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

Stagecoach 49

Maps: Ordnance Survey Explorer 157
Start point grid reference: SU 038641

Refreshments:
Bishops Cannings: pub
Horton Bridge: pub
(½ mile south of start/finish)

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

BISHOPS CANNINGS, THE KENNET & AVON CANAL AND WANSDYKE (Circular)

5 miles/8 km
Suitable for most walkers
Several stiles
Some slight gradients
Walk directions

1. Travelling from Swindon, alight in Bishops Cannings at the stop by the church. Follow the footpath through the churchyard to emerge on a tarmac drive (Church Walk). Follow this to the end and turn right into The Street. At the end, go through the gate on the left signed 'Court Farm Caravan Site'. Follow a track down to a stile and a swing bridge over the Kennet & Avon Canal. Note World War II Pill Box on right.

2. Cross the bridge and turn left to follow the towpath to the next bridge. Go under and turn back up the slope to reach the road.

3. Turn right over the bridge to follow the road for about 200 yards. At Harepath House, turn left onto a Restricted Byway. Follow this right of way for just over a mile, ignoring paths to the left and right at farm buildings. Just past a water tank on the right, climb a stile and walk along the left side of the next field to reach Wansdyke.

4. Turn left through the gate and climb up onto the top of the bank. The view from here includes Lansdowne Column on Cherhill Down to the left. Follow the path on the bank for two fields.

5. Go through a gate and turn left onto a track. After a short distance pass some cowsheds on the right. Carry on downhill on the track to eventually emerge on to a lane by Easton Farm.

6. Turn right and walk along the lane for about half a mile, before bearing left where the road forks. In about 20 yards, turn left into a lane at the end of which bear right to reach a stile by a thatched cottage. Climb the stile and turn right to head towards the church spire. Cross a footbridge and follow the hedge on the right heading towards a row of cottages to a stile in the corner. Go over, turn left down the driveway and then straight ahead along Church Walk to the start of the walk.

Points of interest

Church of St Mary

The Church is often compared with Salisbury Cathedral, whose bishops founded and built it before they began work on their cathedral.

The Kennet and Avon Canal

The River Kennet was made navigable to Newbury in 1723, and the River Avon to Bath in 1727. The canal between Newbury and Bath opened in 1810 and is 57 miles long. The two river navigations and the canal total 87 miles in length. 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 work, much of it undertaken by volunteers, the canal was re-opened in 1990. Her Majesty The Queen performed the re-opening ceremony. It has since become one of the most popular waterways in Britain.

Wansdyke

Wansdyke stretches from Maes Knoll just south of Bristol to Savernake Forest. The dyke dates from the Dark Ages just after the Roman occupation, somewhere between 400 and 700 AD. Its purpose is a mystery; whilst it is commonly thought to be a defensive structure, built to keep invading Saxons away from the indigenous Romano-British, it would have required huge manpower to garrison. Another theory is that it was just intended to be a frontier boundary marker between separate minor kingdoms.

The Lansdowne Monument

The Lansdowne Monument, also known as the Cherhill Monument, is a 125 ft high stone obelisk built by the Third Marquis of Lansdowne to the designs of Sir Charles Barry to commemorate his ancestor, Sir William Petty, in 1845.