



FOLLOW THE COUNTRY 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.

There are regular bus services to Hermitage from Newbury. For details phone

Newbury Buses. Tel.01635 567500

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

Please use the various car parks provided by Eling Estate and shown on the leaflet map if you have to drive to the parish to start your walk.

Please do not park in the village hall car park without obtaining prior permission.

More information can be obtained from Hermitage Parish Council.

Acknowledgements

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



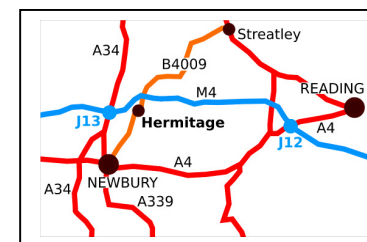
West Berkshire
Countryside Society

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HERMITAGE

Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways



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

HERMITAGE PARISH COUNCIL


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


HERMITAGE– FOOTPATHS BRIDLEWAYS AND BYWAYS


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

Hermitage lies some four miles (six kilometres) NNE of Newbury and, like so much of West Berkshire, is in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The village lies in a shallow valley on the dip slope of the Berkshire Downs. The parish is mainly woodland with small fields around the perimeter. There are two pubs, one shop with a post office and one butcher.

The path network consists of twenty three paths of various classifications and many links to other parish networks. The paths offer walks and rides over differing terrains such as Ancient Woodlands, old coppices, across fields and along ancient drove roads.

 indicates obstacles such as stiles or steep hills which make the path unsuitable for disabled people.

 indicates no obstacles but the path may have uneven and muddy surfaces.

 indicates no obstacles and that the path has a reasonably sound surface.

For more information on the wider network you should use the Ordnance Survey Explorer maps 158 (Newbury and Hungerford). These maps show all Public Rights of Way.

Eling Estate allows many of its paths to be used by walkers. There are maps in their car parks and the paths are shown on the map page in green. They are unclassified and walkers use them at their own risk.


THE HISTORY OF HERMITAGE


The name comes from a legend of dubious authenticity that a holy hermit once lived in the area. A more plausible name is *Faircross* which probably describes the crossing of two important drove routes. The western *Old Street* coming down from the Ridgeway and continuing to Bucklebury Common along Fence Lane. The eastern road coming from Yattendon and continuing to Newbury and the south along *Long Lane*. Old gravel tracks approach the pond from east and west. Fairs were commonly held at such places, but there is no known record of a fair here. *Faircross Pond* was probably an attraction for drovers' thirsty animals from an early date. It was used as a parish boundary marker in 1761 and is probably very ancient. It is a swallow hole where water draining from the plateau gravels under Fence Wood sinks down into the underlying aquifers. *Faircross* gives its name to *Faircross Hundred* that is first recorded in 1256.


The Parish of Hermitage was settled at a very early date. The hill fort in Grimsbury Wood shows that there was a substantial population in the Late Iron Age (0 to 100BC) and Roman remains have been found on Birch Farm.


The parish was formerly the southern extremity of Hampstead Norreys Parish which was itself probably derived from a large late Saxon estate. It became a separate parish in 1840.


In 1761 maps show most of the parish as rough open ground with a scatter of houses around the junctions of Marlston Road and Yattendon Road with the modern B4009. There was a windmill at Little Hungerford. This was moved to


 **Footpath 13** leaves the B4009 near the school and runs to the parish boundary near an old sand pit. This pit probably acts as a swallow hole where surface water enters the underground aquifers. It is valuable wetland.


 **Footpath 14** comes from Oare. Look for the old coppice stools on the boundary bank showing that the bank is ancient. This was once common grazing and the artificial ponds provided water for animals. The large banks and ditches are part of ancient enclosures.


 **Footpath 15** runs through woods to join Paths 11 & 12.


 **Footpath 16** runs from Yattendon Road alongside the old railway (closed in 1964) to Marlston Road. It is well surfaced and passable in most weather. Note the large ash and sycamore stools on the embankment – the result of regular cutting in the steam era. At least 17 species of trees and shrubs can be seen along this path.


