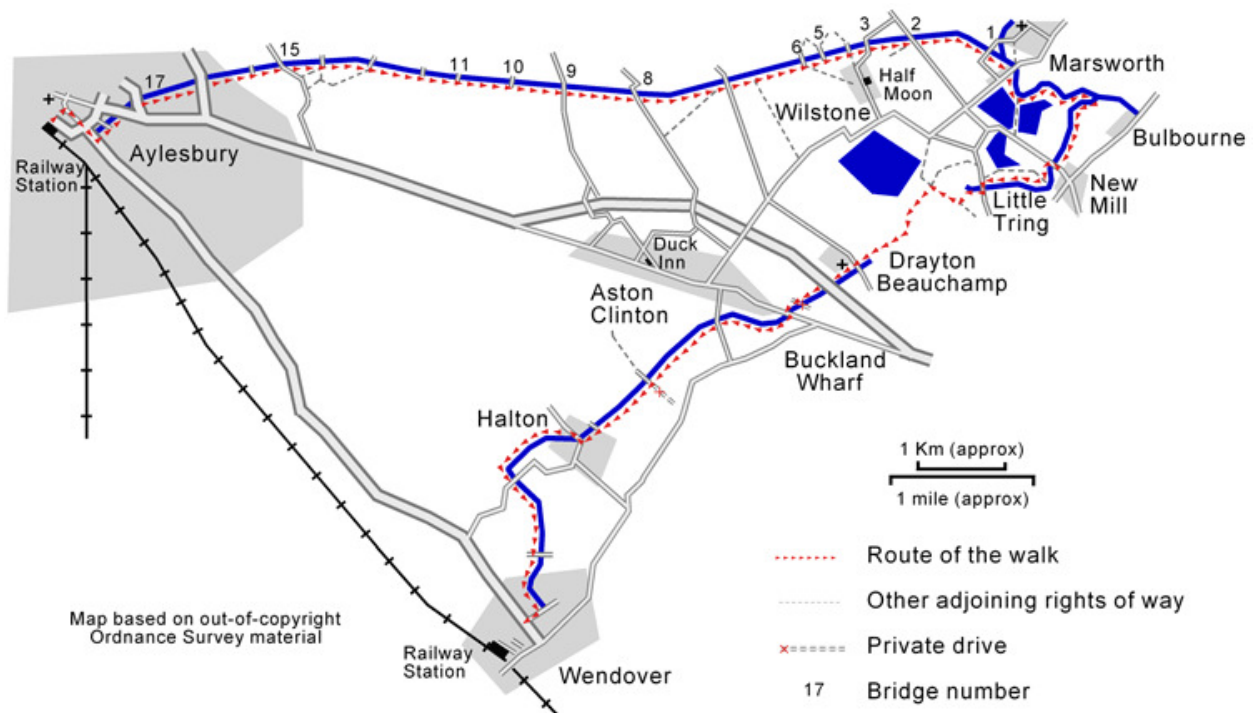


AYLESBURY TO MARSWORTH, BUCKLAND WHARF AND WENDOVER

A canal-side walk, following the Aylesbury Arm of the Grand Union Canal through pleasant open countryside, then a short stretch of the main canal near its summit, finally along the Wendover Arm, now being restored. This is longer than most of our walks, but the walking is easier, as it's mostly on level canal towpaths, and the walk can be shortened, ending (or starting) either at Marsworth or at Buckland Wharf. Another option is to return from Marsworth to Aylesbury; you will be going in the opposite direction to that described below, but you simply follow the canal! Walkers not wishing to do the whole walk will probably find the latter part of it more varied.

Checked 2009



Distances

Aylesbury to Marsworth	6.5 miles (10.5 km)
Marsworth to Buckland Wharf	4 miles (6 km)
Buckland Wharf to Wendover	3.5 miles (5.5 km)
Aylesbury to Wendover	14 miles (22 km)

Travel

Aylesbury is easily accessible by Chiltern Line trains from Marylebone via Amersham or High Wycombe, and has regular bus services from Oxford, High Wycombe, Milton Keynes, Luton, Watford, Tring, Hemel Hempstead and Leighton Buzzard.

