

Whitchurch-on-Thames Circular Walk: Water, Woods and Hills

Starting by the River Thames, this 6 mile walk takes you through the historic village of Whitchurch and up into the Chiltern Hills. This varied walk takes in the best of Chilterns scenery, passing through beech woodlands and open countryside offering magnificent views over the Thames Valley.

Distance: 5 - 6 miles (2+ hours)

P Parking and toilets: There is free car parking and toilets at the Recreation Ground car park in Pangbourne. At the end of Thames Avenue turn left and immediately right down a narrow lane between houses.

Public Transport: Pangbourne Station is a 5 minute walk from Whitchurch Bridge, following the public footpath.

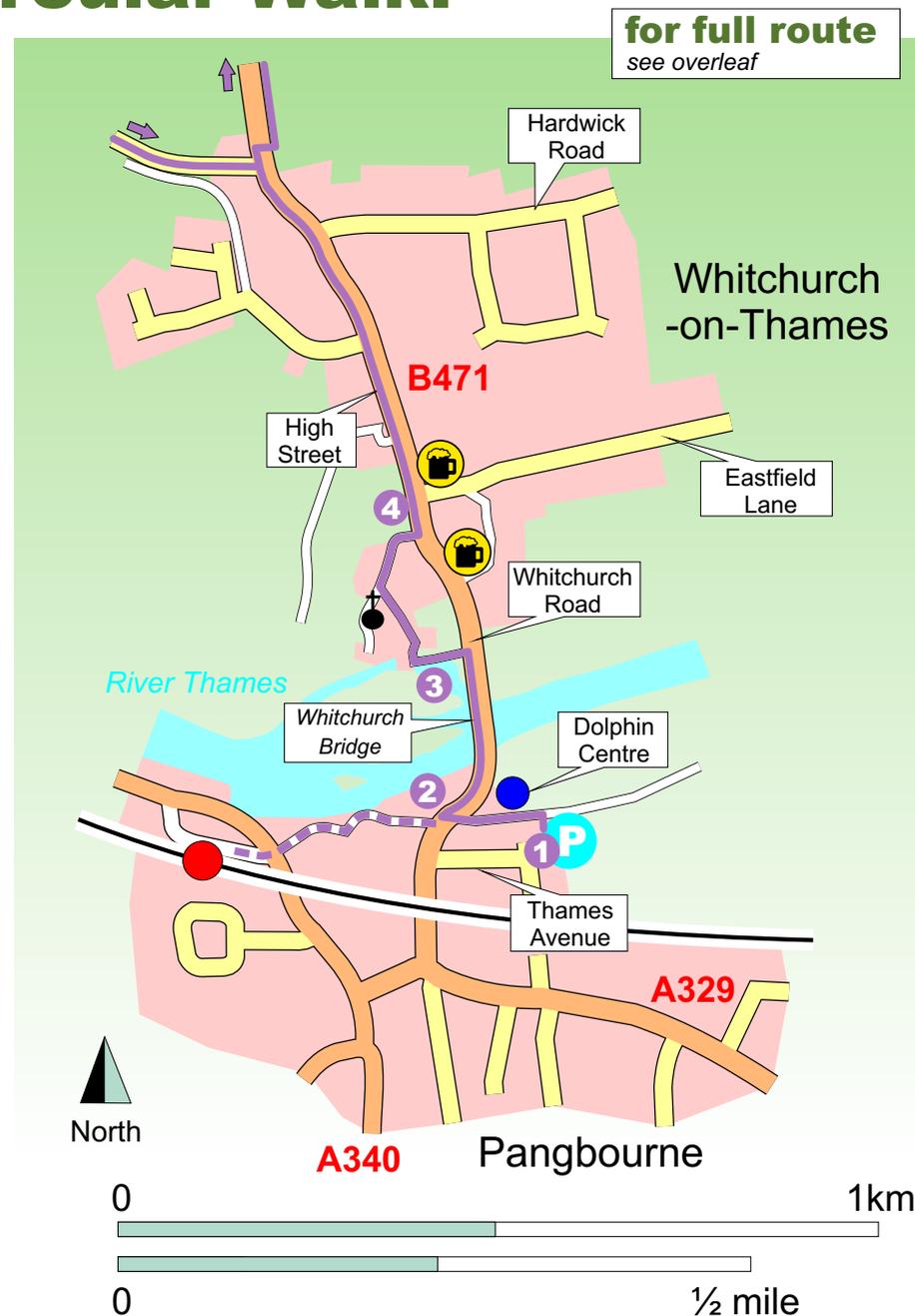
Refreshments: There are two pubs in Whitchurch, The Greyhound (tel 0118 9842161) and The Ferryboat (tel 0118 9842161). There are cafes, a delicatessen, pubs and shops in Pangbourne.

Access Information: This is a moderate walk with some long steady climbs. There are no stiles along the walk but there is one very steep section of the Thames Path (near point 10 on the map) which is slippery when wet.

Route:

- 1 Go through the kissing gate at the far end of the car park and head towards the Dolphin Centre by Whitchurch bridge, either on the track immediately to your left or through the meadows.
- 2 Cross over the road with care, then follow the pavement across the Toll bridge. The original toll bridge was built in 1792. The current Whitchurch Bridge is the third on the site, an iron structure erected in 1902.
- 3 Just after the toll house turn left (following the Thames Path National Trail sign), entering the historic area of Mill Pond. The Mill is mentioned in the Domesday Book and the wharf would have been bustling with barges transporting corn from the mill and wood from the nearby timber yards. Turn right after Church Cottages, down a narrow alleyway to the Church. Go through the other end of the Church yard and follow the drive to the High Street.

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- 4** Turn left and walk up the High Street. Just past the art gallery the road narrows and there is no pavement for 100m, take care. Continue up Whitchurch Hill, crossing over the road to follow the footpath on the raised bank the other side. Cross back over the road opposite the war memorial.
- 5** 50m after the War Memorial take the footpath to your left, then bear left again and go through a kissing gate into open fields. Follow the footpath along the edge of the wood.
- 6** At Beech Farm cross over the entrance drive and follow the footpath along a field edge and through a kissing gate into the woods. Follow the path through the woods ignoring paths to the right. Come out of the woods and cross a field heading towards Coombe End Farm. Follow the footpath through a couple of fields until it brings you out on the farm track. Turn right and follow the farm track to the road.
- 7** Turn left and follow the minor road. After half a mile the view opens out on your left and you can see right across the Thames Valley towards the North Wessex Downs.
- 8** Take the bridleway on the left through the woods and follow it all the way down to Hartslock Nature Reserve.
- 9** Turn left into Hartslock Nature Reserve and follow the path up the hill to the bench where you can enjoy spectacular views across the Thames to the North Wessex Downs beyond. Continue down the hill and out of the nature reserve. Turn left, following the Thames Path National Trail (bridleway) all the way back to Whitchurch Hill.
- 10** There is a very steep dip at point (10) which can be slippery when wet. At the top of the dip you get an excellent view of Basildon Park, a National Trust property nearby. From Whitchurch Hill retrace your steps.

