



Bledlow

Beechwoods and Bledda's Rest

Distance: 16 km=10 miles

moderate walking

Region: Chilterns

Date written: 2-sep-2010

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Date revised: 27-aug-2018

Refreshments: Bledlow, Bennett End

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

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Village, woodland, nature reserves, hills, views

In Brief

This truly unforgettable walk shows you all that is best in the Chiltern Hills. You go through great beechwoods, along valleys and over the Bledlow Ridge with terrific views. The walk begins and ends in a snug Chiltern village which holds its own surprises.



The village has one of the iconic pubs of the Chilterns (to enquire at the *Lions of Bledlow*, ring 01844-343345). Along the way, you can stop at the *Boot in the Ridge* (ring 01494-481499). You also pass one of the great foodie pubs (see text), requiring long advance booking.

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.



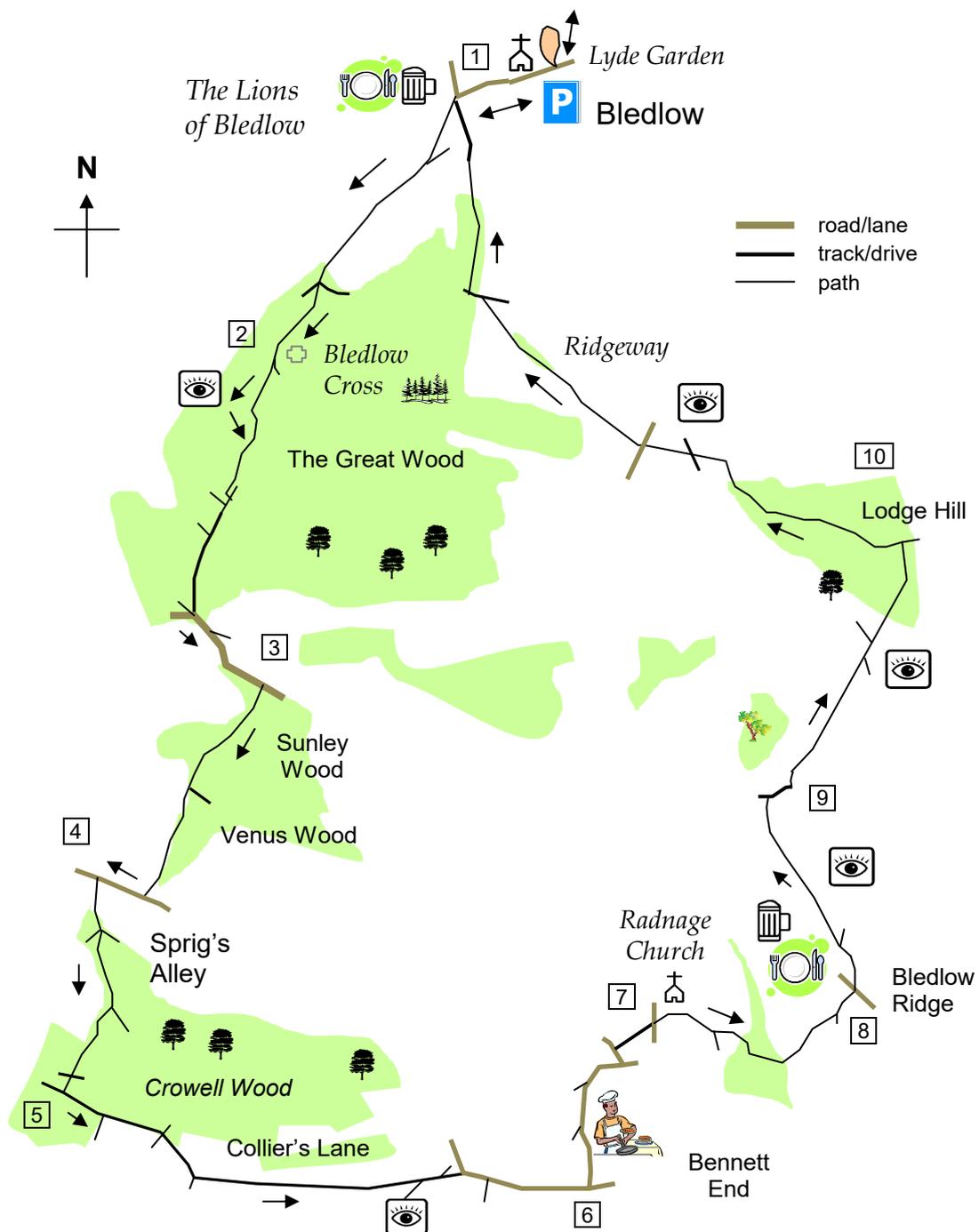
There are only a few nettles on this walk and sensible shoes should be adequate in dry weather. However, after recent rain, and possibly in high summer when the undergrowth prevails, boots will be needed. A hiking pole is useful to swish the vegetation aside. It is also fine with a dog.

