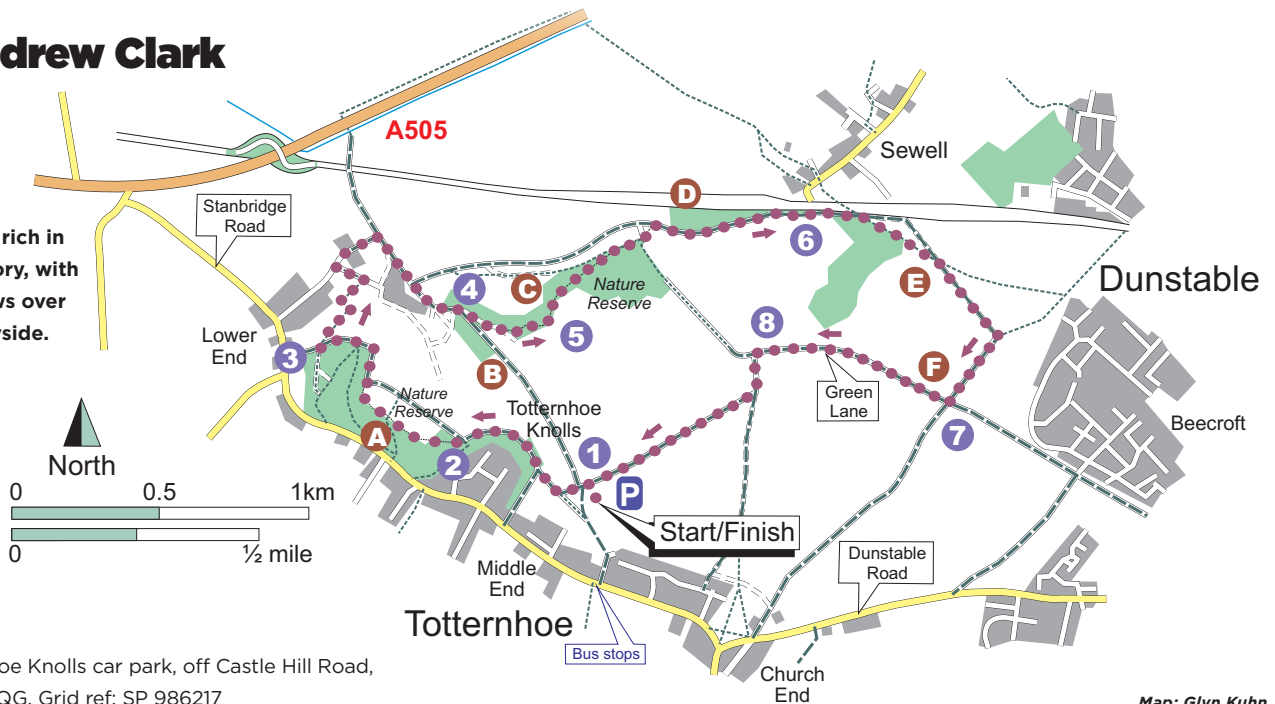


Totternhoe Knolls and its nature reserves

With **Andrew Clark**

A stile-free walk rich in wildlife and history, with outstanding views over the local countryside.



Map: Glyn Kuhn
Photos: Colin Drake

START: Totternhoe Knolls car park, off Castle Hill Road, Totternhoe LU6 1QG. Grid ref: SP 986217

DISTANCE: 4 miles/6.5km

TERRAIN: Easy walking on good paths with a small number of gates. Care needs to be taken as the chalk can be slippery after rain or frost. There are three climbs, one of which is quite steep, and a total ascent of 430ft/130m

MAPS: OS Explorer 192, Chiltern Society 23

REFRESHMENTS: None on route. Nearby is The Cross Keys pub in Castle Hill Road

LOCAL TRANSPORT: No public transport to the start. Buses stop on Castle Hill Road. Please check www.traveline.info for services.

Route

From the rear of the car park, go left up the steps to the top.

