

Pewsey Circular		
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## Pewsey Circular

**Start:** Pewsey Station

**Finish:** Pewsey Station

Pewsey Station, map reference SU 161 603, is 25 km south of Swindon, 116 km west of Charing Cross, 116m above sea level, and in **Wiltshire**.

**Length:** 27.0 km (16.8 mi), of which 2.2 km (1.4 mi) on tarmac or concrete.

**Cumulative ascent/descent:** 380m.

For a shorter walk, see below **Walk Options**.

**Toughness:** 6 out of 10

**Time:** 6 hours walking time.

For the whole outing, including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 9 hours.

**Transport:** Pewsey Station is on the Berkshire and Hampshire line, served by Intercity trains between London and the West Country. The journey time is from 59 minutes. Pewsey is outside the Network South East Area, necessitating split journey tickets at either Reading, Newbury or Hungerford if using the Network Railcard.

**Saturday Walkers' Club:** Take any train up to 11.00 hours.

**OS Landranger Map:** 173 (Swindon & Devizes)

**OS Explorer Map:** 157 (Marlborough & Savernake Forest)

### Walk Notes:

This is an exhilarating excursion through the solitude of the Vale of Pewsey, which separates the chalk upland of the North Wessex Downs to the north from that of the Salisbury Plain to the south, including an ascent up the southerly escarpment of the Pewsey Downs, from where there are stunning far views in all directions over this land of wave-like hills, with its scarps, ridges and valleys. It is a mysterious landscape, full of pre-historic earthworks and hillforts as well as barrows – burial mounds of kings and warriors. Part of the walk leads along the Wansdyke – an earth bank and deep ditch running east to west – which sporadically links Bristol to Marlborough. It was built by the beleaguered Romano-British Celts – after being deserted by the Romans in the 5<sup>th</sup> century – as a fortification to stem the Saxon advance. From there it is just a short walk to Wiltshire's highest peak, Milk Hill with its stunning steep serrated down and then to the Alton Barnes White Horse – cut into the hillside in 1812. After a scenic descent into the Vale of Pewsey, an undemanding stretch along the Kennet & Avon Canal leads back to Pewsey with its tea options.

Shortcuts reduce the rating to 4/10 or even 3/10.

### Walk Options:

Two **Shortcuts** are possible: they reduce the walk by 3.5 km (2.1 mi) or by 3.4 km (2.1 mi) resp., the ascent/descent by 73m or 67m resp. and the rating to **4/10** resp.; or to **3/10** when walking both Shortcuts (resulting in a 19.8 km/12.3 mi walk).

**Bus X5** Salisbury – Swindon gives the opportunity to cut out the first 3.4 km from Pewsey to Oare. It runs every 90 minutes (Mon-Sat), but the nearest stop is somewhat away from the station (check online maps).

**Wiltshire Connect Bus 101** (Pewsey – Devizes, Mon-Fri) stops regularly in Alton Priors and Wilcot, as well as in Honeystreet if pre-booked (either via the app or by calling 01225 712 900, from 08.30 Mon-Sat).

For a timetable: <https://www.connectingwiltshire.co.uk/getting-around/bus/wiltshire-connect/>

**Taxis** are available from **Valleywide Taxi** (<https://www.valleywidetaxi.com/>, 0800-170 7575).

### Lunch (details last updated 22/04/2024)

**The Honeystreet Mill Café** Honeystreet Village, *Pewsey Vale, Wiltshire, SN9 5PS (01672 851 853, <http://www.honeystreetmillcafe.co.uk/>)*. The Mill Café is located 19.6 km (12.2 mi) into the full walk.

Open 09.00-17.00 every day.

**The Barge Inn** Honeystreet, *Pewsey, Wiltshire, SN9 5PS (01672 851 222,*

<https://thebargeinnhoneystreet.uk/>). The Barge Inn is located 19.8 km (12.3 mi) into the full walk.

Open all day every day. Food served 12.00-15.00 and 17.30-20.30 Mon-Sat and 12.00-16.00 Sun. It was first licensed in 1810 and benefits from a canal side location and a large garden area and was designated as Grade II listed in 1987. In 2010, following the closure of the pub, local volunteers successfully applied for funding to aid its reopening from the Village SOS lottery fund. In 2011 the project was the subject of episode 2 of Village SOS on BBC One. It was also an earlier filming location for a 1998 episode of Inspector Morse, an adaptation of *The Wench Is Dead*.

