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## Bix and the Assendons

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Distance: 8½ km=5½ miles

easy walking

Region: Chilterns

Date written: 5-oct-2015

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Last update: 23-aug-2023

Refreshments: Lower and Middle Assendon

Map: Explorer 171 (Chiltern Hills West) *hopefully not needed*

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

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*Meadows, woodland, pubs, deer park, views, pubs*

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### In Brief

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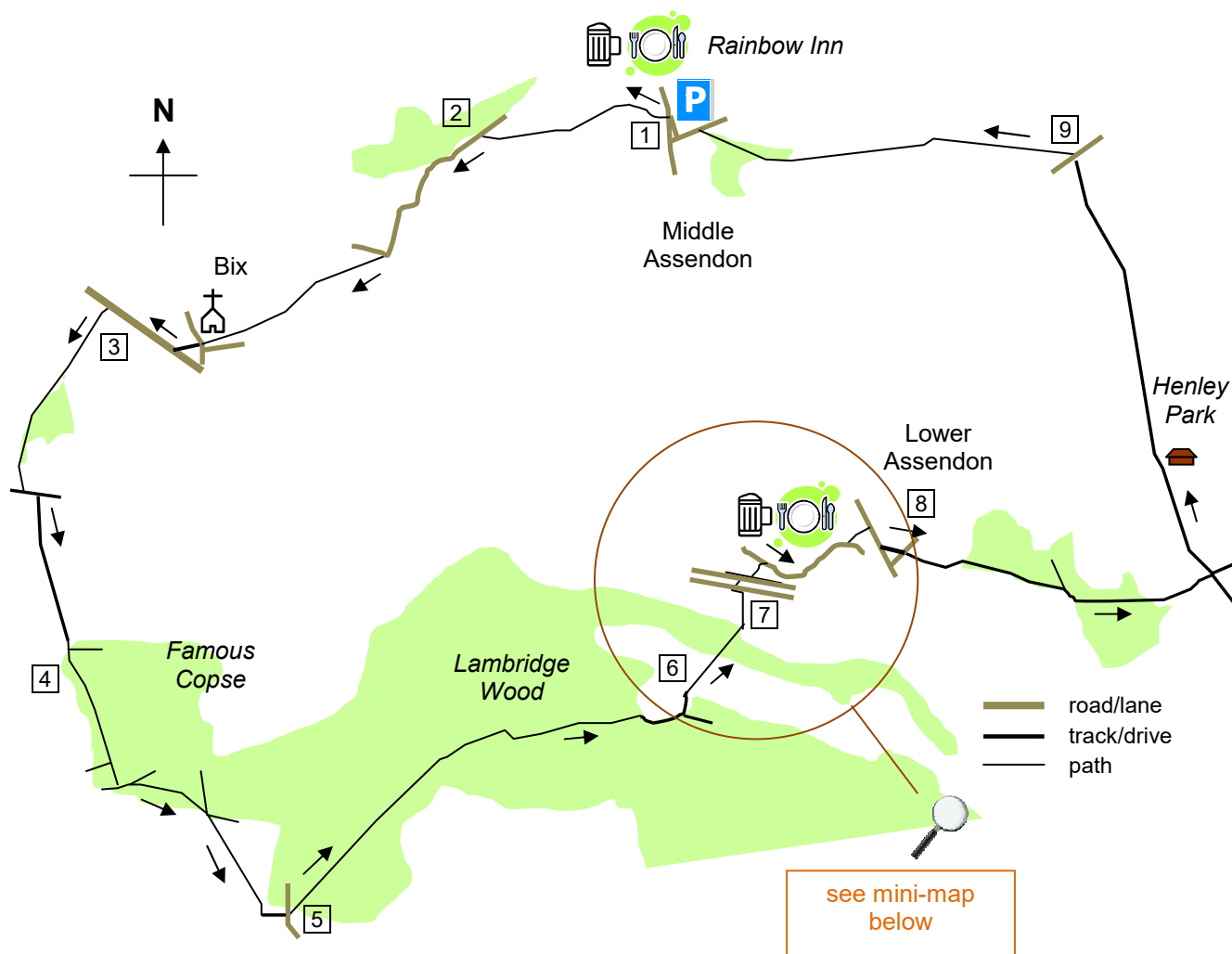
This unusual walk in typical Chilterns landscapes is full of variety and interest. The three villages in the title are one parish joined in history and between them are woodlands, meadows and parkland. The route of this walk finds a surprising lost path through a deer park direct to the charming village of Lower Assendon with “private” access to one of the best pub / restaurants in the Henley area (to enquire at the *Golden Ball*, ring 01491-574157). Another great Chiltern pub is described in detail (→) at the end of these notes (to enquire at the *Rainbow Inn*, ring 01491-574879), making this a kind of double pub walk.



