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| Aldermaston to Woolhampton (via Frilsham) | | | Aldermaston to Woolhampton (via Frilsham) [extended] | | |
| 1 st walk check | 2 nd walk check | 3 rd walk check | 1 st walk check | 2 nd walk check | 3 rd walk check |
| 02 nd April 2016 | 24 th July 2021 | | 02 nd April 2016 | 15 th Dec. 2021 | |
| Current status | Document last updated Friday, 17 th December 2021 | | | | |
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Aldermaston to Woolhampton [Midgham station] (via Frilsham)

Start: Aldermaston station

Finish: Midgham station

Aldermaston station, map reference SU 601 673, is 71 km west of Charing Cross, 13 km south west of Reading and 54m above sea level; Midgham station, map reference SU 572 666, is 3 km west of Aldermaston and 57m above sea level, both are in **West Berkshire**.

Length: 22.9 km (14.2 mi), of which 4.1 km (2.5 mi) on tarmac or concrete.

Cumulative ascent/descent: 407/404m. For a longer and a shorter walk, see *below* **Walk Options**.

Toughness: 6 out of 10

Time: 5 hours 15 minutes walking time.

For the whole outing, including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 8 ½ hours.

Transport: Both stations are on the Berkshire and Hampshire line from Reading to Newbury (and on to Bedwyn and Taunton). Journey times are from 47 minutes Mon-Fri (hourly), 51 mins Sat (hourly) and 53 minutes Sun (between hourly and two-hourly). Change at Reading.

Midgham station is one stop further from London with a journey time from 49 minutes.

Saturday Walkers' Club: Take the train closest to 9.30 hours.

OS Explorer Map: 159 (Reading, Wokingham & Pangbourne) & 158 (Newbury & Hungerford)

OS Landranger Map: 174 (Newbury & Wantage) & 175 (Reading & Windsor)

Walk Notes:

This walk explores a surprisingly quiet part of the commuter area that is West Berkshire, less than an hour from Central London. It is a mildly undulating landscape with some fine views over unspoilt countryside - the West Berkshire Downs, part of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and consisting of a mix of ancient woodlands, commons, fields and pretty villages with pleasant, historical pubs. The route passes through the chalk stream river valleys of the Kennet, the Bourne and the Pang, where you'll also find some evidence of traditional water meadows.

A long section of the walk leads through the elevated Bucklebury Common, one of the largest commons in Southern England. In the main this consists of a variety of woods, but you'll also walk through one of Berkshire's largest heathlands and see part of a famous Avenue of Oaks.

At the end there is a choice of finishes either through the landscaped Midgham Park or along the Kennet & Avon Canal. Carrying map and compass is recommended, as there are plenty of paths in the woods.

An optional westerly extension leads through more fascinating, undulating woods and the large and impressive Iron Age hillfort site of Grimsbury Castle.

Walk Options:

You can **lengthen the walk** by routing **along a more westerly route**. This adds 4.2 km (2.6 mi) and 68m ascent, and is **rated 7/10** (and a diversion to a late lunch stop in **Hermitage** adds another 2.3 km).

Bus Line 41 (Thatcham - Theale) stops in Upper Bucklebury and Chapel Row, Mon – Fri.

Bus Line 6 (West Ilsley - Newbury) stops in **Hermitage**, the late lunch stop on the extended walk, Mon-Sat only, with the last departure at 15.45 (as of 07/2021). Newbury is further down the line than Midgham.

For a shorter walk (which also has an option for an additional shortcut), with the same start and finish, but a completely different middle part, try SWC 117 Aldermaston to Woolhampton (via Stanford Dingley).

Lunch (details last updated 16/11/2021)

The Six Bells The Green, *Beenham, Reading, Berks, RG7 5NX* (01189 713 368, <http://www.thesixbells.co.uk/>). The Six Bells is located 150m off-route 2.8 km (1.7 mi) into the walk. Open all day Wed-Sat, 12.00-18.00 Sun. Food served 12.00-15.00 & 17.00-21.00 Wed-Sat, 12.00-16.00 Sun.

The Blackbird Café Chapel Row, *Bucklebury, Reading, Berks RG7 6PD* (01189 712 332, <http://www.theblackbirdcafe.co.uk/>). The Blackbird Cafe is located 5.1 km (3.2 mi) into the walk. Open to 15.00 Tue-Sat.

The Bladebone at Bucklebury Chapel Row, *Bucklebury, Reading, Berks RG7 6PD* (01189 714 000, <https://thebladebone.com/>). The Bladebone is a family-run, award-winning, 17th century country pub, located 5.1 km (3.2 mi) into the walk. Open all day Wed-Sun. Food served 12.00-15.00 and 17.30-21.30 Wed-Sat and 12.00-18.30 Sun.

The Pot Kiln Frilsham, *Yattendon, Berks RG18 0XX* (01635 201 366, <http://www.potkiln.org>). The Pot Kiln is located 9.7 km (6.0 mi) into the walk. It is a sister pub to The Harwood Arms in Fulham and regarded as one of Britain's best country pub restaurants (and also as one of the 10 best for game, which is usually self-stalked and -culled). The food's presentation can be elaborate, and may be viewed as pretentious by some. The pub is often fully booked weeks in advance. Open all day Mon-Sat and 12.00-18.00 Sun. Food served 12.00-14.30 and 18.00-21.00 Mon-Sat and 12.00-14.45 Sun. Groups of 6 or more require a deposit.

The Cottage Inn 26 Broad Lane, *Upper Bucklebury, Reading, Berks RG7 6QJ* (01635 864 544, <http://www.thecottageinnupperbucklebury.co.uk/>). The Cottage Inn is located 480m off-route, 17.2 km (10.7 mi) into the main walk. Open 12.00-15.00 and 17.00-23.00 Tue-Fri, 12.00-late Sat and 12.00-20.00 Sun. Food served 12.00-14.00 Tue-Fri, 12.00-14.30 Sat and 12.00-15.00 Sun and 18.00-20.30 Tue-Sat.

