



Coombe Hill, Dunsmore, Ellesborough Little Hampden, Cadsden, Kimble Warren

Distance: 14 km=9 miles easy-to-moderate walking
or 12 km=8 miles (avoiding Coombe Hill car park)

Region: Chilterns Date written: 15-aug-2010

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Refreshments: Cadsden Last update: 24-feb-2024

Map: Explorer 181 (Chiltern Hills North)

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

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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.

For refreshment, there is an iconic pub along the way: to enquire at the *Plough at Cadsden*, ring 01844-343302.



The going is easy, apart from one modest climb, so good walking shoes are adequate except in wet conditions. There are no unavoidable nettles.

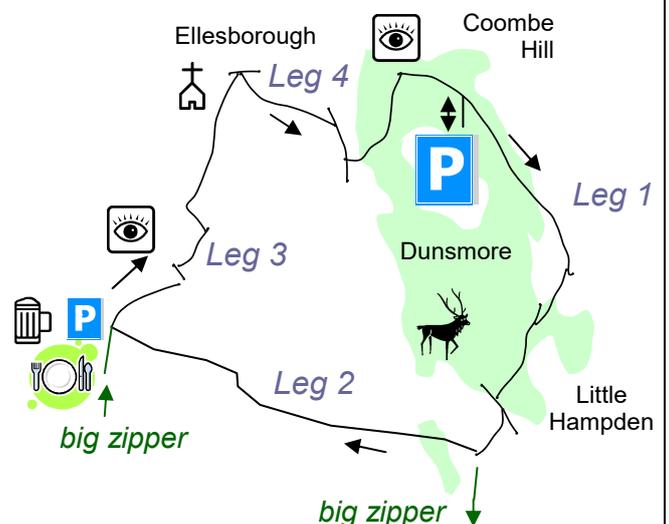
Dogs should be welcome.



This walk can be combined with its sister walk *Princes Risborough, Great Hampden* to make a 19½ km=12½ mile **big zipper** walk in this series.

