



## Butterflies and Warm Glaciers Whiteleaf Cross, Coombe Hill & the Hampdens

Distance 19½km=12½ miles easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Chilterns

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Refreshments: Princes Risborough, the villages

Map: Explorer 181 (Chiltern Hills North)

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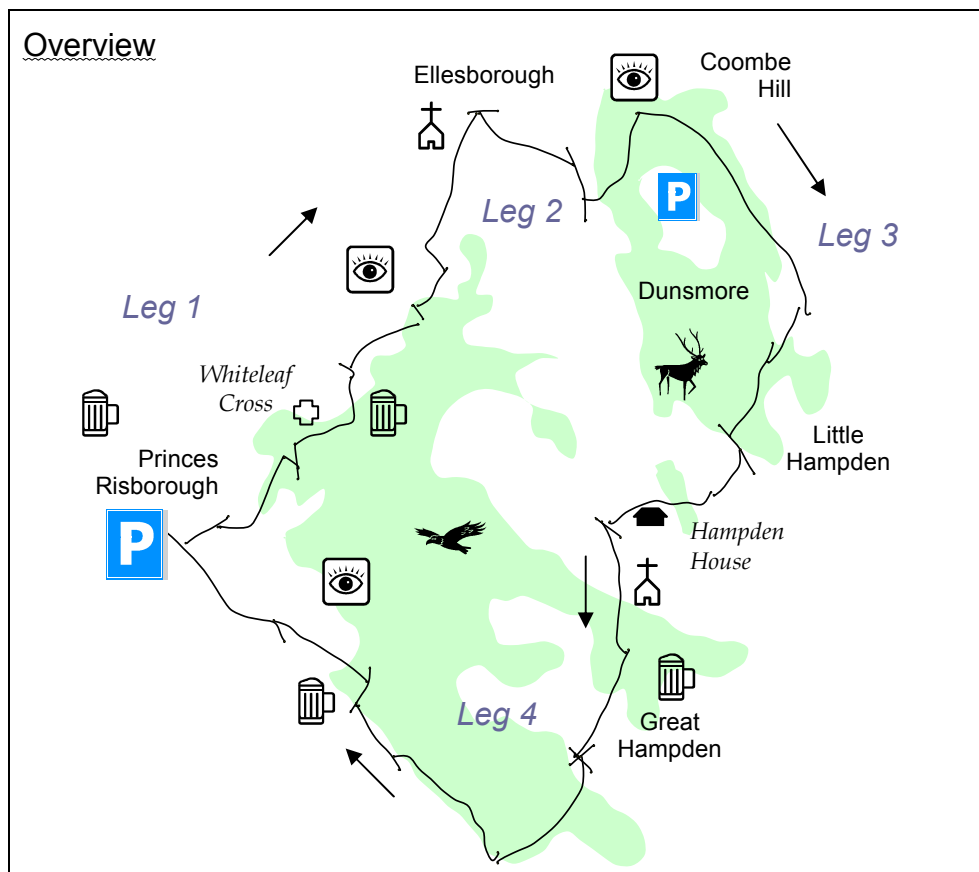
*Hills, woodland, villages, views*

### In Brief

This walk takes you deep into Chiltern forests along a line of hills, including the highest spot, then back through the small villages that deck the lower slopes.

