

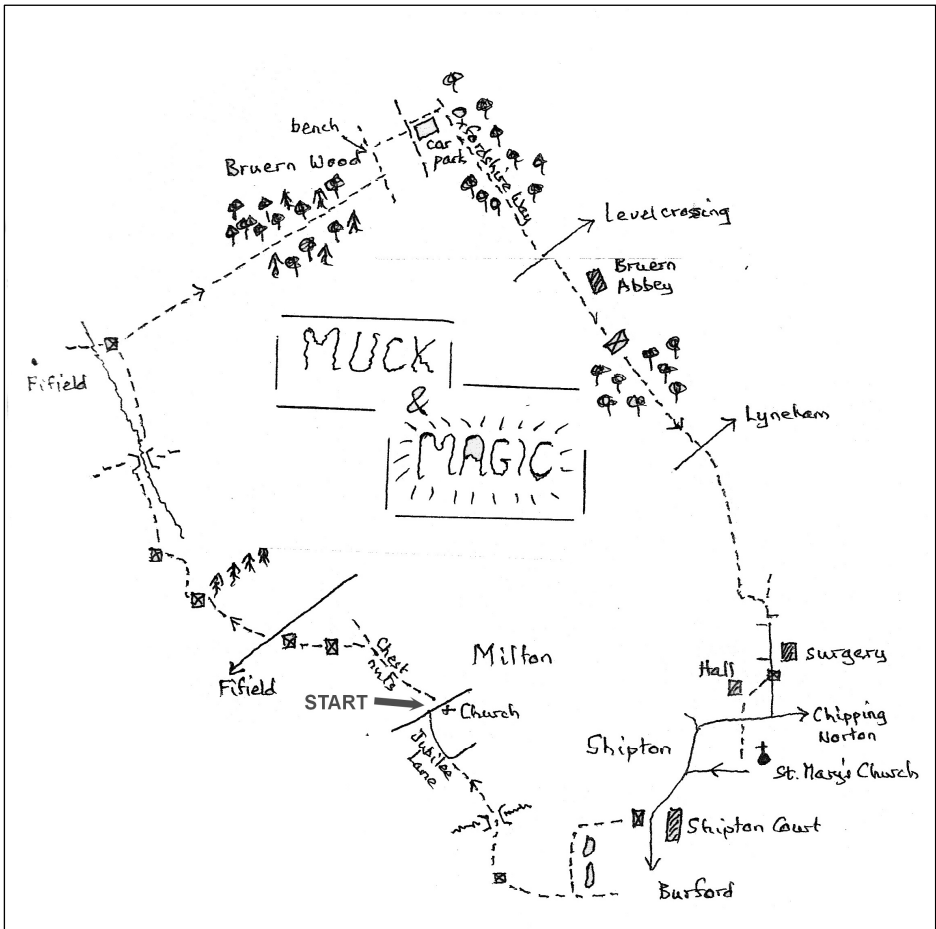
Special Feature Muck and Magic

The Wychwoods provide ideal walking territory, gently undulating, long views, wildlife and changing landscapes; this walk contains the lot.

It's just over seven miles, incorporating the beauties of Shipton's Wild Garden and the solitary calm of Bruern Woods.

Glorious Mud?

There are no hills and if there is a drawback, it's the mud during wet periods, and I mean Mud with a capital M, but old shoes or ideally old trainers are perfect and don't expect either those or your socks to return in pristine condition, but it's worth it for the magic of the route.



The route is circular so it can be started anywhere, we'll start opposite the Baptist Church at the end of Milton High Street.

A clear and well-used bridleway heads straight across a couple of fields, through gates and between an avenue of horse

chestnut trees. Straight after this avenue, follow an arrow that points obliquely off to the left, cross that field to its well-hidden stile, and cross the next field in exactly the same direction, to the gate that is partly obscured, just beyond a metal cattle trough; this brings you out on the Bruern to Fifield road.

Children will Love it

Go straight across, through the gate and follow the footpath sign across a wide field, heading for the left-hand end of a line of conifers.

Walk through a gateway, turn right and follow the hedge, around the corner of the field and cross an overgrown stile into an open pasture with a tiny stream on your right. Walk parallel to the stream and where a more prominent path crosses your path, go over a low concrete bridge then continue to follow the stream, this time with the water on your left. At the end of this field, go through a new stile and prepare for The Mud!

The path bends initially to the left before joining the main bridleway down from Fifield; turn right and continue for a long and often muddy and overgrown gentle ascent towards Bruern Woods. Children will love this section - often overgrown and often over muddied but a lovely track nonetheless.

Bluebells and Ragged Robin

At the top, go straight ahead, ignoring the seemingly attractive alternatives. This wide track is also often muddy, used by forestry vehicles, but there are usually dry bits around the edges. Eventually, this path leaves the forest on its left before meeting a wider track that crosses it. Turn left, back into the woods for a couple of hundred metres, then at a sturdy wooden bench, turn right, and yes, it's on the muddy side again, past or detouring

through the bluebell woods, reaching the BBONT car park and slipping down a narrow path on the left of the park; you are now on the Oxfordshire Way. Turn right. Between here and the Bruern road, the path is well defined. The muddiest parts have parallel tracks through the trees to avoid the ooze. Once over the road, pass to the right of Bruern Abbey, across a field that in June is tinted with the mauve of ragged robin and back through a wide drive in the woods.

Cross the Lyneham road and head straight across several fields before a clear left bend in the path above Shipton takes you down to the continuation of Meadow Lane, past the surgery and through a gate across to the main drive into the New Beaconsfield Hall.

Go straight across the main road towards the church spire and once past the church, turn right back and up to the main road where you turn left towards Burford.

Enjoy the Magic

After a quarter of a mile, opposite the Jacobean splendour of Shipton Court, cross the road and go through two stout iron gates into the Wild Garden. Follow the main avenue past the two lakes, not forgetting some bread for the ducks, and leave the garden by smart wooden gates, turning right onto a wide track.

Follow this undulating track for another quarter of a mile, pass through an old swing gate and walk down the hill with the hedge on your left. Cross the small stream and continue up the hill into Jubilee Lane and back to the start. Don't let the mud put you off; with majestic trees, a large variety of wild flowers, almost continuous silence and, if you're lucky, a muntjak deer, the magic far outweighs the muck!

Bob Forster