



# Berkhamsted Circular walk

A short easy walk to the South-East of Berkhamsted, along the Grand Union Canal and across fields to Ashley Green for lunch, returning via Hockeridge Wood.



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**Length** 15.3 kms, 9 1/2 miles

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**OS Maps** OS Landranger Map: No 165 (Aylesbury and Leighton Buzzard). OS Explorer Maps 181 (Chiltern Hills North) and 182 (St Albans and Hatfield). Most of the walk is in the bottom right hand corner of Explorer 181!

Berkhamsted station (SP993082) is in Hertfordshire.

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**Toughness** 2 out of 10.

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**Features** This easy walk explores the area to the East and South of Berkhamsted, which is not covered by other SWC walks. It is easier going and perhaps less inspiring than alternatives in the Tring/ Berkhamsted area, but it might make a good winter choice. Navigation is easy; you follow the Grand Union Canal out of Berkhamsted then a series of wide bridleways to Bottom Farm, where the short cut branches off. Continue through fields, taking care on the approach to Ashley Green. You then plunge in to Hockeridge Woods (using permissive paths which are often clearer on the ground than the rights of way), perhaps the highlight of the walk, followed by school playing fields leading to the town centre. Expect some traffic noise from the trains in Section 1 and busy roads in sections 2 and 5.

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## Walk Options

The final section describes a short cut, which omits Sections 3 and 4, giving a short walk of 9.3 kms (5¾ miles). There is no lunch option on this walk, which could be done as a half day walk, with lunch in Berkhamsted, either at the start (perhaps at one of the three canal side pubs) or at the end (possibly at The Crown).

A second short cut is described within Section 4, omitting Pancake Wood, which reduces the distance by 1.7 kms (1 mile). This would be useful if it is getting dark, but the full walk is preferable.

For a longer walk, consider starting at Tring station and following TOBCW Book 2, Walk 5c, the Shorter walk from Tring to Berkhamsted, which would add 9.4 kms (5¾ miles) to the distance. You could then have lunch by the canal at Berkhamsted and continue with either the full version of this walk or the short cut).

Red Eagle bus 354 runs approximately hourly (except Sundays) from Chesham to Berkhamsted on the A416 and could be caught either from Ashley Green or just after Christmas Tree Place (which avoids an unpleasant main road section). In 2022 the last bus from Ashley Green was at 17.45 (weekdays) and 16.19 (Saturdays).

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## Travel

Three direct trains an hour run between London Euston and Berkhamsted (journey time approximately 30-35 minutes). There is also one train an hour from Clapham Junction via Shepherd's Bush from Monday to Saturday (journey time approximately 55 minutes from Clapham Junction); on Sunday you have to change at Watford Junction.

Tring is one stop further from London. Not all the Berkhamsted trains stop there.

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## Points of interest

**Berkhamsted** is an historic market town in Hertfordshire, with a population today of some 18,500. The town's main historic claim to fame is its link to the Norman Conquest in 1066. After the Battle of Hastings, the Anglo-Saxon leadership surrendered to the Norman encampment in Berkhamsted. During the 13th and 14th centuries the town thrived as a wool centre. It then went into decline and was only revived by the building of the canal. Berkhamsted was the childhood home of writer Graham Greene, whose father was the headmaster of Berkhamsted School.

**Berkhamsted Castle** (01375) 858486, next to the railway station, is a classic Norman motte and bailey castle, built by Robert, Count of Mortain, the half brother of William the Conqueror. Thomas a Becket, Henry II's chancellor and later martyred when archbishop of Canterbury, lived here from 1155 to 1165. There is not much to see, just a few ruined walls, but

entrance is free, and if you have just missed a train at Berkhamsted, it is worth a quick look. The castle is open until 4pm in winter and 6pm in summer.

The **Grand Union Canal** was formally the Grand Junction Canal and the section through Hertfordshire was dug in 1798. It was for a brief time the major transport artery linking London and Birmingham, which played its part in facilitating the industrial revolution before speedier modes superseded it. The centre of Berkhamsted's canal trade and boat building activity was Castle Wharf, on the opposite side from the towpath in the early stages of this walk.

The **River Bulbourne** is a chalk stream which rises at Cow Roast (near the canal between Tring and Berkhamsted) and runs alongside the canal for seven miles before joining the River Gade at the appropriately named Two Waters. It used to support a vibrant watercress industry and remnants of the watercress beds remain today. Chalk streams are a rare habitat which support many plants and animals, including water vole.

**Ashley Green** is dominated by the village green which lies central to the village and features a pudding stone, King's Pond and a replica Well Head constructed in 1995 by village volunteers on its original site. The playground lies in the Glebe meadow adjacent to the Memorial Hall at the southern end of the Green. St. John the Evangelist Church is nearby.

