

6 WESSEX DOWNS 2-dayer 42km/26 miles



Lambourn Hills

It's the mane attraction! Looking across the Uffington White Horse.

White Horse race

Steven Davison leads you on a magical history tour along the Ridgeway and past the famous White Horse of Uffington.

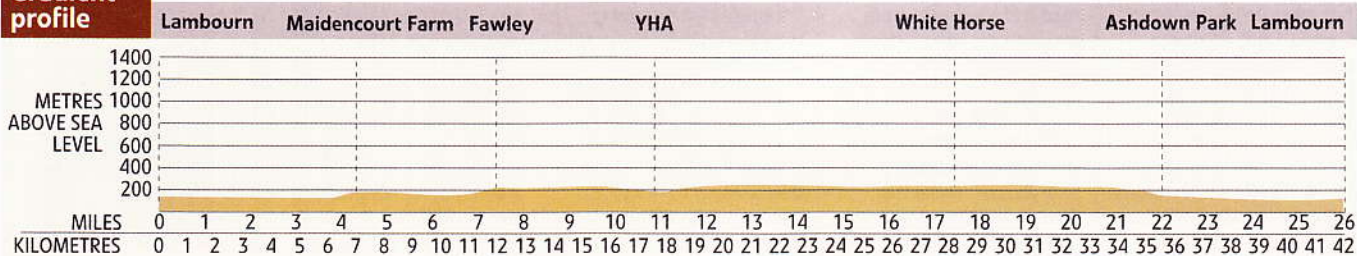


Enjoy a weekend wander over the gentle contours of the Lambourn Downs, south-west of Wantage. The downs, with their springy turf, also make for ideal horse riding, and Lambourn is surrounded by several racing stables.

The route starts in the village of Lambourn and follows the River Lambourn, which rises in the downs and flows to the River Kennet at Newbury. After passing the pretty village of East Garston, the route leaves the valley in favour of the downs.

Day two follows part of the Ridgeway, a long distance route which stretches for 85 miles from near Avebury in Wiltshire to Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire. It follows the line of ancient trackways across the country and many have been in use for more than 5,000 years, making them some of the oldest roads in Britain. After passing the famous Uffington White Horse, you descend back to Lambourn.

Gradient profile



ILLUSTRATIONS JEREMY ASHCROFT

DAY ONE

1 From the market place head down Newbury Street. After 400m follow the path on the right signposted as the Lambourn Valley Way (LVW) past the playing fields. The Lambourn Valley Way is a 22 mile walk which runs from the Uffington White Horse to Newbury.

Continue straight on along Bockhampton Road, then go left over the bridge and right along Newbury Road. At the junction with Long Hedge lane on the left, leave the road and follow the signposted path between the fences. Follow the path across the fields eventually to join the course of the disused Lambourn Valley railway line which closed in 1960.

Just before Eastbury

descend to the sunken lane, then climb back up onto the old railway line passing Eastbury en route for East Garston. Next to All Saints' Church, go through the gate and along the path between the fences. At the lane turn right down Station Road, then left through the picturesque village.

Continue along Front Street and shortly after the Queens Arms leave the road and go straight on along the farm track. At the left bend, leave the track and go across the field (LVW signs) following the River Lambourn to reach Maidencourt Farm.

2 Turn left up the track, continue past the trig point, drinking in the views over the Lambourn valley, and follow the track to the right of Furze Border. Continue straight on at the crossroads to reach a tarred

lane. Turn right and, at the crossroads at the corner of Oakhedge Copse, right again.

After 350m turn left over Kite Hill and follow the track past Well Copse towards South Fawley. Go left along Dogkennel Lane and cross over the T-junction. A short distance along the track, bear right on a footpath to Fawley.

3 Thomas Hardy's grandmother Mary was born in Fawley, and Thomas used it as a model for the village of 'Marygreen' in the novel *Jude the Obscure*. After crossing the open field, go through the gap in the trees, next to the footpath sign, and follow the fence on the left.

At the corner go

DAY TWO

4 Retrace the route back to the Ridgeway then head west. The route now passes some impressive sites with great views over the Vale of the White Horse. After about 10km, you reach the top of Whitehorse Hill; do make a short detour to visit the earth ramparts of Uffington Castle, an Iron Age hillfort.

A short distance below is the famous Uffington White Horse, the oldest such horse in the country, and probably dating back to the Iron Age. Further down is a small, flat-topped hill known as Dragon Hill where St George is reputed to have famously killed that creature.

Continue west on the Ridgeway and, shortly after crossing a tarred lane, make a short detour to Wayland's Smithy


right-hand edge of the field. At the corner of the fence, continue straight on to reach a stile. On the right are the remains of Alfred's Castle, an Iron Age hillfort or fortified farmstead.

Continue through the gate and follow the track along the edge of the field; to the left is Ashdown House. Built in 1660, it's been described as the 'perfect dollhouse' and the house and grounds are open to the public (for details - tel. (01494) 528051). Continue through the gate and turn left to pass Ashdown Farm.

When you reach the B4000, turn right. Shortly after the pumping station, turn left up a wide track, then right, and follow the bridgeway for 2km to join a tarred lane. Turn left through the village of Upper Lambourn,

following the High Street. At the T-junction go straight up the lane with the babbling brook on the left.

At the end of the road continue along the Fulke Walwyn Way - there's separate paths for horses and walkers. Take the lane to the junction by the Malt Shovel Inn and then follow the fenced path across a field to rejoin the B4000 leading to Lambourn and the market place.

For a well-deserved drink, try The George or Valentines Tavern, both a short distance along the High Street. 

Facts

Distance day one - 18km (11 miles); day two - 24km (15 miles)

Total ascent day one - 150m; day two - 260m

Time 2 days

Start/finish market place, Lambourn (**SU326790**)

Nearest town Wantage

Terrain paths, tracks and minor roads; can be muddy

Map OS Landranger (1:50,000) 174

Accommodation Youth Hostel at The Court Hill Ridgeway Centre (**SU394850**), also allows camping in the grounds - tel. 0870 770 6064

Public transport Wilts Busline - tel. 08457 090899

Tourist information Wantage - tel. (01235) 760176

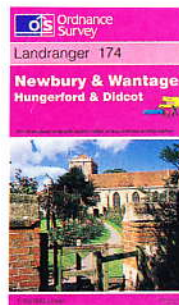
TRAIL recommends

Best pubs The George - tel. (01488) 71889; Valentines Tavern - tel. (01488) 72891



Almost as old as the hills - the Neolithic long barrow at Wayland's Smithy.

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straight on (the path is very indistinct here) to reach the end of a garden. Follow the signs and turn right along the gravel drive. At the road go left past St Mary's Church and, at the crossroads next to the trig point, go right along a tarred track past Pit Plantation. Take the track straight on for about 2km to reach the Ridgeway.

Turn right to the junction with the A338, passing the remains of the Iron Age hillfort of Segsbury Castle. Follow the road down the hill and turn left along the next lane. The Youth Hostel, which allows camping in the grounds, is on the left and offers a great view across the Vale of the White Horse.

- a Neolithic long barrow or burial mound from 3700BC. The site is named after the legendary Wayland the Smithy, who would shoe a horse if a coin was left with the horse next to the tomb.

5 After crossing the B4000, continue along the Ridgeway for 350m and turn left along a track over the field. Cross the stile and follow the path next to the