Wendover is also on the Chiltern Line between Amersham and Aylesbury, with a good bus service to Aylesbury.

The 61/161 bus connects Marsworth and Buckland Wharf (near Aston Clinton) with Aylesbury, Tring, Dunstable and Luton (but on Sundays only four buses, and no service for Dunstable and Tring) and the 500/501 serves Buckland Wharf, Aylesbury, Tring, and Watford.

Detailed travel information for the whole of this area is available from the Traseline South East website www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk or telephone 0871 200 22 33

Ordnance Survey Map

The whole of this walk is on the Ordnance Survey Explorer map 181, *Chiltern Hills North*.

Refreshments

Aylesbury has a full range of shops (including Tesco by the canal), pubs, restaurants and cafes. The Half Moon at Wilstone is 300 yards from the canal. The shop nearby is now open once again, all day during the week, Saturday 8 – 2, Sunday 8 – 12.

At Marsworth, the White Lion pub and Bluebells tearoom are beside the canal, and the Angler's Retreat quite close.

The PH shown on older maps at Buckland Wharf is no longer a pub and the one 400 yards from our route at Aston Clinton is now a Thai restaurant, but the Duck Inn is 500 yards further along the road, and there is a shop a little closer.

Wendover has several pubs and restaurants and a tea-room.

Please always be considerate about muddy boots in pubs etc; either take them off, or cover them up. Never eat or drink your own provisions on pub premises (including the garden, if there is one).

Route

From Aylesbury station go uphill towards Friars Square, with the bus station on the right.

If you intend to do the whole walk, you won't have much time to explore Aylesbury. However, it would be a shame if all you ever saw of the County Town were the railway and bus stations. Beyond the bus station is the Market Square (*antiques market on Tuesday, general market on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday*).

At the top of the Market Square is the National Trust owned King's Head Centre (*refreshments available*). It dates from before 1450, and was originally a monastery guest house.

Beyond that is the unspoilt Conservation Area leading to, and surrounding, St Mary's Square and the large and handsome parish church.

In Church Street is the splendid County Museum, recently refurbished, with displays on the history, environment, crafts and industries of Buckinghamshire, plus the Roald Dahl Children's Gallery and the Buckinghamshire Art Gallery. *Open Monday to Saturday 10 to 5, Sunday and bank holidays 2 to 5.*

Immediately after the bus station, turn right to walk down the left hand side of Walton Street to the roundabout at the bottom.

Cross by the zebra crossing on your left and continue in the same direction 100 yards along Walton Street – now a dual carriageway – to the entrance to the canal wharf on the left.

Turn left and follow the towpath to the right of the canal basin. Suddenly, you will find yourself in a different world. From here on walking instructions are largely superfluous for the next six miles (10 km), as it's simply a question of following towpath all the way to Marsworth!

A branch canal to Aylesbury was first mooted in 1794, although the scheme was not finally agreed until 1811. It opened in 1814 and was initially very busy, with substantial trade in both directions. However, fierce competition arrived with the Cheddington to Aylesbury branch railway in 1839. More sustained railway competition had arrived by the turn of the century with the coming of the Great Central and Metropolitan Railways. The canal's decline was thus speeded up, and by the Second World War trade on the arm had become spasmodic. Commercial traffic lasted until the 1950's, but the last regular delivery of coal to Aylesbury was in 1964. Since then, however, the canal's fortunes have been revived and sustained (after much effort by the Aylesbury Canal Society and other amenity bodies) by pleasure boating and other recreational interests. British Waterways, working with local authorities and countryside bodies has carried out many improvements to the waterway and its infrastructure, ensuring its continuing attraction as a pleasant and inviting route, not least as a green "back door" into Aylesbury. There are 16 locks, falling some 95 feet to Aylesbury, and 19 bridges.

You shortly come to a footbridge, behind which is an information board (often unfortunately vandalised) giving details of the birds that can be seen near here, especially in winter.

