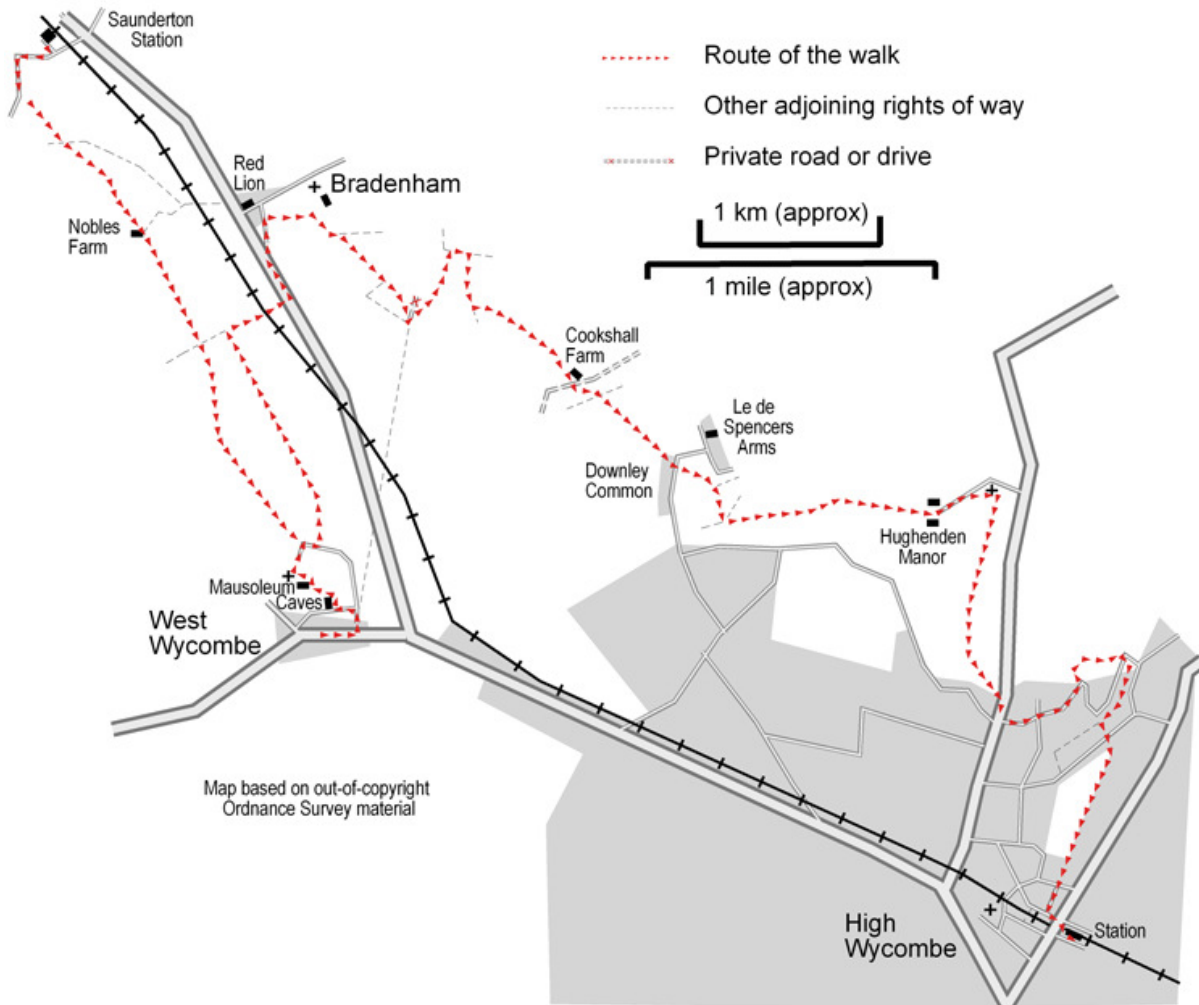


WEST WYCOMBE or SAUNDERTON – (BRADENHAM) – HUGHENDEN -- HIGH WYCOMBE

A fairly hilly walk, much of it through pleasant and varied Chilterns woodland and visiting unspoilt National Trust villages, with connections with Disraeli in two of them, and possibly the largest mausoleum built in Europe since classical times.

Checked 2009



Distances

West Wycombe to Bradenham	2 miles (3 km)
Saunderton station via mausoleum to Bradenham	4 miles (6.5 km)
Saunderton station via short cut to Bradenham	1.5 miles (2.5 km)
Bradenham to Hughenden (A4128)	4 miles (6 km)
Hughenden to High Wycombe	1.5 miles (2.5 km)
Total	7 miles (11 km) to 9.5 miles (15 km)

Three main hills of 200 – 300 feet (60 – 90 metres), one in each section of the walk, and several smaller ones.

