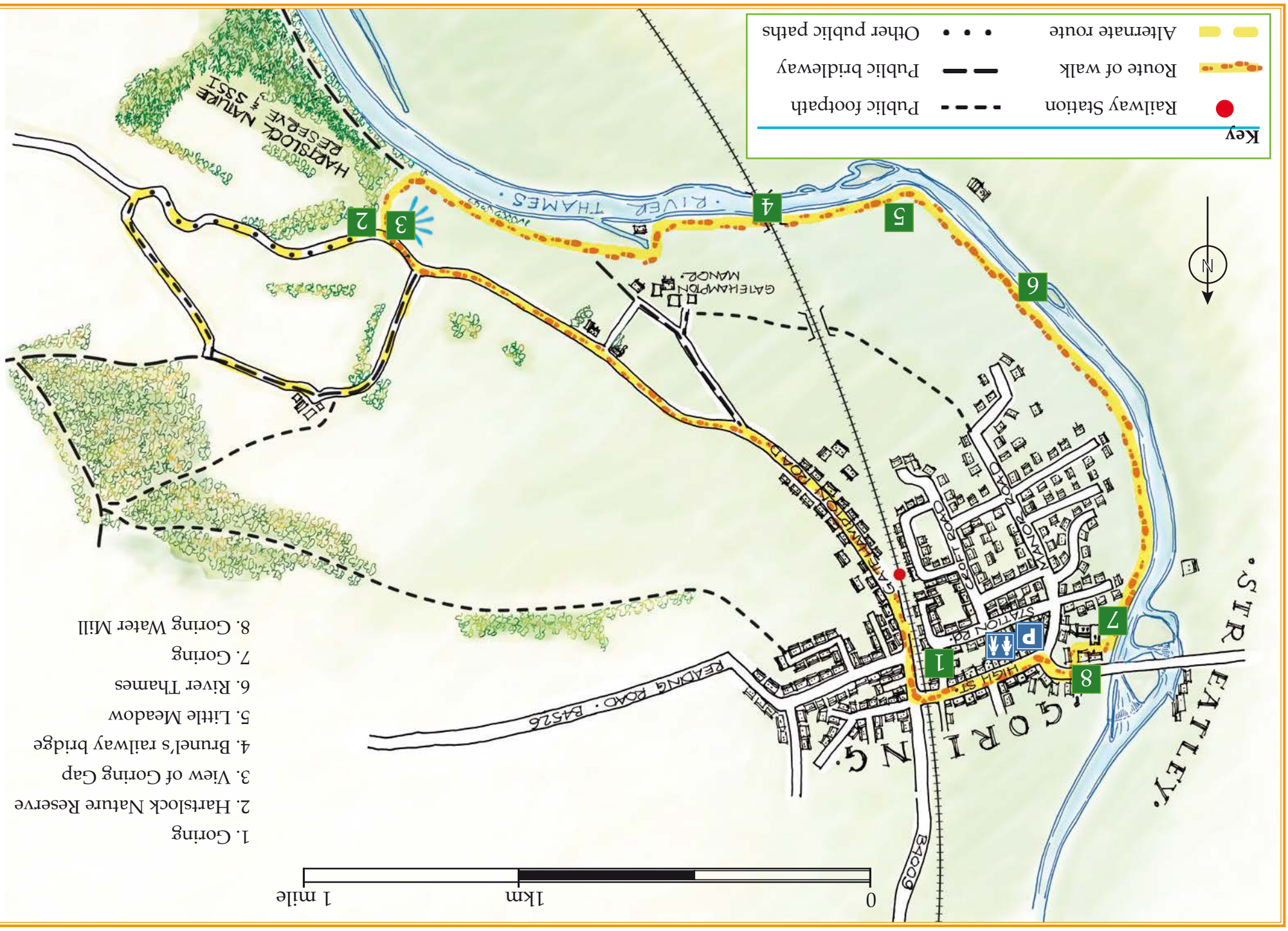

Map redrawn from the 1947 Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 sheets and updated.

The Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a unique place of great beauty and wildlife interest. It incorporates a wide range of landscapes shaped by its geology and history.

The Chilterns geological story began *c.* 100 million years ago when sea levels rose more than 300m due to global warming. The chalky muds deposited on the sea floor eventually became today's Chalk. The rounded hills and deeply dissected dry valleys of the Chilterns are actually very recent, sculpted by melting glaciers about 450,000 years ago.

Stone Age hunters and gatherers lived in the Chilterns. Neolithic settlers cleared trees to grow crops, leaving behind their burial mounds and starting the process that created flower-rich chalk grassland. The Anglo-Saxons knew this area as *Cilternsetaen*, a 'god-forsaken place that no-one in their right minds would want to settle'. But settle they did, leaving Anglo-Saxon names such as Goring, Bledlow, Wycombe, Chesham and Luton to remind us of the many groups of people who have lived, farmed, traded and died in the Chilterns.

