Fancy Free Walks

point your feet on a new path

Chesham

Distance: 19 km=12 miles or 15 km=9½ miles or 11 km=7 miles easy walking

Region: Chilterns (Bucks) Date written: 10-sep-2014

Author: Phegophilos Last update: 9-oct-2022

Refreshments: Lee Common, Hyde Heath, Chesham

Map: Explorer 181 (Chiltern Hills North) *but the maps in this guide should suffice*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Country town, fields, woodland, villages, views, arrival by Underground

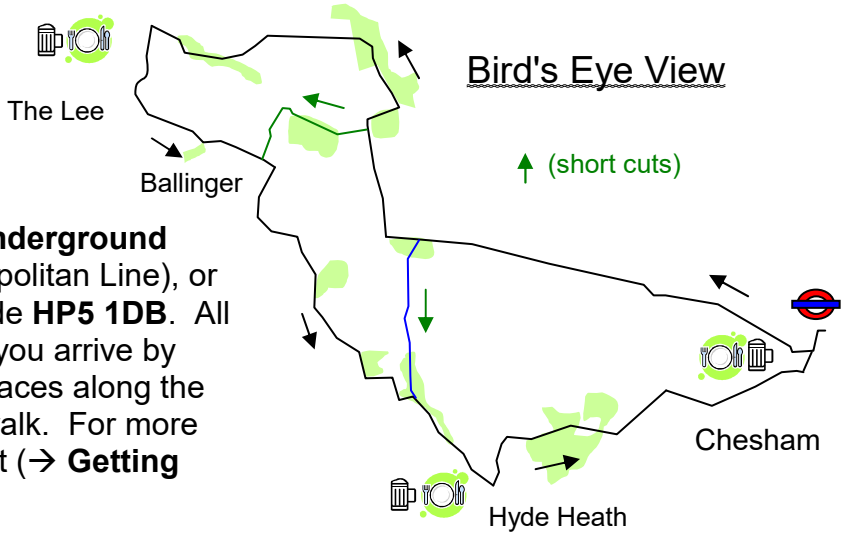
In Brief

Another wonderful walk in the rolling Buckinghamshire countryside, amidst the legendary Chiltern beechwoods. The central point is the wonderful old town of Chesham. All this is accessible via the *London Underground!*

Outside the town, there are two pubs en route which serve excellent food. (To enquire at the *Cock and Rabbit*, ring 01494-837540. For the *Plough*, ring 01494-774408.) Note: they may be **closed on Monday**!

The walk can be shortened by taking one of two short cuts, described below as the *Little Hundridge Lane Walk* and the *Ballinger Loop*, both satisfying in their own right.

There are some nettles on the fringes of paths so shorts are not advisable in case they catch you unawares, especially in high summer. The terrain is mainly grassy so, in dry seasons, trainers or good walking shoes are wearable. However, in late autumn or winter, you may find a fair amount of mud, in which case boots are best. A large dog will have difficulty on all but the short walk because there are a number of stiles.



