



Aldbourn and Ramsbury

Distance: 13 km=8 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Wiltshire

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Author: MacMeadow

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Refreshments: Aldbourn, Ramsbury

Map: Explorer 157 (Marlborough) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Historic villages, thatched cottages, churches, pubs, high rolling hills, views, easy field paths, woodland

In Brief

The Wiltshire village of Aldbourn is one of the delights of this series. Entering the village always raises a smile and you may want to stay too long, or rush through the walk to spend some time afterwards. As well as some of the best thatched or timbered properties, the village has a pond, a Heritage Centre, two pubs, a village shop/café and a Co-op. Aldbourn's 12-century church is a wonder, not to be missed. Because the main Hungerford Road diverts traffic beyond the pond, the centre of the village near the *Crown* pub is a lively place with the chatter of children. The village has a peaceful green (down the side roads behind the *Crown*) where you will find the church and the *Blue Boar* pub (ring 01672-540-237 for info).



This walk takes you over the downs to another historic village, Ramsbury, before returning on an easy country path and through woods back to the start. Ramsbury also has two inns. (For the *Bell*, ring 01672-520-230.)

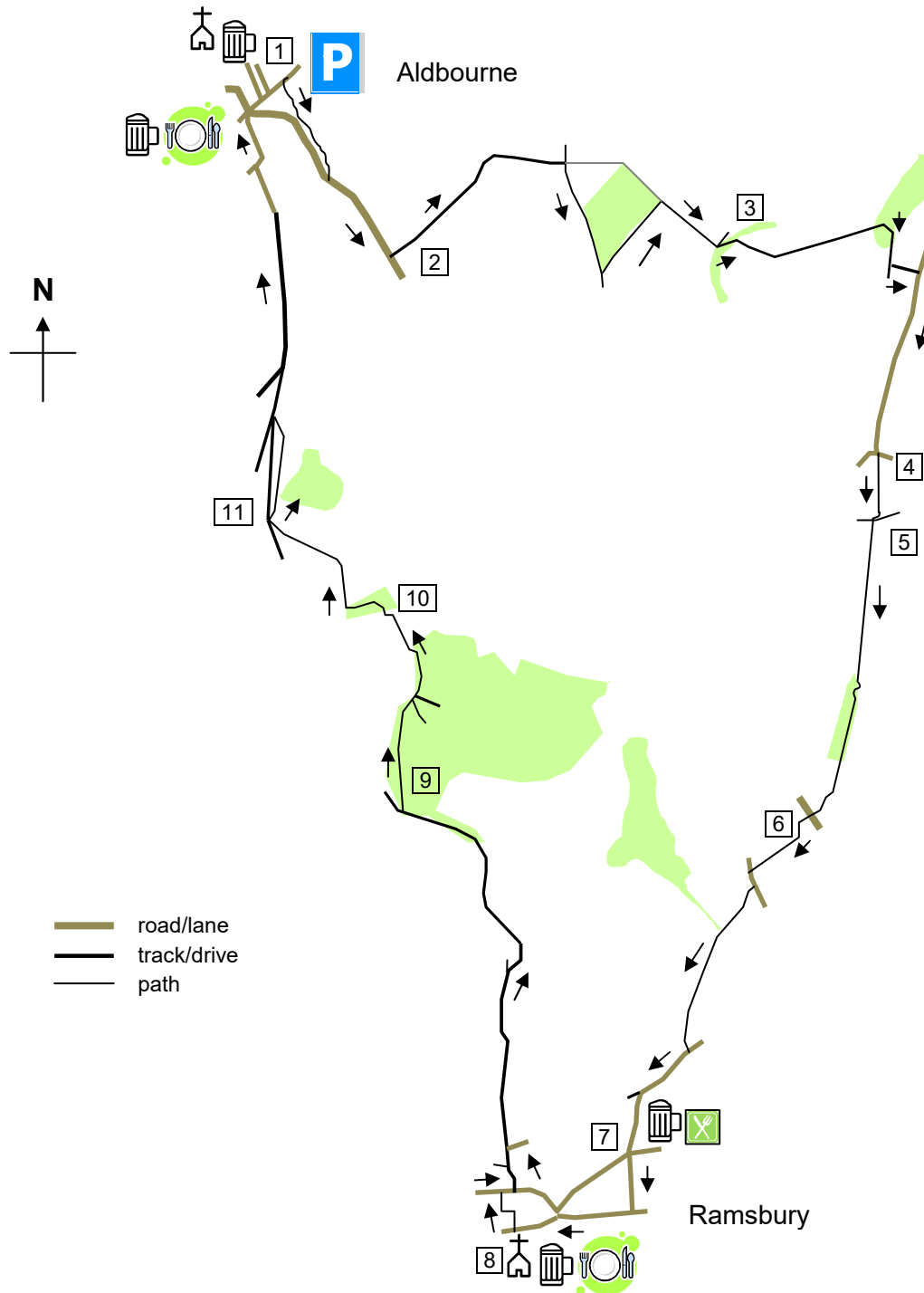
There are no nettles or brambles to speak of on this walk. Underfoot the walk is firm with only one short ploughed field to cross. The paths along the edges of fields are a little stony but quite comfortable, so boots are advisable but not essential. If you bring your dog, he will find a way round or under the four stiles without too much trouble.



