



Where to go  
What to see  
Map of the area

Discover the  
North Wessex Downs  
National Landscape



## A Truly Special Place

From remote, rolling downland to picture postcard villages the North Wessex Downs National Landscape is truly special.

Among Britain's most beautiful landscapes, this is somewhere to be treasured, protected and enjoyed.

Straddling four counties the area is united by a single factor – chalk. The geology gives the North Wessex Downs their wide-open downland topped by rampant white horses, dramatic scarp slopes, majestic ancient woodland and sheltered valleys with sparkling rivers and streams. Peace and tranquillity on top of the downs contrast with bustling, charming market towns below.

This is a place to relax, unwind and enjoy. So why not explore more of this fascinating patch of English countryside?



Uffington White Horse



Woodborough Hill



The Ridgeway

"... somewhere to be treasured, protected and enjoyed."



Bee orchid

## Digging Down

Scratch the surface in the North Wessex Downs and you find what really makes the landscape tick. Chalk!

The area lies at the heart of the chalk band that stretches across southern England, and 100 million years ago it was under a warm sea, teeming with billions of tiny creatures called coccoliths. These creatures formed the soft white rock we have today.

Rain runs easily through the chalk creating valleys with streams and seasonal winterbournes that carry crystal-clear filtered water from hillside springs. Chalk streams are internationally rare habitats that support some of the UK's most threatened and fragile plants and animals.



A chalk stream



Silbury Hill

The geology is also responsible for the rolling and dramatic contours of the landscape and the thin soils of the chalk grassland.

Less suited for cultivation, some of these grasslands haven't been disturbed in centuries so ancient historical features remain largely untouched and still visible today. This rich heritage includes the World Heritage Site of Avebury, with its three great stone circles enclosed by a massive bank and ditch, which was one of the principal ceremonial sites of Neolithic Britain.

Nearby is the mysterious Silbury Hill as well as numerous Neolithic barrows. Along the northern edge of the North Wessex Downs runs the Ridgeway - one of Britain's most ancient roads.

Other historic sites include numerous Bronze and Iron Age enclosures and hillforts, like Beacon Hill in north Hampshire and Barbury Castle in Wiltshire.

"... these grasslands haven't been disturbed in centuries."



Walkers near Avebury

## Love Nature?

Wildlife has an abundant range of special places to live in the North Wessex Downs and chalk grassland is one of the most significant.

Wildflowers that thrive here include the nectar-rich scabious and pyramidal orchid. These, in turn, attract insects - you could well catch sight of rare butterflies like the Adonis blue in the warmer months. Visit the Pewsey Downs National Nature Reserve to see one of the finest examples of chalk grassland in southern England.

Farmland here provides a home to lots of rare bird species. Listen out for the 'peewit' call of the lapwing or the distinctive chirruping of the skylark. The rare stone curlew is a regular summer visitor.

Other valuable habitats include heathland such as at Bucklebury Common (where you might be lucky enough to see an adder on a warm day) and veteran trees at Savernake. In spring brilliant bluebells appear in profusion at West Woods near Marlborough. Sparkling chalk streams, such as the River Kennet, are home to brown trout and watch out for the iridescent flash of a kingfisher.



Bluebells

"... you could well catch sight of rare butterflies ..."



Adonis blue on horseshoe vetch



Kingfisher



Lapwing

Pyramidal orchid

## Getting here



**By Train:** Regular services from London and Exeter to Hungerford, Bedwyn and Pewsey. Services from London also stop at Pangbourne, Goring & Streatley, Cholsey and Aldermaston, Overton and Whitchurch. For up-to-date train information call 03457 484950 or visit [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk)

**By Bus:** Regular buses include Newbury – Hungerford (3); Swindon-Devizes (49). For up-to-date bus information visit [traveline.info](http://traveline.info)

**By Bike:** Sustrans' National Cycle Route 4 follows the Kennet & Avon Canal west out of Reading across the North Wessex Downs. Other routes include NCN 45, 403 and 246. For more information visit [sustrans.org.uk](http://sustrans.org.uk).