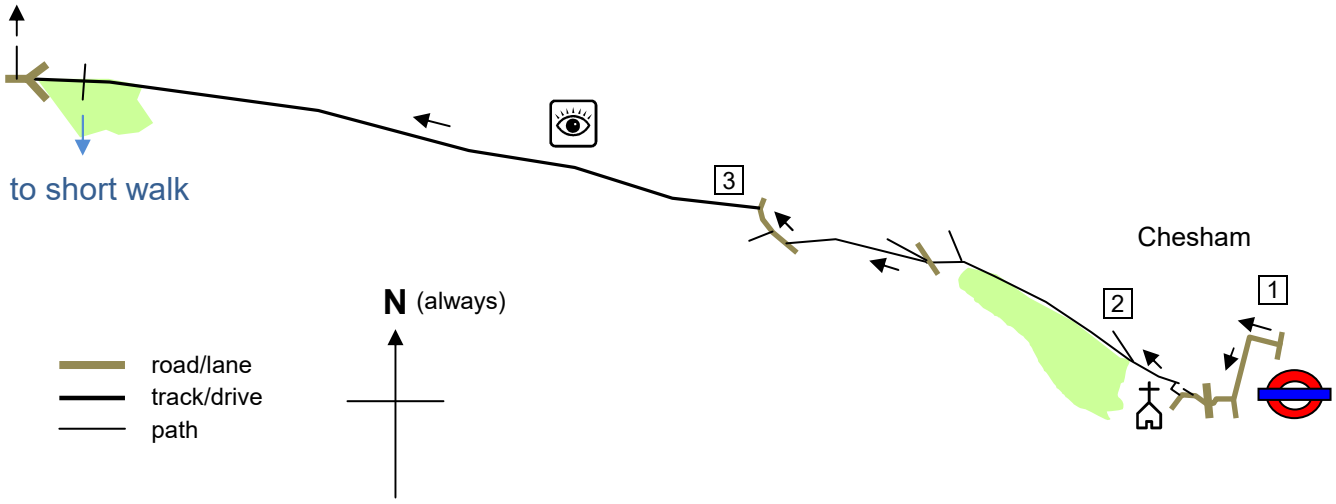
The walk begins in **Chesham Underground Station** (a terminus of the Metropolitan Line), or in the town of Chesham, postcode **HP5 1DB**. All day parking is £5 (card only). If you arrive by car, there are numerous other places along the route where you can begin the walk. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Archaeological evidence shows that there has been a settlement at Chesham since 8000 BCE. The first recorded reference to the town is under the Old English name 'Cæstæleshamm' which means 'the river-meadow at the pile of stones'. The river that runs through the valley is the River Chess, apparently named after the town.

Chesham station, opened in 1889, is now a Grade II-listed building. It holds a number of records. The 3.89 miles between Chesham and Chalfont & Latimer is the longest distance between any two adjacent stations on the Underground network. At 25 miles northwest of Charing Cross, Chesham is the furthest Underground station from central London. It is both the northernmost and the westernmost Underground station.

The Walk

Leg 1: Chesham to Black Grove 4 km=2½ miles



1 *If you need to pack nourishment, there is a small Waitrose by the station, and soon in the High Street a big Sainsbury and a Greggs; try "Darvells" the local bakery on the right.* From the station, turn **left** and then **right** down the hill to the shopping area. Turn **left** along the pedestrianised section as far as the little clock tower. Turn **right** just before the clock tower and cross over the main road, St Mary's Way, to the narrow Church Street directly opposite (using the zebra on your left). Avoid a signed footpath into Bury Lane but take the next cobbled track **right** just after that, marked *Welcome to St Mary's Church*. Just before a gate into the churchyard, turn **right** on a tarmac path with the church on your left. Go through a tall metal gate into Lowndes Park – a huge open space, one of the many blessings to the people of Chesham. Immediately turn **left** uphill on a tarmac track, by a fingerpost indicating *Lower Rednor & Chartridge CM4*. *The Guides hut on the right shortly stands on the site of the historic manor Bury Hill House.* Soon you need to shift a little to the left to continue on a dirt track. You come out into open country.

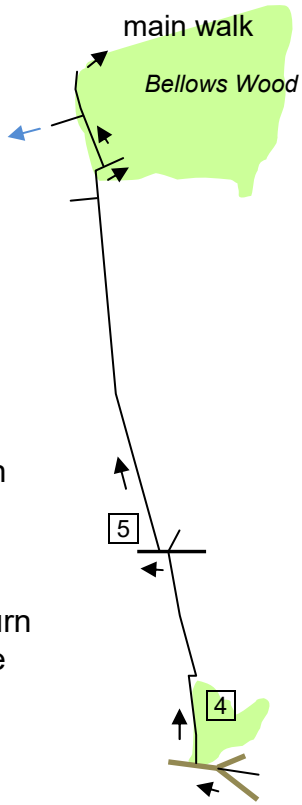
2 Avoid paths forking right across the grass and keep dead straight under the ash and horsechestnut trees. Just before the far corner, your path runs down under trees. As you come out into the open again, avoid a level path on your right and take a narrow left fork. Your path crosses a lane, goes through a wooden swing-gate and down two steps into a large meadow which in high summer is full of wild flowers. Ahead of you are two possible paths: take the **left**-hand path. At the other side, after a wooden swing-gate, your path veers a fraction left across a meadow and goes through another

swing-gate to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane. In 50m, ignore a footpath on the left and continue on the lane till it bends right. Leave the lane here by taking a path on the **left** beside a large metal gate.

