

The Red Lion, Peppard Common

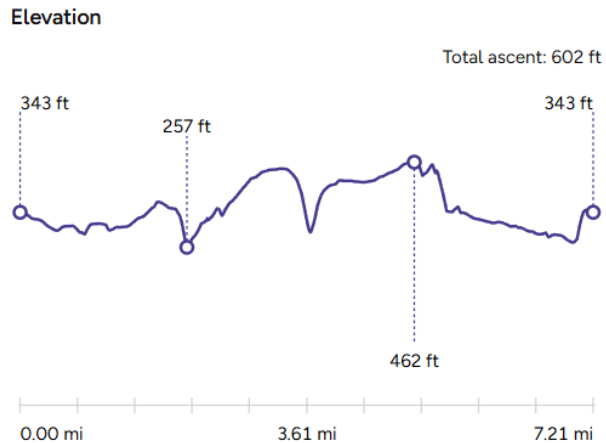
Greys Court, exotic birds, hidden estates, two cricket grounds, a secretive woodland pub and a pint of Gunners Gold

OVERVIEW

Leaving Peppard Common, the route settles into deep woodland and old Oxfordshire lanes that guide you towards the National Trust's Greys Court — Domesday-recorded, Grade I listed, and once embellished in the hope of attracting a royal visit from Elizabeth I.

Its medieval tower and castle-style flourishes sit in a landscape on this walk where every curve of woodland and every hidden farm hints at the long interplay between estate design and the trading routes that passed the Red Lion.

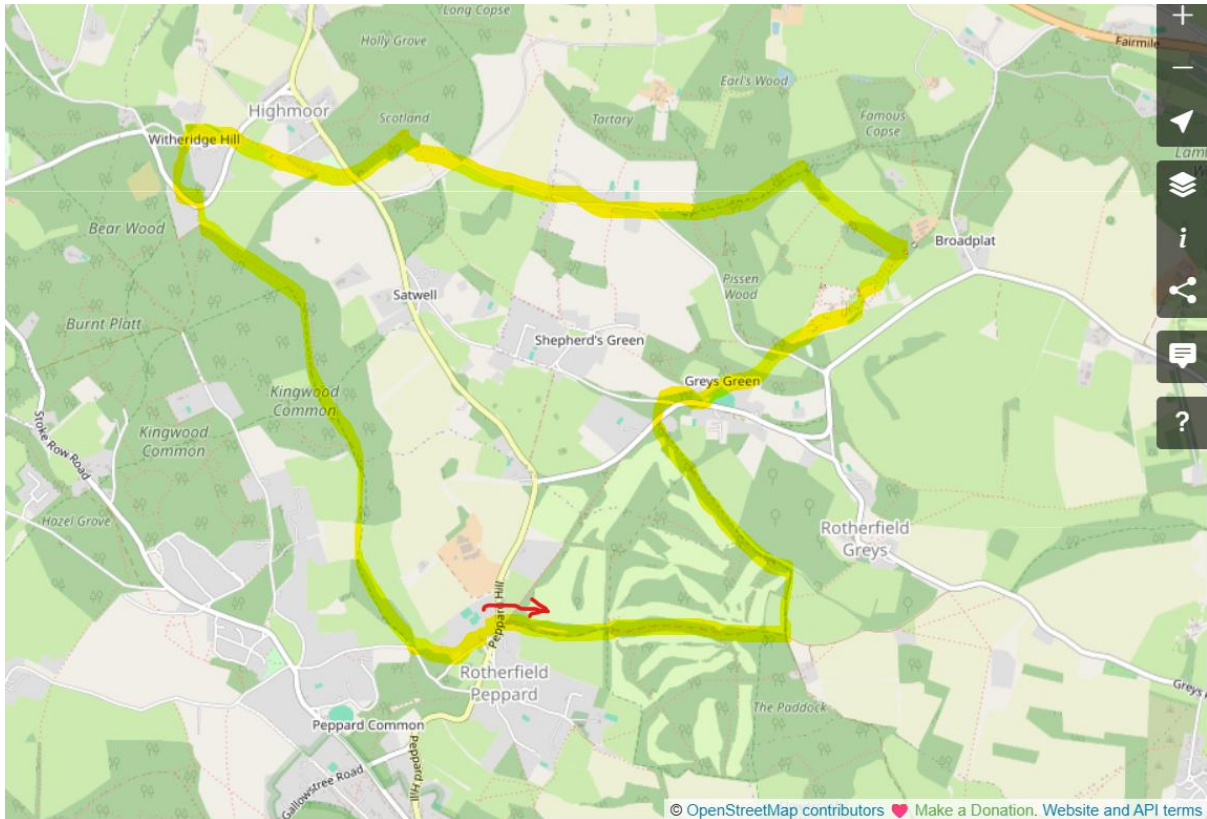
It's a walk that feels richer the more you look, as if the estate's careful grandeur and Peppard Common's old revelry still trade glances across the woods — one world screened behind fences, the other still open to anyone who wanders through.



