

a 5.5 mile/ 9km circular walk

Chiltern Trails Chinnor to Bledlow



www.chilternsaonb.org
to develop these trails.
Conservation Board funding that made it possible
We gratefully acknowledge The Chilterns

This is one of a series of 'Chiltern Trails' walks under development by Chiltern Archaeology. Each route highlights the interesting geology that makes the landscape, as well as the wildlife, the history, local stories and folklore which give insight into what makes the Chilterns an interesting and beautiful area.
A book, *The Chiltern Trails*, will provide more information about the Chilterns, with intriguing stories and many more interesting places to visit.
Chiltern Archaeology, 13 Pusey Way, Lane End, Bucks, HP14 3LG
www.chilternarchaeology.com
email: chilternarchaeology@btopenworld.com

Refreshments
There are several pubs in Chinnor as well as The Lions in Bledlow. Alternatively bring a picnic to eat along the way.

About the Chinnor to Bledlow walk
This is a walk through a classic Chilterns landscape, beginning at the foot of the Chalk scarp, then climbing the steep hill to explore the wooded top and dip slope. From the top you can fully appreciate how geology makes scenery! The route also shows the variety of ways in which people have used the landscape – and geology – for thousands of years: flint for tools and building; chalk for cement, springs to supply water and the soil itself for farming.
The route starts in Chinnor, but you could begin at any point or walk in reverse: it's your choice. There is a short-cut reducing the walk to 2 miles / 3km. The nearest train station is Princes Risborough, with buses 320 and 232 to Chinnor (no Sunday service). If you arrive by car, please park considerately.

