

The River Misbourne

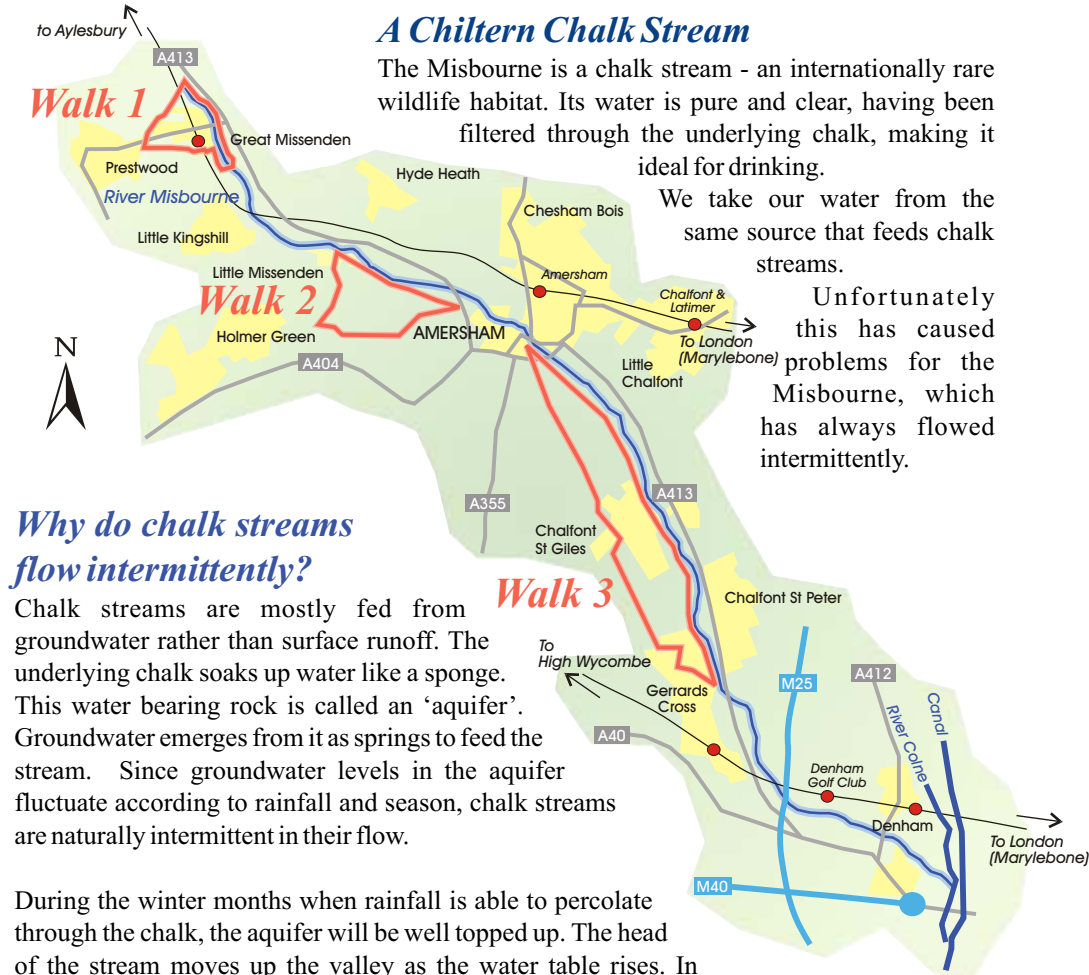
The River Misbourne rises above Great Missenden in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It flows for 17 miles (27km) through Little Missenden, Amersham and the Chalfonts to Denham, where it meets the River Colne.

A Chiltern Chalk Stream

The Misbourne is a chalk stream - an internationally rare wildlife habitat. Its water is pure and clear, having been filtered through the underlying chalk, making it ideal for drinking.

We take our water from the same source that feeds chalk streams.

Unfortunately this has caused problems for the Misbourne, which has always flowed intermittently.