3 This wide path runs in a long valley known as Herbert's Hole. Follow this nice easy path (although possibly muddy in wetter seasons) past several field boundaries for almost 1 km. Soon after the path narrows, you will meet a crossing path marked with chain stiles on either side. On your left is a wood called Black Grove.

Decision point. If you are doing the **short walk**, skip to near the end of this text and do the **Little Hundridge Lane Walk**.

One walker suggests turning **right** through other chain stile, up and through woods, passing the historic *Pednor House*, across fields with fine views down to Pednor Bottom, rejoining the given route (OS map required).



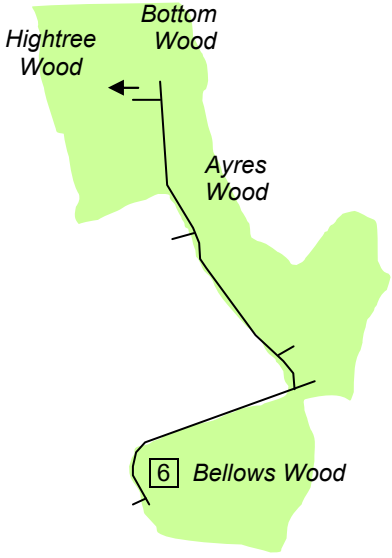
Leg 2: Black Grove to Bellows Wood 1¼ km=¾ mile

4 Continue straight on ignoring the chain stiles. The path eventually ends at a road. Turn **left**, passing on your right, at a 3-way road junction, *Herbert's Hole* cottage. Immediately after the cottage, go **right** through a donated metal gate and up a narrow path beside a fence beside Okey Wood. Your path zigzags right-left through a (now gateless) gap. Your path continues ahead on a driveway to a junction of paths by a fingerpost. Go **left** through a wooden swing-gate.

5 In 10m, go **right** through a small metal gate and follow the path beside a wire fence and a cattle pasture on your left. After a second meadow your path goes past a derelict swing-gate to a junction on your left: keep straight on regardless. Shortly, your path goes **right** over a stile into Bellows Wood. Immediately turn **left** again on a descending path along the left-hand edge of the wood. In 80m, you reach a 3-way fingerpost.

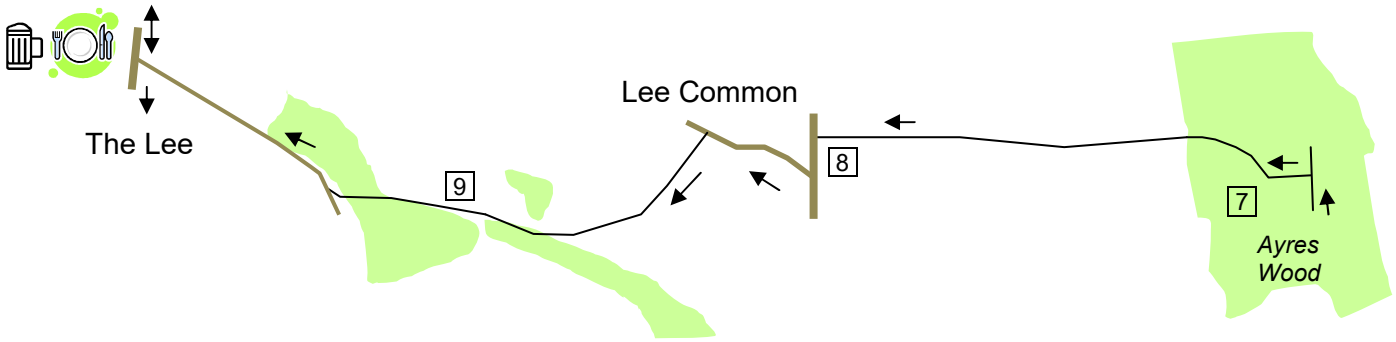
Decision point. If you are doing the **medium walk**, skip to near the end of this text and do the **Ballinger Loop**.