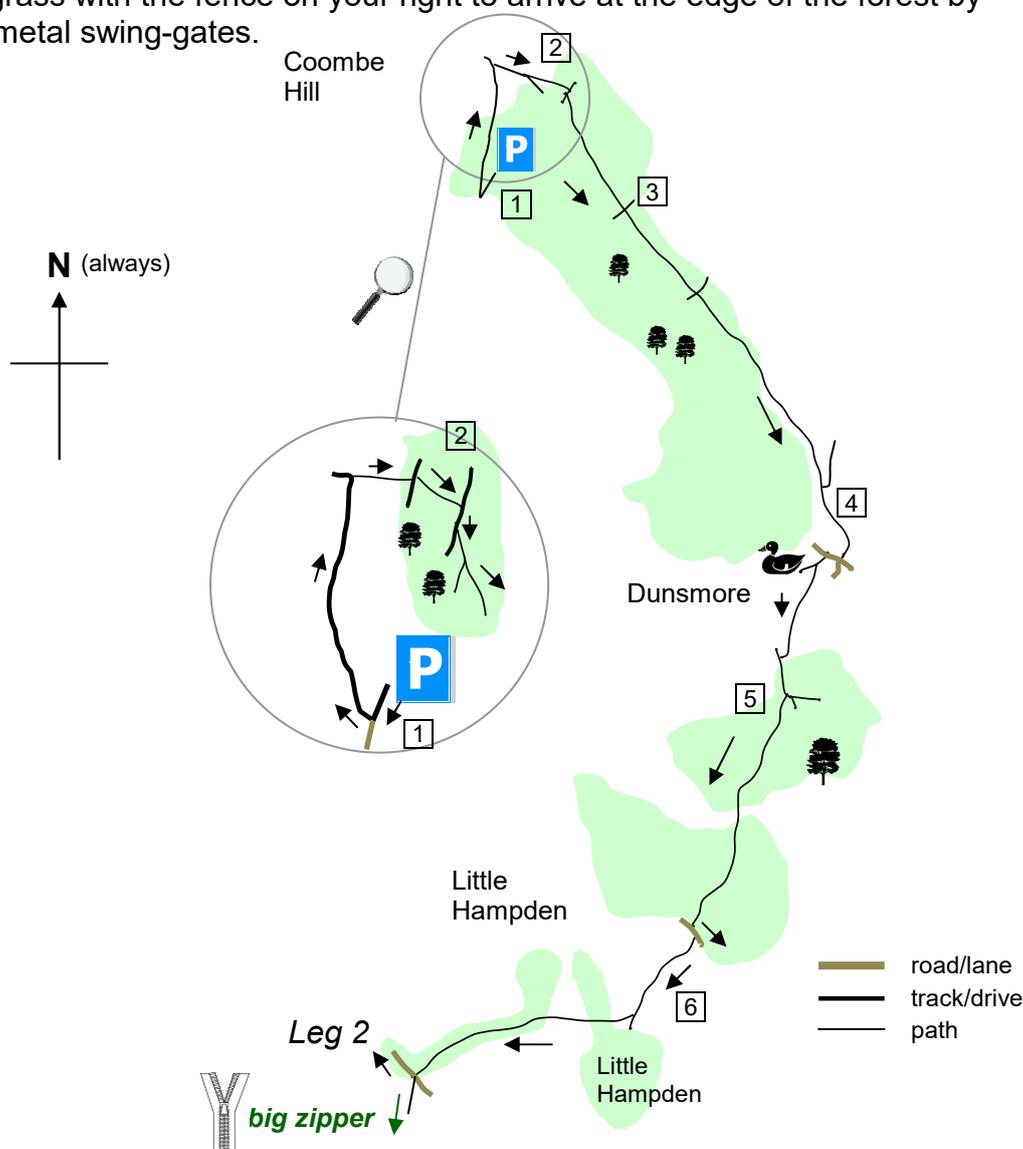
The walk begins at the **Coombe Hill** NT car park, once known as *Low Scrubs*, off Lodge Hill, Butlers Cross, nearest postcode **HP17 0UR** www.w3w.co/canines.sprouted.hissing (so dog on lead please!), grid ref SP 851 063. Another possible start is at the side of the approach road to the *Plough* at Cadsden (*not* the patrons-only car park), postcode **HP27 0NB**. For full details, see the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Bird's Eye View



Leg 1: Coombe Hill to Little Hampden 5½ km=3½ miles

- 1 Starting in the **Coombe Hill** NT car park: first go out to the road. Immediately turn **right** through a small wooden gate next to a large one and take the **right** fork, a wide light-coloured shingle path. Follow it for 500m until it suddenly bends left. **Leave** the main path here and instead turn **right** over the grass with the fence on your right to arrive at the edge of the forest by two metal swing-gates.



- 2 The walk resumes here if you did not park in the Coombe Hill car park. 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*. Just keep dead straight on in the same direction on a fairly clear path through the trees. If you see yellow arrows on the trees on your right, just ignore them. In 60m, you reach another wide riders' track running beside a line of beeches. Veer **right** onto it. In 80m, you reach a marker post by an old iron fence post at a gap in the line of trees on your left. Here, fork **left** through the gap onto a wide path leading away from the line of beeches, ignoring a path that runs along the other side of the line of beeches. The track soon follows a line of old fencing on your left which will be with you for much of the way. (In the future, this old fencing could be removed or replaced.) You will be following this path straight on for over 1 km into Dunsmore.

- 3 In about 200m, a bridleway joins you from the right. In nearly ½ km, your path goes over a dirt drive and the surface improves. A bridleway, on your left, and a footpath cross your path. Just before the village, at the edge of a field, another bridleway joins from the left. Follow the hedged path, now a tarmac lane, into the small isolated settlement of Dunsmore.

