

West Berkshire Countryside Society

was formed in January 2012 by merging four long-established environmental groups. These were *The Friends of the Pang*, *Kennet & Lambourn Valleys*, *The Bucklebury Heathland Conservation Group*, *The Pang Valley Conservation Volunteers* and *The Pang Valley Barn Owl Group*. Since then the *Kennet Valley Barn Owl Group* and the *Lambourn Valley Barn Owl Group* have joined us.

Our remit is to continue their work of promoting and improving the landscape of West Berkshire by practical conservation work and by introducing people to the countryside, its work, history and wildlife, through the medium of talks and conducted walks – of which this is one.

Members of **West Berkshire Countryside Society** currently pay a £15 annual subscription for individual and family membership to provide a financial resource. Those members who wish to, make up volunteer working parties to undertake practical conservation tasks.

Non-members are very welcome to join our conservation tasks and conducted walks for which we make no charge. Non-members are also welcome at our talks for which we make a small charge.

If you would like more information about our activities or would like to join us and help with our work, please visit our website:

www.westberkscountryside.org.uk

The Berkshire Geoconservation Group

The Berkshire Geoconservation Group are a volunteer group which aims to work with local authorities, landowners and the general public to safeguard our special landscape for future generations and to promote understanding of this its geology and geodiversity.

We designate sites of significance within the county so that these can be conserved and enhanced where appropriate.

Over the year we have a regular programme of walks to areas of interest and anyone is most welcome along on these. We are always happy to give talks to local groups about the area.

For more information about the group and how you can become involved in conservation of sites or simply join our walks please contact Lesley Dunlop via our website

www.berkshirerigs.org.uk

References:

Victoria County History – Berkshire
The Concise Dictionary of English Placenames. OUP.
The Soils Survey of England & Wales. Sheet 267 Newbury
British Geological Survey
Sheet and Memoir 267 Newbury
Williamson T *Shaping Medieval Landscapes*
Mr P Harvey *Personal Communication*

Boyd, David. *The Running Horses*
Rocque, John. *A Survey of the County of Berkshire 1761*. Re-printed by Headley Bros. Ashford
Ordnance Survey First Edition 1878
Pevsner N *The Buildings of England – Berkshire 1966*
Wordie R. Ed. *Enclosure in Berkshire 1485-1885* Berks Record Society 2000
Morgan P (Ed). *Domesday Book – Berkshire*. Phillimore 1979.
Dunlop & Greenaway *Around the 3 Valleys* 2011



West Berkshire
Countryside Society



WEST BERKSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE SOCIETY
&
BERKSHIRE GEOCONSERVATION GROUP

‘STONES AND HORSES’

A walk around the Lambourn countryside to look
at the interaction between geology, wildlife and
human history.

Starting and finishing at Lambourn church.

About 5 miles or 8km.

Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps
158 – ‘Newbury & Hungerford’ and 170 – ‘Abingdon and Wantage’
will be useful

There are two steep hills on this walk. A short cut is provided
to avoid the second hill which reduces the walk to about
3½miles

© Lesley Dunlop and Dick Greenaway 2010

General Geology

Lambourn lies on chalk of Cretaceous age. In this area it represents deposition in warm, shallow, tropical seas about 95-85 million years ago. At the time Britain lay further south than its present position. Chalk is composed of microorganisms, coccoliths, and the lack of impurities has led to a very white pure limestone. There are certain hard bands within the chalk representing changes in deposition and one of these very traceable bands is found within the chalk around Lambourn. Material from this horizon has been extensively quarried close to Compton Beauchamp for the stone for Ashdown House. More recently, particularly over the last 1.8 million years, erosion has taken place and this has led to the development of the landscape seen at the present time. Today dry valleys and winterbourns are common in the area whereas at other times in the Quaternary streams would have flowed freely especially during periods of higher precipitation and when the ground was frozen. Sarsen stones are the remains of Palaeogene sands which once covered the area but have been eroded. Most of the sand was soft and unconsolidated but some parts were well cemented and resistant to erosion. Root holes of vegetation from about 55 million years ago can still be seen in many stones.

How the geology has affected the human history.

