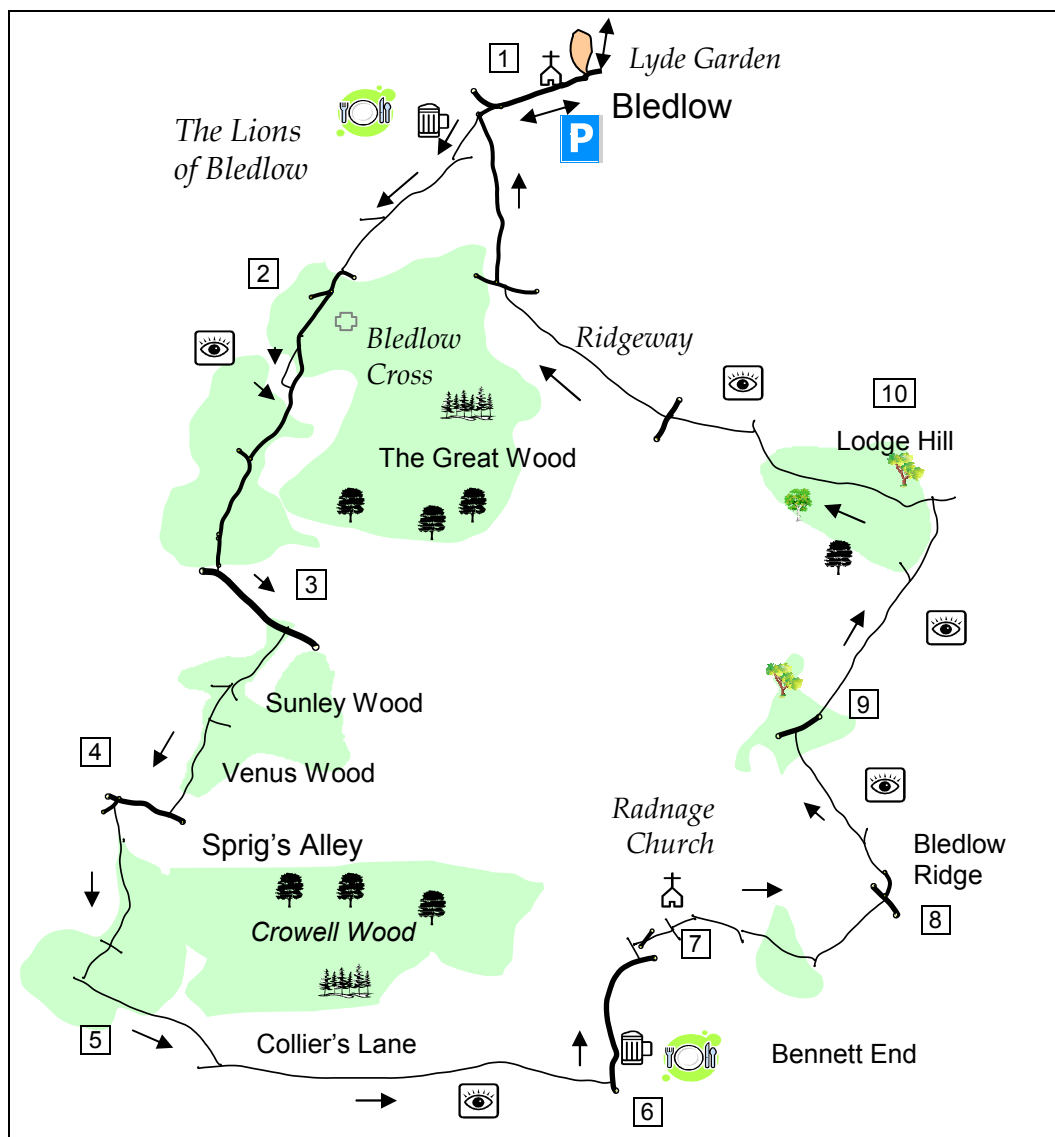
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Refreshments: Bledlow, Bennett End

Map: Explorer 181 (Chiltern Hills North), Explorer 171 (Chiltern Hills West)
(hopefully not needed)

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Village, woodland, hills, views



In Brief



This walk takes you from a cosy village up into the Chiltern Hills and back with fine views to remember. It is perfect for those who like to combine walking with a posh lunch (or just a drink) having a gastronomic stop-over at the half-way point. If you want to book a table at the *Three Horseshoes*, you should ring 01494 483273. Outside the summer months you may find the *Lions* pub closed when you finish.



This walk is a tribute to Raymond Hugh's *Adventurous Walks* books, since it follows the same route as one of his walks. These books are out of print but still possibly available by mail order and the other nine walks are also a pleasure to do.



This walk is nettle-free and sensible shoes are adequate. It is also fine with a dog.

