



Streatley, Aldworth, Ashampstead *Stone Giants and a Sting-in-the-Tail*

Distance: 23 km=14½ miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Berkshire, Oxfordshire (part)

Date written: 27-mar-2011

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Last update: 24-jun-2019

Refreshments: Aldworth, Streatley

Maps: Explorer 159 (Reading) with parts of 170 (Abingdon)
but the maps in this guide should be all you need

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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River, villages, woodland, views, remarkable churches

In Brief

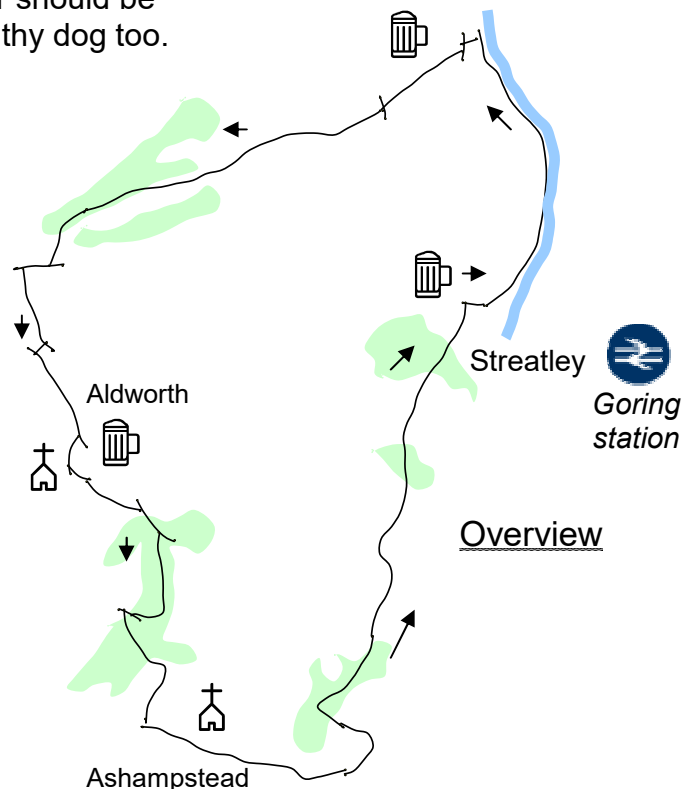
This wonderful long walk takes you from the picturesque Thames-side town of Streatley gently up into the hills to meet some giants and some old wall paintings. This area was introduced to the author by the *Adventurous Walks* books and it follows the latter section of the route in one of the books; some of the anecdotes from the book are retold here.



There are just a few nettles on this walk, but not enough to rule out shorts. Any good strong footwear should be sufficient. The walk seems fine for a healthy dog too.

