



Pewsey: White Horse Trail and Canal

Distance: 14½ km=9½ miles
+1½ km=1 mile if starting at station

moderate walking

Region: Wiltshire

Date written: 2-sep-2019

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Refreshments: Pewsey Wharf, Wilcot

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

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Canal, meadows, high hills, views, thatched village, woodland

In Brief

This walk takes you along part of the celebrated White Horse Trail in mid Wiltshire, a high ridge walk with terrific views in all directions. There is a long climb near the start, enough to class this walk as “moderate difficulty” but the gradient will not really challenge anyone and the reward when you reach the top is outstanding. At the southern end, the walk takes you along a good stretch of the Kennet and Avon Canal where you can watch the colourful canal boats. In between, there are meadows, pretty thatched cottages and a couple of pubs.



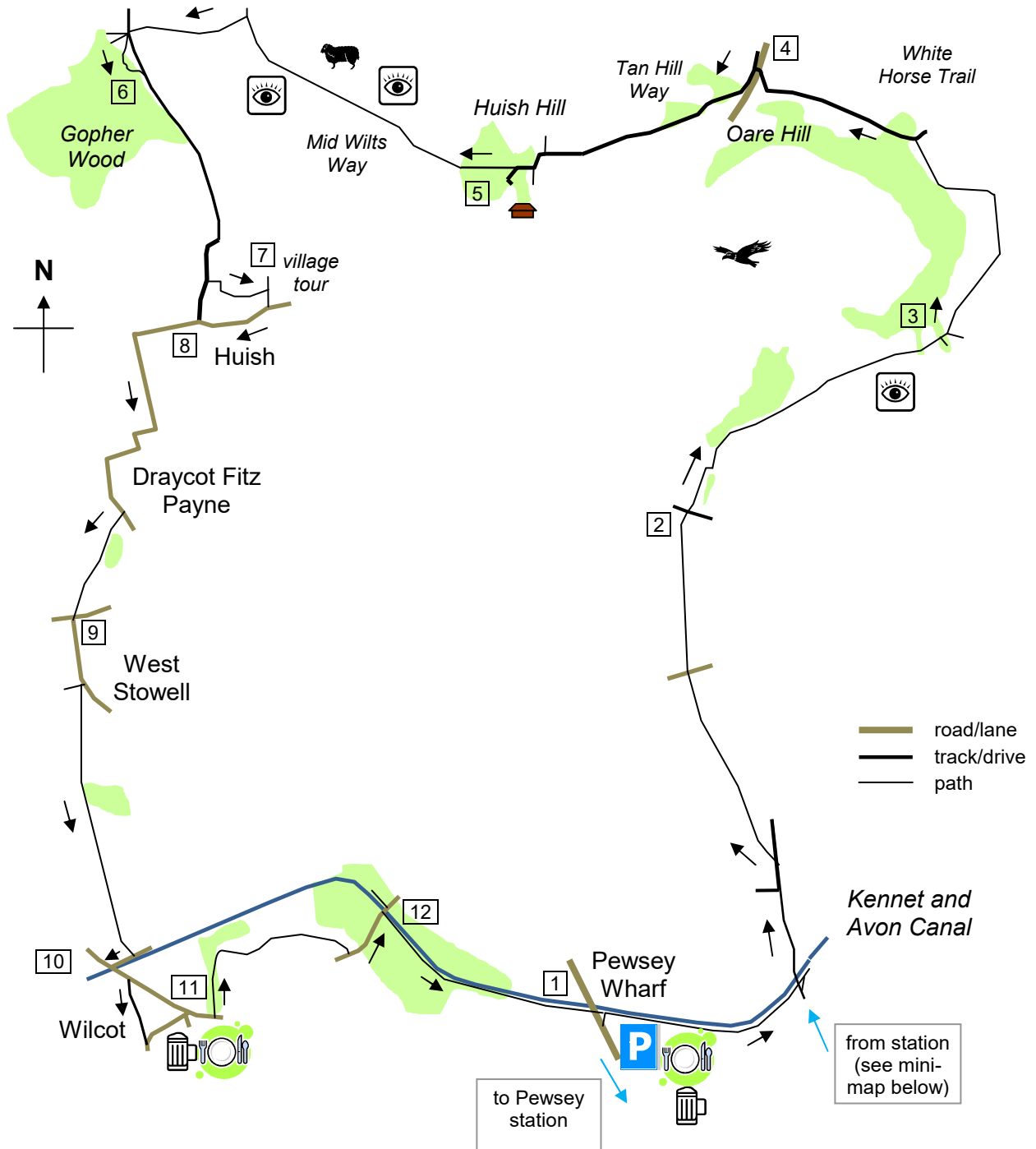
? There is no unavoidable undergrowth worth speaking of on this walk. The paths are generally dry or grassy, but the crop field before Wilcot may be a little squishy in winter. You dog can come with you on this adventure.



