

# CHRISTMAS COMMON *Let's go fly a kite*

The walk starts from the National Trust car park at Watlington Hill and explores the rabbit-grazed hillside above Watlington where you can enjoy fantastic views over the Oxfordshire Vale. The route then descends beside the chalk-cut steeple called White Mark, to reach the Ridgeway. Children can look out for the white arrows showing the way on the return journey. You may also enjoy close-up encounters with the local red kites and deer in this area.



## BACKGROUND NOTES

Christmas Common is a small hamlet near Watlington. The 1811 census shows it to have then had just six inhabited houses. It is said to have got its name from the Christmas Day truce of 1643 between participants in the English Civil War. Another story says that it is named after a local family whose surname was Christmas. During the festive season, fir trees and decorations are available from the tree barn in the hamlet.

Watlington Hill came under the ownership of the National Trust in 1941. The 112 acres of chalk grassland are heavily grazed by rabbits and are home to several varieties of rare flowers. The slopes are covered in shrubs such as juniper and privet, as well as sections of yew woodland. It is one of the best locations for seeing red kites, and deer are commonly sighted. The nearby large house of Watlington Park was built in the 17th century by the Stonors of Stonor Park, Henley-on-Thames, and has been altered many times since.

The White Mark is a 270-ft-tall triangular shape cut into the chalk hillside on the lower part of Watlington Hill. It was carved in the 18th century under the orders of the local squire Edward Horner who thought that the view of his local church from his home would be greatly improved by having a spire.

**2½**  
LENGTH OF WALK (MILES)

**1½**  
DURATION (HOURS)

Allow longer for exploring Watlington Hill and the White Mark.

**GETTING THERE** Leave the M40 at junction 6 and take the B4009 south-west into Watlington. Take the first turning left uphill towards Christmas Common. The National Trust car park on Watlington Hill is on the right.

**TERRAIN** Only slightly steep descent and a gentle ascent. Good footpaths but they may be too narrow for an all-terrain pushchair. There are several stiles.

**START/PARKING** The Watlington Hill National Trust car park on Hill Road (GR SU710935).

**MAP** OS Explorer 171 Chiltern Hills West.

**REFRESHMENTS** The Fox and Hounds in Christmas Common. Alternative refreshments may be found in Watlington.

**FUN THINGS TO SEE AND DO** You could try some kite flying on Watlington Hill; this is a popular location for flying both kites and radio-controlled aircraft. Along the way you can play hide and seek in the scrubland. On the return journey look for the white arrows painted on the trees showing the way. See if you can help find the way for everyone! Bring a tree and shrub book with you to help identify the different species you may find.

## THE WALK

**1.** Leave the car park through an exit at the rear, taking a path between two information boards. The path runs through woodland to a kissing gate onto the open hillside. Keep ahead to reach the top of the hill where there are extensive views over the Oxfordshire Vale. You may see red kites circling over Watlington. Continue in the same direction bearing slightly right while descending carefully beside the White Mark. At the bottom go through a kissing gate and soon reach Hill Road.

**2.** Follow this ahead, ignore the first footpath to the right and take the next turning on the right, the Ridgeway. After about 100 yards, go right through a kissing gate. Bear left on the footpath ignoring the steps ahead. Follow this path through low woodland and soon fork left. Keep ahead on the path following the white arrows painted on the trees and navigate around low bushes. Follow this path as it ascends the hillside fairly close to Hill Road. Eventually you will come across two sets of wooden steps which lead to a stile into a field.

**3.** Cross the stile and turn right following the right-hand field boundary. Go through a gap and keep ahead to a stile in the field corner leading to the Stokenchurch road. Turn right on this and then right again on the Watlington road. The car park is soon reached, on the left opposite Watlington Hill Farm.



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