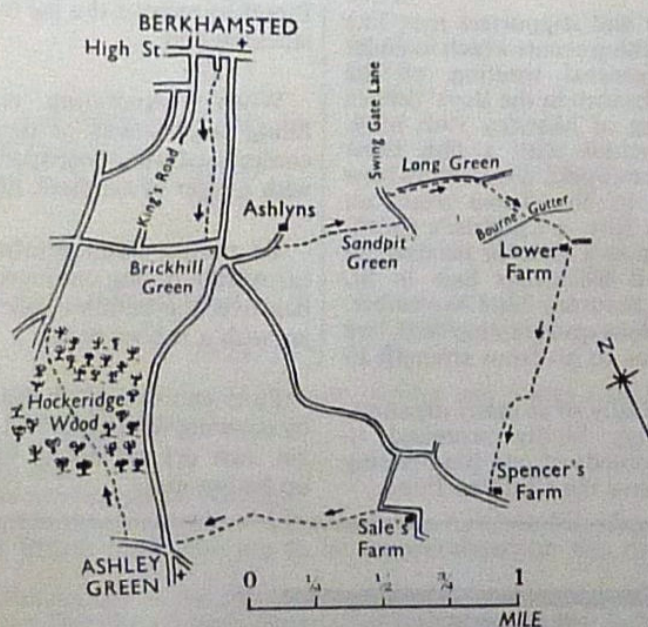


BERKHAMSTED'S BEST WALKS—1

THE VALLEY OF THE BOURNE

A new occasional series in which 'Townsmen' offers our readers a chance to combine exercise with an appreciation of the countryside.



At any time of the year the Bourne valley is worth a visit. But it is especially lovely in springtime, and this year there is an added attraction. For the first time in several years the little chalk stream, the Bourne, has been in full spate. It will probably still be running when this issue of the *Review* is published, but a current performance cannot be guaranteed.

The Bourne Gutter, to use its full and inaptly ugly name, is usually dry. According to tradition it is a 'woewater' which flows only in times of war, but the town's top scientists now believe that very rainy seasons encourage the occasional flow of water.

The Bourne rises in a valley beyond Harriotts End Farm, flows under the Haresfoot—Whelpley Hill road, continues past Bottom Farm (at the far end of Swing Gate Lane), and joins the Bulbourne at Bourne End. That village, of course, takes its name from the intermittent Bourne; the stream also determines the county boundary for a mile or two.

A running jump usually ensures a dry-footed crossing from Hertfordshire to Buckinghamshire, or vice versa; the stream is seldom more than a few inches deep or more than 6-ft. wide. At Bottom Farm there is a ford which may be negotiated by clambering along a fence.

The route for our seven-mile walk may be shortened; some alternatives are suggested in the itinerary. If you are in a hurry to see the Bourne, the quickest means of access is via Swing Gate Lane. This is a very good lane for wild flowers; there are some tame ones too, on the bank a short distance before you reach Bottom Farm. Keen gardeners have provided a brilliant flower show for all to enjoy.

THE ROUTE

To get away as quickly as possible from the sight and sound of road traffic, our route starts from Butts Meadow. Take the upland path via Tompkins Meadow and the School playing fields to Brickhill Green corner. Then go along the drive towards Ashlyns Hall, but where the road veers left, go straight ahead along the track which runs through Sandpit Green to Swing Gate Lane.

Turn left along this lane for 150 yards, then go right along the Long Green track for a third of a mile. About 80 yards beyond the Green (the track now runs between fields) look for a stepless stile on the right and take the downhill path (wire fence on your left) to a stile in the valley.

Cross the Bourne and keep left, following the fence to the top corner of the narrow water-meadow; then go over the stile or through a small wooden gate to a track and continue (left) along this track for a few yards.

(Alternative: To shorten the walk you may continue along this track to Bourne End; the stream is on your left for most of the way).

Turn right, just in front of Lower Farm, along the gently rising track for about a mile; beyond the second field gate the track veers right and continues (hedge on your right) to Spencer's Farm and the Whelpley Hill—Berkhamsted road. Turn right in this road.

(Alternatives: The tour may be shortened by (a) continuing along the narrow but pretty road to Berkhamsted through Haresfoot Park or (b) walking along the track to Bottom Farm and Swing Gate Lane; it starts at a small iron gate (beside an iron field-gate) on the right, just past a white bungalow at a sharp bend of the road).

Half a mile from Spencer's Farm, at the steep S bend (near Spring Meadow Farm) go left along a track for a quarter of a mile. Where this track takes a sharp left turn, go right over a stile and continue half-left; in a minute

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THE BOURNE VALLEY (contd.)

or two, in the valley ahead, you will see a group of pylons. (This valley is the source of the Bourne). Go over the stile near the pylons, continue straight ahead to the tallest pylon (only a few yards beyond the stile) and keep on in the same direction, uphill, to another stile, and then beside a row of tall trees (on your right). At the end of this row of trees, in a small valley, turn sharp left at a field-gate and follow the track and path to Ashley Green.

Cross the green and go along Hog Lane for 250 yards. Just past the house 'Wishanger', turn right along the sign-posted footpath which runs between a fence and a hedge. Keep straight on, then veer slightly left and continue downhill, with the hedge on your right, to Hockeridge Wood. Then keep straight on through the wood to the road and go uphill to Shootersway and Cross Oak Road.