

TRING STATION TO LEIGHTON BUZZARD

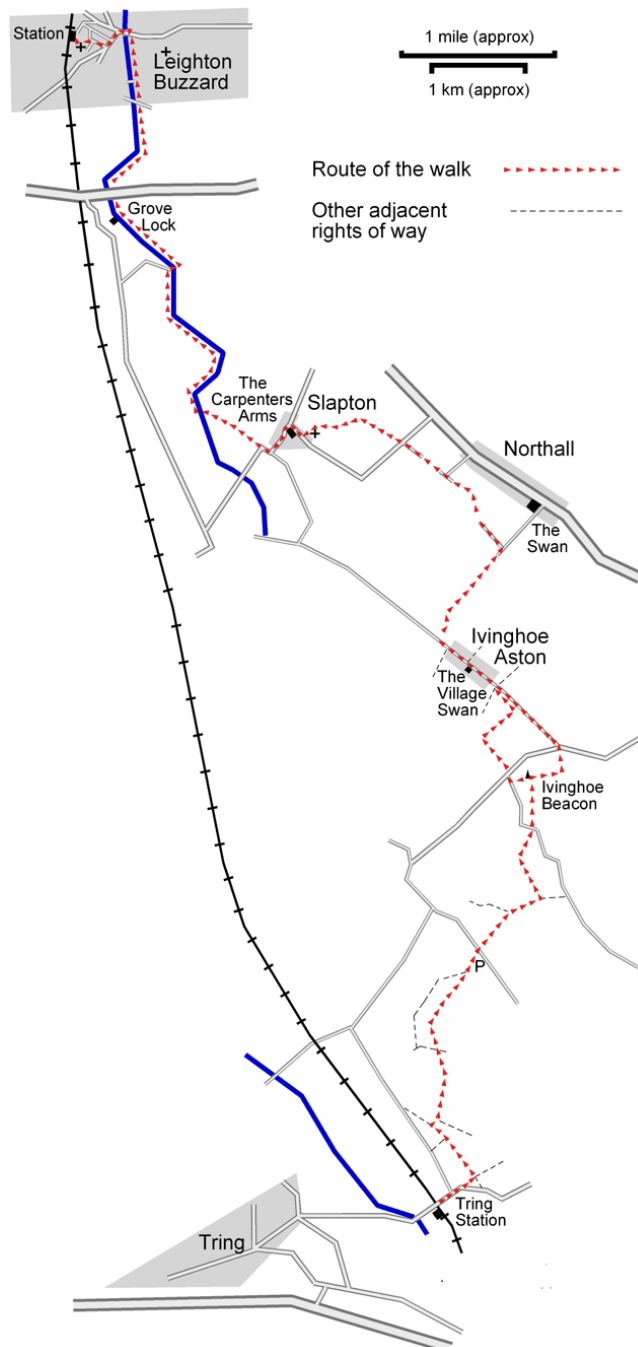
This walk starts in Hertfordshire and finishes in Bedfordshire, but for almost all its length is in Buckinghamshire.

The first part follows the Ridgeway national trail for its last four miles (6 km) to Ivinghoe Beacon (and here it really is a ridgeway – perhaps the finest on the Chilterns). In fine weather this section is outstanding, with probably the largest expanse of open hillside in our area.

The middle section may be a bit disappointing, with a choice between a very steep descent and 800 yards of road.

However, the last section from Slapton onwards and along the canal is through very attractive, though less dramatic, countryside, and is easy walking.

Minor amendments 2008



Distance

12 miles (20 km)

A steady climb of a little more than 300 feet (100 metres) in the first part of the walk, a couple of short sections of it quite steep.

Travel

Tring and Leighton Buzzard stations are on the main line from Euston to Milton Keynes and on to the Midlands.

Frequent stopping trains connect both stations directly with Euston, Harrow, Watford, Berkhamsted, Bletchley and Milton Keynes.