About the Goring to Hartslock walk

The route takes you through a range of picturesque scenery, from meadows beside the Thames to the chalk grassland and yew woodland on the slopes of the Hartslock Nature Reserve. There are no stiles and the walk is fairly flat until the incline up Hartslock Hill. Beware: the Thames floods low ground here during the winter. If the weather has been wet, check before you set out (Environment Agency Flood Information Line 0845 9881188). For more information on the Hartslock Nature Reserve, or to volunteer to help on the site, visit www.hartslock.org.uk

The route starts at Goring Railway Station, but you could begin at any point or walk in reverse: it's your choice. Arrive by train or park at the station or town centre car parks.

Refreshments

Goring has pubs with good restaurants and a coffee shop with lovely cakes. Alternatively bring a picnic to eat in the nature reserve or beside the river.

This is one of a series of 'Chiltern Trails' walks under development by Chiltern Archaeology. Each route highlights the interesting geology that makes the landscape, as well as the wildlife, the history, local stories and folklore which give insight into what makes the Chilterns an interesting and beautiful area.

A book, *The Chiltern Trails*, will provide more information about the Chilterns, with intriguing stories and many more interesting places to visit.

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We gratefully acknowledge The Chilterns Conservation Board funding that made it possible to develop these trails.

www.chilternsaonb.org

The Chilterns Conservation Board

Chiltern Trails

Goring to Hartslock

a 5.5 mile circular walk

The Chilterns Conservation Board

Route summary

Leave the station by the Platform 4 exit (the car park side). Walk away from GORING (1) by turning right out of the station, past the houses and following the lane left. Keep on this lane, past the turning to Gatehampton Manor, where you can see the hill with the Hartslock Nature reserve in the distance. Although a short-cut is possible, for the uphill and longer walk, when you reach a point where footpaths join the lane, follow the lane round to the left. The walk takes you past the farm and, at the point where the lane bends left, take the bridleway on your right. Continue downhill and you eventually come to a gate on your left through which you can access the HARTSLOCK NATURE RESERVE (2). Follow the left hand path to the information board, walk around the fence to the right, admire the VIEW first (3) with BRIDGE (4), and then walk downhill and through a gate. Turn right along the Thames path bridleway, after the horse paddock on the left, turn left following the signs to the river and Thames Path (if you reach the houses you have gone too far!). Cross the footbridge and turn right past LITTLE MEADOW (5) following the Thames Path alongside the river (6) for 1.5 miles returning to GORING (7). Turn right at the bridge, past the MILL (8), and keep on past the shops and High Street. Turn right at the bridge and the station is just ahead.

The winter Thames at Goring.

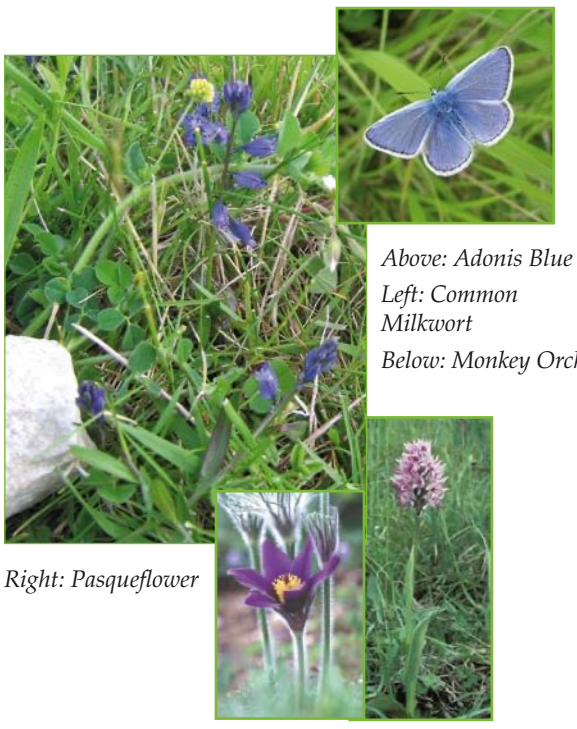
1. GORING: A lot of our ancient history is captured by place names. For example, 'Chilterns' is derived from the Celtic *Cilterne* meaning 'land beyond the hills'. Goring comes from a person's name *Gara* and from *inghas* which means 'tribe of' or 'people of'. Hence, we know that in Anglo-Saxon times Gara's people settled here. On the other side of the river 'Streatley' tells us there was a Roman road coming through a wood clearing as the name is derived from *strat* and *leah* (street/Roman road and clearing respectively). This 'street' refers to the major road from Dorchester-on-Thames to Silchester. Again the name was given to the town by the Anglo-Saxons, so we do not know what people called it before this time.