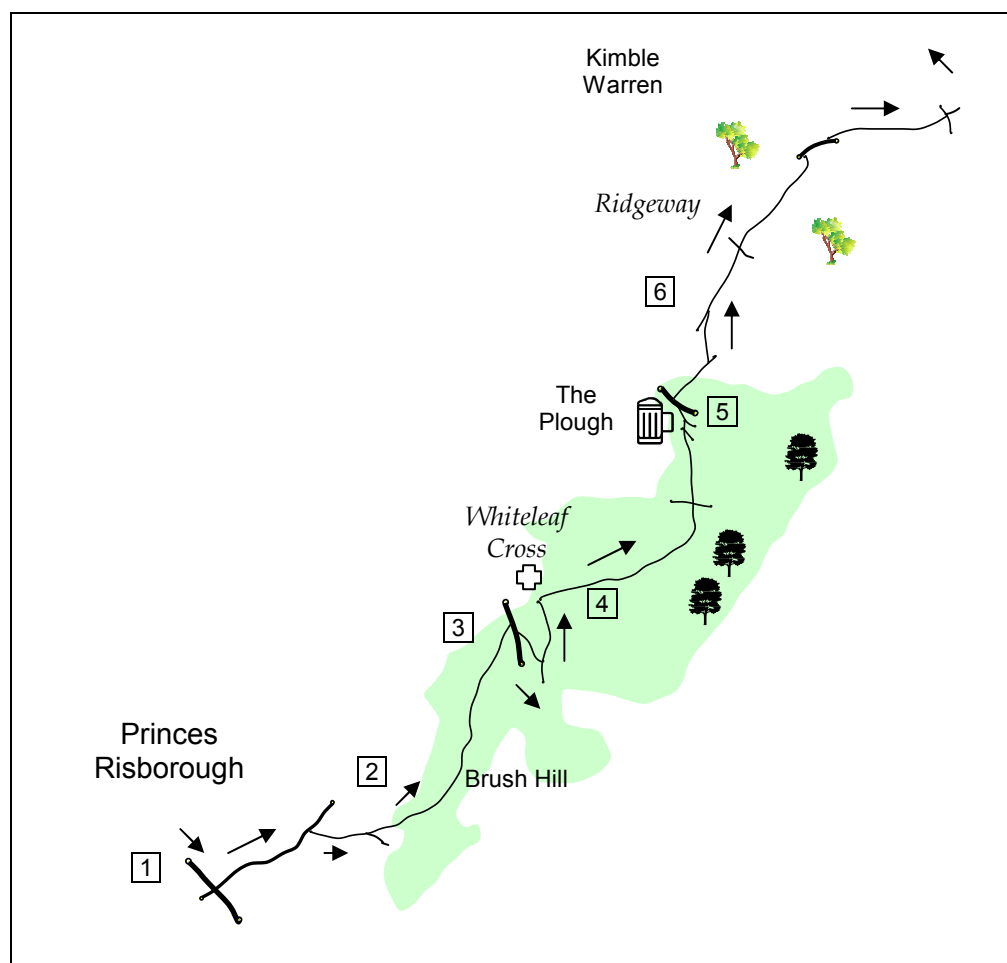
The going is easy, apart from one modest climb, so good walking shoes are adequate. There are no unavoidable nettles. Dogs should be welcome.

The full walk begins at **Princes Risborough**, Bucks HP27. Park off New Road. For full details, see the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



## The Walk

### Leg 1: Princes Risborough to Kimble Warren 4km=2½ miles



- 1 Walk up New Road until the wide section with its grass strip and parallel side-road ends. Just after this, turn **left** onto the Upper Icknield Way at a dark-brown sign for the Ridgeway. *You will find more information on these two great routes under another walk in this series: Bledlow.* In about 400m, near the end of playing fields on the left, at a 3-way fingerpost turn **right**, thus staying on the Ridgeway but leaving the Icknield Way. Go up the right-hand side of the field but, on meeting a post with a white acorn, fork **left**, thus temporarily leaving the Ridgeway. *In summer this hillside is full of wild flowers of all kinds.*
- 2 The path leads up through woodland. Ignore all turnings off and go past a sign indicating that you are on Brush Hill. *Brush Hill is a Nature Reserve, assisted by the Heritage Lottery Fund, dedicated to preserving many wildflower species, bats and other mammals and butterflies.* Go up steps and, at a T-junction, turn **left** on a more level path through the Reserve. This pleasant grassy path goes round the head of a wooded valley, past a bench and eventually out to a road, Peters Lane, which is in fact just below the Whiteleaf Cross.
- 3 Cross the road and turn **right** on a footpath opposite. This path takes you steeply up to the top of the hill where you meet a fine wide sandstone path. You are back on the Ridgeway. Go through a wooden gate onto Whiteleaf



Hill. A little further, there is a viewing platform looking down on the Whiteleaf Cross.