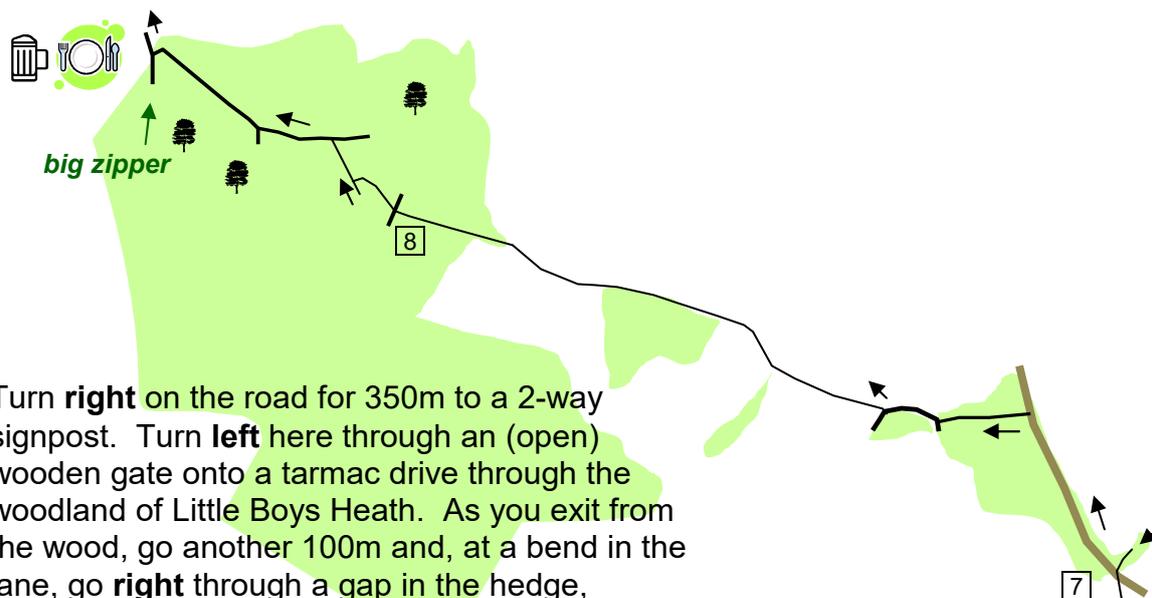
A cluster of forty or so dwellings perched at the top of a steep Chiltern escarpment and approached by two very steep single-track roads, Dunsmore is a haven of tranquility. The name Dunsmore appears on an estate map of 1620 but, until well into the 1900s, much of it was known as Scrubs or Scrubwood. 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, check the Frith Collection or do a websearch for "Frith Dunsmore Remembered".

- 4 Stay on the lane, passing the art studio of polystylist Peter Jewell, 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 **right** fork that leads you diagonally across the field to reach a stile in a wooden and barbed wire fence. Go over the stile and head down, diagonally **right**, to cross over another stile in a wooden fence. Continue down a path between fencing and bushes to cross yet another stile onto a track. Turn **left** on a bridleway here running beside a high wooden fence.
- 5 Where the fence ends, there is a choice of three paths, the middle one being a narrow footpath going past a [2024:grounded] marker post. Take the **rightmost** path, a wider stony path through woodland. You will be following this woodland path for nearly 1 km. In 400m, the woodland narrows to a neck and then widens again. After more beautiful 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.
- 6 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. Continue straight ahead across the field on a clear path, passing to the right of the bulge that is Warren Wood. At the other side of the field go through the small visible gap as directed by a marker post (care! don't make the mistake of going through the gap with a marker post on your left!). Go through a wide band of trees, through a gate and down the centre of another meadow, this time slightly right. Go through an opening and across a small crop 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 ½ km or so, you come out of the woods, through a wooden gate to a road.



