



# Historic Landscape Walk 2: Blewburton and Lowbury Hill

**Blewbury – Blewburton Hill Fort – Aston Upthorpe – Lowbury Hill – Blewbury**

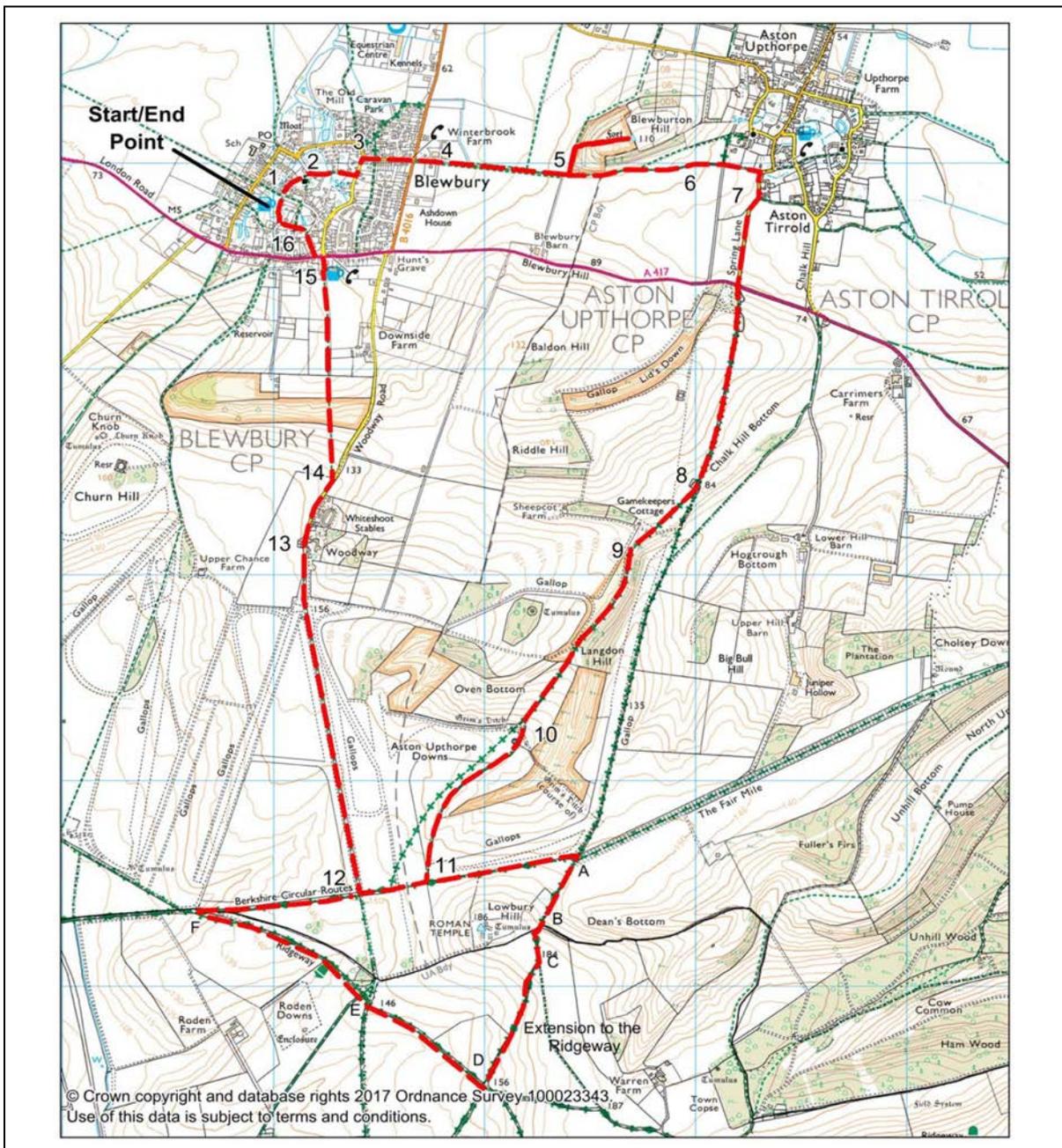
**Distance: 11.04 km / 6.9 miles**

**\*Extension to the Ridgeway 4.28 km / 2.66 miles**

Start/End Point: Chapel Lane, Blewbury, OX11 9PG

Public Transport: The 94 bus from Didcot Parkway serves the village of Blewbury

Parking: On-Street. Please be courteous of other road users and residents.





