

Last checked			
30 th December 2023			
Current status	Document last updated Thursday, 11 th January 2024		
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Kintbury to Great Bedwyn

The North Wessex Downs & Great Bedwyn.

Start: Kintbury station

Finish: Bedwyn station

Length: 21km (13 miles). For a shorter walk and other variations, *see below*

Walk options.

Time: 6 ½ hours. For the whole outing, including trains and meals, allow 10 hours.

Transport: Trains run hourly (every two hours on Sundays) between London Paddington and Kintbury (journey time: 1 hour). Take the train nearest to 10.00am. Trains run back from Bedwyn to Paddington (hourly Mon-Sat; every two hours Sun, mostly changing at Newbury or Reading; journey time: from 1 hour 13 minutes). Buy a day return to Bedwyn. For drivers, it is best to park at Kintbury station and return to your car on the train from Bedwyn station (a 10-minute journey).

OS Landranger Map: 174

OS Explorer Map: 157 and 158 (most of the walk is on 158)

Kintbury, map reference SU386672, is in Berkshire, 8km west of Newbury.

Toughness: 5 out of 10

Walk notes: Though only an hour west of London by train, this walk has a decidedly

West Country feel, far removed from the more manicured charms of the Home Counties. In the morning, it passes through an idyllic series of woods and pastures, with largely gentle gradients. After lunch at a quiet country pub in Inkpen (the sort of place where the conversation at the bar is more likely to be about farming than the price of second homes), it then climbs up onto a long ridge, giving views as dramatic (and even more unspoiled) than any on the South Downs. The rest of the walk follows a broad track along the top of this ridge, before descending to the valley and the pretty village of Great Bedwyn.

Walk options: The walk can be shortened by taking shortcuts to two different points, both of which fall on the same bus route. At point [5] in the walk text, instead of crossing over the road, turn right to continue down the road for 1.6km to reach the Crown & Anchor (01488 668242), Ham, which shortens the walk by 6.2km. Alternatively, at point [6], continue down the road for 1.8km to reach the Plough Inn (01672 870295), Shalbourne, which shortens the walk by 4.2km. There is an infrequent 20 or 22 bus service on Mon-Fri between Marlborough and Hungerford which calls at the Plough Inn and the Crown and Anchor. (Eastbound for Hungerford

station (one stop up the line from Bedwyn), or westbound for Marlborough via Bedwyn (Bus enquiry line 0870 608 2608/ www.travelinesw.com)). Alternatively you could order a taxi.

A Kintbury circular option for this walk is available on the website of the Saturday Walkers' Club www.walkingclub.org.uk in the 'Time Out Country Walks 2' section.

WALK DIRECTIONS

[1] Coming off platform 1 from **Kintbury station** *turn left along the road* over the canal and past the Dundas Arms on your left.

After 40 metres you pass by Millbank with Kintbury Mill on your right. In 50 metres the pavement goes up an incline with a roadside handrail. *At the top of this incline turn right at the footpath signpost*, up a tarmac car-wide path, your direction west.

In 40 metres the path narrows to a tarmac footpath called The Cliffs running between houses, your direction 260 degrees. In a further 150 metres you pass by a white house to your left, to go through an unusual wooden turnstile, where you *veer left up a lane*.

After 15 metres you turn right to enter a churchyard. Go through the churchyard on a sand shingle path between trees to exit through a gate at the far end, to continue up an (initially) shingle path between gardens, your direction 240 degrees.

After 120 metres at a footpath junction turn half left to reach a T-junction after 20 metres, (with **The Blue Ball** pub immediately on your left). *Cross the lane to continue on a tarmac driveway (Titcomb Way) slightly to the right*.

In 25 metres fork right off the tarmac driveway along a shingle footpath between wooden fences, your direction due south. After 80 metres the wooden fence on your right-hand side gives out and you continue in the same direction beneath an arbour of trees meeting

overhead for the main part, with the odd clearing.

After 450 metres, where the arbour ends, go through a wooden gate to turn right, and in 15 metres go through another wooden gate to cross a footbridge. Turn left to follow the footpath with trees on your left and an open meadow on your right edged with a wire fence and hedgerow. In a further 150 metres at the end of the field turn right through a wooden gate to go up the left edge of the field, your direction 200 degrees.

In 200 metres you go through a gap to the left of a metal field gate with a footpath signpost to the left. *Veer right across the field*, your direction 210 degrees.

In 320 metres *at the far field corner turn right to go through a wooden squeeze-stile to the left of a metal fieldgate. Turn left up a lane*, your direction 170 degrees.