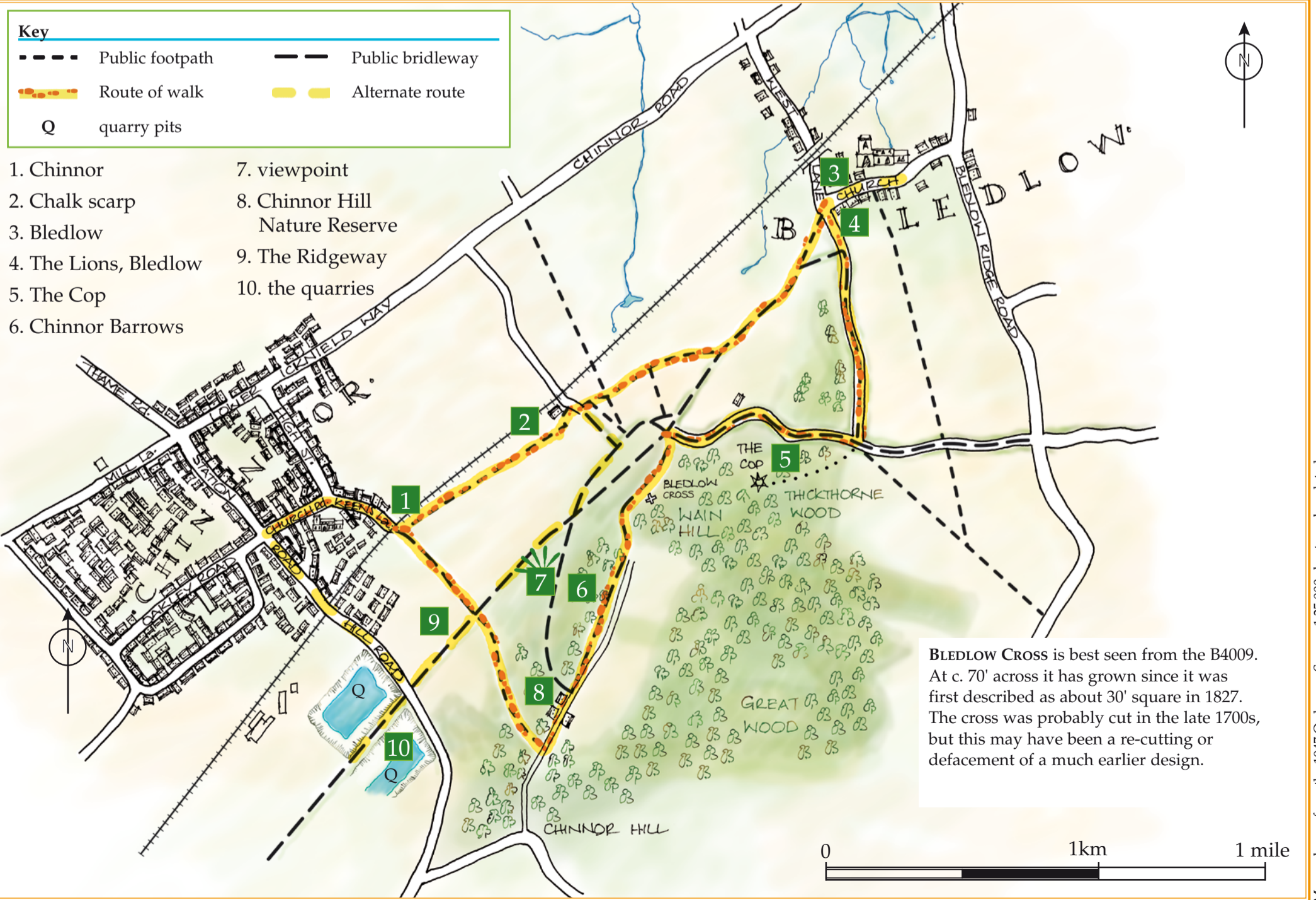


The Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a unique place of great beauty and wildlife interest. It incorporates a wide range of landscapes shaped by its geology and history.
The Chilterns geological story began c. 100 million years ago when sea levels rose more than 300m due to global warming. The chalky muds deposited on the sea floor eventually became today's Chalk. The rounded hills and deeply dissected dry valleys of the Chilterns are actually very recent, sculpted by melting glaciers about 450,000 years ago.
Stone Age hunters and gatherers lived in the Chilterns. Neolithic settlers cleared trees to grow crops, leaving behind their burial mounds and starting the process that created flower-rich chalk grassland. The Anglo-Saxons knew this area as *Chilernsetaen*, a 'god-forsaken place that no-one in their right mind would want to settle'. But settle they did, leaving Anglo-Saxon names such as Goring, Bledlow, Wycombe, Chesham and Luton to remind us of the many groups of people who have lived, farmed, traded and died in the Chilterns.

Key

- Public footpath
- Public bridleway
- Route of walk
- Alternate route
- quarry pits

1. Chinnor
2. Chalk scarp
3. Bledlow
4. The Lions, Bledlow
5. The Cop
6. Chinnor Barrows
7. viewpoint
8. Chinnor Hill Nature Reserve
9. The Ridgeway
10. the quarries



BLEDLOW CROSS is best seen from the B4009. At c. 70' across it has grown since it was first described as about 30' square in 1827. The cross was probably cut in the late 1700s, but this may have been a re-cutting or defacement of a much earlier design.

Route summary

From Chinnor village hall walk past the shops, turn right and continue over the railway line. Turn left almost immediately (1) onto the paths near the *scarp* (slope) (2) towards Bledlow (3). (SHORT CUT: turn right on the tarmac road near Hempton Wainhill, then right again onto the Ridgeway. Pass a house on your left, turn right onto the path and walk back to Chinnor). Otherwise continue to The Lions in Bledlow (4), then turn south uphill to the Ridgeway. At the T-junction you might like to walk a few hundred meters uphill to the Cop (5). If so, go through the gate opposite and take the track to the right, directly uphill. Watch to your right for the burial mound (*tumulus*) known as the Cop. Otherwise turn right, onto the path continuing west towards Hempton Wainhill. Turn left onto the path signed for 'Chinnor Hill and the Barrows'. Watch for the sign on the fence for the Barrows (6); go through the gate to investigate them further and admire the view (7). Now continue south on the path, to Chinnor Hill Nature Reserve (8). At the tarmac road turn right about 50m past a postbox onto a steep path down the escarpment to Chinnor. You can turn left onto the Ridgeway (9) to take a quick look into the chalk quarries (10). If so, the road you cross will return you to Chinnor: walk back from the quarry, turn left, and walk past the old railway station into the village.

1. CHINNOR: Place names preserve a surprising amount of ancient history. For example, **Chiltern** is derived from the Celtic *Cilterne* meaning 'land beyond the hills'. **Chinnor** is derived from *Ceonna*, an Anglo-Saxon man's name, and *ora*, a flat-topped hill. So 1500–1000 years ago the village was named after a person and the shape of the hill towering above it.

pattern. The ditches are about 1.5m wide, but now only about 30cm deep, having filled with silt over the many, many years since they were created.



One of the Chinnor Hill Barrows with view to Chinnor

7. THE VIEW ACROSS THE VALE: the whole of Chinnor and a patchwork of fields is laid out before you from the top of the Chalk. It is a relatively hard rock in this area, so has resisted erosion to stand high as the Chiltern Hills. The softer and older rocks beneath the Chalk lie under the surface of the flat vale in front of you. From here, the further in the distance, the older the strata. On a clear day you may just see some small 'bumps' along the horizon. These small hills are the Jurassic rock of the mid-Vale Ridge underlying villages such as Long Crendon, Chearsley, Upper Wichendon and Brill.