The reliable 46 bus service, which also runs on Saturdays, can be used to shuttle you between the villages making a half-walk in either direction.

The walk begins in the village of **Aldbourn**, Wiltshire, postcode **SN8 2DU**. There are numerous free marked-out parking slots on the roadside. Best for this walk is the double row on your left just as you come into the village from the north. You could also start at Ramsbury (postcode **SN8 2PE**.) For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



The Saxons founded “Aelda’s stream” around 800-900 on a Stone Age site. The “bourne” is a winterbourne (dry in summer) which flows into the River Kennet near Ramsbury. An unusual source of wealth for the medieval village came from rabbits! From 1300 the warrens fetched a tidy income and in the late 1600s the natural philosopher John Aubrey described the rabbits from Aldbourne as “the best, sweetest and fattest in England”. This came to an end in 1809 when the Enclosure Act saw the pastures fenced off, reducing the villagers to penury, so that when William Cobbett (of “Rural Rides”) visited in 1826 he found the village “a decaying place” destined to be “depopulated”. But small industries flourished: a bell foundry cast church bells for many nearby parishes and, in celebration, an upturned bell was filled with ale outside the “Blue Boar”. This peaceful village was often touched by war. In the Civil War in

1643, Prince Rupert led a skirmish at Aldbourne Chase. During WWI, more than 100 Aldbourne men joined the forces but 48 did not return. In WWII US Army paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division were stationed here. Aldbourne people are known as the “dabchicks” and the parish magazine “The Dabchick” appears bimonthly. A famous later dabchick was the much-married Anthony Marreco, a barrister at Nuremberg and co-founder of Amnesty International.

St Michael's parish church is a medieval Grade I listed building. Some of the arches are Norman but the nave and aisles date from around 1200. The three-stage tower was built in 1460. The building was restored by the Gothic revivalist architect William Butterfield in 1863-67 (see the Mapledurham walk in this series). To understand the wonderful ceiling, the stone memorials and the monumental brasses, you need to buy the hardback book “St. Michael's, Aldbourne: The Story of a Wiltshire Downland Village Church” by Frank H. West.

- 1 Your route out of Aldbourne is on the Hungerford Road, the B4192, but this guide keeps you off the road for as long as possible. Begin at the junction of Oxford Street and South Street by the little library, where there are two short rows of car parking spaces. Take the narrow lane, South Street, to the left of *Ivy House*. Before you reach the main road, cross over a shingle drive and take a green path beside a stone wall, with the road on your right on the other side of a ditch. *Note the large wind vane on the long barn of the Old Malt House*. After *Lavender Cottages* you have to join the road and soon you need to switch to the right-hand side to use the footway. Continue past an end-of-30mph sign and gently up a rise for 180m. At the top, opposite the entrance to Ford Farm, turn **left** onto a gravel track signed as a footpath, going past a large metal gate.
- 2 Your track runs beside a large field on your right, with great views, gradually uphill. After the track levels out and at the end of the second field, you approach some metal gates with direction arrows on a post. [\(There is an alternative, slightly shorter, path straight ahead, but the field was ploughed up \(2018\), obliterating the path.\)](#) Turn **right** here, before the gates, on a bridleway that runs through tall shrubbery. The field on your left is followed by an old tree plantation. After 250m, where you come out into the open, turn sharp **left**, along the other side of the tree plantation, with a sloping field on your right. Walk down to the end of the field and go through a gap into the next large field. Turn **right** on a wide grass verge along the right-hand edge of the field.
- 3 At the far side of the field, take the **second** wide path on the **left**, a rising path (see the arrow on a tree). The path runs between green fields and fences and elbows left. At the top, the path runs through a patch of woodland and turns right, leading to a farm on the top of Marridge Hill. Turn **left** between the farm buildings and turn **right** at the end on a quiet tarmac lane. You pass houses and an older flint house and finally, after 600m on this pleasant level lane, you reach a road junction by a white house.
- 4 Cross straight over the lane to a signpost marked *Ramsbury 2*, leading into a field. This field may be ploughed up and the path unclear. Your direction is across the field, diverging a fraction left away from the right-hand edge. Head first for a nearby electricity pole. Now keep the same direction heading for the distant edge where there is a solitary horse-chestnut, just visible against the backdrop of the trees on the far side. In 150m or so, you pass just to the right of the horse-chestnut to reach a stile in the hedge. Go