In 240 metres, where the lane turns sharply left, turn right on to a tarmac car-wide track, (ignoring a public footpath ahead through a metal gate). Go over a stile to the left of a wooden field gate (with a cattle grid) to continue down the track, your direction west. In 80 metres the track crosses a bridge.

In a further 100 metres, where the car-wide track swings up and round to the left, go straight ahead through a wooden gate into a field. *Veer slightly right to cross the field on a gently descending path, aiming for the bottom corner*, your direction 330 degrees. *In 120 metres cross a stream to go through an opening and veer left up the left-hand side of the next field for 20 metres to a stile in the left-hand corner. Go over the stile shortly followed by another*.

Continue up the path through a lightly wooded area to enter an open field. Continue up along the left hand boundary of the open field with trees and a wire fence off to your left.

After 130 metres go through a wooden kissing gate to continue down the footpath across a field towards a wooden fieldgate on the far side, 140 metres distant. At the bottom right corner go through a wooden gate, cross a track and continue between fences (field on left, newly planted trees on right).

In 100 metres *cross a stream and veer left, along a strip of grassland bordered by trees*, your direction 320 degrees, (ignoring a left bearing track towards a wooden barrier).

After 240 metres cross a footbridge to veer left along a footpath through a wood. In 220 metres the path *comes out to a lane*. On your left is the entrance to a very grand looking building, which is **St Cassian's Centre**.

Cross over the lane to go through a wooden gate, by a footpath signpost. *Veer left across a field*, your direction 290 degrees. After 40 metres you go under some mini pylon cables. To your left you can see a good view of St Cassian's Centre. In another 50 metres you pass by a games field to your left.

After 150 metres, *at a crosspaths [2] with a four-armed footpath signpost*, turn left, your direction 250 degrees. *In 100 metres cross a car-wide concrete track to cross the next field. In 120 metres you go through a wooden gate into a wood.*

Follow the footpath through the wood, your direction 220 degrees. Look out for banks of bluebells here in spring. *In a further 220 metres cross a three-plank bridge with handrails over a dried-up stream to go through a wooden gate. Follow a fenced in footpath across a field, towards the far left-hand corner*, your direction 220 degrees.

After 300 metres at the far corner you turn left through a wooden gate and cross a wooden footbridge to *turn right along a tarmac car-wide track*, following a yellow footpath arrow, your direction 240 degrees.

You are now at Balsdon Farm (on the OS map). After 120 metres the tarmac car-wide track becomes grass and concrete.

In 50 metres *where the track meets a junction* with a five-armed footpath sign to your right (half-hidden by a hedge), *turn half left down a car-wide grassy path* between high hedges (a little to the right), your direction 190 degrees.

In 180 metres veer left (following a marker post) down through some trees. After 20 metres cross a footbridge over a stream (often dried up). Veer up to the right to go through a metal kissing gate into a field and turn half left, up the right-hand edge of the field bordered by a wire fence, your direction south.

In 180 metres you go through a metal gate to continue along the right hand side of the field. After 400 metres you go through a metal gate with a two-armed footpath signpost. *Turn right down a tarmac car-wide track.*

In 80 metres go through a metal gate to the right of a metal fieldgate *to reach a T-junction with a tarmac lane [3]*, with a black and white Tudor-style cottage ahead. *Turn right and after 40 metres cross a bridge over a stream to immediately turn right past a redundant stile* to go along the bottom right edge of a field with a wooden fence and stream on your right and an attractive house beyond.

In 110 metres at the corner of the field *turn right* to go through a metal gate to *go over a stone walled bridge* over the stream, now with a wooden garden fence on your right, and a stream to your left.

After 80 metres cross over a concrete footbridge across a stream with a small cattle grid at both ends of the bridge. Go uphill for 20 metres to reach a field.

[!] *Turn left*, your direction 220 degrees, *up a footpath boundary between fields.*

In 120 metres, at the field edge, go down an (initially) shingle car wide track, between gardens.

After 90 metres at a T-junction with a lane, turn left down the lane, your direction 150 degrees. In a further 200 metres you come up to the long term closed Swan Inn, Lower Inkpen.

Turn left from the pub to continue up the lane in the same direction. After 70 metres at a Give Way sign at a triangular lane junction, turn right on to the lane signposted to Ham & Shalbourne. In 40 metres continue along the lane as it curves to your right, signposted Ham & Shalbourne. After 50 metres you pass by a thatched red brick cottage on your right.