The Fox Inn High Street, *Hermitage, Thatcham, Berks RG18 9RB* (01635 200 772, <http://www.hermitage-fox.co.uk/>) The Fox is located – 1.2 km off-route – 15.4 km (9.6 mi) into the extended walk. Open all day every day. Food served 12.00-14.30 and 17.30-21.00 Mon-Sat & 12.00-16.00 Sun.

The White Horse of Hermitage Newbury Road, *Hermitage, Thatcham, Berks RG18 9TB* (01635 200 325, <https://thewhitehorse.co.uk/>) The White Horse is located 1.8 km off-route, 16.0 km (10.0 mi) into the extended walk. Open for lunch Fri-Sun.

Tea (details last updated 16/11/2021)

The Cottage Inn 26 Broad Lane, *Upper Bucklebury, Reading, Berks RG7 6QJ* (01635 864 544, <http://www.thecottageinnupperbucklebury.co.uk/>). The Cottage Inn is located 480m off-route, 5.9 km (3.7 mi) from the end of the walk. For other details see above.

The Coach & Horses Bath Road, *Midgham, Reading, Berks RG7 5UX* (01189 713 384, <https://www.thecoachandhorsesmidgham.co.uk/>). The Coach & Horses is located 3.3 km (2.0 mi) from the end of the walk's canal ending option. Open all day Tue-Sat and 12.00-16.00 Sun. Dinner served 18.00-21.00 Tue-Sat.

Village Shop Woolhampton Bath Road, *Woolhampton, Reading, Berks RG7 5RT* (01189 712 205, <http://www.thevillageshopwoolhampton.co.uk/>). Open to 17.00 Mon-Fri and weekend mornings.

The Angel Inn Bath Road, *Woolhampton, Reading, Berks RG7 5RT* (01189 713 307, <https://www.angelwoolhampton.co.uk/index>). Open all day every day. Food served all day.

The Rowbarge Inn Station Road, *Woolhampton, Reading, Berks RG7 5SH* (01189 712 213, <http://www.brunningandprice.co.uk/rowbarge/>). Open all day every day. Food served all day (-18.00 Sun).

Notes:

Aldermaston Station

Aldermaston station is located between the A4 road and the settlement of Aldermaston Wharf on the River Kennet, which itself is about 3 km north east of Aldermaston village.

St. Mary's, Beenham Valence/Beenham

Valence has never been part of the village name, but – reputedly meaning 'on the spur of a hill' – clearly refers to the position of the church itself. Beenham derives from Saxon 'Beena's Hamme', i.e.: 'Benna's Meadow'. The current church building is from 1859, after several earlier buildings burnt down (the original 12th century one did so in 1794 after lightning struck). Its peal of six bells gave name to the local pub.

River Bourne/River Pang

The River Pang is a small chalk stream river, and a tributary of the River Thames. It runs for approximately 23 km (14 mi) from its source near the village of Compton. To the east of Bradfield the Pang is joined by the River Bourne, which has its source near the village of Chapel Row, eventually entering the Thames in Pangbourne. Rivalling theories contend that – either – the river's name is a backformation from the villages' name, or that – in contrast – the village is named after the river.

The river and its water voles are thought to have inspired Kenneth Grahame's character Ratty and his book *The Wind in the Willows*.

Bucklebury Common/Estate

Bucklebury Common is an elevated common consisting of woodland with a few relatively small clearings, it encircles the settled localities of Upper Bucklebury and Chapel Row and is one of the largest commons in Southern England covering 350 hectares (860 acres). It includes the famous mile-long Avenue of Oaks at Chapel Row, ancient woodland at Holly Wood and one of the largest areas of heathland in Berkshire. The Avenue of Oaks is perhaps the most celebrated area of Bucklebury Common. The inner row of Oaks was planted to celebrate Queen Elizabeth I's visit to Bucklebury and the outer row was planted to commemorate Wellington's victory at Waterloo in 1815. New trees have been planted over the years. Since the Enclosure Act the area is privately owned by the Bucklebury Manor estate, the oldest landed Estate in Berkshire and one of the oldest Estates in the country, but has public access on a network of public rights. http://buckleburyestate.com/bucklebury_common.htm

Water Meadows along Chalk Rivers

Strictly speaking, not every level grassland beside a river is a 'water meadow'. Water meadows were the high point of late medieval agricultural engineering. The idea was imported from Holland in the 16th Century as so many agricultural advances have been. It consisted of an interlocking system of small channels. One series was linked to a head leat which carried water from a point higher up the river. Water in these channels flowed along the crests of low ridges built across the field. From them the water overflowed down the sides of the ridges into the second series of ditches that took it back to a lower level channel where it continued down the valley. This irrigation did not aim to flood the ground, but to keep it continuously damp. Chalk water contains calcium and other nutrients. It slowed as it passed through the stems of the grass and deposited some of its load thus fertilising the field. Because the spring water in the river was likely to be warmer than late winter air it also warmed the grass, causing an early growth of grass. In-lamb ewes were fed on the grass to give them a boost before lambing. They dunged the grass which then produced a heavy crop of hay. Working water meadows have now largely disappeared.

Brockhurst & Marlston House Schools

Marlston House is a listed country house prep school set in 24 hectares of beautiful undulating gardens and parkland and available as a unique wedding venue during the school half terms and holidays. Brockhurst (boys) and Marlston House (girls) are independent and boarding twin schools, sharing the same estate.

River Kennet

The Kennet is 72 km (45 mi) long, the largest Thames tributary and one of England's most important chalk streams. It has an extensive range of rare plants and animals that are unique to chalk watercourses. One of the sources is Swallowhead Spring near Silbury Hill in Wiltshire, the other being a collection of tributaries north of Avebury near the rural settlements of Uffcott and Broad Hinton which join up with the waters from Swallowhead Springs near West Kennett Long Barrow. It flows into the Thames at Reading.

North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is located in the counties of West Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire. The name North Wessex Downs is not a traditional one, the area covered being better known by various overlapping local names, including the Berkshire Downs, the North Hampshire Downs, the White Horse Hills, the Lambourn Downs, the Marlborough Downs, the Vale of Pewsey and Savernake Forest.

