

Stokenchurch

World War II Memorial, Cricket Ground, Nature Reserve



WWII Memorial

Cowleaze Wood was once the site of a sculpture trail, until the money ran out. Today it is best visited in the spring for a memorable display of bluebells. However, such an attractive vista disguises a tragedy in 1944 when a returning bomber crashed in the wood killing the seven aircrew.



The Sculpture Trail began from the north end of the car park (the concrete structure displaying information has now disappeared), but you must go to the southern end for the start of the walk. Take the wide path opposite the entrance that joins and becomes L23 after the latter comes in from the right. Follow the tree arrow under telegraph wires and the path narrows. Ignore L24 that goes right.

On the slow descent look out for the small sign to the memorial to the crashed bomber (1).

This granite stone remembers the aircrew of a Halifax bomber who, returning from a raid on Nuremberg, crashed into the hill while on their way to make an emergency landing at nearby RAF Benson. The reasons are unclear but the 1000 aircraft that took part in the raid had suffered considerably due to the unforecast clear weather conditions.

Retrace your steps, go left and continue until reaching a kissing gate. Now go $\frac{1}{4}$ left under telegraph wires to another kissing gate at the bottom of the field. You are now on the 2500 acre / 1000 ha Wormsley Estate, a bucolic heaven where Red Kites fly and deer roam, bought in 1986 by the immensely rich philanthropist and cricket lover, the late Sir Paul Getty.



Turn left onto the lane (L29) and just before Lower Vicar's Farm go right, through a gate onto L23. The path goes behind the farm to a gate where you go $\frac{1}{2}$ left across a field studded with cowslips in the spring. Cross the next stile and continue $\frac{1}{2}$ left climbing to a bridleway (L19) and turn right.



You will reach a lane and go right, continuing straight past a signpost for 'Wormsley'. Once past the house that is just visible on your right, the lane will bear right to a little bit of south London in the chilterns (2). For Getty was so enamoured with cricket, after Mick Jagger introduced him to the game, that he built his own ground based on the Oval in 1992. From the lane you can't see a great deal and forking left on the bridleway does nothing to improve the view.

Once past the ground, the bridleway will narrow and, ignoring S7a, you carry on S7 until reaching a crossing path that is the Chiltern Way. Here turn right and go $\frac{1}{4}$ left over the field to a gate and stile. Go over the lane to another stile and $\frac{1}{2}$ left to a further one next to a 5bar gate.

Turn right onto the lane and quickly left before you reach a warning sign of the 'Keep Out' variety. The Chiltern Way shortly goes left but you must keep on SH4. This clear path passes a memorial and then winds through Blackmoor Wood.



Ignore a crossing track and then SH6 that goes left, and you will climb to meet SH5. Here bear right keeping on SH4 for a short distance before forking left on PY3 until you reach a driveway.

Turn left past a tennis court and go in front of a house to a wire fence where you turn right. The path bears left and reaches a road. Here go $\frac{1}{2}$ left signposted Nettlebed and Henley, and forward to the Fox & Hounds (P).



Described by CAMRA as having a rare interior of outstanding historic interest, the pub probably hasn't changed much since the Civil War's opposing armies allegedly observed a truce on the common on Christmas Day in 1643.



When you leave the pub, turn left, returning to the crossroads in the direction of Stokenchurch and Chinnor. Just past a second crossroads turn left onto the Oxfordshire Way. After ignoring W4 you continue downhill into trees, cross a stile and then go left on PY4. You will reach a tarmac drive past the Pyrtan Cat Hotel and a sawmill. This is Point A.

Shorter Walk from Point A.

For a shorter route back from the Pyrton Cat Hotel turn right onto PY16 a short way along the drive. After a wooden gate the path bears left as SH3. This path reaches a metal kissing gate and then goes ½ right uphill, eventually reaching another kissing gate, continuing up to a track, over a stile and ¼ right over a field to the road back to Cowleaze Wood.

To complete the longer walk turn right onto the Ridgeway that crosses the drive after approximately 700 yds / 640 mtrs. Walk along the track for about 1½ mls / 2.4 kms until going beneath a row of telegraph wires with the M40 clearly in view.

Go ¼ right to another kissing gate and then follow the clearly arrowed path to the edge of the wood. Turn left following the telegraph wires along the edge of the field adjacent to Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve (3). The reserve covers 400 acres / 162 ha and is composed of flower rich chalk grassland, beech woodland and juniper scrub. Although there are waymarked paths you are free to wander amongst the scarce flora and fauna that include orchids, butterflies and red kites.

Continue uphill through a field boundary, with outstanding views behind you, bearing right up to and through a gate. After following the pylons, the path will now deviate right along a tall wire fence then goes left steeply uphill. Continue through a metal 5bar gate to the road and left back to Cowleaze Wood.



Location:

SU726956
Explorer Map 171
Chiltern Hills West

Length:

Long Walk: 8½ mls / 13.6 kms
Shorter Walk: 7½ mls / 12 kms

Terrain:

A full of interest walk along clear paths but with two steep hills.

