



The Bell Inn

FOLLOW THE COUNTRYSIDE CODE

- Respect other people: consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors
- leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available.
- leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
- keep dogs under effective control
- plan ahead and be prepared
- follow advice and local signs

For the full Countryside Code and information on where to go and what to do, visit

www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk

No responsibility is accepted by the authors of this leaflet for the state or condition from time to time of the paths comprising these walks.

Walking is recommended by the Government as a safe and health promoting form of exercise. However, it should be carried out with care and forethought. Always wear appropriate footwear and take care when walking in the town or countryside.

Acknowledgements

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Path titles and routes acknowledged to West Berkshire Council Definitive Map.



West Berkshire
Countryside Society

Aldworth Village

<http://aldworthvillage.uk>

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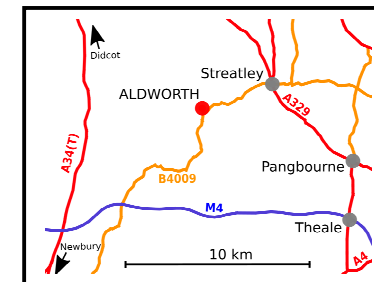
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ALDWORTH

Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways



Aldworth Church and Byway 4



**Aldworth Parish lies in the North Wessex Downs
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

ALDWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

Further copies of this leaflet may be downloaded from

www.aldworthvillage.org

www.westberkscountryside.org.uk

ALDWORTH – FOOTPATHS BRIDLEWAYS AND BYWAYS

This leaflet gives descriptions of the footpaths, bridleways, byways and restricted byways in the parish of Aldworth, West Berkshire.

Aldworth lies high on the dip slope of the Berkshire Downs some nine miles (14.5km) northeast of Newbury, and like so much of West Berkshire is in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The parish is without public transport, a post office, or a shop but it does have two pubs and a Saturday Market. There are 24 paths of various classifications and many links to other parish networks. The paths offer walks and rides through different terrains such as ancient woods and coppices, across chalk downland and along ancient drove roads.

Paths with red titles have obstacles such as stiles or steep hills which make them unsuitable for disabled people.

Those with black titles have no obstacles but may have uneven and muddy surfaces.

Those with blue titles have no obstacles and reasonably sound surfaces but it would be wise to check the path's condition before use.

These classifications are based on observation and opinion, but time and weather can make changes.

THE HISTORY OF ALDWORTH

People have lived in Aldworth Parish for many millennia. The round barrow (burial mound) near the northern end of Footpath 8 was built in about **2000BC** – the same time as some of the Egyptian pyramids! The banks and ditches in Streatley Warren are the remains of Iron Age and Roman fields cultivated from around **100BC** to **400AD**. The massive Grim's Ditch was built in the **Iron Age**. It runs east to west across the parish. Even the parish name is ancient and means 'Old Enclosures'.

In **871AD** the Battle of Ashdown was fought between the Anglo Saxons and invading Vikings somewhere in the vicinity of Aldworth and Compton. The fighting took place in open country around a dead thorn tree and the victorious Saxons named the area 'The Hundred of the Naked Thorn'.

In **1086** Domesday Book records Aldworth (*Elleorde*) as having been a royal estate before the Conquest and that it was afterwards granted to Theodoric the Goldsmith. There were 6 villagers and 4 smallholder families with 3 ploughs between them and 4 slaves. There was only enough woodland for 10 pigs! Farming was very important. More and more downland was converted to arable until the Common Fields covered about 900 acres – but there were still large areas of downland grazing! Gradually the Common Fields were enclosed until by **1757** they had all gone leaving the landscape we now enjoy.

Aldworth's church is mainly **14th century** but its origins are much earlier. It contains an interesting group of stone effigies of the de la Beche family. In **1335** Phillip de la Beche was licensed to make a deer park on his Aldworth lands. The boundary can still be traced.

The first good map of the area was published by John Rocque in 1761 and this is called 'The 1761 map' in the path descriptions.

NATURAL HISTORY

The underlying geology is chalk that is close to the surface – particularly in the north. Further south there are areas of loam and of clay with flints.

The woods are home to fallow, roe and muntjak deer and an increasing population of badgers. Red kites and buzzards are common.

Because of the different soils the wild flowers are particularly rich – especially on the chalk verges. Notes have been made of these with the path descriptions.

Restricted Byway 17 is narrow and can be overgrown in summer. It runs along the field edge down a ridge to join the Compton network. It is lined with species rich hedges and is on the 1761 map. There are extensive views north to the Ridgeway and Lowbury Hill.

Footpath 18 runs alongside the churchyard's northern hedge. The surface is good but the path is very narrow and can become overgrown in summer. Look for the walnut tree at the southern end.

Byway 19 is shown on the 1761 map. It crosses a shallow valley and the hedges on the north-western slope have a woodland flora. Look for bluebells, sweet woodruff, wood melick and a crab apple tree opposite the houses.

Path 20 number not used.

Footpath 21 continues south as Streatley 6. It is an ancient road shown on the 1761 map as leading to Southridge. It is tree-lined and the massive coppice stools on the boundary banks confirm its age. They are often several hundred years old.



Beech coppice stool

The surface is reasonable and from Gould's Cottage to the B4009 it is tarmaced. Note how deeply sunk this section is and look for the badger sett in the side.

