

Dancers End Nature Reserve walk

With **Andrew Clark & Mick Jones**

This walk is about discovering the autumn treats that await you in and around Dancers End Nature Reserve. Look out for Chiltern gentians, beechnuts, various types of fungi and, if you're really lucky, the sight of edible dormice collecting sufficient food to see them through winter hibernation. You can also enjoy the display of autumn colours in both Dancers End Valley and Wendover Woods.

START: The Café in the Woods, Wendover Woods (nearest postcode HP22 5NQ). Grid ref SP 890 090. Park in Wendover Woods pay & display car park.

An alternative start point is the Dancers End Nature Reserve car park, Bottom Road, Tring HP23 6LB. Grid ref SP 904 088

DISTANCE: 4.7 miles with 590ft of ascent

TERRAIN: A moderate stile-free walk on easy, but sometimes muddy, tracks. One steep climb

MAPS: OS Explorer 181, Chiltern Society 18

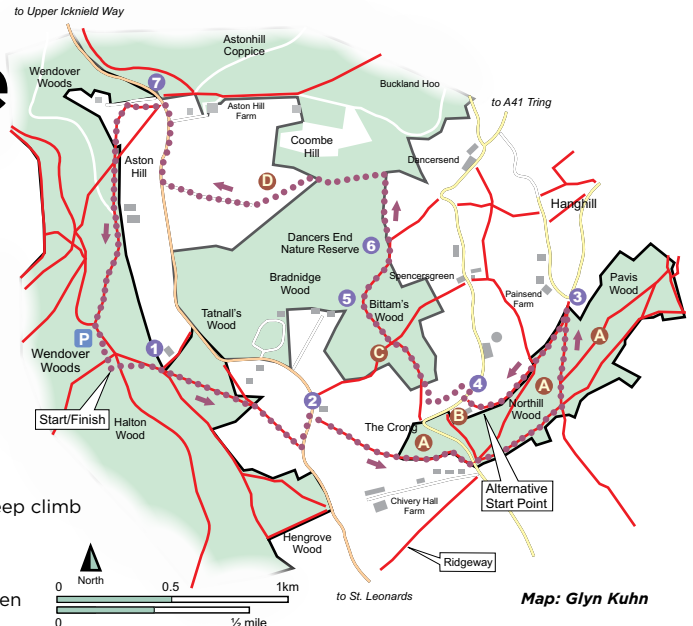
REFRESHMENTS: The Café in the Woods. None on route

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: None at the start. Bus 50 runs between Aylesbury and Halton (Mon- Sat), which could add 20 minutes to the walk. On Sundays Bus 50 runs between Aylesbury and Ivinghoe and stops nearby on the B4009.

Route

From the front entrance of the café, take the path on the left-hand side of the building to the exit road. Turn left along it for 230m to where the road bends to the right.

1. Take the second path on the left past the elevated electricity transformer and follow the winding woodland path to a gate. Go through it, cross the middle of the field to pass the next gate and onto a road. Turn left along the road for 140m to a gate on the right signposted the Icknield Way.
2. Go through the gate and continue along the brideway while taking in the lovely views on the left towards Dancers End, Tring and Ivinghoe Beacon. Pass through two more gates, enter Black Wood and stay on the brideway to meet a lane. Cross directly over it and follow the Ridgeway for 500m through Northill Wood to the start of Pavis Wood, where a signpost shows a footpath crossing. Turn left on the footpath and after 100m fork left down a sunken path to the bottom of the hill.
3. Just before reaching a lane, turn sharp left on a brideway for 300m to a four-way path junction. Do not follow the brideway uphill to the left, but continue straight ahead on the footpath for a further 300m to reach a field gate. Go through it into the yard of Dancers End pumping station. Bear right past the offices and go through the brick gateway, noting post 1 of the Tree Trail on the right. Go down the access drive to a lane and turn right along it for 30m to a gate on the left.
4. Go through this gate and the one to the left to enter Dancersend Nature Reserve. Follow the permissive path along the valley floor, go through a gate and stay in the same direction as the line of overhead cables. The



Map: Glyn Kuhn

path then bends right under the cables and down to a gate. Go through it, take the steps ahead and follow the purple Tree Trail markers past posts 2 and 3 to the top of the hill. At the junction with a wide grassy ride, continue ahead to the public footpath opposite and follow it for 250m to meet a sunken track.

