

# Captain's Wood, Chesham

With **Andrew Clark**

This wonderful, varied walk takes in ancient field patterns and hedges, old earthworks and the home of a famous author, as well as looking at the work carried out by Chiltern Society volunteers.

- START:** The Black Horse Inn, Chesham Vale, Bucks HP5 3NS. Grid ref SP 963 045. The landlord has given permission to park at the far end of the car park
- DISTANCE:** 5.7 miles, with c140m of ascent
- TERRAIN:** An easy walk, with two gentle climbs and one steep descent
- MAPS:** OS Explorer 181 and Chiltern Society 8 and 17
- REFRESHMENTS:** None on the walk, but the landlord of the Black Horse would be delighted to serve you some!
- PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** No direct bus service to the start. Buses 149/194 do, however, provide a service to Bellingdon. Please check timetables.

## Route

Exit the pub car park and turn right down the road for c100m.

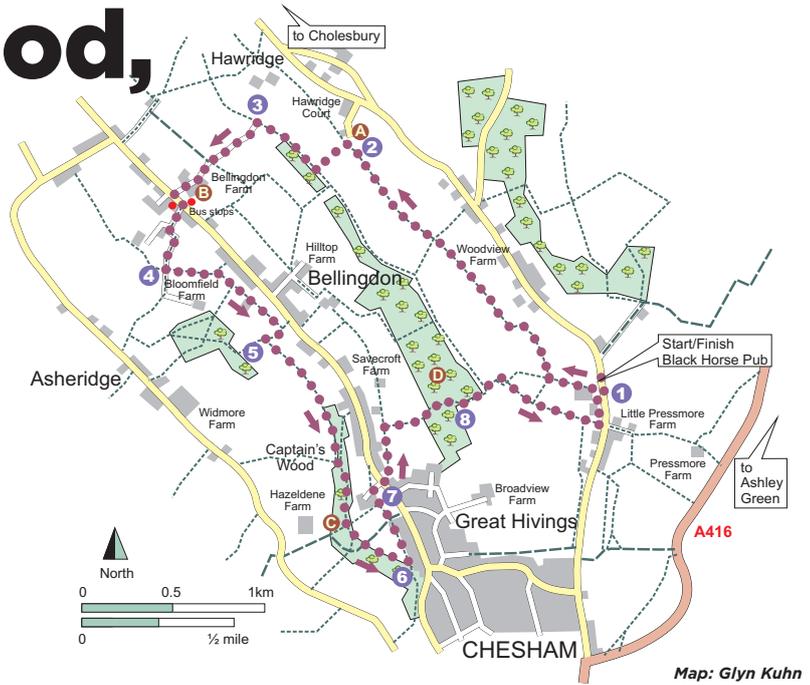
1. Turn right over a stile, continue ahead to cross the next one and then follow the transmission cables up to the top of the hill. Go over the stile on the right into the next field. Turn right and continue uphill, keeping to the left of the hedge. Follow the field edge round to the left to a gap in the hedgerow and turn right through it. Continue straight across the middle of two fields to a kissing gate. Go through it and the next one directly ahead.
2. Turn left and follow the hedgerow, passing through two further gates, all the way down to the bottom of the hill. Turn right and follow the valley floor for 400m to cross a stile to a wide track: Hawridge Lane.
3. Turn left along the track as it climbs gently and then continue to a busy road. Cross with care, turn left along the verge and then right into Two Gates Lane. After 100m bear left and follow the lane as it bends left and then right. Continue for c150m to a kissing gate on the left.
4. Go through it and across the middle of the field to the next gate. On the other side, bear diagonally left to a gate in the corner of the field. Go through it and stay in the same general direction past the next four gates to meet a wide track. Turn right along the track and where it bends to the left, keep straight ahead through a gate. The path then emerges at the top of a field.

## Points of Interest

The Black Horse pub is over 500 years old and reputed to be the oldest in the Chilterns. The current building dates from the 18th century. Mind your head on the low beams!

In medieval times, most of the land in Chesham Vale was farmed using an open-field system, where there was a mixture of common fields and narrow strips. These strips, sometimes called lynchets, were usually cultivated by the tenants of the Lord of the Manor. This area is also known for its ancient hedgerows, some of which could be 1,000 years old. Recently they were the subject of a survey carried out by local people on behalf of the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Biodiversity Partnership.

- A Hawridge:** To the right of the second gate are the grounds of Hawridge Court, a medieval manor house dating from the 13th century. It's enclosed by an earlier ringwork, comprising a single rampart and ditch. Hawridge gets its name from the Anglo-Saxon *Aucrug* which means 'ridge frequented by hawks'.
- B Hawridge Lane:** On the left at the top of the hill is Animal Farm. This is a small farm producing a wide variety of free-range fresh and frozen meat. Further along on the left are Bellingdon Farm Cottages. They are



5. Turn left and follow the hedgerow along the top of the hill for over 800m. Just before a hedgerow joins from the valley floor, bear left into Captain's Wood. Stay on the wide track for another 800m, ignoring all paths left and right and always maintaining the same height.
6. The path then sweeps to the right by a line of garages on the brow of the hill. Here, turn sharply left and go gently uphill to a playing field. Keep to the left of a playground and cross to the far right-hand corner of the field. Go past a barrier on the right to an access road. Turn left, go through the smaller gate and continue ahead. Just before the path swings to the left, turn right through a large metal field gate. Go through the smaller gate directly opposite into a field. Bear left across the corner of the field and over a stile. Stay in the same direction, bear to the right of a paddock and go through a gate onto the drive to Mount Nugent Farm.
7. Turn right down the drive to a busy road. Cross it, go through a kissing gate opposite and follow the wide track round to the left. After 200m, follow the track round to the right. Go past a field gate and stile, and continue to the entrance of a wood. Go over the stile and then straight ahead for c170m.
8. As the main track swings to the left, bear right to exit the wood at a field edge. Follow the fence down to a kissing gate and onwards to meet a byway. Turn right to reach a busy, narrow road. Taking great care, turn left along it to return to the Black Horse.

Grade II listed and date from the 17th century. DH Lawrence rented one of them between August 1914 and January 1915, during which time he wrote *The Rainbow*.

- B Bellingdon:** The walk passes both Bellingdon Farm and Bloomfield Farm. Like many farmhouses in the area they were built during the 16th and 17th centuries and both are Grade II listed. Bellingdon is famous for its brickworks, the last one of which, HG Matthews, is nearby.
- C Captain's Wood:** There is little evidence to show how the Wood got its name; perhaps it came from a local landowner, Captain Spratly. The Spratly Islands in the South China Sea were named after him. Captain's Wood is an ancient woodland and, since 1995, a designated nature reserve. Its lower bank is one of the most diverse hedgerows in the Chilterns and may date back to the 7th century. Much of the top edge is hornbeam, which was grown for firewood. Since spring 2013, the Chiltern Society has been organising regular conservation working parties to ensure the Wood is kept open for all.
- D Ramscoat Wood:** At the entrance to the Wood were the Baker family brickworks, which, it is said, made the finest bricks in Chesham. They were used in the construction of Park Royal Underground Station in London.