



Walk 3
HARTSLOCK WOOD

KEY			
	Paved Road		Walk number & direction
	Bridle Path		Viewpoint
	Footpath		Sites of Interest
	Permissive Path		Public House

Walk 3 - HARTSLOCK WOOD

A slightly longer walk, about five miles; allow two hours and then you can enjoy the views, perhaps even rest halfway!

Walk up the High Street, with care through the defile, stay on the left and when you reach the bridle path to Goring turn left onto it. A long and tall, protective fence has recently been installed by the new owners of Coombe Park. This is an enjoyable walk and is in frequent use both locally and as part of the Thames Path and is a continuing section of the Tuddingway. It now also forms part of the King Alfred long distance cycle route so will be even more popular! As you pass Long Acre Farm the mound on your right covers an ice house. Continue along the bridle path with its snatched views of the river, of Coombe House and of Berkshire. The fields alongside are often used by the nearby stud farms for their mares and foals and local cattle. Regrettably the occupants of Elm Cottage have also found it necessary to erect a metal barrier to keep intruders out. The bridle path narrows when it reaches the edge of the woodland. To your left a path drops to Hartslock Cottage and is a private road; your path is immediately ahead down a steep and sometimes very slippery slope to the valley floor below. The steps now provided are called the Hartley Steps after a lengthy battle with the County Council to get them replaced. The path having descended rises immediately and as you top the rise the views open out, the two trees at the top define the western edge of the old village boundary and you then enter Upper Hartslock Wood. The path ahead is obvious and you should not deviate from it, the land is private. The walk through the woodland is enjoyable; the path swings over to meet the land rising from the river's edge. The path passes close to an area of very severe erosion and a sheer drop. It was a quarry where approximately 16,000 cubic metres (16,000 tonnes) of chalk were removed and conveyed by boat possibly to provide material for the building programmes of Henry I and Henry III. So do take care with children at this point (it is well guarded, but nevertheless a temptation). The path starts to fall as it runs along parallel to the river. I saw a pair of foxes at this point in broad daylight, only about five yards away from me. The riverbank below is private and is used by an anglers association. Across the river is the Child Beale Trust which owns the land you are on.

As the path nears the side of the river so it emerges from the woods. The bridle path continues to Goring, without you on this occasion. On your right just before the end of the wood is a path leading up to a kissing gate and beyond it an open hillside and the next part of your walk. This is the Hartslock Nature Reserve so please take great care; go through the gate and up the slope to your right. The views are most rewarding; the river, the cluster of houses, farm and Church at Lower Basildon, Brunel's railway bridge, and the Berkshire Downs but also now the heavy gantries and support network for the railway electrification programme! Walk down to the other side of the hill to another gate in the left hand corner of the field; go through and immediately turn right onto a lane.

The lane (the Old Reading Cart Road) also links with Goring, running to Lower Gatehampton Farm, Gatehampton Road and emerging by the railway station. The lane strikes uphill and you are permitted to stop for a breather, if you choose the correct place you will find the views most enjoyable; three times they are excellent. Continue up the lane until it joins the farm road above. Carry on along the road until you pass a pair of cottages on your left and a little further on a signpost saying 'Chiltern Way Extension' pointing to the entrance road to Coombe End Farm. Do not take this route but continue until you reach another pair of cottages and a second footpath sign saying '1½ Miles to Whitchurch'.

Turn right here, go through the pedestrian section of the gate (remembering to close it behind you). Follow this path that leads down what was a lovely avenue of chestnut trees (horse on the left and edible on the right), it then skirts the edge of Boundary Farm (where two trees and a marker stone define the old parish boundary). You pass a gate on your left and as the path swings to the right a footpath leaves it at a point some 20 yards from the barn on your right. This path is not always very obvious but it is marked as it enters the thicket on the edge of Beech Wood.

Follow the narrow path as it winds its way into the woodland, the path is then fenced until it emerges onto a new path through a kissing gate. Turn left onto this new path and it will lead you to another kissing gate at the edge of the wood. Go through and follow the fence to the next gate by the road leading to Beech Farm. Go through and cross over the road and the grass opposite and follow the footpath sign to another kissing gate, enter the lane beyond which will lead you to another gate. Your path skirts the right hand edge of the field and woodland and strikes towards the top of Whitchurch Hill - again be aware of the possible presence of cattle or sheep. You meet a kissing gate, go through and drop down to the War Memorial. Cross over the road with care to the entrance to Foxglove Manor and join the high level footpath which runs parallel to the main road and will bring you back to the start of your walk.