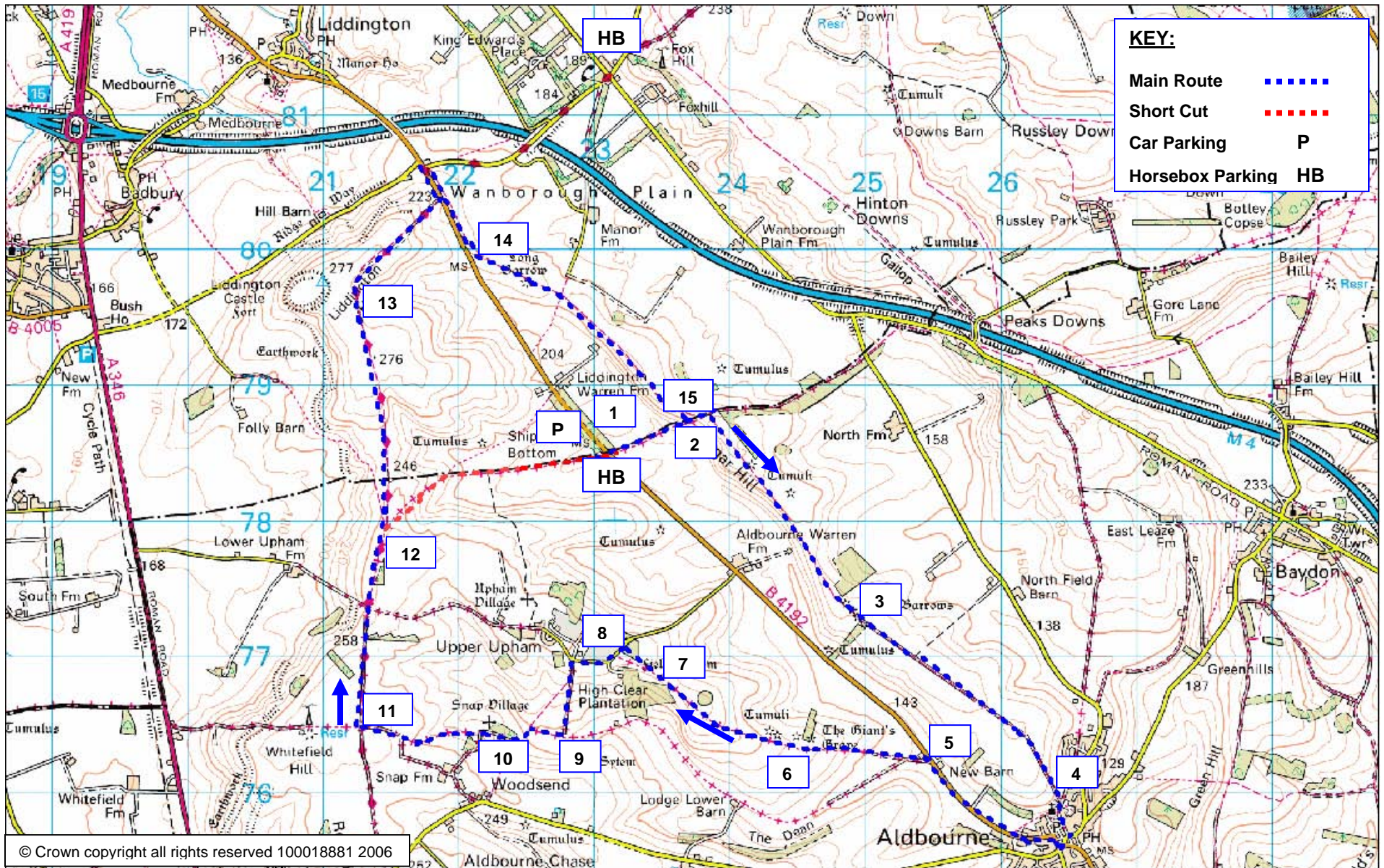


ALDBOURNE CIRCULAR ROUTE for walkers, horse riders and cyclists (route description and views of route below)



ALDBOURNE CIRCULAR ROUTE – route description

Introduction

This circular route in the north Wiltshire Downs, just 5½ miles (9km) southeast of the centre of Swindon, is suitable for walkers, horse riders and cyclists. The route mainly follows broad tracks through rolling downland countryside rich in history from prehistoric to recent times.

The route is waymarked with 'Ridgeway Circular Route' waymarks. Please keep to the paths and keep dogs under control to prevent them disturbing wildlife or stock.

Parking

Cars can park at the start of the route at point 1, or in Aldbourne. Horseboxes can park at the start of the route on the west side of the B4192 at point 1, or on The Ridgeway at Fox Hill, 1¼ miles (2km) northeast of the route. If you park at Fox Hill, ride on the road over the M4 to the T-junction. Turn left, go through the bridlegate on the left after 50m and ride along the field edge to join the route at point 14.

Public Transport – Regular buses on Mondays to Saturdays (not Sundays) from Swindon and Marlborough stop in Aldbourne at the pond and on the B4192 just north of point 14. Telephone Wiltshire bus enquiries on 08457 090899 for further details.

Refreshments

Aldbourn has pubs, a restaurant and various shops.

Directions

Main Route: Approximately 12 miles (19km)

1. From the laybys at grid reference SU230785 on B4192 head briefly towards Aldbourne. Turn left through the first gateway at the end of the avenue of trees and follow the track away from road alongside the fence. Go through the next gateway and head uphill.
2. At the top, go through the gateway ahead and at the junction of paths in front of the wood go right. Follow the track keeping the field boundary to your left.
3. At the group of barrows, bear left between the 3rd and 4th barrow and to through the gateway. The track is now fenced on both sides and eventually descends to Aldbourne.
4. At the road, bear right passing the church and Blue Boar pub. At the junction go over, then bear right signed to Cirencester (B4192) keeping the pond and bus shelter to your right. Continue on the B4192 bearing right and then left out of the village. Beyond the village the left verge provides a safe path.
5. At the barns on the right after ¾ mile (1km) from the centre of Aldbourne take the track to the left. At the junction of tracks after 200m take the right fork. Go through the gateway and climb steadily, eventually reaching the clump of trees containing the Giant's Grave.