**Hockeridge Woods** comprises (with the neighbouring Pancake Woods) 180 acres of woodland, owned and maintained by The Royal Forestry Society. There was a thriving timber industry here throughout the 19th and well in to the 20th century. Timber from the woods was taken for decorations to mark King George VI's coronation in 1936, but the forest was clear felled for timber to help the war effort, and then was designated as land on which future building would occur. In 1952 Mary Wellesley (descended from the Duke of Wellington), purchased the woods and replanted with many 'fashionable' trees including conifers, and also many non-native species which are still seen today, including Giant and Coast redwoods, Tulip tree, Southern beech and Red oak. In 1986 she gifted the woods to the RFS.

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## Lunch

There are three canal side pubs early on the walk (200 to 500 metres from the start), which might be suitable if (a) you are doing the long walk, starting at Tring, or (b) you plan to take the short cut, with a late start.

- [The Crystal Palace](#), Station Rd, Berkhamsted. Describes itself as a quintessential British village pub with a modern sensibility. Re-eopened

in December 2021 following refurbishment after a lengthy period of closure. (01442) 862998

- [The Boat](#), Gravel Path, Berkhamsted Serves food from 12 to 9pm (or 6pm on Sundays). A canalside pub with a pleasant outdoor verandah. (01442) 877152
- **The Rising Sun**, George Street, Berkhamsted. Unspoilt traditional canal side pub, popular with lovers of real ale, also offering food and a garden.

The suggested lunch stop for the main walk, reached after 9.4 kilometres (not on the short cut).

- [The Golden Eagle](#), Ashley Green. (01442) 866422. A 16th century building, formerly the village blacksmith's house and forge.

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## Tea

- **Buenos Pizza and Coffee Shop**, Prince Edward Street, Berkhamsted, is directly on the route. It closes at 3 and re-opens at 6 and it is closed all day on Sundays.
- **Berkhamsted High Street** has various refreshment options, all about 400 metres from the end of the walk with short detours. These include **Mario's Gelateria and Espresso Bar**, open till 5pm daily and 5.30pm Saturday; **Simmons Bakery**, which serves hot drinks, has tables, and a good selection of cakes and is open until 5.30pm Monday to Saturday and 5pm Sundays; and **Bel Caffe**, open till 5pm daily. There are also the usual coffee chain outlets – **Starbucks**, **Caffe Nero** (open to 6.30pm daily) and **Costa Coffee** (open until 5pm Monday to Saturday and 4.30pm Sunday). In addition the High Street has several pubs, including the Kings Arms the **Crown** (part of the Weatherspoons chain) and the Mad Squirrel.
- If you are rushing to get a train, Berkhamsted Fish Bar is by the station and the **Platform Wine** shop in the ticket hall of the station serves a full range of hot drinks to take away, as well as the alcoholic drinks its name suggests.

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**By Car**      **Start** HP4 2AR

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**Help**      National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Traveline (bus times): 0871 200 22 33 (12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234

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**Version** Dec-23 **Mike Powell**

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## Walk Directions

### 1. Berkhamsted to Sharpes Lane 3.3 kms

1. Trains from London normally arrive at Berkhamsted on platform 3. Go down the steps and turn right to depart the station through the subway. From the station exit, turn right and in 25 metres cross Lower Kings Road ahead. Turn left on the pavement, with the Grand Union Canal below on your right. In 150 metres at the first bridge (Castle Street), do not cross the canal but descend the slope which is sharply to your right. In 25 metres turn left on the towpath (resuming your previous direction) and go under the bridge in 20 metres.
2. In 50 metres you pass the Crystal Palace pub. In 250 metres you pass a lock and go under Ravens Lane and a colourful bridge (number 142). In 10 metres you pass The Boat. In 100 metres you pass the Rising Sun and another lock. In 180 metres you go under bridge 142A. In 450 metres go up the slope to bridge 143 (Bank Mill) and turn right to cross the canal (as the towpath continues on the other side). Turn right down the steps and in 10 metres right again under the bridge to continue with the canal on your left. In about 150 metre the rail line is visible further to the left (so you may get disturbed by noisy dirty trains) with open countryside beyond.
3. In 320 metres you pass Top Side Lock. In 160 metres go under bridge 144 (Bullbeggars Lane). The River Bulbourne runs close by on your right. In 280 metres you pass Bottom Side Lock. In 180 metres you go under power lines. Soon there are some very overgrown old water cress beds to the right and the river runs alongside you. In 250 metres you pass Sewer Lock (lock 58). In 350 metres you pass under bridge 145 (Little Heath Lane).
4. In 450 metres leave the canal by turning right just before bridge 146 (by a Hertfordshire Way marker on a bridge) and in 15 metres continue away from the canal on Sharpes Lane.