The AONB covers an area of some 1,730 km² (670 sq mi). It takes the form of a horse shoe on its side, with the open end facing east, surrounding the town of Newbury and the River Kennet watershed. The northern

arm reaches as far east as the suburbs of Reading in mid-Berkshire, whilst the southern arm similarly reaches Basingstoke in northern Hampshire. The western extreme of the AONB reaches as far as Devizes. The highest points are the 297m summit of Walbury Hill, situated southwest of Hungerford in West Berkshire (and the highest point in southern England east of the Mendip Hills), and the Milk Hill – Tan Hill plateau northeast of Devizes in central Wiltshire, at 295m above sea level.

At its northeast extreme, the North Wessex Downs AONB faces across the Goring Gap to the Chilterns AONB on the other side of the River Thames.

Beyond the town of Marlborough the downs (now called the Marlborough Downs) sweep in a semicircle to the south around the headwaters of the River Kennet, with the Vale of Pewsey cutting through these downs carrying the headwaters of the Hampshire River Avon.

The downland is part of the Southern England Chalk Formation which runs from Dorset in the west to Kent in the east and also includes the Dorset Downs, Purbeck Hills, Cranborne Chase, Wiltshire Downs, Salisbury Plain, the Isle of Wight, Chiltern Hills and the North and South Downs.

Geologically, its chalk downs, dry valleys and sarsen outcrops are of note, the last in the area around Marlborough providing material for many of the Neolithic and Bronze Age sites in the area such as Avebury Henge.

Horse racing forms a major industry in the area, largely because of the good quality turf that comes with the chalk underlay, and much of the upland area is made over to gallops and other training areas.

St. Matthew's, Midgham

St Matthew's church was erected in 1869 in a tall 13th century style, on a new site. The old church was in the grounds of the former Midgham House, and was pulled down when the present church was built. The site of the old chapel is now marked by an overgrown walled graveyard. From the Bath Road (A4) in the valley St. Matthew's appears to lie on the hill on its own. It is made of flint with spires.

The Kennet and Avon Canal

The Kennet and Avon Canal is 140 km (87 mi) long and is made of two lengths of navigable river (Avon and Kennet) linked by a canal (between Bath and Newbury). It links the Bristol Channel to the Thames.

In the area covered by this walk therefore, the canal itself is not technically a canal, but an improved river navigation of the Kennet River. There are many sections that are in fact the natural River Kennet, which are interspersed with man-made locks and canal sections to make the river more navigable.

Midgham Park/House

Midgham House is a building which is not listed but which has a double 15th century red-brick former stable block with later additions and is at the top of a landscaped private park.

Woolhampton

To the Saxons it was 'Wulflafingatun', and while the ending is the common Saxon suffix '-ton', meaning simply 'settlement', from which the modern word 'town' derives, the rest of the name appears to be its proper Celtic title. It was possibly something like 'Alebhion' meaning 'Ridge Place', referring to the high ground in the parish which stretches alongside the Kennet Valley. The Roman road running from Calleva (Silchester), a major provincial capital, to Corinium (Cirencester), which crossed the Kennet at Thatcham, lies half a mile to the south. Later, that same corridor was to be used for the routes of the Great Bath Road, the Kennet & Avon Canal and the Great Western Railway.

The village is served by Midgham railway station. The railway station was originally known as Woolhampton railway station but, according to local legend, was renamed (after the village of Midgham, a couple of kilometres west-northwest) in order to avoid possible confusion with the similarly named Wolverhampton railway station.

Because of its location on the Bath road, Woolhampton was well known for its coaching inns. Only one of these survives on the main road, The Angel.

Within the civil parish is the Benedictine Douai Abbey.

Grimsbury Castle

Grimsbury Castle is a "multiple enclosure" Iron Age contour hillfort, roughly triangular in shape and with a size of 3.2 hectares (8 acres). It is built to overlook the Kennet and Pang valleys, although now it is almost entirely covered with trees and its strategic position is difficult to appreciate. The site benefits from a natural spring which reportedly has never been known to run dry. The entrenchment would appear to have been extended on the South side of the hill for the purpose of enclosing this spring. The Romans used it as part of the outer defences of Calleva (Silchester).

The name shows that the later Saxon settlers in the region found the earthworks so impressive that they thought they must have been built by the chief of their gods, Woden alias Grim.

Grimsbury is a Scheduled Monument in recognition of its national importance.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Alight from the train at **Aldermaston Station** on platform 2, cross a footbridge over to the other platform and *turn left* to walk out of the station car park, to continue along the tarmac driveway. In 150m *turn right* at a T-junction with **Station Road** and in 40m cross the busy **A4** and continue in the same direction along **Grange Lane** (with a bridleway signpost in 15m on the left). Ignore ways off and in 540m *fork right* with the lane at the entrance to **Copas Farms/Beenham Grange Business Park**. In 100m you continue in the same direction along a gravel car wide lane at a staggered four-way junction by **Yarnfield** (a house) on the left. You pass **Wayside Cottage** and ascend with the lane, soon turning right, then left and in 200m you walk through an often-open metal field gate. In another 40m you ignore a right turning track near the brow of this rise and in 165m emerge from the trees by a farm in a pretty valley on your right. In 160m **[!]** you *turn left* through the lychgate of **St. Mary's, Beenham Valence**.

You reach the church entrance in 40m on its left-hand side and *turn left* to leave the church yard by turning right in 40m through a wooden gate. Continue towards **Old Copse** (with a large mansion up on the right), which you enter in 60m through a wooden gate. The path *veers down right* to cross a brook in 165m on an earth bridge. In 50m you leave the wood through a metal kissing gate to the left of a wooden field gate and *turn up right* along a car wide gravel byway (**Clay Lane**). In 250m you reach the top of this rise (**Clay Hill**) by the entrance to **Oakwood Farm** on the left and continue on tarmac. In 250m ignore a signposted tarmac footpath turning right but in 50m *turn left* along a narrow gravel path with another footpath signpost. **[Unless** you want to visit **the first pub on this walk**: continue in the same direction along **Clay Lane** into **Beenham** village and in 150m reach **The Six Bells**.] In 30m walk through a metal kissing gate and in 230m enter **High Wood** and continue in the same direction along the right-hand fringe of it, in 20m *forking right* with a marker post.