6. Beyond the next gateway climb past the small barrow on the right and through another gateway from where there are excellent views to your right of the Four Barrows passed earlier. Pass another clump of trees to your right on the brow of the hill.
7. After the next gateway bear slightly left and go through the gateway in the opposite fenceline.
8. At the end of the paddock go left through the gateway and follow the metalled road. Just past the brick house on the right, turn left onto the track.
9. At the crossing at the bottom of the hill, turn right. Follow the hedgeline bearing left by the old windpump and then right through the site of Snap village.
10. At the junction of tracks continue straight ahead through the gateway and maintain the same direction up the valley on a track through a cross-country riding course. Carry straight on after the next gateway.
11. At the crossing of tracks, turn right onto The Ridgeway. At the next junction bear right then left keeping to The Ridgeway.
12. At the junction of tracks continue straight ahead on The Ridgeway towards Liddington Castle. (To shorten the route to 9 miles (14½km) bear right here and return to point 1 after 1 mile (1¾km).
13. Keep to The Ridgeway as it bears right away from Liddington Castle and down to the road. If walking, cross the road and turn right at the bottom of the steps along the fenceline. If cycling or riding, turn left along the road and just before the junction go through the gateway on the right and turn right along the fenceline.
14. Follow the path as it bears left away from the road and keep the fenceline to your right as you pass through several gateways.
15. At the junction of paths go through the bridlegate and then the large gate to the right. Head downhill to the road and back to point 1. (NB if you started from Fox Hill, go through the bridlegate but turn left towards the wood and pick up the route description from point 2).

Short Route: Approximately 5 miles (8km)

1. From the laybys at grid reference SU230785 on the B4192 head briefly towards Aldbourne. Turn right at the end of the avenue of trees and follow the track as it climbs uphill.
2. At the first junction of tracks turn right onto The Ridgeway and then follow waymarks and directions from points 13 to 15 for the main route from here.

Points of Interest

Sugar Hill

This fine hill probably gets its name from 'Segur' the name of a local 12th century landowner. The track onto the hill (and between points 1 and 12) on the short route) is an old Saxon way known as the Thieves' Way, indicating it may have been used as a droveway for stolen cattle. Here it is the parish boundary marked as such by large sarsen stones. Southwest of Sugar Hill were both Liddington and Aldbourne warrens where rabbits were farmed during medieval times. Rabbit-warrening ended when the land was ploughed during the Napoleonic Wars to grow wheat. Now only the names of the two farms are left to remind us of this former activity.

Prehistoric Sites

A look at any Ordnance Survey map will show that this area is thick with the remains of ancient man's activities. The oldest remains are the Bronze Age barrows or burial mounds some 4,000 years old and recorded on maps as tumulus or tumuli. Several are seen on the route, the best being the group of Four Barrows on the ridge of Sugar Hill at point 3. Another, called The Giant's Grave, is found in a copse at point 6.

Northwest is Liddington Castle, an Iron Age hillfort some 2,000 or more years old that can be visited via a permissive footpath from point 13. Built here it commanded the head of the River Og valley, one of the main approaches into Wessex from the north. More recently this hillfort was the haunt of Richard Jefferies, the 19th century local writer who describes it in his autobiography 'The Story of My Heart' written in 1883.

Aldbourne

The village has flourished for over 1,000 years and although agriculture has been the main industry others such as textile-weaving, brewing, bell-casting and chair-making have previously employed local people. The central area of the village contains many older cottages built from a range of materials including sarsen stone, brick, flint and chalk. A severe fire in 1760 reduced much of the village to ashes.

Upper Upham

The history of this site dates from as early as Roman times and there are remains of a deserted medieval village behind the Elizabethan manor house. The house, added to early last century, is probably on the site of a hunting lodge used by John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, when he owned Aldbourne Manor and Chase in the 14th century. He would have ridden the very track this route follows between Aldbourne and point 8 on journeys from Upper Upham to Aldbourne, sometimes no doubt in the company of his son who later became King Henry IV.

The Civil War

In 1643, returning to London from relieving the siege of Gloucester, the Earl of Essex and his large Parliamentary army marched through Aldbourne Chase. They were caught just east of point 9 by Prince Rupert's cavalry. After a harrying action, the Royalists without any infantry were unable to stop the Parliamentarians getting back safely to London.

Snap

The deserted village of Snap is unusual since it was abandoned as late as the last century as a result of agricultural depression. Of early origin, with records dating from 1268, by 1841 Snap was a small farming community of 47 people. However, with the import of cheap corn from America in the 1870s the population went into decline and the final blow came in 1905 when a butcher bought Snap and the surrounding land. Snap is best visited in winter when the few remaining mounds of rubble are not overgrown. This route passes Snap but the site itself is private and may contain dangerous well-shafts.

Wildlife

The wildlife on this route is typical of chalk downland with many flowers, butterflies and birds if you are here at the right time of year. The larger animals to look out for all year round are hares and deer. Skylarks and meadow pipits singing overhead and corn buntings singing from fence posts are common summer sounds. You are also likely to see buzzards and possibly red kites, both large birds of prey.

Spring views along the route



South from point 2



Aldbourne



North east from just beyond point 6 showing four barrows passed earlier on ridge in distance



Path as it goes past site of deserted village of Snap

May 2006