



Bradenham and West Wycombe

Distance: 9 km=5½ miles + [very short options](#)

easy walking

Region: Chilterns

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Map: 172 (Chiltern Hills East) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

[Problems, changes?](#) *We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org*

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Villages, woodland, historic house, caves, churches

In Brief

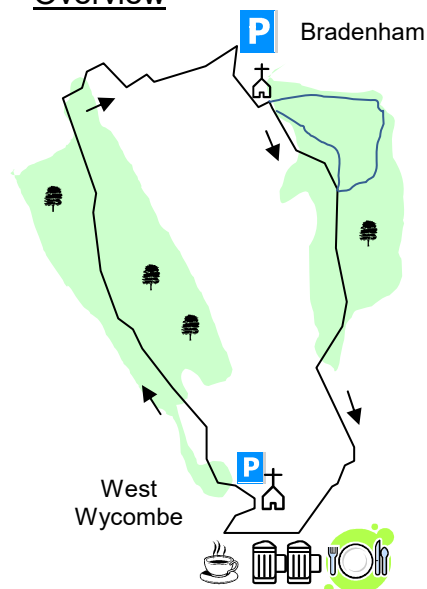
This wondrous little circular walk takes you from one of the most charming and peaceful National Trust villages of the Chilterns: Bradenham with its church, its manor and pretty houses, to the another National Trust treasure: the historic village of West Wycombe with its pristine cottages, mausoleum, caves, great house and church on the hill. This walk is over-endowed with three excellent pubs in West Wycombe (plus a tea-room).

The route is an adventure since it takes you through dense woodland and over the hills before returning over another long wooded hill. Any sensible clothes and footwear should be fine and your dog will be welcome everywhere except in the caves.



The walk begins at the village of **Bradenham, Bucks**, in the Wycombe area, just off the A4010 (postcode **HP14 4HF**). Park off-road opposite the church where there is a gravel car parking area. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Overview