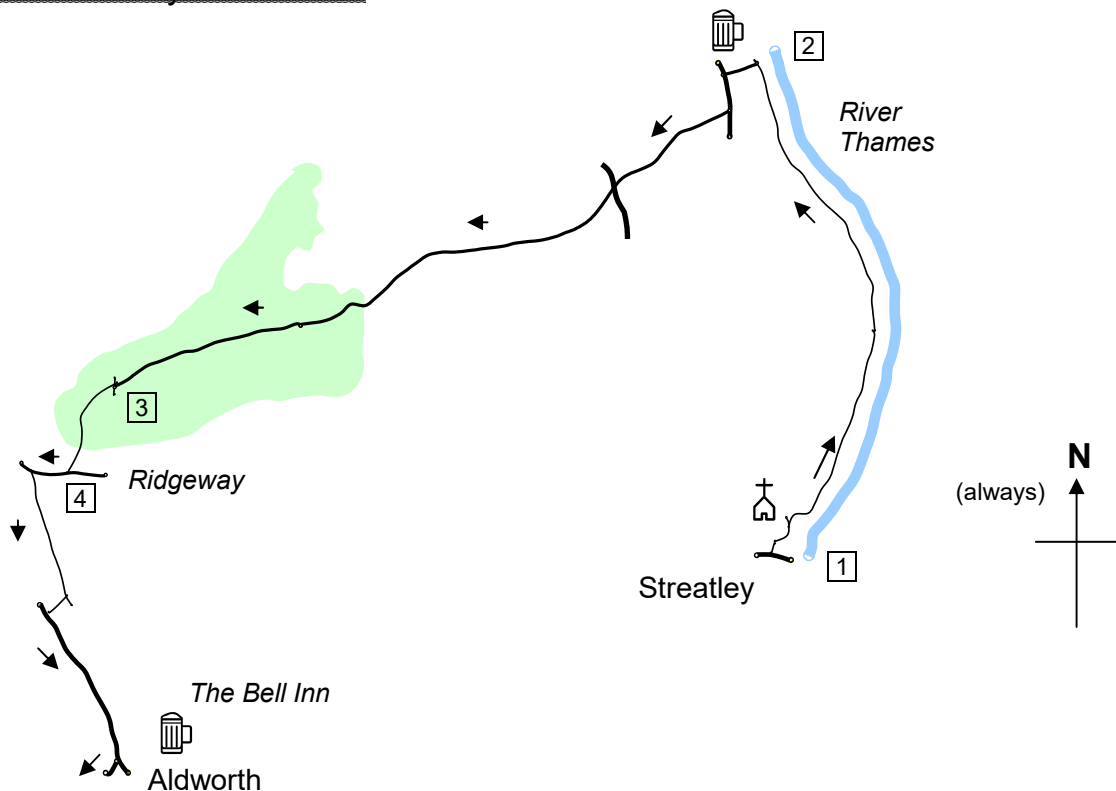


The walk begins at **Streatley, Berkshire, postcode RG8 9HR**, 13km west of Reading. It is reachable by **rail**, via Goring station: a picturesque river bridge crossing takes you into Streatley to start the walk. Coming by car, turn into the town from *The Bull* pub. Aim for the church (which is set back off the road) and park tightly on the left at the roadside. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

Leg 1: Streatley to Aldworth 10½ km=6½ miles



- 1 Before you begin this walk, go a short distance down to the river and spend a little time enjoying the view of the weirs, the islands, the riverside houses and probably the colourful leisure craft. On the other side is Goring-on-Thames, Oxfordshire (*starting point for another walk in this series*). The walk starts along this side of the river but the only access is past the church, so you need to backtrack a short distance and take the lane on the north side (to the **right**, if you are walking back after viewing the river) leading to the church. Keep to the right of St Mary's Church, going past cottages and reaching a fork.

Many walkers take the Ridgeway path up into the hills. You can do so by taking the **left-hand** fork, turning **right** on the main road and going **left** up Townsend Road (see your map). But the walk in the following text finds a different and very remarkable path and you are urged to stay with it and be surprised.

Take the **right-hand** fork, marked *To the River*. Turn **right** where the path bends, go through a gate to the river and turn **left** there. You now walk 3km along the river to the *Beetle and Wedge* at Moulsoford. As you go, you have another view of the weir and Goring church. You may see and hear trains speeding along the Great Western Railway. There is a great deal of birdlife, especially where the river widens just before Cleeve Lock. When you reach the lock, you can go through the wooden gates and view the passing river traffic. After this there is a long pasture, some fine pollard willows and a narrow pasture until you reach an enclosed path and soon come to the *Beetle and Wedge* bar / restaurant. (A "beetle" is a mallet used in boatbuilding.) You are now in Oxfordshire, by the way.