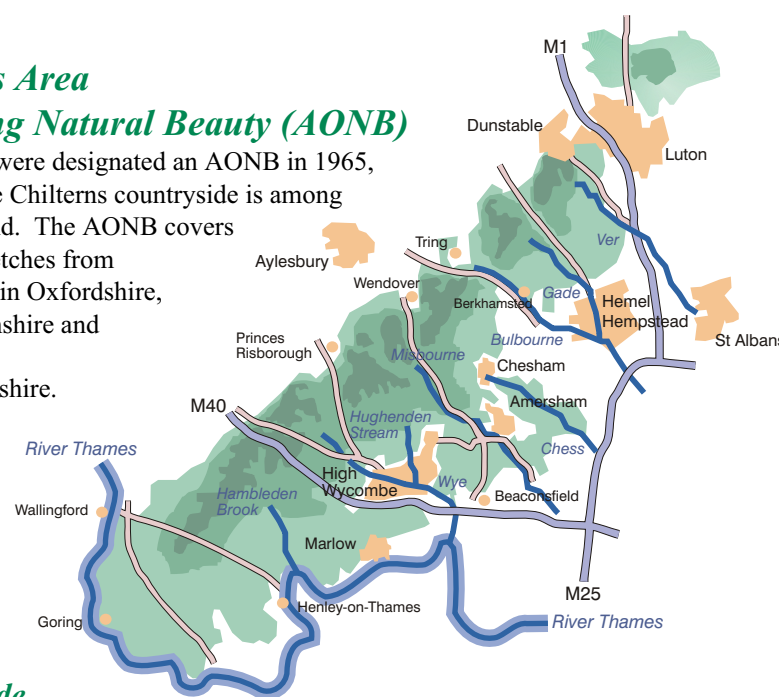
Why do chalk streams flow intermittently?

Chalk streams are mostly fed from groundwater rather than surface runoff. The underlying chalk soaks up water like a sponge. This water bearing rock is called an 'aquifer'. Groundwater emerges from it as springs to feed the stream. Since groundwater levels in the aquifer fluctuate according to rainfall and season, chalk streams are naturally intermittent in their flow.

During the winter months when rainfall is able to percolate through the chalk, the aquifer will be well topped up. The head of the stream moves up the valley as the water table rises. In summer, rainfall does not percolate into the chalk as it is taken up by plants and lost through evaporation. The water table drops and the head of the stream moves down the valley, leaving the top section of the stream dry. This top section is called a 'winterbourne', because it only flows after the winter rains.

The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

The Chiltern Hills were designated an AONB in 1965, recognising that the Chilterns countryside is among the finest in England. The AONB covers 833 sq. km and stretches from Goring on Thames in Oxfordshire, across Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire to Hitchin in Hertfordshire.



The Chilterns Countryside Code

- Enjoy, care for and learn about the Chilterns
- Respect countryside activities, such as farming and forestry
- Keep to public rights of way
- Leave all gates as you find them
- Please keep the route tidy and take your litter home
- Show respect to other users of the countryside
- Try and visit the Chilterns without using your car
- Please do not pick wildflowers
- Support the local economy and buy local products and services

For further information contact the Chilterns AONB Office, 8 Summerleys Road, Princes Risborough, Bucks HP27 9DT
Tel: 01844 271300 Fax: 01844 271301 E-mail: office@chilternsaonb.org



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Produced by the Chilterns Conservation Board

Walks in the Misbourne Valley

Three circular walks celebrating the return of the River Misbourne



Walk 1 (3 miles/5km)

Walk 2 (4½ miles/7½ km)

Walk 3 (10 miles/15km or 6 miles/10km)



An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Walk 1: Now you see it, now you don't

A 3 mile (5km) circular walk around Great Missenden

Allow about 1½ hours walking time

The start.

By train: Great Missenden station is on the Marylebone to Aylesbury Chiltern Line. See the map for the route to the start of the walk.

