



BEENHAM

Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways

FOLLOW THE COUNTRYSIDE CODE

Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs.

Leave gates and property as you find them.

Protect plants and animals and take your litter home.

**Keep dogs under close control.
Consider other people.**

Know your rights and responsibilities.

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

www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk

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.

Beenham can be reached by public transport. Details of the services can be obtained from the parish website www.beenhamonline.org or by telephoning

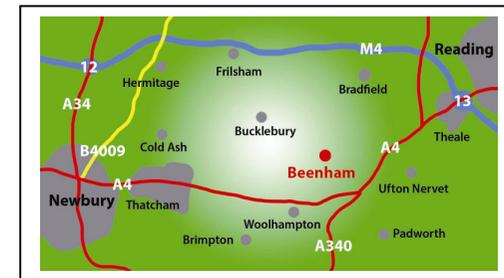
Newbury Buses. Tel.01635 567500 and Rail Enquires 08457 484950

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.

For more historical information see '*Beenham. A History*' Beenham History Group 1999.

Acknowledgements

Images and text by Dick Greenaway. Map compilation by Nick Hopton.



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

BEENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Further copies of this leaflet may be downloaded from
www.westberks.gov.uk and www.beenhamonline.org



West Berkshire
Countryside Society



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BEENHAM – FOOTPATHS BRIDLEWAYS AND BYWAYS

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

Beenham lies some seven and a half miles (12km) east of Newbury, and like so much of West Berkshire is in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The parish lies on the north slope of the Kennet Valley and the geology ranges from alluvium along the River Kennet through gravel terraces to infertile clays and gravels along the northern edge of the parish. The valley floor is mainly large rectangular fields whereas the valley side has an irregular pattern of smaller fields and woods. The steep slope and springs in the upper strata have resulted in a number of dramatic narrow steep-sided valleys that can be seen from the paths.

There is a school, a pub but no shop or post office. There are bus services and trains from Newbury and Reading stop at Aldermaston Station on the southern edge of the parish. There are 23 paths of various classifications and many links to other parish networks. The paths offer walks and rides through differing terrains such as ancient woods and coppices, across fields 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. It would be wise to check its condition before use.

Local people provided the route information, but Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 158 (Newbury and Hungerford) will provide the bigger picture.

THE HISTORY OF BEENHAM

Neolithic, Bronze Age and Roman finds have been made in the parish mainly on the flat land to the south.

Beenham is first mentioned in 956AD as *Benna's Hamme* – meaning 'Benna's enclosure', but is not mentioned in Domesday Book (1086). There may have been two manors. The main one based on Grange House on the flat land to the south and a tiny one based on Beenham House. The church and manor were granted to Reading Abbey on its foundation by Henry I in 1121. The isolated church is the third church on the site. No trace of settlement around it has been found. The earliest settlements grew up on the ridge at Beenham Stocks and at the west end near the 'Six Bells'.

During the Civil War 1642-46 the area was 'no man's land' and many skirmishes took place. A bar maid in an alehouse near the more recent 'Six Bells' was murdered by soldiers.

The original common fields were enclosed piecemeal at various dates with a final Parliamentary Enclosure in 1814. During World War 2 the Great Western Railway's management was dispersed to the area around Aldermaston and the General Manager's office was in Beenham Grange. Beenham Grange was a scientific establishment but is now empty and the eastern side of path 17 is devoted to re-cycling and scrap yards. *See the parish website for more information.*

Bridleway 13. Runs diagonally across a flat alluvial field at the west end and will be difficult when the field is cultivated. Note the dark and relatively stone free soil. The land rises suddenly to the north along the field edge indicating a change of geology. Look out for the ancient oak and ash coppice stools along the northern hedge. A large rounded bank running just inside the wood parallel to the hedge perhaps means that the original track was just inside the wood. The straight species poor hedges on the flat land are the result of the 19th century Inclosures.

Footpath 14 Cuts across the paddocks of Malthouse Farm to Gravelpits Copse. Each fence has a very narrow squeeze stile. The aptly named copse has a tangle of shallow quarries. These probably provided road making material in the days when parishes had to maintain their own roads and used local material. In 1889 the new County Councils took over responsibility for roads and used more formal quarries.

Bridleway 15 is un-trodden and runs though a series of marked gates along the north-western side of Malthouse Farm paddocks. It is much to be preferred to the heavily used

Permitted Path which runs along outside the southern sides of the paddocks and along the edge of Gravel Pit Wood. When using this path look for the deep narrow valley with its large coppice stools alongside the path in the wood. These stools may be 400 years old.

Path 16. Number no longer used. The path was transferred to Woolhampton as a result of boundary changes.

