



Wildwood, Riverrun Goring-on-Thames

Distance 22km=13½ miles easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Chilterns

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comments please to feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

Refreshments: Woodcote, Whitchurch, Goring

Map: Explorer 171 (Henley) and 159 (Reading) with a small part of 170 (Abingdon) *but the maps in this guide should be all you need*

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Great beechwoods, river, hills, stately home, villages

In Brief



This is a really stunning walk exploring the great beechwoods north of the Thames valley and returning along a quite delightful stretch of the river.

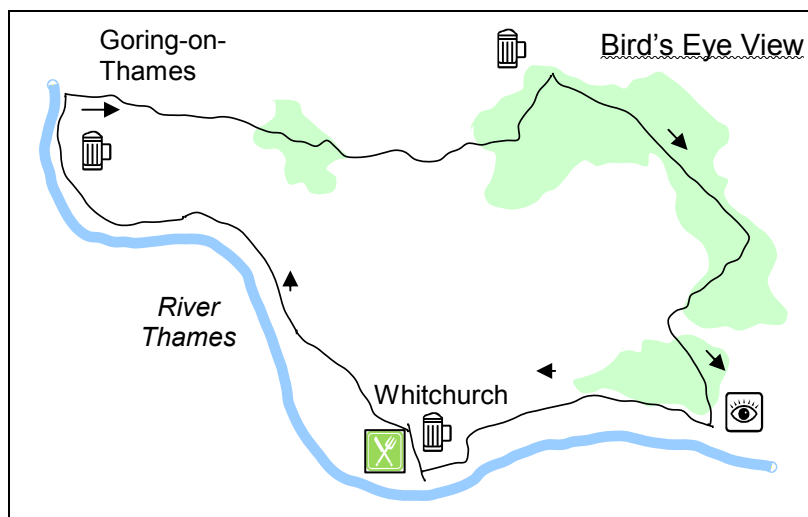
This walk was inspired by one in the *Adventurous Walks* series.



There are no nettles and no big problems underfoot, except where horse riders have churned the ground a little. This walk seems fine for a dog too, with a lead of course.

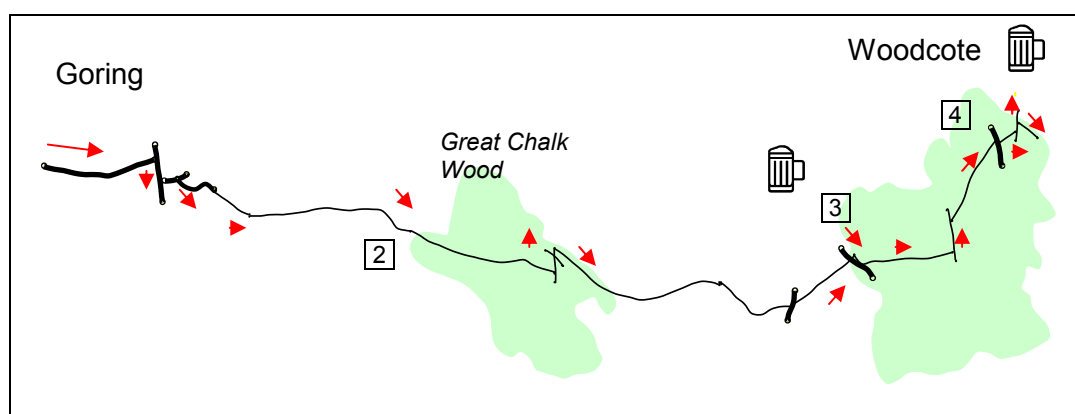


The walk begins in **Goring-on-Thames** (postcode RG8 9AR grid ref 600809) but, if coming by car, you should park across the river in Streatley where there is plenty of parking by the roadside. (See the walk *Stone Giants and a Sting-in-the-Tail*.) This also gives you an excuse to enjoy two little walks over the Thames bridge. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