Start/Finish	The Red Lion, Peppard Common, Rotherfield Peppard, Henley-on-Thames RG9 5LB. 01491 756561		
Parking	Parking on the common in front of the pub.		
Grid Reference	SU 709 819		
What3Words	///dancer.yards.snail		
Distance	7.2 mi/11.5km	Time 3.5 hours	Ascent 600 ft / 190 m
Paths/Terrain	Forest paths; stony wooded trails; quiet lanes; fields. Some gates.		
Difficulty	Easy to Moderate.		
Public Transport	Buses from Reading town centre to Peppard Common.		
Toilets	The Red Lion; Greys Court; The Rising Sun at Highmoor Cross.		
Other Pubs Nearby	The Rising Sun at Highmoor Cross is on the route. It's closed on Wednesdays. Most pubs in the area are excellent, and apparently doing well, with strong beer selections and foody reputations. The Unicorn on Kingwood Common; The Maltsters at Rotherfield Greys		

has just reopened; The Black Horse at Checkendon has a historic pub interior, so worth seeking out.

DIRECTIONS



1. Turn left from the Red Lion on Colliers Lane. At the main road, cross to the small parking/turning area to take a path to the side of Daisy Cottage - Dog Lane. There are some superb period cottages at the top of this lane. Follow this wooded path all the way until you reach a tarmac lane with footpath direction markers before it. Take the path to the left, the Chiltern Way.
2. Follow this long, straight-ish wooded path until it reaches the road. We're heading to the right, but there's an extension to the Chiltern Way across the road to avoid following the verge on the right. Cross to take the short trail that winds through the woods, to emerge onto a gravel drive, in front of a property called The Lodge.
3. You'll soon arrive at Greys Green cricket pitch. Follow the boundary on the left towards the pavilion. To the right of it is the path which takes you through woods, downhill to a gate into fields, then on towards Greys Court.
4. Pick up the tarmac drive uphill towards the front of the house and explore. The house is to the left, but the path we need is straight ahead on this drive - through the main entrance/exit area near the car park.

5. Turn into the car park and make your way to the rear, along the left-hand side. You'll see a grassy track leading off along a fence towards a gate. Head that way and through that gate. (I wondered if the sloping grassy area on the right was an overflow car park).
6. The path is waymarked. Transition from one side of a fence to the other, through a gate. And soon, at a small bridge, follow the path to the left, into the woods briefly. This is where I saw the parakeet!
7. The path now emerges into a field, with the path clear. Make your way across, and beyond the next field over a lane. You're heading for the conifer woods ahead, with signs to lead the way.
8. This is called Famous Copse. At the first opportunity, turn left. There are a number of path options, they combine later. I took the right-hand way, and eventually arrived at downhill section where a short section of wooden bar fence offered some route choices. Stay to the right of the fence downhill.
9. At the bottom, at a crossroads of walking paths, follow the blue markers straight ahead. Once wide woodland paths now narrow as the route heads uphill on what looks like a water channel. It was dry when I did it, likely a stream after wet weather. It's only a short uphill burst, up to a lane called Rocky Lane. There are some interesting places lurking behind gates along this lane, including the mysterious Rocky Lane Farm.
10. Continue straight on for some time, until the lane noticeably bends to the left, in front of a driveway. Look closely and you'll see a footpath on the left heading into woodland as you stand looking up that driveway.
11. The path leads into a grassy field and on to conifer woods, curiously called 'Scotland'. After 100m in the woods, turn left, then continue straight ahead, all the way until you meet a B road - the B481 - at the entrance to Highmoor village. You'll likely have heard the traffic! Cross over carefully, to follow signs for Witheridge Hill.
12. This path takes you onto the second cricket pitch of the day. Follow the boundary on the left, keeping your eyes peeled for the waymarked path on the left, in line with the side of the pitch - probably Point or Backward Point, in the deep!
13. The path again is clear, running now to the side of a brick construction to emerge onto a gravel drive. Continue straight ahead on this gravel track. You'll pass a derelict house on your left, then through a kiss gate into grassland, and the continuation of the path at the rear of some garden sheds before joining a lane.
14. We're heading up the road immediately ahead, signposted The Rising Sun, which is off to the left across a small village green at the top of the short uphill.
15. The next leg of our journey is straight ahead on this road. As soon as it starts to head downhill there's an entrance to the Manor on the left. Look on the verge on the right as you look at the driveway, there's a well concealed path into the

woodland. Follow this down to the road below. It's the road we crossed earlier when heading uphill to The Rising Sun.

