

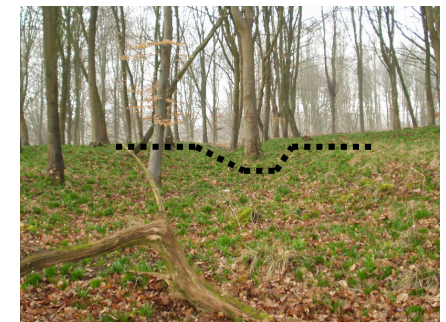
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Groynes in the River Dun At 3



An ancient holloway in Cake Wood at 8



West Berkshire
 Countryside Society

‘A Cake Walk’

A walk to explore the landscape history and wildlife along the County Boundary northwest of Hungerford. Starting and finishing at Hungerford Town Hall. About 5 miles or 8 kilometres

Ordnance Survey Explorer map 158 ‘Newbury and Hungerford’ will be useful.

There is a long (c.1 mile) steady climb from the Kennet & Avon Canal to the top of the chalk ridge. It is nowhere very steep. The return over the ridge near the sewage works is short and very steep.

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‘Ripe for renovation’ ? At 10



A well used badger track.

9. County and parish boundaries are of very ancient origin. The *shire* was the basic unit of Anglo Saxon administration and the *shire reeve* (sheriff) gathered the taxes and led the army. Most **parishes** were formed from nobles' estates and had been defined by the 9th century. They often used existing features as boundaries.

8. Cake Wood is a very ancient wood. It is referred to in 1362 and in an earlier charter. Its name comes from the Saxon *Caefca wudu* which means *Caefca's wood*. Even from the footpath the density of the bluebells can be seen. Note the old track or holloway leading up into the wood. The *lynchet* (step) at the top of the field was caused by ploughing moving soil down the slope so the coppice was planted in an old field.

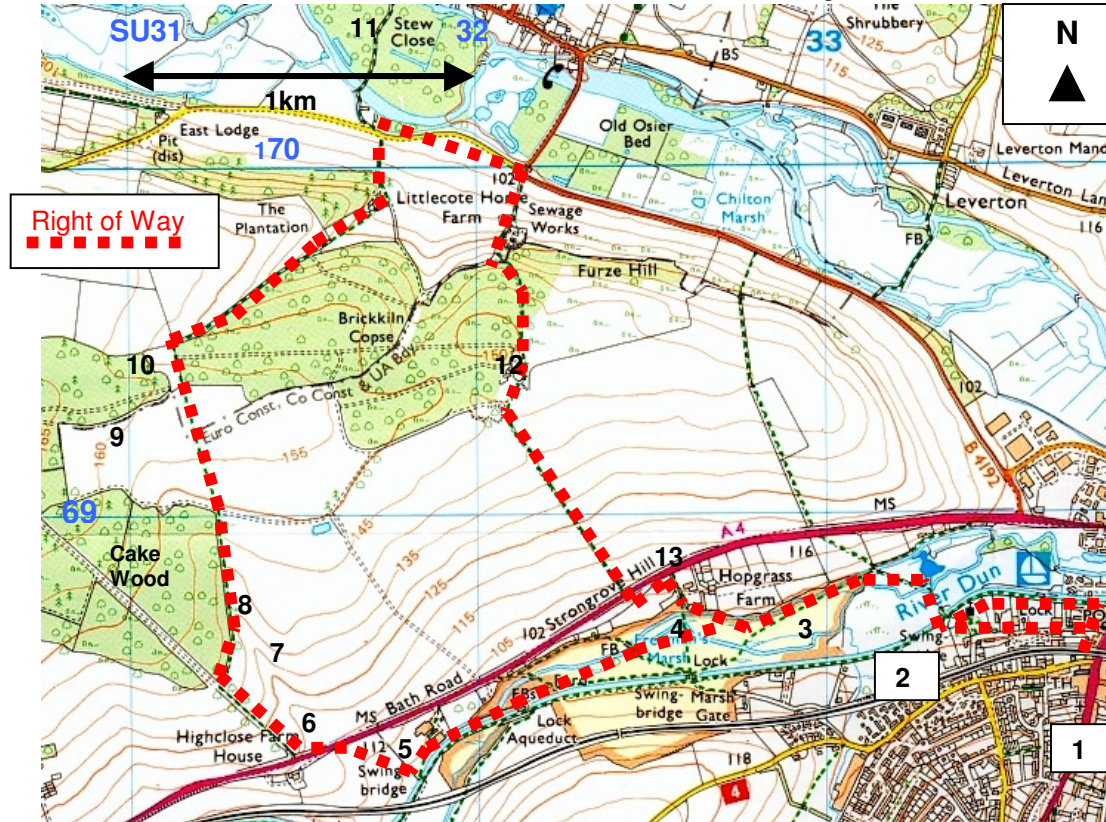
7. Dry valleys were formed during the Ice Ages when the chalk was frozen and summer meltwater could not soak through. Ice from the winter added to the erosive power of the water.