Walkers wishing to avoid the last hill can take a bus at the main road after Hughenden or finish the walk on a flatter (less pleasant) route.

Travel

High Wycombe is at the hub of a network of bus services.

The main connection for West Wycombe is the bus from High Wycombe to Stokenchurch and Thame, about hourly (two-hourly on Sundays, with no connection to/from Thame).

An alternative start from Saunderton railway station is given at the end of this description. This may be more convenient, especially on Sundays and for train travellers. High Wycombe and Saunderton are on the Chiltern Line, with frequent trains from Marylebone to Banbury and the Midlands and connections to Aylesbury. Not all trains stop at Saunderton station.

There are frequent daily buses (hourly on Sundays) connecting Hughenden with High Wycombe, Princes Risborough and Aylesbury.

Buses to/from Bradenham are too infrequent to be likely to be useful.

Detailed travel information for the whole of this area is available from the Traveline South East website www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk or telephone 0871 200 22 33

Refreshments

At West Wycombe there is a cafe at the caves (as well as pubs etc in the village).

The Red Lion at Bradenham.

The De Spencers Arms at Downley is just a couple of hundred yards off our route.

The tea shop at Hughenden Manor is open 11 – 5 on days when the house is open (Wednesday to Sunday from early March to the end of October).

There are many pubs, cafes and restaurants in High Wycombe.

Please always be considerate about muddy boots in pubs etc; either take them off, or cover them up.

Never eat or drink your own provisions on pub premises (including the garden, if there is one).

Ordnance Survey Map

The whole of this walk is on the Ordnance Survey Explorer sheet 172, *Chiltern Hills East*.

Route from West Wycombe

West Wycombe village was acquired by the National Trust in 1934, and has been carefully preserved since then, with no jarring note to mar the effect of the mostly 16th to 18th century houses, built from local materials.

Before the opening of the M40 it was a notorious bottleneck on the A40.

West Wycombe House and park are just off our route. They were largely the creation of the second Sir Francis Dashwood and are now in the care of the National Trust.

The graceful house (completed in 1771) sits naturally in the landscaped grounds. The best view of the grounds, as was clearly the intention, is from the house itself, where the various features, including the lake, the Temple of Venus, the Temple of Music, several bridges, and even the church on the summit of the nearby hill, all blend harmoniously in an apparently natural landscape.

In June, July and August the house and grounds are open on Sunday to Thursday in the afternoon, and the grounds also in April and May.

Buses from High Wycombe stop at the Swan public house towards the western end of the village (the far end from High Wycombe) and you start by walking back towards High Wycombe.

(For passengers from Stokenchurch or Thame, the stop is towards the eastern end of the village and you start by walking back into the village, away from High Wycombe.)

Opposite the Swan notice the house of random flint construction (the flints are not laid in courses). To the left are a number of old houses, and then West Wycombe House and park, but our route goes to the right.

In the High Street are two former coaching inns, with their characteristic arches, and a number of old houses.

A leaflet describing the village is available at the post office.

Walk along the High Street to the Church Loft, with its prominent clock and archway, opposite house number 21.

This is the oldest building in the village, dating from the 15th century, and was originally a rest house for pilgrims. One of the wooden uprights shows where there used to be a crucifix, with a place to kneel below. The rounded structure to the left of the arch is said to be the remains of the village lock-up, with a shackle on the whipping post nearby.

Go through the arch of the Church Loft and continue up Church Lane to where it narrows.

Take the tarmac path curving left to join a road.

Continue 50 yards to the entrance to the caves.

The West Wycombe caves are the result of large amounts of chalk excavated from the hillside by Sir Francis Dashwood, in order to build the straight main road which leads to High Wycombe. This created work for some 40 local unemployed farm workers.

Sir Francis was a founder member, along with other pillars of the establishment, of what became known as the Hellfire Club, which met for bacchanalian orgies at Medmenham Abbey, on the Thames between Marlow and Henley. Meetings of the club were subsequently held in these caves, when the original venue began to attract too much publicity.

Sound effects, tableaux and a commentary provide the atmosphere for the modern visitor.

Caves and cafe are open 11.00 to 5.30 on Saturdays, Sundays, bank holidays and Bucks school holidays all the year, and Monday to Friday April to October

Immediately to the right of the gates to the caves, go up the steep path with steps, then follow a grassy path up to the mausoleum.

The mausoleum (according to Pevsner, possibly the largest in Europe since classical times) was built by Sir Francis, paid for by a bequest from another member of the Hellfire Club.

