



Pilgrim Paths

Chipping Norton Deanery

Little Tew to Swerford 5 Miles

A pilgrimage is a spiritual journey to a sacred place.

In addition to route directions, this leaflet offers reflections on Psalm 143 to accompany your journey, with suggestions of places to pause. Although the trail could take two to three hours, you should allow much more time if you wish to participate fully in the spiritual element of this pilgrimage.

The circular route includes road walking through and beyond the villages, on public footpaths and bridle roads, through woods and fields (some of which may contain cattle or horses). There are also several stiles to climb over.

Church of St John the Evangelist, Little Tew.

Preparing: inside the church

The nave and chancel of 1852-3 are by George Edmund Street, architect of the Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand. Street worked under George Gilbert Scott but later became architect to the diocese of Oxford. Charles Buckeridge added the north aisle and tower in 1868-9.



The Psalm chosen for this walk has a somewhat sombre theme at first appearance, but while it may draw us to first consider our own difficulties, we are reminded that we live within the context of God's ultimate loving-kindness.

As you begin this walk, you might wish to take some situation that is causing you distress and using the words of the Psalm offer it to God.

Reading from Psalm 143

*1 Lord, hear my prayer,
listen to my cry for mercy;
in your faithfulness and righteousness
come to my relief.
2 Do not bring your servant into judgment,
for no one living is righteous before you*

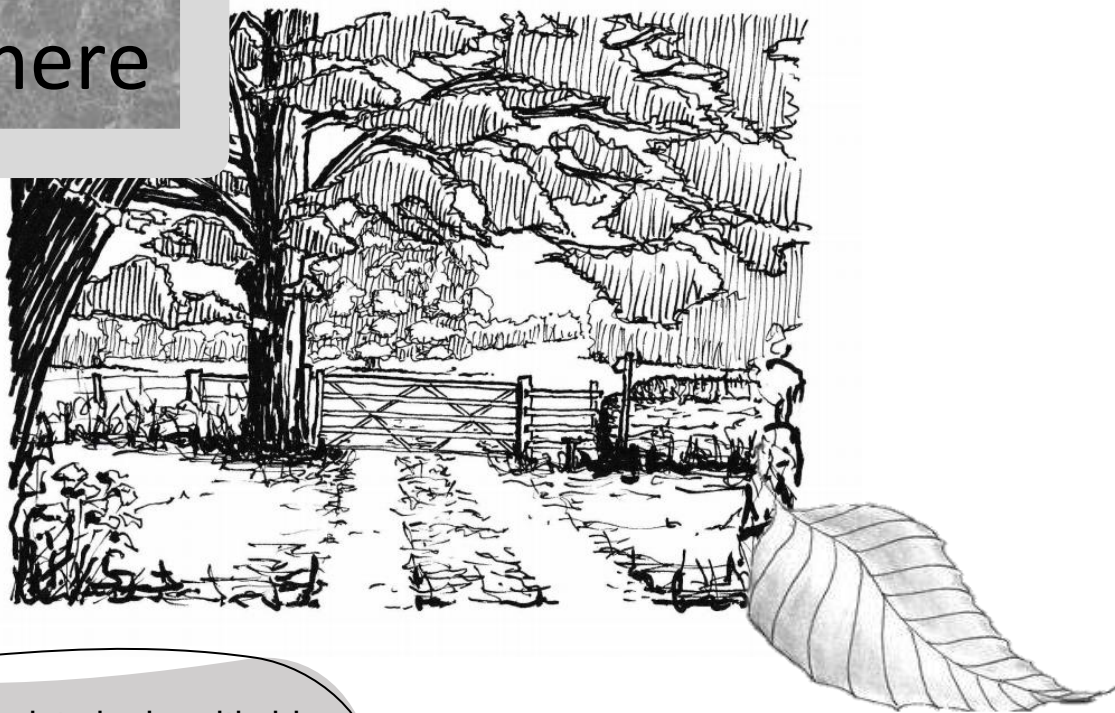


A PRAYER of PREPARATION:

***God bless us with a safe journey
Set our feet on your path today.
May we live this day in justice and joy. Amen.***

Turn left out of the churchyard and follow the main street but, where it bends left, go straight on to the right of the tall conifer on the village green. The large 17th-century house on your left is the Manor House; the double-gabled house on your right is called The Bell House and was once an inn. Just past it, bear slightly right onto a track leading to a wooden field gate and a stile.