Byway 17. Note, at the northern end the path is sound but uneven and there are some steep hills. This is a tarmac road past the re-cycling and tile making yards at the south end near the Bath Road (A4). The tarmac ends at Beenham Grange with its magnificent cedar of Lebanon. Granges were the local headquarters of monastic estates and this may have been the site of Reading Abbey's operation. During World War 2 the Grange was the office and residence for the general manager of the Great Western Railway. The steep hill to the north indicates a change of geology. Look for the small quarry on the wood at the top of the hill. Downrings Farm is beautifully situated at a junction of two spring fed valleys but does not appear to be ancient. This path ends at the church.

Bridleway 18 is a tarmac road past scrap yards for its western half. The eastern half is sound but uneven with interesting views to the north.

Footpath 19 is the driveway to Butlers Farm and has a smooth tarmac surface as far as the farm. Look for the ancient oak tree on the bank near the north end of the path. In 2012 it had a girth of 5.2m indicating an age of about 350 years.

Footpaths 20, 21 & 22 *There are steep hills on these paths.* These paths form a loop through High Wood. This wood was also mapped in 1761. It is another coppice. Look for the massive sweet chestnut coppice stools. These may be 300 years old. Sweet chestnut poles were favoured as supports for hop growing. Part of the loop runs along the parish boundary. Look for the low bank and ditch on the east. This may be an early boundary marker.

Footpath 5 has a tarmac surface and runs along 'Church View'. There is a double barrier at the mid point.

Footpath 6.1 runs along the field edge from the village to Butlers Farm. A wide strip is left unploughed because a sewer pipe with manholes limits the ploughing. The path route is often muddy and overgrown. Look for the early 18th century Awberry Farm to the north of the path. There is a stile at the eastern end. Wolves from the Conservation Trust may be seen behind the fence.

Footpath 6.2 Continues as a smooth tarmac drive to the superb Butlers Farm which has a 16th century origin. The path then runs in the field close to the western hedge around the house. There are three stiles. North of the third the path crosses an arable field. Head for the large wooden power cable pylon with a yellow label. This path is often muddy.

Footpath 7 good at the southern end. Northern end less sound. Look for the large oak in the hedge at the southern end. White Cottage is the oldest house in the parish and is sited to take advantage of a nearby spring. The barn is *cruck framed* and therefore older. It may be the original house on the site. The hedges are mainly single species and may result from the 19th century Inclosures. There are good views of the Bourne Valley.

Access Path. Permission to use this path has been negotiated between the Parish Council and the landowner. Look for the large sycamore coppice stools. The shallow rectangular pit near the mid point could be a filled in sawpit. The round pits are tree root holes.

Bridleway 8. Once again the hedges are straight and single species. Those at the south end have late 19th century 'park rails' imbedded in them. These are made of *wrought iron* which does not rust as quickly as mild steel. The wet area around the Bourne crossing is very valuable for wetland plants and amphibians. Holly copse is a hazel coppice with oak standards and may have been planted on old arable fields about 250 years ago. The steep rise alongside it indicates a change of geology.

Footpath 9 There are double rail barriers at the east end and mid point of this path. The surface is hard gravel but can be muddy. Look for the ancient large bank and ditch as you enter the wood. High Wood has a wide variety of trees and plants. Look for cherry trees, oaks, hazel coppice stools etc.

Bridleway 10A runs along the edge of Greyfield Wood which was mapped in 1761. Look for the wide rounded boundary bank beside the path. The flora shows that this is an ancient wood damaged by 20th century conifer planting. It was bought by, and is managed for the community by the Beenham Investment Group.

Bridleway 10. Look for the steep sided pit which is the head of a valley. The large ash coppice stools are hundreds of years old.

Footpath 11 leads through the edge of the wood to the parish boundary at The Bourne and then on to Chapel Row.

Footpath 12 links path 11 to the road and passes through old hazel, ash and sweet chestnut coppice.

NATURAL HISTORY

The geology very much determines the natural history. A few damp areas survive from the ancient marshes that once existed along the Kennet and these are home to willows and wetland plants. The acid soils further up the slopes are a patchwork of woods and coppices. Some of these, particularly in the deep, narrow valleys, are ancient and home to plants like bluebells, wood anemones, old twisted coppice stools and hazel bushes. Deer, particularly muntjak, are regularly seen and there is a wide range of bird species – including red kites. You may hear wolves howling! These, however, are safely enclosed at the Wolf Conservation Trust! (See Path 6.1).

WALK DESCRIPTIONS

Byway 1. Note, at the northern end the path is sound but uneven and there are some steep hills This is 'Clay Lane' and the hard gravel track is part of an ancient route from the grazing areas on Bucklebury Common down to the Kennet Valley marshes and arable land. Note how deeply it has been cut into the landscape. Look for interesting plants on its banks such as horsetail, once used to polish pewter and polypody fern, quite rare in West Berkshire and a sign of ancient undisturbed woodland. Note the old farm complex at Hall Place Farm. *Deerbourne* is a conversion of an early 18th century barn. Close to the north is a brick and timber granary on *staddle stones* (stone mushrooms) in which seed was stored. There are remains of the old marshy floodplain near the A4 Bath Road.

