

Walking in
West Berkshire

2



Bradfield

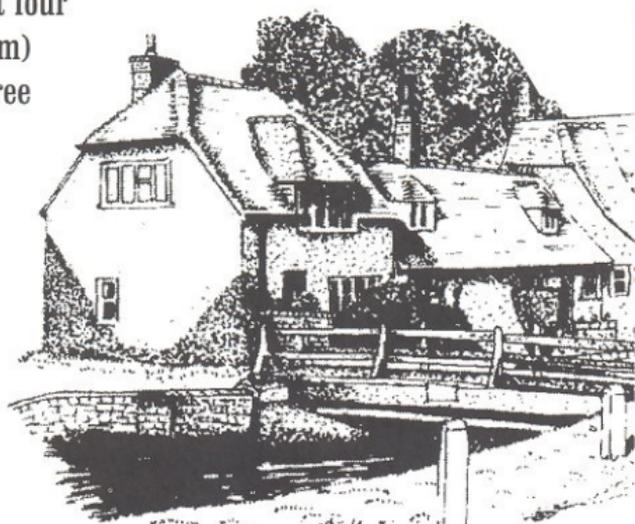
4

mile circular route
for walking

Introduction

Some features of the landscape endure many centuries, while others change completely within a few years. This walk passes through both ancient and recent woodland, a farm which combines the modern and the traditional, the meadows of the River Pang, and a village transformed by the presence of a major public school.

The main walk is about four and a half miles long (7km) and should take about three hours, but can be shortened slightly to four miles. You can also do a short walk of two miles starting at Rushall Manor Farm. The terrain is gentle, apart from a few short climbs in the woodland. Boots are advisable. The route is marked with the



Riverside Cottages, Bradfield

Countryside Agency's standard arrow waymarks, carrying the words 'Recreational Route'. There are no pubs or shops on the route (the nearest pubs are in Stanford Dingley) and there are toilets at Rushall Manor Farm.

The map in this leaflet should enable you to follow the route. For the general area, see Ordnance Survey Explorer 159 and Landranger sheets 174 and 175.

The walk is described starting from the car park at Rushall Manor Farm.

A farm has stood on this site for at least 700 years. The present buildings include a large 18th century thatched barn and a granary perched on Staddlestones to keep rats at bay. The Farm is now managed from modern buildings at a new site (Rushall Farm) to the east. With over a square mile of land, 800 sheep, and 40 cows, the farm produces meat, wheat, wool, barley, oilseed rape and timber. It won an award from Berkshire County Council for its work in conservation, and visitors are encouraged through the John Simonds Trust, an educational charity dedicated to teaching young people about farming and the countryside. For details of farm visits, telephone (0118) 974 4547.

The farm stands near an important geological divide. Below, the Upper Chalk produces well-drained soils of flinty loam, easy to work



as arable land. Above, the Reading Beds form ill-drained heavy clays, too difficult to work in the past; for centuries, this land has been devoted to woodland and permanent pasture, and has built up rich communities of plants and animals.

Walk down the farm drive to the road (Back Lane). Turn right, then immediately left on to a bridleway, which leads down to a gate. Go through this and cross the bridge over the River Pang. Follow the path by the river to another gate and path junction.

The Pang is bordered by woodland and wet meadows – a habitat for birds such as redshank, lapwing and snipe, and a feeding ground for such migrants as common and green sandpipers.

At the path junction turn left and follow the path to Mariner's Lane through a series of kissing gates. Turn right along Mariner's Lane for about 50 yards, then left on to the next footpath, which runs along the edge of Longmeadow Plantation before rejoining the River Pang.

Many water plants (for example, great willowherb and purple loosestrife) grow along the river's banks. Towards Bradfield, the Pang has been canalised to serve as the mill stream.

Follow the path along the river to Bradfield Church.

Bradfield owes much of its present character to Thomas Stevens, who, in 1842, became both rector and lord of the manor. In 1847-8, he re-built and enlarged St. Andrew's Church, with the architect Gilbert Scott. Only the 16th century tower and parts of the 14th century north aisle survive from the medieval building. Below the church, the former village school and mill form an attractive group with some picturesque 17th century cottages and Georgian houses.