In 210m a footpath joins from the left by a marker post and in 30m you *turn right* at a signposted five-way footpath/bridleway junction along a right-hand field boundary (which is often very muddy). In 160m *turn right* again with a bridleway marker post to walk along the fringe of **Greyfield Wood**, ignoring permissive paths into the wood. In 340m, after following the path left and right, you *turn left* with a footpath marker on a medium high post along a narrow forest path at a three-way junction, with an electricity substation now on the right. In 70m ignore a faint path forking right – at the corner of a fence on the right – and in 100m *turn left* at a three-way junction of footpaths (260°), now with **Withy Copse** on your right. In 120m and in another 30m you cross brooks on two-railed plank bridges. They are some of the furthest tributaries of the **River Bourne**. You continue in the same direction through **Ironmongers Copse** and in 230m go along a two-railed boardwalk over a boggy stretch and a stream and in 50m leave the copse through a metal gate into a field.

Turn left along the field boundary and in 80m – in the field corner – *turn right before* a metal field gate to continue with the boundary hedge on your left. In 100m you get splendid views in every direction from the brow of this field over the mildly undulating landscape and in 80m *turn left* through a metal gate into the neighbouring field and *turn right* along the boundary hedge, down towards the bottom of this field. In 50m walk through a metal gate to the left of a metal field gate and cross another tributary of the **Bourne** on a concrete bridge. In 25m *turn right* along a concrete lane (with a sewage works on the right). The lane continues as a gravel drive in 35m and in 235m you **[!]** *fork left* at a three-way gravel track junction by an electricity pole and a three-way footpath signpost. In 25m the now narrow path leads through trees and in 20m you continue in the same direction diagonally across the village green in **Chapel Row**.

In 200m reach the main road through the village (**The Avenue**) at a three-way junction, opposite a **bus stop for services to Theale** and in the middle of a small section of a famous mile-long **Avenue of Oaks** (see the 'Notes' on **Bucklebury Common**). The early lunch stop **The Bladebone at Bucklebury** is on your left across a road, with **The Blackbird Café** just to the left of it. Continue past café and pub along the pavement and in 35m *turn right* across The Avenue at a triangular junction by **Chapelrow Common** and continue along grass to the left of the right-hand road. In 90m pass an octagonal bench around a tree away on your left and in 70m *turn left* at the end of the grassy area along a car wide gravel track into trees with a byway sign. In 300m this turns briefly left by some farm buildings before in 20m you *turn right* at a T-junction of tracks. In 40m *turn left* at a three-way byway junction by a signpost on the left and continue to the left of the red brick **Brittons Cottage**. In 60m – at a signposted five-way junction of three byways, a bridleway to the right and a footpath from the left – **[!]** *turn hard right* down the narrow bridleway into trees (335°) [i.e.: along the edge of the wood, **[!]** **NOT** along the car wide track turning half right.]

In 150m some houses can be spotted through the trees on the left, in 80m you walk through a mud-prone area at the bottom of a dip and in 50m *turn right* where a bridleway joins from the left. In 65m you pass some cowsheds on your right and continue with a brook on the right. In 180m you cross that brook where another bridleway joins from the left and *veer right* with a barbed wire fence and some trees on your right. In 120m emerge from the wood and *turn right* along a driveway. In 20m *turn up left* along a tarmac lane. In 90m ignore a footpath turning left over a stile to the right of a double wooden field gate, opposite **Browns gate** house on your right, but in 15m **[!]** *turn right* over an easy-to-miss stile by a footpath signpost into a large field's corner. Continue close to the right-hand curving fence towards the bottom right-hand field corner with splendid views over the **Pang Valley** and in 200m follow the obvious path wiggling right then left and across a stile into the next field, where you continue along the left-hand grassy margin.

In 250m go over a two-railed plank bridge at a signposted four-way footpath junction into the next field and cross it along a usually clear path in the same direction. In 180m you cross another two-railed plank bridge and then go over a stile to continue in the same direction through the next field. In 175m – at the opposite side of the field by a ford through the **River Pang** – walk over a two-railed bridge a little to the right and *turn left* on the other side. In 15m the path *turns right* where the fording byway joins, to continue between trees. In 250m you cross a tarmac lane and continue in the same direction along a gravel driveway to **Rushdens Farm**. In 165m, at the far end of a barn on the right and by a 'Private'-sign, you *turn right* with a low marker to continue through a wooden kissing gate by a metal signpost into a meadow and follow a fenced path left past another barn. In 100m go through a wooden kissing gate and continue in the same direction uphill, with a hedge on the left and a wood on your right, in 110m walking through another wooden kissing gate (the soil here is London Clay, it will be muddy and sticky after rain).

In 200m *turn down to the left* at the top of this rise (280°) [the ditch next to an earth bank passed in 10m is an ancient parish boundary, possibly pre-Roman] and in 35m:

- **Either** *turn right* uphill at a T-junction with a **Road Used As Public Path** (i.e.: an often well-churned forest track) into **Burgess' Copse**. In 300m another track joins from the left out of trees;
- **or**, as a **slightly longer alternative**, only partly along rights-of-ways, follow this route **along the bottom of the wood** with **views into the Pang Valley**: *turn left* down the slope, in 90m *turn right* along a footpath at the bottom of the steep wood, ignore one footpath from the right in 65m and one turning left in 165m and in 350m *turn left* at the top of the wood at a T-junction.

For a while you walk along a wide gravel track on a narrow ridge, and in 90m you may get views through the trees on the left into a narrow valley and the **Pang Valley** beyond it, and in 260m you continue across a restricted byway forest track and a little to the left along a narrow footpath into trees, left of a four-way signpost. In 165m cross a streamlet and in 130m cross the driveway to **Thorncuts Cottage** (on the OS map) by a two-way signpost to continue through **High Copse**. In 110m emerge from the wood through a metal gate into a pasture, with a prominent, lonely red brick building on the far side across a dip. Continue in the same direction down the right-hand side of the pasture (the road noise you are likely to hear by now is from **the M4**, which is barely 600m away, but runs largely in a cutting here) and in 120m go over a two-railed plank bridge over a stream and continue in the same direction along a fenced path. In 90m walk through a metal gate and *turn left* along a tarmac lane to **The Pot Kiln** in 60m.