The new housing alongside the canal just before the second road bridge (no. 17, built 1906) at Park Street replaces the original 1870 factory buildings of the Aylesbury Condensed Milk Company, later part of Nestle.

The lock immediately beyond the bridge is no. 16 "Hills and Partridge", a name which refers to the proprietors of the now forlorn Walton water mill (probably 19th century, but on the site of an earlier mill), seen on the opposite bank ahead.

Further along, and bordering the canal on the right for some distance, used to be the works of BPC Hazells, one of the country's foremost printers and binders, who opened their factory here in 1867. The works closed in 1997 and are being replaced by housing, resulting in a dramatic change to the landscape here!

You shortly pass under the Aylesbury ring road, and then the first of a long series of attractive brick arch structures that emphasise the narrowness of this canal.

Lock no 14 "Broughton", adjacent to bridge number 15, denotes the hamlet of the same name. In more open and pastoral countryside than we have seen so far, this is a popular spot with its canal-side car park (with information board). From here on attractive views of the Chiltern Hills open up ahead and to the right.

One and a half miles (2.5 km) further on, just before bridge no. 9 there is a small wharf on the opposite side, and a small iron marker denoting 3 miles from Marsworth Junction. The bridge is followed by lock no. 13 "Red House".

The Red House was once a pub but closed many years ago. This is an attractive spot suitable for rest and refreshment, as it once was for Aylesbury folk who reached here on their Sunday walks out of town.

In another mile (nearly 2 km), a boat restoration yard (usually with one or two interesting vessels under repair) is seen on the opposite bank just before bridge no. 7, which is followed by lock no. 11 "Puttenham Bottom", where there is a nicely restored lock cottage.

At the lock 300 yards beyond bridge 7 you leave Buckinghamshire and enter Dacorum borough (you also briefly crossed into Dacorum between bridges 8 and 7).

Nearly a mile (1.2 km) further on, 100 yards before bridge no. 4 just to the right of the towpath, is another marker, denoting 1 mile from Marsworth Junction.

The bridge has been restored, and is unique in the series for being of wooden construction and solely a footbridge.

(For the picnic site or the Half Moon pub or the shop at Wilstone, turn right here.)

On your route beyond bridge no. 2, the view opens out over flat country to your left to Wingrave church on a hill a little behind you, and to your right, where you can see over the hedge, to the highest point in the Chilterns in Wendover Woods, with lower hills behind Tring further ahead.

In three quarters of a mile (1.3 km) we go under bridge no. 1, then pass locks nos. 1 and 2 ("Marsworth Top Locks"), finally to reach the junction with the main Grand Union Canal, with British Waterways workshops to the left.

Continue along the towpath of the main canal (signposted "Braunston 54 miles" and "Brentford 39 miles"). There are always plenty of boats and visitors here.

The Grand Junction Canal, as it was originally called, was built at the end of the 18th century to provide a short cut between Braunston, near Rugby, and Brentford on the River Thames west of London.

Built to a new, wide standard, it very quickly became a busy and profitable trunk route, linking London with the industrial Midlands. Attempts to persuade other companies to widen their locks and establish a similar standard capable of carrying barges of 70 tons capacity were not, however, successful. The Grand Union Canal Company was the result of an amalgamation in 1929 of a number of companies.

Passing the seating area of the White Lion pub, you reach the road bridge carrying the B489.

The canal just below the bridge is often seething with enormous carp.

Cross the road carefully (traffic is controlled here by lights). There is an information point in the car park on the right, with a recorded commentary.

Bus stops are to the right; the one for Aylesbury is on the side opposite the pubs.

To return to Aylesbury on foot, go back down to the canal and past the seating area of the White Lion.

Walkers starting from Marsworth should get off the bus at Watery Lane, walk up to the canal bridge and turn right for Buckland Wharf and Wendover, or left for Aylesbury.

To continue to Buckland Wharf and Wendover, go along the towpath, alongside the lock and passing the restored lock cottage, now Bluebells tea room. Stay with the canal as it bends left, passing the raised banks of Startops End and then Marsworth reservoirs on your right.