Walk down the church lane to the main road (if you wish to look round the rest of the village, turn right. Return to this point afterwards). Turn left along the road, then take the next wide track to the left. Keep to the left past the drives to the buildings, until you reach a stile on the right.

Bradfield is dominated by the college, a public school founded by Stevens in 1850. He at first intended a small school, to provide a choir for his new church, but his ambitions and the buildings grew, finally leading to his financial downfall in 1880. The college, however, survived and now occupies most of the old village. The buildings are constructed of the brick, flint and timber native to Berkshire, but have one exotic feature, the Greek Theatre, fashioned from an old chalkpit in the 1880s. Every three years, the pupils stage a Greek play here.

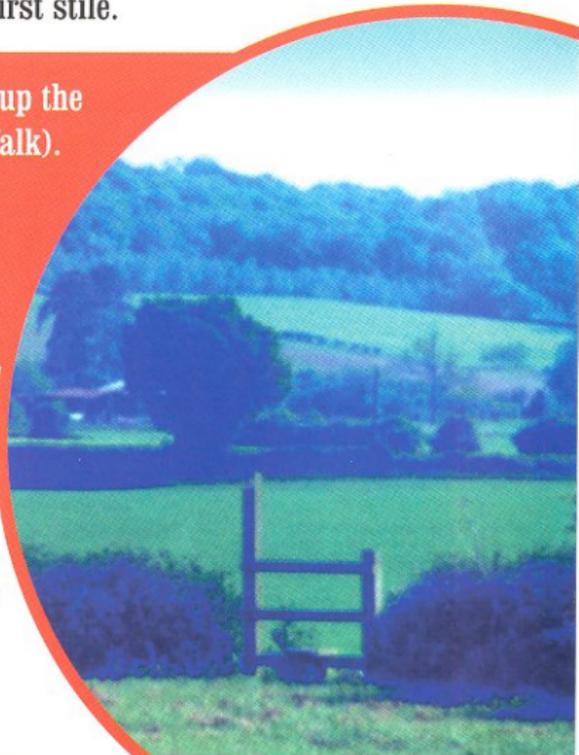
Cross the stile into the field. Follow the fence on the right to the corner. Turn left across the field, past the corner of the sports ground, aiming at the distant clump of trees (Hamblin's Copse). Cross the stile in the intervening fence and continue on to Back Lane.

A house name is the only clue that the village gasworks once stood in the area to the right of the first stile.

Cross Back Lane, and walk up the track opposite (Greathouse Walk).

Continue past Greathouse Cottages until you reach a large mound on the right (a covered reservoir).

**View from the Black Barn
(Rushall Manor Farm)**



'Greathouse' commemorates Bradfield House. The house was destroyed in the 1840s and only the cottages remain on the site. Thuja Wood, on the left of the track, contains some 'thuja plicata', the Western Red Cedar, a native of North America's Pacific coast. It was introduced to Britain in 1853 by the plant collector, William Lobb.

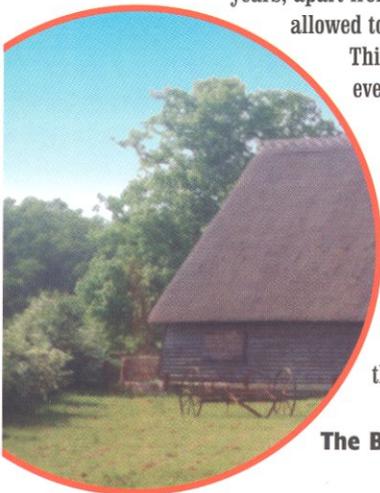
At the reservoir, you have a choice of two routes: for a shorter walk, turn left along the path which leads down through the woods; for a longer walk, keep going along the main track.