### 2. Sharpes Lane to Bottom Farm 2.6 kms

1. In 100 metres the lane crosses the Bulbourne and in 90 metres you reach the busy A251 (London Road) and turn right on the pavement. In 160 metres turn left to cross the main road and continue uphill on Sugar Lane opposite. In 200 metres you reach the aptly named Lane's End, the last house on the right. Continue on a wide track, passing a green public highway signpost (Long Green, 1) in 20 metres. After a gentle climb the path levels out in 150 metres and continues undulating gently for another 350 metres between fields before

levelling out again, with the noisy A41 to your left and hedgerows to both sides.

2. In 100 metres you cross a private farm track. In 120 metres you pass a convenient seat and continue gently downhill, with the A41 close by now. In 350 metres go under electricity wires. In 180 metres there is a cheeky little short cut on your left to the path visible through the gap. Alternatively, continue for another 20 metres, then turn sharp left through a metal kissing gate just before power lines at a green footpath signpost reading 'Lower Farm and Bottom Farm ½'. In 80 metres go through the subway under the A41. In 40 metres you enter a field, with a yellow arrow pointing you due South. In 60 metres you pass the corner of a hedge and continue with the hedge on your left. In 140 metres ignore the gate ahead and turn right (West) at a 3 armed signpost, reading 'Public Bridleway 51 - Bottom Farm 400 yards'.
3. Continue with a hedge on your left. In 130 metres you pass back under the electricity wires. In 140 metres note the elaborate tree house in the garden to your left. In 60 metres you reach The Granary (part of Bottom Farm) at a T-junction with a 3 armed signpost.
4. To the right the sign reads 'Public Bridleway: Swing Gate Lane'. This is the route taken by the short cut (see the final section below).
5. For the main route, turn left on a wide track marked 'Public Bridleway: Whepley Hill ¾'.

### 3. Bottom Farm to Ashley Green 3.5 kms

1. In 60 metres the wide track turns left, but you continue ahead with a wooden fence on your right. In 15 metres turn right at a bridleway marker post, on a possibly muddy path with a fence on your right. In 70 metres continue with a small copse below on your right (The Larches), West then South-West as the path curves to the left and gently uphill (Mount Hill). The valley is the line of the Bourne Gutter, a tributary of the Bulbourne, but there is rarely so much as a trickle here. In 450 metres you reach the end of the woods and the path ascends more steeply with fields on both sides.
2. In 250 metres you emerge in the corner of a large field with a metal field gate to your left. Follow the right edge of the field on a wide track, next to a neat hedge, towards a cream coloured house (240°), with more houses ahead to the left. At the end of the hedge in 260 metres the track curves to the left, then in 60 metres back to the right. In 70 metres you pass under electricity wires (GR SP995052). In 200 metres go through a wooden gate by a black field gate. Turn right on a road between high hedges (White Hill, but not named here) with Kenmore Farm on your left. In 75 metres, just before the cream house seen earlier, go up a step on the left then through a wooden gate, at a green public bridleway sign. This is not quite the Hillary Step, but it does require some care in slippery conditions - note that the step and a potentially saturated field

ahead can both easily be avoided by continuing along the road a short distance then taking the next path on the left, to rejoin the main route below after Sale's Farm. To stay on the main route, after the awkward step the path follows the right edge of the field, under wires (South-West).