By car: Leave the A413 at Great Missenden roundabout. Continue for 200 yards down Link Road and park in the car park on the right. Note the interpretation panel about the Misbourne on the public convenience building



--- Walk route (please note that this route is not waymarked)

--- Other public rights of way

Refreshments

There are a number of pubs and restaurants in Great Missenden and at Mobwell Pond

Interest points

Numbered anti-clockwise from the start

- 1 As you walk towards Mobwell Pond see if you can see the river on your left. This is the winterbourne section (see explanation under The River Misbourne). Mobwell Pond is said to be the source of the Misbourne. However, it has been known to start above this point at Rignall Farm, as prior to World War I a boy could earn a penny or two pumping the farmer's kitchen dry.
- 2 At the top of the field look back at the typical Chiltern landscape, one of rolling chalk hills, clumps of beech woodland, and arable and pastoral farmland.
- 3 On leaving Angling Spring Wood you look down on Great Missenden. In the last 100 years, Great Missenden has changed from a small village centred on farming and cottage industries to the busy, much larger commuter settlement that you see today.
- 4 At the end of the unmade residential road you come across the oldest inn in the village, The George. This timber-framed building was once the court house. Once in the High Street you will see other buildings up to 450 years old.
- 5 From the bridge at Warren Water you look towards Missenden Abbey. This building is on the site of the original abbey, founded by Sir William de Missenden in about 1133 and used as a monastery for 400 years. The Abbey was tragically gutted by fire in 1985, but has been restored and is now a conference and adult education centre. The area to the south of Warren Water is open access land - you may wish to explore.
- 6 When you reach the road, you may like to visit the Church of St Peter & Paul. Turn right and walk up over the bridge. The church dates back to the medieval period and has 8 bells, the oldest dating back to 1692.
- 7 The river runs underground here where it has been culverted. It may be possible to open it up for wildlife and people. Do you think this should happen?



Church of St Peter and Paul

Rescuing the river

Over the course of the 20th century a series of pumping stations was opened to tap the high quality groundwater for the public and industrial supply. Water demand has increased over the years and the level of water abstraction rose to meet this demand. This affected river flows and in drought years the river often dried up along much of its course. Thus a river that had once supported fishponds, mills, plentiful wildlife and recreation disappeared.



Mobwell Pond

The River Rescue Scheme

In 1990 the National Rivers Authority declared that the River Misbourne was one of the 20 worst affected rivers nationally through over abstraction. A Rescue Scheme was developed by the Environment Agency, Three Valleys Water and Thames Water Utilities.

In 1997 Phase 1 of the scheme began with the building of a new pipeline from the Colne Valley to Amersham pumping station. This pipeline brought groundwater for the public supply from sources that were environmentally sustainable. Abstraction was then reduced at key pumping stations in the valley, allowing groundwater levels to gradually recover. The first phase of the rescue scheme has been completed. The river is now being monitored to see if a second phase of work will be needed.

use water wisely



It must always be remembered that the Misbourne is a chalk stream that may dry up in periods of low rainfall. We can help keep the Misbourne flowing by using water wisely e.g. by collecting rainwater in a butt for garden use and by having showers instead of baths.

These walks are dedicated to the memory of Vic Wotton, who tirelessly campaigned for the recovery of the River Misbourne.