Leg 1: Goring to Woodcote 6½km=4 miles



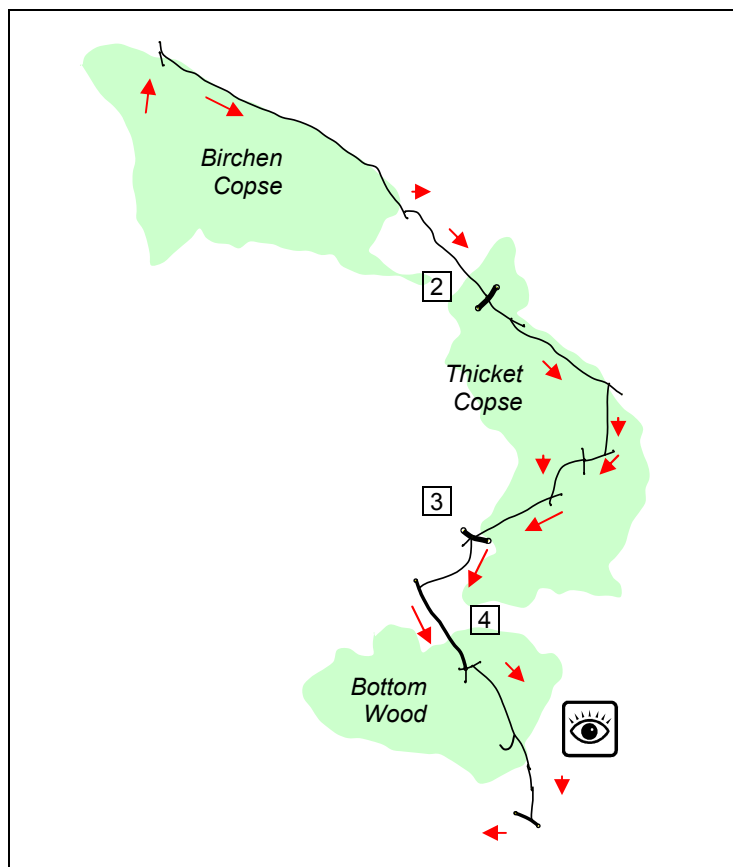
- 1 If you are parked in Streatley, cross the long bridge viewing as you go the weir, the riverside houses and perhaps colourful craft. Continue up the main street of Goring-on-Thames, past the *Miller of Mansfield*. At the end of the road, cross the railway bridge and turn **right** on the road. Take the next road **left** by the *Queen's Arms* and, in 100m, turn **right** into Whitehill Green with its splendid new houses set in a patchwork of front gardens and ornamental trees. Stay on the road as it bends left and at a T-junction turn **right**. Continue over the lawn to a signed footpath between hedges. Go **half left** diagonally across the playing field, go through a gap in the far corner and turn **left** uphill with fields on your right. Continue through a gap and along the left-hand side of the next field. Just before the corner, ignore a swing-gate on the left and at the corner veer right downhill. At the next corner, go through a swing-gate followed by another that takes you into the great Chalk Wood.
- 2 Continue on this path amidst conifers and silver birch in woodland which in late spring is decked with bluebells. At a crossing path, keep straight ahead as indicated by the yellow arrow. You are joined by another path coming from the right at another waymarker post. *Note that you are now on the Chiltern Way, a long-distance circular path of around 200 km (125 miles) between here and Hitchin.* Soon after, at a T-junction, turn sharp **left**, thus saying au revoir to the Chiltern Way. Soon after, at a junction by a meadow, veer right, going over a horse path between a meadow on your left and light woodland on your right. The path goes through an open gate welcoming you to Bottom House Farm, followed by another gate and you join a shingle path going past the house and its fine garage, fashioned from a barn. Continue on the track for some distance and later ignore a footpath left. The track becomes tarmac, where you avoid a footpath right. This is the hamlet of Blackbird Bottom. Continue to a road. Turn **left** on the road and, in 20m, turn **right** on a footpath through a swing-gate. *The White Lion pub in Crays Pond can be reached by staying on the road.* The path goes slightly left across a meadow going straight ahead past a line of cypress and exits in the far corner. Cross the road into the woods on the other side.

