

From Chorleywood into the Chess Valley

With **Andrew Clark**

A stile-free walk that explores the picturesque Chess Valley, the pretty village of Chenies with its Tudor manor house, 15th century church and village green, and finally delightful Chorleywood Common. This walk has been timed to coincide with the relaunch of the Chess Valley Walk, financed by a grant from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund.

START: Chorleywood Station, Station Approach, Chorleywood WD3 5ND. Grid ref: TQ 025961

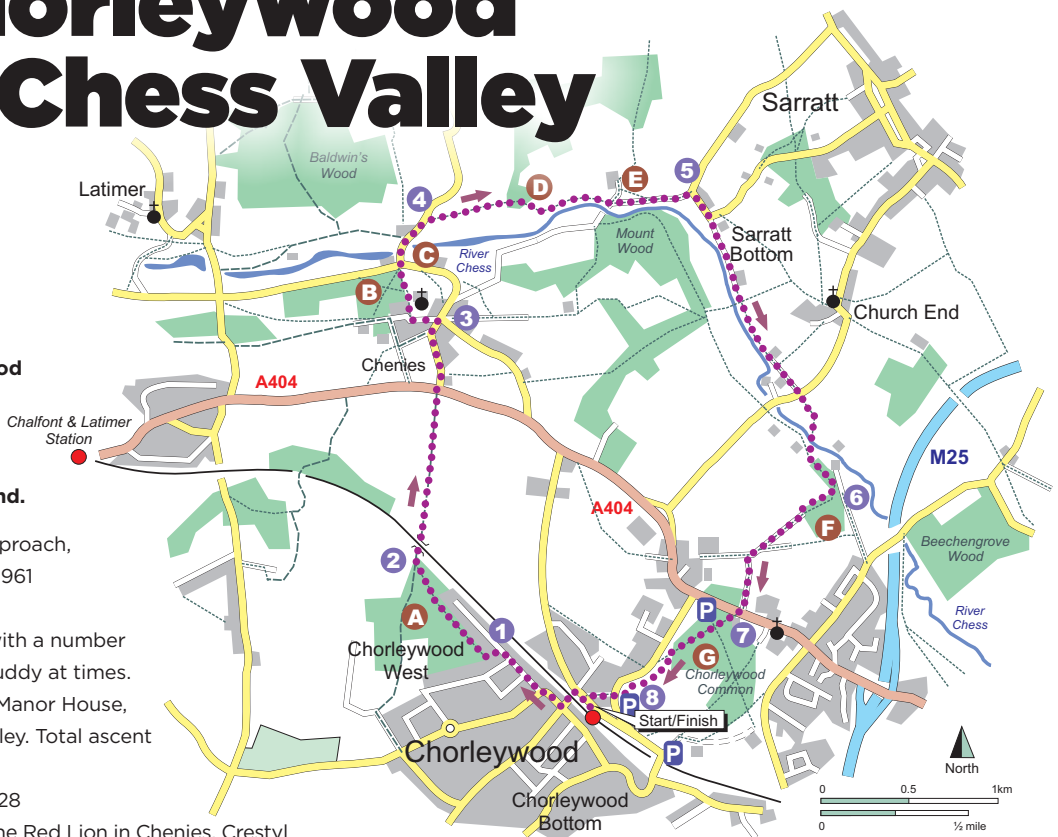
DISTANCE: 6 miles/9.5km

TERRAIN: Easy walking on good paths with a number of gates. Sections of this route can be muddy at times. There's one steep descent after Chenies Manor House, and one steep climb out of the Chess Valley. Total ascent 430ft/130m

MAPS: OS Explorer 192, Chiltern Society 28

REFRESHMENTS: The Bedford Arms & The Red Lion in Chenies, Crestyl Watercress Farm (seasonal), and pubs and cafés in Chorleywood

PARKING: Chorleywood Station car park, or the rough car park on the A404 between waypoints 7 and 8



LOCAL TRANSPORT: There are bus stops outside the station. Please check www.traveline.info for services.

Route

From the station entrance turn left downhill, left again under the railway and first right into Whitelands Avenue. Where the road turns left uphill, continue straight ahead and soon after Carpenters Wood Drive take the surfaced footpath on the left up into the woods.

1. Ignore the first path on the right, continue uphill past the information board and take the next right along a wide path. Follow it as it runs parallel to houses on the right, drops to a path junction and then rises to the right up to the next junction. Turn left and follow the path to the corner of the wood.
2. Turn right under the railway and continue all the way to the main road (A404 Amersham Road). Cross to the road opposite and walk towards Chenies village. Follow the road round to the right past the school and turn immediately left down to the gravel driveway of Chenies Manor House. Turn left up the driveway to the gates of the manor house.
3. Turn right along the path between the walls of the house and the church down into a wood. Go straight ahead as the path drops steeply to a road and cross to the lane opposite. Turn right down to the junction, left along the lane and over the River Chess to reach Mill Farm Barns. Continue for a further 130m to a footpath on the right. The route will now follow the Chess Valley Walk to the Chorleywood House Estate.
4. Turn right through the gate, follow the path between the fencing and through a gate into a field, part of Frogmore Meadows Nature Reserve. Cross the field following the hedgerow to the left and go through both a gate and a small wood. Follow the path past the

viewing area to the concrete driveway and the entrance gates of Crestyl Barn and Watercress Farm.

