

# Christmas Common and Watlington Hill

With **Andrew Clark**

This could be described as a Christmas walk for all seasons, or perhaps a walk of two halves – an adventure in lovely woodland or on a breath-taking hilltop. The choice is yours.

**START:** Watlington Hill car park, Hill Rd, Watlington OX49 5HS. Grid ref: SU 709935

**DISTANCE:** The full walk is 7 miles/11km.

The woodland adventure is 5 miles/8km

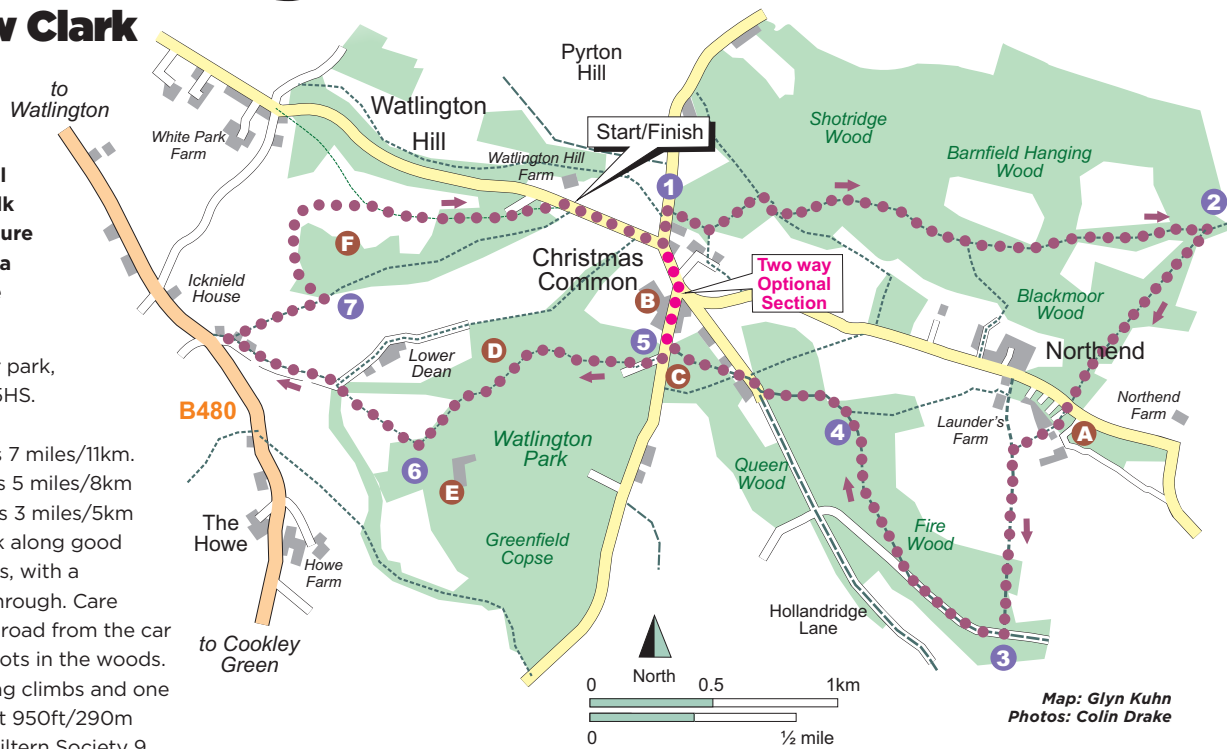
and the hilltop adventure is 3 miles/5km

**TERRAIN:** A stile-free walk along good paths and some quiet lanes, with a number of gates to pass through. Care should be taken along the road from the car park and on slippery tree roots in the woods. The full route has three long climbs and one steep descent. Total ascent 950ft/290m

**MAPS:** OS Explorer 171, Chiltern Society 9

**REFRESHMENTS:** The Fox & Hounds, Christmas Common OX49 5HL

**PARKING:** National Trust car park as above. Charges apply



**LOCAL TRANSPORT:** None at the start. The nearest bus services are in Watlington. Please check [www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info) for services.

## The complete route

Turn right out of the car park and walk to the road junction. Turn left towards Stokenchurch and, after 160m, turn right along a wide track towards Magpie Cottage.

