



SHINFIELD PARISH WALKS

WALK 4: SPENCERS WOOD AND RIVER LODDON

LENGTH: 3.5 miles, 4 stiles.

Some paths may be very muddy. Appropriate footwear is recommended. Dogs should be kept on a short lead.

STARTING POINT: Entrance to Spring Gardens on Basingstoke Road.

OS grid ref: 715666

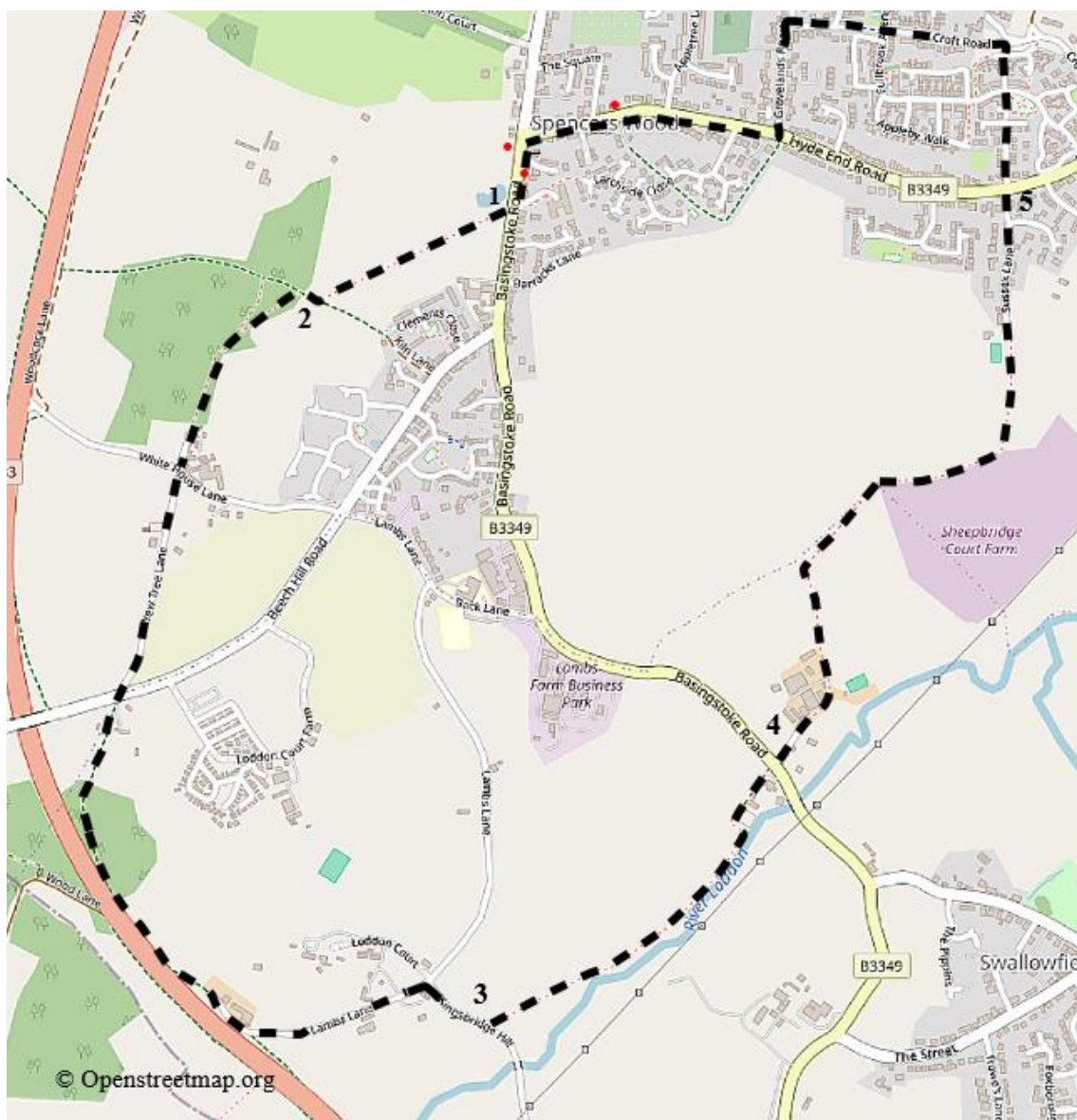
Lat/long 51.39308,-0.97398

w3w: /// doors.spike.store

CAR PARKING: Verge parking on Basingstoke Road

BUS: Reading bus **600**. The nearest bus stops are marked in red. One is The Square and the others are Hyde End Road.