- 3 Turn **right** on a woodland path parallel to the road. In a few metres, the path crosses a track used by foresters, narrows and soon veers left deeper into the woods. Keep to the winding path, past an enclosure on the right, and then fork **right**, as indicated by the white arrow on a tree, and go over a wide track. *The woodland here is coated with bluebells in late spring.* Go through a gate, still following the white arrows, now in a fine beechwood. You reach a T-junction with white arrows pointing left and right. Turn **left** here. In about 100m, you come to a fork indicated by more white arrows. Take the **right** fork. Follow the path through beechwoods, aided by many white arrows. When you meet a fence on the right, ignore a wooden gate and continue next to the fence. Finally, leave the wood through a swing-gate out to a road opposite a converted chapel.
- 4 Turn **right** on the road going past the chapel and, in just 30m, turn **left** up a bank to a signed footpath. This path is a little unclear and curves first right and then left after which you simply keep straight ahead roughly at right angles to the road you just crossed, aiming for the edge of a field you can see ahead. The path meets a track at an angle. Turn **left** and in 50m approach a junction on the outskirts of Woodcote.



If you would like refreshment, the *Black Lion* pub, a simple free house, can quickly be reached as follows: turn **left** at the junction, fork **right** past the thatched house and follow the drive past a transmitter to the road. You need to backtrack to rejoin the walk. The *Black Lion* is the only pub until Whitchurch.