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 you set out on the walk, there is a secret gem, **not be missed!** Go a few steps along the road past the church on your left to a small gate in the wall. 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.



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

- 1 Walk along the road, with the *Lions of Bledlow* pub on your left, and, at a set of signposts at the corner, turn diagonally **left** on a wide marked path 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=105 km footpath running from Goring-on-Thames almost to Northampton.* Continue for 650m 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=136 km 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 into a Nature Reserve 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. *This small nature reserve has 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 and its windmill immediately below. You are now in Oxfordshire. After nearly 200m, when you reach a slanting information tablet near the end, turn **left** on a narrow path, exit through a large metal kissing gate back onto the track you were on, and turn **right** to resume your direction. Eventually, go over a low barrier to 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 *Bluebell* and a dark water tower, turn **right** on a bridleway marked *Sprigg's Alley* (sic). Keep **right** on a path under trees, following some white arrows on trees. The path runs along the left-hand edge of a wood and then downhill through the centre of Sunley Wood, where you are guided by more white arrows on trees. At the bottom of the valley, avoid a wide path left and follow a footpath straight on up the hill. The path rises beside a field on the right. After the first gradient, there is also a pleasant parallel path on your left, just inside Venus Wood. The footpath exits the wood by some converted sheds (now eco-cottages) and follows a track to a large gate and a lane in front of *Dove Cottage* in the hamlet of Sprig's Alley. Ignore a narrow footpath on your right here but turn **right** on the tarmac lane.
- 4 In 200m, after a shallow dip, 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. (The high path forks a lot: it is ok to keep **right**, so long as you do not stray too far from the main path in the valley.) Soon the path forks at a post with blue arrows (if you are on the

high path, the post is down on your left) and two white arrows on a tree. Take the **right** fork leading up towards the edge of a field. Ignore a small metal gate and footpath on your right and keep to the footpath which stays inside the wood but not far from the field on the right. The path runs through fine beech woods and once again you are guided by white arrows on trees. In 250m the field on the right disappears from view and the path descends, crossing a private wide track. Finally, at the bottom, at a T-junction, turn **left** on a major wide track. *As the Adventurous Walk book remarks, this route is the frontier between Oxfordshire (left) and Bucks and travellers in earlier times frequented this path to avoid road tolls, until the government changed to taxing vehicles rather than roads.*

- 5 The track quickly reaches the corner of a field. Here, ignore a wide path off to the right and, a little later, go over a diagonal crossing path, still with the field a stone's throw to your right. The track takes you around a metal barrier and over another crossing path. Soon after, the track, known as Collier's Lane, runs in the open between fields giving you fine views all round. At a 3-way signpost, veer **left**. You will be following the valley bottom for over 1 km, avoiding several crossing paths. You can see the houses of Bennett End ahead as you meet a tarmac lane at a bend. Keep straight on, soon reaching the a 3-way junction in the centre of the hamlet. Turn **left** on the lane, shortly reaching the *Three Horseshoes*, now run with a huge passion for natural food by Nick Mash as the *Mash Inn*.



The "Mash Inn" was listed by the Times in May 2017 among the 20 best foodie pubs in the country. It began as an open-fire menu-less experiment in natural dining, but it now follows convention by having a "daily menu" and a "tasting menu" both of which are said to be worth every penny of the rather steep price. You will probably need to pack a fresh shirt and some house-shoes and, unless it's your lucky day, you will need to book days in advance. One idea is to stay overnight and resume on the morrow. (Ring 01494-482440 or consult the web for info.)

Leg 2: Bennett End to Bledlow 8 km=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** beside a shingle drive just before a signpost. The path goes straight on over a stile drive and across a grassy meadow, still on the CW. 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, walk to the far end of the churchyard and exit through a small wooden gate into a meadow.

