

In Betjeman Country: Catmore to Farnborough

A circular walk of 3.5 miles/5.6k on well used tracks and paths, sometimes muddy in wet weather. Short sections of road walking. Park in the large car park opposite the church in Catmore. SU453802 ///congested.curious.adopt OS Explorer 170. Refreshments in surrounding villages.

1. The village of **Catmore** is characterised by its quaint, traditional architecture, with many of its buildings dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries. There are a number of charming cottages and farmhouses set within the extensive landscapes of the North Wessex Downs.

2. **St Margaret's** is a very interesting small church, with a distinctive flint and stone exterior, dating from the 12C. It is maintained by the Historic Churches Conservation Trust. Access follows the footpath beside the black barn, signed 'Historic Church'.

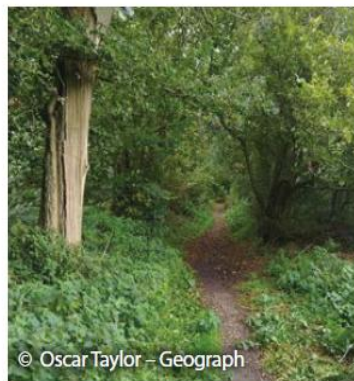
From the car park, turn left (right, if leaving the church) to walk up the lane to a 5-way junction of tracks. Take the second of the two tracks on the right towards woodland. At the wood, take the bridleway to the left through the edge of the wood eventually crossing two fields to rejoin the lane on a bend. Turn left with Heath Copse nearby on the right. A short distance along the lane it bends sharp right. Take the track (Old Street) straight ahead.

3. **Old Street**, as its name implies, is an ancient route linking Walbury Hill, south of



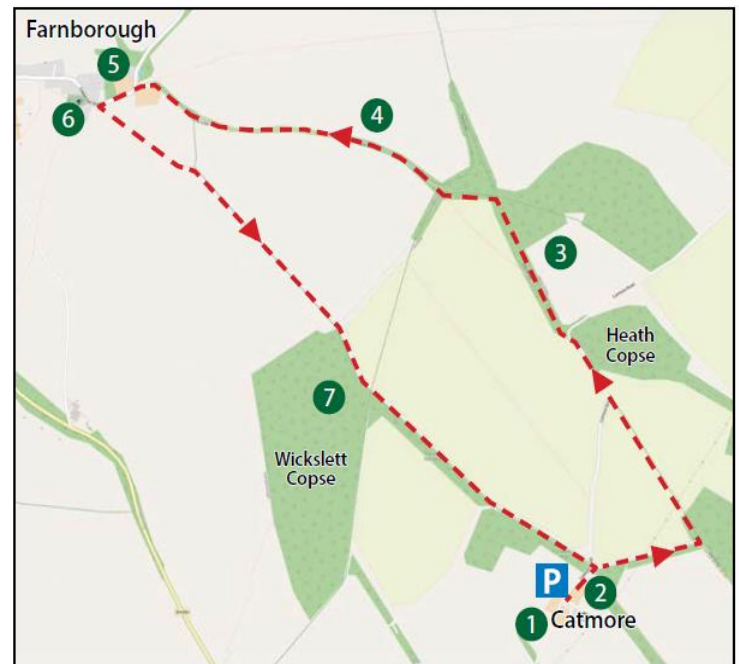
Newbury, to the Ridgeway not far to the north of here. It also linked to many drove routes running to and from the river valleys and commons in the south. This would have provided access to markets at Wantage and Oxford and to the sheep fairs of East Ilsley. It also forms part of the modern-day Ilsley Downs Riding Route.

At the next crossroads, take the road used as a public path to the left. This is Furze Lane.



4. **Furze Lane** presumably got its name from serving as the route from Farnborough, which lies ahead, to the higher ground like that around Heath Copse where scrubby plants grew. Gorse or 'furze' was cut from pre-enclosure common land like this and bundled into faggots to provide fuel, especially firing for ovens.

Continue along Furze Lane, with far-reaching downland views, to reach Upper Farm, Farnborough. Join the road, turning left, to pass in front of the Old Rectory with its lawn bounded on the roadside by a ha-ha. At the Church, take the path immediately left on the bend in the road.



5. The village of **Farnborough** is the highest in Berkshire. Its name means 'fern clad hills' in Old English and the records of the village date from 916 AD. More recently, it was home to the Poet Laureate John Betjeman who lived in the Old Rectory from 1945 to 1951. According to his wife, Penelope, the house had no water, no light and was falling down when they moved there.

6. The earliest parts of **Farnborough Church** date from the 11th Century with later additions and restoration. It is notable for the commemorative stained-glass window to John Betjeman designed by the famous artist, John Piper. The window shows a tree of life flanked by fish on one side and butterflies on the other, intended to symbolise the resurrection.

Follow the path from the church across two small fields, then left and right to



join a bridleway. Turn right to rise uphill towards the corner of Wickslett Copse.

7. **Wickslett Copse** is a Local Wildlife Site noted for its importance as a corridor for wildlife, forming a key component of the ecological networks formed by the hedgerows, shelterbelts and woodlands of the area.

Follow the bridleway as it passes the copse and Wickslett North Row to reach the 5-way junction of paths. Turn right along the lane to return to Catmore.

Margery Slatter