Leg 3: Bellows Wood to The Lee 3¼ km=2 miles



6 Continue straight on at the fingerpost, quite steeply downhill. At the bottom, ignore a stile and swing-gate on your left and turn **right**, staying in the wood. This is the most majestic part of the walk, overlorded by those great beech trees. As the open meadow on your left ends, at the corner, turn **left** on a path, still beside the meadow and with Ayres Wood on your right. Ignore a footpath on your right, keeping straight ahead on the bridleway. Your route goes under wires and through a small metal kissing-gate. Ignore a footpath on the left here and continue on a level path, deeper into Ayres Wood. You are in another majestic beechwood forming a high canopy. After 150m, look out for a marker post with white arrows on a tree. Turn **left** here uphill through the well-named Hightree Wood. As the sign indicates, you are on part of the Chiltern Heritage Trail.

7 In only 60m, your path wheels **right**: this is indicated by white curved arrows on trees. Follow a level path for about 50m until you see more white arrows curving **left**. Your path leads you through hollies, a wooden swing-gate and out into a gorgeous green meadow which makes a welcome change after your trek through the woods. Keep ahead along the right-hand side. At the far side, a stile takes you into a wide grassy shaded



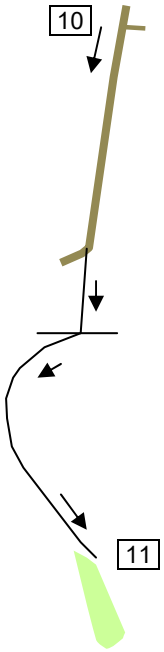
boulevard. This is the most fascinating and mysterious parts of the walk. It seems to be an ancient drover's path, where livestock could be driven between fields or out to the highway. You pass through a metal kissing-gate, then three more spaced at intervals. Finally, after nearly ½ km on this trail, you emerge onto a tarmac road, Ballinger Road.

8 Turn **left** on the road and, in 60m, go **right** at a junction through the quietly genteel hamlet of Lee Common. After houses and the village well, on your left are allotments, concealed by a hedge. Just opposite St Mary's Close, go **left** on a footpath indicated by a yellow arrow. Your path goes through the allotments, past a children's playground on your left and through a small wooden gate. It now crosses a gravel drive and leads you through a wooden swing-gate, down the right-hand side of a pasture and through another swing-gate into a larger meadow. Veer **right** on a very faint path diagonally down the meadow. At the bottom, you go through a narrow section with a clump of trees on your right. Ignore a kissing-gate here on the left in a corner. A little further on, you meet a second kissing-gate: go through it into woodland.

9 Follow this nice wide path in the woods of Lee Common, at first near the right-hand edge before the path enters the centre of the wood. After nearly 300m, your path veers left to meet a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane. Soon on the other side of a brick wall is Manor Gardens, now open to the public, part of the grounds of the adjoining Manor which you will see from the Green. At the end of the lane, turn **right** on a major road and immediately **left** to a welcome pub by the Green in the hamlet known as The Lee.

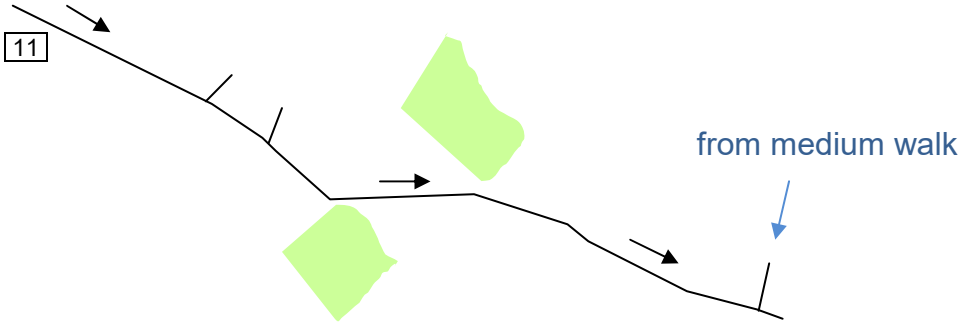
The "Cock and Rabbit" is quirky (or charming, if you like) because it is both a pub (you can just have a drink) and also an Italian locanda, the Graziemille, that has been run for 35 years by an Italian family who have resisted anglicisation. The pub has been used many times in the Midsomer Murders series. This is serious food, cooked with care and attention, far from your usual pizza joint with less emphasis on pasta. Try the salmone thermidor or the pollo al contessa rosa. The pub is open all day Saturday and Sunday. You may need to leave your boots outside. Booking is advisable (ring 01494-837540).

