



Ashridge, Dockey Wood, Aldbury, Ridgeway

Distance: 13½ km=8½ miles or 7½ km=4½ miles
moderate walking with long easy sections

Region: Chilterns, Herts

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Refreshments: Aldbury

Map: Explorer 181 (Chiltern Hills North)
but the maps in this guide should be sufficient

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

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High hills, views, forest, village, bluebells in spring

In Brief

This walk has all the best ingredients: extensive beautiful woods, a village with two pubs and a high walk on grassy hills with wide views. It is perfect at any time, but especially in late spring for the bluebells and autumn for the colours.

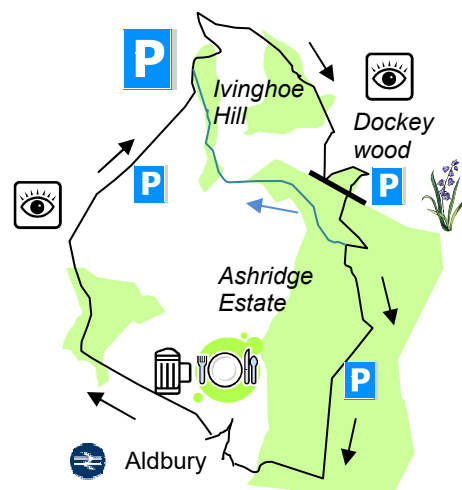


There are no nettles on this walk. Good sensible walking shoes should be fine. It will be fine for your dog too, with just three stiles near the farm (which you could avoid).



This walk is accessible by rail, from **Tring station** which is only 800m from the walk. By car, the walk begins at the **Ashridge car park**, just below **Ivinghoe Beacon**, Buckinghamshire. The **postcode** just before the signposted turn-off right before Ivinghoe village to the Beacon is **LU7 9EJ**. If the main car park is full, there is always plenty of space on the huge grass verges less than 100m south on the road. Another good starting point is the **Ashridge Estate** car park; however this has the disadvantage that the village and pubs come soon into the walk. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Overview



The Walk

Leg 1: Ivinghoe to Dockey Wood 3½ km=2 miles

Before you set out, you cannot help standing awhile to admire the views. Across to the east are Dunstable Downs with the White Lion cut in the chalk near Whipsnade Zoo. To your left is Beacon Hill itself, a popular 1½ mile round walk from where you are. This area is very popular for model airplanes and the occasional microlight.



- 1 Starting at the Ivinghoe Beacon (Ashridge) car park, with your back to the road, after admiring the view, turn **left** past an information tablet on a path signposted to *the Ridgeway*. (The small gate half way along the side of the car park leads to a sheep field which is open access land; so you can instead go very steeply down and veer right and rejoin the walk at * below.) Your path runs beside a wire fence on your right towards Beacon Hill. At the bottom you find a milestone indicating the Icknield Way.

The Icknield Way is one of the oldest roads in Britain, one of the great “four highways” (the others being Ermine Street, the Fosse Way and Watling Street) established at least in 1100 and possibly millennia earlier. The name is Celtic, possibly named after the Icenii tribe, who needed to extend trade from their homeland in East Anglia.

Not far to your left is the Ridgeway path, by which you will be returning and to the right is the Peddars Way: they all meet here. Go sharp **right** through a small wooden gate next to a large one, following the yellow arrows. Keep to the right-hand side on a pleasant level grassy path beside a fence with extensive sheep meadows stretching away to your left. Your path continues through a small wooden gate. A second wooden gate takes you into the sheep field on your right. [*] Keep straight ahead on a level path across the grass, cutting the corner of the meadow. Another footpath cuts across your path diagonally at a marker post, coming from a gate in the corner. Keep straight ahead to wooden gates under trees ahead.


- 2 Go through a small wooden gate next to a larger one into the woods of The Coombe, another National Trust property, populated by beech, hawthorn and field maple. After a good 300m, your path enters a dense area of tall cypresses and zigzags left-right past a marker post. The atmosphere is now much darker and closer. The path zigzags several times and you need to look out for markers. Finally the path veers left out of the wood and runs in the open, still part of the Icknield Way. Your path now goes up a very long flight of steps to reach a plateau. The rooty path leads up to Ward’s Hurst Farm. Go through a swing-gate and ahead through another small wooden gate. Turn **right** through the farmyard, keeping straight ahead past a large corrugated steel barn and immediately turning **left** and **right** on a concrete track leading away from the farm.