1. Turn right and then immediately left along a wide track. Go past a metal barrier, climb the hill and walk along for 350m to a gate on the left.
2. Turn left through the gate and stay straight ahead through the field. Follow the path round to the right, heading towards and up to the trig point at the top of the mound. This is Castle Hill, the remains of a 12th century motte & bailey castle. Walk past the trig point, go down the slope and through the gate directly ahead. After admiring the views, return through the gate and turn immediately left along the fence line to rejoin the wide track. Go straight ahead and follow the track downhill for 300m to a crossing path near the bottom of the hill.
3. Turn sharp right and follow the path between the hedgerow and fence to a service road T-junction. Turn right along the byway, go past a metal barrier and continue to a junction of byways. Stay on the same track, follow it round to the right and up the hill to a fork.
4. Take the right fork for a few metres and turn left through a kissing gate in the hedgerow. Turn right uphill to the top, follow the track

round to the left for 100m to the next junction and fork left.

5. Stay on this main path for 200m as it descends through the reserve, ignore a path on the right and continue straight ahead for a further 300m to a kissing gate. Go through it, turn right down a set of steps and immediately left to drop down onto a wide track. Follow the track round to the right. Continue uphill and along to join a track running parallel on the left. Go straight ahead for 230m to meet a surfaced lane. To the left is the remains of a bridge for a disused railway line.
6. Keep straight ahead up the lane for 200m and take the first path on the right. Climb up the hill, passing, on the right, the wide gap into Maiden Bower hill fort. Continue ahead and then left to rejoin the surfaced lane. Turn right along the lane, follow it round to the right and walk along to where it swings sharp left.
7. Walk on a few paces and turn right along the wide byway for 670m to the next junction.
8. Turn left and, where the hedgerow on the right ends, turn right along the next track. Climb up the hill and then down to a path on the left at the bottom. Turn left and immediately left again to drop down the steps to the car park and the end of the walk.

Continued overleaf



Chalkhill blue butterflies



Totternhoe Knolls



Approaching Totternhoe Knolls car park



View south from the Totternhoe Knolls Nature Reserve

Points of Interest

Totternhoe: The name is said to come from combining two words; 'Totene' and 'hou', which means a lookout house and a spur, and may refer to the high ground around Totternhoe Castle. Its history dates back to at least the Iron Age. In the 1950s investigations were carried out at a site near the parish church and the remains of a Roman villa were found. Totternhoe was also famous for its stone - a type of fine-grained limestone, sometimes referred to as freestone or clunch. The parish church, St Giles of Provence, is a Grade I listed building, parts of which date back to the 14th century. It's built from locally quarried clunch. Both Westminster Abbey and Windsor Castle used Totternhoe stone in their construction. Totternhoe was also known for its orchards, which were used to grow the Aylesbury prune.

A. Totternhoe Knolls is a local nature reserve and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), one of three locally. It contains the remains of an 11th century Norman motte & triple bailey castle. The motte is the conical earth mound and the bailey the enclosure on top. The downland supports such plants as adder's-tongue fern, autumn gentian, fragrant orchid, restharrow, common spotted orchid, cowslip, twayblade and yellow rattle.

B. Totternhoe Stone Pit is a large disused chalk quarry and SSSI.

C. Totternhoe Quarry Nature Reserve is also a disused chalk quarry and SSSI. There are a number of rare plant species, including great pignut, as well as butterflies such as the chalkhill blue and the nationally rare Duke of Burgundy. Glow-worms are also present.

D. The old railway track was part of the Leighton Buzzard to Dunstable railway line. There were sidings serving the Totternhoe lime works. The line opened in 1848 but was closed by Dr Beeching in 1965.

E. Maiden Bower hill fort: Archaeological investigations suggest that this site may have been a Neolithic 'causewayed' enclosure, which could date back 5,000 years. These usually took the form of a roughly circular area enclosed by ditches. The remains of a 2,000-year-old Iron Age hill fort are visible today. Maiden Bower is protected as a Scheduled Monument.

F. The green lanes and nature reserves also support unusual and declining breeding bird species such as corn bunting, yellowhammer, willow warbler, lesser whitethroat and (occasionally) turtle dove, cuckoo and quail.

This walk was created with the assistance of Steve Halton, Senior Countryside Officer of Central Bedfordshire Council.

Nearby Chiltern Society Walks

There's a walk from Totternhoe in the Society's *50 Great Walks in the Chilterns* book.