



Warburg Nature Reserve, Nettlebed

Distance: 8½ km=5½ miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Chilterns

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Refreshments: Nettlebed, Middle Assendon (after the walk)

Map: 171 (Chiltern Hills South) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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Nature reserve, woodland, historic village, hills, views

In Brief

This walk leads you from the dense microclimate of a nature reserve, into extensive woods, to the historic village of Nettlebed, then through forest and meadows on a pleasant trek ending back at the nature reserve.

Refreshments are to be had in the village of Nettlebed, either in the pub / hotel * or in the *Field Kitchen* which has produced some favourable comments. (* To enquire at the *White Hart*, ring 01491-641245.)



This walk is also part of the **Bix-Ewelme chain walk** and can be combined with one or two other nearby walks to make a larger walk of up to 25 km=15½ miles. Look for the “chain link” icons in the margins or the “chain link” symbols in the map.



There are a few small patches of nettles near the start of the walk, so shorts might be a problem. Underfoot the ground is fairly firm, so any strong comfortable footwear should be fine. This walk should be ideal for your dog.



The walk begins at the **Warburg Nature Reserve**, grid ref SU 720 879, postcode **RG9 6BL**, in **Bix Bottom**, near Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

and views on your left. At a fork with signs on a tree, take the **right** fork, marked as SW26, staying on the Oxfordshire Way. Your path opens out with more fine views ahead, before running by more trees, then between fields. Eventually you come down to a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane.

2 In only 100m look for a large notice board on your right, just before a medium-sized oak tree. The notice board tells the history of the church of St. James. Turn **right** here passing through a hedge. This path leads to the ruins of the Church of St. James, Bix Bottom. *This Norman church was abandoned in 1875 when the new church was built. It has been used as a setting for horror films. The name "Bix", incidentally, is a shortening of "Bixa", meaning box-tree wood.* After viewing the ruins, return to the lane, turn **right**, continue along the lane for about 25m, and turn **right** on a wide path. Your path leads uphill between fields and you may see some of the ubiquitous red kites. Soon your path enters a glorious beechwood, as befits a Chiltern walk. Keep straight ahead at all times, later passing a yew wood on your right. On emerging from the wood, go through a swing-gate and along the left-hand side of a meadow.

3 Keep to the edge of the meadow as it curves left. As you approach the houses of Crocker End, go through a swing-gate beside a metal gate and continue along a pebble lane. As you make your way through this prosperous village, keep ahead along the left-hand side of the Green, going straight over a tarmac drive in about 80m. *Crocker End is well worth exploring for its period cottages. It lost its pub about 20 years ago. Crocker End House, soon on your right, was bought by the Duke and Duchess of Kent in 1989.* Your path crosses another tarmac lane obliquely. Keep ahead, passing a small fingerpost and still keeping to the left-hand side of the Green. Where your path eventually merges with a tarmac lane, turn **left** on it. Where the lane soon curves left, continue **straight ahead** up an unnamed tarmac lane. After around 100m you pass on your right, *Walnut, Apple Tree and Cherry Tree Cottages* to reach the main road in Nettlebed.

4 Bear **right** towards the village. Very shortly, you pass a cul-de-sac where the old Brick Kiln is on view.

The whole of this local area lies on a bed of clay above the chalk escarpment and Nettlebed and Crocker End were producers of bricks and tiles since the Middle Ages. The 18th-century kiln was just one of many, now preserved for posterity. What you see is only the firing chamber, the fuel shed and working areas being long gone. Among the buildings made from these local bricks are Stonor House (see "Red Kites & Red Deer" in this series). This particular kiln was later converted to burn lime.

Your route continues for just a few paces, by turning **right** on Watlington Street. However, you may wish to stroll through the village first.

Nettlebed has obscure origins, compared to the much smaller villages that surround it. The church of St Bartholomew, however, dates from Norman times, although only one arch and a window remain of the old church. The Fleming family still live in Nettlebed, the most famous so being James Bond writer Ian Fleming (see also "Hampstead to Oxford Circus" in the London series of this website). The "White Hart" hotel/restaurant, in a 600-year-old building, has had good reviews and also does a hearty breakfast in case you are an early starter. The Nettlebed Field Kitchen (in the church hall) has eat-in or take-away health food (closed Sundays).