Leg 4: The Lee to Ballinger 2 km=1¼ miles



10 After your break, go back to the main road and turn **right** on it (that is, **left** if you didn't visit the pub). In 300m, just before a right bend, go **left** at a footpath sign, over a stile or through an open gate, on a path beside a paddock on your right. Another stile takes you to a T-junction with another path. Turn **right** and, in 5m, fork **left** on a narrower path, going over a stile into the corner of a meadow. Stay on the left-hand side of the meadow. The edge soon begins to curve round to the left. Before the end of the curve, leave the edge on a faint path that goes diagonally across the centre, reaching the far right-hand corner under an oak tree.

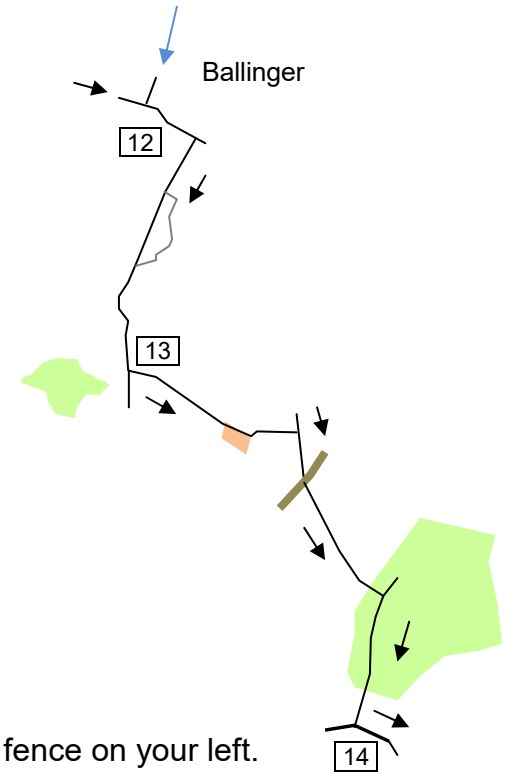
11 Go over a stile in the corner and keep the same direction straight ahead across the field. Hopefully the field isn't too ploughed up and the path is obvious. This is the only open field you need to cross. Head for the corner of another field ahead with a wide gap. When you reach the corner, ignore the gap and take a path dead straight on along the left-hand side of a field beside a



hedge on your left. (Some walkers go *through* the gap an along the right-hand side of the field.) Ignore various other yellow arrows that point in different directions. In the next corner, go over a stile and keep straight on along the left-hand side of the next meadow, avoiding paths left and right. In the next corner, go **left** over a stile and then take a diagonal path across a meadow, passing close to an electricity pole. When you reach the far side, your path veers right along the left-hand side of the meadow. After 300m or so, you meet a line of trees near a large metal field gate. Veer **left** here through shrubs to emerge on the sports pitch in the hamlet of Ballinger.

At this point, the **medium walk** re-joins the main walk.

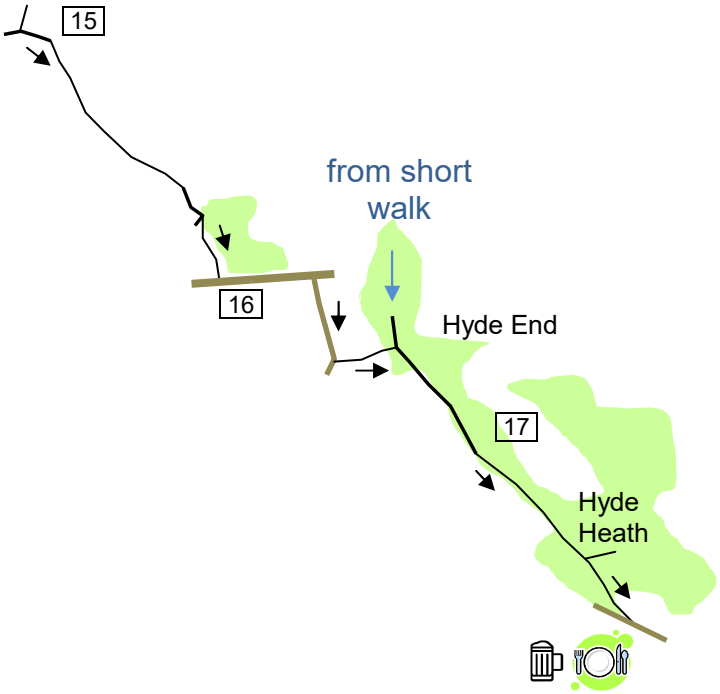
Leg 5: Ballinger to Hyde Heath 4 km=2½ miles