3. In 70 metres you go through two metal field gates and in to the next field. In 50 metres go over two stiles to the right of field gates. If the field ahead looks saturated you are advised to return to the road and turn left, as per the previous paragraph. In 120 metres, just over half way along the field, go through a single metal gate on the right, followed in 5 metres by a second (wooden) gate. Continue with the field boundary on your left. In 65 metres go through a wooden gate by a field gate at Sale's Farm and turn right at a marked four-way path junction, heading downhill on a wide probably muddy track, following a blue arrow on the wall of a farm building, soon with holly bushes on both sides.
4. (!) In 220 metres the wide bridleway track turns right (the bad weather alternative mentioned above joins you from this direction), but you continue ahead through a wooden gate with a footpath marker, circumventing a large tree. The grassy path veers left along a narrow field (290°) and downhill towards the end of the line of trees below. In 130 metres you pass a wooden footpath marker post with a yellow arrow and continue downhill in the same direction (you may just be able to make out the trampled path across the grass). In 200 metres go over a stile by a wooden gate, to the right of a large painted arrow on a tree.
5. (!) (!) Despite (or because of) the arrow, the way ahead may be far from clear on the ground. The arrow points straight ahead at a direction of 280 degrees, but this is neither the right of way nor the most direct route (it is however the direction in which the field is normally ploughed so it may be the easiest option - if you do go this way make sure to turn right at the far end of the field and expect a long trek to the exit). For the right of way, pass just to the left of the pylon which is immediately ahead then take a compass bearing of 305 degrees. This means cutting across the ploughed ruts, so it may feel counter-intuitive. As you get over the top of the field, aim for a wooden marker post with a white top, near the point where the field boundary ahead makes a sharp turn to the left.
6. Whichever way you get there, as you approach the far end of the field in 400 metres, you should see the footpath marker post with a white top. Go through a gap in to the next field, then veer right with the field boundary on your right (though the map indicates that the path runs to the other side of the boundary). In 50 metres at a wide wooden post with several arrows, bear left (due West), keeping the hedge and wooden fence on your right. In 180 metres go through a kissing gate and continue on a narrow path. In 140 metres ignore a gate and public footpath to your right. In 75 metres go through a kissing gate

and continue ahead, ignoring the left fork. In 100 metres you emerge on the village green, with Hebuterne House on your left. St John's Church is visible to your left and closer ahead there is a seated shelter and a bus stop. Turn half right on the grass, passing a red post box in 35 metres. Stay on the grass as the Golden Eagle comes in to view. In 90 metres carefully cross the A416 (Chesham Road) to the pub opposite Snowhill Cottages (to continue the walk, cross the car park with the pub on your right).

#### 4. **Ashley Green to Kingshill Way 4.1 kms**

1. From the pub, turn right in the car park and leave it in 50 metres through a kissing gate in the far right corner. Continue with the field boundary on your right (300°). In 180 metres go through a gap in the corner of the field with a footpath marker post. In 20 metres turn right in the next field, with a hedge to your right. In 70 metres follow the field boundary downhill and to the right (20°).
2. In 180 metres enter Hockeridge Wood (not named here) by a post with a yellow arrow. Continue ahead on a clear path, now uphill. In 140 metres ignore a path from the right and in 40 metres you reach a cross-paths with a wooden bench to your right. For the main route via Pancake Wood turn left here and ignore the following paragraph, but for the short cut continue ahead.
3. (!)On the short cut, in 200 metres there is a wooden post with a yellow arrow, indicating a path to the left. You turn right here, rejoining the main route (if you reach a picnic area in another 120 metres, you have gone too far). Skip the next three paragraphs.
4. From the cross-paths in Hockeridge Wood (by a bench on the right), take the level wide hard surfaced path to your left, 305 degrees at first, passing plaques for a Holm Oak on the right and a Red Oak on your left. In 90 metres ignore a post with footpath arrow to the right and ignore an unmarked narrow post to the right in 80 metres. The path starts to turn to the right (North-West). In 180 metres ignore another unmarked path to the right. In 160 metres pass an information board and map on the left (with useful advice on how to identify the Edible Dormouse). In 10 metres go through a gate, cross a minor road (Johns Lane) and go over a stile in to Pancake Wood. A sign identifies this area as Queen's Green Canopy, in commemoration of the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee (2022).
5. Continue on a wide track. Ignore an unmarked path to the left in 60 metres and in 15 metres ignore an unmarked path to your right (under electricity wires and by a telegraph pole). Follow the main path, now narrower and gradually turning to the right, North, then North-East (later South-East). In 250 metres cross an unmarked path, then in 120 metres another one, now with a newly planted area to your right (and probably traffic noise audible ahead). In 140 metres at a path junction, turn right with a green wire mesh fence on your left, passing a padlocked wooden gate in 10 metres. Keep left alongside the fence, ignoring a



right fork under electricity lines. In 100 metres drop down a few steps, cross Johns Lane again, go up some steps (re-entering Hockeridge Wood) and immediately turn left, parallel with the road.