### Tea (details last updated 22/04/2024)

**The Golden Swan** Wilcot, *Pewsey, Wiltshire, SN9 5NN (01672 562 289,*

<http://www.thegoldenswan.co.uk/>). The Golden Swan is located 3.1 km from the end of the walk, 320m off-route. Open daily 12.00-14.00 and 18.00-22.30. Food served 12.00-13.45 and 18.15-20.45 daily.

**The Waterfront Bar & Bistro** Pewsey Wharf, *Pewsey, Wiltshire, SN9 5NU (01672 564 020)*. The Waterfront is located 800m from the end of the walk. Variable opening hours, check their facebook account.

**The Crown Inn** 60 Wilcot Road, *Pewsey, Wiltshire, SN9 5EL (01672 562 653,*

<https://www.thecrowninnpewsey.com/>). The Crown Inn is located 320m beyond the station at the end of the walk. It is a family-run freehouse with attached brewery: World's End Ales. Open at least to 22.00 Mon-Sat and to 18.00 Sun. Food usually served Fri-Sat 18.00-20.30 and Sun 12.00-13.30.

**The Royal Oak** 35 North Street, *Pewsey, Wiltshire, SN9 5ES (01672 563 426,*

<http://www.theroyaloakpewsey.co.uk/>). The Royal Oak is located 620m beyond the station at the end of the walk. Open 12.30-15.30 and 17.30-22.30 Tu-Thu, 12.30-22.30 Fri-Sat and 12.30-18.00 Sun. Food served 12.30-14.30.

**The Shed Alehouse** 20 North Street, *Pewsey, Wiltshire, SN9 5EX (07769 812 643,*

<http://theshedalehouse.com/>). The Shed is located 660m beyond the station at the end of the walk.

Open 17.00-21.00 Wed-Thu, 16.00-21.30 Fri, 14.00-21.30 Sat and 13.00-16.30 Sun.

**Pewsey Vale Community Craft & Tea Room** 1 Old Ford Court, High Street, *Pewsey, Wiltshire, SN9 5AQ (01672 563 823)*. The Craft & Tea Room is located 800m beyond the station at the end of the walk.

Open 10.00-16.30 Wed-Sat.

**The Little Lunch Box Café** 14 High Street, *Pewsey, Wiltshire, SN9 5AQ (01672 569 383)*. The Lunch Box Café is located 830m beyond the station at the end of the walk.

**The Moonrakers** 57 High Street, *Pewsey, Wiltshire, SN9 5AF (01672 562 585)*. Moonrakers is located 1.0 km beyond the station at the end of the walk. A sports pub without Real Ales.

## Notes:

### **Pewsey/Vale of Pewsey**

Pewsey Vale is an extent of lower lying ground separating the chalk downs of the Salisbury Plain to the south from the Marlborough Downs to the north. It is around 30 km long and around 5 km wide. At the western end is the town of Devizes. Although not itself part of the downs, the vale is included as part of the North Wessex Downs AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). The area is not believed to have been glaciated. Pewsey (Saxon: Pefisigge) has about 3,500 residents and boasts the 'Oldest Carnival in Wiltshire', held annually for two weeks in mid-September. Pewsey was once owned by the Saxon King, King Alfred. The crossroads of Pewsey is home to a prominent stone statue of the King, unveiled in June 1913 to commemorate the coronation of George V.

### **The (Hampshire) Avon River**

The Avon is 96 km (60 mi) long and begins as two separate rivers. The western Avon rises to the east of Devizes, draining the Vale of Pewsey, and the eastern Avon rises just east of Pewsey adjacent to the Kennet and Avon Canal. These two merge at Upavon, flowing southwards across Salisbury Plain through Durrington, Amesbury and Salisbury. To the south of Salisbury it enters the Hampshire Basin, flowing along the western edge of the New Forest before meeting up with the river Stour at Christchurch, to flow into Christchurch Harbour and the Channel at Mudeford.

All the significant direct and indirect tributaries of the Avon, including the Nadder, Wylye, Bourne and Ebble, converge within a short distance around Salisbury.

The Avon is thought to contain more species of fish than any other river in Britain.

