

How to get to the start

The 17 mile circular walk starts and finishes at Berkhamsted railway station. To plan a journey by public transport from anywhere in the country to the starting point, call 0871 200 2233 or visit www.traveline.info

By bicycle: There is a cycle shelter at Berkhamsted station.

By train: Call National Rail Enquiries 0845 600 5165 or visit www.londonmidland.com

By bus: Arriva bus 500 stops in Berkhamsted High Street, a short walk from the station. Tel 0844 800 4411 or visit www.arrivabus.co.uk

By car: There is a car park at the station and in several other places in Berkhamsted.



Chalkhill blue butterflies



Aldbury Nowers

This is one of a series of walks through the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It mainly follows rights of way most of which are waymarked as follows:

-  'yellow arrow' Footpaths (walkers only)
-  'blue arrow' Bridleways (horseriders, cyclists and walkers)
-  'red arrow' Byways (open to all traffic)
-  'purple arrow' Restricted Byway (horseriders, cyclists, walkers and non-mechanically propelled vehicles).

If you have a problem using a public right of way, please contact Hertfordshire County Council, tel 0300 123 4047.

Please be considerate in the countryside

- Keep to public rights of way, and leave farm gates as you find them
- Keep dogs on leads near livestock and do not allow dogs into the river or canal



Bridgewater Monument

There are many other wonderful walks in the Chilterns:

- Visit www.chilternsaonb.org or call 01844 355500 for other Chilterns Country walks.
- Visit www.chilternsociety.org.uk or call 01494 771250 for information on the Chiltern Society's walk programme, to obtain Chiltern Society footpath maps or to join the Society.

Learn more about Chilterns commons at www.chilternsaonb.org/commons

This leaflet has been produced by the Chilterns Conservation Board as part of the Chilterns Commons Project. The Project benefits from funding by the Heritage Lottery Fund and help from volunteers.



Photographs kindly provided by © Colin Drake

Chilterns Country

Walks on commons near Berkhamsted
Discover some Chiltern commons in these circular walk while enjoying extensive and varied views

17 mile circular walk
from Berkhamsted railway station



8 mile northern circular walk
from Bridgewater Monument, Ashridge

8.5 mile southern circular walk
from Berkhamsted railway station



an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Visitor information

Take a break with a picnic on the commons and/or refreshments at a pub or café along the route.

Berkhamsted is a historic market town offering cafes and pubs, shops, public toilets, a tourist information office and numerous other amenities. En route you will pass

- Brownlow Café at the Ashridge Estate visitors centre, next to the Bridgewater Monument
- Pubs in Aldbury - The Greyhound Inn (01442 851228) and the Valiant Trooper (01442 851203)

For details of places to stay, visitor attractions and other walks, contact the Tourist Information Office in Berkhamsted library (tel 01438 737333) or visit www.visitchilterns.co.uk

Points of interest

The following points of interest can be found on the walks. See map for locations.

A Berkhamsted Castle. The castle was built during the Norman conquest of England in the 11th century to control a key route between London and the Midlands. A motte and bailey design, the castle was surrounded by extensive protective earthworks and boasted a deer park for hunting. After 1495 the castle was no longer inhabited and gradually fell into ruin.

B Berkhamsted Common. The route takes you past WW1 troop training trenches and a golf course. Berkhamsted was the setting for one of the most notable commons events in the country. In 1865, Lord Brownlow bought up the rights of many of the common's tenants and erected iron fencing to enclose a large part of the common. However one commoner, Augustus Smith had kept his rights and brought in 120 men from London who pulled down three miles of the fence overnight. When the matter went to court, Smith prevailed.

Berkhamsted Common



Points of interest

C Ashridge House. The 7th Earl of Bridgewater commissioned the architect James Wyatt to build the neo-Gothic Ashridge House as his home. Completed in 1814, the house is regarded as one of the finest examples of early Gothic Revival architecture. During World War II, the building and the lawn in front of it was used as a hospital. Today the house is used as a management training college.