6. In 75 metres turn right, in the direction of a green public footpath signpost (which is to your left). In 40 metres turn left and downhill, following a yellow arrow on a marker post, merging with a path to your left in 40 metres. Take the wide path to your right in 50 metres. In 45 metres there is an enclosure to your left, at a break in the dense woods. In 320 metres ignore an unmarked path to your left, just before the main path turns right and uphill. In 120 metres you pass a picnic area and information board on your left. In 120 metres there is a wooden post with a yellow arrow, indicating a path to the right. You turn left on the path before (not after) this post, rejoining the short cut option.
7. To the right of the path there is a Wellingtonia (Giant Redwood) tree (identified by a sign on the tree). Continue downhill on the narrow path lined by tall trees. In 150 metres you pass a yellow arrow on a post and the path becomes a wide track, leading more steeply downhill. In 120 metres there may be bluebells to your left, but for the walk continue past a cross-roads (this is Hockeridge Bottom) at a green 3-armed signpost reading 'Chesham Road  $\frac{1}{4}$ ', now steeply uphill. In 120 metres go over a stile and continue with a field boundary on your left. This is Christmas Tree Place, which has been buying and selling trees since 1991, so expect to see infant Xmas trees even in January. In 120 metres follow the path round to the right ( $100^\circ$ ), still with the field boundary to your left. In 200 metres go through a kissing gate and cross the A416 again (as there is a busy approach road coming up on this side), then turn left on the wide verge. Regrettably there is no pavement.
8. In 80 metres you pass a bus stop and the drive for Haresfoot Campus. In 200 metres ignore a turning to the right (White Hill again) and continue on the pavement. In 80 metres you go over the A41. In 40 metres cross back over the road and go over a stile opposite (immediately after the A41 bridge barrier) with a sign reading 'Public Footpath 44' in to woods (Access Land). The map shows the path turning right by a pond in the woods, but this is not apparent on the ground. For the only viable route, in 120 metres the narrow path starts curving to the right (North-East) near the edge of the woods. A cemetery is visible to your left. In 170 metres go through a gate, cross a road (Kingshill Way) and turn left.

## 5. Kingshill Way to Berkhamsted 1.8 kms

1. **[A : Shortcut rejons]** In 10 metres go through another gate on your right, by a green public footpath signpost telling you that it is  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile to the town centre. Follow a line of trees between school playing fields (now  $40^\circ$ ), at first with a low white fence to your left. In 200 metres you pass to the left of a wooden hut and there is also the occasional wooden seat. In 40 metres you pass the first of several footpath markers on trees.

2. In 200 metres continue downhill, now with residential fences on both sides and tall trees to your left, in 20 metres going through a gate. In 130 metres go down steps and in 15 metres continue downhill in a grass meadow by a seat, keeping to the hedge on the left, with fine views of Berkhamsted and the hills beyond. In 240 metres at the corner of the fence on the left, continue in to public playing fields, keeping to the right edge with allotments beyond. In 150 metres cross a tarmac path and continue on tarmac, between the Gossoms End FC clubhouse and a nursery. In 100 metres the path turns right, then left in 20 metres.
3. Continue on Prince Edward Street, with Gobstoppers Theatre on your left. Buenos cafe is on your left in 50 metres. In 45 metres you reach Berkhamsted High Street. Costa Coffee is directly opposite. The Crown Inn, Kings Arms and Mad Squirrel are all to the right with Bel Caffe opposite. Starbucks, Cafe Nero and Mario's are all to the left, after the former Town Hall (if heading this way for refreshments, you are advised to continue to Lower Kings Road, the next road on the right, which leads you back over the canal and on to the station). Mario's is on the corner of Lower Kings Road. Further along the High Street are Gail's, Caffe Nero and Simmons Bakery.
4. To complete the walk, cross the High Street and take Water Lane, immediately to the right of Costa Coffee. In 80 metres turn left after the public toilets and cross the car park to the far left corner following the one way signs and staying to the left of Amersham House. In 100 metres, turn left with Berkley Court to the right, now heading towards the Naturality Wellness Centre on the road ahead. In 120 metres turn right on Kings Road. You go over the canal in 100 metres and Berkhamsted Station is across the road in 120 metres. Berkhamsted Fish Bar and Platform Wines and Coffee Bar are at the station. Trains for London normally leave from platform 4.

## Short cut from Bottom Farm to Kingshill Way 1.8 kms

1. Go under an electricity line in 90 metres and the track turns sharp left in 80 metres by Swingate House. In 350 metres take a possibly muddy path on the left in to woods, at a green signpost reading 'Public Byway 53, Sandpit Green' (if you get as far as a bridge over the A41, you have missed the turning). In 100 metres keep left (290°) on a wide track, soon with a wire fence (and traffic noise) on your right, then with wooden fences on both sides.
2. In 650 metres turn right at a green public byway signpost to go through a subway under the A41 in 15 metres. In 20 metres veer left, parallel with the main road. In 120 metres the track veers right, then in 20 metres you turn left on a drive with the buildings of Ashlyn's Residential Home to your right. In 250 metres cross the busy Chesham Road and turn left on the pavement, which you follow to the right, in to Kingshill Way. In 120 metres, note the gate and footpath opposite - you rejoin the main route here, at point [A] above.

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