Walk 2: Traditional Chiltern industries

A 4¼-mile (7½ km) circular walk through Little Missenden

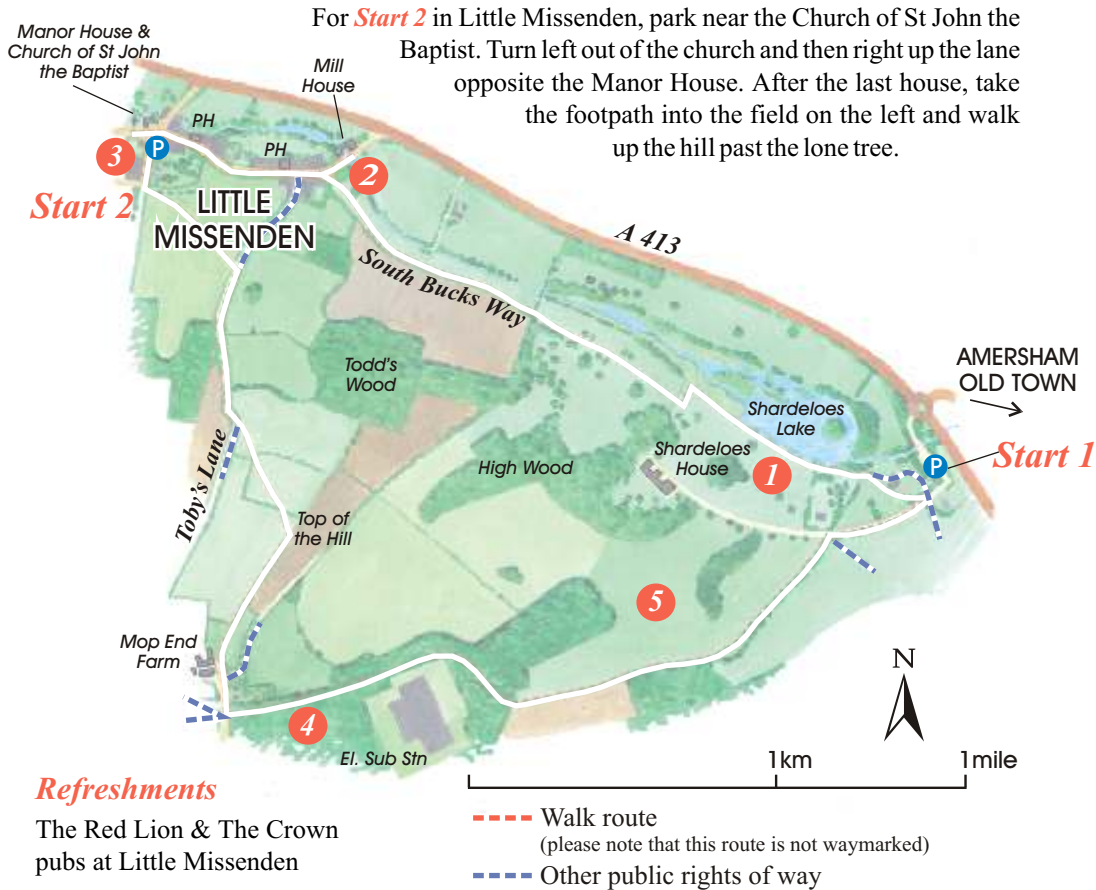
Allow about 2 ½ hours walking time

The start

Either start at Shardeloes (*Start 1*) or in Little Missenden (*Start 2*)

By car: For Shardeloes come off the A413 at the roundabout north west of Amersham Old Town, and take the exit signposted to Shardeloes. Go down the hill and park in the lay-by on the right. You will see the South Bucks Way signpost next to the post box. Walk into the Amersham Cricket Club and follow the map.

For *Start 2* in Little Missenden, park near the Church of St John the Baptist. Turn left out of the church and then right up the lane opposite the Manor House. After the last house, take the footpath into the field on the left and walk up the hill past the lone tree.



Refreshments

The Red Lion & The Crown pubs at Little Missenden



Shardeloes Lake, showing some of the many birds you can see

Interest points

Numbered anti-clockwise from Shardeloes

1 You are in Shardeloes parkland, which was laid out by Humphrey Repton in 1793. The lake is the home of many types of water fowl and a good place to do some bird watching.



Mill House, Little Missenden

Shardeloes House was designed by Stiff Leadbetter and finished in 1766. The house and stable block were converted to multiple residences in the 1960s.

2 On reaching the road at Little Missenden, turn right to take a look at Little Missenden Mill House a little way up on the left. There is evidence that the Misbourne used to have about 11 water mills, though none remain in working order. This mill house was called Sibley's Mill and its chimney still remains although it is a private house.