12 Walk the right-hand edge of the sports pitch to the next corner and here turn **right** on a narrow path between hedges. Go over a stile and over another stile into a meadow. Keep your direction along the left-hand side of this meadow. In the next corner, go over a well-concealed stile into a wheat field. Keep straight ahead on a path that runs parallel to the left-hand edge. (The official footpath goes left-right-right round the corners but local people have carved this route across, with or without the farmer's consent.) In the far corner, go through a gap and along the left-hand side of the next field. In the next corner, go **left** over a stile and turn **right** on a narrow path with a small meadow on your left and a tall hedge on your right. Go over a stile and, in only 5m, after some bushes and barbed wire, turn **left**.

13 You are now on a meadow path running beside a wire fence on your left. On reaching a fenced-off enclosure, go straight ahead over a stile and along a path between hedges. The path veers left over two stiles and takes you into a small sloping meadow. Keep straight on diagonally, heading for a white house ahead. Unofficially, a gap in the line of trees on your right gives you a way of avoiding yet another stile (and is preferable, say some walkers, to avoid some yappy dogs). Just before the house go **right** over a stile and cross a horse pasture to the opposite corner. Here, go through a metal kissing-gate by a pair of ornamental gates to a road.

14 Cross the road. Avoid a residential road but take a narrow footpath just on the **left**, opposite the sign for Marriotts Avenue, going up two steps. Your path runs between gardens and a meadow. Ignore a footpath off to the right. Your path enters a wood and turns left beside a fence. In 30m you reach a marker post and arrows painted on trees. Turn sharp **right** here on a clear path through woods with a bank and an old wire fence on your right. Soon there is a green meadow on your right and your path comes out through a small wooden gate beside a large one onto a driveway. Turn **left** on the drive.



15 After passing some superior residences, at the end of the drive, go over a stile just to the left of a house entrance. Follow the path beside a wall. It meanders through hollies and comes out into a field. Turn **right** along the edge of the field and go over a stile into a pasture shared by a sheep and horses. Go diagonally **left** here, heading for the other long side, just to the left of some farm buildings. As you go, the stile comes into focus in a line of young trees. Go over this rather rickety stile and veer **left** through a "farm" yard which seems to be a storage facility for all kinds of house fittings, granite, slate, even a giant pig. As you come past a large shed on your left, look for a marker post on your left. Follow the arrow **left** across some grass and various items of rusting junk. Go through a small patch of woodland to meet the entrance drive coming from the "farm". Turn **left** on the drive, using the grass verge, to reach the busy Chesham Road.

If your legs are flagging and you see the bus stop here, beware: the 177 runs on Tuesdays and Thursdays only! But there is a chance for refreshment and some lovely woods still to come.

