

The map shows Berkhamsted Common as it exists today. This walk will take you around the central section of the common which was saved from enclosure in 1866.



About the battle

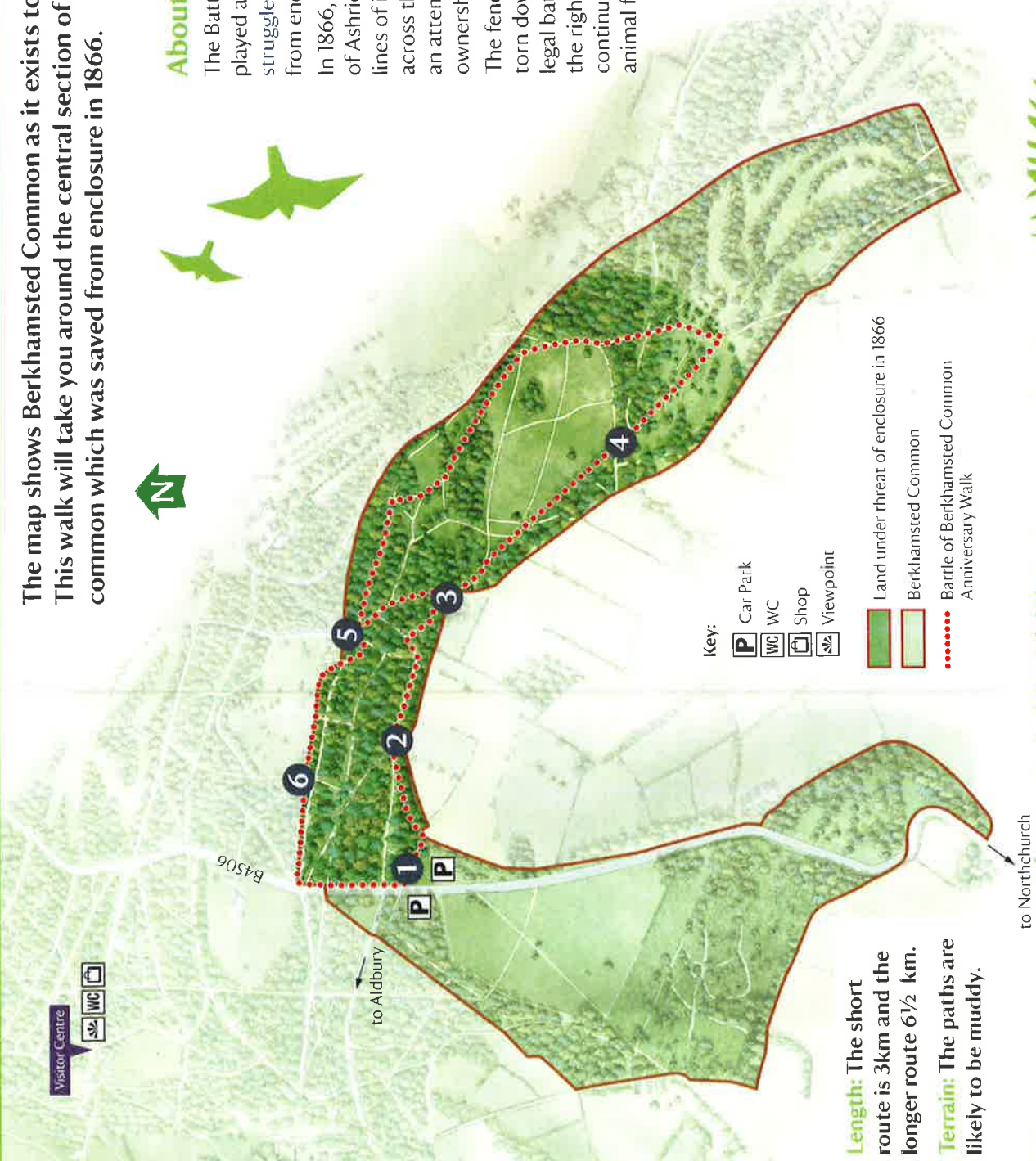
The Battle of Berkhamsted Common played an important part in the historic struggle to protect our commonland from enclosure by private landowners.

In 1866, Lord Brownlow of Ashridge erected two lines of iron fencing across the common in an attempt to take sole ownership of the land. The fences were torn down and the legal battle that followed established the rights of the local commoners to continue to use the common for fuel and animal fodder.



Parking:

Please use one of the car parks on the B4506 just south of the turning to Aldbury. The waymarked trail starts from the Information Panel in the larger car park.



Length: The short route is 3km and the longer route 6 1/2 km.
Terrain: The paths are likely to be muddy.

to Northchurch

Numbered information points



1. To your right is an old trackway, bordered by tree-lined banks. Tracks like these ran across all the Ashridge commons, allowing people and their animals to pass through without encroaching on the local grazing rights of the commoners.



2. You can tell by the presence of so many silver birch trees in this area that you are now walking through a relatively young wood. Silver birch is one of the first trees to grow into open spaces.

For the last 400 years much of Berkhamsted Common was dominated by a gorsey-heath. The actions of local commoners, of harvesting wood for their fires and grazing their animals on the common, kept the landscape open.

3. Coldharbour Farm dates from the time of the Coldharbour Enclosure in 1618. The distinctive semi-circular shape of the common was created at this time, when land in the centre was enclosed and then turned to farmland.

There was a great deal of unrest in the early 1600s when the Lord of the Manor attempted to enclose further portions of the common, but spirited resistance by locals ensured that the common remained open.



4. The extraction of clay, flint and chalk from the common goes back at least as far as the 1600s. This cottage, now known as Brickkiln cottage, was established by the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater in 1803 to supply clay bricks to re-build Ashridge House.

Tensions arose between the estate and the commoners as he used so much gorse from the common to fire his kilns that there was little left for anyone else.

5. Woodyard Cottage stands on an old road which ran from Aldbury to Hemel Hempstead, along the edge of Berkhamsted Common. The road was obstructed by the 7th Earl of Bridgewater (1753 – 1823), during the final years of his life, in an attempt to prevent commoners from exercising their rights on the common.



6. The banks on either side of the path are the remains of the medieval park pale, which marked the original boundary of the Ashridge deer park with Berkhamsted Common. Successive expansions of the park into the surrounding commons were also marked by banks which can still be seen as you walk through the Ashridge woods. There is little doubt that the attempted enclosure of 1866 sought to expand the park still further.

Get in touch...

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...and stay in touch



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In association with Berkhamsted Golf Club

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The Battle of Berkhamsted Common 150th Anniversary Walk 1866 – 2016

Ashridge Estate