You can arrive by train at **Pewsey Station**, with a short interesting extension adding about a mile to the length of the walk.

For motorists, the walk begins at **Pewsey Wharf**, Pewsey, near Marlborough, Wiltshire, postcode **SN9 5HY**. There is a charge (as 2019) of £1 for 4 hours (not enough for this walk!) or £4 for 8 hours and the money goes to help maintain the canal. You can park free on the roadside elsewhere, such as Wilcot*, postcode **SN9 5NN**. (*Park tight beside the hedge to allow tractors to pass!) For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



The Kennet and Avon canal links London (via the Thames at Reading) with the Bristol Channel, in the east the Kennet navigation, in the west the Avon, with the canal to link them. The canal was begun in 1724 and finished in 1810. The canal fell into disrepair in the 1900s until 1990 when leisure and tourism spurred a restoration project.

If you arrived at **Pewsey station**, skip immediately to near the end of this text and the section called **From Station**.

- 1 Starting at Pewsey Wharf, walk along the towpath with the canal on your **left**. After an easy 750m watching the canal boats ply the water, you reach Pains Bridge, a typical brick bridge of the period. Pass under the bridge, turn sharp **right** up a bank* and sharp **right** again to cross the bridge. (*On your left is an entrance to the Jones's Mill Nature Reserve, a 33-ha woodland and wetland area, worth exploring.)

The route from Pewsey station joins here.

Keep ahead on a wide green path under ash and oak trees. The high table of the great long White Horse Trail (WHT), which you will be climbing shortly, looms ahead to your right. In 300m or so, you meet a driveway coming from Inlands Farm. Keep straight on on a dirt track. In nearly 100m, look left for a stile. (Seasoned walkers tend to stay on the track and turn left on the lane.) There is a sign for the *White Horse Trail* on the post – you will be following these signs until you descend from the high hills.

There are (or were) no less than thirteen white horse figures in Wiltshire, the oldest and best known being the Westbury White Horse and the (1804) Marlborough White Horse. Some were rediscovered hidden under grass and were remade. The White Horse Trail is a 151 km=94 mile circular walk which visits the principal eight figures, plus other archaeological sites.

Your path veers right, cutting the corner of the field, and takes you over a stile in the hedge. Take a path straight ahead across the crop field. After a gap in the line of trees, continue similarly in the next, shorter, field. *Note the little raised lookout hut to your right.* An unneeded stile leads to a tarmac lane. Cross straight over the lane and take a track opposite along the left-hand side of a crop field. Your route veers right to meet a wide track.

- 2 Cross straight over through a small wooden gate. The climb has begun! Take a path up the slope of the meadow heading for trees at the top. *The village of Oare can be glimpsed on your left.* Before you reach the top, look right for a small metal gate. Go **right** through this gate and keep up the left-hand side of a wild meadow. *You are also walking part of the Mid Wiltshire Way (MWW), a 109 km=68 mile walk across the county, useful because it covers the long ridge of hills.* Your path gets steeper and steeper and finally you reach the top and a trig point, with terrific views south across the Vale of Pewsey and, for the first time, north as well. Continue on a path beside a wire fence on your left, passing a (dry) dew pond on your right. You come through a large metal gate (or over a stile) on what is now a wide grass path. Soon there is deep woodland on your left. Ahead of you soon is a large silvery metal kissing-gate.

