

LIDDINGTON CASTLE CIRCULAR WALK

8½ miles (13¾ km) - allow 4 hours (see map on final page)

Introduction

This walk within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty takes you through some remarkably remote, undulating and scenic downland. It is just a few miles south of Swindon and includes a lovely stretch of The Ridgeway as well as the ancient Iron Age fort of Liddington Castle. Please note the walk shares part of the route with the Aldbourne Circular Walk, although the shared section is walked in the opposite direction.

Ridgeway Circular Route

The walk is waymarked with this 'Ridgeway Circular Route' waymark.

Terrain and conditions

- Mostly downland tracks, some a little rough or rutted. Short lengths of field path through pasture and minor road at start and finish.
- Quite strenuous with several fairly steep up and downhill sections. 248m (814 feet) ascent and descent.
- No stiles. 14 gates many of which seem permanently open.
- 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 park on the minor road 100m west off the A346 just south of the petrol station at Chiseldon at map grid reference SU192793. To find it online, visit www.multimap.com and enter 'SU192793' in the box under 'find a map', and click 'find'.

By Bus: *(Please note these details were correct in May 2009 but bus services can change with little notice so do check before travelling)*

Regular service 70 from Swindon to Marlborough stops in Chiseldon and runs Monday to Fridays. ☎01793 521415 for further details.

Facilities and refreshments

- Refreshments:
 - Chiseldon has two village pubs:
 - The Patriot Arms – open lunchtimes and evenings (not Mondays except bank holidays) and all day Saturday and Sunday. It serves lunches and evening meals (not Mondays except bank holidays). ☎01793 740331 or visit www.patriotsarms.co.uk.
 - The Elm Tree – open from 2pm during the week and from noon at weekends. ☎01793 740220 or visit www.theelmtree.co.uk
 - Badbury (½ mile north close to the start) has one pub, the Bakers Arms – open lunchtimes and evenings. Serves food except Sunday evening. ☎01793 740313 or visit www.swindonweb.com/arkells/bakers-badbury
- Accommodation can be found in Chiseldon at:
 - Chiseldon House Hotel – ☎01793 741010 or visit www.bestwestern.co.uk
 - Courtleigh House – ☎01793 740246
 - Norton House – ☎01793 790508 or visit www.nortonhouse.uk.com
- Village shop and post office: Chiseldon
- Toilets: In the pubs only

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. Turn right out of the car park. Carefully cross the main A346 and follow the minor road signed for Hinton Parva and Bishopstone.
2. After about 600m take the first turning on the right signed to Folly Farm and walk steadily uphill to the end of the road.
3. Bear left onto the footpath past the metal field gate and follow the track first gently down hill and then as it undulates.
4. At the end of the track go through the gate and continue in the same direction through the pasture field keeping the hedge to your right.

5. Go through the gate into the next field. Continue ahead following the track which veers slightly away from the fence on your left and heads up through the field in a shallow dip with a couple of hawthorn bushes on a bank to your left. *There are great views from here, so take some time to look around!* The track soon swings left and then right up towards gates in the corner of the field.
6. Go through the gate ahead and immediately turn left along the fence line.
7. At the end of fence go through the gateway to your left and then immediately right through the bridlegate onto The Ridgeway.
8. At the first junction of tracks turn sharp left leaving The Ridgeway and follow the track downhill to the road (B4192).
9. Cross over the road and follow the track ahead that soon rises steeply onto Sugar Hill.
10. At the top of the slope, go through the field gate and immediately left through the bridlegate. Continue on the track next to the fence, passing through 5 gates, which eventually runs adjacent to the road for the final stretch. *There are tremendous downland views along here of arable and grazed land together with clumps of beech woodland that look magnificent during autumn. Be sure to turn around on occasions to enjoy them fully!*
11. About 50m before the large roadside sign turn left up the steps at the break in the fence and cross the road. Follow The Ridgeway steadily up the stony track ahead.
12. At the gate at the top of the slope turn right to visit Liddington Castle along the permissive path kindly provided by the farmer. Return along the same path and continue on The Ridgeway which soon starts to descend gently back to point 7. At 7, turn right and retrace your steps back to the car park.

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 Midland & South Western Junction Railway

The car park where the walk starts is sited on this disused minor railway that ran from Southampton to Cheltenham. The Swindon to Marlborough section of the MSWJ opened in 1881 and the line closed in 1961. It only really attracted much business during the two World Wars, when exceptionally heavy traffic was carried, including

that to military camps on Salisbury Plain. Today National Cycle Route 45 uses a large proportion of the trackbed between Cricklade and Marlborough.

Thieves and Rabbits

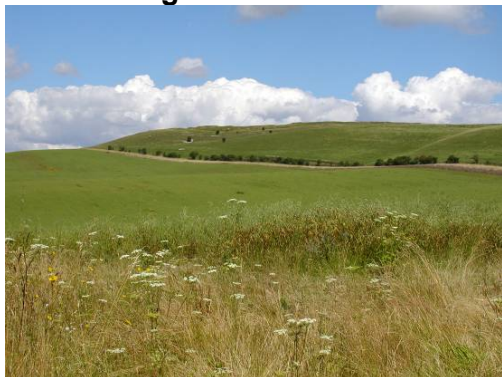
The track between points 10 and 13 is an old Saxon route is known as the Thieves' Way, probably indicating it was used as a droveway for stolen cattle. It is also the parish boundary and is marked as such by large sarsen stones. At the foot of Sugar Hill, which probably gets its name from 'Segur' the name of a local 12th century landowner, is Liddington Warren Farm named from the rabbit-warrening in this area in medieval times. The 17th century writer, John Aubrey, remarked that the rabbits here were the '*best, sweetest, and fattest of any in England; a short, thick coney, and exceeding fatt.*'¹ Rabbit-warrening declined when the land was ploughed during the Napoleonic Wars to grow wheat.

Liddington Castle

Liddington Castle was first occupied in the 7th century BC and is one of the earliest hill-forts in Britain. Built here it commanded the head of the River Og valley, one of the main approaches into Wessex from the north. It is sometimes suggested this is the site of the 5th century AD battle of Mount Badon, now part of Arthurian myth, where the Romano-British Celts defeated an invading Anglo-Saxon army. More recently it was the haunt of Richard Jefferies, the 19th century local writer of natural history and rural life, who describes it in his autobiography 'The Story of My Heart' written in 1883. Liddington Castle is relatively unvisited in spite of being a clearly visible landmark to the millions who pass along the M4 motorway so you're likely to find yourself quite alone to enjoy its secluded atmosphere.

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 with corn buntings singing from fence posts are common summer sounds whilst the laughing calls of flocks of fieldfare, which migrate here from Scandinavia, are typical during the winter months. You are also likely to see buzzards and possibly red kites, both large, magnificent birds of prey.

Views along the route



Liddington Castle from near point 4



View south from near point 5



Descending from point 8 with Sugar Hill in the distance



Crop circle in August 2007 below Sugar Hill



Looking northwest from point 10



Looking northeast from near point 10

This walk has been supported by



LIDDINGTON CASTLE CIRCULAR WALK MAP