- 7 Cross the centre of the meadow and pass through a small wooden gate on the other side. *Note the poetic attribution on the gate which was once a stile.* Go through another small wooden gate and take the **left** fork up to the left-

hand corner to a wooden gate leading into woodland, part of the Yoesden Bank nature reserve. (The hillside on your left is “access land”, perfect for a picnic.) 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. Keep straight ahead, ignoring a path right and passing an info tablet. The fenced path leads between meadows and goes through a metal kissing gate to a road at the village of Bledlow Ridge. Your route is straight over the road, but refreshments are available on your left.



The appropriately-named “Boot” inn was saved from redevelopment in 2010 by the villagers and has become a huge success. It offers a wide menu, plus daily specials and sandwiches; ales are Marlow Rebellion and others.

8 Take a track opposite which bends left. On reaching two wooden gates, continue on a narrow path between them. You reach a large wooden gate with a field on the right. Here, ignore the stile on the right and continue on a narrow hedged path, still marked as the CW. [2018: this path was recently overgrown but is now completely clear – no need to bypass it through the field!] On your right you have a view of the opposite ridge with Loosley Row and the immaculate Lacey Green windmill clearly visible. At a crossing track with a 4-way fingerpost, keep ahead on a pleasant grass path. The path leads you through a wooden swing gate, down and up the other side of a meadow, through a new metal kissing gate, along a fenced footpath and out to a lane by houses. Turn **right** on the lane, thus leaving the CW.

9 The lane downgrades 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 small 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. In a further 150m, at the top, ignore a turning right and continue ahead on a grassy path. *This hillside, full of brambles, brush and thorn bushes, is a perfect habitat for small birds and on a good day you may see flocks of redstart, whitethroat and spotted flycatchers.* In 400m, 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 with great views, through woodland and, after nearly 500m, through a wooden swing-gate in a line of beeches. This is followed by a lovely downhill grassy stretch with fine views and more woodland. In 500m more, the fenced path has a meadow on the right. Just before the next corner, turn **left** through a metal kissing gate, still on the Ridgeway, and take a clear footpath across the field, followed by another gate and another field corner to another gate and a road. Cross the road, Wigan's Lane, a fraction left, and take a gate into another field. Proceed along the left-hand side of this field. Near the end of the field, **ignore** a gate on your left but, 15m later, go through a second gate on the **left** into a grassy meadow, still on the Ridgeway. Keeping the same direction, go along the right-hand side of the meadow. In 200m, **ignore** a new wooden gate on the right. Follow the path up to the far left-hand corner of the meadow and go through a kissing 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.

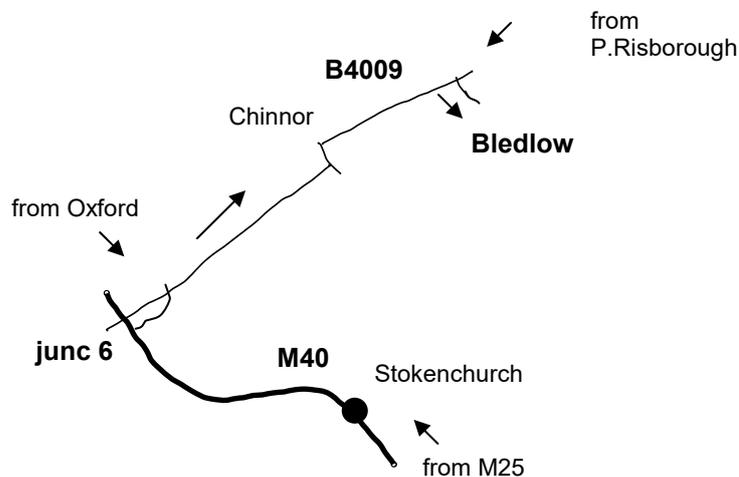
Turn **left** on the track and, in 30m, turn **right** on a track that takes you back to Bledlow, via woodland and a track, and arrives beside the *Lions* pub where the walk began.



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. This freehouse offers a good rotating range of real ales including Loddon, Tring, Haresfoot, Sambrook, White Kinght, Vale’s Red Kite, Hook Norton, Hop Gun, Ascot Blind Tiger and Burton Bridge, and a good menu with daily ‘specials’. Apart from ‘normal’ hours, the pub is open all day at summer weekends.

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.)



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