After lunch *turn right* out of the pub (i.e.: continue in the pre-lunch direction) through a wooden gate into a pasture and follow its right-hand boundary fence, initially past the pub garden. In 150m stay to the left of a row of mature trees and in another 150m pass a footpath marker on a pole on the right. You then continue in the same direction through a narrowing part of the pasture between two woods and afterwards continue along the left-hand wood's boundary (**Whitmoor Copse**). In 220m go into the next field and in 180m leave it through a wooden gate and continue along a fenced path. In 80m you walk through a wooden kissing gate at a bend of a tarmac lane on the right. You **[!]** *turn left* through a gap to the left of a metal field gate, but *turn right* along the fringe of **Hawkridge Wood**, parallel to the tarmac lane, ignoring a bridleway joining from the left. Foliage permitting, on this stretch you can get some views on the right along the **Upper Pang Valley**, with **the distant M4** traffic visible in places.

In 60m continue in the same direction where a footpath joins from the left and in 300m (having gone through a wooden gate en route) you go through a fence gap by a footpath signpost by **Homerstead House** and *veer right* across its driveway, then downhill along a car wide gravel track. In 170m walk through a usually open wooden field gate and **[!]** in 10m *turn right* at a fence corner along the right-hand side of a grassy area – and with **Blackwell Copse** on the right – just before the gravel track curves left to a house. In 40m you go over a stile and in 100m walk through a wooden kissing gate into **Cray's Copse** and follow a descending path through it. In 25m you cross a ditch on a two-railed wooden plank bridge. Leave the wood in 190m to continue downhill between trees, soon passing a disused pit on your right.

Turn left along a road (**Brocks Lane**) – with an arm of the **River Pang** on your right – and in 50m *turn right* across the river over an earth bridge, in 20m cross another stream and walk through a wooden gate to the left of a metal field gate, and continue through a meadow to in 30m pass a redundant metal kissing gate and cross some more arms of the river, here dammed up to create some fishing ponds, over a couple of two-railed plank bridges. This set up of river channels at different height levels on either side of grassy fields is an example of a traditional **water meadow along a chalk river**. You walk through a metal kissing gate into a large pasture and continue in the same direction, in 100m go through a squeeze stile in an electric fence and in 10m enter an arable field by a redundant squeeze stile. Cross the field along a usually clear path in the same direction and in 130m leave it through another squeeze stile in a hedge onto a T-junction with **Burntbush Lane (Track)**, a byway.

Here you have a choice:

For the extended walk, you *turn right* along the car wide track and pick up the directions at the end of the main walk directions under **Extension**.

For the main walk, you *turn left* and in 40m ignore a farm track turning right but instead **[!]** *turn half right* through a gap to the right of a metal field gate and then diagonally cross an arable field towards a hedge corner on the left boundary (220°). In 230m at the hedge corner *veer left* to continue along the grassy field boundary, gently uphill. In another 230m *veer left* along a car wide track to leave the field and in 35m cross a road and continue in the same direction along a tarmac lane to the right of the entrance of **Brockhurst & Marlston House Schools**, with a bridleway signpost a little further along on the right. In 20m pass a wooden gate on your left leading into the churchyard of **St. Mary Magdelene Church, Marlston** (usually locked). Ignore a few left turns to parts of the school and some car parks and in 150m continue in the same direction down a gravel lane. In 20m ignore a left fork to a house lower down in a wood by a bridleway marker post and in 60m a footpath joins over a stile on the right. In 110m *turn left* with a public footpath at the corner of the garden fence on your left at a signposted three-way junction and in 30m walk through an often-open metal field gate and continue in the same direction along the left-hand arable field boundary.

In 190m *turn right* diagonally across the field with a marker post (130°) and in 100m continue in the same direction uphill at a wooded corner of the field with a marker post. In 70m *fork left* (135°) across the field corner along a usually well-cleared path and in 60m at the opposite field boundary continue in the same direction through a neighbouring field, still uphill (good views back here, over your shoulder, of **Marlston House**). In 150m you go over a stile in a fence and then cross a plank bridge over a streamlet into **Marlston Pightle** (on the OS map), a small, newly reforested enclosure. Follow an obvious path towards some wooden barns at the top of the rise by **Wither's Farm** (150°). In 120m *turn right* at a three-way signposted junction to pass the farm buildings on their right in 80m and in 60m continue in the same direction at a four-way byway/footpath-junction, where the farm's driveway turns right. Continue with a wood on your left and in 125m walk along a car wide track through a wooded strip into a neighbouring field to continue in the same direction downhill towards the bottom of the valley and a – not initially visible – gap in the boundary growth (190°).

Cross **Holly Lane** (an ancient track, on the OS map, and a byway) and descend further through trees with a marker post. In 30m cross a stream on a railed wooden bridge and continue in the same direction in a large field, initially to the left of a lower tree, then in 60m at that tree *veering right* to the right of some taller trees. Continue uphill for 150m and leave the field with a marker post into a wood through a gap 10m to the right of the corner of the wood. Follow a wiggly path through a mud-prone new plantation with occasional marker posts. In 250m emerge into a pasture and follow its left-hand boundary. In 110m pass a redundant stile to the left of a metal field gate and enter a wood and in 50m **[!]** *turn left* at a T-junction with a tarmac lane, ignoring a bridleway ahead, while the Extension joins from the right along the lane.

***)** Ignore all ways off until in 300m – by a large green on the right – you *veer right* across the green. Do not follow the obvious path, but aim just to the right of a solitary multi-stemmed birch tree at the bottom of the green, about 50m to the left of a metal railed bridge over a stream (110°) and there cross a tarmac lane and *turn right* along an initially hidden path just before a garden fence. In 20m cross a stream over a two-railed wooden plank bridge and in 80m cross the driveway of **Slade Farm**. The next stretch leads through the woods of the westerly part of **Bucklebury Common**, which has plenty of tracks, lanes and paths, generally (but not always) well signed and marked, but it is nevertheless easy to take a wrong turn. For the next stretch therefore, please pay utmost attention to the write-up! In 20m enter a wood by a two-way bridleway signpost and continue in the same direction uphill (150° initially), ignoring a left fork. In 110m **[!]** *fork left* with a footpath marker post along a narrower path, just after passing a holly bush, still uphill (ignore the sharp left turning path), again on 150°.