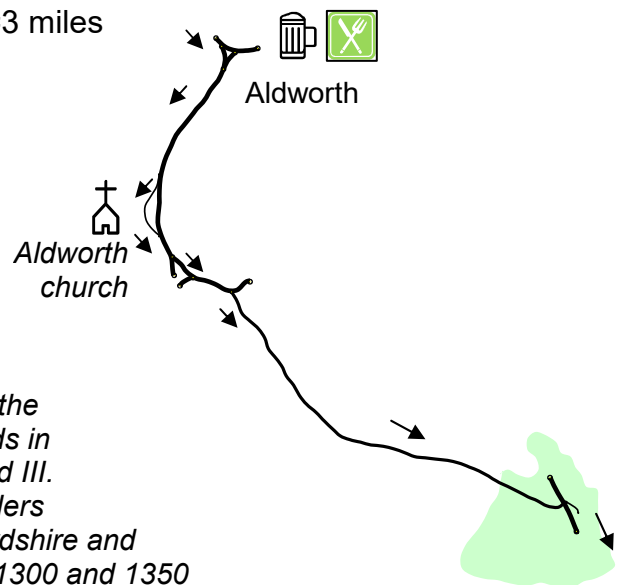


- 2 Turn **left** by the restaurant away from the river and follow a lane by a flint wall, up to the main road. Turn **left** carefully on the main road for only 150m and then **right** on a signposted byway. You pass some houses and a farm, where the path becomes tarmac. Cross a road and go through a wooden gate opposite, onto a tarmac footpath. This remarkable path will take you more than 3 km, always on the same beautiful tarmac, gently up into the hills. It seems to be largely unknown and you may well have it to yourself. The house below on the left is part of the Well Barn Estate. You are soon walking along an avenue of trees and after about 1½ km the path reaches two wooden huts. Continue straight on with huts on your right and take a path ahead uphill, as indicated by the signpost. On your right is Unhill Wood and on your left, across a field, is Ham Wood.
- 3 The path finally meets a crossing path and curves left at the top of the valley. Leave the path here to take a narrower path across the grass directly ahead, as indicated by the signpost. The path runs through trees, winding leftwards and becomes fenced, passing a house and small farm on your left. Go over a stile on the **left** and turn **right** on the driveway away from the house. The driveway takes you out to meet the Ridgeway, recognised from its distinctive brown fingerposts. Turn **right** on the Ridgeway. You are now back in Berkshire.
- 4 In 200m, turn sharp **left** on a chalky track marked as a byway. Avoid a footpath right at a 3-way fingerpost. Eventually, near the top, you reach a second 3-way fingerpost. Fork **right**. The track reaches a T-junction. Turn **left** here on a rough lane and follow it all the way into the village of Aldworth. At the centre of a fork is a converted chapel. The route is **right** at the fork. However, you may prefer to take the left fork at first because it leads to the *Bell Inn*, the only watering hole before you're back in Streatley. *Note: it is closed on Mondays.* The well opposite the Bell is said to be the deepest in England, cut 111m down into solid chalk. For a terrific social history of the inn, see <http://www.aldworth.info/Aldworth/bell.html>.



Leg 2: Aldworth to Ashampstead 4½ km=3 miles

- 5 Taking the right fork, as mentioned, keep **right** past the old baker and grocer and, after 200m on the road, veer **right** though the lychgate into Aldworth Church. As you enter the church of St Mary the Virgin, you are greeted by a remarkable sight – nine reclining stone giants.



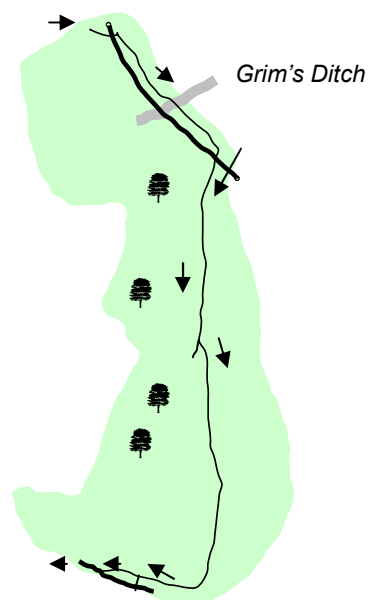
This is the De La Beche family, usually called the "Aldworth Giants". They were knights and lords in the 1300s, during the reigns of Edward I, II and III. Some of them were retainers to the king, warders to the Tower of London, and Sheriffs of Oxfordshire and Berkshire. The figures were carved between 1300 and 1350 and vandalised by Cromwell's men in the Civil War. First was Sir Robert, knighted by Edward I in 1278. His grandson, Sir Philip, the knight on his side down on the left, must have been a huge man, over seven feet tall, since the figures are supposed to be life size. At his feet is a dwarf. He became powerful during the reign of the weak king Edward II and was imprisoned by Edward III and then pardoned. He and Lady Joan, formerly De

La Zouche, had four children, Sir John (married to Lady Isabella and placed beside her), Sir Philip, Sir Nicholas and Edmund who is not represented. A tenth figure, known only by the rather doubtful nickname “John Everafraid”, was placed outside in a recess, now blocked. For more information, go to the web at www.aldworthvillage.org and click “history” and “Aldworth Giants”.