 **Footpath 17** rises up a steep slope from the B4009. In 1761 the whole of this area was open Common land. There are many species of birds and deer are often seen.


 **Footpath 18** leaves the Yattendon Road and runs along the boundary of Chalk Pit Piece to a field with hollows and humps from old brick earth or sand quarries. These continue in Furze Hill Wood. Some are very deep and contain ponds. The highest point to the south is the site of a windmill moved to Compton in 1760. In 1761 all this area was open scrubland. There are stiles.


 **Number 19** Links Path 2 to the Yattendon Road and runs through conifer plantations which smell wonderful in warm weather. There are yet more quarry pits in the woods.

 **Footpath 20** leads from Doctor's Lane diagonally across the field to Spring Copse. There are three stiles. Look for bluebells in spring and some very ancient coppice stools. The old pit probably supplied sand to make bricks at Kiln Farm. The wet area near the top of the hill is caused by the springs that named the wood.


 **Footpath 21.** Joins Paths 7 and 8.
Number 22 Not used

 **Byway 23.** Doctor's Lane, named because it led to the doctor's surgery. It has the same name on the 1877 map and so Hermitage had a resident doctor earlier than most villages. Note the pressure marks, glazing and colour variations in the brick wall and the small sarsen stone which may possibly be a boundary mark. Hermitage House is dated 1715. Note the sand pit at the parish boundary.


 **Footpath 24** rises up a steep slope from the B4009 onto the old Common where it joins Path 14 near a pond. The soils are sand and so the pond must be lined with clay.


 **Footpath 25** This path is shared with Frilsham as 'Frilsham 13'. The parish boundary runs along the centre of the path indicating great antiquity. It may have been established by the 9th century. Note how deeply it is sunk. There are deep quarries in the wood and excellent views to the east.


The Furze Hill Open Space path runs from the Forest Edge Estate along the old railway through the very species rich Butterfly Meadow and Furze Hill Wood to Path 18.

 **Permitted Path.** Runs underneath the M4 from near the entrance to the Village Hall and then along the disused railway line to Hampstead Norreys. The path was opened in 2020 and is specially built with disabled people in mind. It has an even surface and no hills.


WALK DESCRIPTIONS


 **Restricted Byway 1. Fence Lane.** This is a very ancient drove route connecting the Ridgeway with Bucklebury Common via Old Street. It probably pre-dates Grimsbury Castle which is an Iron Age hill fort. The high banks allowed a large number of animals to be driven by a few men with dogs. The woodland plants such as bluebells and wood anemones on the banks indicate that they were built through ancient woodland. The rich ground flora in Fence Wood show that this is Ancient Secondary Woodland. Look for the conical quarry pit on the east of the lane. Look out for buzzards and red kites


 **Restricted Byway 2.** This wide track is an ancient road that ran north across the open land to Bothampstead Green and south to Bucklebury Common. It is often very muddy. Look for quarries at a number of places beside the track. Wellhouse Farm at the southern end is late 18th century in origin but is on the site of an older settlement. Look for an ancient stub oak on the bank near Wellhouse Farm.


 **Footpath 3** runs across the field from a stile on Yattendon Road to a gate at Birch Cottage.


Number 4 Not used


 **Footpath 5** runs north from Wellhouse Lane and enters the parish after about 350metres. The wide ditch to the north in the wood marks the boundary. This path is an ancient road leading from Bucklebury to the open grazing around Little Hungerford.


 **Footpath 6** runs from Path 5 to Box Cottage formerly on the edge of the open land. Look for the oak lined banks.


 **Byway 7** continues Path 2 to the south from Wellhouse Farm to Marlston Road. There are yet more quarry pits on either side.

 **Byway 8** continues Path 9 to the north from Marlston Road to Wellhouse Lane. The house at the Marlston Road end was a shop in the early 20th century.

