




Walking in
West Berkshire **5**



East & West Ilsley

5 mile circular route
for walking and horse riding



Introduction

This route is approximately five and a half miles (9km) long and should take three and a half hours to walk. The East/West Ilsley recreational route is waymarked with the Countryside Agency's standard arrow waymarks, carrying the words 'Recreational Route'. A short route is also available and this is shown on the map in the leaflet.

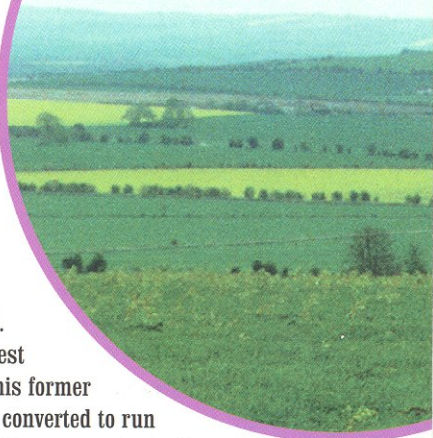
The route has been described from the car-parking area at Bury Down, although it can be started in either East or West Ilsley, both of which are served by buses from Newbury and Oxford. Please refer to the back of the leaflet for details.









The Ridgeway (National Trail) has been called England's oldest road. The story of the route is thought to have started in the Bronze Age more than 3,000 years ago. Over the centuries, many different peoples have used the track as a thoroughfare for trade with the more remote parts of south-west England, and invading armies such as the Danes may have found it convenient for their forays against King Alfred in the 9th Century. It wasn't until the Enclosure Awards of the late 18th and 19th Centuries that the track was given a width. In the parish of West Ilsley in 1828 the width was set at 68 feet, reflecting the track's use as a Drove Way.

To the north and east of Bury Down two large establishments can be seen. The northern group of buildings was formerly the Atomic Energy Research Establishment at Harwell. The old nuclear plant and reactors have been decommissioned and the site is now a leading science and technology business park.

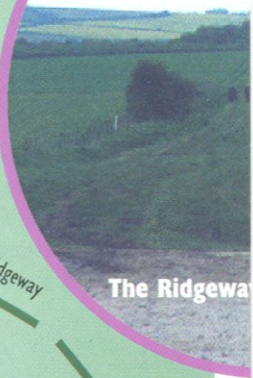
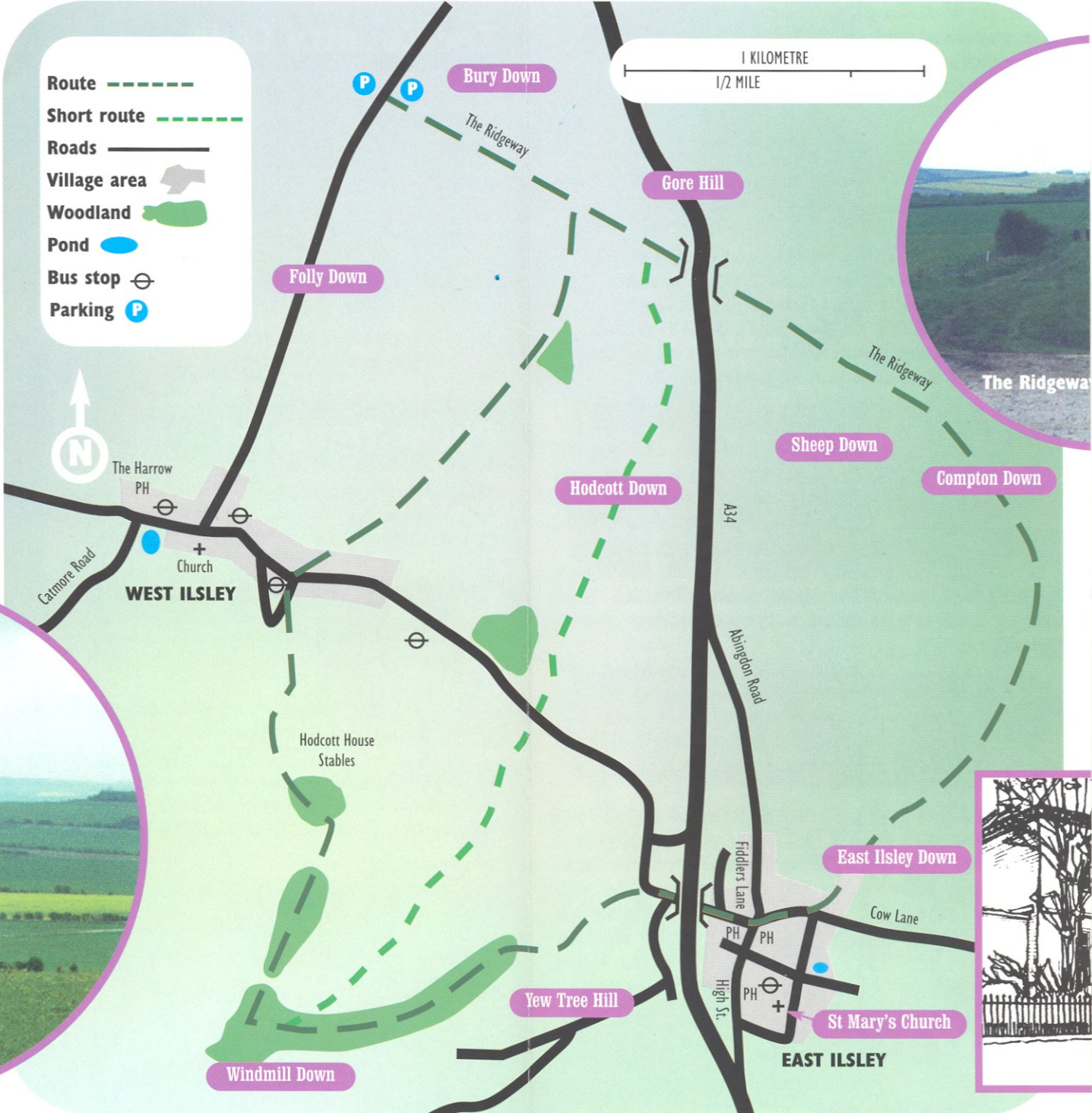
The eastern complex is the Didcot Power Station. Built on the site of the largest military depot in Europe, this former coal-fired station has been converted to run on either oil or gas. In addition, a new gas turbine