Leg 2: Woodcote to Hardwick 5km=3 miles



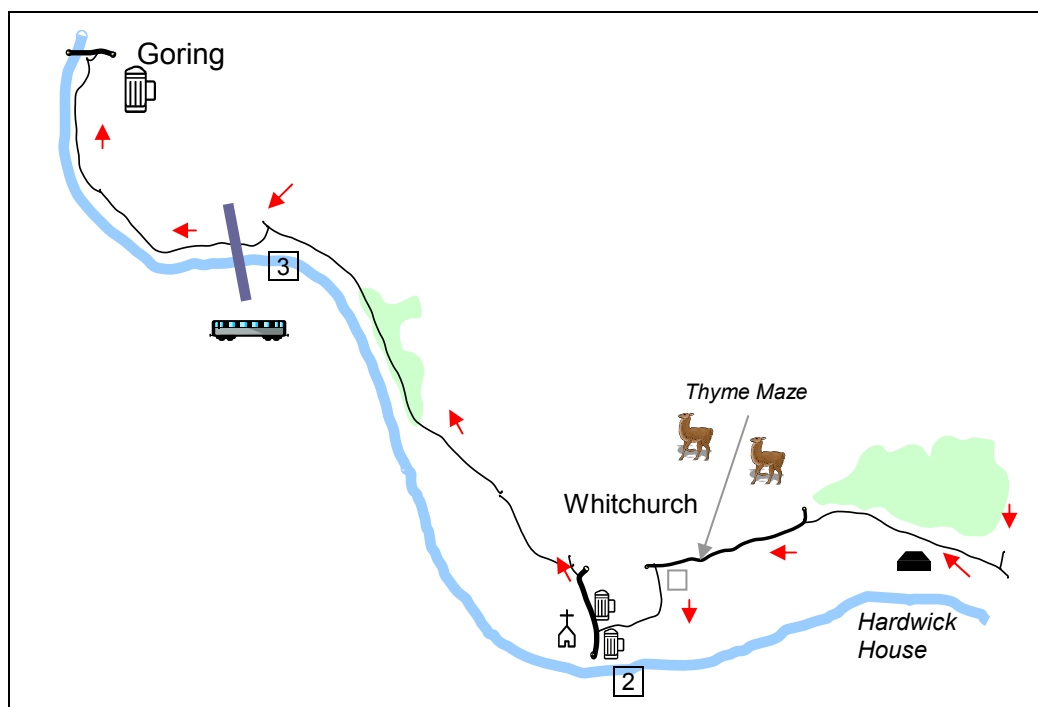
- 1 Turn sharp **right** at the junction on a track that runs close to the fields on your left. After a while, the path goes over an unusual barrier and a crossing path and enters deeper into the wood. Keep following the white arrows which are especially clear. The path goes over another crossing path and curves right a bit by a fence on the other side of which is Tillys Wood (for sale at the time of writing at £55,000). Shortly after, ignore a footpath right. About 100m further, the path bends **left** into hollies, as indicated by the white arrow. (Don't miss this turn.) Eventually the path descends to a road known as Deadman's Lane, which you will cross with trepidation.
- 2 Take a bridleway on the other side signed to "Nuney Green ¾". Follow the path through woodland, soon with a field on your left. At the end of the field, you meet a gate and stile on the left with white arrows on a tree. Ignore this left fork and keep ahead. In just over 100m, by a large fallen tree, turn **right** on a permissive path with the cheerful sign *you are welcome to walk in these woods*. The following stretch needs more concentration than usual. At the end, at a T-junction, turn **right**. In 40m, you arrive at a junction with forestry tracks to the left and right and a wide track ahead going downhill. Take this wide track downhill. The track curves left uphill and, on reaching the top, zigzags. From here you need to judge about 100m of distance. The path curves right and left again and is crossed by an official footpath marked with white arrows which are difficult to see. You can see a white arrow on a tree on the left, about 30m away. The white arrow on the right is about 40m away, hidden by a holly bush. Turn **right** on this footpath at right angles to the previous track, soon passing that white arrow. Follow this winding path, soon reaching a road.
- 3 Cross over the road and go over a stile (the first on this walk) and take the **left** option, going diagonally left across a horse meadow. At the far corner, go over a stile and keep to the path alongside the horse pasture on your right, all the way to a crossing tarmac drive with an avenue of cherry trees on the right. Turn **left** here and follow the drive past *Briar Cottage* and soon reach the delectable *Holly Copse* and its almost edible neighbour *Holly Copse Cottage*. Keep to the **right** of the cottage on a track downhill through laurels. *Note that you are now back on the Chiltern Way*. The track leads down to the bottom of a wooded valley.
- 4 Turn **left** on the valley bottom, avoiding a permissive path ahead uphill. In 25m, at a post with variously coloured arrows, fork **right** uphill on a wide path with white arrows, also marked as the *Chiltern Way*. You now have fine views left over the valley. Near the top, at a post with yellow arrows, keep straight ahead, ignoring the right turn. You are now in the Hardwick Estate and are greeted by bluebells in late spring. At the top, go through a metal swing-gate onto the open hillside. Suddenly you have a spectacular view of the river valley – one of the most delightful surprises in the Chilterns. Before you sit and admire the view, note: the bench seat is *not anchored and will tip over*.



Immediately ahead is the small town of Purley-on-Thames. Reading is far to the left and you can just make out the giant wind turbine at GreenPark by the M4. Closer down to the left is Mapledurham House and weir.

Walk down the grassy hill ahead to a metal swing-gate at the bottom and turn **right** on a bridleway.

Leg 3: Hardwick to Goring 10km=6 miles



- 1 Soon the bridleway passes through wrought iron gates of the Hardwick Estate and soon after, on your left, is the noble redbrick Hardwick House itself.

To comprehend the splendid aspect of Hardwick House, you really need to come again on a river boat. From the land side you can make out the walls, Tudor chimneys, crest and, in particular, the eccentric clock tower. The Manor of Hardwick was given by William the Conqueror to his favourite, Robert D'Oyley. The oldest walls date from Richard II's reign. The house was bought by Richard Lybbe in 1526 and Charles I stayed here and played bowls. The main building dates from around 1650 when Anthony Lybbe restored it after much desecration caused during the Civil War. See <http://thames.me.uk/s01200.htm> for pictures, an account of daily life and a description of the surrounding area.