The presence of sheltered valleys and clean chalk streams has led to a line of villages along the course of the River Lambourn. These each have a slightly different character in the buildings present due to the availability of local building materials. Buildings in Lambourn use flint, sarsen and brick as well as chalk but further downstream chalk is not used as it is too soft from local strata. Bricks are usually made from local sands and clays eg near Wickham or clay with flints, on the hills near Lambourn.

Racehorses on the Berkshire Downs.

Horses have been bred and trained in Britain for millennia, but serious systematic breeding did not start until the late 17th century when there was a need to improve horses for the cavalry. Three stallions were imported and all thoroughbreds descend from them. The Byerly Turk came in 1690, the Darley Arabian followed in 1704 and the Godolphin Barb in 1733. The Stud Book recording pedigrees started in 1791 and the Jockey Club was founded in the 1750's. The first races were private matches between owners. Usually four races were run over 4 miles each, the first to win two races won the match. Later single *dash* races became more popular. Charles II set rules for matches, called King's Plates, aimed at encouraging the breeding of stronger horses. From 1750 to 1803 Lambourn had its own racecourse. Steeplechasing started in the mid 19th century and the National Hunt Committee was founded in 1866. Formal training establishments with professional trainers are a product of the 19th century. By 1840 William Ford was training from stables in Lambourn High Street, in the 1860's George Oates is listed and Charles Jousiffe was at Seven Barrows in the 1890's. By 1976 Lambourn had 23 training establishments. The smooth, firm, sheep grazed turf of the downs was found to be ideal for racing horses. However modern racing requires horses to be worked every day and this has resulted in the construction of *all weather tracks* both for training and racing. The track is excavated and a stone foundation laid and covered with



Lambourn market cross



Late Norman door



Church porch



Sarsen, flint and Jurassic limestone



The Hangman's Stone



A sarsen and chalk block wall



An early cruck framed cottage



The headwaters of the Lambourn

3. Lynch Wood. This is a Permitted Path not a Public Right of Way. Vampires beware! This wood is carpeted with dense wild garlic! The terraces on the steep hillside are *lynchets* cut by desperate medieval farmers ploughing marginal land. At the eastern end they have been quarried for chalk.

4. Possible mill site. This dam and the associated channel along the left bank may have been the site of a small mill. Domesday gives Lambourn two mills which would have been watermills. One of these is known to have been at the Lamb pub in the town. The silted up pond upstream of the dam stored water to power the mill.



5. Uplands Stables. These were the headquarters for the famous trainer Fred Winter. They produced several outstanding racehorses including *J. Trump* – Grand National winner – and the outstanding hurdlers *Lanzerote* and *Bula*.

6. The Hangmans Stone. Not as gruesome as it sounds! The name

probably came from the Celtic '*ach maen*' meaning '*boundary stone*'. King Alfred's will (9th century) makes it clear that there were still manors where Celtic speaking people lived under different customs from their Saxon neighbours, so it is not unlikely that their name for the stone could have survived.

7. Gallops. These are described in detail on page 2. Note the wide view up the dry valley to the west. This valley was formed during the 500,000 years when the ground was at times frozen and subjected to thaw. The valley floor contains a material called *Head* that forms when frozen ice with fractured rock melts. The water helps the material to slide down-slope.

Look for the badger sett at the junction of the paths to the SW.

8. Holloway and quarries. Once again the track has been cut deep into the hillside by centuries of hooves, wheels and feet followed by rain washing away the loosened soil. The pits dug into the sides were probably to provide road making material in the period before 1889 when parish councils were responsible for the maintenance of their own roads.

9. An interesting spot. Look carefully at the wall on your left. There is a picture of it on page 7. It is built with sarsen and Chalk Rock

The ditch running under the track is the River Lambourn. The thatched house to the left is *cruck framed*. This is a very early method of building.