5. Turn right downhill for 300m and where the track bends to the right to become a major track, turn left towards a metal gate. Go through the gate on the left and ahead for a few metres to see the information board. (If you have 20 minutes or so to spare, follow the short circular Wildlife Walk as shown on the board). Return through the gate to the permissive path and woodland walk on the left.
6. Take this path for 100m and, where the woodland walk bears left, stay straight ahead to follow the edge of the wood. Where this path ends, turn left onto a wide track along the valley floor. Go through the next gate and almost immediately bear right on a smaller path to pass through the next gate into a field. Bear half left up through the middle of the field, go under the overhead cables and head towards a fence line and nesting box at the top. Pass through a gate, turn right and continue to climb to the left of the fence through three further gates to reach a road. Taking great care, turn right along the road for 400m to a footpath on the left just after the entrance to Aston Hill Lodge.
7. Take this path, go ahead for a few metres then turn right along the driveway to the gates of The Chalet. Bear left on a track to the side of the gates, continue through a tall deer gate and then on to meet the access road to Wendover Woods. Stay in the same direction, following the road for 650m to reach the café, toilets and car park.

Points of Interest

Wendover Woods are owned by the Forestry Commission. Covering 325 hectares, they comprise a mixture of coniferous and broad-leaved trees. Once in the ownership of Alfred Rothschild they were heavily felled during WWI to support the war effort. In 1919 the Air Ministry bought the Woods and planted conifers. Subsequently the Woods passed to the Forestry Commission who planted beech, spruce, larch and pine. A Chiltern Society conservation volunteer group has worked with the Forestry Commission for over five years to help manage the Woods for recreation, preserve ancient monuments and encourage biodiversity.

A Black, Northill and Pavis Woods: These are ancient beech woods covering the steep slopes around the end of Dancersend Valley. They are owned by Bucks County Council, but managed by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT). They have many interesting archaeological features, including old woodland and parish boundary banks, sunken trackways and deep pits where marl, a chalky type of clay, was dug to spread on the acid heath that could be found at the tops of these hills centuries ago.

B Pumping Station: The Grade II listed station was built by the Rothschilds in 1867, primarily to supply their estates at Tring, Halton, Aston Clinton and Waddesdon. In the early 20th century the site was taken over by Buckinghamshire Water Board before passing to Thames Water Authority in 1975. An area of old chalk pits with a number of rare plants and insects is now managed by BBOWT as part of Dancersend Reserve, but access is by permit only.

C Dancers End Nature Reserve: This fabulous reserve is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) managed by BBOWT. Although the theme of this walk is autumn interest, there is plenty to see all year round. Once part of the Rothschild family estate, the Reserve it was established in 1939 in memory of Charles Rothschild, who set up the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves - regarded as the launch of the Wildlife Trust movement in Britain. The soil at Dancers End ranges from acid to alkaline, thereby ensuring a wide variety of flora and fauna. There are ten types of orchid, including pyramidal, common spotted, bee, fly and greater butterfly. Other plants include Chiltern gentian, clustered bellflower, stinking hellebore and wood vetch. Look out for butterflies including dingy skipper, green hairstreak and both dark green and silver-washed fritillaries. Over 600 species of fungi have been recorded, including the remarkable collared earthstar, whose outer layer splits and folds backwards into a star-shaped pattern. A signposted Tree Trail will introduce you to 12 species of tree typically found in Chiltern woods.

D Dancers End Reserve Extension: Three fields that were ploughed up for cereal production towards the end of WWII were purchased in 1999 and are gradually being restored to flower-rich meadows. Some of the rarest plants on the Reserve have been established here, using seed collected by volunteers. Chalk scrapes have been excavated to create the right conditions for some of the most threatened butterfly species in the Chilterns.

This walk and notes have been compiled with the assistance of Mick Jones, warden for BBOWT at Dancers End. For further information go to www.bbowl.org.uk.