- 3 In 20m, at a fingerpost, turn **left** through a small metal gate (currently not needed since the track is not fenced). (If you have a large dog, you could stay on the drive and turn left at the road.) Ignore a footpath and gate squarely opposite and instead take a diagonal path, still going away from the farm, across the sheep pasture. The next stile, which is not clear until you get closer, is about half way along the far side. After the stile, maintain the same direction to the far corner of the meadow where there is another stile to cross, leading to a road. Turn **left** on the road and continue until you reach the entrance on your **left** into Dockey Wood, another National Trust area. (There used to be another entrance closer to the junction.)

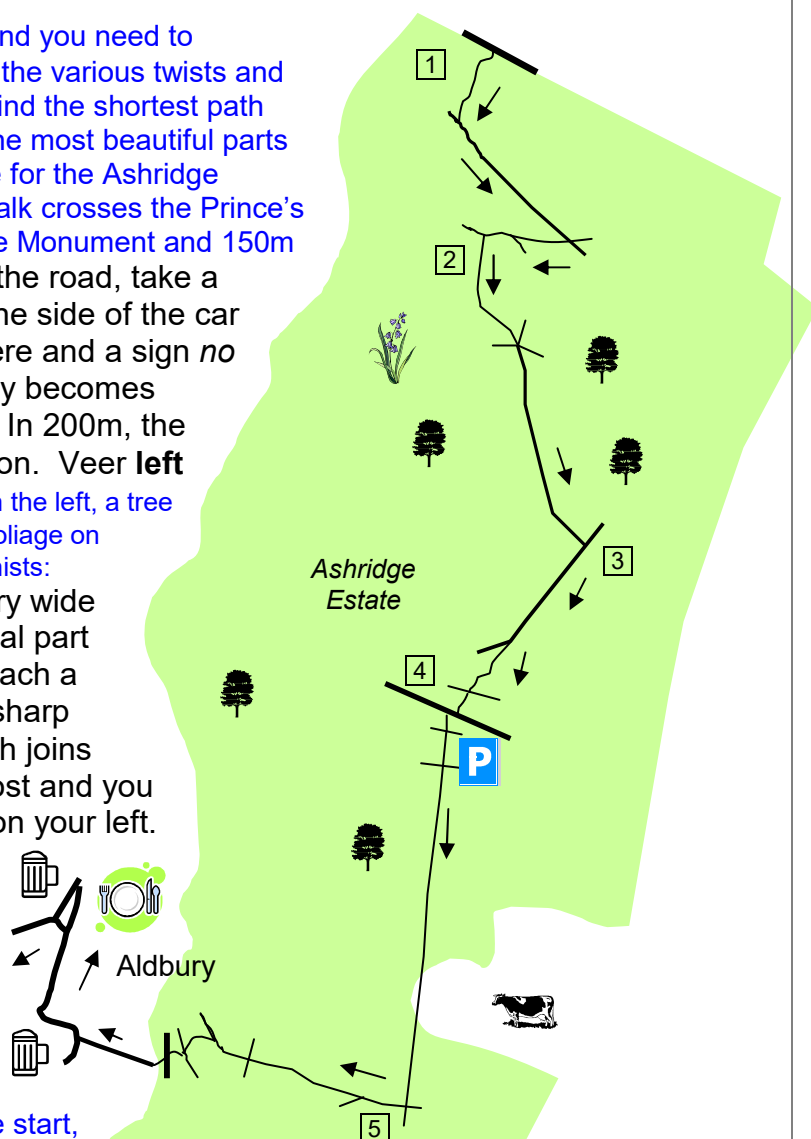
Dockey Wood appears on all the tourist brochures for the Ashridge Estate because of its glorious bluebells, that cover the entire wood like a blue-purple carpet. The straightness of the beech and oak trees frame the bluebells perfectly.