The reservoirs are interesting and attractive, with abundant wildfowl and other water birds. There are a number of information boards showing walks around the reservoirs.

We now pass six sets of locks in quick succession, finally to reach lock no. 45, Marsworth Top Lock, at Bulbourne.

We are now, at 430 feet, at the summit level of the Grand Union Canal. The Wendover Arm joins the main canal on the right, completing its 6½ mile (11 km) journey from Wendover.

The building opposite is a dry dock (the entrance is at the far end).

Here join the Wendover Arm. Cross over the junction footbridge and double back underneath it to pick up the towpath, noting the map board on the bridge wall at the junction.

The principal purpose of the Wendover Arm was to act as a feeder to supply water to the summit of the main canal. The main source of that water was to be the diverted flow from the Well Head at Wendover. Shortly after construction began in 1793, it was realised that, at very little extra cost, the waterway could be built to carry boats, linking Wendover and the Vale of Aylesbury with principal markets throughout the country. However, the canal was built on porous chalk, which had to be puddled to prevent leakage. These measures were singularly unsuccessful, and leaks were the main cause of the canal's failure and ultimate closure. Attempts were made to stop the leaks, including drainage and partial relining in 1803 and 1856, but they failed to deal with the problem. Throughout the 19th century it continued to leak, causing great difficulties for traders and financial strains for the canal company. By 1894 it was actually taking water from the main canal, and by the turn of the century water losses were colossal. The canal struggled on for a few more years but inevitably abandonment came, in 1904.

A stop lock was built at Tringford to prevent further drainage losses, and it was only this top section, from Tringford to the junction at Bulbourne, that remained in water and navigable. Work is currently under way to restore the rest of the canal to navigation. However, it retains a great deal of charm and interest, and improvements to the towpath in recent years have ensured its popularity with walkers and nature lovers.

In a little more than half a mile (1 km), at the brick arch bridge at New Mill ("Tring Wharf" on the Ordnance Survey map), leave the towpath by crossing a stile, and go up onto the narrow bridge. (There are bus stops 300 yards to the left.)

Cross the bridge (where traffic vies for the right of way!) very carefully to rejoin the towpath, now on the other side.

The bank side here is dominated by the buildings of Heygates Mill. Beyond the mill area, the Tring feeder enters on that bank. This stretch plays host annually to a colourful boating festival, which raises funds for the Wendover Arm Trust.

In a few hundred yards you arrive at Tringford Pumping Station.

Until the recent restoration, a stop lock here marked the abrupt end of navigation. The pumping station was built to pump water up from the neighbouring reservoirs to feed the summit level of the main canal via the arm. Once powered by powerful beam engines, it now houses electric motors, which do the same job.

Continue ahead alongside the canal to a road bridge (Little Tring).

It is expected that when the restoration of the next three quarters of a mile (1.2 km) of the canal is complete it will be possible to continue on the towpath on the right-hand side of the canal but at present it is blocked. An alternative briefly away from the canal offers some variety (though one gateway can get very muddy).

Go up the steps to the road bridge, cross and follow the footpath to the left of the canal, until just before the restored canal forms a large basin.

This is a “winding hole” for turning boats, apparently pronounced as in “north wind”, not rhyming with “finding”.

Here turn left and follow the footpath along the fence, to a kissing gate.

Turn right after the kissing gate, to go immediately through another similar gate and along the right-hand side of two fields over a low ridge.

There are fine views over Wilstone Reservoir ahead, towards Whitchurch and Quanton, with a glimpse of Mentmore to the right as you go down the hill. The reservoir, built to supply water to the Grand Union Canal, is now also a nature reserve, very popular with bird watchers.

Continue down to a kissing gate on to the course of the canal (where a new footbridge has been installed).

Cross to the other side of the canal, and turn left.

Continue alongside the course of the canal for a further mile (1.6 km), to where the canal is in water again (and you re-enter Buckinghamshire) just before the cement-rendered brick arch bridge at the pretty hamlet of Drayton Beauchamp.