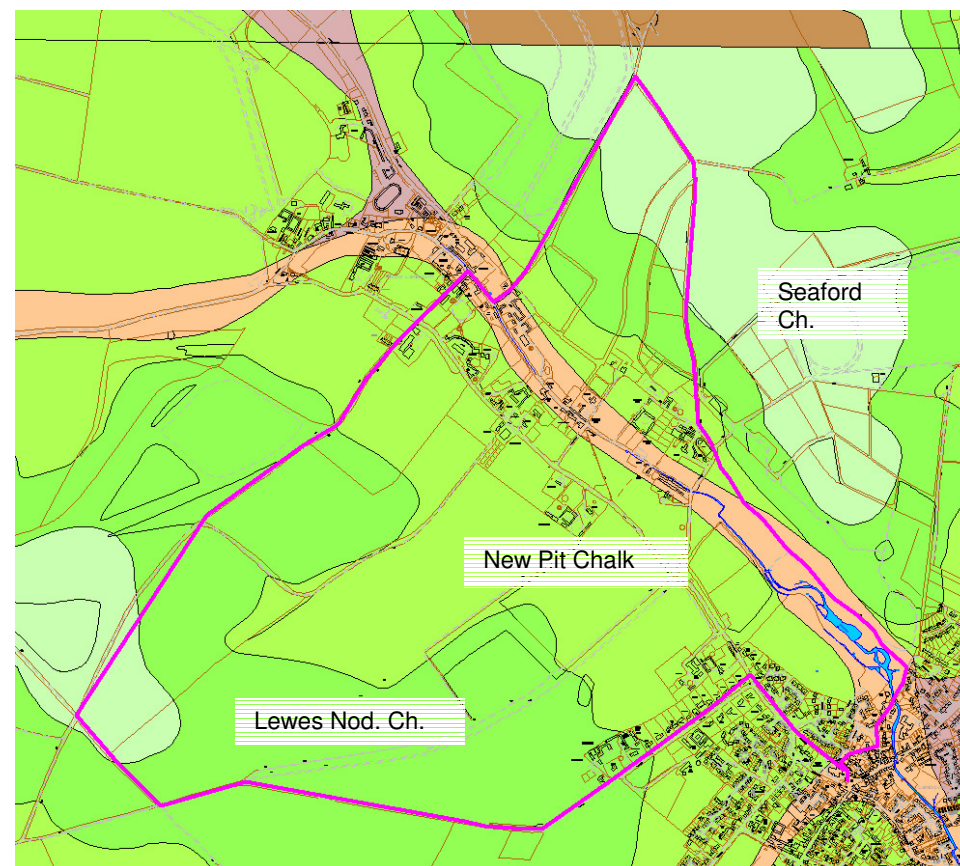
The short cut follows the '*Fulk Walwyn Way*' to the left back to the church.

10. Row Down geology. As you climb the hill you go from the oldest chalk in the valley and then across the Lewes Chalk with the Chalk Rock to the youngest chalk on the hill top.

11 and 12. Excellent views over dry valleys to the communications mast at Membury, an Iron Age hill fort and the remains of a World War 2 airfield.