The walk begins at the village of Bledlow, Bucks, easy to reach from the M25 and M40. Park by the church (grid ref 778022 postcode HP27 9PE) or along the road nearer the Lions of Bledlow pub. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Bledlow is a picturesque village with small houses and gardens along the side of the hill. The name in Anglo-Saxon means 'Bledda's burial mound'. The village lies on the ancient Icknield Way. The Lyde Brook that runs down from here drove two mills for many years. The watermill is still on view. The parish church of the Holy Trinity was built in the 1100s and 1200s and is largely unchanged with columns along the nave dating from about 1200. The prominent tower houses a peal of eight bells.

Before setting out on the walk, go eastwards a few metres along the road from the church to a small gate in the wall on the left. This unassuming portal leads to a secret gem, the **Lyde Garden**. This water garden was built on the site of the natural springs that surface close to the church. It features board-walks and ornaments set in a combination of ponds and water plants and is a true delight. Don't miss it! (For the *Times* article, click [here](#) or on the thin line: _____.)

Leg 1: Bledlow to Bennett End 8km=5 miles

- 1 Walk west along the road, past the *Lions of Bledlow* pub and, at a set of signposts at the corner, turn **half left** across the centre of a field, heading towards Bledlow Cop and the Great Wood in the distance. After the first field, a track joins from the left. *This is part of the Swan's Way, a 65-mile (105km) footpath running from Goring-on-Thames almost to Northampton.* Continue up to a cottage at the tree-line, avoiding several minor paths right. Here you are joined by a track coming from the left, part of the Ridgeway, and also of the ancient trackway known as the (upper) Icknield Way. *The Ridgeway is a legendary and historic 85-mile (136km) trail running from Overton Hill near Avebury Wiltshire to Ivinghoe Beacon.* Veer **right** around the cottage and immediately, at a fingerpost, fork **left** uphill, signposted *Chinnor Reserve and Barrows*, having had only a short acquaintance (though soon to be renewed) of those two ancient tracks.

2 Follow the sunken track for some distance through the Great Wood. You have a choice of a high and a low path: the higher path is usually easier. Soon you pass close to the Bledlow Cross. *The Bledlow Cross is a large cross cut out of the chalk hillside, similar to the nearby Whiteleaf Cross. It's about 230m from the cottage and just 50m left up into the trees.*

Unfortunately, it's usually so overgrown as to be difficult to see. Soon you pass the chalk pits on your right. *The noticeboard describes this small nature reserve and its many rare plants such as the small scabious*

(scabiosa columbaria), kidney vetch and centaurea (knapweed), together with butterflies such as the peacock and gatekeeper (hedge brown). Near the top, where the path curves left, leave it to go straight ahead through a gate on a permissive footpath onto the open hillside where you have a fine view over the Vale of Aylesbury with Chinnor immediately below. You are now in Oxfordshire. When you reach a slanting information tablet near the end, turn **left** on a narrow path and exit through a metal swing-gate back onto the track you were on, and turn **right** to resume your direction.

Eventually, at a T-junction, turn **left** onto a tarmac path and immediately turn **right** again, going past a small car park. Follow the lane, Hilltop Lane, past houses to a road. Turn **left** on the road.

3 After 400m of unavoidable walking beside the road, just after *Bluebells* and a dark water tower, turn **right** on a bridleway marked "Sprigg's Alley" (sic). (Take the path beside the wood, *not* the gate on the left.) The path runs along the left-hand edge of a wood and then downhill, where you are guided by white arrows on the trees through Sunley Wood. At the bottom of the valley, avoid a path left and go through a gate with a sign for footpath CH31a. Follow this gently rising path with a field on the right. (There is also a pleasant parallel path on the left, just inside Venus Wood.) The footpath exits the wood by farm sheds and follows a track to a large gate and a lane in front of *Dove Cottage* in the hamlet of Sprig's Alley. Turn **right** on the lane.

4 In 200m, turn **left** on a concrete track for Crowell Hill Farm. In only 20m, fork **left** at a blue arrow on a narrow path. Again, you have an option of a high path which is drier. Soon the path forks at a post with blue arrows. (If you are on the high path, the post will be down on your left.) Take the **right** fork leading up towards the edge of a field. Ignore a metal gate and footpath on the right and stay on path CR12 which stays in the wood but close to the field on the right. The path runs through fine beech woods and once again you are guided by white arrows on trees. Eventually the field on the right disappears from view and the path descends, crossing a wide track. Finally, at the bottom, at a T-junction, turn **left** on the wide track S87. *As the Adventurous Walk book remarks, this path is the frontier between Oxfordshire (left) and Bucks and travellers in earlier times frequented this muddy road to avoid road tolls, until the government changed to taxing vehicles rather than roads.*

5 The track reaches the corner of a field. Here, ignore a footpath off to the right and, a little later, go over a crossing path, still with the field a few metres to your right. Soon after, the track, known as Collier's Lane, runs in the open between fields giving you fine views all round. At a T-junction, veer **left** and keep to the valley bottom for some distance, avoiding several crossing paths. Eventually, you reach the hamlet of Bennett End. Turn **left** on the lane, shortly reaching the *Three Horseshoes "Country Inn and Restaurant"*, a gastronomic stop-over. *This pub / restaurant / inn is in a*



fine location and offers an impressive fixed-price 2- or 3-course menu, boasting a Bib Gourmand award for “good food at moderate prices”. It is not known whether they provide house-slippers for walkers, but your attire and footwear are their problem, not yours.