There are no nettles to speak of on this walk so bare legs are unlikely to be irritated. However, in high summer, because of the rare paths used on this walk, some of the hedgerows may be overgrown and a hiking stick will be useful. In damper seasons, boots may be an advantage in the long woodland walk; otherwise good walking shoes or trainers are adequate. Your dog will enjoy his walk if he is not too large, in view of the stiles.

The walk begins in the village of **Middle Assendon**, nearly Henley, Oxfordshire postcode **RG9 6AU**. It is easy to reach from London via the M4. There is an off-road parking strip just this side of the pub. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

## The Walk




- 1 Facing the *Rainbow Inn*, just to the **left** of it, take a footpath at a small fingerpost, going through a swing-gate into a rough meadow. On the other side, go through a new swing-gate and along the right-hand side of the next meadow. At the top, go through yet another swing-gate and up a narrow path by a tall wooden fence. Go up some steps and across tarmac, then along a path darkened by cypress trees on both sides. At the top, go through a swing-gate and out to a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane.
- 2 The lane curves left past *Peppers* and leads to the wide open space of Bix Common Field. Here, leave the tarmac as it curves right and take a path straight across the grass, as directed by a small fingerpost. At the other side, you reach Bix's church of St James (usually closed unfortunately).

*Bix and the Assendons have always formed a single parish. They go back at least to the year 800. The name "Bix" comes from the box trees which were so common in this area. "Assendon" means "valley of wild asses". You may wonder: is there an Upper Assendon? Yes! It's the old name for **Stonor**, as renamed by the family of that name. The Norman church on Bix Bottom was abandoned (see the "Ewelme" walk in this series) and the "new" church was finished in 1875. The interior is especially rich with its bricks in three colours.*

Just on the left of the church, by a red 'phone box, take a tarmac footpath leading to the main road. Turn **right** on the main road and follow the footway until you reach the second-to-last cottage, just before the end of the dual carriageway. Turn **left** here and cross the road to a footpath next to *Foxhill Meadow*.

3 A narrow path runs beside a fence and discharges you over a stile and into a meadow. At the other side, ignore a stile on your left and keep ahead over a stile (or through the large metal gate to the right, if open) into another pasture. Go along the left-hand side and over a stile (or through a gate) at the other end. **The author passed a few quiet cattle here (and nowhere else) with no worry.** Cross a tarmac drive and another stile, cross a small pasture and yet another stile onto a wood-chip track. **Officially, the footpath crosses the next pasture too, but everyone uses the tracks now.** Turn **left** on the track and, in 30m, turn **right** on a similar track. Continue between fields, ignoring a footpath on your right and keep ahead through a swing-gate into the woodland of Famous Copse.