*Whiteleaf Hill is another Nature Reserve and also a Neolithic barrow from which burial artefacts from 6000 years ago have been unearthed. One particular tomb, excavated here by Sir William Lindsay Scott in the 1930s, indicates a man ceremonially buried about 5500 years ago with much pottery and other treasure and subsequently reverently preserved. Studies of the remains revealed much about his life and diet. The cremated remains of a bronze-age child and Roman coins were also found. Whiteleaf Hill was the site of a mill about 300 years ago, unsurprisingly because mills were very common on streams and hilltops.*

*No one is sure when the Whiteleaf Cross was first cut but it is at least 250 years old. Even its shape is a mystery and it may have been modified by restorers as it was traditionally "scoured". In World War 1 the site was used for trench warfare training and in World War 2 the cross was disguised with brushwood.*

After admiring the fine view of Princes Risborough and beyond across the Vale of Aylesbury, turn **right** at the Ridgeway sign, going through a wooden gate.

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You pass through fine beeches and steep slopes of Giles Wood with, down on the right, a beautiful area of woodland known as The Hangings. About 600m after leaving Whiteleaf Hill, you come to a 4-way signpost by a fence on your left. Go straight ahead here. The path leads down over tree roots to a metal gate. Go through a swing-gate beside it to *The Plough*. *The Plough at Cadsen is a very popular pub which is open all day at the weekends. It provides home-cooked food from a menu that seems to change regularly. If you began at Princes Risborough, this is far too soon for a break however.*



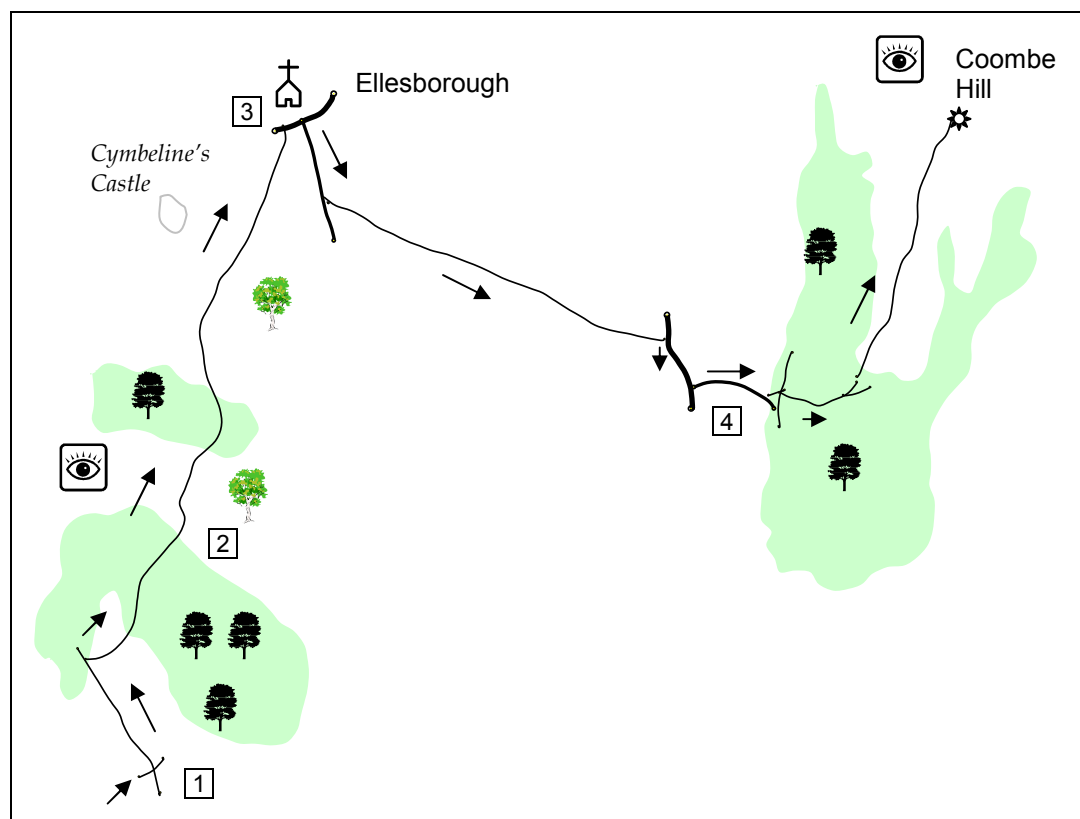
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From the *Plough*, go straight on along the lane and bear **left** where the lane meets a road. In just 10m, turn **right** between railings on a footpath, thus temporarily leaving the Ridgeway. At the end of the path, go through a wooden swing-gate onto the open hillside. Just 3m forward there is a choice of paths. Take the **left**-hand level grassy path. Across the hillside, at a T-junction, veer **right**, thus re-joining the Ridgeway.

