



LAMBOURN VALLEY WAY

A walk

from the Whitehorse Hill to Newbury



Walking the Lambourn Valley Way

The route follows public rights of way for the most part, but certain sections follow permitted paths. The whole length is signed with waymark discs and fingerposts. There are some slight alternatives to the route which take you through the villages of Upper Lambourn, Eastbury and East Garston. (The one into Upper Lambourn from the downs is rather narrow and may also be used by horses).

The terrain is generally easy going, but there is a gradual drop in height totalling 560 feet from west to east. The Lambourn Downs can be bleak in winter, contrasting with the more sheltered valley. Suitable clothing is therefore recommended.



Cottages at Eastbury

Although wherever possible stiles have been replaced with kissing gates and squeeze-stiles, you should be prepared to meet all three structures along the route.

The whole route is approximately 19 and a half miles (31 km) in length.

You may wish to walk shorter sections of the route. (You could make a day-trip by bus, walking a section of the route between villages on the bus route - details of bus service below).

The following are approximate distances between some of the villages on the route:-

Lambourn - East Garston 2.9 miles (4.7 kms)

East Garston - Great Shefford 1.9 miles (3.1 kms)

Great Shefford - Boxford 4.2 miles (6.7 kms)

Boxford - Bagnor 2.4 miles (3.8 kms)

Bagnor - K&A Canal 2.2 miles (3.6 kms)

The spur between Bagnor and Donnington Castle is about three quarters of a mile (1.2 kms)

How to Get There

By rail: there is a main line railway station at Newbury.

Phone National Rail Enquiry Service on 0845 748 4950.

By bus: An hourly bus service (4/5) runs Mon-Sat between Newbury and Lambourn stopping at many of the villages on the route. Phone Newbury Buses on 01635 567500 for details.

By car: there are public car parks at each end of the route at Whitehorse Hill and Newbury. In between these points however you should have little trouble finding places to park.

Long Distance Routes

The Lambourn Valley Way links two long distance routes. Why not make a real expedition and walk the 140 miles or so from West Kennet Long Barrow to London along the Ridgeway, Lambourn Valley Way, Kennet and Avon Canal Towpath and the Thames Path?

Take Care

Please follow the Country Code and keep Berkshire tidy. Take extra care when the route occasionally takes you onto sections of road.

Useful Maps

The most useful maps are the Ordnance Survey Explorer Series Maps. Map Nos. 170 (Abingdon, Wantage & Vale of White Horse) and 158 (Newbury and Hungerford) cover the route at a scale of 1:25000. The Ordnance Survey Landranger Map No. 174 also covers the whole of the route at a scale of 1:50000. These maps can be purchased at book shops or borrowed from public libraries.

Accommodation

Newbury Tourist Information Centre, The Wharf, Newbury 01635 30267.

Acknowledgments

West Berkshire Council is grateful to the Ramblers' Association for supplying the original idea and route for the Lambourn Valley Way.

This leaflet was produced by West Berkshire District Council. For further information about this and other leaflets please contact West Berkshire District Council, Countryside and Environment, Faraday Road, Newbury RG14 2AF Tel: 01635 519808.



Printed on recycled paper

THE LAMBOURN VALLEY

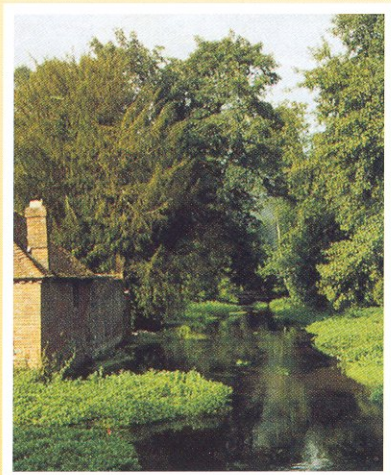
The Lambourn Valley Way is a 20 mile-long walk running from the expansive Berkshire Downs at the Uffington White Horse to Newbury along the picturesque valley of the River Lambourn. It passes through an area with a long history of human settlement, and the valley's prosperity has been built for much of this time around the presence of sheep.

Ancient History

The Ridgeway, which lies at the western end of the walk, has been used as a road across the dry chalk uplands from as far back as the Stone Age (c. 4000 B.C.). In the New Stone Age, people began to settle, clearing fields on the downs where the soil contained flints for making tools, and was light and easily worked. The poor soil however soon became exhausted so that new fields were cleared and the old ones abandoned and grazed. Gradually the clearings became the great expanses of chalk grassland that have existed for centuries ever since.

