

Combs Highs and Lows



The 'Lost Pubs of Combs' walk mentions a couple of pubs that have been lost in the comparatively recent past. This 4.75 mile circular walk (short cuts available) around Combs goes further back in time and passes by the sites of a couple of village mills and takes in some of the highest and lowest points in the village.

There are no stiles and the walk is along generally quiet roads and field edges, which may be muddy at times after rain, and there is one short field crossing.

As there is no convenient central parking point in the village this description starts at the bus shelter on Park Road but the route can be picked up at any point. If you are coming into the village by car please park carefully.

From the bus shelter, facing the road, turn left, and almost immediately go through the hedge at the fingerpost. Follow the path with fences on both sides before emerging in a vista with wide, distant horizons. There is the old familiar Great Finborough church spire in the distance ahead of you just above the trees, turn to the right to see Stowmarket church spire, further to the right you will see Combs church nestling on the edge of Combs Wood. Beyond Stowmarket you may be able to pick out the 1,000 ft tall mast at Mendlesham – although this is 7 miles away it often seems much nearer especially when the bright red safety lights are glowing in the gloom.

At a crossroad of paths go left, down a descending farm track with fields on either side and birds in the air. At the bottom, the lowest point on the circuit turn left, after 100 yards when you reach a hedge on your left with a broken wooden post and a deep ditch turn left. The temptation is to walk straight on but this is not the footpath although it is a wide swathe of grass. After a few yards bear right with the Charcoal and Churches walk signpost on the bend, which can be obscured due to the hedgerow.

As you go round a gentle left-hand curve you will see Jack's Grove, a small wood, ahead of you. On the Ordnance Survey maps this has a "Mill Mound" marked but there is no written history of any mills here. Oral history, as recorded in Pevsner's, "Buildings of England, Suffolk", suggests that boats, at one time, were able to use the stream that you have just walked beside to get from the mill to the River Rat at Combs Ford. It seems hard to believe.



Before you reach Jack's Grove look to the right when you get level with a field hedge in the field beyond the field you are in. There is a broken off footpath sign in the hedgerow on your left, you do not see the footpath until you arrive there. If you get as far as the power lines you have gone too far.

Turn right you can see the roof tops of Boyton Hall on the brow of the hill. Head across the small field using the footpath then over a three-sleeper bridge and follow a wide, grassy, steadily rising, winding, field edge to Boyton Hall. On reaching the concrete road, pause a moment to take in the open views from one of the highest points in the village.

Turn left on the concrete road. Just after passing under the power lines a footpath sign may tempt you to go right along a reinstated footpath across the field to Great Finborough – this is not for today, but we do thank the farmers that maintain and reinstate the paths across their land. Thanks

also to the farmers that allow Permissive Paths around their fields these do help greatly in being able to vary the length of any walk.

Continue ahead to meet Jack's Lane (who was Jack?), then left and around the bend to the entrance to Jockey's Lane on the right (who was the Jockey?). For a shorter walk (2.5 miles in total) continue along Jack's Lane past Combs Water Reservoir and Booster back to Park Road, very near to where your walk started.

For the longer walk turn into Jockey's Lane and walk its full length – almost a mile – with little for company except the birds flitting along the hedge or an occasional rabbit diving for the ditch. Emerge on to Bildeston Road and turn left. For a shorter walk (3.75miles) continue on Bildeston Road back to the village and the start point.

There *is* a footpath through Fir Tree Farm but this can be difficult so instead follow the road for 100 yards and then turn right down a Permissive Path through a short wooded section, then a field edge with a hedge on the right and a vineyard on your left. Continue along the edge of the vineyard until you reach Mill Lane. Turn left here and follow this quiet lane past The Nursery and past the footpath signs right and left and reach the Old Mill House with a date board of 1769. There was a post mill here, known as Branstead Mill (or Brad Street Mill?), which was demolished in 1937.

