**Outdoor Activities **

The terrain of the North Wessex Downs provides many ideal locations and routes for a wide range of outdoor pursuits. The numerous footpaths, trails and bridleways give easy access to the beautiful countryside for walking, cycling and horse riding. For example the Three Downs Link is a multi-user bridle path connecting the two national trails of the South Downs Way and The Ridgeway.

En route you will enjoy mile after mile of open chalk downland, crossing Watership Down and heading North towards Marlborough and the hill forts of the Ridgeway before heading South again towards Hungerford.

Within easy reach of major conurbations, but remote in its feel, the North Wessex Downs are the ideal place to enjoy country pursuits while respecting the environment. Kite flying is very popular on the Ridgeway, Wittenham Clumps and many other Downland locations. There are horse riding trails with minimal contact with roads, taking in many of the best views and ancient monuments. Alternatively, check out the North Wessex Downs on the 1SW Adventure Map to find off road cycle trails, graded according to your level of skills and experience.

If you like messing around in boats you can hire a canal boat or go kayaking along the Kennet and Avon canal, which runs through the middle of the North Wessex Downs. The ‘Rose of Hungerford’, run by the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust, offers 2-3 hour trips from Easter to October. Further along you can visit the historic Crofton Pumping Station or simply walk the scenic towpath.

For those who like country sports there is game shooting and deer stalking at Hungerford Hall, or a shooting school at Barbury Castle. Alternatively you can enjoy a day’s fly fishing or coarse fishing on the River Kennet at Barton Court and Aldermaston Mill, or on the River Lambourn (we recommend you use a professional guide). Why not visit the Lambourn Valley Open day on Good Friday when over 30 horse trainers open their yards to the public?

**Places to visit before you leave**

**The Ridgeway**

Some of the most dramatic scenery of the Ridgeway National Trail passes through the North Wessex Downs. This is an ancient route used since prehistoric times by travellers, herdsmen and soldiers.

For walkers, horse riders and cyclists it is the perfect location to get away from it all in this busy part of England. The climbs are not too strenuous, but the views are very dramatic. It is the ideal trail for both long distance treks and day trips.

**Horse Riding**

The North Wessex Downs is a wonderful landscape for horse riding, taking in some of the most remote locations and finest views and escaping the pressures of modern life. The Pewsey Vale Riding Centre offers trail rides along the Ridgeway, plus day rides to other locations. Other riding schools and equestrian centres can be found at Southill Stables in Aldbourne, Little Hidden Farm near Hungerford, Cunetio at Mildenhall, Cullinghood in Pangbourne or the Blewbury Riding Centre. For information on horsefriendly accommodation or other equine facilities contact the British Horse Society.

**Game Shooting at Hungerford Park**

For those who enjoy country sports there is a full programme of day shoots throughout the year at Hungerford Park. The estate offers driven shoots of mixed pheasant and partridge plus deer stalking. For a simulated shooting experience, try Hilldrop Farm near Ramsbury or Barbury Shooting School.

**Lambourn Valley Way**

The Lambourn Valley Way starts at the Uffington White Horse and follows the River Lambourn for almost 30 kilometres to Newbury. Lambourn is a Special Area of Conservation –the highest level of protection – for its very special chalkstream wildlife. The route is well sign posted with waymark discs and fingerposts and takes in the picturesque villages of East Garston, Great Shefford and Boxford. The terrain is easy going, with a gradual drop in height of 560 feet from west to east.

**The Kennet and Avon Canal**

The Kennet and Avon Canal has been developed as a popular heritage tourism destination for

boating, canoeing, fishing, walking and cycling, and is also important for wildlife conservation.

You can hire canal boats for longer visits or canoe down the canal. Along the way you will find

fascinating places to visit, including Crofton Beam Engine and Pumping Station, historic pubs

such as the Dundas Arms at Kintbury or wharf-side cafes in Pewsey and Devizes.

**Racing Yards and ‘Valley of the Racehorse’**

The Wessex Downs have many links to horse racing and eventing. The Lambourn Valley is one of the major horse racing centres in the UK. On Good Friday every year over 30 trainers open their yards to the public. Alternatively, get up early and watch the horses being ridden out on West Down, near Beckhampton, have a day out at Newbury Racecourse, or visit the Barbury International Eventing Show in early July.

**Watership Down and Whitchurch**

The Watership Down Trail is an invigorating cycle ride which takes in some of Hampshire’s finest scenery. The route begins on a quiet country lane out of Kingsclere, followed by a challenging off-road climb to the top of Ladle Hill. The route continues along the ridge of Watership Down, south past North Oakley, through Ibworth and off road back to Kingsclere. Choose between a 9-mile or 17-mile trail. Whitchurch off-road cycle trail is a challenging trail covering many of the places that were also an inspiration for Richard Adams’ ‘Watership Down’. Stunning views from Woodcott Down and

Ladle Hill contrast with the picturesque Hampshire villages of St. Mary Bourne and Binley.

**White Horses**

The White Horse trail is a 90-mile walk providing the best vantage points for viewing all of

Wiltshire’s 8 White Horses cut into the chalk hills. In addition the route takes in other historic and prehistoric locations, including Avebury, Silbury Hill and the Kennet Long Barrow. You can try and view all 8 White Horses in one go, or do the walk in stages on separate visits. Slightly further afield in Oxfordshire, the prehistoric Uffington White Horse sits alongside Dragon Hill, where legend has it that a bare patch of chalk shows where St George spilled the dragon’s blood.

**Swindon to Marlborough Railway Path**

The Path follows the old railway line (closed in 1967) from the Coate Water Country Park to Marlborough. The path is ideal for walking or cycling with gentle slopes and magnificent views of the North Wessex Downs. The Friends of the Railway Path group offers opportunities to get involved in maintaining the Path, with activities such as hedgelaying and wildlife walks.