The urns in the alcoves were intended to hold the heart of each club member after death, but they never did.

It does, however, include a monument to Francis Dashwood's first wife, and, on one of the walls, monuments to the two wives of the first Baronet.

Pause for breath, and the fine view towards High Wycombe and, if you choose your viewpoint carefully, of the river Wye and the lake in the grounds of West Wycombe House.

The old West Wycombe station was some way along the road towards High Wycombe. While the older part of the village is tucked away below you on the right, the more modern settlement that sprang up on the way to the station is also part of West Wycombe.

Go round to the right of the mausoleum, into the churchyard, and pass to either side of the church.

Although the church is medieval in origin, the interior was beautifully remodelled in the Palladian style. The nave is said to be based on the Temple of the Sun at Palmyra. Note the magnificent painted ceiling and the unusual font, resting on a slim column around which is entwined a snake.

At the same time, the tower was increased in height and the golden ball added. The ball is a landmark for miles around and is said to seat ten people. John Wilkes, another member of the Hellfire Club, said that it was “the best Globe Tavern I was ever in.” It is possible to climb the tower to just below the ball, to be rewarded with a panoramic view of West Wycombe village and park and over typical Chiltern scenery.

The church and tower are open on Sunday and bank holiday afternoons from Easter Sunday to the end of September.

After the church turn right to exit through the churchyard gate.

As you leave the churchyard, note the perimeter bank. This is the boundary of an Iron Age hill fort, which would have dominated the valley below.

Continue ahead to the car park, and follow the tarmac exit track as it curves quite sharply right, past the National Trust sign and a footpath sign.

Continue downhill on the exit track 130 yards to a footpath sign on the left opposite a passing place on the right.

Follow the path through woodland, with the hillside falling to the right.

Ignore a field corner after 100 yards and continue just inside the wood until the path emerges from the wood along the top edge of a field, with views over the Bradenham Valley below to Cookshall Farm (which you pass later in the walk) then re-enters woodland.

Take care here, as for a couple of hundred yards the path may be very indistinct, especially just after leaf fall. In 80 yards look for a waymark post, then a succession of white arrows 30 - 40 yards apart, the first on a small tree, the second on a large one, and the fourth on an old fence corner post. (You should keep more or less level, and NOT bear left uphill beside a low bank towards a more open area.)

Continue, at first beside the remains of the old fence, nearly three quarters of a mile (1 km), more or less level and more or less straight until a steady rise of 60 yards to a T-junction of paths.

Turn right, downhill, soon emerging from the woods, with a view of Bradenham ahead.

When the path reaches a farm, go down the farm road under a railway bridge to the main High Wycombe to Princes Risborough Road (A4010).

Cross this busy road with care and turn left along the footway.

After 150 yards (and soon after a private driveway) take a tarmac pedestrian way bearing right which soon becomes a minor road.

Follow this until it reaches Bradenham village green, and turn right onto a track with a bridleway sign, up the right-hand side of the green.

(The Red Lion is just 150 yards down from the green to the left).

Virtually the whole of this pretty village, together with the surrounding estate, is owned by the National Trust.

Queen Elizabeth I was entertained at the manor house at the top of the green in 1566 on a journey from Oxford to Hampden House. The owner at the time was Lord Windsor! The house was rebuilt in the 17th century.

In 1829 the manor came into the hands of Isaac D'Israeli. Isaac was the father of statesman and novelist, Benjamin Disraeli, who lived here at the family home, making several unsuccessful attempts to become Member of Parliament for Wycombe. His last novel *Endymion* describes "Hurstley" as his hero's childhood home and says of the woods behind: "It had once been a beech forest, and though the timber had been greatly cleared, the green land was still occasionally dotted, sometimes with groups, and sometimes with single trees, where the juniper which here abounded gave a rich wildness to the scene". In 1838 he fell in love with Mary Anne, the wealthy widow of his friend Wyndham Lewis; they married the following year and moved to her house in London.

Bradenham Manor is not open to the public.

The parish church of St Botolph, across to the left, has a Norman south door and some interesting memorials. Isaac D'Israeli is buried here.

A National Trust notice board by the car park at the top of the green tells something of the history and natural history of the village, and the management of the estate.

Follow the track past the car park and continue uphill, with the wall of the manor grounds on your left, until the track enters woods.

Turn right here, immediately before the track forks, onto a narrow path just inside the wood edge 70 yards to a field corner.

Bear half left up through the wood to a field corner, then continue inside the wood 400 yards, passing a path junction in a dip, to join a path coming up from your right, at a triangular junction with a broad track on the left and another path ahead. There is a large oak tree in the middle.