- 3 Ignore a path on your right before the gate and go through the gate to meet various direction pointers. Ignore the path that forks right and stay on the **left**, thus leaving the MWW, but staying on the WHT (unsigned at this point). Your path follows the left-hand edge of the meadow and curves right at the top to meet two large metal gates. Go **left** through the **second** gate (or over a stile) onto a path which runs between two banks of nettles and docks. Your path winds left and right and ends at a dense line of trees. Turn **left** here on a wide stony track along Oare Hill. *This high trail is part of the Tan Hill Way a 19 km=12 mile walk along the ridge.* The track finally bends right and meets the main road.

- 4 Cross the main road to a dusty drive opposite and turn **left** on it. Stay on the main drive as it curves away from the road passing green meadows on Huish Hill. After 750m, ignore a footpath on the right as the drive suddenly

bends **left**. In 40m, turn **right** with the drive, ignoring the narrow footpath straight ahead. In 50m, where the drive bends left again to Huish Hill House, **leave** the drive by keeping straight ahead on a farm track. In 200m,



- 5 Veer a fraction right and take a level course along the left-hand side of the pasture. At the far side, go through the right-hand set of gates and continue as before in the next meadow. As you near the end of the meadow, shift to the right-hand side and go through a small metal gate next to two larger gates. Immediately go **left** through another small metal gate and take a grass path straight ahead between shallow banks. This bendy path ends in about 400m at a fence. Go through the smaller of two metal gates here to reach a signpost at a multiple junction. Here you will say farewell to the national trails and make your way home.
- 6 Turn sharp **left** on a wide track downhill but immediately fork **right*** on a narrower more level path. (*This little loop is optional, more scenic than the track although possibly a little scratchy.) Your path descends gradually through the treescape of Gopher Wood and meets the track again. Continue downhill, ignoring a yellow arrow on your left. Shortly, the break in the trees affords a fine view of the hills where you were walking. Finally you reach a farm marking the start of the village of Huish. Keep **right** and **left** round the property, passing the courtyard of the big farmhouse, going through a small wooden gate (or the large metal gate if open). On your right shortly is a small wooden gate leading to St Nicholas Church. *The ancient village of Huish was recorded in the Domesday Book; the church, built in the 1200s, used to be much larger, indicating the past importance of this small settlement. Huish is famous for its "heart", a copse of that shape, but the author couldn't find it.*
- 7 This section is a little loop round the thatched village, with several delightful surprises. Although all the paths are public, you will shortly see why this little tour is probably best suited to one or two people, or children. Others: simply stay on the lane. Just 70m after the gate to the church, go **left** through a small gate into a garden with a lake and a weeping willow. It is wonderful to discover that the path through this private garden is in fact a footpath. Your route is straight on up four steps, passing some sculpture, turning **right** and **left**, always following the main path. You pass some standing stones on your left and on your right the owners are building a (private) pond bridge. Keep straight on to pass near a large metal gate and a fence and now follow a narrow path beside a meadow and a wooden fence on your left. The path zigzags to meet a large green meadow. Turn **right** on the grass, going down a narrow path through woods to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane. *Note the faux deer in the sheep meadow on your left.* You pass a stableyard and on each side there are rows of thatches. (The last row on the left was restored a few years ago.) Just before a road junction, there is a sign for a footpath pointing left. (If you did *not* do this little loop, it is on your right when you turn left at the T-junction.)

There is a footpath here, through low trees and then across two crop fields, direct to the next hamlet (Draycot Fitz Payne). Unfortunately, there are no markers to direct you across the fields and there is no (visible) way into the second field. There is a corresponding signpost at the other end in the farmyard – but nothing in between. For the time being, this walk takes the narrow lane instead. **Footpath watch:** walker, please send feedback about any change to this problem.