This charming wood is worth the short excursion, even if the bluebells are not in bloom. After your visit, cross directly over the road to a car parking area opposite.

Leg 2: Dockey Wood to Aldbury 5 km=3 miles

- 1 Ashridge woods are vast and complex and you need to concentrate during this section to follow the various twists and turns. This guide makes no attempt to find the shortest path but tries to guide you through some of the most beautiful parts of the forest. If you get lost, ask anyone for the Ashridge Estate car park or the Monument (the walk crosses the Prince's Riding access road about 400m from the Monument and 150m from the car park). With your back to the road, take a narrow path starting half way along the side of the car park. (There is a felled tree trunk there and a sign *no fires or barbecues*.) Your path rapidly becomes wide and grassy under tall beeches. In 200m, the path curves left and meets a T-junction. Veer **left** here on another wide path. In 60m, on the left, a tree with silvery bark has spectacular "knots" of foliage on each branch.  Fishing for feedback, botanists: species please? The path becomes very wide and grassy and this is another magical part of the walk. In another 350m, you reach a marker post with horseshoes. Turn sharp **right** on a wide path. In 200m, a path joins from the left at another horseshoe post and you reach a dense wall of cypress trees on your left. Only 15m **after the start** of the cypresses on your left is an unmarked path.

Decision point. If you want to do the shorter 7½ km=4½ mile walk, skip to the end of this text and do the **Clipper Down Cut** which will take you by an easy route back to the start, but omitting the village and pubs. Otherwise, continue with the next section.



 **2** Turn **sharp left** on the clear but unmarked path, between pines on your left and bluebell woods on your right. In late spring, these woods are blanketed with bluebells, more extensively even than in Dockey Wood, but hidden from the tourists. Your path swings left round the edge of the pines. In under 100m, it goes over a bank and reaches a junction of five paths by another horseshoe post. Ignore a path very sharp left and another wide path on the left and take the path a fraction right, almost straight ahead from your previous direction. After a few metres, at a fork in this path, take the **right**-hand fork. The path is bumpy, passes some very thick tall pines on the right and becomes quite straight and rutted by foresters' trucks. Avoid all side paths, however tempting, and follow this path for over 500m. At the end, you reach a T-junction by another horseshoe post, with a yellow arrow indicating a standard footpath. Turn **right** here on a wide forest track.

3 The track is very rutted but so wide that you can easily find a smooth course. It goes down and up a shallow dip and, about 300m after you joined it, takes you to a junction with a marker post. Here the main track forks away right. **Leave** the main track now by forking **left** (really straight ahead) on a much narrower path. This path winds through trees and, in 60m, leads to another 4-way junction by a marker post. Go straight over the crossing path here, still on a narrow grassy path. This path leads to a wide straight tarmac drive known as Prince's Riding. Incidentally, you are now in Hertfordshire. You will already be well aware that this is also a major overflow car park, used by hundreds of families. On the right, 400m away and not part of this walk, you can see the Bridgewater Monument ([a possible diversion for snacks and other facilities](#)). *This Doric-style column, designed by Sir Jeffry Wyattville, was built in 1832 in memory of the Duke of Bridgewater (1736-1803), founder of the British canal system. It is 33m tall and can be ascended via 170 steps.*

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4 Turn **right** for just 20m on the tarmac and **left** at a metal post bearing footpath signs. Keep ahead on a concrete path, ignoring a concrete path on your right. Your path changes to a wide dirt path, crosses a bridleway with blue arrows and another path with purple arrows. *In spring, bluebells are in evidence again.* On the left is a large pasture which the cattle happily share with a herd of deer. 200m after the corner of the pasture, you reach a crossing with a marker post. Turn **right** here on a bridleway.

