

HISTORY

The Ridgeway, one of the most ancient tracks in Europe, dates back to prehistoric times and is surrounded by the remains of early civilisations in the form of tumuli (Bronze Age round barrows), Stone Age long barrows and Iron Age forts. On your way along the Ridgeway you may notice the remains of Grim's Ditch to the north, an important landholding division which once ran 24 miles to the River Thames, but which is now only evident in isolated stretches. At Cuckhamsley Hill the open vistas of downland are temporarily obscured by a small stand of trees which surround "Scutchamer Knob", a barrow which is believed to be the burial place of King Cwicchelm of Wessex, who died in AD 593. The downland over which much of the route runs is chalk upland which has a shallow soil profile. In the past this has proved unsuitable for ploughing and was left to be grazed by sheep, but with modern farming techniques it has been possible to turn the majority of this land over to crops.

The A34 is the main through-route between Southampton and the North West of England. At Gore Hill it follows a similar line to that of the dismantled railway that used to link Oxford with Newbury and Southampton.

East Ilsley is an attractive village containing a 13th Century church. Typically plain in design, the church contains a brass (1606) to Katharine Hildeslea, the surname being that from which "Ilsley" is derived. East Ilsley, like Lambourn further to the west, is now best known as a centre for racehorse training, relying as it does on the lush, springy turf which carpets the Downs encircling the village. In former times, most notably in the Middle Ages, the village was an important centre specialising in the sheep trade. It was not unknown for several thousand sheep and lambs to be auctioned within a single day, the beasts having been driven down the narrow roads and tracks that lead into the village.

Old Street Lane, as the name suggests, is an ancient track which ran from the south of Newbury (Walbury Hill) to the Ridgeway.

Stand of trees at Lands End



The unspoilt village of Farnborough, at 700 feet above sea level, is the highest village in Berkshire. It contains the remains of a medieval cross and has a 12th Century church with a modern window by John Piper, in memory of the former Poet Laureate, Sir John Betjeman, who once lived in the village.

You may wish to visit West Ilsley by taking one of the signposted rights of way off the Ridgeway National Trail. Although traditionally of less significance than its eastern neighbour, the village has an unusual history. Perhaps the most notable event relates to one of the former custodians of the church, an Archbishop of Spalato (Split) who journeyed to England following profound disagreements with the Pope in 1616. It is likely that these differences of opinion centred on faith, as on his arrival in England he became a Protestant and was subsequently made rector of the parish and later Dean of Windsor. On his eventual return to Rome, mistakenly believing he would be made Cardinal, the unfortunate man was imprisoned.



Farnborough Church

DOWNLAND WILDLIFE

Many flowering plants are supported by the downland soils. Some, such as orchids and milkwort, are dependent on the calcium-rich earth and several species of insect such as the common blue and chalkhill blue butterflies feed exclusively off downland plants. There is also plenty of bird life to be seen on your way round, including skylarks, meadow pipits, lapwings and corn buntings which inhabit the areas of sparse cover. Yellowhammers populate the scrubland and the denser vegetation is the home of woodland birds.

ADDITIONAL NOTES Downland routes can be hot and dry in the summer months when water may be scarce. There is a water tap, trough and hitching post at the start of the gallops to the east of the A34 on the Ridgeway. There are also public houses in East and West Ilsley.

USEFUL MAPS The Ordnance Survey Pathfinder maps SU47/57 and SU48/58 along with the Landranger map 174 cover the Ilsley Downs Riding Route.

Greening Beautiful Berkshire

Berkshire County Council runs a campaign to conserve and enhance the county's environment and to encourage others to do the same, under the banner of "Greening Beautiful Berkshire". The campaign promotes a range of initiatives concerned with:

- Reducing pollution, including litter.
- Helping to conserve global resources.
- Promoting environmental understanding.
- Making Berkshire's environment safe, diverse and attractive.

For further information about the "Greening Beautiful Berkshire" campaign, please contact County Environment at Berkshire County Council, Shire Hall, Shinfield Park, Reading RG2 9XA (Tel: 01734 234158)

Acknowledgements

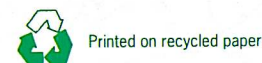
Berkshire County Council is grateful for a financial contribution towards this leaflet from the Countryside Commission and for the help and assistance of the British Horse Society and The Ridgeway Officer.