Growth of Agriculture in the Lambourn Valley

On the chalk downs there are very few rivers because chalk is a porous rock, and water seeps downwards to rest at



River Lambourn at Welford

the line of saturation, or "water table". The source of the River Lambourn is where this water level breaks the surface, and it migrates up and down the valley according to how much rainfall there has been.

The settlements along the walk have grown up along this sole supply of water. Many villages from the early Middle Ages were under the control of a manor, with their livelihood coming mainly from the growing of corn on the lower slopes of the downs. The poor soil was fertilised by the dung from huge flocks of grazing sheep, which were usually tended by a shepherd employed by the manor, and which consisted of animals belonging to all the tenant farmers.

By the 16th century the fertility of the soil could only be maintained by keeping more and more animals. As a result, a new technology of artificially-watered meadows was introduced to enable sheep to be brought down from the exhausted downland in winter to feed on lush grass. A network of channels and drains by the river was dug to enable the meadow to be covered during the winter months with a thin, rapidly-moving sheet of water to both protect grass from frost and to stimulate its early growth. This then provided early feed for the sheep, allowing greater numbers to be kept. The flock was folded by night onto the arable land where the dung fertilised the soil.

Changes in Land Use

In the late 1870's there was an agricultural depression caused by poor weather; low grain yields coinciding with cheap imports; and a fall in the price of wool. Many of the arable fields were laid to grass; the water meadows were abandoned and the sheep population consequently decreased dramatically. It is only since the Second World War that new techniques in agriculture have meant that great areas of downland have seen



Sheep at East Shefford

the use of huge machines for ploughing and management of land, bringing the demise of the traditional small-scale mixed family farming.

Legacies of Prosperity from Sheep

You will see many legacies of the influence of sheep and wool on the Lambourn Valley. The name "Lambourn" means "stream where lambs are washed", and a market and sheep fair thrived in the village from the time of the erection of the market cross in the 12th century until the Middle Ages. Since the 18th century the racehorse training industry has grown in and around Lambourn from early meetings at Ashdown Park. The downs have ideal soft, springy, dry turf and around Lambourn are suitably flat. "Shefford" means "sheep ford", and at Bagnor there is a water mill (now a theatre) which was once a cloth mill sited beside "Rack Marsh", an area of waste ground where the cloth was dried. "Newbury" means "new market town". Its prosperity began in the 15th and 16th centuries when wool from downland sheep was spun in a string of highly successful cloth mills founded by John Winchcombe, also known as "Jack of Newbury". Cloth-making declined in the 18th century due to competition from mills in the north.

More recently this century, the Lambourn Valley Railway has provided transport up and down the valley for agricultural as well as passenger and horse-box traffic. Although a well-used and successful railway, unfortunately it was closed by the government in 1959.



Great Shefford Church

Waymark discs you will see

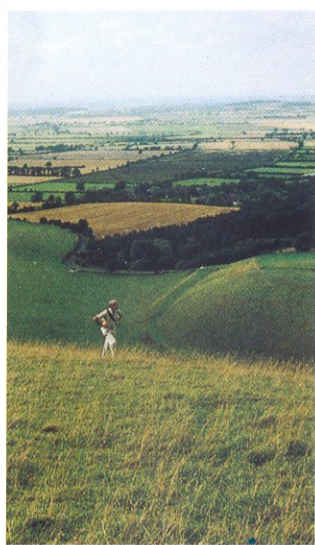


Based upon the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of HM Stationery Office. Crown copyright. West Berkshire District Council LA9072L 2001. Cartography by GEOprojects (UK) Ltd., Reading, Berks. Unauthorised reproduction infringes copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings.



Wildlife

Centuries of grazing by sheep on the downs have kept the grass short, whilst chalkland soil is shallow, drains easily and warms up quickly after rain. These features have encouraged a wide range of insects and flowering plants, some of which are only found on chalk grassland. The enclosure of open fields in the 18th and 19th centuries marked the beginning of the extension of arable farming over large areas of downland. However, it is only since the Second World War that the majority of grassland has been ploughed, resulting in a great reduction in its original area. Woolstone Down near Whitehorse Hill has grassland which may be original, but it appears to have been little grazed. There is also evidence that the woodland area nearby was in existence long before the arrival of Man in the area. Some of the flooded pastures in the river valley are now no longer grazed, and are becoming invaded by alder and willow scrub. Rack Marsh at Bagnor and Boxford Marsh are both protected reserves containing a rich variety of plant species.