Go under the bridge and continue ahead.

200 yards past the bridge a waymarked footpath leaves the towpath on the right, going up steps to afford a visit to the 15th century church, which has a number of interesting features. The monument to Lord Newhaven and his widow has been called “the best church monument in England”; there are some fine 14th century brasses in the chancel, and a wonderful east window depicting ten of the twelve apostles.

A note in the porch indicates where the key may be obtained.

Soon after the church is passed, the canal has been diverted to a bridge under the new A41 Aston Clinton bypass. You can see its old course to your right (best the other side of the bridge). Continue another half a mile (0.8 km) to the former A41 at Buckland Wharf (ignore a tarmac drive bridge just before the main road). (Bus stops are to the right; the one on the opposite side is for Aylesbury.)

Cross the road (which was extremely busy until the opening of the bypass) with care and rejoin the towpath, now on the opposite bank.

From here right through to Wendover, the towpath was surfaced a few years ago as part of a major refurbishment scheme, including information boards and promotional signs, featuring a kingfisher, quite a common sight along this stretch. The high wooded Chiltern escarpment is now quite close to the left, but the canal, as expected, keeps to the level by contouring around it.

In half a mile (0.8 km), you come to Wellonhead Bridge. (For the Duck Inn, go up on to the bridge and turn right, then left at the T-junction; otherwise go under the bridge.)

Green Park, formerly the site of a Rothschild property (Aston Clinton Manor, since demolished), but now a flourishing Bucks County Council conference and adult education centre, is to the right, immediately beyond the bridge.

On a now more wooded path, we arrive shortly at a wharf of blue brick on the opposite bank (now often submerged), probably built to enable deliveries to be made to Aston Clinton Manor.

To the left of the towpath here is an area of excavations known as Cobblers Pits, through which ran an old road, truncated by the building of the canal. An information board tells you more about this.

In another half mile (0.8 km) we go under Harelane Bridge, before passing a seating area, and continue past RAF Halton's sports ground on your left and their airfield buildings on your right.

Nearby, but out of sight and not open to the public, Halton House is a spectacular mansion built in the style of a French Chateau for Baron Alfred de Rothschild in 1884. It now serves as the officers' mess for RAF Halton.

Continue along the canal passing under a bridge of splendid ironwork, complete with the Rothschild monogram (picked out in gold paint), to the flattened road bridge at Halton village. (Buses from the nearby shelter are infrequent; the main bus stops at Halton Camp are not much closer than Wendover.)

It is worth a short detour along the road to the right to view the charming pictorial decorations in the plasterwork of two houses, opposite and next to the village hall. Note also the Rothschild motto "Concordia. Industria. Integritas" inset into the wall of the house on the left.

Carefully cross the road and continue 1.5 miles (2.5km) on the towpath on the opposite bank, going under another pleasant ironwork bridge and passing "The Wides", a low-lying wetland area with a

variety of interesting wildlife and another winding hole, where there is another informative noticeboard.

Where a branch railway which served Halton House crossed the canal a wooden footbridge now allows pedestrians access to the east bank, but our route continues ahead to the southern terminus of the canal at the appropriately named Wharf Road, Wendover, where the water flows into the canal from under the bridge.

There is interesting information on the board at the end of the canal.

Turn right along Wharf Road to reach the A413 (Aylesbury Road).

Across the road and to the right can be glimpsed the top of a windmill tower. This was built in 1804. At 66ft in height and with two pairs of Derbyshire grit millstones, it was one of the largest windmills to be built in England. It is now a private house, but a public footpath goes beside it.

For the nearest bus stops (on the other side of the road, just beyond the lights, for Aylesbury), turn right. (The stop in Wharf Road is for local buses only.)

To visit Wendover or to reach the station, turn left along Aylesbury Road, cross just before the mini-roundabout at the clock tower (which now houses the tourist information centre), and follow the main road as it bends right. For the station, continue past shops, cross Dobbins Lane, and go ahead along Pound Street for a short distance to reach the Shoulder of Mutton Inn on the right. Here turn right and go down Station Approach.