A winter view from the top of the Chalk scarp.

2. CHALK SCARP: Chinnor and Bledlow sit on the flat ground stretching out from beneath the Chalk. The scarp shows the boundary between the harder Chalk and the soft clays and sands of the Vale. Originally the scarp would have been further north: millions of years of erosion have worn it back to this place. The scarp slope exists because the Chalk was tilted, forced up by the same the event that produced the Alps and the Taurus mountains (50 to 10 million years ago)!

As you walk through the landscape remember that the field boundaries are much older than the crops. A Roman villa lies beneath Lower Wainhill, but the Romans inherited their landscape from Iron Age or Bronze Age farmers.



The Chalk scarp

3. BLEDLOW is named for the burial mound (locally known as the 'Cop') on the hill overlooking the village. **Bledlow** is derived from the Anglo-Saxon *Bledda*, a personal name, and *hlaw*, a burial mound. Bledda must have been someone very important to have deserved such a significant burial monument.

4. THE LIONS at Bledlow. This 17th-century pub is a good place for lunch and a must for Midsomer Murder fans, who will recognise it as the 'Queens Arms'. 'Badgers Drift Church' is just up the road! The pub was originally two adjoining pubs: the Red Lion and the Blue Lion. When they merged the name changed to 'The Lions', but you can still see the two front doors.



A late Bronze Age or Iron Age farm may have looked like this.

8. CHINNOR HILL NATURE RESERVE: 2,500 years ago you would be walking past an Iron Age village near the car park, where people still live today.

Chinnor Hill is a rich environment for wildlife. The reserve protects chalk grassland on the scarp slope from the Ridgeway, juniper scrub, and the beech woodland at the top of the hill. The grassland is full of colourful wildflowers for much of the year – primrose, cowslip, both Spotted and Pyramidal Orchid, Twayblade, Rock Rose and Agrimony. Juniper is more than flavouring for gin: it's a rare plant, home to a diverse insect fauna including rare insects such as the Juniper Shield Bug.

Clockwise from top:
Cowslip; Spotted Orchid;
Juniper Shield Bug;
Pyramidal Orchid



The burial mound known as Bledlow Cop

5. THE COP: Today the burial mound on the hill overlooking Bledlow is almost hidden within the trees, but when it was built the hillside was probably treeless, wood being in great demand for huts, equipment and fire-wood. The mound would have been higher, possibly surrounded by a ditch which has since filled with silt. Barrow burials such as this are often sited high in the landscape, on the sides of hills with a good view (to be seen by the people living nearby, rather than for the deceased!).

Many of these burial mounds (often marked *tumuli* on maps) are early Bronze Age in date, but Anglo-Saxon and, less often, Romano-British mounds may look very similar. The Cop is probably Bronze Age, from 4,600 to 3,600 years old, but some people think it Saxon (after 410 AD). The Saxons seem to have known the name of the deceased (*Bledda*), so it's possible.

6. THE CHINNOR HILL BARROWS are Bronze Age burial mounds between 4,600 and 3,600 years old. Burial sites such as this were still recognised as significant places many years later: an Anglo-Saxon was buried in a grave dug into the side of one of the mounds.

Even after centuries of erosion the two barrows remain an impressive sight (23m and 24m across and just over 1m high) and if you look carefully you may be able to see that they are surrounded by a ditch forming a figure-of-eight

The beech woodland sits on the Clay-with-Flints that caps the hill. The many irregular pits and depressions in the ground were dug by people quarrying flint. In summer Violets and White Helleborine flower on the shady woodland floor. If you explore you may find two ancient tracks worn hollow over time by feet and wheels. They may even have led to the Iron Age settlement.

9. THE RIDGEWAY: this 87 mile (139 km) route along the Chalk has been in use since the Neolithic period, perhaps from as long ago as 6,000 years. Originally much of its length was a wide route across grassland; hedged boundaries restricted its width after the Inclosure Acts of the mid-1800s.



10. CHINNOR CEMENT QUARRY: chalk has been extracted for cement-making from this quarry since 1908. At the height of production the quarry manufactured 5,600 tonnes per week. It closed in 1999, its life extended by a sudden need for more cement for the Channel Tunnel! In fact, the boring machine was tested here before tackling the tunnel. Cement requires a vast amount of Lower Chalk which, unlike the Middle and Upper Chalk, is not hard, but is a soft chalky clay. Extraction leaves large pits that fill with rainwater which looks blue due to fine particles in suspension. (Caution! DO NOT enter the quarries: they are dangerous and privately owned).

Cover images clockwise from top left:
Chinnor quarry; the Ridgeway; Cowslips (inset); the Chalk scarp.