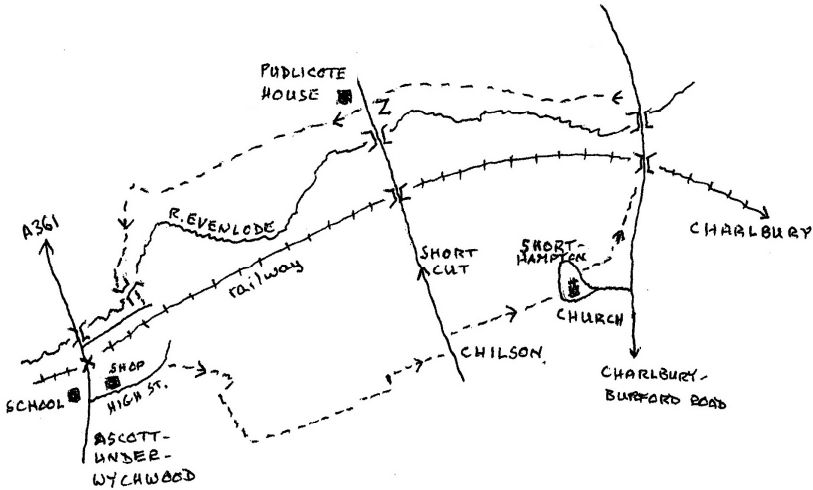


Wychwood Walks The Evenlode by Foot



Oxfordshire's rivers are known across the country – the Thames for its passage through the beauties of Oxford and the Windrush for its meanderings past the honeyed stone settlements of Bourton, Burford and Witney, but the Evenlode is often overlooked. It has no grandeur and few highlights. However it has that most precious quality: peace.

Our River

'Far from the madding crowd' could have been written about 'our' river, the one that wanders through the Wychwoods, unsung but enormously appreciated. This circular walk starts and finishes in Ascott; it can be either around four or six miles depending on the reader's enthusiasm. Start near the award-winning village shop in Ascott; a good place to stock up - there are no other shops or pubs along the route. Go straight along the High Street until the houses end and the road bends

around to the left; here, look for a footpath sign on your right and head up across the field along a well-trodden path. When the path reaches the corner of the field, turn right on the far side of the hedge and almost immediately left, following a long hedge, gently uphill, on your right hand side. The path, still quite clear on the ground, turns ninety degrees at the top of this field; follow it to the left, keeping the hedge on your right.

Chilson in Sight

This long, straight path climbs very gently, revealing wide views of the valley with Pudlicote House and Chadlington in the distance. Just when you think the path has died out in front of you, after about half a mile of this direct route, turn left beyond a hedge and then right, with the hedge now on your left, the houses of Chilson coming into sight.

Continued on page 43

Once through a gate, the track becomes wider and very clear, past houses on the left and joins the road. At this point, decisions need to be made: long route or shorter one? The shorter one goes left, straight down the road, out of the village, across the railway and the river and turns left along the Oxfordshire Way where it joins the longer route. To follow this route, pick up the trail at point **Z** on the map.

Visit the Wall-paintings

The longer route follows the road, again to the left, for a short way before following the signed track on the right, a well marked and very straight path. This later dips steeply into a side valley, climbs up the other side and meets the minor road at the hamlet of Shorthampton.

Turn left, downhill, past a row of cottages, around in front of a farm and follow this U-shaped route back up the slope for a short way until you reach a stile on your left. If you have time and it is open, call into the tiny church with its wall-paintings – it is well worth it.

Cormorants Fishing

This next part of the path is less clear but simply follows a fence on your right, through a gateway and heads slightly downhill with the brick railway bridge coming into view; aim for the bridge. A gate close to the bridge brings you to the road towards Chadlington; turn left and cross the river. Be on the lookout on your right, downstream of the bridge, where the statuesque dead branches of a tree, about a hundred metres away, are often

used by cormorants as they look down into the water for fish. After a further hundred metres, turn left along the Oxfordshire Way.

From here, the path is almost dead straight for around a mile. At one point, just before you arrive at the road, the path is close to the river, the banks making for the perfect picnic spot. The road crossing is the point marked **Z**, mentioned earlier, the place where the long and short routes meet.

Elegance

Continuing along the Oxfordshire Way, the path passes beside the gentle elegance of Pudlicote House, built at the start of the nineteenth century, now a Grade II listed building that is divided into apartments. Again, the route is virtually a straight line. A small dip after about a third of a mile leads to a gate - often mucky after wet weather, which you go through and then turn left. The path follows a hedge on your left, through another open gateway, gradually getting closer to the river.

Slow and Gentle Pleasure

Using a much-repaired bridge, cross the river and head for a series of barn conversions. When the approach road is reached, turn right onto it, past a slowly declining play fort, its fading ‘Ascott d’Oyley’ name plate standing as a testament to a long-past childhood, before joining the road below the level crossing. Over the crossing and past the school, High Street is on your left and the route is complete, a pathway of slow and gentle pleasure.

Bob Forster

Charlbury Farmers’ Market

The next Charlbury Farmers’ Market will take place on **Saturday 13th September**, from 9am to 1pm. The market is held on the Playing Close by kind permission of the Thomas Gifford Charity.