

3·2 Ogbourne St George to Sparsholt Firs

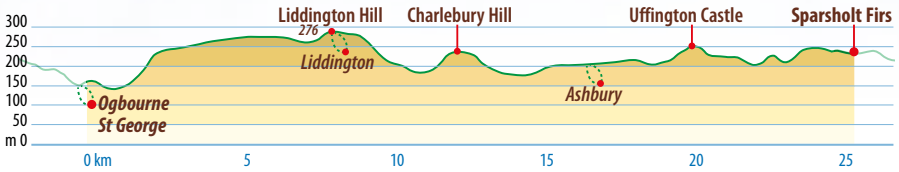
Map panels 1 and 2

Distance 25·6 km 16·0 miles

Terrain mostly byways on gravelly and sometimes grassy ground, with a short stretch on road after a sustained climb near the start, mainly easy slopes

Food and drink Foxhill (The Burj); also offroute pubs at Ogbourne St George, Liddington, Bishopstone, Ashbury, Woolstone, Uffington and Wantage; offroute shops at Uffington and Wantage

Summary a remote section, on which most facilities are 1-2 km offroute; wide views from the escarpment and historical interest with two Iron Age forts and Uffington's famous White Horse



- Follow Draycott Close south for 100 m to where it bends sharply left. Look for the fingerpost on the right taking you offroad on a track straight ahead through an avenue of high trees.
- Continue to follow the track as it skirts to the south of Ogbourne St George. About 1 km after the track began, look for the fingerpost where The Ridgeway turns left down a tree-lined road, heading south-east.
- Cross the bridge over the River Og (which is sometimes underground). Pass through the delightful thatched cottages of Hallam.
- Soon cross the busy A346 with care, and continue ahead on a track. The second house on the right is Elm Tree Cottage with an outside water tap (please ask before using it).
- After a further 150 m, cross cycle track 482 and pass between two brick and stone columns that once supported the Chiseldon & Marlborough railway.
- After 400 m, continue the loop around Ogbourne St George by crossing Bytham Road: the straightness of the road reveals its Roman origin. (To reach Foxlynch campsite and bunkhouse, turn left along Bytham Road for 600 m.)



Thatched cottage, Hallam

- Now go uphill fairly steeply on a tree-lined track for 600 m. As it levels out, it is joined by another byway (with fingerpost), and almost immediately you reach a track junction where a second fingerpost turns you left.
- Carry on for just over 1 km (0.6 mi). You are back on the Ridge now, with good views to either side. After a farm on your right, you meet a public road: turn left, and after a further 300 m cross straight over another road.
- The trail continues north towards Liddington Hill with lovely open views en route: after a further 1 km (0.6 mi) cross a track past a radio mast; after a further 1 km follow a right-left dogleg; and after a further 500 m reach a fork.
- At the fork, take care to bear off left on the narrow bridleway: don't be tempted to stay on the much wider byway that bends right. (There is a fingerpost, but its angle is unclear.)
- Over the next km, the grassy path rises to a height of 276 m (905 ft), the highest point of the whole route.



Bearing left on the narrow bridleway

- After descending slightly for about 500 m, you reach a wide gateway. The trail turns right through the gateway, but you may wish to detour first to Liddington Castle.
- If so, follow the fingerpost at the gate pointing you left along the permissive path (not shown on some maps). It follows two sides of a field, north for 100 m then south-west for 100 m, to reach the earthworks. Retrace your steps to the gate.
- After the gate, the trail continues downhill for 1 km (0.6 mi) to meet the surprisingly busy B4192. Be careful here!
- Turn left to follow the B4192 briefly. Further ahead, this road leads to the facilities of Liddington, Wanborough and eventually Swindon.
- After only 150 m, turn right off the B4192 and follow a lesser tarmac road. There is no proper verge, so walk on the right to face oncoming traffic and stay alert.

