

Walk 2

Whipsnade to Dunstable Downs

This walk starts from Whipsnade, an attractive village clustered around a traditional green. The route takes you from the Tree Cathedral to the open downs, offering magnificent views over Aylesbury Vale.

Distance: 4 miles (allow 2 ½ hours)

Start: Car park at the Tree Cathedral, Whipsnade. Bus service available

Access Information: Fairly level walk; gradual climb if you go as far as the end of the Downs at Five Knolls. The route should be suitable for pushchairs from Dunstable Downs car park to either Five Knolls or Whipsnade Down.

Refreshments: Pub in Whipsnade village or nearby Studham. Visitor Centre with café due to open at Dunstable Downs Autumn 2006.

Route:

From the back of the car park ① ignore the gate on the left to the Tree Cathedral, but go through a gap in the fence on the right at the far end and follow the bridleway along the right hand side of the Tree Cathedral. After a short way the bridleway joins a lane where you turn left for a few metres and then turn right along a public footpath. On reaching the boundary of a house ② turn sharp left to rejoin the road. Turn right along the road, which becomes a bridleway, to a telecommunications mast on your left. ③ Continue straight on along the bridleway between two posts, with the telecom mast to your left, and follow this until you meet a minor road. Cross over and go straight ahead alongside a wood to a bridlegate where you emerge on top of Whipsnade Down. ④

Turn right following the top of the Downs under two lots of pylon cables, using either the permissive footpath, or the parallel bridleway below the footpath, both meeting up a few hundred yards further on above

the glider airfield. Eventually you will reach Dunstable Downs car park and shop on your right. ⑤ A visitor centre is due to open here Autumn 2006.

The Five Knolls burial mounds are of Neolithic origin, with skeletons from the fifth century A.D and are well worth a look. ⑥ To reach the Five Knolls pass through an overflow car park and through a kissing gate on a path slightly lower down on your left (waymarked Chiltern Way and Icknield Way). Follow the crest of the Downs curving left to the Five Knolls with views over Dunstable below.

Return following your outward route as far as the bridlegate where you emerged on to Whipsnade Down. Continue past this gate using either the permissive footpath or bridleway along the edge of a wood on your left until you meet a gate ⑦ where you turn left along a bridleway.

Follow ⑧ the bridleway until you reach a house (Dell Farm Bungalow) where you take the footpath immediately on your left just before the kissing gate, through fields. This path goes through a couple of gates to reach the entrance to the Tree Cathedral and car park. The trees, laid out in the shape of a cathedral, commemorate soldiers killed in the First World War.

