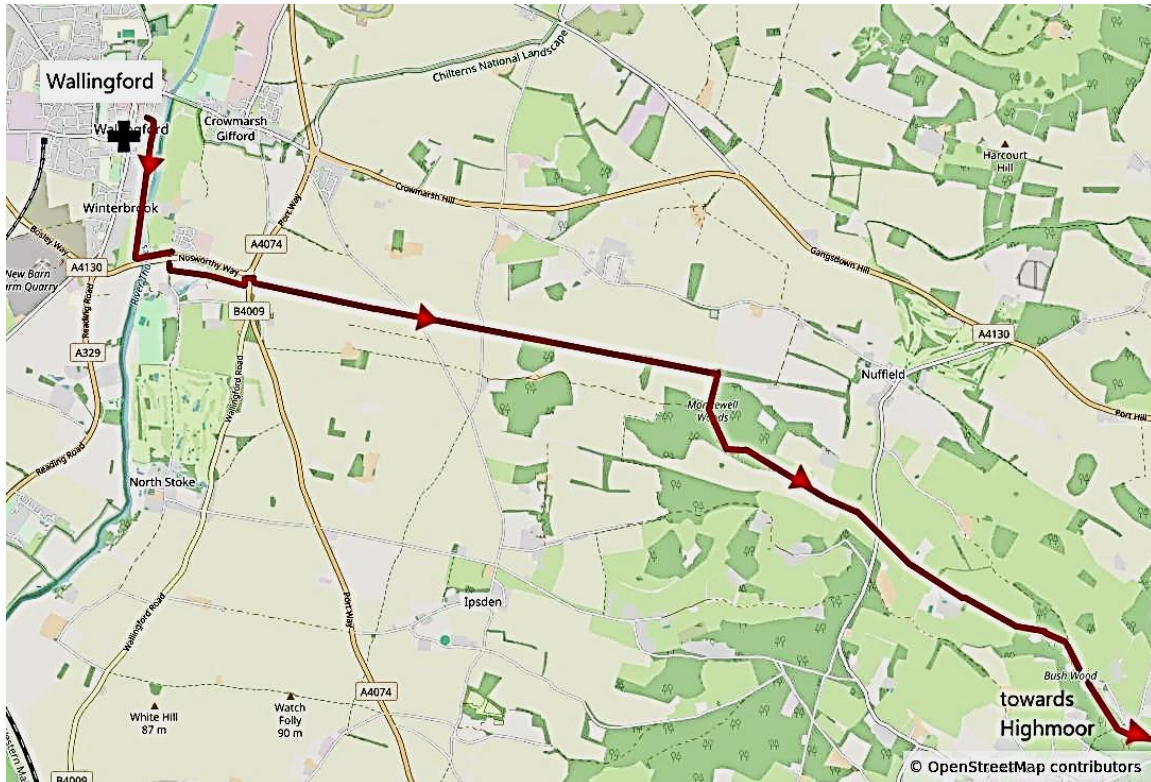


Day 6: Wallingford to Henley



Today we begin on the Thames Path but soon leave it for a delightful walk “overland” from Winterbrook to Henley, cutting off the River Thames’s long detour to the south via Goring and Reading. The first two and a half miles follow another National Trail, The Ridgeway, along Grim’s Ditch, a Scheduled Monument. The entire walk is through pleasant, quiet country, using footpaths, tracks and quiet lanes. The only watering place is an excellent pub about three-fifths of the way along.

Distance: 12 miles

Duration: 5 hours, not including breaks

Level of difficulty: Easy; a few gentle rises, but nothing strenuous.

Maps: Ordnance Survey Explorer 171

Car parking: (Among others,) ‘Cattle Market’ in Wallingford (£6 per day); Southfield car park in Henley (£6)

Public transport: Routes 23/33: Henley - Wallingford - Didcot - Abingdon - Oxford. Henley has a station, the end of a branch line from Twyford (GWR).

Refreshments: Cafés and pubs in Wallingford and Henley. No amenities along the route until we reach the excellent *The Rising Sun* at Highmoor (7½ miles from start).

Toilets: In Wallingford; at *The Rising Sun*; and in Henley.

Short Walk Option:

Wallingford to *The Rising Sun*, Highmoor 7½ miles. Directions 1 to 7.

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Wallingford

An important river-crossing point, on the route of a north-south Roman road from Dorchester, settled by the Anglo-Saxons and fortified by Alfred the Great in the 9th century as part of his defensive line protecting Wessex against the Viking invaders. The fortifications are still evident as a group of four roughly square areas around the centre of the town. Alfred granted the borough the right to mint coins. During the Norman invasion of 1066, Wigod, the Saxon thegn (lord) of Wallingford, allowed William the Conqueror safe passage across the Thames following his earlier repulse earlier at London.