Horses grazing, below Liddington Hill





North over the convex curves of 'Smith's Bottom'

- Over the next 1.6 km (1 mi) you bridge the M4, cross Wanborough Plain and finally reach The Burj – formerly a pub, now an Indian restaurant. Continue on the road for just 100 m, then turn right up a waymarked path near a radio mast.
- You are now en route towards Wayland's Smithy. This stretch of trail is fairly remote, but is clearly waymarked as it crosses path, track, or road every km or less.
- The views are extensive and the lighting can be dramatic even in poor weather. The Ridgeway's curvaceous slopes become more visible to your left.
- About 2.5 km (1.6 mi) after the Burj, cross a minor road that to the left leads to Bishopstone 1 km (0.6 mi) away.
- After a further 1.3 km (0.8 mi), reach a lane (Idstone Hill) with a barn on the left and a water tap (fed only in summer). The surface has changed from a loose road to grass and mud, at times rutted.



Wayland's Smithy

- Another 1.3 km (0.8 mi) brings you up to a road (B4000) that leads to Ashbury to the left.
- The trail crosses the B4000 and a car park. After 1.5 km (0.9 mi), Wayland's Smithy Long Barrow is on your left and well worth exploring. It's a Neolithic communal grave sited in an atmospheric glade of ancient beech trees.



Wayland's Smithy

The name is Saxon, called after Wolund, a Germanic smith-god who appears in *Beowulf* and in earlier Norse sagas. The site was first used for burial about 5,500 years ago. It marks an important change in burial practice: a smaller, older tomb of timber was covered by a larger, later stone tomb that includes separate chambers. Excavations show that at least 14 people were buried here.

- Continue for 2 km (1.2 mi), at first descending, then rising gently to a flattish plateau. The earthworks of Uffington Castle, an Iron Age hill fort, are on your left.
- To explore the fort, go through a gate on your left marked by the second National Trust white sign for White Horse Hill. Head towards the concrete trig pillar: from here you can make a circuit of the hill fort and appreciate its scale and enjoy the views from its lofty embankment.
- The famous White Horse is etched on the hillside below the fort, slightly east of north. To view it, from the trig pillar walk about 250 m due north on a narrow informal trod path until you start to see its startlingly large white head. The National Trust asks you not to walk on this fragile ancient work of art.



White Horses and other hill figures

There are 57 large-scale hill figures scattered over England, including 16 white horses, 2 human giants, and other symbols such as crosses and crowns. Uffington's White Horse is by far the oldest: it is 3,000 years old, whilst the next oldest horse at Westbury was created under 250 years ago.

Uffington's horse is about 110 m (360 ft) long, and its role enigmatic, possibly a fertility symbol. The Whipsnade White Lion was created in 1933 to advertise the zoo, and is about 147 m long. You may see it from Ivinghoe Beacon.

The head of Uffington's White Horse; Dragon Hill in middle distance





Dragon Hill, a natural mound named after its legendary link with St George

- It's hard to appreciate the Horse from close quarters. For a better view, you could drop down to Dragon Hill, which is ahead to the left, see photograph above, albeit you will lose 70 m of altitude. (If you wish to visit or stay at Uffington, however, you don't need to retrace your steps: simply continue 2 km/1.2 mi north from Dragon Hill along the road.)
- Retrace your steps from the fort to The Ridgeway en route for Sparsholt Firs. The first section descends gently and is punctuated by signs promoting detours to the Teapot Tearoom (weekend afternoons) and, later, to the Blowingstone pub (open daily, 1.6 km/1 mile offroute).
- For about 1 km after the road to Blowingstone, the trail rises and falls gently over a small hill with gallops to the right. Then it crosses a track that gives access to Down Barn farm (B&B and camping).
- The trail then climbs, steeply at first, for about 800 m. As it levels out, it passes Hill Barn (B&B and water) on the right.
- Descend for about 400 m to join a minor public road. Within 100 m this reaches the crossroads at Sparsholt Firs, with a shaded car park on the far side of the B4001.