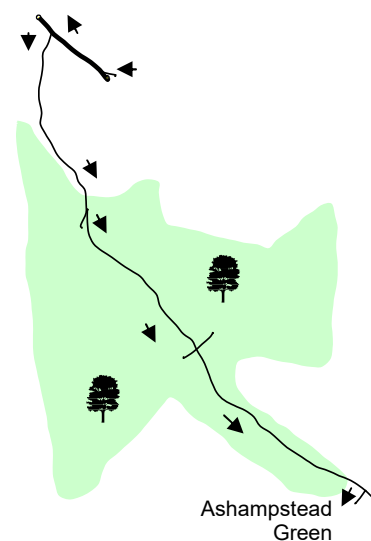
In the churchyard you will notice an ancient yew tree, thought to be 1000 years old, and now propped up. In the back of the churchyard, inside an enclosure is the tomb of the parents-in-law of the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson who loved Aldworth and named his house after it. (See the Surrey-and-West-Sussex walk in this series: “Hindhead and Blackdown”.)

Leave the churchyard on the other side through a little wooden gate opposite a half-timbered cottage. Turn **left** on the dirt track for 10m and turn **right** back onto the road you were on. In 30m, at a triangular green, fork **left** and turn **left** at a T-junction with a major road. Go past a couple of houses and, where the road bends left, leave it by turning **right** on a signposted byway. After about 700m past some large houses and fields, the track reaches a lane.

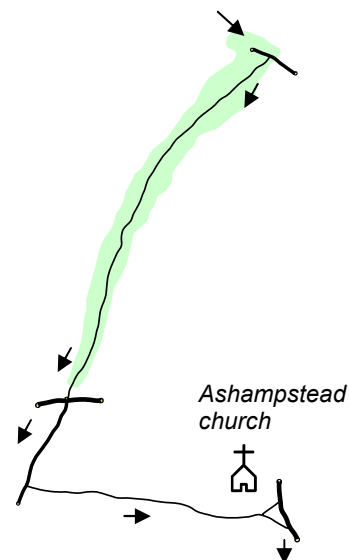
- 6 Cross the lane into the woodland on the other side and turn immediately **right** on a path through beech trees parallel to the road. The path goes over a double bank with a trench between. *This is Grim’s Ditch, an iron-age earthwork that runs across much of Berkshire and Hampshire and the Chilterns, whose purpose is still a mystery.* When you begin to notice an open meadow ahead on the right, look out for a fingerpost in the lane. Scramble back to the lane here and turn **right** on a footpath through pines. Soon you go over a crossing path and later you reach a fork in the path. Take the **left** fork. (The right fork is not a genuine path.) The path bends right and soon there is a lane parallel on the left. At a post with yellow arrows, turn **left** down steps and turn **right** on the lane.



- 7 After 250m or so along the lane, turn **left** at a fingerpost onto a footpath across a field. At the other side of the field, bear **left** and go alongside the woodland on your right, until the edge of the field bends left. Here, bear **right** at a post with a yellow arrow. Just after the post, fork **left** on a very narrow path through trees. (Don't miss this fork!) Follow this narrow winding path for some distance through a charming wood which in spring is carpeted with bluebells. The path meets a crossing path at a fingerpost. Keep straight on over the crossing path. Soon the path veers left parallel to other paths with a line of beeches separating them and shortly is joined by a farm track. This takes you into the hamlet of Ashampstead Green.



