

Ewelme

Water Cress Beds, Author's Grave, Two Historic Churches



Ewelme Water Cress Beds

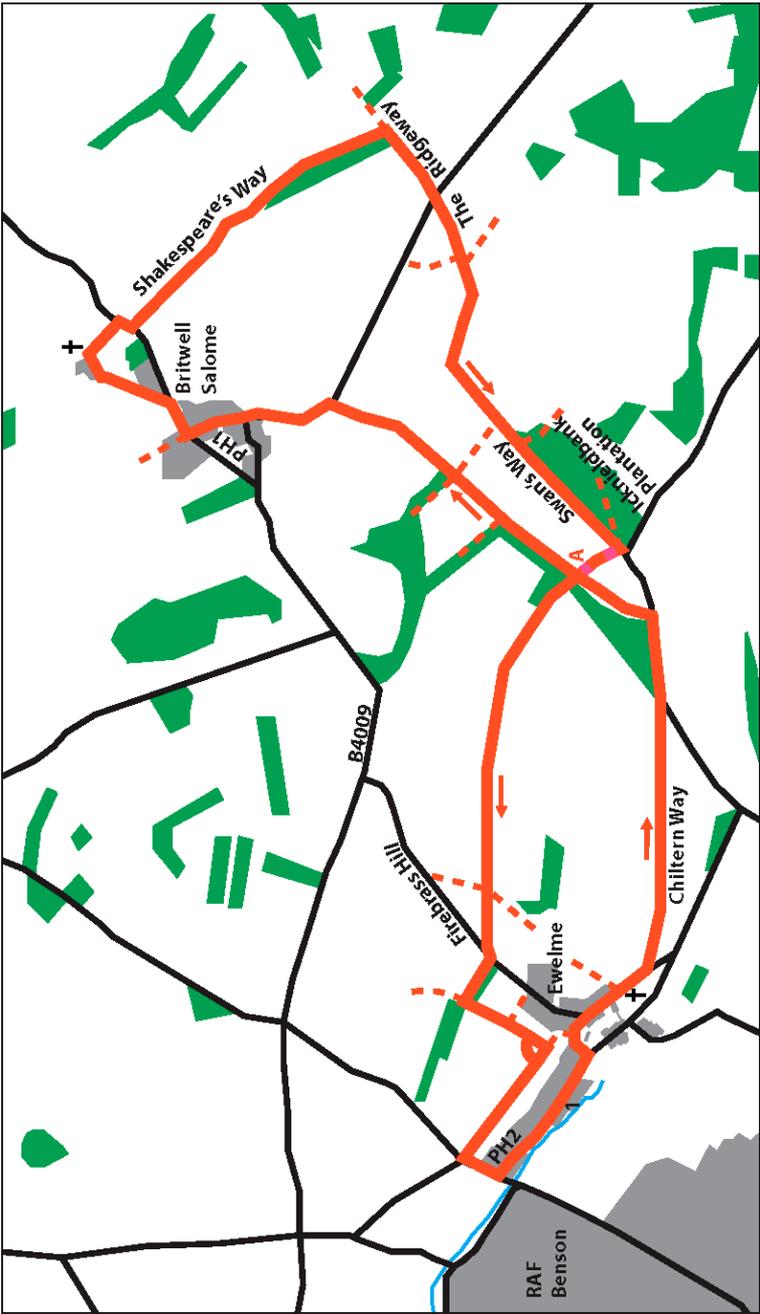
The Ewelme water cress beds are one of the many success stories for the Chiltern Society. Established in the late 18th century, the chalk stream running through the village was dammed and widened to form a slow running, shallow body of water suitable for cress production. After ceasing commercial trading in 1988 the site was prevented from deteriorating by local effort but proper restoration only began after the beds were purchased by the society in 2000.

There is now a visitor centre and the adjoining wetlands boast a rich diversity of wildlife. From the Visitor Centre (1) follow the stream up High Street.



