

Living Landscape Wild Walk One

Berkshire
Buckinghamshire
Oxfordshire



Enjoy varied wetland wildlife, ancient woods and rare heathland

Starting in Thatcham, this 6-mile circular walk takes in the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust's (BBOWT) Bowdown Woods. Thatcham Reedbeds and Greenham and Crookham Commons are managed by BBOWT on behalf of West Berks Council.

- 9.7 km/6 miles (allow 3–4 hours)
- The walk starts and finishes at the Nature Discovery Centre. It is managed by BBOWT on behalf of West Berks Council, and has parking, a shop, toilets and café. Visit bbowt.org.uk/nature-discovery-centre for opening times.
- Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 158 1:25,000 scale, covers the area of this walk.

How to get to the start

Postcode: RG19 3FU **Grid ref:** SU 506 660

By bus: There are bus stops on Lower Way near the Centre.

By train: Thatcham railway station is near to this route. Starting there increases the walk by just under one mile.

By car: There is parking at the Nature Discovery Centre, Bowdown Woods and Greenham and Crookham Commons.

By bike: There is a cycle rack at the Nature Discovery Centre.



Please help us look after wildlife by keeping dogs on a lead when in nature reserves and under close control at all other times.

West Berkshire Living Landscape

Living Landscapes are big and bold; they create space for wildlife and people, reconnect isolated habitats and give wildlife room to adapt and thrive.

The West Berkshire Living Landscape is on the edge of Newbury and Thatcham. It covers 27 km² and is a mosaic of land rich with history and wildlife; a place for people and wildlife to thrive side by side.

Walking past history

- Excavations near Thatcham Reedbeds uncovered many flint tools from 10,000 years ago: used for cutting vegetables, scraping animal skins, making holes and sawing.
- In Bowdown Woods the 'Old Bomb Site' was used as a wartime munitions site. Bricks left from the demolished buildings provide shelter for reptiles and small mammals.
- Greenham Common is best known for its turbulent history. The airfield was used by the US Airforce during the 'Cold War', attracting anti-nuclear protests. The fences finally came down in 2000. 1.25 million tonnes of concrete and gravel were removed, new pools and slopes were landscaped. Today it's a 'common' place once again and full of very special wildlife.

Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)

BBOWT relies on the support of our members to help us look after local wildlife. By joining BBOWT you can help to secure the future of special landscapes like Bowdown Woods nature reserve. [Join us today!](#)

NATURE NOTES



Heathland is a rare habitat in Berkshire but one that is

important for many species. Ground-nesting birds such as nightjar nest here and reptiles such as adders live here all year round, basking in the sun on patches of bare ground. In late summer the heath at **Greenham and Crookham Commons** is covered with the pink and purple blooms of flowering heather; contrasted by the bright yellow gorse.



Reedbeds are among the most important habitats in the UK for birds. Some species,

such as reed warblers, will nest here while wildfowl like tufted ducks and gadwall feed in the shallows.

The habitat is also important for insects such as dragonflies and damselflies, which can be seen flying over the reeds. **Thatcham Reedbeds** is home to the very rare and tiny Desmoulin's whorl snail which is no bigger than 2 mm.



Woodland This walk passes through **Bowdown Woods**, the

Trust's biggest woodland reserve in Berkshire. The woodland is made up of hidden valleys, sunny glades and patches of heathland which are all rich in wildlife. In spring, wild flowers such as bluebells carpet the woodland floor, and birds, including treecreepers, nest in the branches up above. Later in the year a vast array of fungi emerge from the leaf litter.



Farmland is one of the most extensive habitats in the UK and

can be a very important link between other habitats for wildlife. The hedgerows, flower-filled field margins, seed-filled stubble and ponds are home to small mammals, birds such as yellowhammers, and insects. These insects can be essential pollinators for the crops that farmers grow. We're working with farmers so that farmland is managed in the best way for wildlife.

STAGE 2

At the canal towpath, turn right to go over a bridge. Pass Bull's Lock and cross the canal on the swing-bridge. Turn left onto the road and walk under the railway. Keep to the right along a track following the footpath sign until you come to a lake created from a disused gravel pit on the right. Continue on the track up the hill. Warning: After heavy rain, it can flood under the bridge.

STAGE 1

Leaving the Nature Discovery Centre, head south with the lake on your left. At the corner of the lake, head west across the junction of tracks, signed Reedbeds. When the track bears left, continue straight ahead along a small path under the electricity wires. Follow the path through the reedbeds, crossing two small streams, until you reach the river and canal.

STAGE 7

Our walk turns left on the towpath, but you might detour right along the towpath to Monkey Marsh lock. Head back along the towpath to the next lock, Widmead. Just after, turn away from the canal through a gate. Cross the railway being extremely careful and walk straight ahead back to the Centre where our walk ends.

STAGE 3

Turn into the car park for BBOWT's Bowdown Woods Nature Reserve on your left. Take the path in the top corner of the car park and follow it up a slope between two banks until you reach a fence on your right. Follow the path along the fence. When you reach a T-junction, turn right on a Tarmac path.

STAGE 4

When you reach the car park, walk along the Tarmac drive to Bury's Bank Road. Cross the road onto Greenham Common. Turn left onto a small path through the gorse, heading for a flagpole. Before going left, you might detour ahead to the old Airfield Control Tower.

STAGE 5

Re-join the walk at the flagpole, walking east along the Common on a wide gravel track. After some distance, take the left fork and follow this path as it goes through the trees.

STAGE 6

Keep the lakes on your right until you come to a gate on your left. Cross the road and head down the gravel bridleway. Turn left at the metalled track and cross the River Kennet to Chamberhouse Farm. Continue ahead between the hedges to the canal.

KEY



BBOWT Nature Reserve



Railway station



Parking