1. Walk past the communications mast and, where the track bends right, continue straight ahead into the wood. Follow the path for 230m to a path junction and turn right past the clay pits. After 100m, fork left downhill and continue to descend for nearly 2km to a large urn. Behind it are the walled gardens of the Wormsley Estate.
2. Continue for a few metres and turn right to join The Chiltern Way. Follow the path steeply uphill to leave the estate and walk ahead to cross Northend Common. Go under the overhead cables and continue to a lane. Cross it and walk along the rough driveway opposite signed 'Brackendale'. At the end bear left and take the path on the right just after Brackendale House. Proceed along the path and go through a gate into a large field. Turn right down to a path junction and turn left to descend through the middle of the field into a wood. Keep straight ahead for 300m to a path junction in the valley.
3. Turn right along the bridleway on The Oxfordshire Way for 500m to a clearing. Fork right to leave the track and continue uphill to the next path junction just before a large field.
4. Turn left and continue gently uphill along the track until it leaves the wood and meets a gravel track. On the left is the entrance to Queen and College Woods. Turn right along the track for 100m and turn left along a bridleway into a wood. Turn immediately right, still on The Oxfordshire Way, and follow the path through the wood to a road.
5. Turn left along the road for 70m, then right along the driveway towards The Tower. Continue on the driveway for 80m to a passing place, and bear right onto a path into the wood. Follow the path for 330m to enter the National Trust's Lower Deans Wood and continue for a further 450m almost to the edge of the wood. Follow the path round to the left. It opens out and offers lovely views over South Oxfordshire.
6. Ahead is the gate into Watlington Park. Take the path to the right of it, follow it round to the right and go through a gate into a field. Go straight down the steep hill and through a gate at the bottom. Carry on to a junction of farm tracks and stay in the same direction for 500m to a path on the right just before the road. Turn right along the path, go through a pair of gates and climb up through a third gate.
7. Turn immediately left up a set of steps into the National Trust's Watlington Hill Estate. Follow the path along the edge of the wood and bear right up and onto the open hillside. Stay on the stony path until the wood on the right ends, continue ahead for 100m and bear right up the grassy slope to the top of the hill. Follow the track through a wide gap in the gorse and stay left along the top of the ridge for 400m to a gate on the right. Go through it and follow the track past two rows of posts to return to the car park and finish the walk.

*Continued overleaf*



Leaving Christmas Common



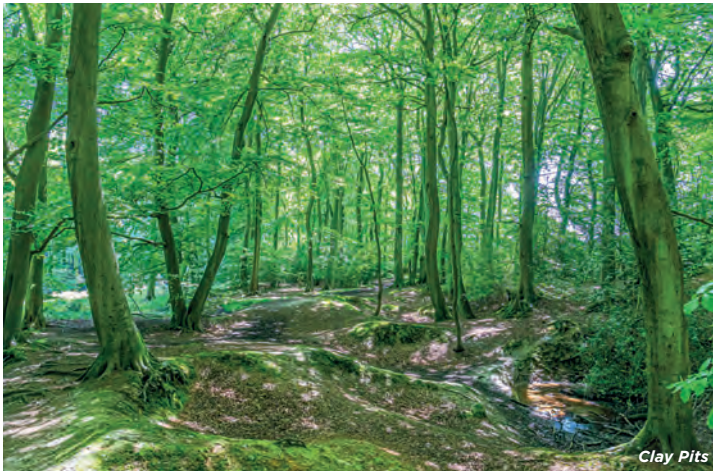
Watlington Hill



The Fox & Hounds



View from Watlington Hill



Clay Pits



Returning to the car park

## Figure of eight option

**For the Woodland Adventure only**, follow the main route until Waypoint 5. Turn right past The Fox & Hounds and take the first left, signposted to Watlington, to return to the car park.

**For the Hilltop Adventure only**, turn right out of the car park and walk along to the road junction. Turn right at the junction and stay on the main road past The Fox & Hounds to join the walk at Waypoint 5.

## Points of Interest

**Christmas Common:** There are many theories as to how the village got its name. They include a truce over Christmas between the warring parties during the English Civil War, an old local family name, or the abundance of holly trees. The communication mast close to Waypoint 1 is thought to be a US Air Force radio relay station which linked Daws Hill, High Wycombe to the base in Upper Heyford.

**A. Northend** is unusual in that the eastern half of the village is in Buckinghamshire and the western half in Oxfordshire.

**B. The Fox & Hounds** pub is Grade II listed and dates from the mid-18th century. It's constructed of both flint and brick, and the cottage at the back is timber framed.

**C. The Church of the Nativity** was built in 1889 as a chapel of ease for

the use of those who couldn't get to the local parish church. It's now called Old Church and is a private house.

**D. Lower Deans Wood** is owned by the National Trust and has a wonderful display of bluebells in spring.

**E. Watlington Park** is a country house and park. The house was built in the 1750s for John Tilson, son of the then Under-Secretary of State. Over the centuries the house has been subject to much modernisation.

**F. Watlington Hill** was donated to the National Trust by the Esher family, the owners of Watlington Park, in the 1940s. Most of it is part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is a nationally important wildlife site.