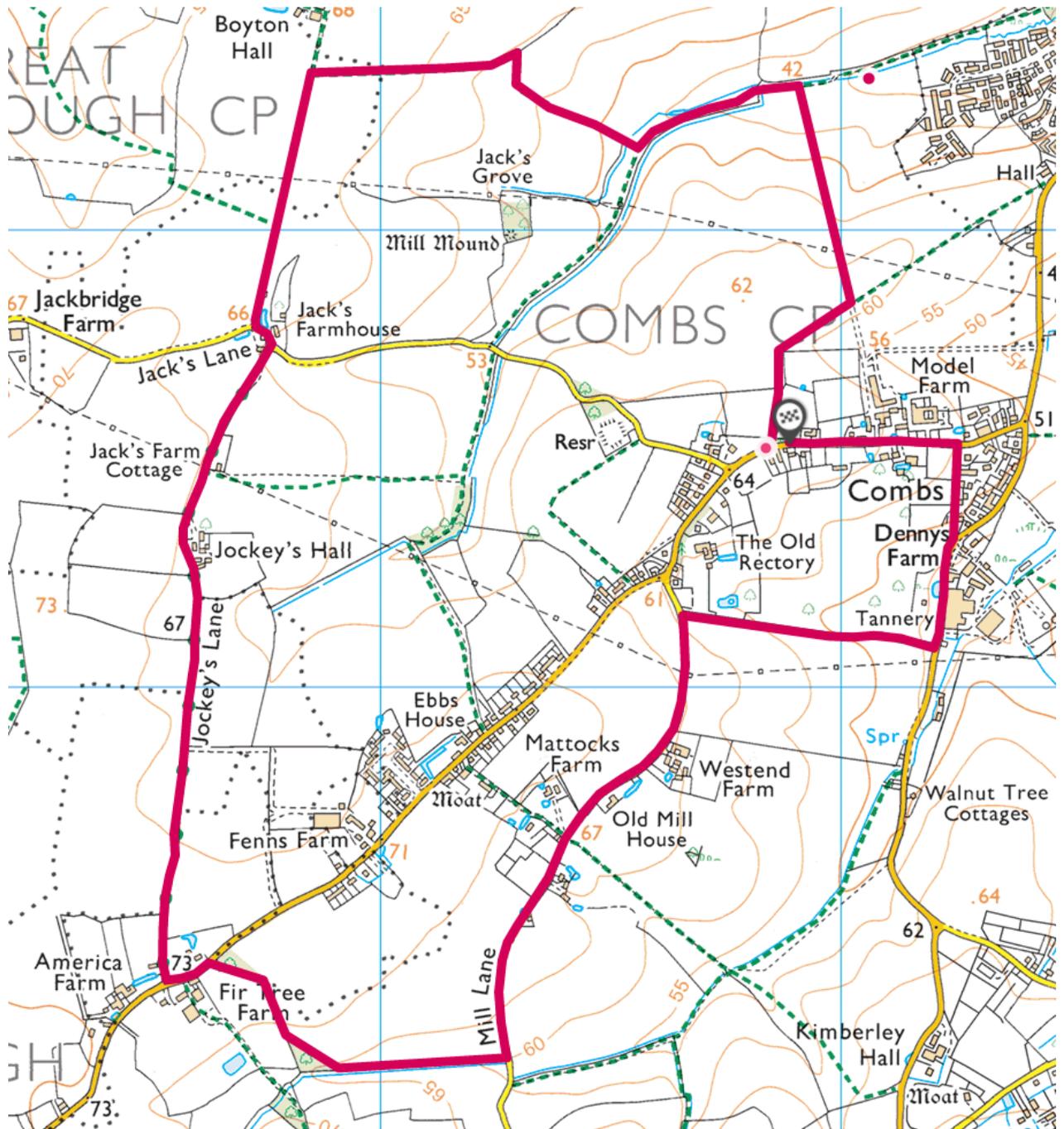


Continue on Mill Lane and before you reach the junction with Bildeston Road and Park Road turn right at the footpath sign. On the left are the grounds of the Old Rectory hidden from view with a field on your right; moving further down on the left there is the park with its grazing sheep for much of the year. On reaching Tannery Road turn left passing the Tannery buildings – now home to several small firms (see elsewhere on website for details) – and the Virginia Creeper clad Tannery House.

Follow the Charcoal and Churches Walk direction post up beside Webbs Close and continue ahead until you reach Park Road near to Model Farm. Turn left to return to the start point hopefully having enjoyed the highs and lows of Combs and the flora and fauna along the way.

Curiously the mill that gave the name to Mill Road in Battsford was, due to a very convoluted parish boundary, technically within the parish of Combs. This mill, known as Upper Mill, dated from the mid-18c and was demolished in the late 1920's. You'll find a route map on the next page.

Walk written by Suzanne Ottewell building on earlier work by Bill Baldry. We thank the Combs History Club for checking historical facts. For more walks visit: www.combsvillage.org.uk/walks.html



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