The Country Code

- Guard against all risks of fire
- Fasten all gates
- Keep dogs under proper control
- Keep to paths across farmland
- Avoid damaging stiles, fences, hedges, and walls
- Leave no litter, and make no unnecessary noise
- Safeguard water supplies
- Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone
- Don't disturb wildlife, plants and trees
- Go carefully on country roads
- Respect the life of the country

This leaflet was designed and produced for Berkshire County Council by Babbie Public Services Division (planning and transportation consultants). For further information about this and other leaflets, please contact Babbie at Shire Hall, Shinfield Park, Reading RG2 9XG (Tel: 01734 758844).

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Royal County of
BERKSHIRE

Ilsley Downs Riding Route

15 Mile Circular Ride



Babbie Public Services Division

PARKING AND STARTING POINT:

Bury Down Car Park on road from West Ilsley to Chilton, north of West Ilsley (Grid Ref. SU 479840). Parking suitable for horseboxes is available.

The Ilsley Downs Riding Route is a safe and attractive ride through the traffic-free lanes and beautiful open countryside of the Berkshire Downs.

The route has been described in a clockwise direction from the Car Park (Point 1).

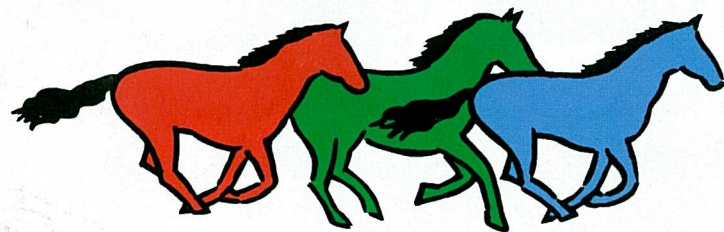
It follows byways, bridleways and roads used as public paths (RUPPs) and each change in direction is carefully signed with an arrow bearing the "Downs Riding Route" logo.



Follow The Ridgeway National Trail in an easterly direction, taking in the splendid views on either side of you, and continue on under the A34 at Gore Hill (Point 2). To the south of you is Sheep Down and to the north lie the villages of Upton and Chilton.