ROUTE: (numbered points on map are described below)



1. START at the entrance to Spring Gardens on Basingstoke Road.



- **Cross the road carefully and go through the kissing gate to follow the footpath across the field (which is called 'Spencers Wood Common' on old maps).**
- **Pass through the kissing gate into Kiln Lane.**

One of the parish footpath notice boards is at the starting point. At Basingstoke Road the linear village of Spencers Wood spreads north and south. Downhill are scattered shops (hairdresser, chemist, baker, post office, and beyond them the newsagent and general store). The library is in the historic building uphill near the road junction, opposite the estate agent and the restaurant. The pond has tadpoles and dragonflies in the spring and summer, and the field has a multitude of wildflowers. To the left on the field, a well provided all the fresh water for many villagers until the late 1940s.

2. Walk about 50 yards uphill then turn left on the track along the edge of the woods which starts with an elevated section of wooden walkway.

- **Continue ahead, bearing slightly to the left, and pass through a gateway with a stile on the right and a narrowed gap on the left.**
- **Keep straight ahead at the junction of roads above White House Farm onto Yew Tree Lane.**
- **At the end of Yew Tree Lane, cross Beech Hill Road and take the footpath opposite, going down Clay Hill.**
- **Bear left when this becomes a roadway (the path on the right leads under the A33 dual carriageway).**
- **Turn right into Kings Bridge Road, which has a sign showing 'Weight Limit 3T 250 yards ahead' to the footpath on the left, after about 150 yards.**

These paths were walked by labourers going to the brickworks in the woods above the White House Farm. The ponds, many of which dry out in the summer, were formed by the extraction of clay to make the bricks. Remnants of kilns and loading ramps are concealed in the bramble thickets and the woodland has grown back since the works were abandoned in the 1930s. This area of secondary woodland stretches down to Woodstock Lane, where the by-pass road divides the parish.

3. Before going into the field, it is worth walking along the road to the Kings Bridge, to look both up and downstream along the river Loddon. The bridge is an old one with iron balustrades.

- **Back at the footpath, cross a flat wooden bridge to enter a new tree plantation which has replaced the mature Poplar plantation.**
- **Walk straight ahead with the plantation on your right. You will see glimpses of the river Loddon but do not try to follow it because that is not our route.**
- **At the end of the plantation enter the field. The true line of the footpath is at an angle between 11 and 12 on the clock towards two white painted posts in the far hedgerow. Most walkers prefer to walk around the field edge to avoid walking on the muddy field or through any crop that may be growing. This is an accepted practice.**

- Pass through the white posts to reach the Basingstoke Road. Again, you may like to walk to the right along the pavement to look at the weir and mill race.
- Cross the road carefully to resume the walk.

Ground beside the Loddon can be muddy, but the banks are important wetland habitats for wildlife. Kingfishers feed among the overhanging trees and shrubs. The water level often rises in winter to cover the flat lands beside the river.

4. Walk on the concrete road through the farmyard to cross a metal stile (RHS) when the gate is closed, turning left to follow the footpath route in front of stables a house and a barn on the left.



- Turn right onto the concrete road and follow the path with solar panels on your right.
- Turn diagonally left at the way mark post to cross two stiles and walk down Sussex Lane to Hyde End Road.

Old buildings at Sheepbridge Farm include the granary set on its staddle stones to prevent rodents from getting to the grain. There is a historic moat on the right. In autumn and winter flocks of birds settle on the fields on the higher ground, where there are views to the south over the Loddon Valley. The land here was used for gravel extraction for road construction until the 1960s.

5. To shorten the walk, turn left along Hyde End Road where the option is to continue to the Basingstoke Road or turn left down a signed byway to rejoin Hyde End Road nearer to the Basingstoke Road. Turn left on the Basingstoke Road to return to the start.



- To continue the longer walk, cross the Hyde End Road into Simonds Grove and walk straight along the pavement which is still a definitive right of way to reach Croft Road.
- Turn left and then second left along Grovelands Road to reach Hyde End Road.
- Here you have the same option as the short walk, cross the road and round the L shaped byway or right to reach the Basingstoke Road and back to the start.

The Croft Road area is now mostly developed with housing. Croft Road was one of the small farmland lanes of Spencers Wood prior to these houses being built and the fields were known as the 'buttercup fields'. Wildflowers grow on its verges and ditches, the hedgerows are white with blackthorn blossom at the end of winter and the trees on the hedge-banks shelter this walk.