In 20 metres turn left to follow a footpath signpost, your initial direction 200 degrees. After 20 metres go over a stile with a yellow (footpath) yellow arrow pointing ahead. Cross the upper left side of a field, soon with a barbed wire fence to your left, to reach the field corner.

Go through a metal gate and cross a field in the direction of houses straight ahead, aiming for a metal fieldgate with a stile to the left of the fieldgate. Cross over the stile to turn right down a tarmac lane.

After 120 metres at a T-junction turn left, onto the lane marked Ham and Shalbourne. In 200 metres turn left onto a car-wide track following a bridleway signpost (hidden by a hedge), towards a metal fieldgate 80 metres distant, your direction 150 degrees.

Go through a metal gate to the right of this metal fieldgate to continue straight ahead along the left hand field boundary. After 100 metres the path veers to the right marked by a footpath signpost on your left, your direction now 200 degrees. Follow this grassy car-wide track with trees on your right-hand side.

As the trees on your right come to an end continue now with open fields on both sides towards a row of trees, 600 metres distant. As the path reaches the trees you pass by bridleway signposts to your left to continue up a path bordered by trees.

After 500 metres curve left with the path at a bridleway signpost to go through a wooden gate. Turn right up a steep grassy path, your direction 170 degrees. In 50 metres turn left onto a less steep bridleway, your direction now 100 degrees. Still continuing uphill on this path you can enjoy fantastic views to your left. After 300 metres and still ascending, the bridleway curves to the right. Follow the path to the top of **Inkpen Hill** until it shortly comes to a T-junction with another indistinct path where you turn right, (along the top of the ridge), your direction 230 degrees.

In 30 metres you pass by a wooden gate and a blue bridleway arrow on a gate post on your left to carry straight on. Follow the path for 100 metres to the field corner to cross over a stile to the right of a metal fieldgate. **[4]** Turn right onto a car-wide track (a byway), your direction west. You now follow the ridge path to Botley Down. **[7]**

But in more detail: Keep on the car-wide track with views off to your right. Sections of this path are potentially muddy in wet weather, but after a while this improves as the path begins to descend between gorse bushes.

After 2.2km you go under some mini pylon cables. 30 metres further on the path veers slightly to the right as it descends more steeply through open countryside. After 650 metres the car-wide earth track joins a road where a post to your right is marked as a byway in both directions. (This road is just less than 3 km from where you joined the ridge path.)

Veer right for 25 metres to a T-junction with another road. **[5]** Cross over the road to rejoin the car-wide earth track bridleway, your direction west.

After 500 metres the car-wide track again becomes potentially muddy. In summer trees and bushes on both sides provide some shade. After 400 metres the trees end and you continue through open

countryside with views again to the right and also off to the left in the far distance.

In 400 metres you pass by a bridleway off to your right, and a dilapidated barn to your right.

After 300 metres you come to a T-junction with a tarmac road **[6]** where you veer right slightly downhill. In 50 metres rejoin the track on your left at a byway sign by a metal fieldgate, your direction west.

Go through the fieldgate onto a potentially muddy byway. After 400 metres go through a metal fieldgate to leave the wood, with fine views again to the right.

In 1.4km, as the path gets near to a road ahead, it veers to the right below some National Grid electricity cables. *In 70 metres the path leads down a T-junction with the road, **[7]** where you turn right.*

[If you do not wish to walk along the road, cross over it and take a path up into a wooded area (the entrance to which is often overgrown in summer): Turn half right along a faint path up and across the slope of the wood. In 130 metres you emerge into a field with the National Grid cable run 30 metres to your left. *Turn right along the right-hand edge of the field*, your direction 350 degrees. After 350 metres the track leads down to the road. Cross the road to continue along the grass verge on the right hand side.]

Although the traffic should not be heavy, it does tend to be fast so extra care should be taken. 1km after leaving the ridge path you come to a busy crossroads with the A338 at a Give Way sign. *Cross over the A338 and turn left along a grass verge towards Salisbury*, your direction 230 degrees. *After 100 metres turn right at a bridleway sign*, your direction 320 degrees, to cross an arable field along a usually well-defined path.

After 200 metres you come to a field boundary. Veer right to cross over into

the right-hand field to go down its left-hand side.

After another 300 metres turn right to follow the field boundary, then left after 10 metres through a gap into the next field. You are now in a field with a hedge of trees to the right and a large white painted house clearly visible ahead across the field, your direction 290 degrees. Diagonally to your left you can see a windmill on the horizon, (this is Wilton Windmill).