Tring Station is two miles (3 km) from Tring itself. The buses from Tring town to the station are mostly at commuter times, and there are none on Sundays. However, the Aylesbury to Hemel Hempstead and Watford bus route (numbers 500 and 501) has a good service, including Sundays, stopping a mile (1.5 km) from the station. Get off at the Grove Road stop, at the junction of Station Road and Cow Lane.

Except on Sundays and bank holidays, the car park at Tring station is pay-as-you-enter (£5.00 when last checked), with no change given; so please have coins ready.

The number 150 bus from Leighton Buzzard to Aylesbury is about hourly, but infrequent on Sundays.

The 61 bus (hourly, but never on Sundays) passes below Ivinghoe Beacon, connecting with Aylesbury and Luton. There are occasional buses on Sundays (the 327 Chiltern Rambler in summer; see also the 60 and the 161).

Ordnance Survey Maps

The route as far as just beyond the turning for Northall is on the O.S. Explorer Map 181, *Chiltern Hills North*. From there it is on 192 *Buckingham & Milton Keynes*.

Refreshments

The Village Swan at Ivinghoe Aston, closed Monday lunchtimes, roasts and only limited range of sandwiches on Sundays.

The Swan at Northall is about half a mile (0.8 km) off your route.

The Carpenters Arms at Slapton requests smart dress (undefined) and on Sundays does roasts only.

The Grove Lock pub restaurant is a little over a mile (2 km) before Leighton Buzzard, but you have to walk across the lock gates to reach it, which not everyone may be comfortable with.

In Leighton Buzzard it is also possible to get refreshments from the Tesco superstore beside the canal, and in the station (but not on Sundays) and elsewhere in the town.

The hotel at Tring Station and another inn and a motel at Northall marked on old maps are now closed.

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

The London and Birmingham Railway, opened in 1838, was the first trunk railway, not just in Britain, but in the world. The journey initially used to take six and a half hours, half the time taken by the stagecoaches. Tring cutting, north of the station, was one of the major engineering feats of the Victorian period.

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On leaving the station, turn right. Ignore the first junction on the left (Northfield Road), and continue a further 80 yards to a farm track on the left with a Ridgeway signpost.

Go up the farm track until it bears left.

Leave the farm track and go straight on for 60 yards to a gate.

Go through the gate and turn left along a bridleway for nearly half a mile (0.8 km) to a signpost at a path crossing, with an information board 30 yards to the right.

The board identifies Duchie's Piece, a Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust nature reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest, of importance as an area of chalk grassland. Another board further up the path gives more information.

Follow the Ridgeway to the right up the hill 150 yards between fences, to enter Aldbury Nowers wood (part of the National Trust Ashridge estate), being careful to take the steps to the left where the main path bears right, and to bear left at the waymark near the top of the second, longer flight of steps.

When we first described this route, we made much of the damage caused in the great storm of 1987; now there is little to be seen.

Follow the Ridgeway, well waymarked with acorn symbols, as it winds its way through the woods half a mile (0.8 km) to a kissing gate on to the open hillside (where you enter Buckinghamshire).

Follow the clear path along a ditch as it gradually climbs towards the crest of the hill, bearing right.

This is a section of Grim's Ditch. It is thought that these extensive linear earthworks date from the Iron Age, and were probably built to mark territorial boundaries, rather than for military purposes.

Eventually you will find yourself on the ridge of Pitstone Hill, with extensive views in most directions.

There are fewer fences and less woodland here than shown on the Ordnance Survey map; some have been cleared since we first checked this route, leaving a glorious expanse of open countryside.

Wendover Woods are on the spur of the Chilterns behind you to the left, and below and to the right of them are the reservoirs near Marsworth. Further to the right is Aylesbury, with the prominent County Council offices tower block.

An application to use the old chalk pits in the foreground as a landfill site was rejected following a public inquiry.

Beyond, and to the right of, the old chalk pits is Pitstone church, no longer in use, and no longer surrounded by its village, though building has now taken place on the site of the old Pitstone cement works that used to dominate the landscape here.