over the stile (*careful ! – it's a little awkward*) to meet a crossing path that runs in the strip of woodland.

- 5 Turn **left** on the crossing path for only 5m, then **right** on a narrow path which winds through the strip of trees to reach a large grassy field (which might have crops in the future). Go ahead on a straight path, keeping to the hedge along the right-hand side of this large field. In 600m, you meet woodland on your right and the edge curves away left. Go **right** here into trees and over a stile (*careful ! – awkward*). Your path runs under beeches and into another sloping field. Go down the right-hand side. In the corner, your path zigzags a little to cross a (dry) stream next to a redundant small bridge. It leads past a small sheep pasture and up to the main road.
- 6 Cross the main road directly over to a stile. Go up the grassy slope, past a barn on your left, via another small stile. Your path goes past cottages, wheeling left and right past farm buildings, onto a wide grass path going uphill, keeping to the left-hand side of a wire fence. At the top turn **left** on a road. In only 30m, turn **right** on a wide track. Where the track immediately curves left, leave it by keeping **right**, as directed by a yellow arrow on a pole, on an uphill path through trees. The path levels out and leads through a small wooden swing-gate into a field. Continue along the right-hand side. In 150m, there is a (probably redundant) wooden swing-gate on your right. Go **right** and **left** here through a wide gap, so that you are now walking in the same direction but on the other side of the hedge. Your path leads down to a road in the village of Ramsbury. Turn **right** on the road and stay on it, curving left and passing a residential junction, till you reach a crossroads in the centre of the village next to the *Crown and Anchor* pub.



The "Crown and Anchor" is a pub and a small hotel (the rooms are named after rivers). Lunch is available Thur-Sun, with a table for large groups. You can order snacks, such as their popular cheese and chips. At the time of writing beer was all Sharps.

Ramsbury is both a large village and a parish stretching far beyond where you have been walking. From 909 to 1075, Ramsbury was a holy see with its own bishops. Several, such as Sigeric the Serious and Ælfric of Abingdon went on to become Archbishop of Canterbury. It remained a vacationing spot for bishops of Salisbury, possibly encouraged by its historic brewery. By the 1750s, Ramsbury had a generous tally of pubs, including the Bleeding Horse, the Angel, the Castle and the Swan. Now the only other inn is the Bell at the village centre. For your next visit, Littlecote Roman Villa, less than 2 miles away beside the River Kennet, has now been fully excavated.

- 7 Near the crossroads is the thatched/timbered grade-II-listed *Jasmine Cottage*. The village is yours to explore, ending at the church. The author crossed straight over and down Union Street, passing more thatches, turning **right** at the end. (A very short excursion at the first road on the left shows you the River Kennet at an especially attractive stretch, with a bench seat to take a breather.) Continuing along the raised footway, passing the long thatched house *The Boot*, the village centre reveals the village's other pub. *The Bell* is a hotel and large bar serving ales from the Ramsbury brewhouse; it also has a lovely restaurant and a café, *Café Bella*, with comfortable armchairs. Continuing straight ahead along the quaint high street, just after *Pudding Cottage*, there is a lichgate leading into the church yard of the Holy Cross church.