**By Car:** A-Roads: A34, A338 & A345 (North-South) and A4 (East-West). M4 junctions: J13 for Chieveley; J14 for Hungerford; J15 for Chiseldon.

**Information Centres & Websites:**  
North Wessex Downs National Landscape: [northwessexdowns.org.uk](http://northwessexdowns.org.uk)  
Visit Wiltshire: [VisitWiltshire.co.uk](http://VisitWiltshire.co.uk)  
Hungerford Tourist Information Centre: [visithungerford.com](http://visithungerford.com)  
Marlborough Tourist Information: [marlborough-tc.gov.uk/visitors](http://marlborough-tc.gov.uk/visitors)  
Vale of Pewsey: [visitpewseyvale.co.uk](http://visitpewseyvale.co.uk)  
Great West Way: [GreatWestWay.co.uk](http://GreatWestWay.co.uk)

**Contact Address Only:**  
North Wessex Downs National Landscape,  
Denford Manor, Lower Denford,  
Hungerford, RG17 0UN.  
Tel: 01249 706101  
Email: [info@northwessexdowns.org.uk](mailto:info@northwessexdowns.org.uk)

**Logos:** GREAT WEST WAY, North Wessex Downs National Landscape, and social media icons (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter).

## Get Outside!

### Love walking ...?

Top class walking country and hundreds of miles of rights of way make the North Wessex Downs a great place to get some fresh air and stretch your legs - whether you like a hike on the hills or prefer gentle stroll.

Take in the view from some of the highest points in the South of England – perhaps at Martinsell Hill in Wiltshire from where you can see Salisbury Cathedral on a clear day, or Walbury Hill and Coombe Gibbet in Berkshire. Admire the ancient, fat-bellied oaks in Savernake Forest or wonder at the mysteries of Neolithic Britain while exploring the Uffington White Horse. Or you may prefer to walk parts of the many long-distance paths here such as the Ridgeway National Trail, the Thames Path, the Lambourn Valley Way, or the Wayfarer's Walk - all of which are featured on OS maps.

Visit our website at [northwessexdowns.org.uk](http://northwessexdowns.org.uk) for more ideas of where to walk with free-to-download maps and route guides.



Cyclists at Barbury Castle



Walking near Streatley

"... hundreds of miles of rights of way ..."

### Explore by bike

Bicycles and horses can access the Ridgeway National Trail from Avebury to Goring and the canal towpath and, of course, cyclists can use all the bridleways. The National Cycleway Route 4 runs through the area from east to west and this rolling country presents the keen cyclist with numerous challenges if you wish to take them. Walbury Hill is particularly challenging!

King Alfred's Way is a 350km circular off-road adventure route devised by Cycling UK and much of it passes through the North Wessex Downs via the Ridgeway and the Vale of Pewsey. Head to [cyclinguk.org](http://cyclinguk.org) for full details and route maps.

## Help us Protect wildlife and nature

- Always keep your dog on a short lead when near livestock. If you are chased by cows let your dog off the lead.
- Prevent uncontrolled fires which can be started easily by BBQs, cigarette ends and spent matches.
- Protect plants and animals by taking your litter and dog poo home with you.
- Between 1st March and 31st July please keep your dog on a short lead wherever you are to protect vulnerable ground-nesting birds such as lapwing and skylarks. You can't always see these vulnerable birds, but they can be disturbed very easily by dogs, causing them to leave their nests and their young vulnerable to predators and cold. You must keep your dog on a short lead between these dates on 'open access' land.

Follow the Countryside Code, scan the QR code for more details.



Dog on a short lead

"... please keep your dog on a short lead."



Skylark are ground-nesting birds



Livestock

## A Protected Landscape

The North Wessex Downs is the third largest of Britain's 46 National Landscapes, covering an area of 668 square miles, straddling four counties and taking in 173 parishes including the market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford.