8 Continue straight on at the road junction. (If you did *not* do the little loop, turn **right** at the T-junction.) Now follow the narrow lane round five corners. The only traffic you are likely to meet is a huge tractor where you have to stand well aside: it has exclusive use. About 150m after the fifth corner, the lane bends a fraction to the left and shortly there is a concrete track to a barn on your left and a large metal gate on your right. Go **right** over a stile next to the metal gate into a large green pasture. At the time of writing this was a sheep field but there might be some quiet cattle here when you walk. In case you prefer to avoid them for any reason, you can continue on the lanes, turning **right** and **right** again to meet the footpath at the other end. Keep to the left-hand edge. In 100m you pass a copse on your left which conceals some ponds. Keep direction after the copse, following a shallow ridge, heading for a large metal gate about 50m to the left of the corner. Go through (and close!) the metal gate to reach the head of a T-junction of tarmac lanes.

9 Cross straight over to a tarmac lane opposite, in the direction *Wilcot*. You pass a large thatch, *China Cottage*, in the hamlet of West Stowell. (East Stowell is a deserted village.) Shortly after, as the lane bends left, leave the lane by keeping **right**. Ignore the wide path to the right and go **left** over a stile into a crop field. At the time of writing the field was of head-high maize but, unlike some such fields, the path was perfectly passable. Follow a clear straight path through the crops. In 300m, at the other end, there is a rickety stile leading to a grassy crossing path. However, it is easier to lift the insulated sleeve on the right to avoid the stile. (The wire is most unlikely to be electric because, unlike John Wyndham's *Triffids*, it is doubtful that the maize plants will try to escape.) You may need to step over another rope. Cross straight over through a large metal gate (easier than the stile) and take a clear path which runs with trees on your left at first, then in a straight line across a crop field. After 200m, the path goes over a strip of green and resumes similarly in the next field. At the far end, veer **left** a fraction to exit the field, via a stile or a large metal gate, to a lane in *Wilcot*.

10 Turn **right** on the lane. You can step onto the bank of the Kennet and Avon canal through a gap on the left. It is worth looking right to the fine brick bridge that you are about to cross but you have to follow the lane to cross it. If you do *not* want to visit *Wilcot* and the charming *Golden Swan*, you can instead simply turn **left** along the towpath, through a wooden gate to the road after 1 km, **right** over the bridge and **left** on the towpath again, skipping to section [12]. Turn sharp **left** shortly over the bridge and follow the road for 80m to the corner of a recreation ground. Fork **right** on a rough driveway along the edge, passing on your right some of the greystone houses which were designed as a matching group long ago for this village. Continue to a tarmac lane. Your route is sharp left, but by turning **right** you can see some of the oldest houses in the village, plus the Church of the Holy Cross which is definitely worth a visit. Having turned sharp **left**, passing some thatched cottages, in no time you reach on your right the *Golden Swan* at the corner, in its garden, a soothing spot to pass some relaxed moments. *The Golden Swan is a Wadsworth inn, and not bad for that. Food is available every day except the first Sunday of each month. The inn is open all day at weekends. It is also an excellent B&B in case you decide to stop over.*



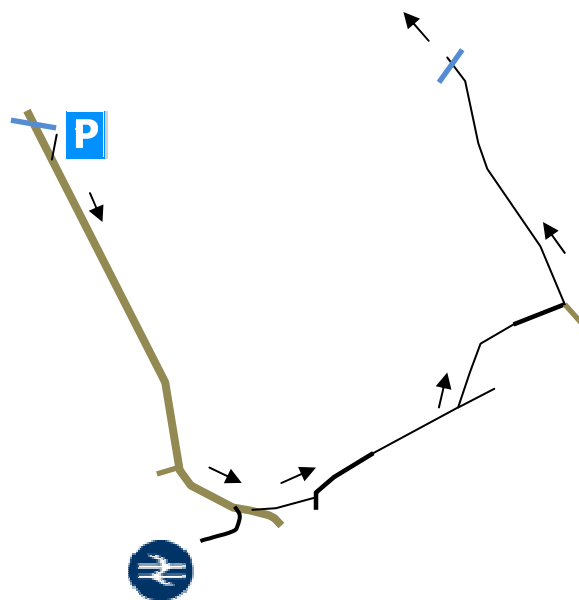
Wilcot could also be very ancient: there was a Roman villa here. The church dates from around 1200. Inside there are Romanesque details on the columns which survived a fire of 1876. According to a 400-year-old legend, the Vicarage is haunted by the sound of a tolling bell.