By going left just after the village hall you follow Parsons Lane to St Mary's Church. Built c.1430 and almost as the builders left it, it is closely associated with the Chaucers.





Look out for the tomb of Thomas Chaucer (son of Geoffrey the poet) and Alice, Duchess of Suffolk, the poet's granddaughter.



Attached to the church are almshouses and a school. The author of 'Three Men In A Boat', Jerome K. Jerome, is buried in the churchyard, a very different location from his Black Country birthplace for this Freeman of Walsall.

From the church turn right on Parsons Lane, away from the village, past the rectory and then fork left uphill on the Chiltern Way.

The track narrows to a path and, when you emerge into open countryside, go straight ahead along a wire fence with flat farmland

to your left but glorious rolling hills on the right. After a short distance, look behind you for views of Didcot Power Station.



After dropping down to a lane, turn left following the Chiltern Way. Just after a plantation on your left take the bridleway marked 'Restricted Byway'.

When you reach the end of the plantation you will see a clear track in front of you in addition to a crossing track. This is Point A, where for a short walk you can turn left.

For the long walk, keeping straight on, you stay on this wide clear track. Ignore a path off to the left and a crossing path where the main track goes right, keep straight and you'll reach Monument Cottage and eventually a lane. Turn left and continue to a crossroads passing Foxington and its dovecot on the way.

Turn left to visit the village gastro pub (PH1), now called The Red Lion and getting very favourable reviews. If not, turn right. Ignoring the bridleway opposite, continue a short way looking out for a path on the left next to a road sign. Go ½ right (not over the cattle grid) keeping the fence / hedge on your right to a 5bar gate at the far end of the field.

Follow the lane to the left, past the pond and up to the church of St Nicholas, Britwell Salome. This quietly situated church dates from the 13th century but the very old churchyard yew suggests that it is predated by a much older structure. The surprisingly modern organ comes from Stokenchurch Methodist church.



Leaving through the main gate, turn left past the Old Rectory and through a 5bar gate marked Castle Hill in horseshoes next to a cattle grid.



When the track turns right up to stables, keep straight on to a stile onto the road from Watlington. Turn right and quickly left at Cooper's Farm. Continue straight through a long shaded section that narrows to a path before reaching The Ridgeway after just over $\frac{3}{4}$ mile / 1.2 kms.

Turn right onto The Ridgeway. You will cross a lane on this wide track and, when The Ridgeway goes left 350 yds / 300 mtrs from the lane, you keep straight onto the Swan's Way.

After a further 800 yds / 730 mtrs the wide track goes right but you keep straight on through Icknielbank Plantation.

When you reach a car parking area turn right, returning to Point A (on the Chiltern Way). On the long walk when you reach Point A, keep straight on.

Long and Short Walk from Point A

The track rises by converted and existing barns and then heads in the direction of Didcot Power Station. The main track goes right 700 yds / 640 mtrs from the barns, but you keep straight along a narrow path and eventually, after a crossing path, you head uphill through elder and hawthorn bushes.

On reaching Firebrass Hill turn left and quickly right. In the autumn you can collect damsons on this restricted byway that's blocked by a large tree trunk.

When it ends turn left and keep straight with a large hedge on your right, parallel with Firebrass Hill on your left.

When you reach a 5bar gate turn right onto a permissive footpath. This arcs and joins a bridleway where you turn right. (Alternatively, continue straight from the 5bar gate, passing converted barns and turn right at The Hyde on the narrow bridleway).



At the end of the bridleway turn left onto a lane with RAF Benson just visible in front of you on the right. Go past Eyres Close and you reach the Shepherds Hut (PH2) and the water cress beds.

Starting Point: Watercress Beds Visitor Centre

*SU641916
Explorer Map 171
Chiltern Hills West*

Length:

*Long Walk: 7¾ miles / 12.47 kilometres
Short Walk: 3¾ miles / 6.04 kilometres*

Terrain:

These are easy undulating walks through attractive Oxfordshire farmland.