- 8 Without entering the hamlet (pleasant though it is), turn immediately **right** at a fingerpost on a narrow footpath that runs to the right of a garage. This path runs through a strip of woodland and is eventually joined by a farm track, just before meeting a road which is remarkably straight and flat and lined with lime trees. Continue straight over through a metal gate on a concrete track signed *Casey Fields Farm Shop*. Just after 100m, turn left at a fingerpost on a path across the field heading for Ashampstead Church. On the other side, go through two swing-gates into the churchyard. The church is a *must visit*. Prepare for a surprise!

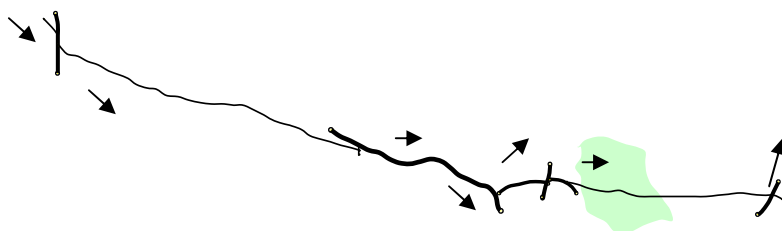


The Church of St Clements at Ashampstead, dating from the late 1100s, has some of the finest medieval wall paintings in the country, painted in the 1200s, probably by a Benedictine monk from Reading Abbey. These pictures were used by the priest to show mainly illiterate worshippers the stories of the Annunciation and the Nativity with the appearance of the Angel to the Shepherds. Over the chancel arch is the figure of Christ and the Apostles whilst on the right souls are being dragged down to Hell by a demon with a pitchfork. Much detail can be seen, even the dogs yapping at the Archangel. After the Protestant reformation, the paintings were covered with plaster but in 1886, some of it fell off during a storm revealing the church's long-hidden treasure.

The route is right on the lane but it is worth having a quick look at Ashampstead village.

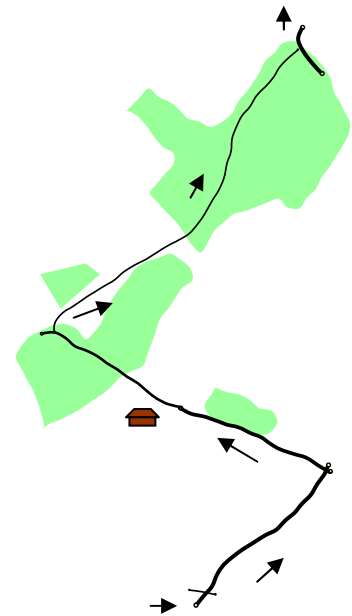
The Adventurous Walks book relates that Bloreng House (at the crossroads) has a brick tower in the garden, built in 1830 as a platform for the local preacher to practice his sermons with only the cows to hear it.

Leg 3: Ashampstead to Streatley 8 km=5 miles

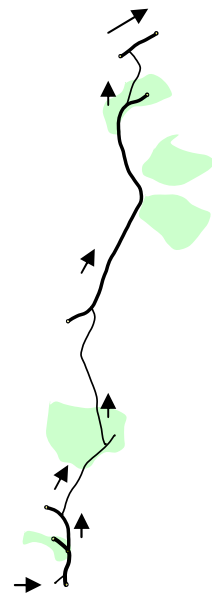



- 9 Exit through the churchyard and turn **right** on the lane. In 50m, at a fingerpost, turn **left** on a byway, go along the edge of a field and then between two fields. As you approach the hamlet of Stubbles, ignore an exit to the lane on your left and stay in the field until the last moment, where you ignore a byway to the right and continue along the tarmac lane through the hamlet. Follow the lane downhill and, where it bends right, leave it by taking a lane **left** towards a white house visible in the distance (overgrown hedges permitting). On reaching the house, cross straight over the major road and go steeply uphill on a lane opposite. In just 50m, at a fingerpost, take a steep narrow path on the **left**. The path soon levels out in an area coated with bluebells in late spring. You reach a field: continue in approximately the same direction on a path that crosses the field diagonally cutting the right-hand corner. On the other side, ignore the footpath opposite and instead turn **left** on the lane, Whitemoor Lane.