Zip point. If you are doing the 19½ km=12½ mile **Big Zipper** walk, cross the road and go across a patch of gravel onto a signed footpath opposite; now switch to the other walk "Princes Risborough, Great Hampden", beginning at **Leg 3**.

Leg 2: Across Ninn Wood 2½ km=1½ miles



- 7 Turn **right** on the road for 350m to a 2-way signpost. Turn **left** here through an (open) wooden gate onto a tarmac drive through the woodland of Little Boys Heath. As you exit from the wood, go another 100m and, at a bend in the lane, go **right** through a gap in the hedge, passing a waymarker. *Don't miss this turn.* Turn immediately **left** along the edge of a field. Ignore a gap on the left and continue to the first corner where the field begins to curve right. Go through a gap in the corner and continue along the left-hand side of the next field. Soon you have the woodland of Cross Coppice on your left. At the end, go through a band of trees and keep straight ahead, to the right of a hedge, along the left-hand side of the next field. At the end of this field, your path dips down into woodland with a sudden change of atmosphere. At the bottom, go straight across a bridleway through a modern kissing gate.
- 8 Follow this narrow rooty path under beeches, on a beautiful route, keeping roughly straight ahead. You soon reach a clear fork: turn **right** here. Your path descends quite steeply to a T-junction with a wider path. Turn **right** on this path downhill. In 100m, at the bottom, veer **left** on another wide path. After nearly 200m you arrive at a junction with a marker post and some more paths joining from your left. Veer **right** here on a wide path. In 250m or so, it leads you through a modern kissing gate, turning **left** to the *Plough* pub.



The **big zipper** walk from Princes Risborough joins here.

The "Plough at Cadsden" is one of the oldest inns in the Chilterns, dating back to the 1500s. It provides home-cooked food from a menu of popular standards, plus daily "specials" on the chalkboard. If you arrive on the first Sunday in August the Cherry Pie Festival may be in swing, with a variety of entertainments. The "Plough" entered the news headlines in 2015 when PM David Cameron invited the Chinese president in for a pint. It is now being replicated in various parts of China. The "Plough" is open all day at the weekends. For enquiries, ring 01844-343302.

Leg 3: Cadsden to Ellesborough 3 km=2 miles

9 With your back to the *Plough*, turn **left** and go straight on along the lane keeping ahead where it meets a road. In just 10m, turn **right** by the end of a short wooden fence, onto a footpath, thus temporarily leaving the Ridgeway. Take the middle, level path and, at the end, go through a wooden swing-gate onto the open hillside. Go up a bank where there is a choice of paths. Take the **left**-hand path which may be muddy in winter, but soon becomes a more distinct grassy path. Across the hillside, at a T-junction, veer **right**, thus re-joining the Ridgeway.