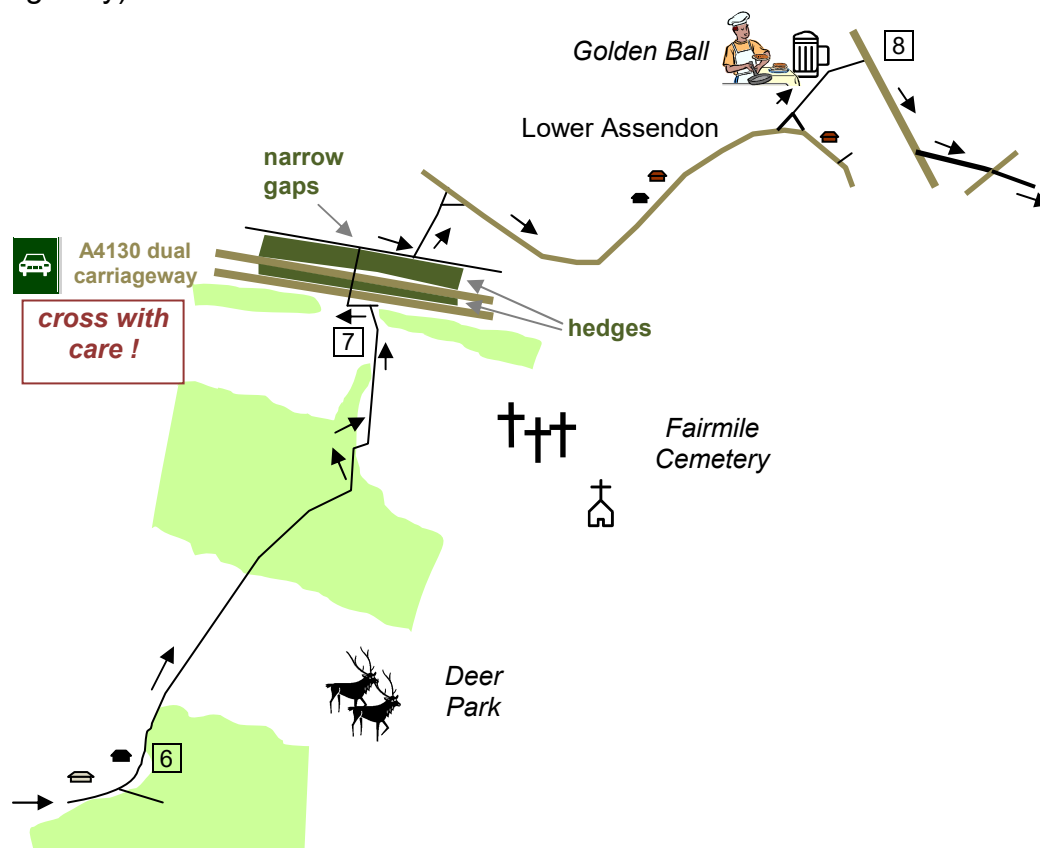
4 Immediately ignore a left turn and keep ahead along the right-hand edge of this beechwood, always on the main path. You pass another meadow, visible through the trees on your right. In 350m you reach the end of the wood at a T-junction, just before a meadow ahead. Turn **left** here on a good path. In 15m, at a marker post, fork **right** in the direction of the grey arrow. In nearly 250m, possibly helped by white arrows on trees, you reach a marker post by a crossing path. Turn **right** here through a swing-gate into a meadow with good clear views ahead. Take a path a fraction left, going past an electricity pole, aiming for the bottom left-hand corner. At the other side, go through a swing-gate and turn **left** on a tarmac track. Ignore a NT path on your left and follow the track down to a lane by a pretty hamlet named after the forge works that still does business here. Turn **left** on the lane.

5 Immediately turn **right** through a wooden swing-gate beside a large metal gate. Veer **left** through trees, away from the cottage, on a beautiful woodland path. You will be walking for 1 km through Lambridge Wood. For the first ½ km the route is fairly straight. There are white arrows on the trees (*a typical feature*  *of the Chiltern woods*) and an occasional yellow arrow on a post. Your path runs close to a field on your right and leaves it at the far corner. Don't make the mistake of veering right round the field corner: your path continues straight ahead into the deep wood. The vegetation is more moist now and a deeper green with plentiful holly. The path is now very wide and you may need to use its width to escape any mud. You pass a ditch, possibly part of the ancient Grim's Ditch, and a diagonal crossing path at a post with yellow arrows. In another 200m, you reach the end of the wood at a junction with timber stacks and houses. Keep ahead to a junction with a post bearing a yellow and a blue arrow.

The next section is an adventurous interesting route used years ago by all the village. It is now impossible (and impassable) because of the new dual carriageway on the A4130 Bix Road. So no one takes it. Except of course for the happy FFW walkers for whom it presents no problem. (But you need to be careful: take heed!)

6 **See detailed mini-map overleaf.** Ignore the bridleway on the right and keep straight ahead. At *Lambridge Wood House*, keep straight on along a narrow path through a tall metal gate. You are suddenly in an elongated deer park, a survivor from the many that characterised this area north of

Henley. A large herd of fallow deer is usually in residence. Go straight over, down across the beautiful grass, passing an electricity pole, to go through a tall metal gate at the other side into the woods. Now go steeply down through undergrowth and through another tall metal gate. Continue ahead, veering left, following a clear downhill path, and through a gap in the hedge, into the far left-hand side of a large cemetery. *This is the Henley Fairmile Cemetery. The early Victorian lodge and chapels are listed buildings.* Keep to the short left-hand side and go through a small metal gate (very overgrown in summer!) and thence out to the main A4130 road (westbound carriageway).



