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

Thamesdown 46, 46A, 48
(no service on Sundays and Bank Holidays)

Landranger 174
Grid Reference: SU 276715

Refreshments:
Ramsbury: pubs and shops

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

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

Ramsbury and Littlecote
(Circular)

5 miles/8 km
Suitable for most walkers
Some stiles
Hilly in parts
Walk directions

1. Alight from the bus at the Square in Ramsbury (close to the Bell Inn). Keeping the Bell Inn on your left, take Scholars Lane signed Hungerford.

2. After about 100 yards, at the Knap, turn right along the Foxfield road (which crosses the River Kennet).

3. About ¼ mile beyond this turn, at Ambrose Farm, turn left along the signposted track and, after 100 yards, immediately beyond a house, turn right along a fenced path up the hillside (this path can be muddy after rain). Take the obvious path through the trees and go straight ahead on joining a concrete road. Follow this road to the bottom of the hill, then take the left fork through a wooded valley.

4. Keep to the road, turning left with trees on the left and an open field on the right. Pass a fir plantation on the right and at the next junction, go ahead up the hill. Continue ahead until the track joins a narrow tarmac road and then turn left along it to Littlecote House, a Tudor mansion, now a hotel.

5. Turn left along the road in front of the ornamental gates. Ignore the turning on the right just beyond the garden wall and keep straight on to the next junction, adjacent to the remains of a pavement from a Roman villa.

6. Follow the sign for a bridleway and footpath along a grass path with a bank on the right and an open field on the left. This leads to a line of trees bordering on the River Kennet. Follow this path, which becomes gravelled at a cottage featuring a rounded end, and continue ahead to reach the Foxfield road. Turn right, then left to reach the Square in Ramsbury.

Points of interest

Ramsbury
The village is steeped in history. The bishopric of Ramsbury was established by 909 AD and there may have been a bishop’s palace in the village itself before one was built on the present site of Ramsbury Manor. The bishopric was ended in 1075 when it was included in the bishopric of Salisbury. The estate remained in possession of the bishops of Salisbury and it was one of their favourite places, often visited for rest and hunting. The village expanded throughout the Middle Ages. By the 17th century the village had many trades relating to agriculture. Principal among these was leather working with curriers, tanners, boot and shoemakers, and glovers. By the 1790s Ramsbury had a successful brewing industry and beer was exported to London. The 1840s saw the onset of rural depopulation locally with labourers moving to Swindon to seek employment in the Great Western Railway works.

Littlecote House and Estate
This is a Grade I listed Tudor mansion. It was here that Jane Seymour was wooed by Henry VIII in 1535, only months before the King beheaded Anne Boleyn. Jane Seymour’s predecessor, The estate grounds cover 100 acres, in which a mosaic pavement from a Roman Villa was found in 1976. The restored mosaic floor, featuring a depiction of Orpheus, the mythological priest of Apollo, surrounded by representations of the four seasons.