### **White Horse Trail**

The WHT is a 146 km (90 mi) waymarked circular Long Distance Path. It provides views of eight white horses which are cut into the turf of the chalk hillsides of Wiltshire, as well as visiting many other historic and prehistoric locations.

### **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. It links the Bristol Channel to the Thames.

### **Mid Wiltshire Way**

The MWW is a 109 km (68 mi) waymarked linear Long Distance Path. It takes in some of Wiltshire's finest countryside and downland areas.

### **Tan Hill Way**

The THW is a 19 km (12 mi) waymarked linear path. It starts at Clench Common and meets the Wansdyke Path above the Pewsey Downs National Nature Reserve.

### **North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)/Marlborough Downs**

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 km<sup>2</sup> (670 sq mi). It takes the form of a horseshoe 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.

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.

### **Pewsey Downs National Nature Reserve**

A sweep of chalk downland located to the north of the Pewsey Vale. The reserve covers three hills and includes Alton Barnes white horse cut into a hillside.

### **The Wansdyke/The Wansdyke Path**

Wansdyke (from Woden's Dyke, Woden=a Saxon God) originally was a long deep ditch and bank, a linear defensive earthwork. The bank is up to 4m high with a ditch up to 2.5m deep. It runs from the Avon valley south of Bristol to Savernake Forest near Marlborough in Wiltshire and it is one of the largest linear earthworks in the UK. It measures 72 km (45 mi) with the middle being formed by the remains of the London to Bath Roman road. It was probably built in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. That is after the withdrawal of the Romans and before the complete takeover by the Anglo-Saxons. The ditch is on the north side, so presumably it was used by the Romano-British Celts as a defence against West Saxons encroaching from the upper Thames Valley westward into what is now the West Country.

The Wansdyke Path is a 21 km (13 mi) waymarked linear path. It follows the Wansdyke for a short stretch.

### **Silbury Hill**

Silbury Hill is a prehistoric artificial grass-covered chalk mound in the shape of a flat-topped cone near Avebury in Wiltshire. It is part of the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites UNESCO World Heritage Site and the biggest prehistoric artificial mound in Europe, similar in size to some of the smaller Egyptian pyramids of the Giza Necropolis. Access to the hill is not permitted. The height of Silbury is 40m, the diameter 160m at the base and 30m at the summit and the monument covers 2.2 hectares. Archaeologists calculate that Silbury Hill was built about 4,500 years ago and that it took 18 million man-hours, or 500 men working for 15 years to deposit and shape 248,000 m<sup>3</sup> of earth and (chalk) fill on top of a natural hill. Various tunnels and excavations over the years have failed to produce any solution as to the purpose of Silbury Hill and its context within the associated sites (West Kennet Long Barrow, the Avebury henge, The Sanctuary and Windmill Hill), from which the summit of Silbury Hill is visible, but they have revealed that the hill was built in three stages. The first phase, carbon-dated to 2400 BC ±100 years, consisted of a gravel core with a revetting kerb of stakes and sarsen boulders. Alternate layers of chalk rubble and earth were placed on top of this: the second phase involved heaping further chalk on top of the core, using material excavated from an encircling ditch. At some stage during this process, the ditch was backfilled and work was concentrated on increasing the size of the mound to its final height, using material from elsewhere. The step surrounding the summit dates from this phase of construction, either as a precaution against slippage, or as the remnants of a spiral path ascending from the base, used during construction to raise materials, and later as a processional route.

Remnants of a Roman village the size of 24 football pitches have been found at the foot of Silbury Hill.

### **Avebury, World Heritage Site**

Avebury is the largest, most impressive and complex prehistoric site in Britain, enclosing an area of 11 ½ hectares. The bank and ditch and the stone circles were constructed between 2600 and 2400 BC, during the Neolithic, or 'New Stone Age', which is around the same time as the first phase of Stonehenge. As originally constructed, Avebury Henge consisted of a large stone circle (the largest in Britain) of at least 98 stones (but now having only 27) inside a grass-covered, chalk-stone bank and ditch, having four entrances at the cardinal compass points, and with two smaller inner circles. The northern circle is 97m in diameter and originally had 27 stones of which only 4 remain; the southern circle is 104m across and once contained 29 stones, of which only 5 remain. Inside the Northern Inner Circle was the Cove, which may have been aligned on the moon's northernmost rising point. The Southern Inner Circle had a great Obelisk in the centre (now lost).