Turn left, not along the broad track, but along a path partly hidden just to the right of it, and parallel with it. There is an old hedge-line of hazel trees to the left of the path and a line of posts (with at most one strand of wire) to the right, with coniferous trees soon coming into sight beyond.

After 150 yards there are fields to the left, and 300 yards further, the path veers to the right away from the fields, and in 40 yards you come to a T junction.

Turn right and go down into a dip to a stile.

Turn right again and follow a small valley down to a gate.

At present the gate has a "PRIVATE PLEASE KEEP OUT" notice. We believe this may be illegal, but for the time being turn left immediately before the gate and follow the fence into the next valley. (If there is shooting here, keep your distance until you know you have been seen.)

Follow the track up the far side of the valley, and ahead for a quarter of a mile (0.4 km), crossing another small valley, to emerge from the woodland at Cookshall Farm.

Continue ahead, with the buildings on your left and a view back to the mausoleum to your right, to cross a minor road and pass through a gateway into the next wood.

Follow the path as it bears left, and then downhill, and cross another path in a valley bottom.

Climb the opposite slope and, at the top, leave the wood and continue with a hedge on your left, and, soon, views back towards West Wycombe on the right.

After passing through two kissing gates emerge onto a road at Downley Common. (The Le de Spencers Arms is well hidden 150 yards along a track at the far left corner of the common.)

The route continues on the opposite side of the playing field (make your way round to the left if there is a match on), just to the left of a post with a dog loo, then bears slightly right, to leave the houses on your left, then goes more steeply downhill into woods.

Continue 300 yards down to a junction of several paths with a National Trust sign.

Turn left, signposted "Public Bridleway Hughenden Valley" and continue down the valley to the edge of the wood.

Continue along a fenced track between fields (in winter, Hughenden Manor becomes visible on the wooded ridge ahead).

The track winds up the hill through woods to pass the gate of the National Trust offices on your right.

The cavern shortly before you reach the top of the hill was apparently an air raid shelter for staff when the Manor was a centre for interpretation of air reconnaissance photos during World War II, and is now used by a colony of bats.

Continue along the manor drive between flint and brick walls (characteristic of the Chilterns), passing the entrance to the house and gardens on the right and the National Trust cafe and shop in a stable block on the left.

Hughenden Manor was bought by Benjamin Disraeli in 1847, shortly after he became Member of Parliament for Buckinghamshire, and the year before his father died at Bradenham. He made major changes to the house and gardens, and lived there happily with his wife Mary Anne, as his political career flourished, becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer and then (twice) Prime Minister. He was made Earl of Beaconsfield in 1876, and in the following year entertained Queen Victoria at Hughenden.

The house and the estate were acquired by the National Trust in 1947. The interior of the house is much as it was in Disraeli's time, and many of the original contents remain. The formal garden, a terrace with attractive views around, has been recreated to reflect Mary Anne Disraeli's original design.

Open in the afternoon, March to October: Wednesday to Sunday and bank holiday Mondays..

Follow the tarmac drive down to a cattle grid.

Bear slightly right here, through a gate downhill to Hughenden churchyard, which you enter through a further gate, to the left of a row of cottages. There is a toilet in the "Family Garden" on the right.

The church is mainly Victorian. On the chancel wall is a very personal memorial to Disraeli from Queen Victoria, said to be the only example of a memorial in a parish church erected by a reigning sovereign to one of her subjects. The pulpit is impressive, of marble and alabaster, with carved angels. There are also some attractive Victorian wall and ceiling paintings in the chancel, and a good number of stained glass windows, many featuring angels. The Disraeli tomb is outside the church, against the east wall.

We have described Hughenden as a National Trust village. In fact, there has never really been a village of Hughenden, except for this core of church, manor and a few other buildings. It is a scattered parish of former hamlets, now almost outlying suburbs of High Wycombe.

From the car park below the churchyard, turn right and head across parkland, to a gate and kissing gate, just to the right of a sports ground and a line of trees marking the course of a stream at the bottom of the valley.

This is one of many Chilterns chalk streams that nowadays are often dry. During the last century, to meet the demands of industrial and domestic supply, abstraction of water by pumping stations increased, lowering the level of the groundwater that feeds the springs.

Carry on down the valley, veering slightly to the right. Just beyond a small lake (which may be dry) go through another kissing gate.

Continue through what is now Hughenden Park, managed by Wycombe District Council, but was at one time part of the grounds of Hughenden Manor, following the course of the river as it bears away to the left, to the second low bridge, where a tarmac path starts.