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The route from here follows the Ridgeway to the top of the ridge and you simply follow the white acorn signs and brown fingerposts. The chalky path ascends gently and crosses a track by a wooden gate. It then follows a straight grassy route by trees and open downland up to another tree line. Go up steps and turn **right** on a sunken path and, in 25m, go **left** up more steps, through a metal swing-gate and over some more beautiful grassy downland, still following the white acorns. The path goes over a (usually dry) ditch and runs by a fence on the left. Here, ignore a wooden gate on the left. At the top, with a green meadow ahead, turn **left** over a stile, thus leaving the Ridgeway.

## Leg 2: Kimble Warren to Coombe Hill 3½km=2 miles



- 1 Keep to the path running beside the fence on the right. When the fence bends away to the right keep straight on towards the grassy knoll until you reach the trees. From here, left and right, you can see the shape and extent of the valleys formed by ice-age glaciers, in particular, Great Kimble Warren to your left.

*Until about 18,000 years ago, thick ice covered Britain from the north as far as the Midlands. Glaciers, like great rivers of ice, appeared as far south as here and carved out the typical shapes of the valleys that you see here and further along the route. The ice gradually thinned and by 10,000 years ago it had all gone, but the dry valleys remained.*

Do not enter the tree-covered part of the knoll but turn **right** steeply down the grassy hillside to a gate in the fence that you were walking beside a moment ago. Go through the gate, a wooden swing-gate in the corner of a meadow, and then along the bottom left-hand side of the meadow and through a wooden swing-gate on the left.

- 2 Follow the wide path over a drive, through some woodland and across a grassy hillside. *Over the slopes on the right is a large house, Chequers, the Prime Minister's country retreat. It has a fascinating history, well worth reading up.* Go down steps with a wooden rail, through a gate and on a bendy course over more hillside with fine views all around. The round hill up on the right is Beacon Hill. On your left are the remains of a motte-and-bailey castle called Cymbeline's Castle. *Cymbeline, who became king of the Britons around AD 9, was chronicled by Suetonius and dramatised by Shakespeare. This castle was probably originally built a little later by the Romans, however.* Go through a gate and across a meadow to reach Ellesborough. Turn **right** on the road to the fine landmark church.



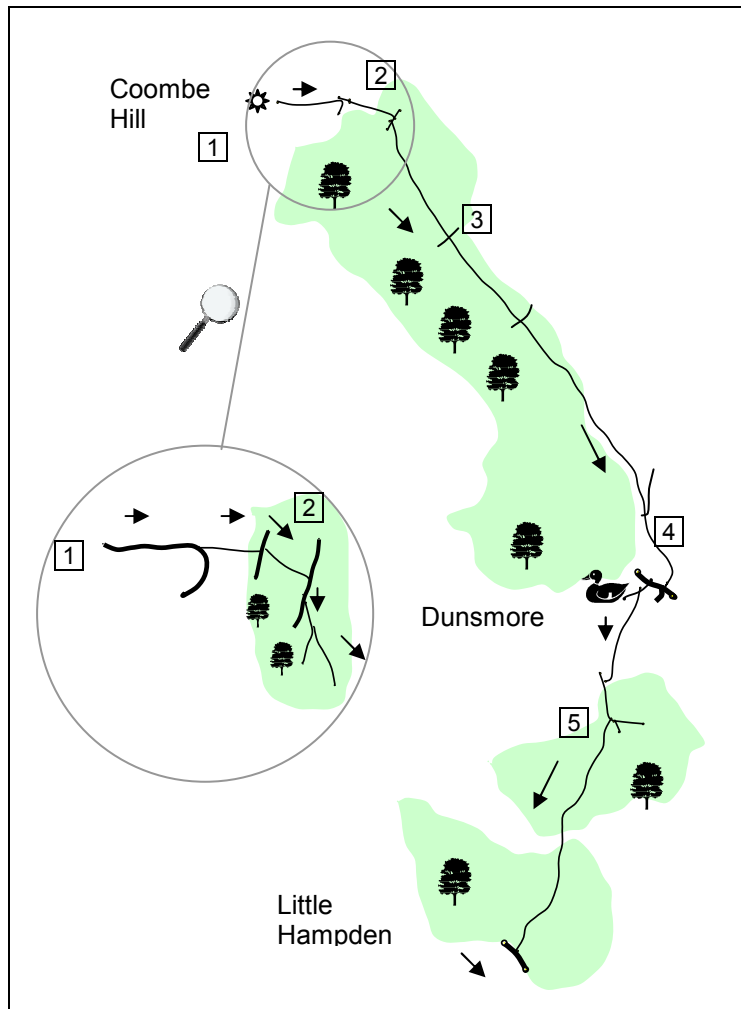
*Ellesborough's name comes from the Saxon word for 'asses' (compare the German word 'Esel') and it was an important township long before the Norman conquest. Possession of the various lands and manors in the parish passed to and from an extraordinarily large number of different aristocrats and noble families. The thatched cottages are especially notable today. The church of St Peter and St Paul is 15<sup>th</sup>-century with much restoration and a Victorian tower. The tower is sometimes open and offers a bracing view. Teas are also usually available.*