Leg 2: Bennett End to Bledlow 8km=5 miles

- 6 Continue along the lane, avoiding as you go two footpaths on the left. (The second footpath is the Chiltern Way (CW) joining the lane.) At a junction by Hillside Farmhouse, turn **left** on a lane, Town End Road. In 50m, turn **right** on the grass at a signpost, still on the CW. The path crosses a drive and a grassy meadow. On the other side, go through a small gate and up a lane opposite, reaching the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Radnage.



The Church of St Mary the Virgin is in a perfect Chiltern setting and with its soft stone hues makes a memorable picture, together with the fine rectory next door. The building is unusual with its relatively narrow straight tower. The interior contains a host of original features, defying the usual Victorian restoration. The church was granted to the Knights Templars in 1231 and in 1291 the church was assessed at £6 13s. 4d. It has been used as a film set, notably for ‘A Month in the Country’ with Kenneth Branagh.

With the church on your left, pass close to the right-hand edge of the churchyard and exit over a flint stile and a small wooden gate into a meadow.

- 7 Cross the centre of the meadow and pass through a robust new gate on the other side. *Note the poetic attribution on the gate which was once a stile.* Go through a similar gate and take the **left** fork up to the left-hand corner to a wooden gate leading into woodland. The path runs uphill, wheeling right around the edge of the wood and then up onto a lovely hillside, with wild flowers a-plenty. Keep to the uphill route. At the top of the hill, the path re-enters woodland and passes through a wooden gate. Ignore a path right. The enclosed path leads between meadows and goes through a metal swing-gate to a road at the village of Bledlow Ridge. *The building on the left is no longer an inn or restaurant.* Cross straight over to a track opposite.

- 8 The track bends left. On reaching a metal gate, continue on a narrow path beside it. You reach a large wooden gate with a field on the right. Here, ignore the stile on the right and take the second stile, leading into a narrow path, still marked as the CW. *On your right you have a view of the opposite ridge with Loosley Row and the immaculate Lacey Green windmill clearly visible.* At a crosspaths with a 4-way fingerpost, keep ahead on a fine grassy path. Go through a wooden gate down and up the other side of a meadow, across an unusual stile, along a fenced footpath and out to a lane by houses. Turn **right** on the lane, thus leaving the CW.

- 9 The lane is demoted to a track. Go through a wooden gate and straight down the left-hand side of a field with fine views on all sides. At the bottom, go through a metal gate and continue between fields. At the corner of woodland, avoid a bridleway on the left and continue along the edge of the field, uphill. At the top, ignore a turning right and continue ahead on a grassy path. At a T-junction by metal gates, turn **left** through a swing-gate. The familiar dark-brown fingerposts tell you that you are now back on the Ridgeway. Ignore a path right immediately after and continue on the Ridgeway following white acorn signs.

- 10 The path takes you over the chalky top of Lodge Hill, through woodland and through a wooden swing-gate in a line of beeches. This is followed by a lovely downhill grassy stretch with fine views. Soon the fenced path has a meadow on the right. Just before the corner, turn **left** through a metal swing-gate, still on the Ridgeway, and take a clear footpath across the field, followed by another gate and another field corner. Cross a road, Wigan's Lane, via two metal gates and cross another field and go along the left-hand side of another field. Near the end of the field, ignore a stile on the left but go through a metal swing-gate into a grassy meadow. Keeping the same direction, and still on the Ridgeway, go along the right-hand side of the meadow, ignoring a stile on the right. Follow the path up to the far left-hand corner of the meadow and go through a swing-gate to a track. This is the (upper) Icknield Way again.

The Icknield Way is one of the oldest roads in Britain, one of the great "four highways" (the others being Ermine Street, the Fosse Way and Watling Street) established at least in 1100 and possibly millennia earlier. The name is Celtic, possibly named after the Icenii tribe, who needed to extend trade from their homeland in East Anglia. The original (lower) Icknield Way is the long straight B2009 road by which you probably arrived.

Turn **left** on the track and, in 30m, turn **right** on a track that takes you back to Bledlow and arrives beside the Lions pub.



*The Lions of Bledlow is an unspoiled 16th-century free house with original oak beams and, in winter, a log fire. It is a location used in the TV series 'Midsomer Murders'. There is also a large garden and, of course, the village green for al fresco consumption. The pub offers a good range of real ales including Loddon, Tring and Burton Bridge, and a good menu with daily 'specials'. The pub is **not** open all day, not even at weekends.*

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Getting there

By car: Bledlow is off the B4009 Chinnor Road, just west of Princes Risborough. It can be reached via junction 6 of the M40, by following signs to P.Risborough. At Chinnor, ignore signs for Bledlow Ridge and wait till you pass a sign that you are entering Bledlow. Just after this, turn **right** at a sign for the pub *The Lions of Bledlow*. (If coming from the east, this is on the left.)