A National Landscape is an area of outstanding natural beauty protected for the nation by law. This is a living, working landscape much loved by visitors and the people who live here.

The North Wessex Downs National Landscape team works with local people and organisations to protect and enhance this beautiful area for all to enjoy. You can find more information about how they do this at [northwessexdowns.org](http://northwessexdowns.org)



Rolling contours of chalk downland

"... an area of outstanding natural beauty ..."



Marlborough High Street



Farmland



Thames view towards Streatley



**Uffington White Horse**  
There are eight huge white horse hill figures in the North Wessex Downs – look out for the white horse symbols on this map. The prehistoric Uffington White Horse is the best-known. Located high up on the Lambourn Downs, it was probably carved around 1000 BC, making it the oldest surviving hill figure in Britain. You can take an easy walk, of less than a mile, to the White Horse from the National Trust car park or extend it to take in one of the many circular routes in the area. Alternatively, the White Horse Trail links all the white horses together by a spectacular long-distance walking route. And nearby...



**Wayland's Smithy**  
A Neolithic long barrow and chambered tomb site built around 3700 BC which had been associated since Saxon times with a Germanic smith-god called Wayland. According to legend, a traveller whose horse has lost a shoe can leave it with a silver coin at the smithy and return the next day to find it re-shod.



**Ashdown House**  
This unusual property with its dolls' house appearance was built for the Queen of Bohemia in 1662. Set in a beautiful valley, it is also

surrounded by woodland to explore. Managed by the National Trust with a small, free car park.

**Combe Gibbet**  
This eerie monument – a replica – sits at the top of Inkpen Hill on a Neolithic long barrow. The original gibbet was put to its grisly use once in 1676. With far-reaching views of the surrounding area and close to Walbury Hill, the highest point in southern England, it is now popular with paragliders and is a popular walking and cycling spot. Wander up to the Gibbet – less than a mile from the car park along a sloping gravel track – or take a longer circular route along part of the Test Way and into Combe Wood.



**Watership Down**  
Richard Adams' timeless novel Watership Down, about rabbit families, draws on his memories of living near the real place. A bridleway, the Wayfarer's Walk, runs along the ridge of the Down. Other nearby features include the Iron Age hillforts at Ladle Hill, immediately to the west, and Beacon Hill a little further on – all great spots for a picnic and glorious views. And nearby...



**Highclere Castle**  
Seat of the Carnarvon family and well-known as television's Downton Abbey, this 'Jacobethan' house is home to some of Egypt's finest treasures from the 5th Earl's exploration with Howard Carter in the 1920s when he uncovered the tomb of Tutankhamun. House and gardens are open to the public. – check the website.



**Avebury**  
This UNESCO World Heritage site contains the largest stone circle in Europe. Constructed around 2600 BC archaeologists believe that it was part of a larger prehistoric landscape and was most likely used for some form of ritual or ceremony. Today, Avebury is managed by the National Trust but access to the stone circle is free and there are fascinating walks of varying lengths in the area which is jam-packed full of Neolithic archaeology. And nearby...



**Silbury Hill**  
Europe's largest man-made hill at 130 feet (40 metres) high. It was built around 2100 BC with antler picks and shoulder blades of oxen as

shovels. (Please don't climb the hill – the archaeology and rare chalk plants are very fragile). Walk to West Kennet Long Barrow from the car park here.



**Fyfield Down**  
Situated on a high plateau of chalk grassland north-west of Marlborough, Fyfield Down has what are said to be the best collection of sarsen stones in Britain and is criss-crossed with numerous footpaths and bridleways.



**Wittenham Clumps**  
The Clumps are the oldest known planted hilltop beeches in England. Renowned English artist Paul Nash (1889-1946) wrote

of a "beautiful English country" on discovering the Wittenham Clumps in 1911 and he returned to paint them many times. Managed by the Earth Trust, you can now walk through the newly created wildflower meadow, discover local wildlife and ancient archaeological features, or simply soak up the stunning panoramic views of south Oxfordshire. And nearby...