- 5 Proceeding up Watlington Street, ignore a footpath left and, when the road bends left, keep straight on along Mill Road, marked as a bridleway. After some houses, take the **left** fork, avoiding a driveway to the *Mill House*. At the top of a rise, turn **left** just before some green metal gates. Follow the main path through the woodland of Nettlebed Common, marked by occasional white arrows on trees. The path is quite clear but you need to concentrate to spot the arrows; don't miss a right turn! Where the path joins a cinder track, keep straight on. Soon you reach two houses.



For the Bix-Ewelme chain walk, turn smartly **left** here and switch to the *Swyncombe Church and Ewelme Park* walk, from section 5.

- 6 Immediately before the front lawn of the first (smaller) house, turn **right** on a narrow path by a tall marker post. The path widens to a strip of lawn, running beside a pond and a bench – a delightful spot for a pause! After a wooden swing-gate, your faint path runs along the right-hand side of a long grassy meadow and rises at the end to the left-hand corner. Go through a wooden gate here into a large wood known as Berrick Trench, a Site of Special Scientific Interest. After a pleasant 500m, you emerge through a wooden swing-gate to a crossing track beside a large gate on your left. Go **right** and **left** along the left-hand side of a meadow. A wooden swing-gate takes you onto a hedged crossing track. Ignore the swing-gate opposite and instead turn **right** on the track. In 250m, the track ends at a junction of five paths with a small signpost and signs for the Chiltern Way. Ignore wooden gates ahead and on your right and take the next (ungated) wide path on your **right**.



The Bix-Ewelme chain walk joins this walk here.

- 7 Your path is fairly solid and is marked with a purple arrow as a “restricted byway”. Soon after, you pass a sign for the *Warburg Nature Reserve*. This may give you heart that the end of the walk is nigh but, remember, Warburg is an extensive nature reserve and you still have well over 1 km to go. After some distance, go over a crossing path marked in white on a tree as SW31. (Your path is SW28.) (You can avoid any mud on the path from this point by going through a wooden gate shortly on the **left** and turning **right** on a grassy path parallel to the path you were on. It is in fact the same path that you took at the start of the walk.) Not long after, the Visitor's Centre comes into view with the car park on the left where the walk began.

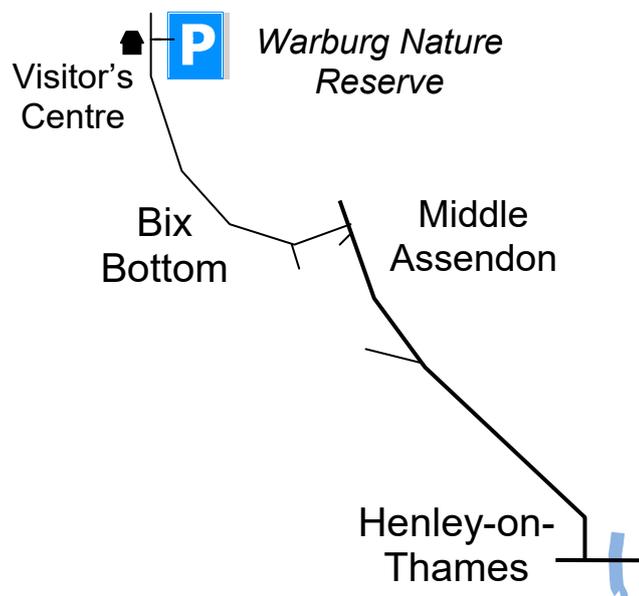


For final refreshments, the *Rainbow Inn* in Middle Assendon is a short car ride, on the homeward route. It is closed however during the afternoons. There are many fine places for food and drink in Henley.

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Getting there

By car: The Warburg Nature Reserve is near Henley-on-Thames which can easily be reached from Reading, Oxford, Marlow or from junction 8/9 of the M4. From Henley, follow signs for the A4130 signposted *Oxford*, leading to the beautiful tree-lined avenue known as Fairmile. After a mile, at a junction, fork **right** on a road signposted *Stonor, Assendons*. After Middle Assendon, turn **left** on a lane signposted *Bix Bottom*. (This is the *second* of two lanes close together.) In 600m, at a T-junction, turn **right**. After 2km on this narrow lane, you reach a large hut on the left, the Visitor's Centre. The car park is opposite it, on the right.



By bus/train: bus 139 from Henley-on-Thames. Start the walk in Nettlebed. Check the timetables.