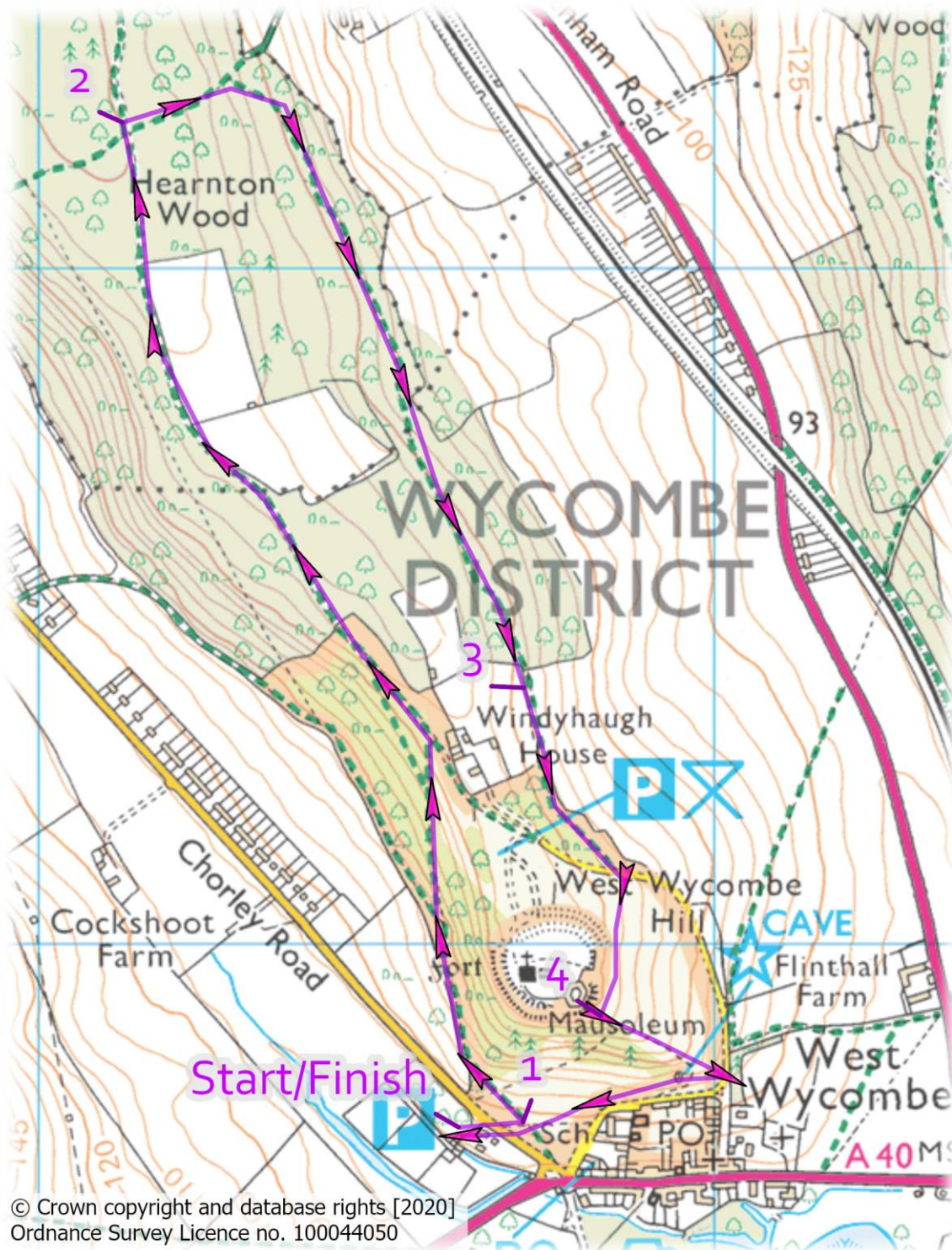


West Wycombe Woodland Walk
By Chris Bush, Chiltern Society

Summary

Initially an uphill walk through woodland with views across adjacent countryside, returning downhill to reach the Dashwood Mausoleum and Hell Fire caves.



Length:	2.5 miles
Terrain:	Easy stile free walking with, initially, a height gain of 200ft. Maybe slippery underfoot across chalk grassland in wet weather around the Dashwood Mausoleum, but alternative paved road can be used to return to start
Start & finish:	West Wycombe Car Park, Chorley Road, West Wycombe HP14 3AP. Grid Ref: SU 826 947
Food & drink:	Pubs and cafés in West Wycombe. None on route
Maps:	OS Explorer 172, Chiltern Society 7
Parking:	Hell-Fire Caves Car Park as above. Parking is no longer free. A free alternative is the National Trust car park near to the Dashwood Mausoleum. The walk can be started where the route crosses the entrance road
Local transport:	West Wycombe is served by two bus services from High Wycombe. Service 40 to Thame and Service 275 to Oxford

Route

Leave car park and cross road directly to path (signpost Hill Top and Hellfire Caves) for about 50yds to a crossing path.

Waymark 1 – Turn left and follow the path, uphill through woodland, for 1 mile. There are good side views to the west across countryside. On the way, do not take any diversions, side paths etc. At the top, turn left along a wide track. Go straight over a junction of major tracks and continue forward to a waymark post just in front of a field with newly planted trees

Waymark 2 – Turn right at waymark post for approx. 170yds and turn right at the next waymark post. Follow the footpath downhill through woodland for just over ½ mile to reach an open area of grassland with views towards West Wycombe and Downley.

Waymark 3 – Continue on path across grassland for approx. 300yds and take the second path on the right into woodland. Continue on the path to meet a road. Cross the road and follow path across grassland to reach the Dashwood Mausoleum, with views towards West Wycombe House below. Note: The chalk hillside around here can be very slippery in wet weather and diversion can be made by taking the road down to the Hell Fire caves and on to the start point of the walk.

Waymark 4 – From the Dashwood Mausoleum, walk directly downhill to near the bottom and take a path to the right which leads directly to the road to the Hell Fire caves. Shortly after the caves take the path to the right across chalk grassland and reach the start of the walk. Cross the road to the car park.

Points of Interest

West Wycombe. Archaeological remains suggest that there may have been human activity in the area during the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods. The earliest known settlement was an Iron Age fort at the top of Church Lane. There's also evidence of Roman activity in the area. The Dashwood family acquired the manor of West Wycombe in 1698. The house and grounds underwent a complete transformation in the 18th century, carried out by their descendant Sir Francis Dashwood, 11th Baron le Despencer, and were passed to the National Trust in 1943. The entire village was sold by the Dashwood family to the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (Royal Society of Arts) in 1929. They carried out extensive repairs before handing it over to the National Trust in 1934. There are many 16th and 18th century buildings to be seen when walking through the village.

West Wycombe Hill is famous for a number of features; the Dashwood Mausoleum, St Lawrence's Church and The Hellfire Caves. The most notable are the caves, which were excavated to provide both chalk for the new turnpike and work for the local population. They were later used as a meeting place for the notorious Hellfire Club. The Grade I listed St Lawrence's Church stands on the site of an Iron Age fort. It was originally built to serve the lost village of Haveringdon and was remodelled in its current form by Sir Francis Dashwood. The crowning feature is the Golden Ball, which is large enough to hold six people and is reputed to have been a meeting place for the Hellfire Club. The design of the mausoleum is based on the Constantine Arch in Rome. It was built to house the urns that contain the ashes of the Dashwood family.