Pause here



One way the psalmist deals with his grief is to cast his mind back to consider the evidence of God's goodness, firstly remembering times when he has known the sense of God in his life, and then also as he looks at the magnificence of the natural world. You may wish to take some moments now to do the same, and then continue to do so as you walk on.

*⁵ I remember the days of long ago;
I meditate on all your works
and consider what your hands have done.*

*⁶ I spread out my hands to you;
I thirst for you like a parched land.*

*⁷ Answer me quickly, LORD;
my spirit fails.
Do not hide your face from me.*

From here bear half-left and walk diagonally across the field to a pair of wooden pedestrian gates either side of a ditch and hedge. Continue on the same line diagonally across the next field to a wooden gate in the top corner.



Cross another field, this time keeping the hedge close on your left. The gap leading to the road is hidden in the far corner. The path continues as a bridleway, a little to the right on the other side of the road, and drops down to the next valley with splendid views to the far horizon.



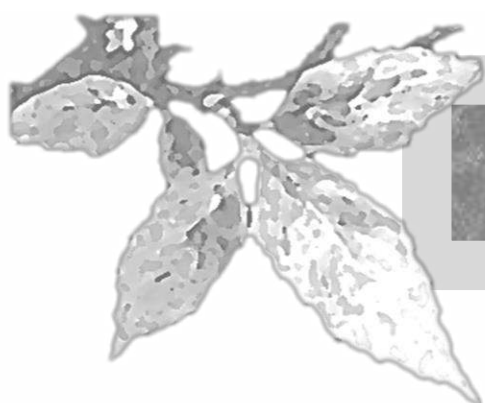
Keep the hedge and then a woodland belt close on your right.

The soil is now a rich orange/red as we have entered ironstone country.

At the lower corner of the field, the path goes into woodland and continues steeply down through the trees to a stream which you may need to cross on stones.



Bear half right briefly to find the continuation up the opposite slope, weaving through the brambles to a pedestrian gate at the top.



Pause here



This has been a bit of a struggle to avoid being scratched and prickled.

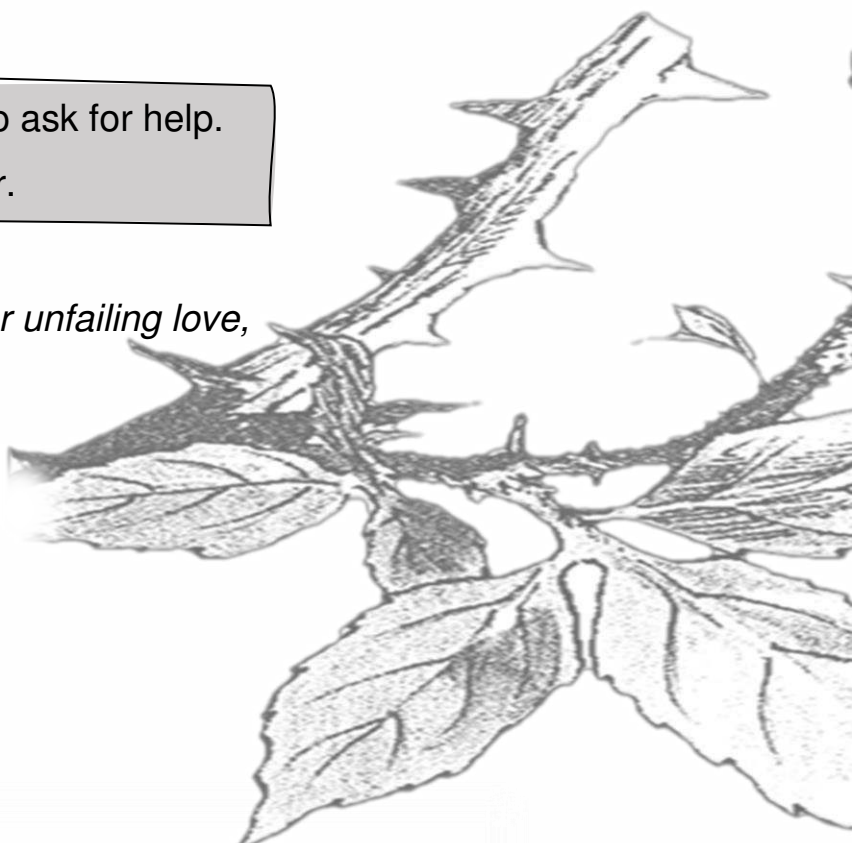
You might like to reflect on the feelings you experience when the path through life is not easy, and to ask yourself how you cope with the frustrations and difficulties.