The ditch was originally 21m wide and 9-11m deep. The sarsen stones can exceed 40 tons weight.

There were also two ceremonial avenues: the West Kennet Avenue (made of 100 pairs of stones), entering on the south side; and the Beckhampton Avenue, entering the west causeway.

Experts think it would have taken as many as 1.5 million man-hours to construct the bank and ditch and place the sarsen stones. Phases of construction are not known, but the outer circle and the West Kennet Avenue may have been a later addition.

By the Iron Age, the site had been effectively abandoned, with some evidence of touristic activity on the site during the Roman occupation. By about 600 AD, in the early Saxon period, a settlement had been built inside and just outside the henge. The site was probably seen as a convenient, semi-fortified site for a settlement. In 1114 AD, a small Benedictine priory and church was built on the site. Many of the 'pagan' stones were toppled and buried for this. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century the villagers began breaking apart the standing stones and using them for walls, houses and churches, possibly spurred on by a resurgent religious puritanism. Only the marmalade heir Alexander Keiller, in the 1930s, while excavating the site, extensively restored it by putting buried and fallen stones back into their original upright positions.

The Avebury Henge is part of a much larger prehistoric sacred complex, which includes Silbury Hill (the largest man-made mound in Europe), the West Kennet Long Barrow (one of the largest Neolithic burial chambers) and the Sanctuary (a former stone circle).

Avebury Henge and Stone Circles are in the freehold ownership of The National Trust and in English Heritage guardianship.

## WALK DIRECTIONS

Alight from the train in **Pewsey Station** on platform 1 and exit into the car park. *Turn left* along the station drive and in 65m *fork right* with the drive, ignoring a path descending steeply. In 40m continue in the same direction along a road and in 50m *turn left* across the road to continue along **Buckleaze Lane**. In 90m walk under railway arches and in 20m *turn right* with the lane, where a footpath joins from the left out of trees. In 50m ignore a drive turning left and continue in the same direction to the right of the garden fence of **Buckleaze Mill**. In 80m *turn right* with the path to cross the (Eastern) **Avon River**, close to its source and just after its confluence with **Ford Brook**. In 160m emerge in a meadow and *fork left* along its left-hand boundary with a hedge on the left (this path can be overgrown in summer, in which case continue in the same direction along the railway bank and *turn left* at the end of the meadow).

In 170m continue in the same direction along a tarmac lane in **Knowle** hamlet and in 90m *turn left* down a holloway with a Bridleway (Quiet Lane) signpost and a **White Horse Trail** (WHT) marker, where the lane turns right. In 180m you cross **The Avon River** on a brick bridge and in 220m cross the arched **Pains Bridge** (on the OS map) over the **Kennet & Avon Canal**, now with first views of a whaleback shaped ridge (**Oare Hill**) on the half right. Continue along a car wide farm track, in 300m ignoring a tarmac drive joining on the left from **Inlands Farm**. In another 85m you [!] *turn left* over a stile in a hedge gap with a **White Horse Trail** marker and *bear right* across a field towards a stile in a fence to the right of a tree 65m away (330°).

Continue on a usually well-cleared path through an arable field (340°) with views of **Huish Hill** towards a hedge gap to the right of two large oak trees (with a single crown) and in 480m continue in the same direction through the next field to the right of a solitary tree. In 140m leave the field through a gap to the right of a stile, cross a lane and continue in the same direction through a metal kissing gate left of a metal field gate and along a left-hand field boundary. You have good views on this stretch of the **Strip Lynchets** (ancient agricultural terracing) on **Oare Hill**. In 450m ignore an unmarked footpath turning left over a stile and in 50m *bear right* with the field boundary. In 40m leave the field through a metal kissing gate to the left of a double metal field gate onto a farm track, with a metal gate leading into a pasture opposite.

### Here you have a choice:

**For a shortcut**, *turn left* along the car wide track and pick up the directions at the end of the text under **Shortcut I**.

**For the Main Walk**, continue in the same direction through the metal gate with a **Mid Wiltshire Way** (MWW) marker and follow a clear path across a field corner to a hedge corner 130m away (30°) and then walk along the field boundary hedge but in 15m [!] *turn right* through a metal gate with **WHT and MWW** markers into a neighbouring pasture to follow its left-hand boundary fence uphill, soon curving right. In 330m – at the corner of a wood on the left – continue uphill with the fence on the left all the way to the top, which harbours **Giant's Grave**, a **Long Barrow**. In 130m walk past a trig point on your left (250m above sea) and follow a clear path along the ridge, with magnificent views on the right across the **Vale of Pewsey** and to the **Salisbury Plain** beyond.