**Basildon Park**  
An elegant 18th century Palladian mansion managed

by the National Trust is set in beautiful grounds near the River Thames between Pangbourne and Streatley.



**Wilton Windmill**  
Wilton Windmill is the only authentic working windmill in the National Landscape and still produces stoneground flour. You can visit the windmill site any time of year, but the building is open for guided tours from Easter to the end of September on Sundays and Bank Holidays. The picnic area has

sweeping views and there are numerous walks to be enjoyed from the mill including down to the Kennet and Avon Canal and Wilton Water. And nearby...



**Crofton Pumping Station**  
A Grade I listed building that houses two Cornish beam engines one of which is the oldest working beam engine in the world. Admire the steam-powered engineering which lifts water 40 feet (12 metres) from river to canal.



**Kennet and Avon Canal**  
Meandering 87 miles and passing through beautiful, tranquil and unspoilt scenery, the Kennet and Avon Canal is one of the most picturesque waterways in Britain. Discover an abundance of wildlife, bustling market towns, picturesque villages and historic monuments along the way. The towpath makes it ideal to explore by bike or on foot, as well as by boat.



**Savernake Forest**  
One of the oldest woodlands in England – believed to have been around for 1,000 years! A particular impressive sight is the 'Grand Avenue' of tall, 200 year-old beech trees. Laid out in the late 1790's by Capability Brown and at just over four miles long it stands in the Guinness Book of Records as the longest avenue in Britain. With beautiful picnic areas including barbecue sites and various routes of different lengths, walking in the forest is the perfect way to get some fresh air.



**Horse Racing**  
Lambourn and its surroundings are second only to Newmarket in their importance as a centre of activity for the UK racing industry. About 10% of Britain's racehorse trainers and approximately 3,700 racehorses are located within the North Wessex Downs NL. The springy, free-draining chalk turf is the perfect terrain for training and the sight of thoroughbred racehorses being exercised on the gallops early in the morning is exhilarating. Look out for the Lambourn Trainers stables open day every Spring.



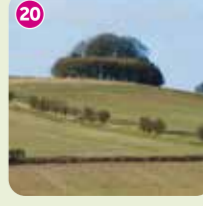
**Pewsey Downs National Nature Reserve**  
A stunning sweep of chalk downland with breath-taking views stretching across Pewsey Vale. Taking in three hills and the Alton Barnes white horse, the reserve offers great opportunities for landscape and wildlife photography. A circular walk from the small car park includes Neolithic features, the white horse and the Wansdyke.