Further to the right, standing in the middle of a field, is the Pitstone windmill. This an early type of post mill, where the whole mill is turned by means of the "tail pole" to face the wind. The date 1627 carved on one of the timbers makes it probably the oldest in Britain. It was given to the National Trust in 1937, and subsequently restored. *Open summer Sunday afternoons.*

Behind, and just to the right of the windmill, is Ivinghoe village. This was once a market town, but has declined over the centuries. Sir Walter Scott is reputed to have taken the name of his most famous novel *Ivanhoe* from the village (or perhaps the beacon).

In the other direction, over to the right, is the wooded Ashridge Estate, in the care of the National Trust, and a favourite area for walks and picnics.

Continue along the crest, and after 500 yards either go over the small summit ahead, or skirt round it to the right, and make for a kissing gate into a car park.

Cross the car park and the road, go through a kissing gate and follow the Ridgeway ahead up the open hillside as it goes around the head of the dramatically steep valley of Incombe Hole, to a stile and a gate.

Do NOT cross the stile, but keep to the left, leaving the fence on your right. Go through a copse, and after another 100 yards, go through a kissing gate (still on the Ridgeway) in the fence on your right.

Follow the Ridgeway over some open hillside and down to a road.

Cross the road, with care, go ahead gently uphill and follow the well-used path up on to the ridge. In 500 yards you will reach the summit at Ivinghoe Beacon, and the end of the Ridgeway long distance path.

Just below the steepest part of the climb to the summit, a shallow ditch winds round to the left; this marks the boundary of an early Iron Age hillfort.

Around the summit there are traces of Bronze Age round barrows marking burial sites.

The view from the summit is stunning.

Edlesborough church is prominent a little to the right.

A little to the left, the nearest village is Ivinghoe Aston, which we shall soon be walking through. Beyond, and also on our walk, is the village and church of Slapton. Beyond that is our destination - Leighton Buzzard – and beyond that is Milton Keynes, where you may be able to see the Xscape leisure centre on the horizon.

Further left, on a low wooded hill, is Mentmore Towers, the extraordinary mansion built by Sir Joseph Paxton, architect of the Crystal Palace, for Baron Mayer Amschel de Rothschild.

Further left is Brill with Muswell Hill (on the horizon, in the direction of Oxford) then, somewhat closer, Waddesdon Manor (built by Mayer Amschel's son Ferdinand de Rothschild) on its wooded hill, then Quainton Hill (on the horizon), then Aylesbury.

Still further to the left, behind Wendover Woods, the Chiltern scarp stretches away to Beacon Hill with its tuft of trees above Ellesborough, and Wain Hill above Bledlow.

In the opposite direction, across to the right on the Dunstable Downs, is the famous White Lion of Whipsnade, carved out of the chalk below Whipsnade Zoo. At the end of the Downs, at the north-eastern extremity of the Chiltern Area of Natural Beauty, are the outskirts of Dunstable.

(From here, the Two Ridges Link goes all the way to Leighton Buzzard and most of it is waymarked, but not always with "Two Ridges" signs. Our route makes a gentler descent to join the Link at Ivinghoe Aston. The Link route, which is steeper but has less road walking, is described at the end of the walk.)

On reaching the Ordnance Survey trig point, turn right and follow the crest of the hill 250 yards to a gate in a fence.

Go through the gate and bear left down to a stile into woodland, 40 yards right of the field corner.

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Continue through the woodland to the road (B489, with bus stops on this side for Aylesbury and on the other for Luton etc).

Cross the road, very carefully, and go down the road opposite for half a mile (0.8 km) to Ivinghoe Aston (joining the Two Ridges Link).

Continue nearly 300 yards past the end of the 40 mph limit, looking for a footpath sign (not the first one you come to) on the right between two gateways.

Follow the track on the LEFT of the hedge towards some farm buildings (Vine Farm).

On reaching the first farm building our route goes diagonally to the left to cross a footbridge in the corner of the field.

Go alongside a new hedge to a stile into a field corner.

The line of old trees here marks the edge of all that remains of an old orchard, which was once part of a large concentration devoted to the growing of a small damson-like plum called the “Aylesbury Prune”. There are a number of damson-like trees, bearing ample fruit in season, in the hedges along the next section of the walk.