The Catherine Wheel, Goring.

2. HARTSLOCK NATURE RESERVE: This reserve is named for a local family (the Harts) who owned the lock on the river beneath this point during the 1500s. The lock was still in use, as a fishing weir, until it was demolished in the early 1800s.

The reserve contains a good area of chalk grassland and it is of national importance for conservation of typical and rare species of this environment. In much of the reserve there is only a thin covering of soil, sometimes revealing bare chalk. Like all chalk grassland, the soil at Hartslock is very nutrient poor. The reserve is home to over 2000 species of plant, animal and fungus, many of which rely on these special conditions. Depending on the time of year it is possible to see a wealth of chalk grassland species including chalk milkwort, monkey and lady orchids (and a rare hybrid of the two), many butterflies including the Adonis blue, a day-time moth (called a pyralid moth) and rare solitary bees. Also, the rare Pasqueflower has been reintroduced to the site.

Chalk hills, Hartslock Nature Reserve.



Above: Adonis Blue

Left: Common Milkwort

Below: Monkey Orchid

Right: Pasqueflower

3. GORING GAP: The picturesque scenery below the reserve is a very new landscape (geologically speaking). The landscape was originally very flat, perhaps like East Anglia today. A sudden and dramatic change occurred during the ice age. More than half a million years ago the proto-Thames rose in the Birmingham area and flowed south towards Oxfordshire, then veered north-east across Norfolk and into the North Sea near Ipswich. It did not flow through Oxfordshire and on towards London as it does today. When an ice sheet (known as the Anglian ice) pushed down from Scandinavia across southern England, the whole of the country became a frozen waste. At the end of this glaciation there was a sudden rush of meltwater which resulted in rivers becoming torrential. However, north of Goring, the old path of the proto-Thames had its old valley still blocked by a massive sheet of ice. The result was the cutting down of a new course for the river. The waters cut deep incisions into the chalk rock and made a series of 'gaps' or valleys. Goring Gap is a good example of one of these features – and one that changed British history for ever!

The Goring Gap

4. RAILWAY BRIDGE: Looking down from the Hartslock reserve the elegant brick railway bridge across the river can be seen. This was built during the 1830s by Isambard Brunel, one of the country's greatest engineers.

5. LITTLE MEADOW: a natural hay meadow alongside the Thames which is managed for wild flowers by the Goring and Streatley Environment Group.

6. RIVER THAMES: like all English rivers today, the Thames *meanders* across the landscape. But this has only been true for about 10,000 years. Before this time – during the ice age – all British rivers were *braided* rivers. Braided rivers flow torrentially when ice and snow melt, then shrink to trickles flowing in sinuous braided narrow channels separated by banks of sediment. Meandering rivers have a more even flow rate, relying mostly on water coming from the water table and through the rocks. Today the amount of water in the river is controlled to even the flow – increasing the water level in summer and reducing it when need occurs during a wet winter.

The lock by Goring Bridge was first constructed in 1788 and is now one of a few that have a third pair of gates inside the lock enclosure. These gates are to make the lock smaller and so save water, but they are not often used.

7. GORING: Goring is the ancient meeting place of three intersecting transport routes: the River Thames, the Icknield Way and the Ridgeway.

All English rivers have Celtic names; the THAMES was the only good transportation route for these ancient peoples until the Roman period.

The ICKNIELD WAY is thought to be the oldest trackway in the country (Neolithic from 6,500 years ago). It is thought the name is derived from the Iceni, the British tribe in Norfolk that later became famous for their female queen, Boudicca. The tribes probably traded along these routes.

The RIDGEWAY is also an ancient path, thought to have been used from Neolithic times and it is 85 miles long connecting Avebury (Wiltshire) with Ivinghoe Beacon (Bucks). The Thames Path follows the river for 184 miles (see the information board by Goring Bridge).

On the other side of the bridge is STREATLEY, which was an important turnpike road stop on the route to Reading. There was no bridge connecting the two towns until 1837; as a turnpike stop Streatley was more important than Goring until the bridge was built. From Roman times the river could be forded – large stones put in place by the Romans still mark the line on the river bed – and there was a ferry. However, this was not always a safe crossing, for instance, in 1674 sixty people drowned when the boat capsized over the weir. Goring grew very quickly during Edwardian times after the bridge was in place – many of the buildings in town date to this period.

The Old Mill, Goring

8. GORING WATER MILL: a mill was first present on this site before 1086 when a corn mill is recorded. In 1895 the mill was converted to generate electricity. The present mill building dates from the 1920s where it replaced the older building and, is in fact, a replica of that mill. Behind the mill is the church of St Thomas. Dating from 1125 the oldest building in Goring.

Cover images clockwise from top left: Adonis Blue butterfly; view of chalk hill near Hartslock; Monkey Orchid (inset); the Goring Gap.