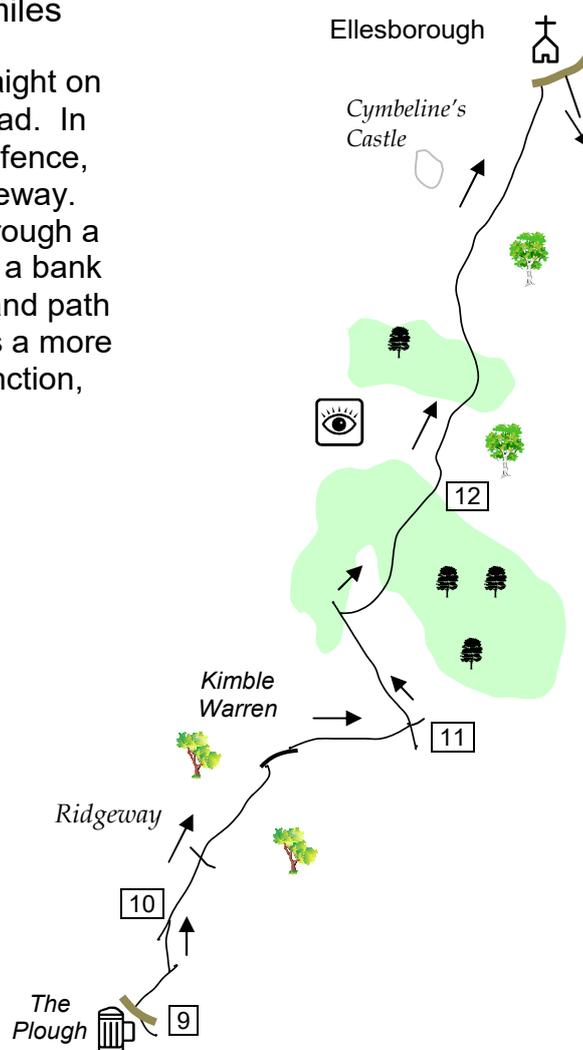
10 The route from here follows the Ridgeway to the top of the ridge. Simply follow the white acorn signs and brown fingerposts. *In summer this hillside is full of wild flowers of all kinds.* The wide grassy path ascends gently, goes through a small metal gate and crosses a bridleway through a modern kissing gate. It then follows a straight grassy route by trees on your right and open downland, up to another tree line. Go up steps, through a wooden swing gate, up steps, **right** on a sunken path and, in 25m, **left** up more steps, through a metal kissing gate and over some more beautiful grassy downland, still following the white acorns. The path goes across woodland with a deep drop on your left. After that, ignore a wooden gate on the left. At the top, with a large crop field ahead, turn **left** over a stile, thus leaving the Ridgeway.

11 Keep to the path running beside the fence on the right. Where 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 they, or the melt water, 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, then along the bottom left-hand side of the field, through trees for 100m and through a wooden swing-gate beside a metal gate on the left.

12 Follow the wide path over a drive, through some woodland, through a wooden swing gate to the left of a metal gate, and across a grassy hillside, following a fence on your left at first, then across the grass. *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 through a wooden swing gate, down steps with a wooden rail, along a level path, through a small



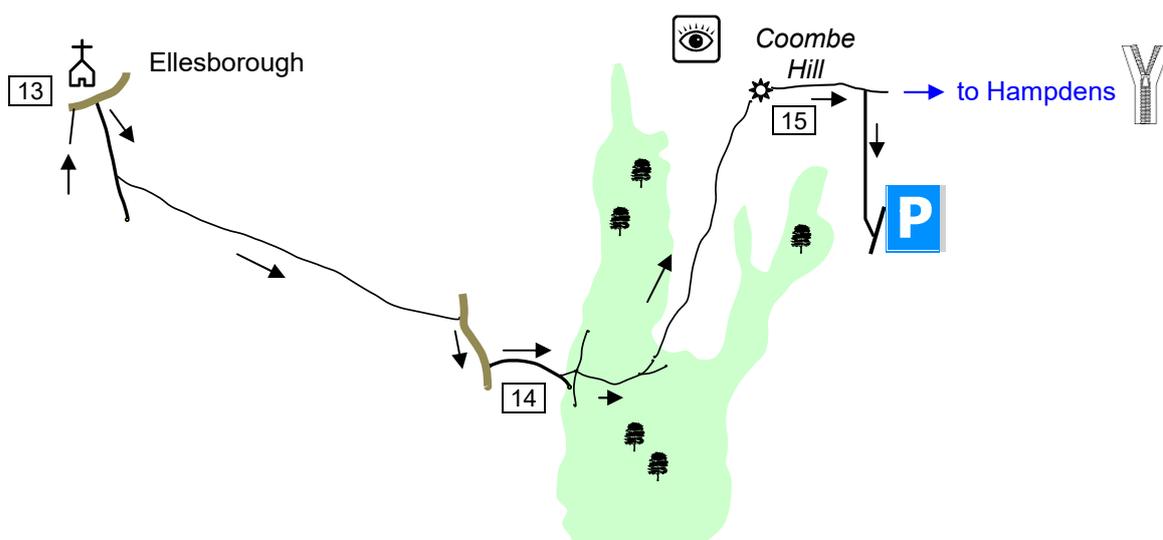
wooden gate and on a bendy course over more hillside with fine views all around. The round hill up on the right is Beacon Hill. (As a self-guided diversion, not on this walk, there is a steep but manageable path up to Beacon Hill from here giving you great views, including *Chequers*, from where you can continue westwards to re-join the main path) 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. After crossing the hillside with great views on your left, go through a gate and a band of trees 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 15th-century with much restoration and a Victorian tower. The tower is sometimes open and offers a bracing view. Teas are also usually available. A notable resident is actor Sir David Jason.