 **Byway 9.** Yet another ancient track leading to Bucklebury Common, it passes Boar's Hole Farm which appears on the 1761 map. It was rebuilt as a 'model' Home Farm for the Palmer family when they bought the estate and built Marlston House (now Brockhurst School) in 1895. The original barn and the granary raised on staddle stones (stone mushrooms) were retained. Look for the sheds built in 'railway' style and the tall chimney in the distance. This was part of a steam driven pump which drew water from a 24m (80ft) deep well and fed it around the estate. The pump house also housed the laundry.

 **Byway 10.** Runs NE from the southern end of Path 1 for 40m along the parish boundary. Look for snowdrops in season.

 **Restricted Byway 11.** Is metalled from Yattendon Road at the M4 bridge to the mobile phone mast. Rooks Copse is Ancient Woodland and very species rich. Look for dog's mercury, bluebell, celandine, violets, moschatel, ramsons, wood anemone, wood sorrel and many more.

 **Footpath 12.** Runs NE between stiles across the field from Path 2 to a beautiful little valley with wooded slopes. The low banks crossing the path are part of an ancient field system.

Compton and re-erected soon after 1761. The church was built in 1835 and the Adelaide Room added later and named in memory of a gift of silver by Queen Adelaide the wife of William IV.

There were two brick and tile works. One at Little Hungerford, known as Pinewood, on the site of Forest Edge Estate and the other in Kiln **Close**. They exploited the sands and clays which overlie the solid geology of chalk.

The railway from Didcot to Southampton Junction was constructed through the parish in 1882 allowing easy access to Newbury. There were two stations, one close to Hermitage Green and the other at Pinewood Halt for the brickworks. The platform was near the modern scout hut in Pinewood Playground. Ribbon development followed to form the existing village. During World War 2 the railway was an important route for war material from the Midlands to the South Coast ports and the line was doubled in 1943. A Buffer Depot was built at Hermitage to house essential stores. The railway fell to the Beeching axe and closed in 1964. The School of Military Survey was established soon after the end of the war on the site of a military hospital.



Lesser celandines

NATURAL HISTORY

The underlying geology is chalk, overlain with soils containing clays and flints on the higher ground and alluvial soils and sands in the valley bottom.

Fence Wood, Meetinghouse Wood and Roebuck Wood are shown in 1761 and are likely to be Ancient Secondary Woodland. Ancient Secondary Woodlands are woods that existed before 1600. Meetinghouse and Roebuck Woods were separated by a Common in 1761 and there was another Common just north of Red Shute Hill.

Hermitage's woods are very rich in birdlife and deer, mainly muntjak and roe, are regularly seen. Many of the paths have interest all the year round, with abundant spring flowers (please do not pick, it is illegal!), beautiful trees and autumn colours, butterflies and far reaching views