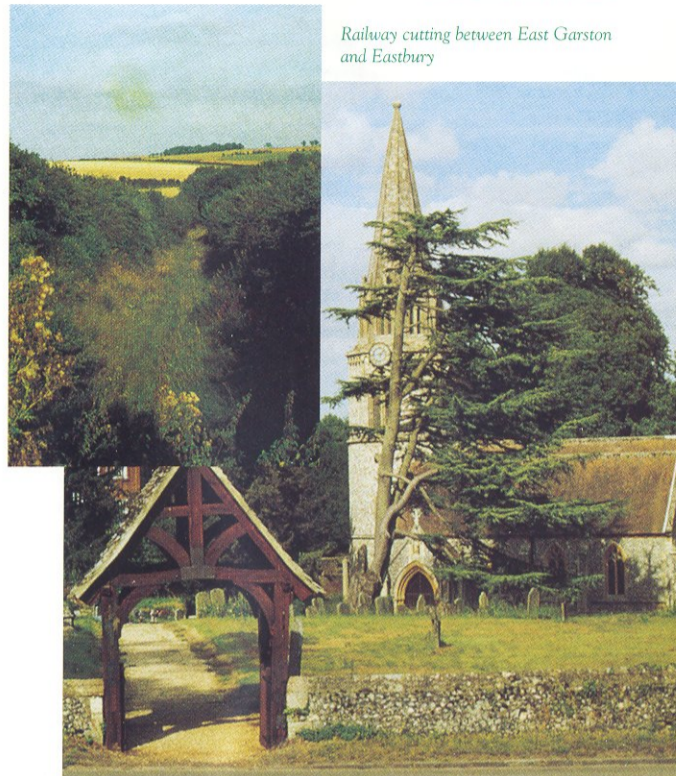
Whitehorse Hill



Almshouses at Lambourn



Wild flowers on the downs



Railway cutting between East Garston and Eastbury

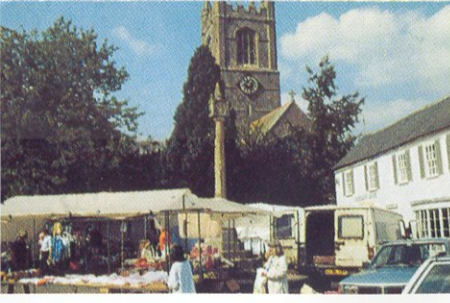
Welford Church



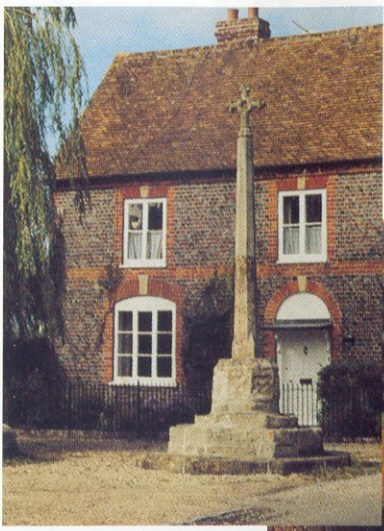
Boxford Mill



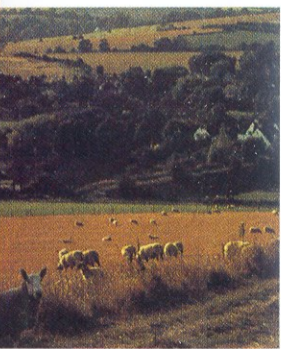
River Lambourn at Boxford



Lambourn market and cross



Eastbury cross



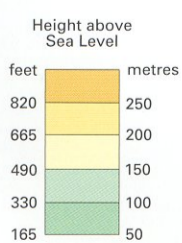
Sheep grazing above East Garston



Donnington Castle

LEGEND

- Lambourn Valley Way
- Other Public Rights of Way
- +++ Course of Dismantled Railway
- P.O. Post Office (and Shop)
- † Church
- ☎ Telephone
- ⊕ Bus Stop
- Ⓟ Car Park
- ⚡ Golf Course



Scale 1:65,000 approx

