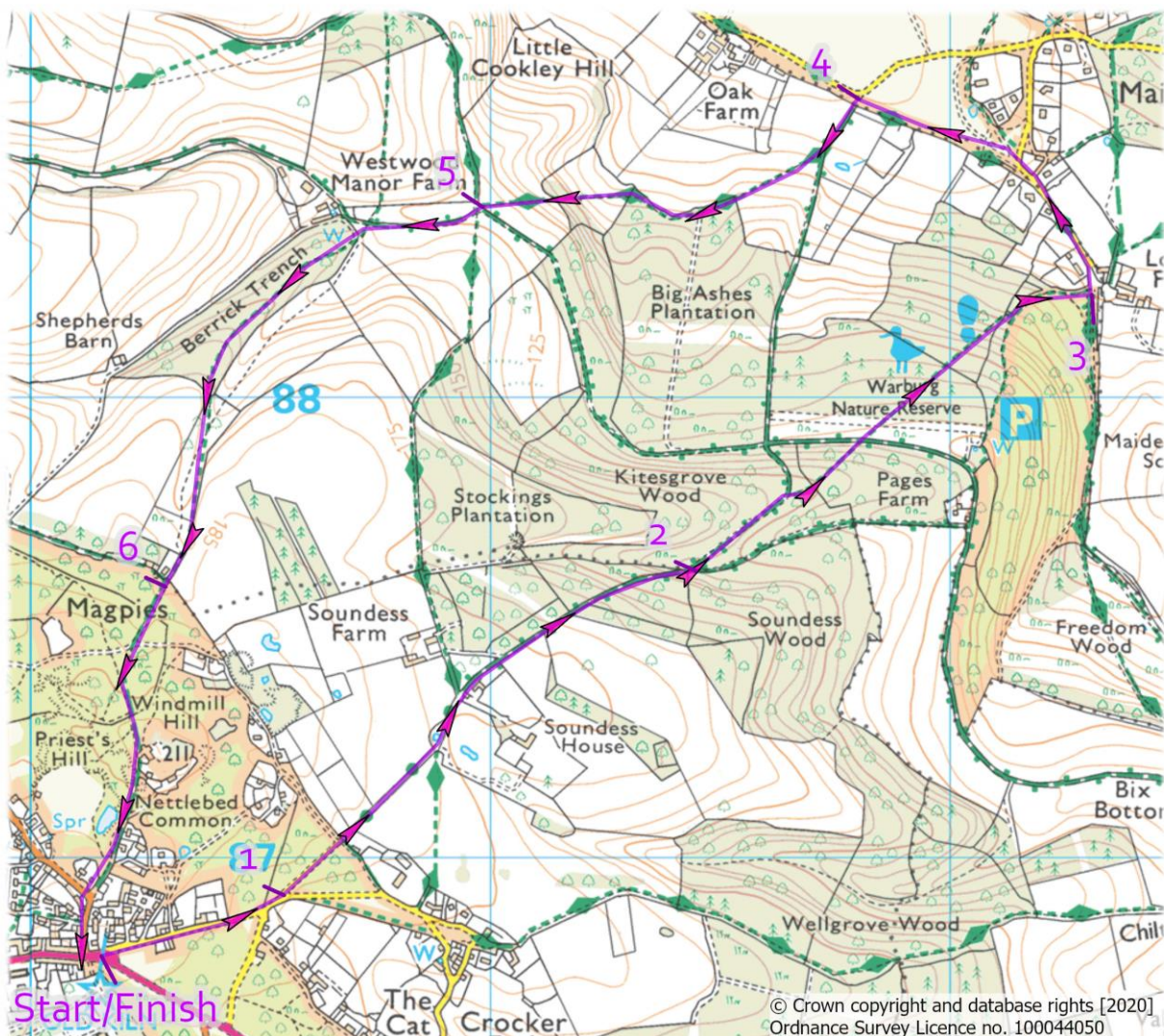


Nettlebed to Warburg Nature Reserve Walk
By Stephen Fox, Chiltern Society

Summary

This beautiful scenic stile-free walk is centred on the historic Oxfordshire village of Nettlebed. It features two commons, a nature reserve and the wonderful Chiltern landscape of beech woodlands, chalk grassland and rich wildlife. Take the many opportunities on route to enjoy the great views.