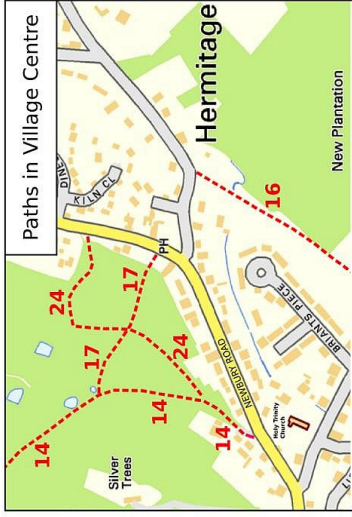
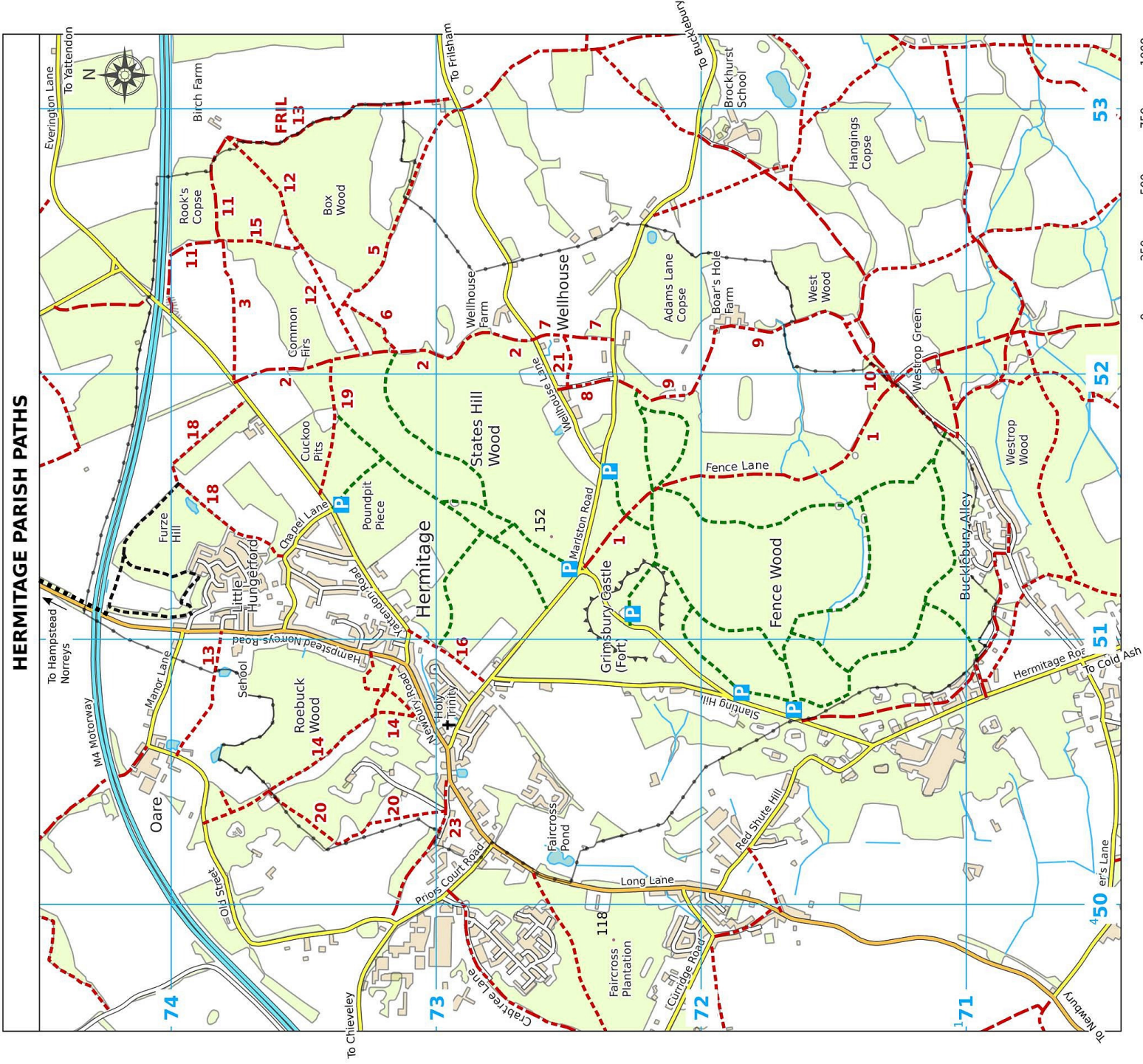


Native bluebells



Wood spurge – the 'cup and saucer plant'.

HERMITAGE PARISH PATHS



ELING ESTATE - PATHS IN HERMITAGE WOODS
 Car parking is provided by the Eling Estate. Users park at their own risk.

P Public access is permitted on foot to all of the paths in the woods. Minor paths in the woods are not shown on this map.

Horse riding is not permitted without permission from the Estate office. Telephone 01635 200268

Do not disturb wildlife or other visitors, keep dogs under close control, do nothing that might cause fires and take your litter home with you.

The following are prohibited in the woods: bicycles, motorcycles, vehicles or any sort, firearms.

Observe the Country Code at all times.

- P** Car park
 - Parish boundary
 - Rights of way
 - Footpath
 - Bridleway
 - Restricted byway
 - Byway open to all traffic
 - Other paths**
 - Open space path
 - Eling Estate path
- In 2014 magnetic north was 2° west of grid north.
 Rights of way data derived in part from Ordnance Survey mapping. © Crown Copyright. Licence 100036335.