- 3 Do *not* cross the road (except to visit the church) but almost immediately, opposite the church tower, turn **right** on a track. In about 180m, shortly after the track begins to ascend, turn **left** at a barrier and follow the left-hand side and then the centre of a large field. Eventually the path ends at another barrier at a road, Missenden Road. Turn **right** on the road for a 120m and then, just before the end-of-speed-limit sign, turn **left** on a drive.
- 4 Keep straight ahead past house entrances and golf tees and continue on a rougher path uphill. Just before a crossing path, take the **left** fork through a gate and keep straight ahead over the crossing path uphill, past a National Trust sign for Coombe Hill. There now follows a short but steep climb through the wooded slopes of the hill. As soon as you see open downland on the left, fork **left** on a much gentler path across the grass. Very soon you see the distinctive Memorial on the top of Coombe Hill and in a minute or so reach it.

*Coombe Hill, the highest viewpoint in the Chilterns, is owned by the National Trust. From here you can see over the Vale of Aylesbury and beyond. The Monument was erected in 1904 in memory of the men of Buckinghamshire who fell in the Boer War in South Africa 1899-1902. Currently (2010) the Monument is under scaffolding and is being restored.*

### Leg 3: Coombe Hill to Little Hampden 3½ km=2½ miles

- 1 **See map overleaf.** Facing the Monument and the view to the north, turn **right** on a light-coloured gravel path eastwards along the flat top of the hill. In just over 100m, the path bends sharp right by a fence. Leave it before it bends and instead continue straight ahead over the grass with the fence on your right. You arrive at the edge of the forest by two metal swing-gates.
- 2 Go through the **left**-hand gate into the deep dark wood, *The Scrubs*. Immediately cross over a wide riders' path and go just to the right of a small notice that says *footpath only, no horses*. You need to keep straight on in the same direction on an irregular narrow path through the trees. Don't worry about yellow arrows on the trees. In 60m, you reach another wide riders' track running beside a line of beeches. Veer **right** onto it. In 80m, you pass an old iron fence post and an old fence at a gap in the line of trees on your left. Here, fork **left** through the gap onto a wide track leading away from the line of beeches, ignoring a track that runs along the other side of the line of beeches. The track also follows a line of old fencing on your left which will be with you for some distance. (In the future, this old fencing could be removed or replaced.)
- 3 At a crossing path, with private land on the left, go straight over. Similarly, at a crossing path with a stile on the right, go straight ahead. Keep following the fence for some distance. Eventually, at the edge of a field, another bridleway joins from the left. Follow the hedged path, now a tar lane, into the small isolated settlement of Dunsmore.

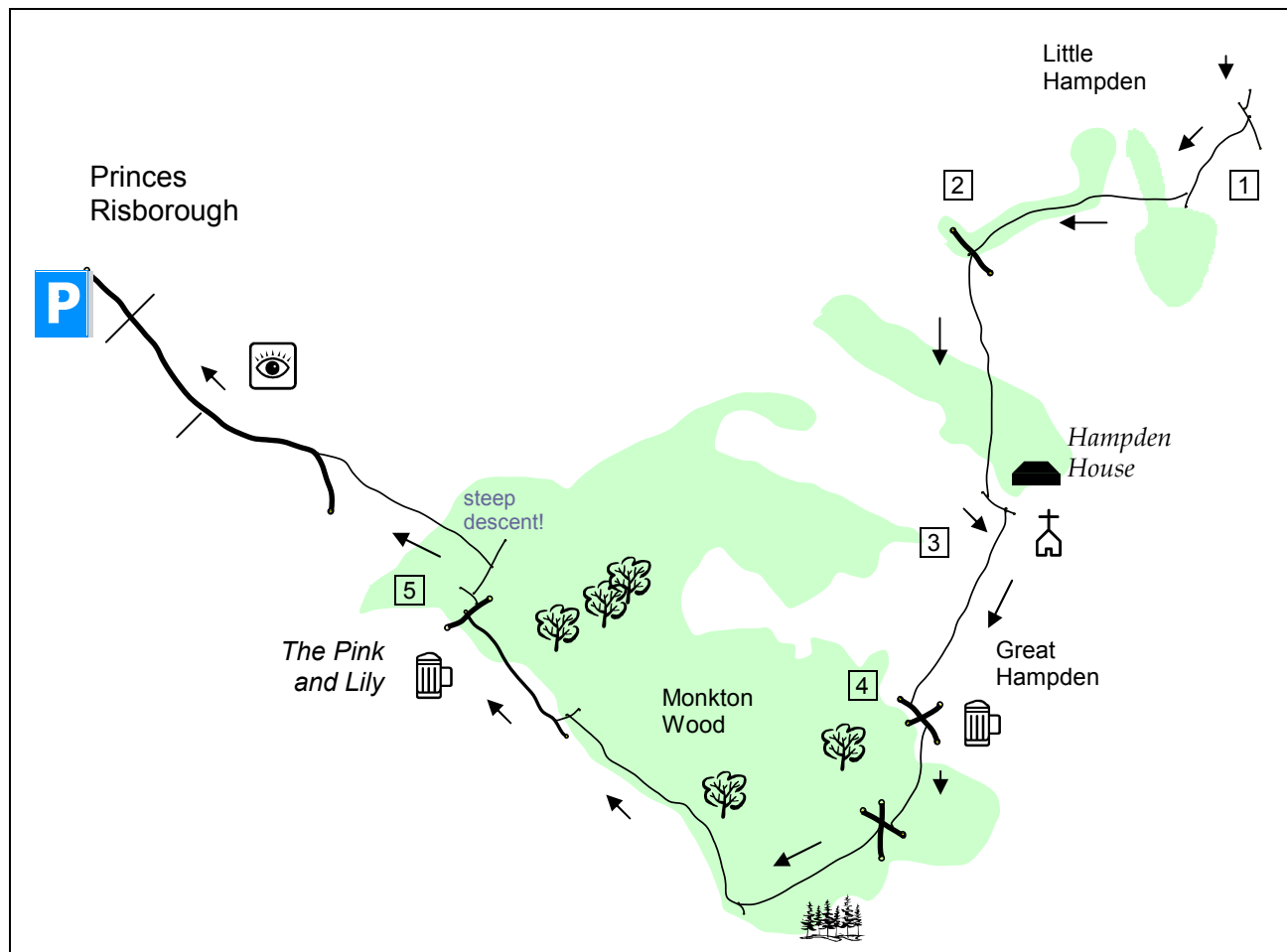


A cluster of forty or so dwellings perched at the top of a steep Chiltern escarpment and approached by two very steep single-track roads, Dunsmore is a haven of tranquility. The name Dunsmore appears on an estate map of 1620 but, until well into the 1900s, much of it was known as Scrubs or Scrubwood. It's disputed whether the name comes from Celtic meaning 'great fortress' or the more prosaic Saxon 'Dunna's Moor' (who Dunna was is uncertain). The village once had three pubs, but recently the last of them closed. Dunsmore people were self-sufficient, self-employed farmers but the Inclosure Acts from 1750 onwards resulted in the lands being parcelled up between the surrounding manors and this reduced them to near poverty. In 1894 the Metropolitan Railway Line was extended to Aylesbury and the A413 road was built, running close to the village. As a result, by 1913 several residents of Kensington had bought up many of the cottages and converted the homes of the poor into country houses for Londoners. So this is not only a modern trend. For an astonishing chronicle of the people in Dunsmore's history, click [here](#) or on the thin line: [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_](#).