[On the following stretch you might see a gigantic art work in the fields below on the left in the grounds of **Rainscombe House** (foliage permitting): the sandstone **Millennium Arch by Andy Goldsworthy**, commissioned by the owner of the estate: Robert Hiscox of Hiscox Insurance Company. There are guaranteed views of it later on as well. ]

In 130m you go through an ancient earth works and in 150m over a stile to the left of a metal field gate and in 90m through a line of trees. In 100m ignore a path forking right, and go through a metal kissing gate to the left of a metal field gate into a large arable field to follow its right-hand grassy edge for 650m to its far-right corner and go over a stile with a MWW marker and continue in the same direction along a narrow grassy path with a barbed wire fence on the right. In 50m *veer up left* with the path through some growth and follow the path (in 50m briefly entering trees) for 230m to a bench on the right. In 20m walk through a metal gate and *turn left* with the rim of **Martinsell Hill's Iron Age hillfort** along its bank and ditch system and along the fringe of a wood on the left, now with far views east towards **Savernake Forest** and **Great Bedwyn** in the valley below (SWC 399 Bedwyn Circular via Savernake Forest and Marlborough. In 380m *turn left* as you reach a small wood (ignoring a continuation of the path turning down right) and in 110m an unmarked footpath (the **Tan Hill Way**) joins from the right along a wide grassy path.

In 30m walk through a metal gate, in 120m cross a track and in 90m you continue in the same direction through **Withy Copse** (bluebells, celandines and stitchwort in season) at a four-way junction (three bridleways and one footpath, your direction signposted **Oare Hill**). In 350m you continue in the same direction at a cross paths and in 210m you emerge from the wood onto a car wide track and *turn right* along it. In 90m the trees on the left veer away from the track and you get far views of the onwards route, from **Oare Hill** to **Huish Hill** and beyond, as well as on the right into the **Marlborough Downs** and on the left into the valley bottom, including to the **Millennium Arch by Andy Goldsworthy**. In another 400m *turn right* with the track (now on tarmac) past some barns, in 75m cross the **A345** (Salisbury to Marlborough) and continue up left on the other side along a gravel track, initially parallel with the road. In 800m ignore a signposted footpath turning right through some growth into an arable field, just by **Huish Down Farm**. Follow the track left and in 40m *turn right* with it, where a footpath joins along a narrow grassy path (this is Shortcut I).

\*) In 60m *turn left* with the track (ignoring a lane continuing in the same direction) and in another 40m *veer right* along a wide grassy path between hedges, where the track veers left into the car park of **Huish Hill House**. In 35m ignore a footpath turning left through a metal gate and in 150m walk through a metal gate into an open area on top of the Downs, with far views on the left south across the **Vale of Pewsey** and on the right north across the **Marlborough Downs**. In 260m you walk through a metal gate between two metal field gates with a **WHT** marker (ignoring an unmarked footpath forking left through the left-hand field gate) and continue in the same direction with a fence on the left. In 150m ignore an unmarked footpath turning left through a metal gate and in 400m *curve right* in the far-left corner of the pasture.

In 110m walk through a metal gate to the left of double metal field gate and **[!]** *turn left* through a metal gate to the right of a metal field gate at a three-way junction of paths to follow a clear grassy path downhill with scattered trees on the left of the path (250°). In 375m go through a metal gate to the right of a metal field gate and in 25m you reach a T-junction of paths. Continue in the same direction across a track and through a wooden gate to the right of a wooden field gate with a **MWW** marker (bluebells in the wood away to the left) and *veer a little to the right* along a well-trampled grassy path to the right of a clump of oak trees (due W), which you pass in 75m and then *veer slightly to the left* towards a metal field gate at the rim of this rise (240°, **Draycott Hill**). In 210m go over a stepless stile or through the metal field gate and *veer left* towards the corner of **Gopher Wood** (carpets of bluebells in season).

