

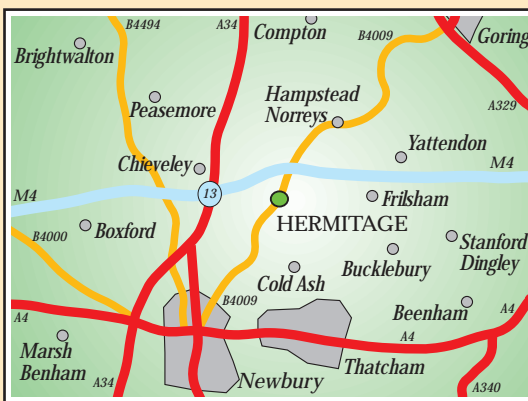
They exploited the sands and clays which overlie the solid geology of chalk. The railway from Didcot to Southampton Junction was constructed through the parish in 1882 allowing easy access to Newbury. There were two stations, one close to Hermitage Green and the other at Pinewood Halt for the brickworks. 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.

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.

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* (Path 1). 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' thirty 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* which is first recorded in 1256. The Parish of Hermitage was settled at a very early date. The hill fort in Grimbsbury 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 Marston Road and Yattendon Road with the modern B4009. There was a windmill at Little Hungerford. This was moved to 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.

THE HISTORY OF HERMITAGE



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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Walk information from Hermitage Parish Council
Compiled by Dick Greenaway
Thanks to Vic Bates, the cartographer who was responsible for producing the map & designing this leaflet.



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THE COUNTRYSIDE CODE

Code for the Public:

- ◆ 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.

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.

HERMITAGE-FOOTPATHS BRIDLEWAYS AND BYWAYS

HERMITAGE

Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways



HERMITAGE PARISH COUNCIL

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

Hermitage lies some three miles (five 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 and post office, one butchers. Details of the public transport service can be obtained from Newbury Buses. 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.

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 have reasonably sound surfaces.

Local parishioners provided the route information. Eling Estate allows many of its paths to be used by walkers. There are maps in their car parks. (See map page).

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.