Leg 4: Ellesborough to Coombe Hill 3 km=2 miles



- 13 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 fingerpost and go through a barrier to 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 after two brick houses, turn **left** on a drive marked as a bridleway.
- 14 Keep straight ahead past house entrances and golf tees and continue on a rougher path uphill. At a fork, keep **left** through a gate and keep straight ahead over a 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** at a marker post on a much gentler path across the grass which hugs the edge of the hill. In 500m, after rounding the last clump, you see the distinctive Memorial on the top of Coombe Hill and quickly 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.



- 15 From the Monument, facing the view to the north, turn **right** (eastwards) on a light-coloured wide gravel path along the flat top of the hill. In 250m, the path bends sharp right by a fence. If you are *not* parked in the Coombe Hill car park (as most who are doing the Big Zipper walk), leave the main path here and continue straight ahead over the grass, with the fence on your right, to arrive at the edge of the forest by two metal swing-gates; now skip to the near the start of this text and resume the walk from Leg 1 section 2. Otherwise: Keep **right** with the main path and follow it for 500m to the Coombe Hill car park where the walk began.

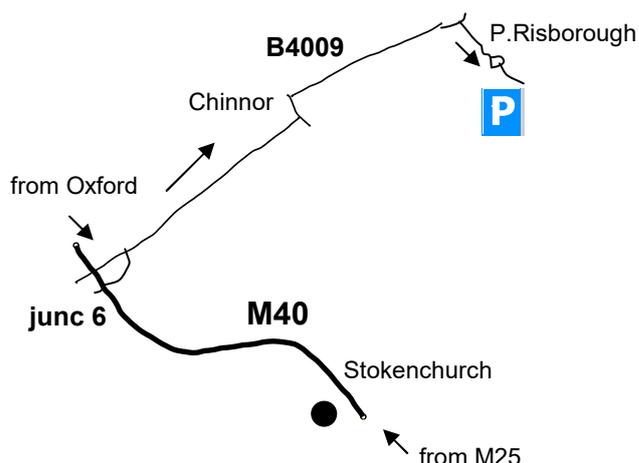


Getting there

By car: For the **Coombe Hill** car park, one way is through **Princes Risborough**. This town 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 to a large roundabout (next to the dome-shaped church). Turn **sharp left** here, direction *Aylesbury*. Follow this road, the A4010, for 2½ miles to a roundabout with a junction right for *Wendover, Butlers Cross*. Turn **right** here and follow the road through Ellesborough. ½ mile on, at Butlers Cross, turn **right** opposite the *Russell Arms* on the Missenden Road. In 1 mile, turn **left** at a small grass triangle. The car park is in ½ mile.

The Coombe Hill car park is also easily accessed from the A413 near Wendover, through Dunsmore.

For **Cadsden**, follow the A4010, direction *Aylesbury*, as described above. Just over 1 mile after P.Risborough, at a prominent roundabout, turn **right** in the direction *Gt. Missenden, Gt. Hampden, Cadsden*. The *Plough* is ½ mile on the right. Park on the roadside just before the pub.



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