

THE DEVIL'S PUNCHBOWL & SEGSBURY CAMP CIRCULAR WALK

7½ miles (12 km) - allow 3½ hours (see map on final page)

Introduction

Within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, this walk takes you through some classic undulating downland west of Wantage, a wonderful stretch of The Ridgeway, and includes a visit to the ancient Iron Age fort of Segsbury Camp.

Ridgeway Circular Route

The walk is waymarked with 'Ridgeway Circular Route' waymarks.

Terrain and conditions

- Tracks, field paths, mostly through pasture, and enclosed footpaths. Just one short length of minor road.
- Quite strenuous with a steep downhill and uphill section. 238m (781 feet) ascent and descent.
- 3 stiles and 12 gates
- Some paths can be muddy and slippery after rain.
- There may be seasonal vegetation on the route.

Preparation

- Wear appropriate clothing and strong, comfortable footwear.
- Carry water.
- Take a mobile phone if you have one but bear in mind that coverage can be patchy in rural areas.
- If you are walking alone it's sensible, as a simple precaution, to let someone know where you are and when you expect to return.

Getting there

By Car:

The walk starts in the small car parking area on The Ridgeway at Sparsholt Firs on the south side of the B4001, 2 miles south of Sparsholt at map grid reference SU343851. To find it online, visit www.multimap.com and enter 'SU343851' in the box for 'Address, town or postcode'.

Facilities and refreshments

- Refreshments:
 - Sparsholt (2 miles north of the start) has one village pub, the Star – open Monday evening; lunchtime and evening Tuesday to Friday and Sunday;

and all day Saturday. It serves lunches and evening meals (except Sunday evening). ☎01235 751539 or visit www.starinnsparsholt.co.uk

- Childrey (2 miles northeast of the start) has one village pub, the Hatchet – open lunchtimes and evenings Wednesday to Sunday. Serves lunches only. ☎01235 751213
- Letcombe Regis (½ mile off the walk at around the midpoint) has one village pub, the Greyhound – open every day, lunchtime and evening. Serves meals all week except Monday evenings. ☎01235 771093
- The Barn Tea Rooms at the Court Hill Centre (1 mile east along The Ridgeway from Segsbury Camp). Open from 10.30am to 5.00pm except Tuesday and Wednesday. ☎01235760253 or visit www.courthill.org.uk
- Accommodation:
 - The Star, Sparsholt – ☎01235 751539 or visit www.starinnsparsholt.co.uk
 - Westcot Lodge, Westcot – ☎01235 751251
 - Down Barn Farm (1 mile west of start of walk in the downs) – ☎01367 820272
 - The Greyhound, Letcombe Regis – ☎01235 771093
 - 9 Croft End, Letcombe Regis – ☎01235 763694
 - Quince Cottage, Letcombe Regis - ☎01235 763652 or visit www.rboden.supanet.com
 - Court Hill Centre Hostel, Letcombe Regis - ☎01235760253 or visit www.courthill.org.uk
- Village shop: Childrey
- Toilets: In the pubs and at the Court Hill Centre

Things to remember

- If you bring your dog with you, keep it under close control and on a lead when near to livestock.
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home.
- Remember that the countryside is a working place; leave crops, buildings, machinery and livestock well alone. Leave gates and property as you find them and please keep to the line of the path.
- Park your car responsibly: do not obstruct gateways, narrow lanes and village facilities. Consider leaving valuables at home.
- Please enjoy your walk and spend your money in the local facilities - they need your support!

Walk directions

1. From the car parking area on The Ridgeway walk southeast, away from the telecommunications mast, along the Trail for just over 500m.
2. At the old wooden stile turn sharp left across the field and descend a little to a kissing gate above the Devil's Punchbowl.
3. Go through the gate, turn right and keep to the upper slope following the fence. At the end of the first field go through the kissing gate and continue in the same

direction on the upper slope next to the fence.

4. 75m after the fence ends, bear left down the grass field and go through the kissing gate. Head down the steep slope to the field gate on the opposite side of the field to the right of the trees.
5. Follow the fence around the bottom of the slope for approximately a mile through several fields, including a short dog-leg right and then left at the end of the first field. When you reach a hedge ahead, turn left down the track towards Letcombe Bassett.
6. When the track joins the open field, turn right and go through the gate and along the lane passing St Michael's church which dates from the 12th century. At the junction, turn right and walk uphill.
7. Just before the lane bends to the right turn left up a steep bank. Head across the small field to the right edge of the brick wall ahead. Go over the stile and follow the tarmac drive down to the road. *Alternatively, to shorten the walk to 5 miles/8 km, continue up the lane keeping right at a junction, and turn left at the top of the hill along The Ridgeway to take you back to the start.*
8. Just before the road, take the footpath that rises gently to the right and then follows an enclosed path with views of the Letcombe Brook and meadows.
9. When the path joins the bridleway, turn right through the gate and follow the bridleway towards the hills rising in the distance. *Alternatively, turn left here to visit Letcombe Regis and the Greyhound pub, a short walk away.*
10. At the end of the fenced path, go through the kissing gate and bear slightly left up to the kissing gate in the top left corner of the field. It is a steep climb.
11. Beyond the gate, bear left to Segsbury Camp and then right to follow the fence around it. Go through the kissing gate, and right onto the track to reach The Ridgeway after 50 metres. *To explore Segsbury Camp, go over the stile on the opposite side of the track.*
12. Turn right onto The Ridgeway and follow this for almost 3 miles back to the start. If you're there relatively early, you may well see racehorses training on the gallops to the south.

Points of interest

The Ridgeway is one of only 15 National Trails in England and Wales. It's thought to be the oldest road in the country having been in existence since Neolithic (New Stone Age) times some 5,000 years ago and is surrounded by numerous prehistoric sites.

Starting in the Avebury World Heritage Site it travels for 87 miles (139km) in a north-easterly direction along a chalk ridge, bisected at roughly the mid-point by the River Thames and finishing in an Iron Age fort on top of Ivinghoe Beacon. Throughout its length it is within fine countryside: to the west of the Thames there's the open, rolling and remote downland of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural

Beauty (AONB), and to the east it's in the more wooded and intimate landscape of the Chilterns AONB.

The Devil's Punchbowl is a dramatic dry valley or coombe sculpted by the action of water in the past. Nowadays it is a great grassy amphitheatre and, as one of the largest expanses of unimproved chalk grassland in the area, much of it is protected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Letcombe Bassett was established in Saxon times and many of the cottages are timber-framed and thatched. The church of St Michael and All Angels dates from the 12th century and has a Norman doorway and chancel arch. In Thomas Hardy's 'Jude the Obscure', Letcombe Bassett is the village of Cresscombe, called after the old cress beds on the brook just down the road from point 10.

Segsbury Camp (also known as Letcombe Castle) is one of the Iron Age forts that line the western half of The Ridgeway. Excavations in the 1990s established that it was densely occupied by roundhouses throughout the Iron Age and that it was largely domestic in function. There are tremendous views north from the ramparts.

Views along the route



Devil's Punchbowl



Cottage in Letcombe Regis



View west from point 11



Looking towards point 1 along The Ridgeway

This walk has been supported by



THE DEVIL'S PUNCHBOWL & SEGSBURY CASTLE CIRCULAR WALK MAP