Over your right shoulder is the monument erected by Mary Anne Disraeli in memory of her father-in-law Isaac, as a present for her husband's 50th birthday, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to see, owing to the growth of the intervening trees. It is half a mile (nearly 1km) away, against the trees on the skyline. Try standing at the nearest pillar of the bridge and looking just to the right of a tall tree 150 yards away.

Follow the tarmac path to the exit from the park to the road.

Turn right along the road, for 200 yards, to the junction with Green Hill, and bus stops.

(If you do not feel like tackling the next hill, and there is no bus, you can walk to High Wycombe station on the flat (well, almost!) by going 150 yards up Green Hill, turning right along Coningsby Road (named after a Disraeli novel), then ahead along Roberts Road, right and left at Benjamin Road, and then along Priory Avenue to the station.)

To complete the walk, go up Green Hill as far as the sharp right turn.

Go through the gates on the left into the wood, and go up the tarmac track as it winds up through the wood, to the top.

Until about 1970, this was the road. A 1969 Ordnance Survey map shows the new road as a cul-de-sac.

Cross the road and follow the path diagonally across the wooded area to the sunken path at the far corner. From here it is downhill virtually all the way!

Go down the path 300 yards to a path junction.

Take the left fork, crossing a road after 150 yards, and continue ahead on the enclosed path, going all along one side of the cemetery.

Looking out over the valley you can see the Disraeli monument towards the left-hand edge of the open area on the hillside opposite. To the right of it are the woods you came through between Downley Common and Hughenden Manor, parts of which can be glimpsed. West Wycombe is in the direction of the tall communications mast, at about three times the distance.

At the end of the path, take The Greenway ahead, to a T-junction beside the railway. Wycombe Museum is immediately to the right.

High Wycombe has been an important manufacturing centre and market town for centuries. In medieval times it had an important clothmaking industry, with mills along the River Wye; lacemaking was a cottage industry here as elsewhere in Buckinghamshire; papermaking was a major industry from the 16th century until very recently. Perhaps High Wycombe's greatest claim to fame, however, is as a centre for furniture making, which started in the 18th century with small-scale chairmaking, using the Chiltern beech woods, and developed into factory production by companies which became household names.

The Museum specialises in the history of chairmaking in the town. Recommended. Open Monday to Saturday 10.00 – 5.00 and Sundays 2.00 – 5.00. Closed bank holidays.

To go to the railway station, turn left alongside the railway for 100 yards, cross over to the other side of the bridge on your right (pedestrian crossing on your left, but the road opposite is also busy), and go down the steps to the station forecourt. (To go to the bus station or the town centre, turn *right* alongside the railway, and cross the footbridge.)

Although there has been much modern development in the town centre, the High Street still has some handsome buildings. The Guildhall of 1757, Little Market House (from about 1604, remodelled by Robert Adam in 1761) and the nearby parish church make a fine group at the western end. The graceful church of All Saints is the largest in Buckinghamshire.

Route from Saunderton

Starting from Saunderton station, go down the hill to a road junction.

Turn right. The road is not heavily used, but for 300 yards it is narrow with poor visibility, so please take care. Follow the road uphill, round a sharp left bend, to the tarmac track for Nobles farm forking left.

Follow the track uphill into the wood. Near the top of the slope is a small grassy area on the right.

(The map shows an optional shortcut to Bradenham from here, following the marked footpath half left down the hill. This is attractive. The railway crossing has been diverted; on entering the field immediately next to the railway, turn right along the field edge to go through the small gate, then turn left to go under the railway.)

Continue along the track to Nobles farm.

The significant dates in the history of the farm are scratched on to the brickwork by the gate.

The route from here along the ridge to the mausoleum may have a couple of awkward puddles in very wet conditions, but is otherwise exceptionally easy walking through varied woodland. When the trees are bare there may be glimpses over towards Bledlow Ridge and Radnage to the right and Knaphill and Downley to the left. Continue a little over a mile (nearly 2km) beyond the farm, until the track swings left and the church tower appears ahead.

Leave the track and go ahead to the churchyard gate. (You come back here after circling the mausoleum.)

Do not (yet) enter the churchyard, but take the broad track just to the right (with fine old yew trees) and follow it round outside the churchyard to the mausoleum. Here (after admiring the view and going down to the caves and West Wycombe if you wish) you join the route from West Wycombe described above, which goes round to the other side of the mausoleum into the churchyard.

To visit the caves, go down the ridge ahead 200 yards, almost to the end of the open grassy area, and take the steps down to the right. To visit the old part of West Wycombe, go down the footway to the left from the caves.

To continue the walk to High Wycombe, go to the comments on the caves and the mausoleum in the main text.