The psalmist speaks to God in order to ask for help.
You may wish to join him in this prayer.

*⁸ Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love,
for I have put my trust in you.*

*Show me the way I should go,
for to you I entrust my life.*

*⁹ Rescue me from my enemies, LORD,
for I hide myself in you.*



At the far end of the field you enter is Buttercombe Farm.





Head over a dry valley that crosses the field to a pedestrian gate to the right of the farmhouse. As you walk along the fenced path beside its garden, notice the fine ironstone (marlstone) masonry of its walls. Crossing a small field beyond, and keeping the hedge close on your right, you will reach another pedestrian gate. Cross the track beyond it and walk up the drive leading from the house to the A361 Chipping Norton to Banbury road – a ridge road at this point. Look for a metal field gate on the opposite side of the main road, and walk down the field, keeping close to the hedge on your right.

You will soon see the spire of Swerford church rising from the valley to your left as you drop down, and more of the village will become visible as you get lower. In the bottom corner of the field are two stiles.

Climb the left-hand one,
go through a gap in the
wide holly hedge and turn
left into the next field.



Taking the church spire as your bearing, walk the length of this attractively undulating field, crossing another valley on your way and continuing along the hillside towards a stile beside a tall beech tree (slightly to the left of the line to the spire).

Beyond this the path forks. Taking the right fork, walk diagonally across the ridge-and-furrow field, this time heading slightly to the right of the church towards a clump of trees. At the bottom of a bank behind this clump is a stile leading to the village street. As you climb the stile, the gate and path to the church are ahead of you on the other side of the street. The lane leading down to the right gives access to the earthworks of Swerford's small Norman castle



For your own notes and observations

Church of St Mary, Swerford

The charming 14th Century church was extended to the north in 1846. The nave is unusual in having two arches at the west end.

The ticking of the church clock resounds in the quiet, reminding us of the passing of time...



“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Eccl. 3:1

A PRAYER:

Lord, you know our beginning and our end.

Help us to realise we are only pilgrims on this earth

May we experience the freedom to wander,

the freedom to hope and the freedom to love as we journey. Amen

From the church porch, bear half-right to another churchyard gate leading towards the village green. Cross the road and follow the drive to the left of the war memorial that leads into a gravelled yard.

The handsome early-18th century house beside it was formerly the rectory. On the far side of the yard is a gate leading into an orchard.

Go through the orchard, keeping parallel to the garden wall, and through a wooden field gate at the top. Carry on up the hill, passing to the right of a magnificent small-leaved lime tree but remaining parallel to a wide tree-lined gulley on your left.

Look back
to enjoy
the view



At the top, look for a short post bearing multiple circular footpath signs.

Pause here

In this part of the walk it is not so easy to see the way. There isn't a very easily defined path.

The repeated words of the psalm remind us that things aren't often clearly defined or simple to follow.

*⁸ Let the morning bring me
word of your unfailing love,
for I have put my trust in you.
Show me the way I should go,
for to you I entrust my life.*



Turn right and make your way through this strange lumpy field to a pedestrian gate beside a metal field gate.

In the next field, continue with the hedge close on your right, until you reach another metal field gate. From this point, take a diagonal line half-left up a sloping field to a metal pedestrian gate in the top corner. The path continues on the same line through a belt of recent planting to a double stile, but then veers half left and follows the line of a stone wall.



Keeping the wall close on your left, continue to the far end where you enter a field-corner spinney by a wooden stile and exit to the A361 on a stone one.

Cross the main road and turn left along the verge in front of Pomfret Castle - another splendid farmstead group of tawny marlstone. Just past the main roadside buildings, turn right on a gravel track beside the farmyard and follow the bridleway through a metal field gate, down the valley to another gate at the bottom and then up the far side to a further gate.

The path now becomes more level and the going is easier. You may like to reflect as you continue how the level ground gives us a chance to adopt a different pace. You could consider what opportunities you need to grasp when the circumstances of life open new possibilities

Pause here

*¹⁰ Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God;
may your good Spirit
lead me on level ground.*



Continue...

.... on the same straight line, keeping the hedge on your right, through the next two fields until you reach a minor road.