The Pang Valley Countryside Project is helping local farmers to co-ordinate their work in conserving wildlife and the landscape throughout the area. Your own ideas, expertise and practical help would be welcome; please contact the project officer on 0118 930 5335.

On the shorter walk, the path emerges from the woods at a stile. Cross over and follow the field edge to the right as far as the next stile. Climb over into the wood. (Here the walk leaves the public right of way and follows a nature trail which the landowner has created as a permitted path.) A few yards into the wood, turn right between the white posts and follow further posts through the woodland.

As you re-enter the wood, you can see the modern buildings of Rushall Farm down to the left. Most of the woodland on the shorter walk is very old. The community of plants includes many (aspens, wild cherry, bluebell, wood anemone, yellow archangel, wood sorrel, common Solomon's seal, sweet woodruff...) that usually occur only in woods dating from before 1600. In the past, the woods were managed by coppicing. Most of the trees were cut back every few years, apart from some 'standards', which were allowed to grow to full height.

This produced regular crops of evenly sized poles, which, with the larger timbers from the standards, provided material for a wide range of uses. These copses were protected from deer and livestock by hedges or banks. The banks still remain within the woodland, as do the deer – roe and the introduced muntjac.



The Black Barn

The path emerges on to Scratchface Lane. Cross the lane and follow the permitted path up to the right through Oaklands Copse, out across a field, through Long Copse, then across another field to a bridgeway. Turn left down the bridgeway, to Rushall Manor Farm and the end of the walk.

On the longer walk, about a quarter of a mile from the reservoir, the track dips down into a little valley. Just beyond this, turn on to the path that goes off to the left.

This area, the highest on the walk, is covered with a geological deposit called the Plateau Gravels (hence the name, 'The Gravels'). The trees here have grown since 1880; earlier maps show the path crossing open ground. Among the conifers are occasional Victorian exotics such as the Monkey Puzzle. (Its seeds were first 'collected' by Archibald Menzies at an official dinner in Chile – they were one of the dishes! William Lobb re-introduced the tree to Britain on a commercial basis in 1844.) Near the far edge of the wood are some fine Thuja; in their native home they grow to 200 feet and provide the timber of choice for totem poles.

The path eventually emerges at a stile. Here you have a choice of two routes: to continue along the main route cross over and follow the field edge to the left along a short stretch of permitted path. Cross the next stile into Scratchface Lane and turn left along the lane. Alternatively, carry on along the public footpath to Scratchface Lane, cross over onto the permitted path opposite and follow the path through Miriam's Copse, bear left at the first junction and continue through the copse to join the main route.

The lane is no longer the overgrown track that its name suggests; watch out for the occasional car. The woods bordering the route from here are much older than those on the Gravels. They are growing on the difficult soils of the Reading Beds.

After about 400 yards, turn right down the bridgeway which leads, as an unsurfaced lane, back to Rushall Manor Farm and the end of the walk.

As the lane passes Long Copse, there are fine views to the west, across the Pang Valley to Bucklebury Common, and to the wooded hills north of Bucklebury. If the present walk has whetted your appetite, the Stanford Dingley Recreational Route (described in another leaflet) explores this country.

Acknowledgements

Rushall Farm:

W.Cumber & Son (Theale) Ltd.(owners)

John Bishop (farm manager)

John Simonds Trust (educational charity)

The Country Code

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
- Guard against all risk of fire
- Leave all gates as found
- Keep your dogs under close control
- Keep to public rights of way across farm land
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges & walls
- Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone
- Take your litter home
- Help to keep all water clean
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees
- Take special care on country roads
- Make no unnecessary noise

Transport

By car, you can reach Bradfield via minor roads from Theale, Pangbourne or Thatcham. From the village, continue via Back Lane to Rushall Manor Farm (see map) where you may use the car park. By bus, Newbury Buses service 101 (Newbury-Reading) calls at Bradfield College, where you can join the walk. For bus times ring (01635) 567500.



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For further information about this and other leaflets please contact West Berkshire Council, Countryside & Environment, Faraday Road, Newbury RG14 2AF (Tel. 01635 519808).