Byway 22 is an ancient tree lined track shown on the 1761 map. It is lined with old coppice stools. At the southern end it cuts across the Iron Age Grim's Ditch in Portobello Wood. There is a large chalk quarry near the northern end. The path is generally wide and sound but can be overgrown at the extreme northern and southern ends.

Footpath 23 runs between the B4009 and the Streatley parish boundary near Bower Farm. It is shown on the 1761 map. The south end runs along the side of an arable field and the hedges have some large coppice stools. Look out for the waymark in the hedge just before the field edge bends, and for the large oak just beyond it.

Byway 24 is a wide hard-surfaced track lined with relatively new multi species hedges. It leads to Bower Farm and is on the 1761 map. It is deeply sunk as it approaches the parish boundary.

Footpath 25 is a delightful walk from the west but a steady climb from the east



View from the west end

along a wide downland valley with good views and interesting flora - especially in the wide grass area beside the wood. There are narrow kissing gates at either end which prevent access for wheelchairs.

Byway 9 runs along the Parish Boundary south from The Ridgeway to meet Streatley Path 8 near Bower Farm. It is shown on the 1761 map and has standard chalkland hedges of blackthorn, hawthorn, hazel and wayfaring tree. The flora under them is impoverished. The surface is good and there are excellent views over the Thames Valley and Chiltern Hills to the north and over Streatley Warren to the east. The network of banks in the Warren are survivors of prehistoric and Roman fields. The Warren is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its unimproved flower rich chalk grassland and the associated insect and bird life. Stone curlews have nested here. It is also 'Open' under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act except that it is closed from 1 March to 31 October to protect ground nesting birds and lambing sheep.

Byway 10 is The Ridgeway and is shown on the 1761 map as a major road. Parts of the surface have been improved but others are still furrowed chalk, especially in the deeply sunk lengths. The hedges are species poor – wych elm, blackthorn, field maple, hazel – and there are few flowers. It is joined by Byways 11 and 12 and continues downhill before rising to another meeting of paths on the Parish Boundary in a wood known locally as Brown's Firs.

Byway 11 is shown on the 1761 map. The hedges are mainly blackthorn and hawthorn but there is a rich chalkland flora - look for bedstraw, cushion calamint, silverweed, toadflax, knapweed, scabious, agrimony and others. There are grand views through gaps in the hedges. The view from the north end is particularly impressive. The track surface is wide and firm but deeply rutted in parts.

Byway 12 is a 'Botanist's Path' and again it was here in 1761. It runs northwest from Starveall as a wide hard track. The southwest hedge is newly planted but the northeast hedge is older and richer. There are many excellent chalkland plants along the sunken length including harebells.



Harebells

Footpath 13 runs through a security gate overlooked by cameras along the drive to Keeper's Cottage in Ham Wood. It links the Ridgeway to Footpath 8 at a stile on the left of the drive.

Footpath 14 is the Aldworth end of a Streatley path. It climbs steadily and quite steeply to the southwest along a terrace cut slanting up the valley side with a steep drop through the wood on the northwest. The surface is hard and good. A kissing gate prevents access to Footpath 25 for wheelchairs.

Footpath 15 starts next to the Bell pub. The length alongside the playing field is narrow with a barbed wire fence on one side and a hedge growing though a wire net on the other. The rest of the path is across arable fields.

Footpath 16 cuts off the corner between Bell Lane and the B4009. It runs between garden fences on one side and a barbed wire fence on the other and is too narrow for a wheelchair.

WALK DESCRIPTIONS

Footpath 1 is a 'Woodland Path' through a pheasant rearing wood. The eastern half is through a conifer plantation with a poor display of flowers. The western half is through mixed deciduous woodland and hazel coppice and has chalkland flowers and is more interesting. The terraces at the west were man made as cultivation terraces and were gardens in 1761. They may be Roman. The path surface is generally good **but there is a very steep drop with steps to the road at the southern end.**

Bridleway 2 is an ancient road and is shown on the 1761 map. The northern hedge is very species rich (at least 9 species) and contains a superb oak tree about 250–300 years old. The path surface is good but the path can become overgrown.



The ancient oak tree

Footpath 3 is a 'Church Path' aiming straight for the church from Pibworth. The path runs through grass paddocks with narrow kissing gates. Pibworth was the girlhood home of the 19th century poet Alfred Lord Tennyson's wife Emily Sarah Selwood. Note the quarry pit at the west end.

Byway 4 only ran as far as Dumworth Farm in 1761 but is now a wide hard-surfaced track joining Ambury Road. The land rises sharply along the eastern hedge and there are many species of chalkland flowers on the verge. There are good views from the northern end.

Footpath 5 provides an interesting 'Farm Visit' through Bower Farm with lots of animals to see. The route is well marked but complicated - look carefully for the signs. **Dogs on short leads please.** There is a large pit near the Ambury Road end.

Footpath 6 runs along the edge of an arable field. It is likely to be very narrow when a crop is growing.

Footpath 7 is a 'View Path'. It runs along a ridge with magnificent views into the Upper Thames Valley from the north end and equally glorious views southward from along the path. Parts will be very narrow when a crop is growing in the field.

Footpath 8 runs north from the stile on Footpath 13 following the green arrow to the left just beyond the stile. The ploughed out banks in the Warren continue in Town Copse with impressive woodland flowers in spring. The path is narrow through the wood but once clear of the trees it becomes a wide grassy path with extensive views to the north.



Wild garlic and bluebells on an ancient boundary bank in Town Copse.