There go through a squeeze stile to the left of a metal field gate and *veer left* away from the wood to a difficult-to-spot wooden signpost right in front of the furthest left of a few trees 180m away (200°). At the signpost *turn right* along the top of the ridge, ignoring

a footpath through a metal field gate down the hillside. In 400m in the left field corner go through another squeeze stile to the right of a metal field gate and to the left of an underground reservoir (ignore the wooden gate to the right of the reservoir). You continue in the same direction with a fence on your right. In 130m *veer right* with the fence and in 400m go over a stile to the right of a metal field gate (note the notice from the **TVHGC – Thames Valley Hang Gliding Club** on the left of the metal gate: these Downs are a favourite place for hang gliders and the like).

You are entering **Pewsey Downs National Nature Reserve** and have splendid views of **Woodborough Hill** and **Picked Hill**, down in the valley below, walked along much later in the walk. In 420m the wide grassy path starts its slow descent from the ridge of **Golden Ball Hill** and curves left a little, with **Knap Hill** (and its remnants of a Neolithic settlement) a little to the left and **Walkers Hill** and **Milk Hill** to the right of it. In 200m go through a squeeze stile to the right of a metal field gate by an info panel and continue in the same direction, ignoring a left forking path to the top of Knap Hill (unless you have spare energy to burn: this is **Access Land**). Continue to the right of the hill's base. In 560m walk through a metal gate to the left of a metal field gate (leaving **Pewsey Downs National Nature Reserve**) and *turn right* along a fenced-in wide grassy path at a T-junction. In 110m this continues through a small gravel car park. In 60m you cross a road and walk through a metal gate to the left of a metal field gate into a large pasture by a three-way signpost.

### **Here you have a choice:**

**For a shortcut** *turn left* through a metal kissing gate along a Permissive Path through a grassy field and pick up the directions at the end of the text under **Shortcut II**.

**For the main walk** continue in the same direction along a bridleway following the left-hand barbed wire fenced boundary, ignoring a Byway turning half-right across the field, as well as a Permissive Path turning left through a metal kissing gate. In 500m – in the far-left corner of the field – walk through a metal gate to the left of a metal field gate and continue in the same direction through another grassy field. Curve left with the fence, admire the curving valley below on the left, ignore a wooden gate on the left just before the far field corner and in 440m continue through a metal gate to the right of a metal field gate. Continue uphill along a farm track and in 200m reach a gap in an earth bank crossing the track. This bank belongs to **The Wansdyke**, a 72 km long defensive dyke built in the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> Century by the Romano-British Celts against the Saxons.

Walk through the gap to admire the gargantuan work that was needed to erect the bank and ditch. Go through the gap and *turn left* with **The Wansdyke Path**, either on top of the dyke or to the right of the ditch. From here (on a good day) you can also see – 4 km away, on a bearing of 350° – **Silbury Hill**, Europe's largest man-made mound of unknown usage, as well as beyond it to the right and to the left of **Waden Hill: Avebury, World Heritage Site**, somewhat hidden by trees. At various places you can admire the views along the westerly continuation of **The Wansdyke** into the distance. In 450m, where a fence line runs down to the right, you *turn left* over a stile on the top of The Wansdyke and cross a farm track and walk through a wooden gate opposite into a grassy hill top, also part of the **Pewsey Downs National Nature Reserve**.

Follow its left-hand boundary fence and in 170m walk through a wooden gate to the left of a metal field gate and *turn left* along the rim of an arrestingly beautiful steep serrated Down (often frequented by hang gliders and similar folk) towards **Milk Hill**. In 460m you walk through a wooden gate to the left of a wooden field gate and *veer right* along the rim towards the right-hand corner of the clump of trees on the hilltop. Past the clump cross a **Cross Dyke** and *curve left* around the hilltop's scattered trees and bushes. In 170m on the other side of the top continue on a bearing of 80° along a clear

path along the side of the hill. In 580m – having walked through a metal gate along the way – you pass a corner of the fence around the chalk **Alton Barnes White Horse** cut in 1812 and at 49 x 55m the third largest of the eight white horses in Wiltshire).

The path curves right and in 250m from the White Horse, as you walk through some bramble and gorse bushes, is a good spot to look back at the hill figure (and the stunning Downs scenery in general). 20m beyond the bushes *turn left* to follow the path along **Walkers Hill**, in 180m *forking right* along a path leading up towards a knoll, harbouring **Adam's Grave**, another **Long Barrow**, in 75m cross another **Cross Dyke** and immediately afterwards **[!]** *fork right* (due S) along the flank of the hill, ignoring the path further up the knoll (unless you have spare energy, of course: this is **Open Access** land), eventually to the left of a large solitary bush.