- 4 Stay on the lane till you reach the crossroads in the centre of the village, with a duckpond. Turn **right** on the lane, signposted *Kimble, P.Risborough*. In 50m, go over a stile on the **left**. The signs indicate a choice of paths: take the **left** fork, the more level path and, on reaching the middle of a wire fence, go over a stile. Go half-**right** down to another stile in a fence, straight on to another similar and over a stile in the corner, leading down to a wooden fence. Turn **left** on the bridleway here.
- 5 Where the fence ends, there is a choice of three paths, the middle one being a narrow footpath going over a little bridge. Take the **rightmost** path, a wider stony path through woodland. Stay on this woodland path for some

distance. In 400m, the woodland narrows to a neck and then widens again. After more forest walking, you reach a wooden gate and a lane in the hamlet of Little Hampden opposite houses, one of which is a former pub. Turn **left** on the lane.

#### Leg 4: Little Hampden to Princes Risborough 8½km=5½ miles



- 1 In only about 100m, after the last house of this group, turn **right** on a sign-posted concrete footpath. Opposite a garage, take a narrow path on the right of a fence leading into a large field. Here, go straight across the field, slightly left, on a clear path, heading for the green bulge of Warren Wood ahead. But the route does *not* go through Warren Wood. Just 30m from the far end of the field, turn **right**, heading for a marker post visible on the edge of the field. Go through a wide band of trees, through a gate and down the centre of another meadow, this time slightly right. Go through a gate and across a smaller field, into a strip of woodland. Once in the woodland, veer **left** on a path that runs down the length of the strip. There are yellow arrows on the trees to verify your route. After some distance, you come out of the woods, over a stile to a road.
- 2 Cross the road and take a path opposite, across the centre of a large field on a well-defined path. *Note that you have been walking on part of the Chiltern Way , a 200 km (125 mile) circular walk.* At the other side, go round an unneeded stile on a path uphill into woodland dominated by tall conifers, including redwoods. Exit the wood into a meadow and keep ahead, passing close to Hampden House on your left.

*Hampden House, seat of the Hampden family, dates from before the Norman Conquest, but the present house is Elizabethan, with a 14<sup>th</sup>-century wing. Famous guests included Edward III, the Black Prince (who received a bloody nose there in a quarrel) and Queen Elizabeth I. The most famous, notorious, heroic, not to say celebrated, member of the family was John Hampden (1595-1643), bitter opponent of Charles I's tax-raising ploys, leader of a demonstration against them and almost winning his case, later imprisoned, exiled and killed in the Civil War. The house fell into disrepair in the 1900s, hence the rendered brickwork, and has been frequently used by Hammer films for horror movies.*

At the other side, go over a stile and turn **left** on a track, through a gate, past the restored façade of Turret House and onwards to Hampden Church. Turn **right** at the church, rounding the churchyard on a tarmac path.



*Great Hampden church of St Mary Magdalene is remote from its home village, although the Hampdens were always widely scattered. In fact its isolation makes it an attractive site for film makers. The grave of John Hampden is sited somewhere here and his first wife Elizabeth is marked by a slab on the south wall. In the chancel are brasses of an earlier John Hampden and his wife, also called Elizabeth, and their family.*

3

Continue over the grass to a gate in the wall and along the right-hand side of a meadow through swing-gates on a path between a fence and a pond. *As you go, a glance back at the church makes for a pleasant sight.* There follows another swing-gate, a wooden gate beside a metal gate and a belt of trees. Cross a tarmac drive and follow a track across the centre of a field. There is woodland on the right and a meadow on the left amidst the first houses of Great Hampden. The path runs between hedges to a lane where it continues ahead, soon reaching the centre of the village. Here, if you arrive of a summer weekend, a cricket match may be in progress. *The Hampden Arms, on the left, is noted for its above-average menu. It is not open all day however.*