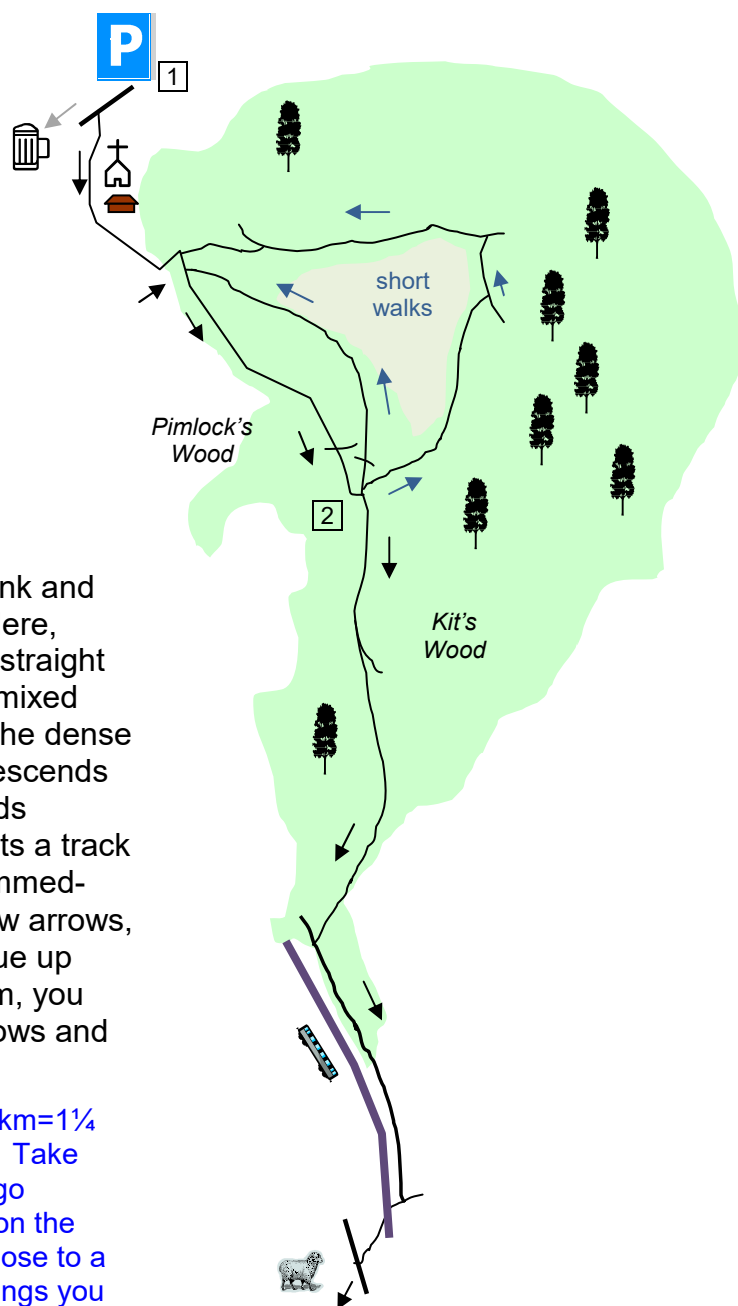
The Walk

Leg 1: Bradenham to West Wycombe 4½ km=2¾ miles

- 1 Cross the road and walk across the green in front of St Botolph's Church which is unusual and must be visited. Continue past the entrance and wall of the Manor. Finally you reach a track from where you can glance back at the village across the green. Turn **left** onto a track and continue beside the wall uphill. In 50m, at a finger-post, the wall turns left as you arrive at a fork. Take the **right** fork and then, in only 3m, turn **right** on a faint, narrow path, scrambling up a bank of tree roots. The path immediately improves and heads up into the beechwoods of Pimlock's Wood. In about 50m, the path goes over a low bank and you will see a white square on a tree. Here, avoid a path forking away left and keep straight ahead, following the flinty path through mixed woodland, with open views right where the dense foliage permits. After 400m, the path descends to a post with a big white arrow and winds upwards again. In another 150m it meets a track diagonally. Veer **left** on the track and immediately **right** again, according to the yellow arrows, to regain your original direction. Continue up through the hollies until, in another 250m, you reach a T-junction with many yellow arrows and a choice of three ways.

Decision point. There is a very easy 2 km=1¼ mile walk back to the car park from here. Take the **first** path from the left and, in 20m, go straight over a crossing path. Continue on the path that gradually curves left, running close to a meadow on your right, and eventually brings you back to the white square on the tree. Continue the way you came back to the car park.

There is another easy 2¾ km=1¾ mile walk back to the car park from here. Take the **second** path from the left and follow it for 500m through woodland and alongside a meadow on your left until you reach a 3-way junction. Veer **left** here on an unmarked path that continues beside the meadow. At a T-junction turn **left** on a wide bridleway. Follow the bridleway, avoiding turnings off, until you join a residential track by some houses. Continue through woodland and, at a major fork in the track, keep **left**, leaving the main track. This takes you back to the wall of the Manor from where you can return to the car park.