**\*\*)** In 150m – just over a little brow – you get views of **Alton Priors** and **Alton Barnes** hamlets in the **Vale of Pewsey** below, as well as **Woodborough Hill** and **Picked Hill**, which you'll walk close by later on. The path *curves right* around the rim of a horseshoe shaped valley on the right during its descent from the hill (in 190m a path joins on the left from the hilltop) and always stays to the right of the top of the descending ridge (220°). In 300m walk through a wooden kissing gate to the right of a wooden field gate by a two-way footpath signpost (leaving the **Nature Reserve**) and – after noticing the info panel on the right about the 8 Wiltshire White Horses – continue in the same direction along an often-overgrown sunken path between trees (the obvious looking alternative on the right along a field boundary does not help/should be avoided). In 80m emerge onto a road at a bend. *Turn left*:

- **either** (the right-of-way) along the road;
- **or** (safer) along a wide grassy field boundary after climbing up a steep bank on the other side (there are some steps).

In 250m *turn right* away from the road or the field boundary with a WHT signpost, to continue along a narrow path between trees (i.e.: not along the field boundary). The path becomes a sunken path and in 530m you continue along a tarmac drive. In 90m cross a road a little to the left and walk to the left of a thatched shed into **Alton Priors** village. The road curves to the right and in 240m you go through a wooden turnstile into a pasture by a two-footpath signpost. Take the right of the two footpaths and in 20m continue to the right of a fenced churchyard with a White Horse Trail marker. In 20m *turn left* over a squeeze stile into the churchyard and *turn right* to the entrance of the redundant, Grade II-listed **All Saints, Alton Priors' Saxon Church**. There is a remarkable **1,700-year-old Yew Tree** in the churchyard. From the church leave the churchyard through a wooden gate and *turn right* along a rare paved path through the pasture, with good views of the White Horse ahead. In 25m *turn left* at a paved path T-junction and 35m go through a set of wooden turnstiles either side of a set of two-railed plank bridges across streams into an adjacent pasture.

You have crossed into **Alton Barnes** village and continue along the paved path. In 125m *turn left* at a paved path junction and in 130m leave the field through a wooden kissing gate by **St. Mary the Virgin, Saxon Church**, also worth visiting. From the church *turn right* along a lane and in 75m pass another wooden turnstile on your right. In 160m *turn left* at a T-junction with a main road. Ignore the **WHT** turning off to the right and continue along the road (the walkable pavement/grassy margin ends in 150m) to the hamlet of **Honestreet**. You'll find **The Honestreet Mill Café** 100m off to the right just before the crossing of **The Kennet & Avon Canal** on an arched bridge and – on the far side of the bridge – *turn down right* to the towpath. The onwards route continues to the right along the canal, but you find **The Barge Inn** on the left along the towpath, 350m away.

*Turn right* to follow the towpath in an easterly direction (i.e.: with the water on your left) **for 6.4 km**. This stretch of the canal is one of the most beautiful and 'wild' ones and is part of what is called **The Long Pound**, the lock-free 15 miles of the canal between Pewsey and Devizes. **In more detail:** In 150m or so you get fine views back on the left of the **Alton Barnes White Horse** on **Walkers Hill**, walked along not too long ago. After that, **Woodborough Hill** dominates the views on the left for quite a while, with the **Knap Hill-to-Oare Hill Downs Chain** behind it. In 400m you walk under **bridge #123**. In 940m you walk up **to bridge #122**, cross it and either follow an unmarked footpath up to the top of Woodborough Hill ahead of you (this adds 1.6 km out-and-back), or *turn right* to continue along the towpath on the left hand side of the canal, now with **Picked Hill** ahead of you half left.