6. Turkey Oaks line this ancient road. These trees harbour the insects that cause *knopper galls* – deformed acorns – on other oaks.

5. The Barracks are shown on early 19th century maps (*see back page*) and were the HQ of the Berkshire Yeomanry. In 1861 they housed 50 people. They were demolished in 1939 when the A4 was realigned and widened.

4. Freemans Marsh is one of the Commons of Hungerford for use only by people with *Common Rights*. It is first documented in 1550. The Northern Meadow was converted to a water meadow. These are not simply soggy riverside fields. They are covered with carefully engineered ditches, ridges and drains which allowed a film of water to move over the surface of the field

10. Geology and brick making. The solid rock is chalk but the higher areas are covered with acid sands, gravels and clays washed out of the Ice Age glaciers which lay to the north. Notice the change from dry paths on the slope to muddy paths on the ridge. A patch of clay allowed the pond to be built to water stock. It is filled by water from the gravels.



warming and fertilising it. This was done in the early Spring and produced early grass to feed ewes before they lambed. Later a heavy crop of hay was produced. The shallow rectangular 'pond' surrounded by a low bank with a small gap in one side may be a *retting pond* where hemp or flax was soaked and then left to rot on the sides to release the fibres. The road from the original settlement at Marsh Gate to the Bath Road crossed here.

Bricks are not made of pure clay. They need sand and lime as well. These capping areas provide all three and the coppices provided the fuel to fire the kiln. Looking into the wood one can see banks and earthworks. These are probably the result of quarrying for brick making materials.

11. Stew Close is an important nature reserve. Its name shows that the ponds were originally fish ponds kept to supply fresh fish to the big house. The **Old Osier Bed** grew willows to provide wands for basket making.

12. Hopgrass Kiln (site of). Early bricks were burned in *clamps* – the dried clay blocks were simply stacked leaving ducts between them filled with dry material which would burn fiercely. The differences of heat and gasses in these ducts cause the bands of colour on old bricks. Later the clay blocks were surrounded with a wall to conserve the heat and recent kilns are totally enclosed.

13. Hopgrass Farm is named after farmers of that name who lived there in 1343. The present house has a date stone of 1649 but the house was given a 'false front' in the late 18th century.

START HERE!

1. Hungerford ('The ford where people starved'). The original settlement was around the church and The Close. The modern town was a 12th century planned 'new town'. It had borough status by 1170 but may not have been immediately successful – hence the name.

2. Railway and Canal. The railway reached the town in 1847 and was the railhead for a while. The K & A Canal was built in 1810 and was bought out by the railway in 1852 and abandoned to reduce competition. It was a fortified defence line in World War 2.

3. The River Dun is an important chalk stream. Chalk is an internationally rare rock and so its chalk streams are rare and important. The water filtered by the chalk is silt free and contains calcium which encourages a wide range of plants and animals. The woven *groynes* are being used to narrow the channel thus speeding up the flow and keeping the gravel bed silt free. Note the build up of silt between them. 'Green Engineering'!