In 55m continue in the same direction at a four-way junction of paths, soon levelling out, then ignore a few more paths forking off and in 65m reach a tarmac lane (marked a '**Bucklebury Quiet Lane**' on a wide wooden post). Continue in the same direction along a signposted bridleway into trees opposite. In 20m you cross a byway, in 25m ignore a right turning path while descending, in 80m *turn right* at a T-junction with a wider track (a byway) by a wooden shack, in 40m walk under an electricity line and in 30m cross a streamlet and start to ascend again. In 130m ignore a byway turning right at a four-way track junction to continue in the same direction and in 100m start descending. In 35m ignore a footpath turning right across a plank before passing a pond on your left. In 30m ignore a right turning footpath to continue uphill and in 130m – where the path has levelled out – **[!]** *fork left* and go under an electricity line in a clearing. In 40m *turn left* along a tarmac lane. In 10m *turn right* along a gravel driveway with a byway signpost to the right of a house. In 90m, where the driveway turns right, you *veer slightly left* across a grassy strip next to a wooden fence (initially).

You pass a three-way signpost and cross a streamlet in 90m, start to ascend again and in 80m *turn right* along an unmarked footpath (185° initially), ignoring the continuation uphill along the fringe of the wood. In 90m you emerge **on a tarmac lane at a bend, by a metal signpost, where a gravel byway joins from the left.** [If you emerge from the wood somewhere else along a gravel driveway or a tarmac lane, look for the junction of these two that matches the description given.] You *turn left* along the **tarmac** lane (i.e.: continue broadly in the same direction) and in 60m ignore a right turning footpath along a car wide gravel track, **unless you want to walk past The Cottage Inn, Upper Bucklebury,** or to a **bus stop for services to Theale,** in which case revert to the end of the walk directions under **Diversion to Pub in Upper Bucklebury.** In 20m ignore a signposted byway joining from the left out of trees and in 30m a byway turning right. In 30m *turn left* along a signposted bridleway into trees, in 75m *fork right* and in 120m *fork left*. In 30m *turn right* along a byway at a four-way junction. In 30m you emerge from the trees and continue in the same direction along a driveway with red brick timber-framed houses on the left.

In 140m cross a narrow tarmac lane and continue in the same direction along a byway through trees. In 150m you cross a road by a **bus stop for services to Theale** and walk into a small car park area. **During Ground Nesting Season** (01 March – 31 July), to protect the birds, walk as follows: continue along the car wide track (tarmac initially, then gravel), curving left with it. In 350m ignore a right turn, in 170m continue in the same direction at a five-way track and path-junction, in 320m cross another track and continue along a row of cottages on the right. In 130m, where the track meets a road at a bend, *turn right* with a footpath signpost along a tarmac driveway to the right of **Fireside Cottage** (signed Wootten's, Park House, Hideaway...), and pick up the directions below at the triple asterisk ***). **At all other times,** in 15m **[!]** *turn left* along an unmarked and indistinct path into trees. In 40m ignore a right fork and 110m emerge in the open heath and *continue in the same direction* – on a clear path – towards a plantation (105°). In 50m *bear left* where another path joins from the right.

****)** You are on **Bucklebury Common (Nature Reserve)**, it is **Access Land**. You can choose any route through it to its far-right corner, but here is the recommended one: You head towards a prominent wooded hillock – which looks like a Neolithic burial mound, but isn't one – 150m away. At the hillock's base, *turn right* at a T-junction (145°) along a gravel path. In 60m, at the far end of the hillock, an indistinct path joins from the left and in 30m you *bear left* at a T-junction (earthen path, 80°). In 15m cross a path and in 110m ignore a right fork and in 30m *turn left* at a T-junction. You pass to the left of a hillock and in 120m (by a lone oak tree), *turn right* at a four-way junction (150°) to pass the wooded hillock on its far side. In 140m enter some trees and *veer left* with the path. Ignore all ways off and in 240m emerge on a road at a crossroads with a gravel track from the right. You *turn right* along the road and *veer right* in 40m

where the road turns left (and where another gravel track joins from the right along a row of white cottages) to continue with a footpath signpost along a tarmac driveway to the right of **Fireside Cottage** (signed **Wootten's, Park House, Hideaway...**).

***) In 400m pass the entrance to **Hideaway** on the left and in 30m [!] *veer right* through a wooden gate to the right of the car wide gate leading to **Wootten's**. You follow a fenced path, which in 40m widens out, revealing splendid panoramic views out over the **River Kennet Valley** to the Hampshire part of the **North Wessex Downs**. In 100m you go over a stile in a fence into a dropping pasture and follow its left-hand field boundary. Half-way down you can spot the church tower in **Midgham** on the right, where you are heading next. In 200m, by a marker post on the left and a redundant stile, you can either continue along the boundary or *bear right* to cut the field corner. In both cases, in 80m you leave the field through a kissing gate and *turn right* along a road. In 400m or in 350m you reach the bottom of this drop and re-ascend along the road, which in 200m levels out at the three-way junction of **School Hill** and **Birds Lane**. You continue in the same direction and in 60m a footpath joins from the left through a car wide gate by **West Lodge**, with the entrance to the church yard of **St. Matthew's, Midgham** right next to it. Walk to the church and enjoy the views across the plain and return to this point.

Here you have a choice:

For a finish along the Kennet and Avon Canal, pick up the directions at the end of this text under **Canal Ending**.