Ramsbury church was built around the year 1200 on the site of an earlier Anglo-Saxon cathedral (remember, Ramsbury once had bishops!). The nave

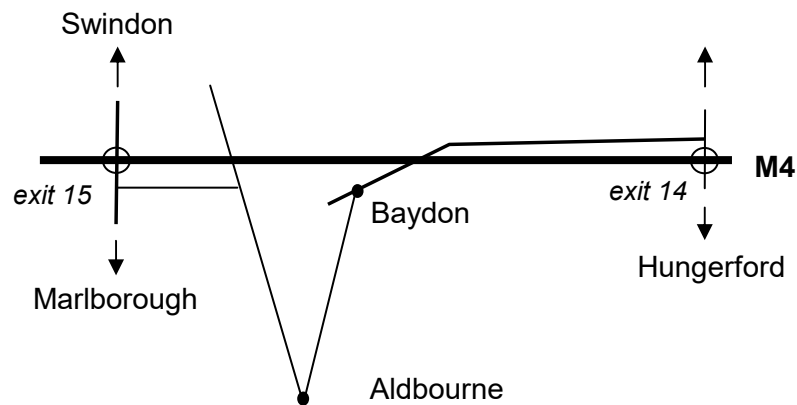
and aisles were extended 100 years later and the inevitable Victorian restoration happened in 1891. The church is full of memorials, including one of Sir William Jones (1631-82), prosecutor of the innocent Titus Oates plotters, "bull-faced" and "not much lamented". Another is of Sir Francis Burdett (1770-1844), an MP who fought a duel, defied the Commons over electoral reform and found himself in the Tower!

- 8 Pass to the left of the church, out via a shingle drive to the road. Turn **right** and, in 50m or so, turn **left** on Love's Lane. This is a popular route with young strollers between the villages and is often misquoted as *Lover's Lane*. The tarmac lasts only until Love's Farm. On the way, ignore any junctions left or right. You know you have reached the farm, after nearly 1 km, when you see an untidy bunch of vehicles. Shortly, the track forks: take the **right**-hand fork, downhill, ignoring the path ahead (which is a let-down). The track is now gravel or semi-tarmac at best. Nearly ½ km from the fork, the track enters deep woodland. Unexpectedly, you come to a brick house, complete with outhouse, modestly named *Brick Kiln Cottage*.
- 9 Fork **right**, avoiding the private entrance to *Brick Kiln Cottage*, and immediately go **right** up a bank by a signpost indicating a public footpath. Your path goes diagonally through the woods. (At the time of writing there are many fallen trees across the path but walkers have carved out a path to bypass them on the right.) After 400m, you come to a junction where another narrow footpath comes in from the right, with a private wide track on your right. Veer **left** here, out into a crop field. Immediately fork **right**, back into the woods. The path runs near the left-hand edge of the wood. In 150m or so, just before a group of three magnificent tall beeches, your path wheels **left** back into the field. As you come out, go straight across for 10m to a pole with a yellow arrow and veer **right** along the right-hand side of a large field, with a hedge on your right separating you from an even larger field.
- 10 In the next corner you approach a small wood. Your direction is basically diagonally **left** across the centre of the wood to a field on the other side, but the footpath is rather bendy. Just before the wood, turn **left** in the field for only 5m, then zigzag right-left into the wood through tall conifers. The path now runs briefly parallel to the field, before turning right through the wood and running diagonally left across the centre, before veering left to come out into the field on the other side. Turn **left** along the edge of the field to come to the corner in 15m. Keep straight ahead past the hedge and turn **right** beside it along the right-hand side of a field. In 150m or so, the path along the edge elbows left. In 200m, at the far end of the field, veer left and right a little on a wide grassy path. The path leads out to a wide track. Turn **right** here, back on Love's Lane; but the re-acquaintance is brief – leave the lane to the lovers!
- 11 Almost immediately, just after a marker post, fork **right** on a track which runs along the left-hand side of a large field with great views across the valley and the houses of Aldbourne visible ahead. (Love's Lane is on the other side of the hedge on your left but the views there are restricted.) Soon the church pops into view and you come out to a junction with a signpost for a footpath pointing the way you have come. Turn **right** on the tarmac lane just ahead. Soon you pass the first houses of Aldbourne. At a road junction, keep straight ahead up a narrow lane signed *No Entry*. Soon you pass a group of immaculate thatched cottages, some of the finest in the village, worthy of a discreet pause to admire. Where you meet another

road at a curve, turn **right**, soon arriving back in the village centre where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Aldbourne is easily reached from the M4 motorway. If coming from the east (London, Reading, Newbury): come off at exit 14 (*Hungerford, Wantage*); turn **right** as for *Wantage* and in 0.3 mile, turn **left** as for *Lambourn*; follow the B4000 into Baydon and turn **left** at a sign for *Aldbourn*. If coming from the west (Bristol): come off at exit 15 (*Marlborough*); turn **right** as for *Marlborough*; in 1 mile, turn **left** as for *Hinton Parva*; in 1.7 miles, at a T-junction, turn **right** for *Aldbourn*.



By bus/train: bus 46 from Swindon station, not Sunday . Check the timetables.

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