- Length:** 4.5 miles
Terrain: Easy walking on good paths which can be muddy at times. Two moderate climbs and eleven gates to pass through.
Start & finish: The Old Kiln, Nettlebed RG9 5BA. Grid Reference SU 701 868
Food & drink: The White Hart pub and the Field Kitchen café in Nettlebed. None on route.
Maps: OS Explorer 171, Chiltern Society 2
Parking: Park around the Green, details as above. An alternative start point is the car park at Warburg Nature Reserve RG9 6BJ. Grid ref: SU 720 879
Local transport: Bus Service X38 runs between Oxford and Reading on Monday to Saturday.



Route

From The Old Kiln road, turn left along The Green and follow the narrow road to a turning on the left signposted to Magpies.

Waypoint 1 – Turn left, walk along the lane, ignore the turning on the left to Magpies and continue straight ahead past the signs for Soundness House for a further 400m to a junction by the entrance gates to the house. Continue straight ahead down a Restricted Byway into Warburg Nature Reserve for a further 300m to a path junction.

Waypoint 2 - Cross over a track and take path up through the trees, then bear right at waymark post onto a footpath (marked SW23). This leads down into a second valley and a T-junction with a hedged track. Turn right and after about 30 metres turn left through wooden gate. Follow the path steeply uphill passing a memorial seat, a cleared area (once a rifle range), a second cleared area and another memorial seat. Go through wooden gate and follow steep path eventually coming out of the reserve onto Warmcombe Lane and the Oxfordshire Way. Turn left and come almost immediately to a track junction and nearby Lodge Farm.

Waypoint 3 – Turn left, follow the lane past the cottages for about 300 metres and bear left at junction to arrive onto the expanse of Russell's Water Common. Turn left on a track along the grass edge of the common for 400m to a road.

Waypoint 4 - Turn left away from the road to join the Chiltern Way. Walk along a hedged flint lane for 140m and fork right into a field. Drop down under the cables heading for a path just to the left of the corner of the woods, part of Warburg Nature Reserve. Follow the path along the top edge of the wood and through a gate into a field. Bear half left down the field, through a gate and descend steep steps to pass through a gate into a field. Bear half right down it and go through a gate at the bottom to a junction of lanes (The Chiltern Way and The Chiltern Way Extension).

Waypoint 5 – Leave the Chiltern Way and go straight ahead along hedged bridleway for about 200 metres to a gate on the left just before reaching Westwood Manor Farm. Turn left through the kissing gate, go straight up field edge and bear right through a wooden gate into wood (Berwick Trench). Continue up through the wood to leave by gate into a field and go diagonally across it and through a gate in the left-hand corner into a garden. Continue past a pond and house onto Bridleway.

Waypoint 6 - Go straight ahead along the wide track for 240m and bear left up through the woods. Very carefully follow the white arrows, avoid side tracks but stay on the meandering bridleway veering left to the highest point of the wood and the gates to the Thames Water pumping station. Turn right down the lane passing 3 houses before turning left along an unsurfaced lane. Turn right into Chapel Lane and follow this through the houses to reach The Green and the parking area.

Points of Interest

Nettlebed: Nobody is sure where the name originates but there are a couple of good theories. One is that Roman soldiers rubbed nettles on their limbs to keep warm on marches and the other is that nettles were used in the production of sheets and table cloths. However, what Nettlebed was most famous for was the manufacture of bricks, tiles and pottery. There was a plentiful supply of quality clay which allowed this industry to thrive from medieval times to the 20th century. At the starting point is the Grade II listed bottle kiln used for making bricks. Probably built in the late 17th century, it would have been one of a number in the area. It was converted in 1927 to burn lime which ceased in 1938. It then fell into disrepair but was restored in 1975. By the bus shelter there are a pair of puddingstones and an information board.

Warburg Nature Reserve: With flower-rich grasslands and majestic woodlands, this is one of the largest nature reserves owned by Bucks, Berks and Oxon Wildlife Trust. It has a visitor centre, picnic area, bird hides and a wealth of fauna and flora, including 15 species of orchid. It's home to an incredible variety of

habitats sheltering thousands of species. In spring the woodland is awash with spectacular bluebells and wood anemones. In May and June the reserve has a superb dawn chorus. When summer comes the wide, sunny rides and open glades of chalk grassland are full of summer flowers, including pyramidal orchids, as well as swathes of aromatic wild marjoram and thyme. During the autumn there are glorious colours throughout the tree canopy, while down below grow the Chiltern gentians and an incredible 900 species of fungi. In winter, visitors can enjoy the magical frost along the valley bottom.

Gate installations - 8 of the gates on this route were installed by Chiltern Society Path Maintenance Volunteers. They replaced some notoriously difficult stiles and were funded by the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE).