



East Garston, Eastbury Two Lambourn Villages

Distance: 10½ km=6½ miles

easy walking

Region: Berkshire

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Refreshments: East Garston, Eastbury

Map: Explorer 158 (Newbury) *but the map in this guide should suffice*

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Woodland, meadows, views, historic villages

In Brief

This is a walk through two of West Berkshire's prettiest villages beside the River Lambourn, with two good pubs, at least one terrific view of the Lambourn valley and the Downs, gentle meadows and woodland. It begins on a Roman road, appropriately since this area was settled by them. *The Plough* in Eastbury serves excellent lunches at reasonable hours; to enquire, ring 01488-71312.

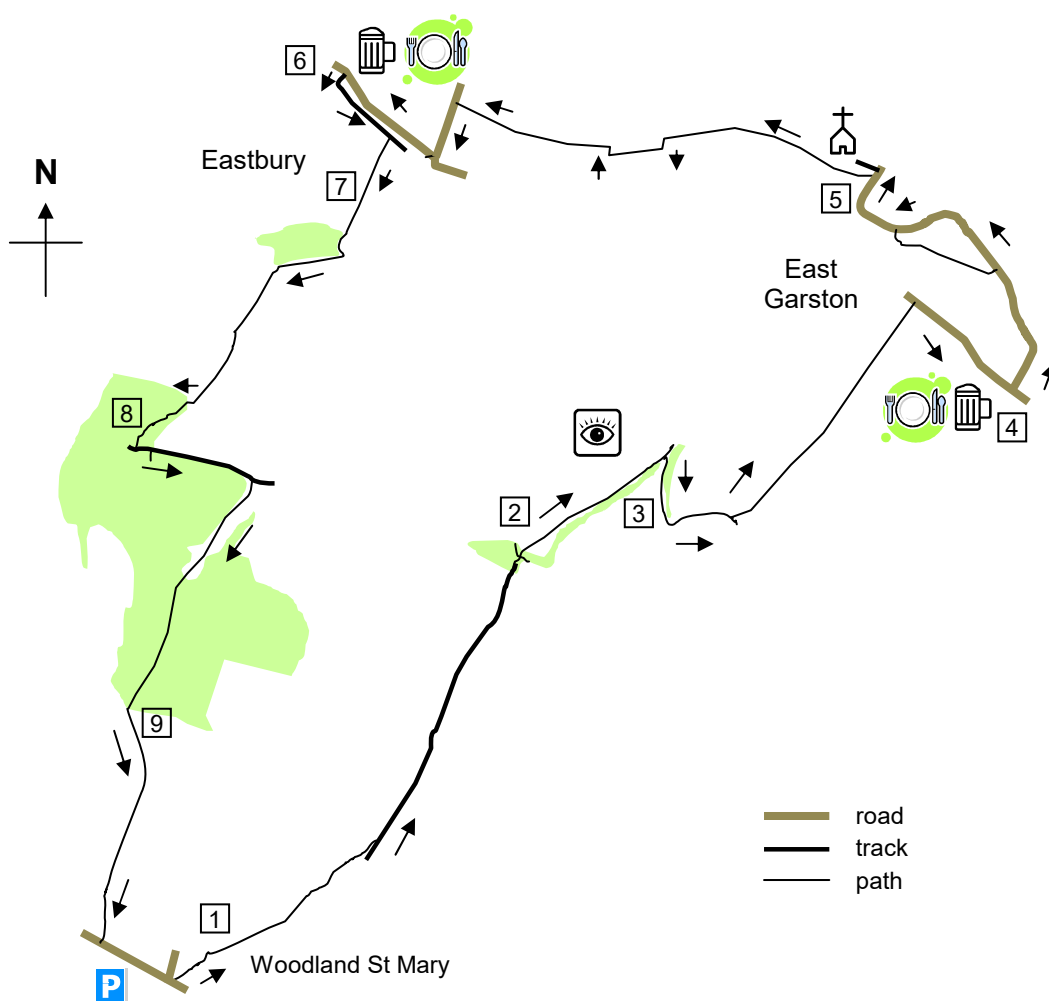


There are a some patches of nettles in high summer, many avoidable if you have a stick. Strong sensible shoes or trainers should be adequate. There are one or two stiles on the return from Eastbury which are not suited to a large dog because they have no gap or dog gate.