D Ashridge Estate. The estate comprises 5,000 acres of woodlands, commons, chalk downland and farmland. Most of the land is open access to the public and is owned and managed by the National Trust. The area supports an amazing diversity of wildlife.

E Aldbury Common. In the past, Aldbury Common was more open than it is today and clay and chalk were dug to make bricks and tiles and lime the fields. Grazing ceased in 1926 resulting in the growth of the woodland which dominates the common today.

F Bridgewater Monument. The Grade II listed Bridgewater Monument was built in 1832 in memory of Francis Egerton, 3rd Duke of Bridgewater (1736–1803), "the father of inland navigation". It is 108 feet (33 m) tall with 170 steps inside, and was designed by Sir Jeffrey Wyatville in a Doric style.

G Pitstone Common. Until the early 20th century, Pitstone Common was wood pasture where livestock grazed beneath mature trees. Ponds were excavated to provide water for the animals.

H Ivinghoe Common. Maps from 1762 show Ivinghoe Common as open grassland with very few trees. The mixed deciduous woodland here today has developed since commoners ceased grazing their livestock.

I The Ivinghoe Hills. The chalk grassland in this area is nationally important for wildlife and is home to many species of plants and insects, especially butterflies. The mosaic of habitats also supports a wide variety of birds. The Beacon is the site of an Iron-Age hill-fort and commands spectacular views across the Vale of Aylesbury and into Oxfordshire.

J Pitstone Windmill. This is one of the oldest windmills in Britain. Pitstone Windmill ground flour for the village for almost 300 years until a freak storm in the early 1900s left it damaged beyond economic repair. Donated to the National Trust in 1937, it has been faithfully restored by dedicated volunteers.

K Pitstone Hill. Excellent views can be enjoyed along this section of the Chiltern's ridge. The site is sensitively managed by the National Trust and is rich in wild flowers and butterflies. Between March and August it's an important area for ground nesting skylarks and meadow pipits.

L Aldbury Nowers. Formerly known as "Duchie's Piece", this Site of Special Scientific Interest comprises two areas of hillside, linked by the Ridgeway. The site is rich in chalk grassland flowers and butterflies.

M Aldbury. In the centre of the village is a green and pond; close by stand stocks and a whipping-post preserved in excellent condition. The Valiant Trooper has served as an alehouse since at least 1752. Today Aldbury is a popular location for films and television programmes.

N Northchurch Common
The large grassy area between Hill Farm and the northern border of the common was ploughed for crops during WWII. It is now managed for wildlife.

O Grand Union Canal. The Grand Junction Canal from the Thames at Brentford to Berkhamsted was completed in 1798 and continued to Birmingham in 1805, linking the industrial centres of the country to London. Under its more familiar name The Grand Union Canal, it continued to be used as a trade route until the early 1960s. Main activities included the transport of coal, grain, building materials and manure. Timber yards, boating wharves, breweries, boat building and chemical works, plus the people who served these industries, flourished as a result of the canal.

The Grand Union Canal
near Berkhamsted





Description of route:

The route follows paths and forest tracks on commons and across fields. Some paths are steep and can be muddy in places. There are no stiles. Take care, wear suitable footwear and allow time to rest and enjoy the extensive and varied views.

Map: OS Explorer 181

1 Leaving the main entrance at Berkhamsted station, turn left under the bridge onto Brownlow Road and cross over the mini roundabout. Pass the castle on your right. At the fork in the road keep left (turning into Castle Hill). After approx 50m take the footpath through Kitchener's Field car park.

2 Follow the path out of the far side of the car park and pass Well Farm on your left. Continue up to the tree line and take the footpath directly in front of you. You are now on Berkhamsted Common.

3 Proceed uphill until you reach the second waymarked crossing. Turn left onto bridlway 55, passing the edge of Berkhamsted golf course. After approx 100m, look at the hollows to your left. These are the remains of training trenches dug by the Inns of Court Officers' Training Corps during WWI.