- 1. Keep the Red Lion public house on your left and turn left down the footpath flanked by cob walls. Take the right-hand path of two across the field and between the houses to the parish church, St Michael's. Take the path across the church yard, keeping the church on your right.**

*Two cottages lie on the left-hand side of the path as you approach the church. These are 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century almshouses. Beyond the garages on the right, facing the church, lies the Malthus School House, established in 1709 by the merchant William Malthus. The church of St Michael the Archangel originates from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, although most of the current building dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.*

- 2. Beyond the church yard, turn right onto Church End and continue along this road as it turns into a path. Turn right onto Watt's Lane and then left onto South Street.**

*On the left of Watt's Lane lies Orchard Dene House, probably an early 17<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse, with its barn next door. Across the road lies an orchard, a rare survival of the many orchards which covered the village and its gardens in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.*

- 3. Turn right onto Bessels Lea Road and walk its length to cross over Bessel's Way and onto the track to Winterbrook Farm opposite.**

*Bessels Lea Road runs across what was once open fields farmed by individual Blewbury farmers. These fields were enclosed in 1805 by an Act of Parliament.*

- 4. Continue straight on along the track as it passes through the farm yard.**

*Winterbrook Farm dates to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its creation has reorganised the fields around it, subdividing those nearest the farm but maintaining the older perimeters, particularly beneath the hillfort.*

- 5. Beyond the farm yard, take the footpath on the left up onto Blewburton Hill Fort.**

*Today Blewburton hillfort forms a distinctive feature on the parish boundary between Blewbury and Aston Upthorpe, the latter of which was part of Blewbury parish until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In the Iron age period, this prominent location attracted settlement and, in approximately 300BC, the site was fortified by a single rampart. Whilst there is no evidence of occupation during the Roman period, an Anglo-Saxon cemetery was identified within the fort, dating to the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Burials were accompanied by amber beads, spear-heads, and brooches. Looking north from the hillfort, the two distinct hills in the distance are the Wittenham Clumps. On the right-hand of these was a second Iron Age hillfort.*

- 6. Return to the track beneath the hill and, instead of turning back to Winterbrook Farm, turn left and continue east along the track/bridleway towards Aston Upthorpe. Keep on this path until you reach Spring Lane.**

*Beneath the hillfort, where the path skirts along the southern edge of the hill, terraces or 'lynchets' can be seen cut into the hillside. These post-date the Iron Age period and may be medieval in date, but this remains uncertain.*

- 7. Turn right onto Spring Lane. Take the lane to the main road, the A417, and cross over to continue along the lane, now a track.**

*Spring Lane and the path that continues on southwards form the boundary between the parishes of Aston Upthorpe and Aston Tirrold. Enclosure began much earlier in Aston Tirrold, with most of the downs and common farmland turned into fields during the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries these fields have seen various phases of reorganisation, with boundaries removed and replaced to suit the ever-changing agricultural demands on the landscape.*

- 8. At the first farm building take the right-hand bridleway of two towards Gamekeepers Cottage.**



- 9. Cross the driveway for the cottage and Sheepcot Farm and continue along the bridleway. The bridleway skirts the lower slopes of Langdon Hill before crossing Oven Bottom and reaching Grim's Ditch.**

*On the hillside above Sheepcot Farm lie a series of Bronze Age barrows, prehistoric burial mounds. Langdon Hill, Oven Bottom, and Aston Upthorpe Down formed a large area of common pasture and grazing for the people of medieval and post-medieval Blewbury and Aston Upthorpe. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, much of this land had been enclosed by large prairie-like fields and plantations of trees had begun to divide up the landscape, but some open spaces remained. Plantations became increasingly common in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and horse gallops criss-crossed the landscape. Despite these changes, the prehistoric landscape can still be seen in places – for example, the barrows above Sheepcot Farm and Grim's Ditch. The Ditch, actually a bank and ditch, once ran a considerable distance westwards across East Ginge and Ardington Downs and across the Donnington-Wantage Road. Much of the Ditch has been destroyed by ploughing, but where it remains, Bronze Age pottery has suggested a prehistoric date.*