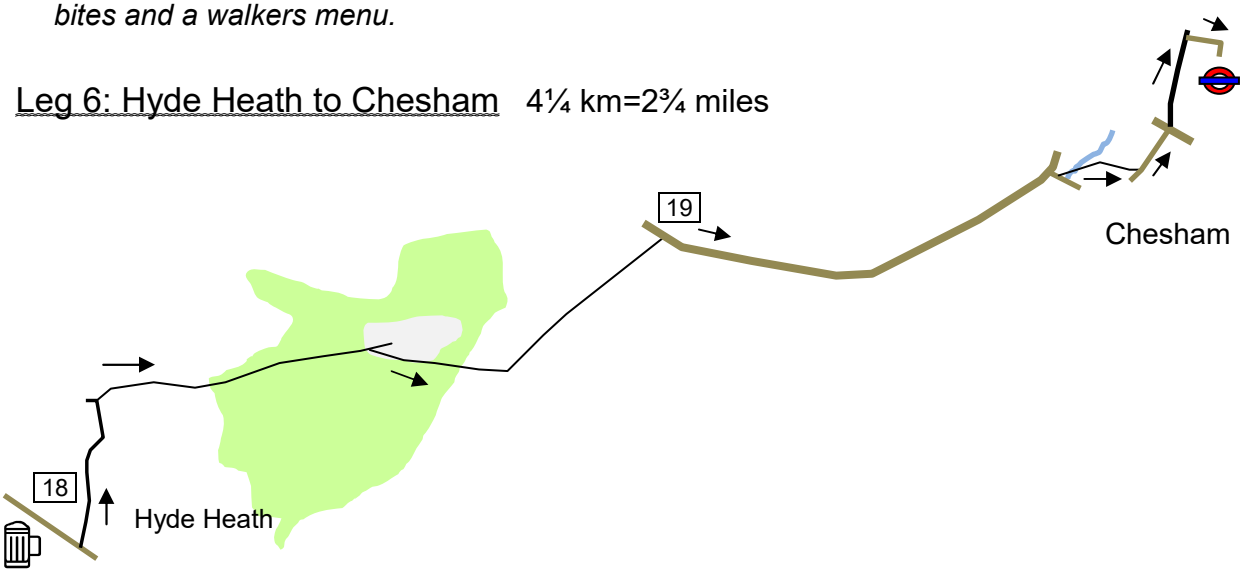
16 Cross the road carefully and turn **left** on it. In 200m, at the first junction, turn **right** on Browns Road. In 200m, just before a right curve, go **left** over a stile and along a narrow path between a fence and a hedge. The path zigzags left-right and enters woods. At a T-junction with a wide track, turn **right**.

At this point, the **short walk** re-joins the main walk.

17 You reach a small green with flint houses on each side. Go straight on along a narrow footpath, a nice easy path between hollies. The path runs quite straight, then bends and runs deeper into the woods. You emerge by *Parsons Cottage*. Go straight over their lawn and take a path into woods by a marker post. In 25m, you come to a junction of paths by a marker post. Fork **right** here, as indicated by a yellow arrow. The path goes up a bank onto the cricket green at Hyde Heath. Go right-left around it soon arriving at *The Plough*, a traditional village pub proclaiming *Inn Business!* There are tables on the green, inviting you to sit outside if the weather is clement and if perhaps there is a cricket match in progress. Just past the pub is the village shop.

The old community of Hyde Heath, probably named after a landowner of past times, is famous all around for its traditional fête, held each May. A full and lively account of life in the village by Irma Dolphin will be found at http://www.hydeheath.com/VillageHistory.htm. The Plough is the last of what used to be five village pubs. As well as a wide-ranging menu, it offers lighter bites and a walkers menu.

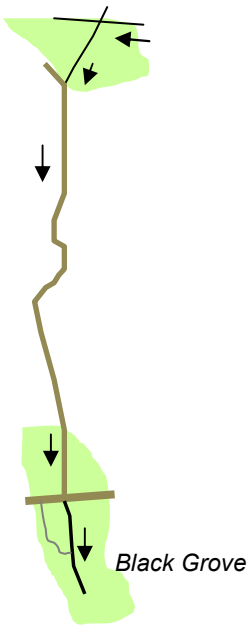
Leg 6: Hyde Heath to Chesham 4¼ km=2¾ miles



18 After a possible break, continue along the road for a further 50m, passing Brays Lane and the quaint village shop. Turn **left** just before the village school onto a very wide dusty track, going past the entrance to a supply depot on your right. The track winds downhill past some large houses. A bridleway joins you from the left as you pass a large cottage, *Lane Gate End*. About 20m before a metal field gate visible ahead, fork **right** on a narrow path and turn **right** on a wide path that runs between two lines of hornbeams. Your path enters the lovely White's Wood on a nice straight route. After 400m, you come out into a green meadow clearing in the centre of the wood. Avoid the wide forester's path that veers left across the centre and instead keep to the **right**-hand edge of the clearing. Your path becomes more obvious as you advance. At the far side, it goes down into the wood again. As the wood shrinks away, you are once again walking between lines of trees or shrubs, between (mainly unseen) fields. Eventually a gravel drive leads to the main Missenden Road.