- 11 After a possible break, cross straight over the road junction in the direction *Pewsey*. About 15m after a rough track on your left, go **left** just before a metal gate on a footpath (there is a signpost just after this point). The path runs through light undergrowth and develops into a fine woodland path with fields a short stone's throw on each side. Keep straight on to go over a stile into a reedy meadow. Turn immediately **right** in the meadow to take a path close to the right-hand edge. Stay in the grassy field as it runs beside a steeply banked field on your right. In 500m, at the end of the field, go through a large metal gate on the right, out to the road. Turn **left** on the road for 200m through woodland until you reach the bridge over the canal. Turn **right** immediately before the bridge on the towpath.
- 12 Follow the towpath, enjoying the sight of the boats on the canal for the best part of 1 km until you pass under the road bridge. Immediately you reach the Waterfront Bar and Bistro with an opportunity for refreshment, adjoining the car park at Pewsey Wharf, where the walk began.

To return to Pewsey station, go to the section below called **Return to Station**.

From / Return to Pewsey Station 2 km=1¼ miles round trip

From Station. Exit the station on the side of the car park, on the opposite side from the main station building. Go out to the main road and turn **right** for 25m. Just before the railway bridge, fork **left** on a tarmac path called Way's Way. In 100m, veer **left** on a tarmac drive (or turn **right** to visit the town). Follow the drive, passing the Mill House and its garden, over a stream onto a narrower surfaced footpath. The path leads up into a green open space. Immediately fork **left** on a level path, passing thatches and gardens, and continue on a tarmac drive, down to a junction. Turn **left** on a sunken path. Your path passes willows and a stream and goes over the stream and along a boardwalk. Ignore a stile on your left and keep straight on to reach a bridge over the canal. Go over the bridge to join the main walk at the indicated point in section 1.



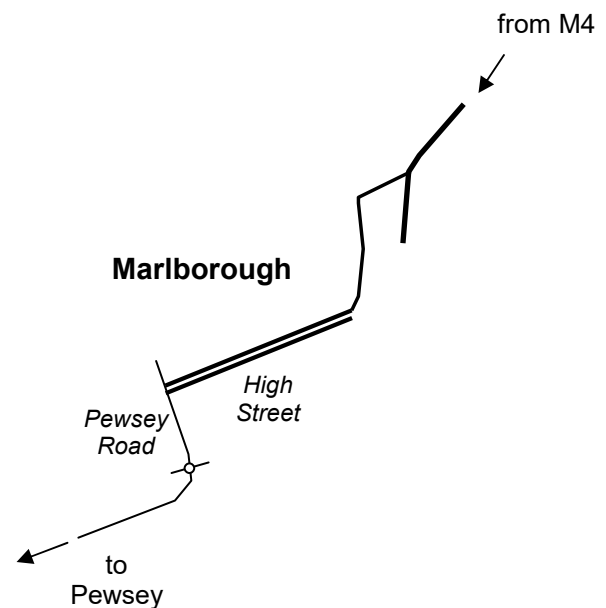
Return to Station. Turn **left** out of the car park and follow the road using the tarmac footway. In about 500m, keep **left** at a mini-roundabout. Just before a railway bridge, go **right** on a slip road as for the station car park.

Getting there

By car: Pewsey Wharf can be reached from **Marlborough** which is accessed from Junction 15 on the **M4**. When in 8 miles you reach the town, follow signs for **A345 Pewsey, Upavon, Amesbury**. If *at first* you don't see these, follow signs for **Salisbury**. (But the most attractive route is down that wonderful wide High Street and left at the bottom on the Pewsey Road.) The car park is on the **left** immediately after you go over the canal bridge about 1 mile before Pewsey.

You can also reach Marlborough on the A4, e.g. from the A34, the Newbury bypass.

The author came via the M3 and **Andover**, through Ludgershall on the A342 (a scenic route taking you over the downs into the Vale of Pewsey).



By train: regular daily service from London Paddington, about 1 hr.

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