4 Continue along the bridlway for approx 1 mile until you reach Brickkiln Cottage. Turn right onto the track for 20-30m and then turn left onto the bridlway waymarked Ashridge Estate Boundary Trail.

5 Continue along the bridlway for approx 1/2 mile to the track leading to Coldharbour Farm. Turn right onto the track waymarked bridlway 47.

6 After passing Woodyard Cottages, go through the kissing gate on your left and follow the path across the field, keeping close to the fence on the right.

7 Leave the field at a kissing gate, turn right and then almost immediately left. Follow the footpath as it crosses a paved road and continue to Ashridge golf course.

8 Follow the path with the course perimeter fence on your right until you reach Prince's Riding. Turn left towards the Bridgewater Monument. After crossing the B4506 you are on Aldbury Common.

If you are walking the shorter Southern circular walk, now return to Berkhamsted by following directions from point 25 to point 30

9 At the Bridgewater Monument turn right onto the Ashridge Estate Boundary Trail. You are now on Pitstone Common.

10 After approx 1 mile turn right onto a footpath leading to Beacon Road. The footpath crosses Ivinghoe Common.

11 Cross the road, take the footpath along the drive to Ward's Hurst Farm and pass between the farm buildings. (NB if walking during the bluebell season, Dockey Wood is worth a detour.)

12 On the far side of the farm and after passing a pond on your left, go through a gate and follow the Ashridge Estate Boundary Trail until you meet the Ridgeway.

13 After approx 70m follow the path through a kissing gate into the woods. Go down the steps.

14 Leave the woods at a gate and follow the path to the right to another gate into a large field. You will have a view of Ivinghoe hills to your left.

15 Follow the straight path keeping the trees on your right. When you reach the second path on your left take it to the top of Gallows Hill.

16 After passing through a gate at the top of the hill, turn left up the ridge. Continue to the summit of Ivinghoe Beacon (the highest point on the ridge).

17 The path then turns left. Proceed down the steep hill following the Ridgeway (identified with an acorn symbol) to the road (Beacon Road).

18 Cross the road and follow the Ridgeway uphill. After approx 50m fork right, continuing on the Ridgeway (not the wide chalky track). Follow the path over the hill. On the descent pass Incombe Hole on your right. Continue ahead and cross the road.

19 Pass through the car park and continue uphill. You will re-join the Ridgeway after descending this hill.

- 20** Follow the Ridgeway to the woods and enter via a kissing gate.
- 21** After approx 3/4 mile and at a path crossing, take the left hand path (leaving the Ridgeway). After about 50m take the right hand fork.
- 22** Leave the woods at a kissing gate and enter the golf course. Take the sign-posted footpath towards Aldbury.
- 23** Join Station Road. Turn left and pass St John the Baptist church on your left.
- 24** Approx 50m after passing the village pond, take the uphill footpath on your left, sign-posted Bridgewater Monument, across Aldbury Common. Continue until you reach the Bridgewater Monument.
- 25** Pass the Monument on your left and the visitors' centre on your right and follow the drive for approx 200m before turning right at the footpath sign. (Turn left if you are approaching from point 8)
- 26** After approx 1 mile and having crossed a road to Aldbury, the waymarked footpath narrows.

- 27** (Note that care should be taken on this section to confirm the correct path/direction.) After a short period of time, the path branches to the left and then joins a bridlway. Turn right onto the bridlway and follow it to Northchurch Common. Continue following the bridlway, keeping the wooded area on your right. After approx 200m the bridlway (waymarked Ashridge Estate Boundary Trail) re-enters the woods for a short stretch and then forks first to the left and then to the right onto a waymarked bridlway.
- 28** Leave the woods through a small car parking area and follow Norcott Hill downhill. The road has no pavement, but is quiet.
- 29** When you reach the Grand Union Canal, turn left onto the canal footpath.
- 30** After approx 2 miles, you reach a black and red road bridge across the canal. Leave the canal and turn left onto the road to return to Berkhamsted station.

