



## **Walk 5 - TO COLDHARBOUR (possibly Col Arbre) and GREAT CHALK WOOD**

This walk is rather longer, say six or seven miles, so allow well over two hours.

Leave the village by the High Street, take care through the defile and when crossing over to the high level footpath which starts on the right hand side at the entrance to Firhill Cottage, Uplands Cottage and Lynches Lodge. I have seen deer here, to our mutual surprise.

Continue up the path to the entrance to Foxglove Manor and then cross over to the War Memorial (again with care). Follow uphill to and through the kissing gate into the field above (there may be cattle or sheep in this field - take care if you have a dog with you). The footpath skirts the edge of the Stoneycroft plantation, where the replanted trees are now well established, then dips and rises towards Beech Farm. Carry on to and through the next kissing gate to the approach track to Beech Farm. You reach another kissing gate, the path then passes the outbuildings of Beech Farm and across the grass to a gate on the opposite side of the farm road. Go through and follow the fence on your left to a kissing gate at the entrance to Beech Wood.

On this occasion enter the wood and follow the path which shortly afterwards bends left, ignore the kissing gate leading to the fenced path on your right and go straight ahead to a kissing gate leading into a field. Go through into the field and almost straight ahead on an obvious, worn, path. You go down into a dip and then up; as you crest the rise you will see a fence and a water trough in front of you. To the left of the water trough there is another kissing gate, go through and enter a second field. Now head diagonally to the right hand hedge, just before it reaches a gate there is another kissing gate. Go through, turn left and follow the edge of the field round the outbuildings and cattle sheds of the farm to another kissing gate leading onto the farm road.

Go through and drop down onto the farm road below, turn right and approach a crossroads, go straight across and head towards two cottages. The road passes between them and continues with pleasant views of Goring and Wittenham Clumps.

The road leads to a 'T' junction, turn left (marked 'bridleway Goring 3 miles') and walk on until you approach Stapnall's Farm (said to be one of the oldest farms in the area and once guarded by geese). On your left just before the farm, at the entrance to Chalkwood House, is a track marked as a bridleway, it skirts the house and drops down to enter Great Chalk Wood. You reach a broken down gate and at the 'T' junction of paths go straight across and head up the slight slope, follow this obvious bridleway straight ahead (do not take any right turns), the path wiggles a little but you can see the edge of the fields on your left all the way along. The path is waymarked at intervals. When you reach a marked fork in the path take the left hand one, as the path emerges from the wood it narrows and follows the line of a hedgerow and is defined by a barbed wire fence on the right. It leads to a farm road, as you turn right onto this road note that the area to your left and below was a major, horizontal, chalk quarry (more later). Follow the road downhill past the cottages, through the farm and in front of the farmhouse at Upper Gatehampton Farm. The road is well made and takes you down to meet another major track at right angles (this is the old Reading Cart Road). The right turn takes you to Goring, however turn left and walk towards the edge of Hartslock Wood. When you reach the edge of the conservation area on your right go through the kissing gate and up and over the mound (take care of any flora or fauna). This is an excellent viewpoint with Lower Basildon, its Church, the Brunel railway bridge, the Thames and the Goring Gap (and the railway electrification!) all displayed before you. There is a seat if you want to sit and stare before you continue the walk.

Drop down to the kissing gate below, go through and turn left onto the bridleway that runs from Whitchurch to Goring, it is a splendid well used section of the Thames Path (and of the Tuddingway and now the King Alfred long distance cycle route). It gradually climbs above the river and as it starts to level out you will see the protected edge of a sheer face of chalk on your right. This was another chalk quarry and thousands of tons of chalk were removed from both areas (horizontal and vertical) and conveyed by river for the construction or refurbishment of Reading Abbey, Wallingford Castle and Oxford Castle under the building programmes of Henry I and Henry III.

Follow this well-defined path through the wood and above the river as it climbs slightly to an open view by the side of the fields. As the path dips sharply down you are on the old western boundary of Whitchurch (another walk later?). This section is the steepest part of the Thames Path but you can use the Hartley Steps to assist in your ascent. You join the road that leads you past the farms and fortified area of Coombe Park (on your right) and back to Whitchurch High Street (take great care as you walk down the narrows to enter the village).