North Wessex Downs AONB

The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) includes some of England’s finest and most ancient landscapes - from chalk downland and river valleys to arable farmland, ancient woodland and world-famous historic sites. The AONB is ideal for walkers, cyclists and riders to enjoy panoramic views along open chalk escarpments, as well as rights of way through woodland and alongside rivers and parts of the Kennet and Avon Canal. Visitors can follow routes that include the Ridgeway National Trail, the White Horse Trail and the Wayfarer’s Walk, taking in attractive rural towns and villages that offer opportunities to enjoy local produce and hospitality. For further information about the North Wessex Downs AONB, please visit www.northwessexdowns.org.uk

This is part of a series of walks in the North Wessex Downs AONB that can be accessed by public bus from Swindon.

Transport options

- Wilts & Dorset X5 (Monday to Sunday)

OS Maps: Explorer 157
Start point grid reference: SU 157611

Refreshments:
- Pewsey Wharf: pub and cafe/restaurant
- Pewsey: pubs, cafes and shops
- Oare: pub
- Wilcot: pub

For further information contact:
S. R. Cassell, Voluntary Project Manager
Swindon Bus Rambles
Email: info@heritagewalks.org.uk

The Countryside Code

- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under control
- Consider other people
Walk directions

1. Travelling from Swindon and Marlborough, alight at the bus stop at Pewsey Wharf (opposite the French Horn pub). Walk over the bridge to join the canal towpath, heading east. With the Waterfront Café on your right, proceed along the towpath for about half a mile to reach a bridge. Go under the bridge, then immediately turn right to walk over the canal bridge heading north.
2. After about 200 yards, climb a stile on the left to a path through a field (waymarked the White Horse Trail). Follow this to another stile and proceed through the field ahead. On reaching a lane, cross over and proceed ahead, crossing a bridlepath.
3. Go through the gate opposite into a field. (The path is signed Mid-Wilts Way, and, on the top of the gate post, the White Horse Trail). To the left is Oare village. After about 300 yards, climb a stile on the right, to follow a path that leads to the summit of the hill known as the Giant’s Grave. (Note: steep ascent). At the summit, follow the path eastwards, to reach a gate, with White Horse Trail sign, and a finger-post pointing to Martinsell hill. Through the gate turn right along a permissive path gradually rising for about 500 yards until reaching a row of trees.
4. Turn left and follow the track until reaching a wood (Withy Copse). Go straight ahead for about 50 yards, then turn left at a junction of paths, to follow the path signed to Oare Hill. This path takes you through Withy Copse. On emerging from the woodland, turn right on to a track. Follow this to reach a road.
5. This is the A345 Marlborough to Pewsey road. Cross with care. Take a path on the left, signed the White Horse Trail. Follow this path behind Huish Hill to reach, after a mile or so, Gopher Wood.
6. At a crossroad of paths, cross over the track and turn half left to follow a bridleway though the wood. On emerging from the wood, follow the bridleway downhill to a gate. Go through the gate and proceed along the track for about half a mile, passing farm buildings.
7. Continue along this lane as it bears to the right. At a crossroads, keep ahead and follow the lane for just under a mile to reach the canal.
8. Turn left to walk back to Pewsey Wharf along the towpath.

Points of interest

The Kennet and Avon Canal

This canal, which runs 57 miles between Newbury and Bath, linking the Kennet and Avon rivers, was built between 1794 and 1810. It was used to carry iron, coal, stone and timber from Bristol and to bring luxuries like spirits and tobacco from London. In the later 19th century and early 20th century the canal fell into disuse following competition from the Great Western Railway, who owned the canal. After nearly 30 years of restoration work, much of it undertaken by volunteers, the canal was re-opened in 1990.

Jones’s Mill – the Vera Jeans Nature Reserve

This nature reserve, owned and managed by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, is a combination of marshy fenland, woodland and meadows. The reserve is crossed by a number of paths giving good access to most areas. The reserve supports rare plants such as greater tussock sedge, giant horsetails and bog pimpernel. The meadows are grazed by Belted Galloway cattle.

King Alfred’s Trail

The Vale of Pewsey separates Wiltshire’s two principal areas of chalk downland, the Marlborough Downs to the north and Salisbury Plain to the south. The King Alfred Trail reflects the wish of the local community to share its access with more people by creating an easy access trail. The Trail is made up of four routes from Pewsey village to different parts of the surrounding countryside. A leaflet of the Trail has been produced. For more information visit www.visitwiltshire.co.uk