19 Turn **right** on the road, using the tarmac footway. In 700m you begin to pass the residential streets of Chesham. Shortly after, you enter the old town and, at a bend in the road, reach the *Queens Head* (Fullers), a genuine old pub and a worthy place for farewell refreshment. One way to return to the Underground station is as follows. Turn **right** before the *Queens Head* on Wey Lane and immediately fork **left** on a footpath beside and over a stream, part of the River Chess. Follow the tarmac footpath between a park and gardens with the stream on your left. At the end, turn **left** on Germain Street, passing the *Red Lion*. Cross straight over a main road, using crossing lights, to the pedestrianised High Street. Follow the High Street to the next junction and turn **right** to the station where the walk began.

Little Hundridge Lane Walk 1½ km=1 mile



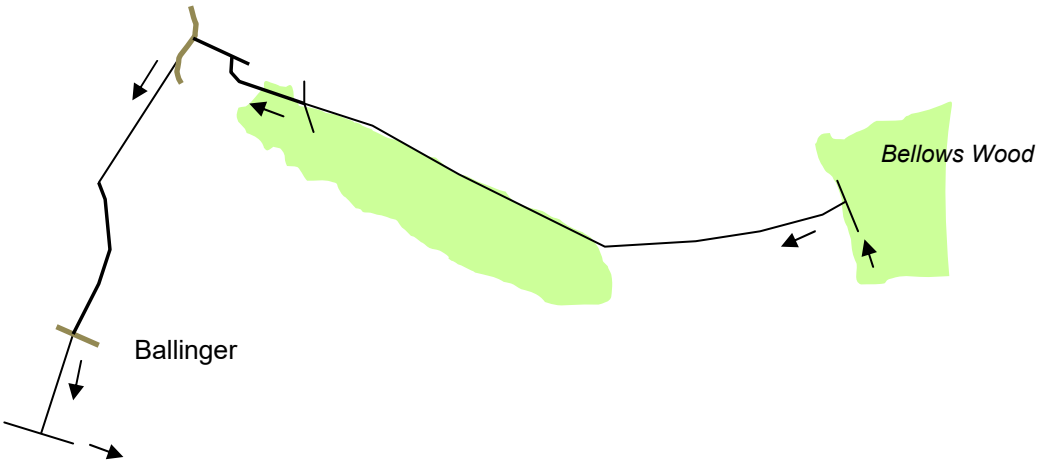
Take this shortcut if you are doing the **short walk**.

Turn **left** through the chain stile and go up on a path through woods. At the top, go through another chain stile and turn left on the quiet Little Hundridge Lane. The lane passes a farm and a white cottage, winds through woods and continues straight. After a total of 1 km on this lane, you reach a T-junction with the main Chesham Road. Cross the road to a track directly opposite. (Strictly, the footpath goes **right** for 60m along the road, turns **left** on a signed narrow path through bracken and nettles and turns **right** on the same track; this route seems to be little used.) Follow the track, avoiding side paths.

Now resume at Leg 5 section 17 of the main walk.

Ballinger Loop 1½ km=1 mile

Take this shortcut if you are doing the **medium walk**.



Turn **left**, exiting the woods onto a lovely sheltered path between sloping meadows. The next section is a wide undulating path through thick woods. You come to a complex junction by a multiple fingerpost near *Well Cottages*. Ignore footpaths on the right and left and keep straight on along a track. The track bends right to a T-junction. Turn **left** here on another wide track leading to a road. Turn **left** on the road. In 25m go **right** up a shallow bank on a signed footpath into a steeply sloping meadow. Veer **left** on a path that goes up the steepest part, following the leftmost of two lines of electric wires. At the other side, go up a shingle path, ignore a wooden gate on your left and take a wide grassy path ahead. The path graduates to a residential lane and reaches a T-junction. Go straight over through a wooden swing-gate onto the sports pitch in the hamlet of Ballinger. Turn **left** in the far corner.

The walk now continues at Leg 5 of the **main walk**.

Getting there

By car: Chesham and the outlying villages can be reached from the M40 via Beaconsfield or the A41 via Berkhamsted, amongst other ways. If you park in the town, the best place is on the housing estate (Chessbury Road) that you pass near the end of the walk, just off the Missenden Road, postcode **HP5 1JR**, w3w:horn.bill.pinks. Other possible starting places are Lee Common, Ballinger or Hyde Heath.

By train: **London Underground** service from Baker Street etc., regular service including Sundays; a quicker way with fewer stops is by **Chiltern Railways** from Marylebone, then change at **Chalfont and Latimer**: check the timetable on leaving and returning to avoid waiting at the station.

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