16. Turn left here for c.200m, past a house called Beech Hollow. As the road curves to the left, you'll see a footpath sign into the woods on the Beech Hollow side of the road.
17. You'll soon see that it'll take you into a large woodland. There are footpath markers that look a little confusing: follow the level path to the left, running alongside a broken-down wire fence.
18. The way from here follows this route straight ahead for quite some time along wide woodland paths. Note the green fencing on your left-hand side - it's the private garden and woods of Satwell House, where Sir David Bellamy once lived. It's now owned by the founder of the Dreams bedding empire.
19. Stay straight ahead on the run back to Peppard Common. You'll eventually meet Colliers Lane, with a small parking area before it. The lane leads uphill and around to the Common. I took an un-signposted uphill footpath through the trees up to the left before the lane to avoid any traffic. It emerges onto Colliers Lane close to the famous Peppard Cottage (Howards End), then onto The Red Lion.

NOTES – THE PEPPARD REVELS

For centuries, **Peppard Common was not just a green but a stage**, and the Red Lion sat at its edge like a grandstand seat. Long before the village acquired its modern quietness, the Common was the beating, brawling, laughing, occasionally lawless heart of local life — and the Revels were its annual eruption.

Origins: a frontier settlement with its own rules

Rotherfield Peppard lay just beyond the easy reach of the sheriffs and beadles of the river towns. This liminal position — high ground between Henley and Goring, threaded by pack-horse routes and woodland tracks — made it a natural gathering place for travellers, traders, drovers, bargees avoiding Reading's tolls, and the occasional smuggler with a keg of tax-free spirits.

In such places, **custom often trumped law**, and communal festivities grew with a freedom that more tightly governed parishes could only envy.

The Revels were part of a much older English tradition of midsummer fairs, wakes, and games — but in Peppard they developed a reputation all their own.

The Revels at their height: organised chaos on the Common

Every summer, for hundreds of years, Peppard's Top Common transformed into a **riotous carnival ground**. The Revels were not genteel fêtes; they were full-blooded, physical, communal spectacles that blurred the line between sport, ritual, and outright mayhem.

1. Mass football matches

The centrepiece was the legendary **100-a-side football matches** between rival pub teams. These were not the codified games of today but the medieval variety: no fixed pitch, few rules, and no shortage of bruises. The Red Lion's vantage point made it the perfect place to watch the chaos unfold — or to retreat to when the enthusiasm of the crowd became too much.

2. Cudgel fighting

Cudgel play — a test of strength, nerve, and occasionally dental resilience — was another staple. Two men faced off with short ash sticks, each trying to “break the head” with a clean blow that drew blood. It was both sport and spectacle, drawing crowds who cheered on local champions. The churches eventually intervened, deeming it too violent, but not before it had become woven into the folklore of the Common.

3. The bear pit

Bear-baiting was a once-common rural entertainment in which a tethered bear was set upon by trained dogs, with crowds gathering to watch, wager, and cheer. It was part sport, part spectacle, and entirely of its time — a rougher age when the Common doubled as an arena. Peppard's bear pit, still visible in front of the Red Lion, is a rare

surviving reminder of those early betting days, before the practice was outlawed in the 19th century.

4. Drinking, trading, courting, feasting

Around these headline events swirled the rest of the Revels: ale tents, food stalls, travelling performers, impromptu contests, and the kind of social mixing that only a rural fair could produce. For many, it was the highlight of the year — a chance to meet neighbours, rivals, sweethearts, and strangers from the road.

Decline and transformation

Victorian respectability eventually smoothed the rougher edges of the Revels — cudgels discouraged, bears outlawed, and football finally resembling a sport rather than a skirmish. Yet one custom refused to die: the drinking, flirting and feasting that have always animated the Common. I guess the centuries change the costumes, but not the choreography.

In their place came more “seemly” pursuits. A **9-hole golf course** was laid out across Top and Lower Common, with the Red Lion serving as clubhouse — a remarkable shift from cudgels to clubs in the space of a generation. This course thrived until the Second World War, when the RAF requisitioned the Common for wartime use.

Modern revivals: echoes of the old spirit

The Revels never disappeared entirely. They resurfaced for the **Millennium celebrations in 2000**, drawing villagers back to the Common in a spirit that would have felt familiar to their medieval predecessors.

More recently, during the **Platinum Jubilee**, the Common once again filled with **around a thousand revellers**, feasting, drinking, and celebrating in front of the Red Lion — a moment when the centuries briefly folded in on themselves.

These modern gatherings are apparently gentler, more family-friendly, and mercifully free of cudgels and bear pits, but they carry the same communal energy that defined the Revels of old.