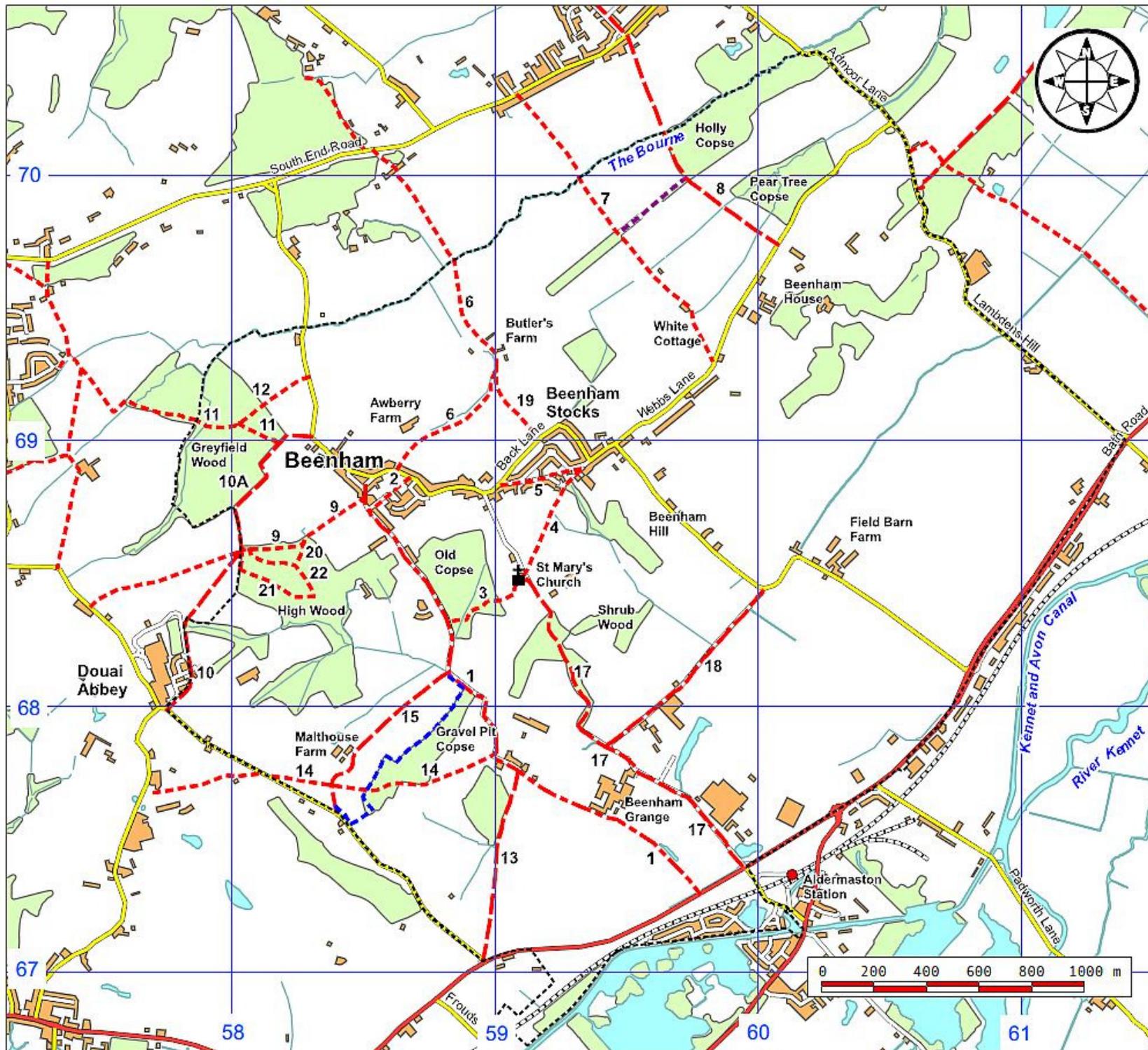
Footpath 2. Runs along the southern edge of the Green. It is of hard, even gravel. A double barrier at the edge of the field has a minimum width of 62cm and may be difficult for wheel chairs.

Footpath 3. Cuts through Old Copse to the church. The copse is well named and has been here for a long time. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Look for the numerous coppice stools cut close to the ground to supply poles, sticks and firewood. It has bluebells, wood anemones, golden saxifrage, wild daffodils and many other plants. Keep to the south side of the wood to stay on the path. There is a steep sided valley on this path. The surface is well drained. The church was twice damaged by fire. The tower was rebuilt in 1794 and the rest of the church in 1860-71.

Footpath 4 is another 'church path'. It has a gravel surface but there is a steep-sided valley at the north end. There are good views to the south where the hedge is low. There is a double barrier at the church end.

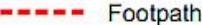


Horsetail on Byway 1



Ancient oak on Path 19

- Parish Boundary

- Rights of Way
 -  Footpath 
 -  Bridleway   
 -  BOAT     
- Permitted Path
  
- Access Path
 