Directions:

1. We begin in Wallingford's large Cattle Market car park (£6 per day), leaving by the pedestrian exit on the south-east corner, turning right on Thames Street, opposite the Rowing Club (a former malt house).
2. We visit **St Leonard's Church**, dating from Anglo-Saxon times and then follow the path to the river, soon passing Oxford University Boat Club's boathouse.
3. As you approach the road bridge, 100 yards away, fork right and then turn right through the gate and take the tarmac path up to the road; turn left and cross the river using the bridge. Continue along the wide pavement for 200 yards, then bear left at the signpost towards the Ridgeway, then go through the underpass and turn left onto The Ridgeway.
4. For about 10 minutes, the path through the wood runs parallel to the main road; when you come to the gate at the end walk to the roundabout to cross the road safely, then walk on the other side of the road for 100 yards until you see a finger post indicating The Ridgeway turning to the left, which continues along Grim's Ditch.

Grim's Ditch

There are many Grim's ditches in England. Grim is the Anglo-Saxon word for the devil, and his name was often attributed to unnatural features in the landscape. This particular Grim's ditch was probably built during the Iron Age; there are various theories about its construction. Is it the territorial boundary between two Late Iron Age tribes, or a boundary marking the conquests of Cuthwulf, King of Wessex over the Britons in 571AD as he expanded his kingdom into the Chilterns? It could be one, or both of these things, or something else entirely!

5. We are now in the Chilterns National Landscape, with views to the left of Wittenham Clumps on the skyline, and of the RAF Benson airfield; to the right we have a good view of the Chilterns. After a mile or so we cross three paths: Icknield Way, Swan's Way and the Chiltern Way. We cross these, bearing slight right through the kissing gate and straight ahead, following The Ridgeway. At the top of the slight hill we pass through the edge of Oaken Copse, then continue along Grim's ditch.
6. After about 500 yards we climb Bachelor's Hill and then pass a narrow copse to the right. 150 yards later we leave The Ridgeway, turning right through a kissing gate and walking steeply uphill ("Permissive Path"). We continue straight ahead until the woodland bears round to the right; we take a right-angle left turn ("Restricted Byway") through Mongewell Woods, keeping to the right where the path divides; after the clearing where there is a large shed with a generator we continue straight ahead, slightly downhill at first, then following the path past Upper House "Farm" until we reach a road which we cross, going straight ahead into Whitcalls Lane.

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7. After a while, the lane continues as a footpath, but later becomes a metalled road again. It takes a sharp left and right, and then continues on the level. At the end of the road at the crossroads we turn left ("Single track road"), signposted Witheridge Hill. At the top of the hill the flint track on the right takes us to The Rising Sun pub, Highmoor – highly recommended for light snacks or a full meal. For those over 60, the "Vintage" small portions of mains and sweets are a great benefit!
8. After visiting the pub we return to the road, turning right. At the bottom of the hill we cross the road and go up the footpath to the left side of the house with a brick front garden wall. We continue straight along this footpath, ignoring tracks to right and left until we cross a cricket pitch and come to the road, turning right. Walk along this busy road (keep close to the right-hand side until it's safe to cross), then cross over and continue along for a few yards to a road on the left; immediately fork right onto the footpath. The path is not very distinct, but is helpfully marked by white arrows on the trees on the side.
9. Emerging from the wood keep straight on, heading for the left side of the wood ahead; the path continues just inside the wood. When you emerge onto Shepherds Green, turn left along the side of the green and take the footpath to the left (marked "No through road"). After a few yards we take a footpath to the right across a field. At the far corner of the field, a kissing gate takes us into a footpath. After a while, take the left fork. A little further on take the right fork ("Permissive footpath"), rather than the left ("Public footpath", which goes steeply downhill). The path ahead is not clear here, but keep straight ahead with the fences at the top of the hill to your right until you reach the road.
10. Just before you reach the busy, fast road TURN LEFT on the sunken path, then cross at the junction 100 yards down, then turn back on yourself along the sunken footpath which runs parallel to the left side of the road (as if you had turned right onto the road, but the other side of it). After a couple of hundred yards turn left onto the marked footpath. Continue straight along the right-hand side of the field which opens out broadly. After a mile or so, the footpath this side of the fence comes to an end and we continue ahead with the hedge on the left; where the paths cross, we take a left slightly uphill which leads us into Pack and Prime Lane; at the end we turn right and follow Gravel Hill down into Henley.

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11. **St Mary's Church, Henley**, standing proudly above the bridge, is basically a 13th century building, enlarged and remodelled in the 15th c. and again in the 19th, but there has been a church on the site since at least 1000 CE.

Henley-on-Thames

The town is believed to have been founded by Henry II in the late 12th century. There are no particular Anglo-Saxon associations, although there is archaeological evidence of Romano-British habitation in the locality. From the 8th century, Henley belonged to the royal estate centred on Benson. There was probably a ford across the river at this point from very early times, but the bridge over the river does not receive any mention in official documents until 1234. There may have been a chapel on the site of the present parish church.

Timings for Tuesday 26th August (approximate):

10:00 - 10.15	Registration and briefing (Cattle Market car park)
10:15	Set off
10:20 - 10:50	St Leonard's Church , Wallingford (0 miles)
13:30 - 14:30	<i>The Rising Sun</i> , Highmoor (7½ miles)
16:30	St Mary's Church, Henley (12 miles)

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With thanks to John Dewhurst, Churchwarden of All Saints, Kingston, for information in the panels