The walk begins in Ermin Street in the village of **Woodlands St Mary**, near Hungerford, Berkshire, just off the M4 motorway, **postcode RG17 7ST**. At the start of the village, look for a side lane with a signpost on the right for *Eastbury*. Park on the grass verge here, preferably a short way along just before a house on the left. Note that traffic runs very fast along this straight main road, without leaving much space. [Some walkers report problems parking on the grass verge, especially in wet conditions. Alternative places are: (1) in the narrow lane opposite (Eastbury Shute): there is space on the verge a short way down but this may be in the way of farm vehicles; (2) outside the village hall (social club) about 450m along the road (it's normally unused in the daytime); (3) in the lane just to the *right of the village hall* where a space is usually available just by a metal green fence, about 150m up the lane on your right (4) in one of the villages, although this spoils the idea of an excursion to the villages and back.] For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

- 1 Go to the junction with the side lane signposted *Eastbury* and take a signed footpath diagonally in the corner. Follow this winding path through woodland, ignoring a path on the left, coming out to a crop field. Cross straight over the field, heading for the right-hand corner of the wood ahead. At the corner, keep ahead with the wood, a cypress plantation, on your left. Turn **right** in the corner and, after only 20m, turn **left** through a band of conifers and then veer **right**, as directed by a fingerpost, along the right-hand side of the next field. In the next corner, go through a narrow gap at a wooden post onto a wide track, also marked as a footpath. Veer **left** on the track, thus keeping the same general direction. Where the field on your left ends and the cinder track curves left, keep straight on along a narrower track, beside the woodland of Peaks Copse on your left. Follow the fingerpost into the next large field and continue in the same direction. In the far corner, you reach a band of trees. Keep ahead through the trees, for only 50m, going down a rather untidy bank, to find a stile in the fence ahead.



- 2 Cross the stile, ignoring footpath arrows pointing left and right to find yourself in a large sloping meadow with fine views ahead and to your left. This is House Hill. Veer a fraction right so that you are walking the length of the hill, along the contour, not far from the woods on your right. The large village on your left, about 4 km distant, is Lambourn, the local capital of horse racing. About half way along the hillside, in the trees, you will see a small metal gate. Go **right** through the gate onto a narrow path, almost doubling back.

- 3 The path leads up to a field. Continue up the left-hand side of the field. In 200m, at the top, go **left** through a the first wide gap you encounter. (Note: there is a *second* gap 20m further on, with a footpath sign: this is not your path!) Now veer **left** again on a wide path across the centre of the field heading for a marker post on the other side (note that in winter the path may be untrodden and hard to make out; in summer the post may be partly hidden by foliage). At the edge of the field, before the start of a line of trees, by a partially hidden marker post, turn **left** on a path, heading for a downward slope. The path follows a line of oaks downhill beside a field on your right. In the far corner, keep straight on along a path through a long strip of woodland. The path is reinforced by a track, still under trees, and comes down to a road in East Garston. Turn **right** on the road and continue past a road junction on the right, quickly reaching the *Queen's Arms*, a real gem.



The Queen's Arms is an upmarket pub-cum-hotel-cum-restaurant, positioning itself with the Lambourn horse training set, although the food and drink are not over-priced. It specialises in English wine and has a seductive patio and garden.

- 4 Immediately after the pub, turn **left** at a road junction, going past racing stables and crossing the Lambourn River. Follow the lane as it bends left and runs through the village, passing timbered and pastel cottages for which this village is renowned.

East Garston is not east of anything: its name is derived from "Asgar's tun" after a Saxon warrior who fought the Normans at Hastings. Before then, under Edward the Confessor, he was procurer of the king's horses (just like some of the present inhabitants nearly 1000 years later). The Romans had settled in East Garston, since it lies close to Ermin Street (at the start of this walk) linking the important Roman regional capitals of Silchester and Cirencester. Their remains are all around, including a villa near Lambourn. Alfred the Great was born nearby, in Wantage, and defeated the Danes in a pyrrhic victory at Ashdown close to here.