At the end of the field you come to a road, where you turn right. Almost immediately you pass ornate gateposts on your left with concrete dogs on top. *10 metres past these gateposts (with a bridleway signpost on the right hand side of the road) turn left through a gap in the hedge to go up the left edge of a field towards trees*, with a garden fence to your left, your direction 290 degrees.

In 100 metres the path veers to the right away from the fence up into a wood. After 90 metres the path comes out of the wood into the open to reach a crosspaths. **[8]**

Turn right along a shingle path at a three-way signpost (direction 'Great Bedwyn'). In 10 metres go past a sign saying 'Bedwyn Brail' on the fence to your right. Follow the car-wide track through woodland, with wonderful displays of bluebells in springtime. After 400 metres, at a three-armed signpost, continue straight ahead, passing on your left, a distinctive wooden bench and a bench on your right (between two carved totem poles) followed by a line of tall fir trees.

In 300 metres the path veers to the left where it leaves the trees behind to emerge into more open countryside. The path then veers to the right to pass by on the right, a storage shed with a green corrugated steel roof. After 100 metres you again enter woodland. In 300 metres you reach a staggered crosspaths marked by a four-armed footpath signpost. Carry straight on, signposted 'Gt. Bedwyn'.

After 150 metres the path comes out into an open area. Continue on a car-wide shingle track, your direction 350 degrees. *After 100 metres, the path forks, marked by a 3-way signpost.*

Note: In very muddy conditions, it may be preferable to take the right fork: After 200 metres you emerge into an open field to continue in a southerly direction for 400 metres to the road and bridge over the Kennet and Avon canal.

Otherwise take the left fork, your direction 320 degrees, to enter woodland after 60 metres.

Follow the path as it winds around up and down, taking care not to stumble on the many tree roots. In 200 metres the path leaves the woodland, to *emerge into the left-hand corner of a field, to continue up its left-hand side, bordered by trees.*

At the far left-hand corner of the field you go through a gap to go down the left-hand edge of the next field, bordered by shrubbery and the odd tree. After 180 metres the path veers right down towards the Kennet and Avon canal and the River Dun.

A bridge over the canal can be seen diagonally down to your right. Follow the path down to this. Go through a wooden gate to *cross the bridge over the canal.* After 15 metres cross a small bridge over the river to go through a white picket kissing gate to *then cross the railway line.*

Go through another white picket kissing gate to cross a field for 60 metres towards a wooden squeezegate adjacent to the churchyard wall of St Mary's, Gt. Bedwyn.

Go through the squeezegate, and in 10 metres turn right into the part of the churchyard nearest to the church. Go straight ahead for 70 metres to exit the churchyard onto the road. *Turn right* and cross over to pass a very unusual Post

Office cum stonemason on your left-hand side. (It is worth stopping here to read some of the memorials to past residents, which are very amusing.)

Further on you pass by a notice on a post 'press button to operate fountain' (the fountain itself is long gone, unfortunately) and soon you will see the long term closed Cross Keys Inn *straight ahead at a T-junction.*

The Three Tuns, is 160 metres off to the left up the road.

To get to the station, turn right at this T-junction, down Brook Street for 50 metres where you will find the station on your left hand side.

Lunch & tea places

Dundas Arms Kintbury, RG17 9UT (01488 658 263). **Open** 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, 12-11pm Sun. **Food served** noon-3pm daily; noon-2pm, 6-9pm Mon-Sat and 6-8pm Sun. A pub at the start of the walk (and therefore the end of the Circular Walk option), with a lovely garden, a small river on one side and the Kennet and Avon canal on the other. Steak and ale-type meals are served in the bar; more elaborate food is available in another light-filled room.

The Blue Ball Kintbury, RG17 9UT (01488 608 126). **Open** Mon-Wed 5pm-10pm, Thu - Sat 12pm - 11pm, Sun 12pm - 10pm

~~**Swan Inn** Craven Road, Lower Green, Inkpen RD17 9DX (01488 668326). - long term closed.~~

The Three Tuns 1 High Street, Great Bedwyn, SN8 3NU (01672 870280). **Open** 10am-3pm, 6-9pm Tue-Thu; 10am-12pm Fri-Sat; 10m-6pm Sun. **Food served** 12.30-2.30pm, 6-9pm Tue-Sat; 12.30-3pm Sun. Meals, snacks, tea and coffee are available at this pub, which is the suggested tea stop for the end of the walk.