In 1.5 km (just after passing **Chasing Ducks Moorings** on the opposite side) you walk under **bridge #120** (Ladies Bridge). In 760m you walk under **bridge #119** and in 600m you reach **bridge #117** in the village of **Wilcot**. Here a 320m walk along the road to the right – all the way to the end of the village green – gets you to the recommended early tea stop **The Golden Swan**. [From there you could follow the road all the way to Pewsey, saving you about 800m of walking.] In 460m you walk under **Stowell Park Suspension Bridge** (bluebells in season in the woods on the left on this stretch), in 330m the canal and path curve right and in 190m **[!]** you leave the towpath, *turn right* over the red brick bridge #115 and *turn left* over a stile on the other side to continue along the towpath with the canal now on your left. In 820m go under the next bridge (#114) under the **A345** and *turn right* through a car park either to the entrance of **The Waterfront Bar & Bistro** or to the car park exit onto the road.

*Turn left* along the road, away from the canal, In 520m cross the **Ford Brook** on the road and in 30m *veer left* with the road at a mini-roundabout. In 120m *turn right* along a lane to **Pewsey Station** in 60m. London bound trains depart from the near platform.

For other **recommended tea options** cross the tracks over the footbridge, leave the station into the car park, *turn right* through it and in 30m *turn left* along a narrow tarmac path (signposted **King Alfred Trail**) to in 110m emerge on **Wilcot Road** at a T-junction.

- *Turn right* and in 70m reach the **Crown Inn**;
- *Turn left* for all other options *into the centre of Pewsey*: in 225m *turn right* along **Marlborough Road**, in 100m *turn right* at a roundabout along **North Street** (signposted **Amesbury**), in 40m pass **The Royal Oak** on the right, in another 40m you have **The Shed Alehouse** on the left, in 20m pass a bus stop on the right (Pewsey Methodist Church), in 100m *turn left* at a three-way junction with **High Street** (and with a **Statue of King Alfred** in the centre of the junction, now briefly with **The Avon River** on the right, in 35m you have **Pewsey Vale Community Craft & Tea Room** on the right, in 20m walk past **The Little Lunch Box Café** on the right and in 200m reach **The Moonrakers** on the left.

## Shortcut I

(cut 3.5 km and 73m of ascent/descent but add 485m to the tarmac count)

**Cut out a steep ascent up to the Neolithic Giant's Grave and subsequent far views from the curving ridge to the South and East**

In 180m the track continues as a tarmac lane (Pound Lane). In 250m *turn right* on the opposite pavement at a T-junction with **Oare Hill**, the main road through **Oare**, pass a **bus stop** (X5 from Salisbury and Pewsey, onwards to Swindon) and **The White Hart** (long closed), and in 140m *turn left* up a road. The road turns right, then left around a school and 80m after that – at the end of a row of cottages on the right – you *turn right* along a car wide gravel lane with a footpath signpost and a **Mid Wiltshire Way** (MWW) marker on it. In 30m emerge into a field corner and continue in the same direction up its right-hand boundary towards **Huish Hill**, the south-facing escarpment of the **Marlborough Downs**, part of the **North Wessex Downs AONB**.

In 350m leave the field through a metal gate and start the steep ascent up the hill, along a stepped path through the grass. On the way you pass a bench ideally located for a short break, at a point where ancient earthworks turn left along the slope (as does the MWW) while enjoying the stunning views south across the **Vale of Pewsey**. From here you can just about spot the outlines of **Huish Heart** a couple of fields to the right at the bottom of Huish Hill: trees planted so that (from above) they form the outline of a heart (and with flowers planted inside it). At the top of the rise walk through a wooden gate and continue in the same direction along a grassy path between a hedge and a fence. In 110m *turn left* along a gravel lane at a bend (you are now following the **Tan Hill Way**).

Re-join the main walk directions at the asterisk \*).

## Shortcut II

(cut 3.4 km and 67m of ascent/descent)

**Cut an ascent up to the Wansdyke (a well-kept defensive dyke built by the Romano-British Celts against the Saxons), views of Silbury Hill (Europe's largest man-made mound) and Milk Hill (Wiltshire's highest hill) and a truly stunning Down**

Continue through the pasture on a bearing of 230° and in 140m walk through a metal kissing gate to continue in the same direction up the slope of **Walkers Hill**. In 170m walk through another metal kissing gate and in 150m cross a (faint) **Cross Dyke** in a saddle. Ignore paths leading up left to the top of a knoll containing **Adam's Grave**, a Neolithic Long Barrow and *bear left* towards a large solitary bush 150m away. At the bush you pick up a clear chalky path along the flank of the hill.

This is the Main Walk.

Re-join the main walk directions at the double asterisk \*\*).