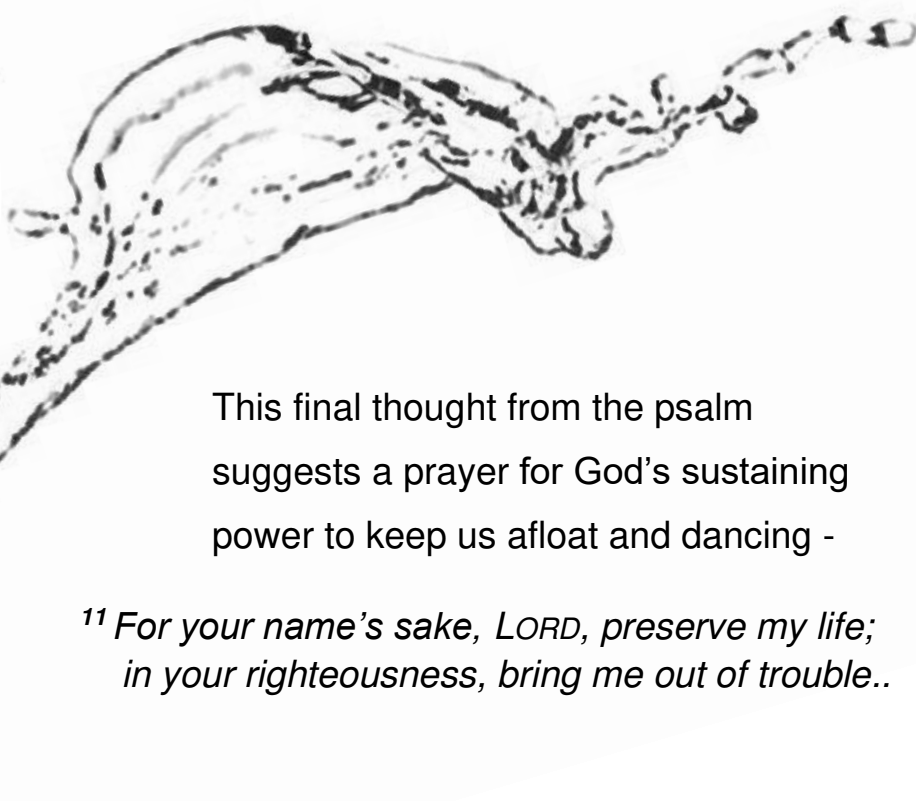
Turn right and follow this road for 150m until you see a footpath sign pointing to the left. Cross the field into which it is pointing, keeping the hedge close on your right. After going through the metal field gate on the far side, turn left again and continue down the left-hand side of the next field to another field gate at the bottom, passing the ruins of an outlying barn and yard on your left.

Bear half right but stay to the left of a small stream, emanating from a pond by the gate, that diagonally bisects an otherwise rectangular field. This leads you to the entrance of a short stretch of green lane that ends in a wooden footbridge over a stream. Go through a wooden gate and turn left in front of Magpie Farm. Continue to the far end of the field, keeping close to the hedge on your left, at the end of which you will find a park-style metal field gate with an equestrian side gate. Turn left along the green lane which leads, after 150m, to a ford and another wooden footbridge over the stream – actually the infant River Dorn.

Pause here

“Always be like water.
Float in the times of pain
or dance like waves
along the wind which
touches its surface.”

— Santosh Kalwar



This final thought from the psalm suggests a prayer for God's sustaining power to keep us afloat and dancing -

*¹¹ For your name's sake, LORD, preserve my life;
in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble..*



Continue...

..... on up the green lane and perhaps take the opportunity to reflect in silence on what God may have been saying to you during the pilgrimage.

On reaching the end of the lane, where you turn right to return to Little Tew, take a moment when you reach the road to read the following....

As you drop down into the village you pass a couple of interesting but very different buildings: first, on your left, a modern house planned as an arc of a circle looking over the lovely valley; second, The Grange, which was built in 1857-8 as the vicarage.

G E Street's original building was first altered by Charles Buckeridge and then extended in 1880 by E G Bruton. His lofty addition includes a tower topped by a timber-framed studio with an octagonal pyramid roof! Further down the hill the road bends sharply to the left and passes more of Buckeridge's Victorian Gothic buildings: first a school group including a lych-gate and then a row of cottages.



At the bottom, follow the road round to the right to return to the church.

Finishing well ...

A PRAYER:

**Eternal light, shine in our hearts;
Eternal goodness, deliver us from evil;
Eternal power, be our support;**

Alcuin (York Scholar, friend to Charlemagne, late 8thC)