Solid and Superficial Geology

Detail taken from BGS maps 267 Newbury



Key to Map

Seaford Chalk

Lewes Nodular Chalk - This contains the Chalk Rock

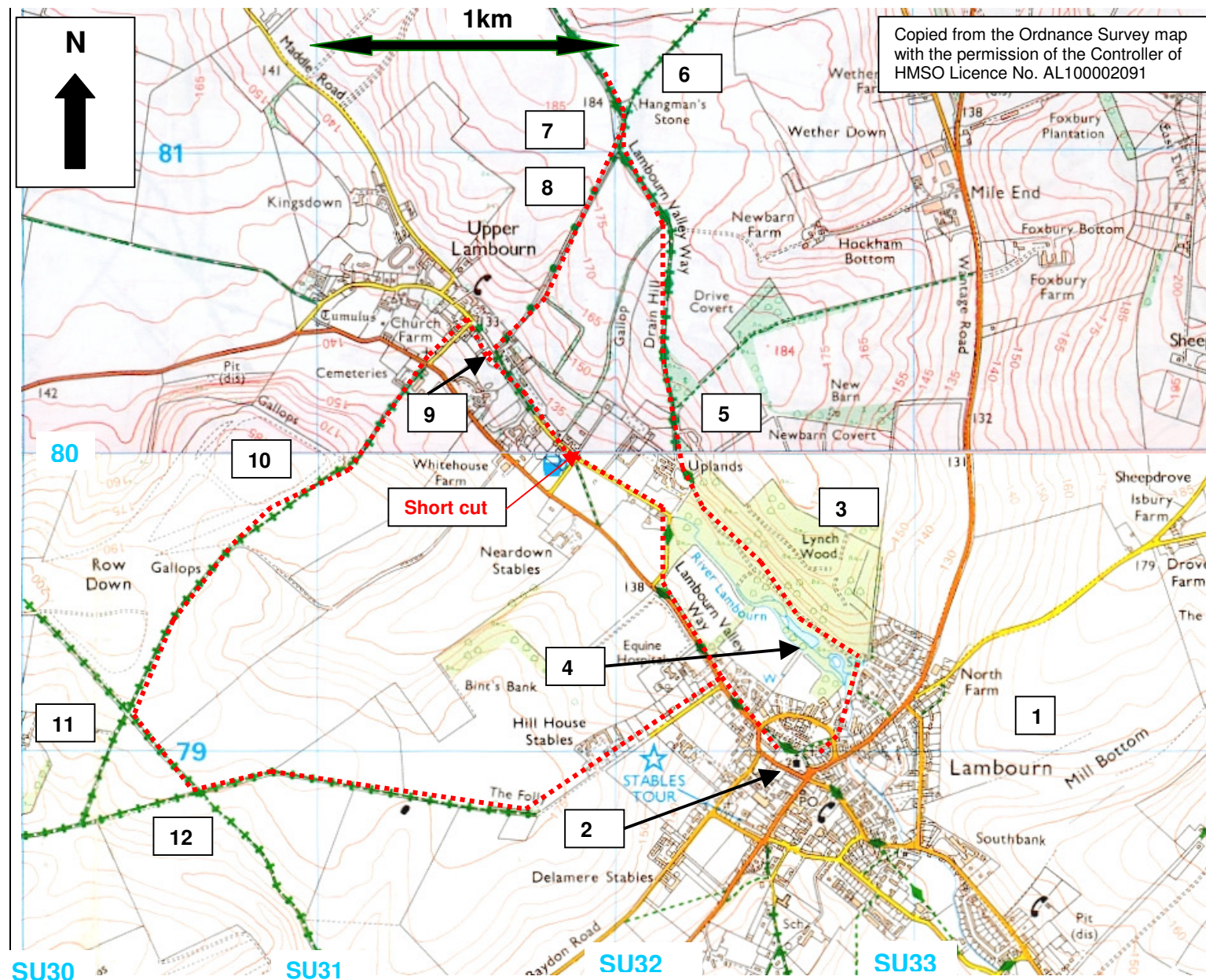
New Pit Chalk

Originally this would have been Middle and Upper Chalk with the Chalk Rock being the boundary

tarmac. Over this oiled sand is laid and a machine used to provide differing surfaces, a soft texture for heavy jumping horses and a firmer surface for lighter flat racing horses. The surface is porous and dries rapidly whereas the turf gallop could freeze or dry hard. The grass gallops are managed by topping to keep the grass about 4" (10cm) high. They are often species rich but the plants are short. A gallop near Compton is bright yellow with dense cowslips in spring.

1. A short history of Lambourn. This is an ancient area. The chalk downlands seem to have been some of the first areas cleared by Neolithic farmers when agriculture reached southern England about 4000BC. This whole area is rich in pre-historic and Roman sites and was obviously densely populated and extensively farmed. The name is first mentioned in The Anglo Saxon Chronicle under the date of 553AD but this should not be taken too seriously. It is frequently mentioned in the 8th, 9th & 10th centuries and the land was willed by King Alfred to his wife. The place name may mean *the stream where lambs are washed* but may also derive from a pre-Celtic word whose meaning is now lost. Domesday Book (1086) tells of three manors with about 124 families farming around 1000 acres of arable land. There were almost no woods, only enough for 10 pigs. This matches the landscape of the 1761 map - fields concentrated in the valley and un-hedged tracks over the open downs. The land was enclosed in the late 18th and early 19th century and parts ploughed during World Wars I & II. Some gallops have not been ploughed for a hundred years.

2. Lambourn church was mentioned in 1017 and was a Saxon Minster. It is dedicated to St Michael and most of it is Late Norman. The substantial porch has a first floor room. Such rooms were sometimes used as schools. After the monasteries were dissolved in the 16th century the vagrant poor lost their place of refuge. Open porches were built to house them in cruel conditions to encourage them not to settle. The geology of the church is fascinating in that there is much use local flint and sarsens for sections not on prominent



show but 'imported' Jurassic limestone from the Cotswolds has been used for

much of the main building. Inside there are several 'marble' tombs, not all on open display.