- 7 The tricky section begins here. If you are a group, cross no more than two at a time. Shift **left** on the roadside for 10m (=15 steps). Cross the carriageway carefully (traffic may approach at 70 mph!). You will find a narrow gap in the central hedge. It is now (2023) easier to see and clear of undergrowth. The “hedge” is about 5m wide. Now cross the eastbound carriageway carefully to the verge on the other side. You will find another narrow gap\* here, a tiny fraction to your right. It leads through bushes for about 10m to a tarmac path. (\* You may prefer to turn **right** for 30m along the roadside verge where there is a much wider gap in the bushes.) Turn **right** on the path and, in 30m, by a large wooden gate, turn **left** on a narrow path up a grassy slope. The path takes you through trees towards a tarmac lane. Fork right and turn **right** on the dark shrouded lane. *This is Bix Hill, part of the Old Bix Road.* The lane bends left past the attractive brick cottages of Lower Assendon. After 250m on the lane, by a tiny green, on your left is the garden of the *Golden Ball* pub. Go **left** through a large wooden gate [Aug 2023: overgrown with brambles: go round by the road or climb over] into this lovely pub garden. (In the unlikely event that the gate or the pub is closed, or if you are not partaking, turn left at the next driveway just before a very pretty cottage.)



The “Golden Ball” is a celebrated restaurant (Luscombes) and it will set you back a bit, although the set lunch menu (£25 in 2023) is quite reasonable and “very good” according to one walker. But it is also a Brakspear pub, as in days or yore, where you can just have a drink and a snack. The garden is also tasty.



8

Exit the pub to the road and turn **right**. In 70m, fork **left** on a tarmac lane, cross straight over a coarse tarmac lane and take a rough track uphill beside a flint wall with a converted barn on your left. The track goes uphill past the *Old School House*. Keep ahead past a junction, with woodland on your left and sweeping pastures on your right. Ignore a private road sharp left and stay on the track as it levels out. Shortly, on your left is parkland receding into the distance, fringed on the long side with conifers. Your path runs over tree roots and reaches a crossing with a tarmac drive. On your right is the path to Henley through the Deer Park, now populated mainly by sheep. However, your route is **left** on the tarmac drive. *You are on part of the Oxfordshire Way long-distance path which runs from Bourton-on-the-Water to Henley and you will be following it to Middle Assendon.* After some redwoods and ornamental cedars, on your right is the large white country house of Henley Park. *Henley Park was built as the dower house for Fawley Court, the even larger nearby mansion close to the Thames. (A dower house is built for the widow of the owner, as e.g. the smaller house in “Downton Abbey” occupied by Maggie Smith’s Countess.)* Continue, passing more houses in the estate, such as the *Clock House*, with its trampoline. The tarmac becomes shingle and you pass *Tanglewood*, nicely rebuilt. The shingle becomes dirt and the track takes you across the peaceful landscape, partly shaded by great oaks. Finally, after 1 km on this drive, you reach a tarmac lane by a flint house, the well-named *Pond Cottage*.

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Cross over the lane and go through a kissing-gate onto a wide grassy path between fences. *These fields are managed by the Turville Court Estate for organic produce.* Go through a small gate, or through the large metal gate, onto a path with a fence on your right, across the edge of an open meadow.



At the other side, continue on a narrow path between fences. A wooden swing-gate takes you into a sloping meadow with terrific views into the Stonor valley and the hills beyond. As you continue down, you will notice that the meadows either side have been planted with hundreds of new trees. At the bottom, go through a tall wooden swing-gate into woods. Follow a good path downhill through trees, emerging after 200m onto a tarmac lane in Middle Assendon. Turn **left** and take the next road **right**, leading direct to the main road opposite the *Rainbow Inn* where the walk began.



The “Rainbow” was converted from three 17<sup>th</sup>-century cottages in 1830-1869. As you step inside, note how the floor was laid lower to allow the opening door to clear a depth of straw. The pub’s car park was a smithy until 1940. The pub is renowned for its well-kept beer (Brakspear of course). For lunch, you may have to arrive (or book) early because they tend to run out of food around 2 pm (probably conscious of the competition from the Golden Ball). Recent (2023) walkers report that the “Rainbow” is **closed** in the afternoon, even on Saturday.