5 Ignore a footpath that forks left in 30m and stay on the wide path. *You pass on your right a prostrate beech, still alive and nurturing gorse bushes like a sleeping gardener.* At a crossing path with a gate and house on your right, keep straight ahead. At a junction on the steep edge of a hill, leave the main path which wheels right by continuing straight ahead. A bridleway joins from the left. Keep on steeply down the hill, avoiding the level right fork. As you descend, turn **left** with the main path downhill. You reach another junction with a marker post and several paths. Avoid the path sharp right but veer **right** on a path just to the right of the steep bank ahead, shortly leading to a road. Cross the road to a footpath opposite, going steeply downhill. *Note that you are on the Chiltern Way, an immense circular trail.* The path comes down to a residential road in Aldbury: keep straight on, still descending, all the way to a major road. Turn **right** here and follow the road till it rounds a bend by the *Valiant Trooper* pub, a worthy stopping place. (Note that there is another pub in 300m with even better food.)



The “Valiant Trooper” is an iconic Chiltern pub and hugely popular. It serves the local Ridgeway brew from Tring, plus Brakspear and an imaginative selection ranging from Sennen from Cornwall and Hambledon from Hampshire. Originally the pub was a pair of 17th-century cottages and an outhouse which started selling ale as the “Royal Oak.” The letters “ID” and date 1769 cut into the brickwork by the main window are the initials of Isaac Dell Master, a previous owner. The present-day name is apparently a tribute to the Duke of Wellington who met his troops here. The pub is open all day every day and serves food during normal meal times, except on Tuesday. For reservations, ring 01442-851203.

After possible refreshment, continue on the road into the village centre.



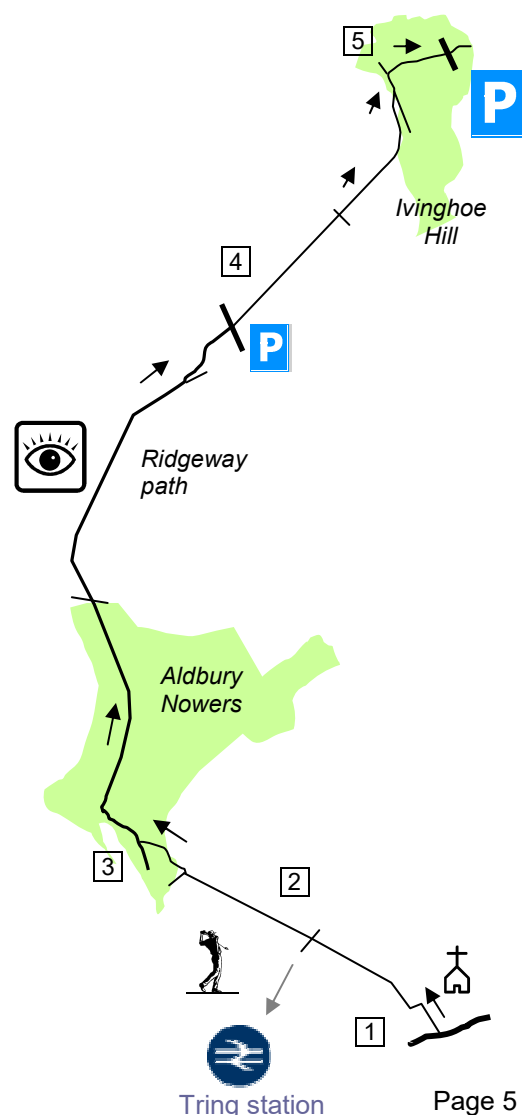
Here there is a shop, the village pond, the Greyhound pub and the church on your left.

The name “Aldbury” in old English means “old stronghold” and the village is of great antiquity. The medieval stocks and whipping post still stand by the duckpond and many old timber-framed houses remain. The “Greyhound” pub is from the 1700s and does good food (ring 01442-851228 for a reservation). If you come on May day, you will be able to join in the Aldbury fair.

In December 1881 you would have witnessed the arrival of the bodies of two gamekeepers at the Greyhound, one with his head horribly smashed in and drained of blood after a long night’s soaking. Two poachers and their pal Smith were quickly arrested after a bizarre sequence of events. To complicate matters, it was well known that the gamekeepers had been brutish men who went out armed with stout sticks, determined to have a showdown. Nevertheless, the poachers were eventually hanged and Smith sentenced to 20 years. When he came out, Smith claimed that he had killed both men himself.