- 10. Keep to the bridleway as it turns southwards – do not take the footpath across Aston Upthorpe Down.**

- 11. The bridleway ends at the Berkshire Circular Routes bridleway beneath Lowbury Hill**

*Lowbury Hill rises up beneath the Ridgeway. On the summit of this hill lies a rectangular enclosure, the site of a Roman shrine. Activity has been identified in the late Iron age and then again in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, but peaked in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century, when a masonry wall was constructed, and continued to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Over 1,000 coins and a series of brooches and rings have been found during excavations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Adjacent to the Roman site lies an Anglo-Saxon burial mound, perhaps attracted to the site by the Roman ruins. This impressive 7<sup>th</sup> century burial with sword, decorated spearhead, and hanging-bowl is on display at The Oxfordshire Museum, Woodstock.*

**\*At this point you can turn left for the extension to the Ridgeway.**

A: Turn right at the cross-road of paths

B: Climb up behind Lowbury Hill

C: Where the route splits in two, keep to the bridleway on the right. This will bring you to the Ridgeway.

D: Turn right onto the Ridgeway. There a wonderful views to the south across Berkshire.

E: At the junction of paths in a patch of trees, either continue on the Ridgeway to re-join the Berkshire Circular Route or turn right for a more direct return to the main walk at point 12.

F: Turn right onto the Berkshire Circular Route and return to the main walk at point 12. N.B. From this direction you will need to turn left to head north at point 12.

*The Ridgeway is one of the largest surviving long-distant prehistoric routeways in the country, stretching 139 kilometres from Ivinghoe Beacon to the east and Overton Hill, near Avebury to the west. This ancient trackway has been used by travellers, herdsmen, and soldiers throughout the centuries and is recognised as a National Trail today. Along its length it is marked by some of the country's most impressive prehistoric monuments – The Uffington White Horse and hillfort, Wayland Smithy long barrow, and Avebury stone circle World Heritage Site.*



**12. Turn right onto this bridleway for approximately 300 metres. At the cross-road of routes, take the right-hand bridleway heading north.**

*The bridleway once more crosses Aston Upthorpe Down and the line of Grim's Ditch, but here there is no trace of the earthworks.*

**13. Continue along the bridleway until it turns into Woodway Road at Whiteshoot Stables.**

*The boundaries of the fields on either side of the bridleway have seen considerable reorganisation during the 20<sup>th</sup> century to accommodate the extensive horse riding facilities that now characterise this landscape.*

**14. Beyond the stables, take the footpath on the left.**

*The footpath leads across Lid's Bottom, former downland and now Open Access Land where you can roam from the path. The path continues across the down into a series of small 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century fields on the southern edge of Blewbury.*

**15. At the road, the A417, turn left and then immediately turn right onto a footpath to the Methodist Chapel and Chapel Lane.**

*Where the footpath joins the road is a junction known as Forty Cross, the spot where the village stocks used to stand. To the north of here in the post medieval period lay an open space, now a confluence of streams, which has kept its name, the Cleve.*

**16. Continue along Chapel Lane to The Red Lion.**

*References:*

Oxfordshire County Council Historic Landscape Characterisation Project. [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/historiclandscape](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/historiclandscape)  
Ditchfield, P. & Page, W. eds. 1923. *A History of the County of Berkshire: Volume 3.*

When out walking, it is always wise to let someone know where you are going or, if possible, have someone with you. Take your mobile phone with you and make sure that it is fully charged. If you use your car to access the route, please park with care – do not block farm gateways or village facilities, and do not leave valuables in view.

Please follow the Countryside Code:

- Be safe – plan ahead and follow signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals
- Take your littler home with you
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people