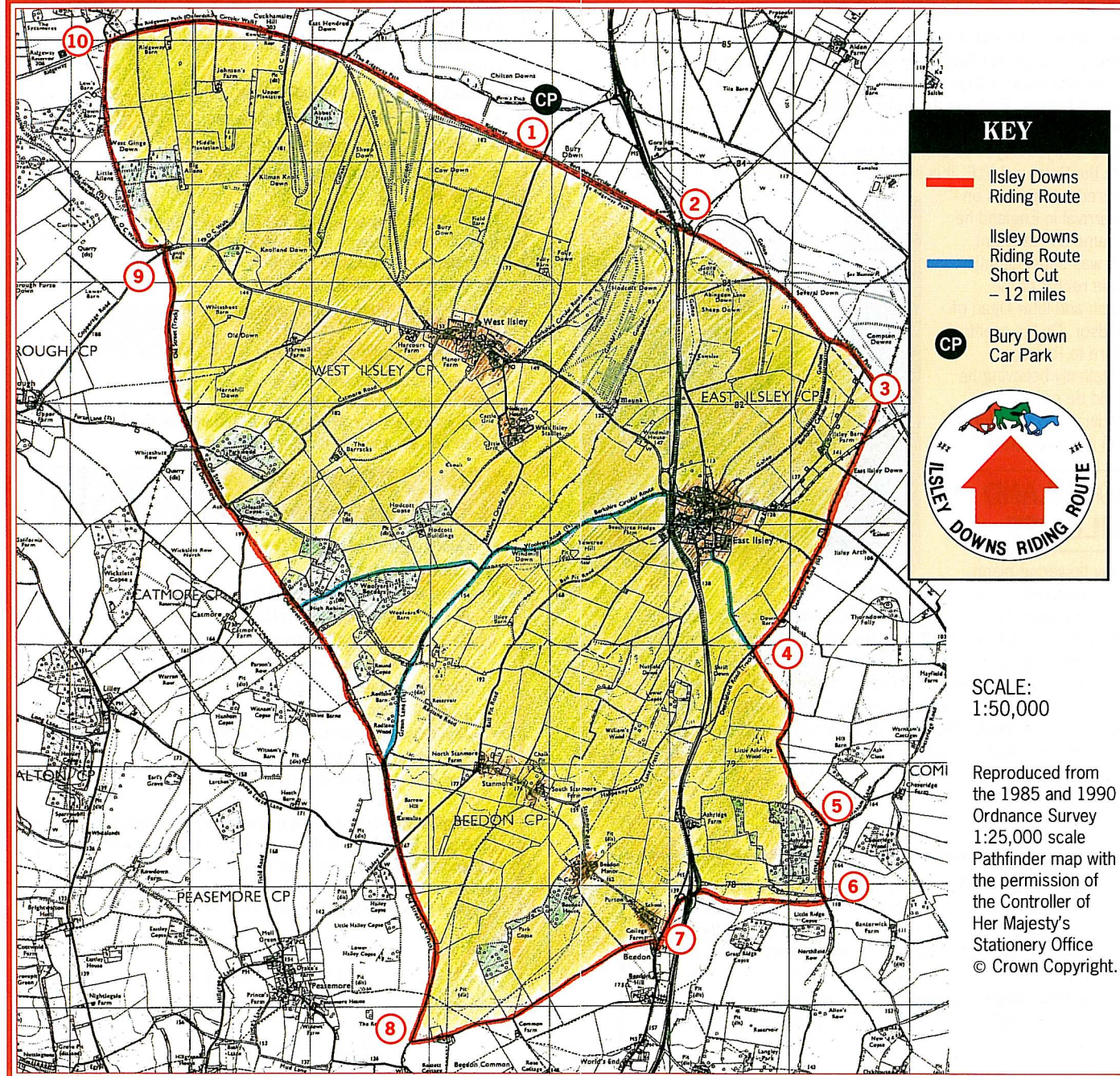
Follow The Ridgeway National Trail along a short concreted section of track and then turn right down the signposted byway (Point 3). Follow this track over East Ilsley Down to the main Compton - East Ilsley road. Cross straight over this road onto another byway

View under Beeches



Cover Picture: Looking West along the Ridgeway National Trail from Cuckhamsley Hill.

Ilsley Downs Riding Route



(known as Dennisford Road) and follow this for approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile until you come to a crossroads in the tracks (Point 4).

To continue on the main route turn left at the junction and follow Green Hams Lane which meanders through some pleasantly wooded scenery (alternatively you can turn right into the village). After about $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles you will come to a junction of tracks (Point 5). Take the track signposted to your right and continue along this for about $\frac{1}{3}$ mile until you come to an avenue of beech trees (Point 6). Turn right at the junction and follow this path westwards which eventually takes you under the A34 and onto the Beedon road. Turn left and follow this road up the short hill into Beedon (Point 7).

Take the first right in Beedon and turn immediately left down the bridgeway.

Follow this bridgeway for approximately $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles past the attractive cottages of Beedon Common and take the next right turn at the gated byway which takes you onto historic Old Street Lane (Point 8).

Follow Old Street Lane for about 1 mile, go across Hailey's Lane and then on past the tumulus at Barrow Hill. Where the track forks, take the left hand track keeping Redlane Wood to your right. Keep going straight on along this track until you come to a small copse where the byway changes to a bridgeway. Follow this bridgeway to its junction with the road and turn right along the road. Three hundred yards along the road there is a sharp right hand bend. Take the track directly in front of you and you are back on Old Street.

Five Hundred yards along Old Street there is a track (a RUPP known as Furze Lane) leading off to the left. If you wish to make a detour into Farnborough then follow this track into the village.

Keep going along Old Street which now runs under a thick canopy of tree growth and then opens out to give pleasant views over the Downs towards West Ilsley and Farnborough on either side. Go right at Copperage Road and then immediately left up the Byway (Point 9) which will lead you to the summit where it joins The Ridgeway National Trail (Point 10). Turn right at the top and follow the Ridgeway back to the Bury Down car park.