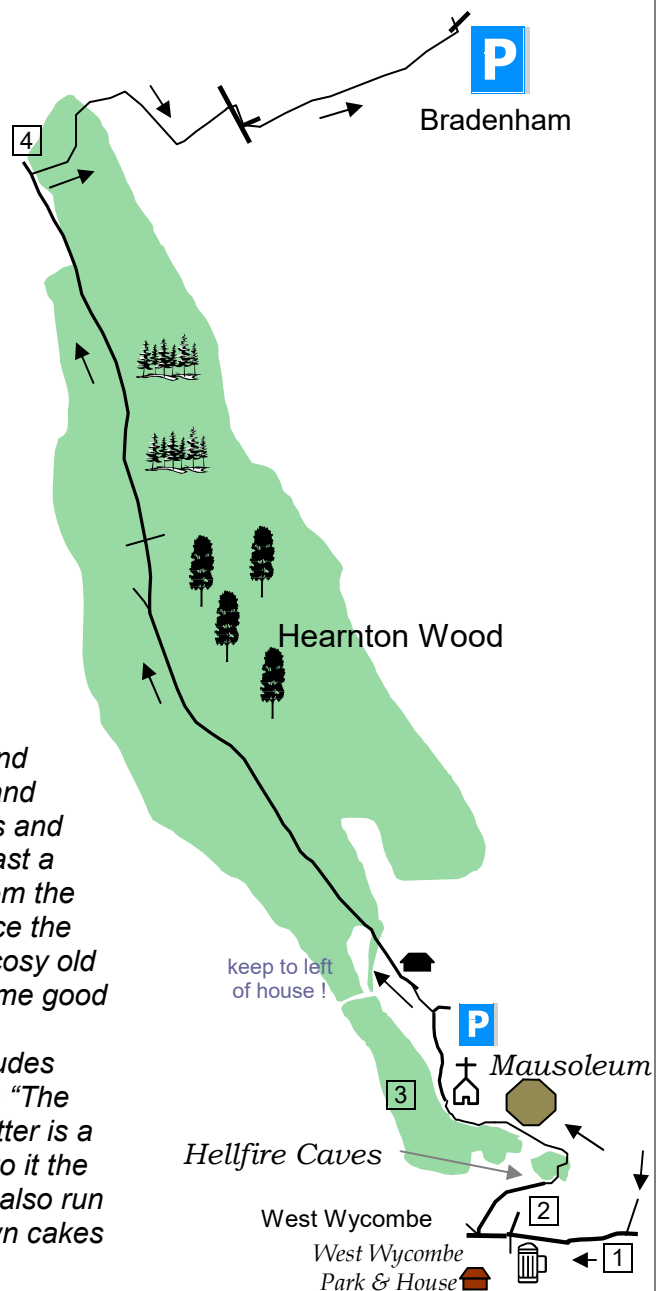


- 2 Turn **right** on a pleasant level path between holly and an oak plantation. After 250m, as the path bends left, you meet a post on your right with a yellow arrow. Fork **right** here on a narrower but still level path. Your path winds down on a route through yew trees, then down an avenue of beeches, soon running between wire fences. Go through a metal gate to a stony track bordering the railway and turn **left** on it. There is a bench here to rest awhile. You have a view across the hill to the Mausoleum and church at West Wycombe – your destination. In about 500m, your path reaches a T-junction. Turn **right** here through an arch under the railway and continue on a wide path across a field to reach the A4010 road.

Leg 2: West Wycombe to Bradenham 4½ km=2¾ miles

- 1 Cross the main road to go through a metal kissing gate opposite into a sheep pasture. Cross the pasture diagonally, on an unclear path, heading for the far left-hand corner. As you near the far side road, you will make out a wooden swing-gate about 30m from the corner. Go through the gate to the A40 road and turn **right** through the village. As you go, you can admire this unspoilt village, hardly changed from centuries past (apart from that busy traffic). Pass as you go the little redbrick St Paul's church, then the 15th-century timbered Church Loft on the right with its 1670 renovated clock. Continue to the end of the village, no doubt taking the chance for refreshment. *A new ghost has now floated out of the history book as a guide for the next hour: welcome to the home and estate of a certain Sir Francis Dashwood.*

West Wycombe belongs to the National Trust and has therefore been left alone by estate agents and developers, as you can see from the plain doors and peeling paint. A village has stood here for at least a thousand years but most of the buildings are from the 1600s or early 1700s. Nos. 57 and 58 were once the village poor house. The "George and Dragon" cosy old coaching inn dates from 1720; it now serves some good St Austell and Marlow brews and has a historic courtyard; it is open all day every day; food includes specials and a Sunday carvery. Other pubs are "The Plough" and "The Swan Inn". Just before the latter is a yard that holds the old butchers shop and next to it the library. The lady volunteers who run the library also run a volunteer open-air tea shop and bake their own cakes for it.



At the end of the village is the entrance to West Wycombe Park and House, a must-visit, although perhaps another day.

West Wycombe Park is a quite magnificent Georgian landscape garden, created, from about 1740 onwards, by Sir Francis Dashwood. From various corners and their temples and follies you have views of the lake and the house. The unique house was given to the National Trust in 1943 by the then Dashwood and later restored by the next Dashwood. It is still dwelt in by the same family. It is a primer of the dilettante architecture of that time. Sir Francis had done the Grand Tour from the age of 18. Normally this would take him to France and Italy but Sir Francis added Turkey and Russia. Returning home, he became an MP and founded the Society of Dilettanti, which still exists. He also co-founded the infamous Hellfire Club for high society rakes devoted to immoral acts, which they undertook beneath a kind of religious cloak. One centre of activity was Medmenham Abbey (see "Pheasants and Thames Pasture", another walk in this series). Sir Francis based his group here in the village.