For the recommended route *turn sharp left* along the gravel footpath past **West Lodge** into **Midgham Park**. In 35m walk through a (missing) metal gate to the right of a metal field gate along a car wide track, which veers left then right and in 280m through a hedge gap (a missing field gate) to continue with a fence and a hedge on your left and with **Midgham Park Farm** on a hill on the left. In 300m you cross the driveway to **Midgham House**, via gates on either side of it. Continue along a clear path through a meadow on a bearing of 95°, i.e.: slightly further left than the signpost indicates. In 100m pass a walled graveyard on the left, the site of the original church before St. Matthew's was built in the 1860s and in 100m – by a summer house by a pond on your left – you walk through a gap to the left of a metal gate and *bear left* uphill through a grassy slope along a clear path, passing either side of a small clump of trees (i.e.: way to the left of the larger clump of trees in front of a wood).

In 180m you walk through a metal gate to the left of a metal field gate and continue with a fence on the left. In 130m go through a horse-blocking barrier, then a metal gate to the right of a metal field gate, and continue in the same direction. In 65m pass the ha-ha of a white house on your left (**East Lodge**) and in 50m go through a wooden gate to the left of a metal field gate to *turn right* along a road. In 800m *turn left* in the village of **Woolhampton** at a T-junction with the **A4**, in 75m *turn right* by a road coming down from the left to cross the road and continue along a narrow gravel track between houses with a footpath signpost on an electricity pole (**unless** you want to go to the **Village Shop Woolhampton** 50m further along on your left or **The Angel Inn** just beyond). Follow this path over a railed concrete bridge and around to the left and in 190m *turn right* along **Station Road** to **Midgham station**. London bound trains depart from the near platform 2, the entrance to which is to the right through the car park.

The Rowbarge Inn is on the other side of the tracks through the level crossing, 140m along the road and then across a swing-bridge over the **River Kennet Navigation**. If you go there, be aware that **there is no footbridge across the tracks and that the barrier can shut very early**, often close to [!] **10 minutes before departure**, as plenty of non-stopping trains run along this line.

**Extension (add 4.2 km (2.6 mi), 68m ascent/descent and 740m tarmac)
Lunch is in Frilsham or Hermitage [the latter adds 2.3 km]**

In 560m cross a road and continue in the same direction with a footpath signpost along a narrow path through trees. In 40m cross a ditch on a two-railed plank bridge and in 20m go over a stile into a large field to follow its right-hand boundary. In 30m ignore a metal field gate on the right and in 150m *turn right* over a decrepit stile into a wooded strip (part of **Box Wood**) on your right and follow a clear path in the previous direction along its fringe. In 600m leave the wood over a stile, cross a track between pastures either side, and go over another stile opposite to continue in the same direction between trees. In 30m *turn left* inside the wooded area at a four-way footpath signpost.

In 220m you pass **Box Cottage** on your left (on the OS map), in 35m *turn right* along its driveway and then continue in the same direction where the driveway turns left and a restricted byway forest track turns right. You pass a 'Welcome to our Woodland' sign by the **Eling Estate**, which the route passes through for a while now. ["Open access is permitted on foot. (...) Keep dogs under effective control or on a lead."] Go through a dip and then uphill (295°) through **Parsons Piece** wood. In 200m the path levels out for a short period and follows a narrow spur, now through **States Hill Wood**, soon ascending further. In 230m, after reaching the top of the rise of the spur, a narrow path joins from the right. In 40m the track bends to the left and in 110m a clear path turns down right, where there is the first of many 'Walkers Welcome' (WW)-marker posts on the left (this is 10m before the path forks).

Here you have a choice:

For a diversion to the pubs in Hermitage (adds 2.3 km out-and-back to the first pub) you *turn down right* along this path (due W), in 110m cross a faint forest path and in 50m *turn right* at a T-junction with a broad forest track with a WW marker post. In 45m *turn left* on a dog-leg along another, even broader forest track (220°), and in 180m *turn right* along a path (310°) with a WW marker post, gently downhill. In 75m cross a ditch to enter **New Plantation**, in 110m you have a paddock about 50m away on the right, in 30m the path veers left and in 80m another path joins from the left. In 200m you *fork right* at the fringe of the wood and in 30m *turn right* along a footpath at a T-junction, with an earth bank on your left towards some houses. In 120m you walk through a bike barrier and *turn left* along **Yattendon Road** and in 120m reach the main road through **Hermitage** at a T-junction, with **The Fox Inn** on your right-hand side and a **bus stop** (for services to Newbury) and a store/post office a little to the left. You'll find **The White Horse at Hermitage** 600m further on the left.

After lunch you re-trace your steps, i.e.: *turn left* out of the pub down **Yattendon Road**, in 120m *turn right* through horse barriers along a footpath, in 120m *turn left* into **New Plantation** and in 30m *turn left* at a four-way junction of paths (120°). In 200m you ignore a right fork and in 220m leave the plantation over a ditch into **Pheasant Hill Wood**. In 75m *turn left* at a T-junction with a broad forest track with a WW marker post on the other side of the track (40°), and in 180m *turn right* at a three-way junction on a dog-leg with another WW marker post. Follow this track for 550m past a small car park area to a three-way road junction with a triangular green in the middle of it. Pick up the directions one paragraph down.

For the main walk, in 10m *fork down right* with the car wide track (220°), ignoring a fainter left fork up the spur. In 115m *curve to the right* with the main track (260°), ignoring a couple of minor paths either side initially, then a left fork. In 100m *turn left* at a T-junction of tracks for 400m through **Pheasant Hill Wood**, past a small car park area to a three-way road junction with a triangular green in the middle of it.

Continue in the same direction up the road through **Grimsbury Wood** (still **Eling Estate**) and in 150m walk (still on the road) through the impressive outer ditch-and-bank ramparts of the now wooded **Grimsbury Castle** Iron Age hillfort site. In 75m pass an 18th century brick folly on your left (also called Grimsbury Castle) and in 40m reach a small car park area with an informative panel. Perhaps *turn right* across the road and walk for 60m to where the **West Gate** used to be, to get a better impression of the size of the hillfort site and of what's left of rampart, ditch and counterscarp (an external bank), then return here and *turn left* from the info panel, i.e.: to the right of the folly, in an easterly direction along a car wide track (110°), passing a car barrier with a WW marker and in another 40m a WW marker post. In 150m leave the hillfort through the easterly part of the ramparts and continue in the same direction downhill at a four-way junction of forest tracks through **Fence Wood**.