Leg 3: Aldbury to Ivinghoe 5½ km=3½ miles


- 1 Turn **left** before the village green passing the church of St John the Baptist, which is worth a visit. Continue along the road and, immediately after the churchyard, turn **right** at a metal signpost via an unneeded swing-gate. Go through a small metal gate, ignore a footpath right and go straight ahead beside farm buildings. In just a few metres, your path takes you through a gate on the left, close to a barn, then through a metal swing-gate, followed by another and so onto a path between fields. In 350m, you reach a black 4-way fingerpost at a crossing path. On your left is Tring station (see *Getting There* by train, below). Keep straight ahead through a wooden swing-gate.
- 2 Your path runs beside a wire fence on your right, straight on across a golf course. Keep to the right of two marker posts, close to the hedge on your right and continue to the far corner where there is a fingerpost. Go ahead, a fraction left, through an unneeded wooden swing-gate into woodland. Follow a winding path through the wood of sycamore and hawthorn. Soon the path veers left across the middle of the wood and meets a wider crossing path. Go straight over, up a bank, on a



narrow path. The path winds through trees and curves left to meet a wide path running above a long narrow depression. *This depression is in fact Grim's Ditch, an iron-age earthwork that runs across much of Berkshire and Hampshire and the Chilterns, whose purpose is still a mystery. (See the Berkshire walk "Stone Giants and a Sting-in-the-Tail".)* Turn **right** and immediately fork **left**, avoiding the rooty non-path uphill, on the main level path. This is the Ridgeway Path which you will be following almost to the end of the walk.

The Ridgeway is one of the great national trails. At 140 km=87 miles in length, it runs from near Avebury in Wiltshire to Ivinghoe Beacon.

- 3 The path runs between fences with views to your left. *You are now entering the well-known nature site known as Aldbury Nowers, amongst over things a butterfly preserve hosting twelve different varieties.* Your path leads up steps into woodland and climbs gently higher, with more beech, hawthorn and sycamore. Occasional gaps in the beeches give you views westwards across the Tring valley to Wendover Woods. The woods give way to scrub, leading through a wooden swing-gate. Keep straight ahead on the Ridgeway, avoiding a bridleway on the left, uphill on the chalk grasslands of Pitstone Hill. You are back in Buckinghamshire. *Below on the left is the Pitstone chalk quarry and church, both now disused, the business park and the modern houses of Church End. In the field beyond is the 17th-century Pitstone Windmill, belonging to the National Trust. Beyond that is Ivinghoe church with its small spire.* The chalky path leads to the top where you cross Grim's Ditch

 again with great views all around, including the tip of the Bridgewater Monument. Walking this wide grass level smooth path is one of the great pleasures of the Chiltern hills and, if you arrive late in the day, you have the added delight of the setting sun. Eventually the path descends to a fence and a black fingerpost. Keep straight ahead, still on the Ridgeway. Continue to another black post. Ignore the right-forking arrow here and keep ahead over the sloping side of a hillock on your left and down to a gate in the fence where there is a small car park (an alternative start). Go through the car park to a lane.

- 4 Cross the lane, through a small wooden gate, signposted *Ivinghoe Beacon*. Keep ahead by a fence on your right. At another swarthy 4-way fingerpost, keep ahead uphill on the grass. Your path is visible ahead skewed on the hill. Follow it uphill with Incombe Hole, a glacial valley, down on your left. You reach a wooden gate with a junction of paths: ignore the gate and stay in the open for a little longer until, in another 100m, you see another small wooden gate on the right. Fork **right** across the grass to an information plaque, go through the gate, and turn **left** on a flinty path.

- 5 Just 60m after this gate, take a path forking away to the **right**. In 100m, a path joins you from the left. Where the main path veers off right 30m later, leave it by forking left on a path across the grass, towards the chalk lion of Dunstable Downs visible in the distance. This path leads to the main road (*careful – traffic!*) with the car park opposite where the walk began.