10 At the end of the lane, turn **left** on a lane marked as a dead end. Follow the lane to the end where there are two large houses, the second *Drift Barn* being a pair of converted barns. The route now continues as a footpath. The path crosses a farm track and descends through open woodland. At the bottom, the path bends left in front of a meadow. **Leave** the path here by turning sharp **right**, as indicated by a fingerpost*, into the grassy meadow. [Jun 2019: care! there are **two** fingerposts; your path is a **sharp right** turn and is usually a vehicle track; if you have a compass, your direction is ENE for about 350m into the distant wood (see the mini-map).] At a post with a yellow arrow, keep straight ahead as indicated. In nearly 100m you have woodland on your left. Where the woodland curves away to the left, keep straight ahead along the centre of the meadow. On the other side, at a yellow arrow, the path enters a beautiful wood dominated by silver birch and later by various conifers. The path zigzags, runs close to a field on the left and finally exits to a lane. Turn **left** on the lane.

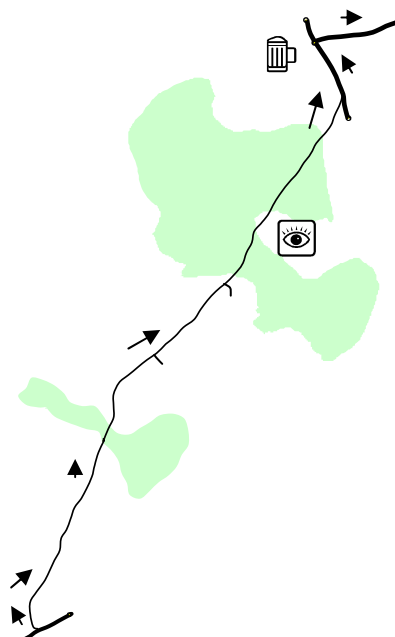


11 In 150m, at a road junction, fork **right** on a lane signposted to *Southridge*. After 100m, where the lane curves left, leave it by turning **right** at a fingerpost into a meadow. Go down the right-hand side of the meadow and, on the other side, descend steeply through woods by a fence. 120m into the woods, look for a 3-way fingerpost and fork **left** here. The path rises steeply to a metal gate. Go through the gate and into the right-hand meadow. Follow the left-hand side of this meadow with trees to your left and fine views on your right. Near the end, go through a metal gate on your **left** and turn



 **right** on a tarmac lane. After some distance, the lane passes *Bennets Wood Farm*, enters trees and begins to descend. Avoid a byway on your left but, 80m further down where the lane bends right, **leave** the lane by taking a signposted footpath straight ahead through woods. The path reaches a field. Turn **left** along the edge of the field, down to a lane. Turn **right** on the lane.

12 In 100m, at a fingerpost, turn **left** on a footpath running close to a garden fence. The path bends right at a corner of the fence and leads to a wooden barrier. Turn **left** here into a steep meadow and shortly **right** again. The meadow now presents you with a final challenge as the route is straight up the steepest part. *You can understand the sentiment behind the poem "A Streatley Sonata" by Joseph Ashby-Sterry that ends "I'd rather much sit here and laze / Than scale the Hill at Streatley!". (The full text can be seen on virtually every webpage referring to Streatley.)* After a short but energetic climb, go over a stile into woodland and keep ahead with a fence on your right. Later





the path runs through attractive heathland. Here you should keep to the right-hand side but avoid a stile on your right. At the end of the open heath, avoid a gate and footpath on the right. Keep ahead to go through a metal-and-wood swing-gate and walk straight ahead. Suddenly there is a wonderful view of the Thames and Streatley below. Ignore the steps to a path on your left. **Shortly after, on your right, there are memorial benches with superb views over Streatley, highly recommended.** Now follow the steps all the way down to the main road. Turn **left** on the road to reach *The Bull* and turn **right** at the traffic lights back to the village where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: take the M4 to junction 12 (Theale). Follow the A40 west to the **second** roundabout and turn **right**, all the time following signs for Pangbourne. Go through Pangbourne and take the pleasant riverside road until you arrive at Streatley. Turn **right** at the traffic lights and park at the end of the village on the roadside near the church.

By train: Begin at Goring railway station. Frequent service. A pleasant river crossing to start the walk.

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