[**You can turn right here for an alternative route** (adds 400m) through this wood, leading through the higher parts of it for longer: ignore a left turn in 220m, cross tracks in 310m and in 140m, cross a stream in 120m and continue in the same direction at a multi-track junction a little further along, then follow the track gently down to the left, cross another track in 150m, ignore a track from the right in 260m, cross another track in 70m and reach **Fence Lane (Track)** at a T-junction in 170m at the bottom of the wood, with a field opposite. *Turn right* and pick up the directions one paragraph down.]

In 130m continue in the same direction at a four-way junction with a WW marker post and in 140m *turn right* at a T-junction along **Fence Lane (Track)** (on the OS map), a restricted byway. In 20m ignore a path turning left into **Round Hill Wood** and follow this ancient track, often between low earth banks, ignoring all ways off, **for 800m**, always with **Fence Wood** on your right, while crossing a few streams on the track. Continue in the same direction where a car wide track joins from the right, now with a field on your left. In 280m you walk through a gap to the right of a metal field gate at a signposted five-way byway/bridleway-junction and continue in the same direction past **Bushnells Cottages** on your left. In 180m continue in the same direction along a bridleway into trees (**Westrop Green** on the right, **Bushnell's Copse** on the left) where the car wide byway turns right. In 190m you cross a stream on a plank bridge, in 100m ignore a left turning path but then *turn left* at a T-junction with a gravel track (a byway). In 35m *turn right* off the driveway to a red brick house and in 15m ignore a signposted footpath turning right into a field to continue along a bridleway (200°). You cross a few streams and in 600m you have a pretty hillock on the right in a field.

In 100m *fork either way* – the paths re-unite in 50m – and in another 50m you *turn left* at a three-way junction of paths at the bottom of **Holly Wood** (on the OS map), an ancient woodland and part of the **Bucklebury Estate**. In 100m you cross a stream on a plank bridge, in 230m a path joins at a higher level from the right and in 50m you reach a road by a bridleway signpost, where you *turn left* (in 50m marked as a '**Bucklebury Quiet Lane**'). Ignore a few paths off: a signposted footpath from the left just before **Holly Farm House**, then a byway from the left (**Holly Lane**) just behind it, then in 140m a signposted bridleway from the right. In 200m a signposted footpath joins from the left out of trees and continues as a bridleway on the right into trees. This is the main walk. Continue in the same direction along the road and pick up the directions in the main walk at the asterisk *).

Diversion to Pub in Upper Bucklebury (add 1.0 km and 390m tarmac)

Turn right along a gravel driveway towards some houses by a '**Bucklebury Quiet Lane**' sign on a wide wooden post. In 40m *turn left* just before the cottages and in 30m – at the end of the cottages on the right – enter **Byles Green** in **Upper Bucklebury**

through a wooden kissing gate to the left of a wooden field gate. You follow a left-hand boundary and in 90m walk through a wooden gate in a hedge 50m to the right of the corner of the meadow to continue in the same direction through a meadow. Leave it in 160m through a wooden kissing gate and continue along a fenced path with a meadow on the right, in 75m between garden fences. In 40m you reach a road at a T-junction, with **The Cottage Inn** 30m on your right and a bus stop further along. *Turn left* along the road, in 250m ignore a left turning byway down a car wide gravel lane and *veer right* across the road and then along a narrow path into trees with a bridleway signpost, just before the road veers left. In 230m cross a tarmac lane to continue in the same direction along a narrow path through trees and in 40m reach a gravel car wide track.

- **During Ground Nesting Season** (01 March – 31 July), to protect the birds, walk as follows: *turn right* along the car wide track and in 300m ignore a right turn, in 170m continue in the same direction at a five-way track and path-junction, in 320m cross another track and continue along a row of cottages on the right. In 130m, where the track meets a road at a bend, *turn right* with a footpath signpost along a tarmac driveway to the right of **Fireside Cottage** (signed Wootten's, Park House, Hideaway...), and pick up the directions above in the main text at the triple asterisk ***).
- **At all other times** cross the track and follow the narrow path through trees and in 135m emerge in open heathland. You now follow a clear narrow path through the heath (65°), in 25m ignore a right fork and in another 15m you continue in the same direction, where another path joins from the left. This is the main walk. Pick up the directions in the main walk at the double asterisk **).

Canal Ending (add 1.3 km including a 450m stretch along a busy and narrow road)

Continue in the same direction down the road and in 600m reach the **A4**. You have **The Coach & Horses** on the right. Cross the road and continue in the same direction along a gravel drive to the left of a red brick wall. In 30m you walk through a kissing gate and then a grassy area in the same direction. In 75m go through another kissing gate onto a road and *turn right* along its pavement. In 100m the pavement discontinues and you walk on the road. In 250m cross the railway tracks on a single lane bridge, in 50m cross the **Kennet and Avon Canal** on a road bridge and *turn down right* on the other side with a signpost. *Turn right* again at the canal to go under **Canal Bridge #36** and continue with the water on your left-hand side. In 900m you *turn left* with the towpath across **Cranwell (Swing-) Bridge** and continue in the same direction on the opposite canal bank. In 800m *turn right* across **Oxlease (Swing-) Bridge** to then:

- **either** *turn left* with the towpath, in 500m cross the **River Kennet**, which flows into the canal from the right, and in 90m reach **The Rowbarge Inn**;
- **or** continue dead ahead to the left of a metal field gate, away from the canal. In 25m *turn left* at a T-junction with a car wide track to continue with a lake on your right-hand side. In 140m you cross the **River Kennet** and then *turn left* at a T-junction, with the river now on your left and another – larger – lake on the right hand side. In 330m you ignore a footpath turning right between trees and in 140m you reach a road with **The Rowbarge Inn** on your left.

From the pub you *turn left* long the road, cross a swing-bridge over the river navigation and in 150m reach the level crossing by **Midgham Station**. London-bound trains depart from the far platform 2, the entrance to which is to the left through the car park **[!] on the other side of the barrier. There is no footbridge across the tracks and the barrier can shut very early**, sometimes close to **[!] 10 minutes before departure**, as plenty of non-stopping trains run along this line.