At a road junction, keep straight ahead, following the winding road through the village. At the far end, after a terrace of timbered cottages with bridges across the Lambourn River, turn **right** with the road. Just before some white fence posts, your route is **left** on a narrow path. But first you may wish to visit the church, which is on the left just *after* the white posts. *All Saints church is late Norman (around 1190), much restored, although the old paintings of nine saints and archangels have been set in the wall. It is a first choice of many couples wanting to get married.*

- 5 Having turned left on the path, follow it through a swing-gate and under trees along the route of the old railway. This nice easy path ends at steps, going up **left** through a wooden gate and into a field. Turn **right** and, on meeting a crossing track, go **right** and immediately **left** on a grassy path, with a field and later small meadows on your left. Your path takes you down steps to a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane, passing thatched barns, to a road in Eastbury, another pretty Berkshire village. Turn **right** on the main road through the village. Continue, passing many attractive properties, until you reach *The Plough* on your right. *The "Plough" is a little gem with excellent food, most of it sourced locally. It closes from "3.30ish" ("4ish" on Sunday) and on Sunday evening.*



- 6 After possibly exploring a little further along the road, turn **left** just after the pub over the Lambourn on a tarmac lane which immediately bends **left** again, beside the river, passing more charming timbered cottages and the

church. After the black-and-white *Eastview Cottage*, ignore the first small wooden gate marked *Poors Furze*. Go another 50m and go **right** through the *second* small wooden gate, also marked *Poors Furze*, just before a brick-and-flint house. Go over a stile and up a wide grassy path.

- 7 At the top, go over a stile and follow a path through a section of woodland [jun 2018: a walker did not find this path and walked along the field edge instead]. Your path soon goes up more steeply and eventually bends **left** into a large field. Turn **right** and **right** again, walking beside the woodland on your right. Your path gradually curves left up the gentle gradient of Shrags Hill on a nice wide green field edge. About 30m after the path begins to descend, you come to a wide gap in the trees. Turn **right** through the gap by a marker post with a yellow arrow, out into the next field and **immediately** turn **left** onto a path that runs in the trees, parallel to your original path. The entry to the path is rather overgrown and nettly but, as soon as you find a way into the trees, you are on a better wide path running under leaning hazels.
- 8 Your path emerges from the wood into tall grass, near a wire fence on your right. The path leads to a fingerpost on a wide track. Turn **left** here. Ignore a muddy path that joins from your right and continue straight ahead, soon coming into a field. Proceed along the right-hand side of this sloping field with woods on your right. Where the wood ends, at a 4-way fingerpost, wheel sharp **right** round the edge of the wood, up a long narrow meadow, about 30m wide with woods on each side. Keep to the centre and, at the top, go through a narrow gap and continue along the centre of a similar slightly smaller and rougher narrow meadow. As you near the far end, take either the left-hand narrow path under two trees or the wider right-hand vehicle path: it makes no difference as they quickly re-merge.
- 9 Keep left at the end to veer **left** past a yellow arrow on a post into woods. Keep straight ahead at all times through the wood, going very steadily uphill, passing numerous gamebird feeders. Your path goes under wires, zigzagging left and right through a band of trees and out into a crop field. Your direction is a fraction **left**, as directed by a fingerpost, on a very wide grassy track between fields. The track elbows right and passes a wood on your left. At a post with a yellow arrow keep **right** beside a horse pasture with new birch trees. The path ends through a small wooden gate to the road where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Take the M4 and come off at exit 14. Turn **right**, signposted *Wantage*, and take the first road on the **left**, signposted *Lambourn*, passing the *Pheasant Inn*. The village of Woodlands St Mary is reached in just over 1½ miles.

By bus/train: Bus no. 4 goes from Newbury to East Garston and Eastbury. Not Sunday. Check the timetables.

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