4


Cross the road to Memorial Road opposite. Almost immediately, turn **right** alongside the cricket green. At the other side, go into the woods by an unneeded stile. Keep to this fine woodland, predominantly beech, path and after some distance of pleasant walking, arrive at a gate out to a road. Turn **right** for 30m to a cross roads. Here, go ahead and then **left** in the corner onto a signposted bridleway into the woods. Go between the posts and turn **left** on the other side of the fence. You are in the beautiful Monkton Wood and the path is so much better for the fence that separates you from horse riders on the other side. *Part of the way, you sense the aroma of pine and find that you are walking on a carpet of pine needles.* Avoid all turnings off until just before you reach the end of the wood at the edge of a meadow. Turn **right**, staying inside the wood, and keep to a path that runs along the edge of the wood for some distance. Eventually, you see a house on the left. The footpath veers away a little to the right and you see a second house, *Iron Beech Cottage*. The path then goes through a wooden barrier. At a T-junction turn **left** on a stony track and, at the end of the track, turn **right** on Lily Bottom Lane. At the end of the lane, you reach a road at the tiny hamlet of Parslow Hillocks with the pub *Pink and Lily* on the left.



*This house was originally a family home built in the 1700s. In the 1800s, Mr Pink the butler at Hampden House and Miss Lillie a chambermaid became romantically involved and Miss Lillie fell pregnant. Forced to quit the service, they set themselves up by running this local hostelry. Miss Lillie gave birth to a*

son who became the first landlord, renaming it *The Pink & Lily*. *The Pink*, as it is affectionately known, serves beer, including *Brakspear*, but also has a comprehensive wine list and a menu designed to satisfy all tastes, from burgers to a rare treat: pepper, courgette & asparagus pithivier.

- 5 Cross the road and turn **right**. In just 30m, turn **left** on a track for Hampden Lodge. In 20m, turn **right** on a marked bridleway through a wooden gate, ignoring the footpath ahead that goes between the gate posts of Hampden Lodge. In 120m, at a crossing path by a marker post, turn **left** on a narrow path. The path runs steeply down, with a right-left hairpin, and descends via a long series of steps. Finally it emerges into a large field.

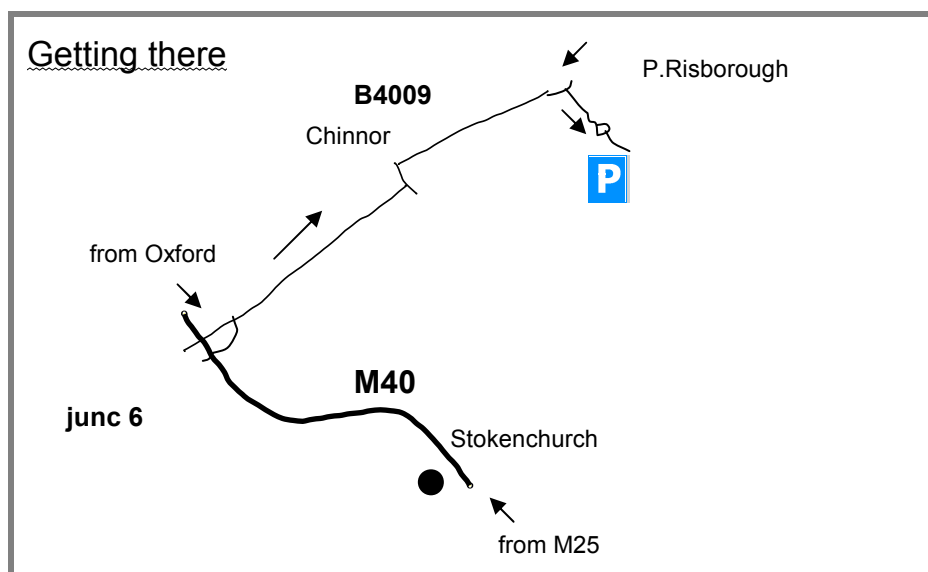
 Take a path across the centre of the field. *You have views extending over Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire with Kop Hill ahead and Windsor Hill just to the right, in the sweeping curve of the escarpment.* At the other side, go over a stile, across the centre of a pasture and over a stile onto Brimmers Lane. Turn **right** on the lane, passing the flint Brimmers Farm. In 1km, you pass the turn off for the Icknield Way where the walk began and soon you are back in New Road, Princes Risborough.

## Getting there

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By train: begin at Princes Risborough station, a short walk from the start.

By car: Princes Risborough is off the B4009 Chinnor Road. It can be reached via junction 6 of the M40, by following the signs. Ignore signs for the station. Turn right as directed for the town. Continue directly ahead over the large roundabout (next to the dome-shaped church) onto New Road and park anywhere. The town is also reachable from Aylesbury or High Wycombe.



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