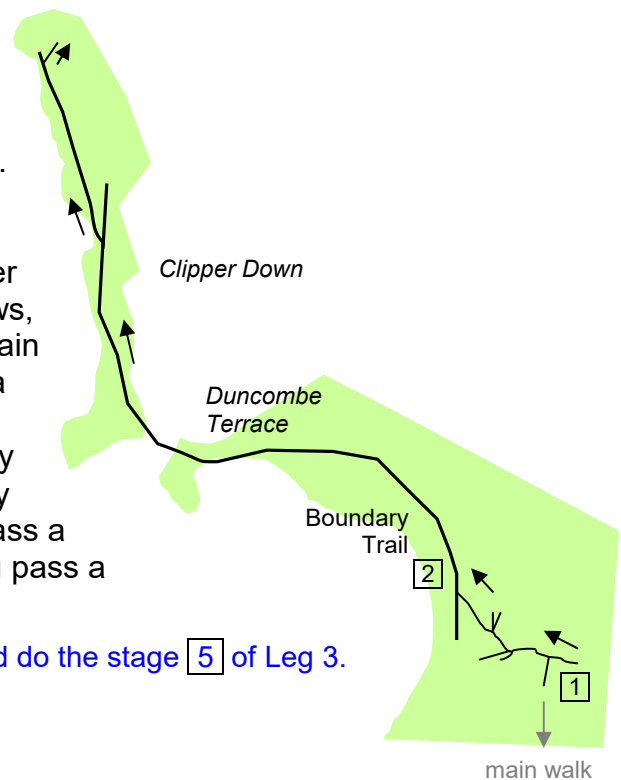
Clipper Down Cut 2¾ km=1¾ miles

Take this short cut from Ashridge woods back to the start if you want to do the shorter walk. You will miss the village of Aldbury and the spectacular Ridgeway walk.

1 See **mini-map overleaf**. Ignore the unmarked path sharp left and stay next to the line of cypresses on your left. *The woods beyond are another notable site for bluebells and in springtime it is worth making a short detour to experience them close-to-hand.* In 60m, the path veers left with the line of trees and reaches an earth bank and a junction. Turn **right**, avoiding two paths on the left. In only 15m, you reach another junction of paths. Here take the **leftmost** path, ignoring several lesser paths on the right. This path goes very gently downhill under beech trees. On your left is a steep-sided depression with a magnificent beech tree. Your path comes down to a straight wide track. This is part of the Boundary Trail, one of the most popular highways for cyclists, riders and walkers on the Ashridge estate. Veer **right** onto the track, an easy level path.

2 You are now in a steep-sided part of the woods known as Duncombe Terrace with occasional views left. Soon, in springtime, there are bluebells on the slopes on both sides. After a long leftward curve, the path goes through an open gate by some kennels and continues ahead. This area is known as Clipper Down. After roughly 400m, at a post with arrows, ignore a footpath forking left and stay on the main level path. Soon your path takes you through a wooden gate beside a cattle grid, announcing Ivinghoe Hill Nature Reserve. Turn immediately **left** on a narrow path. This path runs in roughly the same direction but with views west. You pass a small gate down on your left. Shortly after, you pass a second gate and third regardless.

To conclude the walk, return to the main text and do the stage **5** of Leg 3.



Getting there

By car: if coming from London or the west, the easiest route is via the M25 and the A41. If coming clockwise on the M25, ignore the first exit for the A41 which is for Watford and take the second, signposted *Aylesbury*. After about 15 miles, take the first exit for **Tring**. Follow signs to Tring and make your way through the town following signs to Ivinghoe, not missing a right turn at a roundabout out of town on the B488. Just over 2 miles from the town the B488 bends left at a T-junction. (*An alternative starting car park can be found by turning **right** here, ½ mile on the right.*) Just before you reach Ivinghoe village, turn **right**, as indicated, for Ivinghoe Beacon. In under a mile, turn **right** again following the sign. The car park is $\frac{3}{4}$ mile on the left.

By train: begin the walk at **Tring station**. Turn **right** out of the station and follow the road, which passes a junction on the left and curves right. 100m later, fork **left** at a black signpost onto a concrete track. In 150m, you go over a crossing path. 450m later, you reach a 4-way black fingerpost. Turn **left** here through a wooden swing-gate and join the walk at Leg 3, stage 2.

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