In addition to milling, there was a productive watercress and fish industry along the Misbourne. With the coming of the railway in 1892, fresh produce could be taken to London. Both industries no longer exist.

3 Little Missenden remains a true English village with a church, manor house, pubs, farms and cottages. Before reaching the church, you will pass a Jacobean Manor House on the right. The Church of St John the Baptist is famous for its 13th century wall paintings that were only uncovered in 1931. Little Missenden may once have supported cottage industries such as straw plaiting and lace making.

4 The Chilterns was home to traditional woodland industries in the 19th and early 20th century. Woodlands like this one were once used by bodgers, highly skilled Chiltern craftsmen turning chair legs, tent pegs and wheel-spokes on pole-lathes. The legs they "mead from split 'ood" were best, because those made from the sound wood "ull break as soon as look at ye."

Bodgers had an almost nomadic existence moving between plantations and managing the trees to ensure a continuous supply. The furniture industry in High Wycombe took off at that time. However, with mechanisation, the bodgers' skills became redundant and dwindled after World War I.

5 Farming is one industry that still remains; though increased mechanisation means that it now employs fewer people. With about three quarters of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in agriculture, farming has a huge influence on our landscape and wildlife.

Walk 3: 'Paradise Regained'

A 10 mile (15km) circular walk visiting Milton's Cottage, with a shorter 6 mile (10km) option

Allow about 5 hours walking time for the long route and 3½ hours for the short route

Start from either Chalfont St Peter (*Start 1*) or Amersham Old Town (*Start 2*)
The shorter route starts in Old Amersham (*Start 2*) and goes anti-clockwise.

The start

(Start 1) Chalfont St Peter. **By car:** Turn off the A413 into the Chalfont St Peter Community Centre and Football Club. Park in this car park or turn right past the recycling banks and park in the lay-by on the right. Walk along the lane past the tennis club.

(Start 2) Amersham Old Town. **By train:** Take the Metropolitan line of London Underground or Chiltern Railway to Amersham. You will need to walk down from Amersham-on-the-Hill to the Old Town adding about 2 miles to the total distance.

By car: You can park in the Pay and Display Car Park at the end of the High Street or on the High Street.

Refreshments

Chalfont St Peter, Chalfont St Giles and Amersham

--- Walk route
(please note that this route is not waymarked)
--- Other public rights of way

Interest points

Numbered anti-clockwise from Chalfont St Peter

1 This section of the Misbourne sits above the water table and is called a 'perched' section. This makes it more prone to drying up.

2 Chalfont St Giles sheltered John Milton and his family from the Plague in 1665. Milton's Cottage is now a museum and it is where he finished Paradise Lost and started Paradise Regained. The house is open between March and October, call 01494 872313 for more information.



Milton's Cottage

3 Chalk streams are indeed paradise regained for much wildlife. Stop at Chalfont Mill (disused) to look at the river. The clean gravelly bed is home to brown trout and many invertebrates. The surrounding meadows attract marshland bird species such as snipe and teal. Plants such as mint, sedge, water crowfoot and water forget-me-not are returning to the river.

4 There are two parts to Amersham; the Old Town in the Misbourne Valley and newer Amersham-on-the-Hill. The Old Town's High Street is one of the most delightful streets in the Chilterns with many fine frontages and a number of old coaching inns such as the King's Arms. Dominating the old town is the Parish Church of St Mary's and the charming Market Hall built for the town by the Drake family in 1682.

5 The route now climbs over the rolling Chiltern Hills, through woods and farmland. Follow the map carefully between Upper Bottom House Farm and Chalfont St Peter as there are several footpath junctions.

6 The infamous Judge Jeffreys, nicknamed the Hanging Judge, is reputed to have held court at the Greyhound Inn at Chalfont St Peter during the 1680s.



Market Hall, Amersham



Water vole

Turn left here for shorter loop