

Stroll or Stride at Crookham and Greenham Commons

A 3 mile (5km) walk from the car park at Crookham Common. **SU523 645 direction.loves.divider**

A 3.25 mile optional addition (10km in total) can be followed. Additional parking, café and toilets at Greenham Control Tower

1. Crookham is the southern portion of Thatcham parish. It is a very dispersed hamlet, spread out across **Crookham Common** which rises to 387ft above the River Kennet. It was owned by Reading Abbey in the 13th century and in the 14th century almost all the inhabitants died in the Black Death. In Victorian times, Crookham was the venue for organized prize fighting and, later, for one of the oldest inland golf courses in the country, first laid out in 1873.

Head west and take the left hand of the two paths at the end of the car park near the information board, keeping straight ahead at every junction until it exits onto the Old Thornford Road. Turn left and walk downhill.

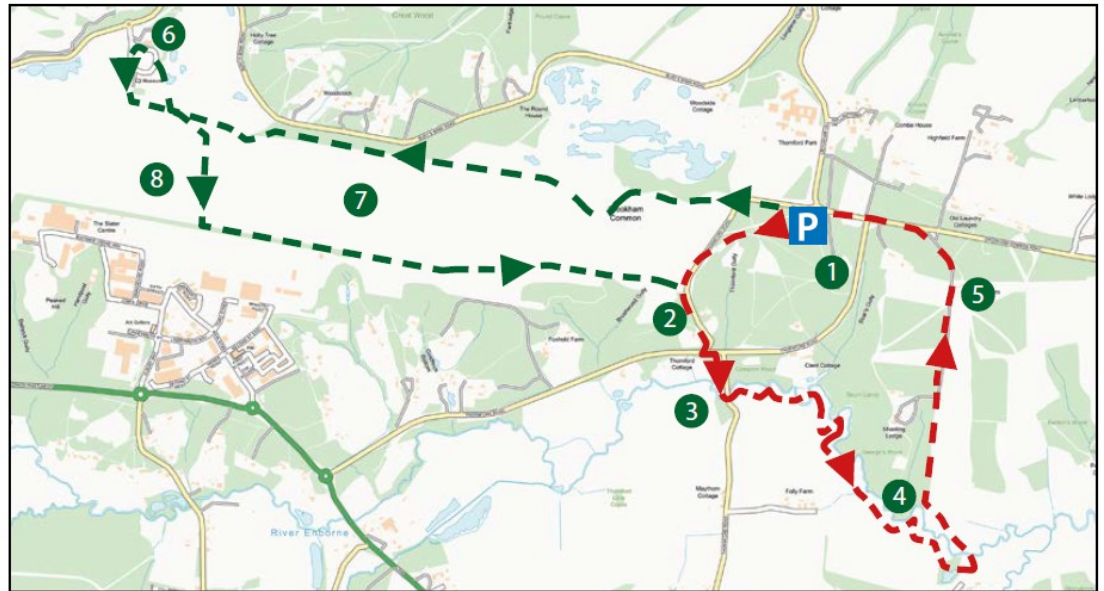
2. Old Thornford Road originally ran over the commons to Greenham before the air base at Greenham Common interrupted its course.

Emerging onto Thornford Road, turn left and walk along the grass verge for about 100 yards, crossing the road toward the clearly signed ford.

3. Headley Ford is too deep for cars, except in the driest weather. The numerous warning signs are the result of a fatal accident when a car was washed downstream.



Cross the footbridge to the right of the ford, turning left



through the hedge, to the left of the large oak tree, and follow the well-used footpath round the edge of the field for a mile. After a kissing gate, the track winds beside the river to a footbridge.

4. The River Enborne marks the county boundary between Berkshire and Hampshire. The river rises near Inkpen and West Woodhay villages and is formed by a series of brooks rising from springs below the chalk hills on either side.

Crossing the bridge, follow the path heading diagonally across the field to the metal gate. Turn right uphill towards the road. Just before it, the path to the left will follow the road in parallel and take you back to the car park.

5. George's Farm is the site of modern gravel extraction, necessitating archaeological investigations which revealed evidence for the 'ritual' deposition of pottery vessels during the Middle Bronze Age and a scatter of pits dated to the Late Bronze Age. Iron Age and Roman phases saw the establishment of a fixed field system with boundary ditches.

For the longer walk, park at the Control Tower and take the wide paths which cross the Common, joining the shorter walk route at the Old Thornford Road.

6. Greenham and Crookham Commons form the largest area of lowland heath in West Berkshire – a threatened habitat full of special wildlife, important for rare ground-nesting birds, like nightjar, woodlark and lapwing.

7. The heathland is on top of a flat gravel plateau laid down at the end of the last ice age, and since then used by pre-historic hunter/gatherers; as common land by farmers; and later gaining significance

as a military air base. General Eisenhower watched some of the 10,000 sorties flown from here during the D-Day landings. In the 1980s, nuclear cruise missiles were stored at the base. The demonstrations against these marked the start of the Peace Women movement in 1981. After decades of military occupation, the Commons were officially reopened for public use on the 8th of April 2000.

8. The infrastructure of Greenham Airbase is still evident in some of the remaining buildings such as the Control Tower. The site of the runways can clearly be seen, including this extraordinarily wide tarmac area which looks as though it might have been used for turning large planes.

On reaching the car park at the top of Crookham Hill, take the path at the west end of the car park closest to the information board and follow this to return to the Control Tower visitor centre.

Kate and Tony McDonald, and Margery Slatter