- 2 At a road junction at the end of the village turn very sharp **right** on Church Lane and, keeping to the tarmac footway on its right, follow the road uphill past a school. Soon you pass, on your left, the café and entrance to the Hellfire Caves.

The caves are man-made. There were already chalk caves from olden times here but Sir Francis saw the chance to extend them. Between 1748 and 1752 he paid the local villagers to dig (they were in need after a bad harvest) until the caves extended a quarter of a mile underground. They became a centre for drinking and wenching. The members addressed each other as "Brother" and the leader, who changed regularly, as "Abbot". Female "guests" were called "Nuns". Sir Francis soon ran up a five-figure bar bill and was consequently made Chancellor of the Exchequer. The caves are open to visitors for most of the year.

Turn **left** to the café but immediately to the **right** of the entrance, take a narrow path uphill. As you go, there are views behind to the village and the hills beyond. Ascend the grassy path, up steps, over a flowery meadow, finally reaching the Mausoleum.

This hilltop is believed once to have been the site of a prehistoric monument, perhaps a little like Stonehenge, and an iron-age fort. There was also possibly a Roman temple here. This Dashwood Mausoleum was built in 1765 of Portland stone and flint to house the urns of the ashes of the Dashwood family, including Sir Francis. It is floodlit at night and a well-known sight from afar.

Turn **left** around the Mausoleum and fork **right** to the church wall and keep **right** to reach the entrance to the church.

The Church of St Lawrence is famous for its tower topped off by a golden sphere. The sphere is said to be big enough to hold eight people and to have been formerly used for secret meetings. It is usually possible to ascend the tower. The church has a square classic interior, looking more like the kind of baroque church that Sir Charles would have seen on his Grand Tour. Note the painted ceiling in the chancel and the font with its serpent and dove motifs. The tower is open to the public on Sunday and Bank Holidays.

- 3 Pass the entrance to the church and continue on a gravel path through the churchyard, then through a wooden gate to a large oval sandy area used as a car park. Bear **left** and keep ahead to the far end. Where the stony track bends right, keep straight on between a row of stumps and quickly fork **right** to join a wide track running beside a hedge with a house (*Windy-haugh*) and its garden immediately on your right. You will be following this track for nearly 2 km. At first there are shrubs, then tall beeches, occasionally a faded white arrow on a tree. Almost 1 km after the house, the path forks. Choose the **right** fork. This is the most beautiful part of Hearnton Wood with its tall pines [Mar 2020: all recently harvested, causing a

temporary bleak landscape and some mud]. About 250m from the fork, your path goes over a crossing path by a post with yellow arrows. There is now a large open fenced-off area on your right with woodland of various conifers on your left. 700m from the fork, your path goes through a swing gate onto a path by a hedge and passes the entrance to Nobles Farm.

- 4 Just after the entrance to the farm, turn **right** at the corner of a fence. Follow the narrow winding forest path downhill. It ends at a wooden gate. Now go down the right-hand side of a meadow, through a thicket and through another wooden gate. Your route turns **right** to run along the top of a field, where the church and manor of Bradenham come into view. Go past a wooden gate and turn **left** down the left-hand side of a meadow. Veer **left** to go under the railway. Go through a small metal gate and finally through a kissing gate beside a large metal gate, taking you to the road. Cross the road, turn **right** and **left** on Bradenham Wood Lane, passing the site of the old *Red Lion*, using the green as a pleasant footway, and passing the houses of Bradenham, soon reaching the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Bradenham can be reached from the M40. Come off at junction 4 (*High Wycombe*). Follow signs for the A4010 to *Aylesbury*, over several roundabouts. In 2½ miles= 4 km, after a gradual descent, at a series of mini roundabouts by a filling station, fork left for *Aylesbury*. Follow Chapel Lane to a T-junction. Turn **left** here on the A40. At the next roundabout, just before West Wycombe village, turn **right** on the A4010, signposted *Aylesbury*. Bradenham is signposted in about 2½ km=1½ miles on the right.

By bus: bus 40 runs from near High Wycombe station to West Wycombe (½ hourly Mon to Fri) - (hourly Saturday) - (2-hourly Sun).

There are two bus services (X30 and 321) from High Wycombe to Aylesbury via Bradenham (*Red Lion* pub stop), not weekends.

Check the timetables.