Join a drive coming from the House and pass Hardwick Stud with its many fields of horses and old stables. Continue through more wrought iron gates and join a lane ahead. *On either side are fields of alpacas belonging to Bozedown who have bred them since 1989. Pass Bozedown Farm, with Chalk Hills farmhouse beside it.*

Chalk Hills has an ammonite embedded in the drive, a large humorous scarecrow in the garden and on the wall a tablet showing the Equation of Time. The figures depicted here are the number of minutes you have to add or subtract to get the "true" time after reading a sundial (one coming shortly). For example, on the 11th and 16th June a sundial gives the "true" time to the minute.

Just by the house you can use a footpath that runs parallel to the lane. After a driveway, the footpath continues and rejoins the road near the welcome sign for Whitchurch. Just before a sidewalk starts on the left, turn **left** on a signed footpath. In 30m on the left is the Thyme Maze. *This is the brainchild of a local man, based on an Ancient Greek pattern and surrounded by symbols that have a supposedly magic significance. Next to it is a human sundial where the gnomon (the rod) is yourself standing at the marked spot.* Continue along the footpath and, at the end, turn **right** on a residential road with many houses of individual character leading into the village of Whitchurch-on-Thames by the Greyhound pub.



Whitchurch takes its name from the Saxon flint church “Hwitcurke”, centuries before the Normans. It prospered from its commanding position on the Thames despite its proximity to the estates of Hardwick and Mapledurham which demanded exclusive access by land. As you will see, the village has several attractive flint cottages, Edwardian villas and Georgian town houses. The village is connected to Pangbourne on the Berkshire side by a toll bridge, first built in 1792 and now an iron structure dating from 1902. St Mary’s church is accessed by a lane that runs past a walled garden. The dense and profuse stained glass gives it a dark atmosphere which eventually reveals a large number of tombs on the floor, including that of Anthony Lybbe of Hardwick. The “Greyhound” is a reliable local that serves a good lunch. The “Ferryboat” a little nearer the river is also very good for food.

- 2 Turn **right** on the main road through Whitchurch, passing many interesting houses, including the Manor House and an art gallery, and keep straight ahead at a junction. Just before the 40mph sign, turn **left** on a tarmac lane marked as the Thames Path. Follow the lane past farms and fields for about 1½km where it ends. Here go through posts with blue arrows and descend very steeply between pastures and ascend equally steeply. The winding path now enters woodland high above the Thames which curves below you. Gradually the path descends and runs beside a large meadow. About 40m before the meadow ends, look for a sign for the Thames Path and turn **left** here. The path takes you over a little bridge to the river. Turn **right** on this particularly peaceful section of the river.
- 3 From here it is an easy task to stroll along the river path back to Goring-on-Thames. You pass through three metal gates and go under the four-arch railway bridge. There are then two more metal gates and pasture, with a view left up to Streatley Hill on the other side. You next go through a barrier and over two bridges on an enclosed path. Ignore footpaths right as you approach the village. The main bridge comes into view as you round a bend and go over a creek, followed by another creek by the millpond with Goring church in the background – a beautiful sight. Turn **right** before the bridge, passing the millrace, the old mill and the swan rescue station. If you are parked in Streatley, turn **left** over the bridge.

Getting there

By car: (a) from Reading, take the A4074 north and turn west on the B4526.
(b) from the M4, exit at junction 12 (Theale). Follow the A40 west to the **second** roundabout and turn **right**, all the time following signs for Pangbourne. Go through Pangbourne and take the pleasant riverside road until you arrive at Streatley. Turn **right** at the traffic lights and park at the far end of the village of Streatley from where you can walk over the bridge to Goring.

By train: Regular service to Goring station.

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