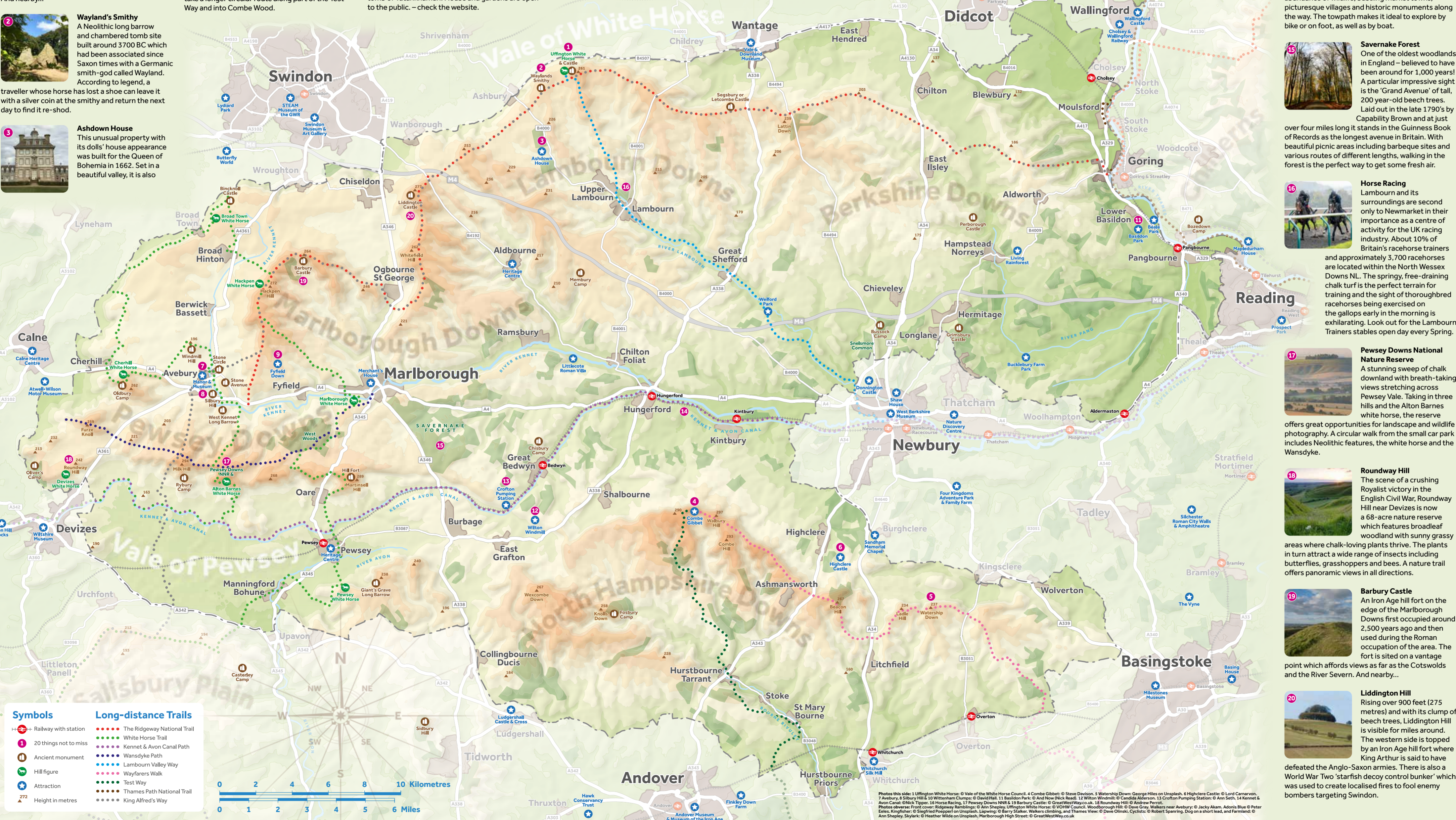
**Roundway Hill**  
The scene of a crushing Royalist victory in the English Civil War, Roundway Hill near Devizes is now a 68-acre nature reserve which features broadleaf woodland with sunny grassy areas where chalk-loving plants thrive. The plants in turn attract a wide range of insects including butterflies, grasshoppers and bees. A nature trail offers panoramic views in all directions.



**Barbury Castle**  
An Iron Age hill fort on the edge of the Marlborough Downs first occupied around 2,500 years ago and then used during the Roman occupation of the area. The fort is sited on a vantage point which affords views as far as the Cotswolds and the River Severn. And nearby...



**Liddington Hill**  
Rising over 900 feet (275 metres) and with its clump of beech trees, Liddington Hill is visible for miles around. The western side is topped by an Iron Age hill fort where King Arthur is said to have defeated the Anglo-Saxon armies. There is also a World War Two 'starfish decoy control bunker' which was used to create localised fires to fool enemy bombers targeting Swindon.



**Symbols**

- Railway with station
- 20 things not to miss
- Ancient monument
- Hill figure
- Attraction
- Height in metres

**Long-distance Trails**

- The Ridgeway National Trail
- White Horse Trail
- Kennet & Avon Canal Path
- Wansdyke Path
- Lambourn Valley Way
- Wayfarers Walk
- Test Way
- Thames Path National Trail
- King Alfred's Way