Continue along the edge of the field, and in the next field bear slightly left, heading for the largest tree ahead (a willow), to cross a bridge between gates.

Carry on across the next field in the same direction, passing the moated Butler's Manor on your right, to a gateway and cattle grid leading to a made-up lane ahead.

After 150 yards, turn left along another surfaced lane.

(To reach the Swan at Northall, instead of turning left here, continue ahead instead, for a little less than half a mile (0.7 km). To rejoin the walk, retrace your steps to this point.)

Follow the lane as it becomes a track ahead into a field.

Continue along the edge of the fields ahead, going through a kissing gate, then another gate, then a kissing gate into an enclosed path.

Go ahead with a stream at first on your left, then cross the stream and continue on the other side until the path becomes a track, then a lane.

Carry on in the same direction (ignoring a road to the right) at first on a concrete track, then on an enclosed path, then along the right hand edge of a field, to join a track some distance to the right of buildings (Orchard Cottages).

Continue ahead to reach a road.

Cross this and continue in the same direction beside a large field with a ditch and hedge on your right.

At the end of the field, go diagonally to the left across the next field to a waymark post at a stream crossing, then slightly right to a bridge.

Go round the left-hand edge of the next field to the far side, turn right at the field corner, and in 100 yards go left through a gap in the hedge, and over a stile.

Cross the field to the stile opposite, into the churchyard (briefly leaving the Two Ridges Link).

The churchyard is grazed by sheep, with only the most recent graves fenced to protect the flowers.

The church dates from the 13th century. English Heritage have awarded a grant for the restoration of the tower. The church is usually locked.

Go through the churchyard to the road.

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Turn right and walk along the road through Slapton, to a T-junction with the timber-framed Carpenters Arms on your left.

Turn left, rejoining the Two Ridges Link, and at the end of the village follow the road round to the right at a junction, and where the road then turns left go straight ahead over a stile by a gate and along a track.

In 500 yards the track ends at a gate and a stile.

Carry straight on, following the path as it curves to the left to cross a bridge over the Grand Union Canal.

Cross a stile immediately on the right to follow the towpath on the left bank.

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.

If you watch the canal ahead, you will be unlucky not to see herons, especially if there are not many people about. In summer fork-tailed terns can be seen.

Directions for the three miles (5 km) from here to Leighton Buzzard are unnecessary - simply follow the towpath, which changes sides after the first mile (1.5 km) at Church Lock.

The tiny 14th century Grove Parish Church near Church Lock was restored in 1888 and has been converted into a private house. The small river to your right is the Ouzel.

You enter Bedfordshire at the road bridge shortly after Grove Lock.

Wharves and remnants of a narrow-gauge railway are evidence of past commercial/industrial activity on the canal.

Arriving at Leighton Buzzard, go under two footbridges (the first a converted railway bridge, which carried the line to Dunstable) and a road bridge, where you turn sharp right up a ramp to Leighton Road, turn right and cross the canal.

At the lights bear left along Wing Road as far as the second road on the right (Church Road), For buses to Aylesbury continue ahead a few yards to the stop near the road form. Otherwise for the station turn right up Church Road. Shortly before the Hunt Hotel bear half left, and go past the church and across a park, then turn right for Leighton Buzzard station.

Alternative (steeper) descent from Ivinghoe Beacon

From the Ordnance Survey trig point, turn sharp left and go straight down this very steep hillside, making for a point just to the left of a cattle-grid, clearly visible on the road below.

On reaching the road turn right for 100 yards to a T-junction at a main road.

Cross this very carefully, walk a very short distance to the right, and take the Two Ridges Link on the left.

Walk along the left-hand edge of the field to a kissing gate.

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Walk ahead along the edge of the next field to the field corner.

Turn right and follow the fence to the far end where you will find a kissing gate on the left.

Go through this and walk along the side of the field with the hedge and road on your right to the field corner with a kissing gate on your right.

Go through the kissing gate to follow the road through Ivinghoe Aston.