5. Turn left past the farm and walk along the driveway to a lane. Turn right along it, go straight ahead at the road junction, past the cottages on the left and through a wood and gate into a field. Climb up the bank on the left and turn right along the base of the hill. Go through a gate to the right of the houses onto a rough track and continue ahead to a road (New Road).
6. Cross it and go through the gate, continue in the same direction along the field edge and right into a wood. Cross the bridge over the River Chess. Turn left and left again to the riverbank. Follow the track for 300m to a path on the right by the Chorleywood House Estate information board.
7. Turn right up the slope for a few metres to a crossing path, then turn right and immediately left uphill. At the top of the field, continue ahead to a path junction and turn right along a wide track to a parking area. Turn left along a surfaced driveway (Lady Ela Drive) to a busy road (A404 Rickmansworth Road). Cross it, go past the rear of the cricket pavilion onto Chorleywood Common and turn right along the wide avenue.
8. At the end of the avenue, bear left past the pond on the right and continue ahead to the car park. Near the left-hand end of the car park, take the steps down to the road and cross into Betjeman Gardens. Follow the driveway downhill, take the first left and use the steps to descend to Chorleywood Station.

Continued overleaf



Chorleywood Common



Christ Church, Chorleywood Common



Chenies Manor



River Chess

Points of Interest

Green Recovery Challenge Fund: The Chiltern Society and Chilterns Conservation Board have been successful in receiving a grant from the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund to support a suite of schemes focusing on chalk streams and wetland habitats across the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. One of these schemes involves the upgrading and relaunch of the Chess Valley Walk.

Chorleywood: The Romans settled in the area we now know as Chorleywood, building villas, a small village and a mill. The Saxons called it 'Cerola Leah', which means a clearing or meadow in the forest. Since then it's been known as 'Bosco de Cherle', Churl's Wood and Charleywoode. Major population growth came with the extension of the Metropolitan Railway in 1889.

A. Carpenters Wood is an ancient woodland, at least 400 years old. In fact, it's made up of three areas, Hillas Wood, Whitelands Wood and the larger Carpenters Wood.

B. Chenies village and Manor: The village was first recorded in the 12th century when it was called Isenhampstead. It later became Isenhampstead Chenies from its connection with the Cheyne family, who built the Manor. It was shortened to Chenies in the 19th century. The Manor House is a Grade I listed building, visited by both Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I on many occasions. For a time it was the seat of the Russell family, (Earls, later Dukes, of Bedford) before they decamped to Woburn. The gardens were voted Garden of the Year in 2009.

C. Dodds Mill: Originally called Chenies Mill, it was first mentioned as a corn mill in 1200. It later became used for fulling, where newly woven cloth was beaten and scoured with wooden hammers, stretched out to dry on tenterhooks and then combed. In the 18th century the mill was bought by the Dodd family who converted it to papermaking. In the 19th century it reverted to corn milling and later to cattle feed. It finally closed in 1933.

C. River Chess: The Chess is a chalk stream fed by groundwater, which is stored in the aquifer – layers of chalk rock which work like a sponge, soaking up water until it emerges at ground level. Regular winter

rainfall is needed to recharge the aquifer and keep the chalk streams of the Chilterns flowing throughout the year. Typical chalk streams like the Chess are shallow and narrow, with gravel beds and clear, warm water. We take our water from the aquifer too, so we need to it wisely in order to reduce our impact on chalk streams and their wildlife.

D. Frogmore Meadows is a Site of Special Scientific Interest run by Hertfordshire & Middlesex Wildlife Trust. It's a rare example of a traditionally managed wild flower meadow and supports an abundance of grasses, orchids and wild flowers, as well as water voles.

E. Crestyl Barn and Watercress Farm: Watercress is one of the oldest green vegetables known to man. The Chess, with its clean mineral-rich spring water, is ideal for producing this wonderful superfood. The watercress beds at Sarratt Bottom sadly recently closed due to water quality issues. It used to be the last representative of a once major industry in the Chilterns.

F. Chorleywood House Estate dates back to the early 18th century, when it consisted of two farms. It was bought in 1822 by John Barnes who built the current Regency mansion. In 1892 it was bought and modified by Lady Ela Russell. The Estate is now owned and managed by Three Rivers District Council and was designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 2007.

G. Chorleywood Common is an attractive 76 hectares of grassland and woodland owned by Chorleywood Parish Council. The mix of grassland, ponds and woodland provides excellent conditions for a wide range of flora and fauna, including heather, orchids, harebells, butterflies, moths and other insects.

Nearby Chiltern Society Walks

There's a walk in the Chess Valley in the Society's *50 Great Walks in the Chilterns* book.

Photographs of Chorleywood and Chess Valley can be found on our PhotoGroup's website: www.chilternphoto.org.uk