**View eastwards
from Bury Down**



- Route 
- Short route 
- Roads 
- Village area 
- Woodland 
- Pond 
- Bus stop 
- Parking 

1 KILOMETRE
1/2 MILE



has been built to produce low-cost electricity in a cleaner and more efficient manner. The cooling towers, each over 100 metres high, were split into two groups of three in an attempt to lessen the impact of such a large power station on the most important local views. It is possible to have a tour of the power station, for more details telephone (01235) 516079.

Start east along The Ridgeway. After a third of a mile the circular route begins. Follow the Ridgeway to Gore Hill. (A shorter route is waymarked to the right of the track just before Gore Hill.)

The A34 road crosses The Ridgeway at Gore Hill. It has been a notorious spot for travellers for many years. In 1830 the Southampton coach from Oxford "was enclosed so fast in snow at Gore Hill the coachman and passenger were necessitated to leave it". 150 years later, the snows of the winter of 1981/2 also caused people to abandon their vehicles for the warmth and comfort of the pubs and schoolrooms of East Ilsley. Road improvements during 1986/87 placed The Ridgeway National Trail path under the new section of dual carriageway, obviating the need to cross this very busy road. Once through the tunnel, the village of East Ilsley lies to the right in a fold of the downs.

Carry on along The Ridgeway and after about a mile (1.5 km) turn right at the second of the two bridleway signposts. This bridleway runs alongside some training gallops, and leads into East Ilsley. At the end of the way, turn right into the village .



Kennet House, West Ilsley

East Ilsley pond

The village of East Ilsley retains many interesting features, of which the recently restored duck pond is most noticeable. By the pond is the winding

mechanism of the village well, long since disused. Above the village stands the

Church of St. Mary, said to have been built by Canute in the 11th Century. Most of the present church is 13th Century, with a tower added in the 14th. The bell tower contains a peal of five bells dating from 1589.

The houses of East Ilsley Hall and Kennet House are the grandest in the village. Pevsner calls the Hall "quite a swagger early Georgian house". Kennet House, with six Bays and Shell Hood on carved brackets, dates from about 1700.

"Ilsley remote amidst the Berkshire Downs
Claims those distinctions o'er her sister towns
Far famed for sheep and wool though not for spinners
For sportsmen, doctors, publicans and sinners"

(FROM BERKSHIRE BOOK OF SONG, RHYME AND STEEPLE CHIME, HUMPHREYS.)

East Ilsley was famous for the sheep fair, which started in the reign of Henry III and continued until 1934. Permanent pens were sited along the main street and once during the fair's hey-day over 80,000 sheep were penned in one day. Three pubs are within a very short distance of the route. These are The Star, The Swan and The Crown and Horns. All serve traditional beer and have a good selection of lunchtime fare.

Walk through the village. Go straight on at the road junction and continue past The Swan and The Crown and Horns. Pass under the A34 road-bridge. The next waymark is on the other side of the junction (the track is signposted with a 'Byway' sign.)

The next path crosses some large fields bordered with hedges. The hedges provide a valuable refuge for downland wildlife. The hill the path traverses is known as Windmill Down. Years ago a windmill once stood on the road between East and West Ilsley. During a violent storm the mill was destroyed, never to be rebuilt.

The shorter route merges with the main route along this path. At the next path junction turn right onto a bridleway and bear right at the next path junction.

This bridleway passes the West Ilsley stables. East and West Ilsley are world renowned for race horse training. Properly managed, downland turf makes an excellent surface for the exercising and training of horses: thick, green and springy. It is also a superb walking surface. Today there are five stables in East and West Ilsley that are involved with race horse training.

After passing the stables, continue down the hill and turn left onto the metalled drive that doubles as a bridleway. Where the road forks at the end take the right fork. At the road junction, the next waymark is directly in front (signed 'cart track') and if the amenities of West Ilsley are required (shop, pub, public telephone etc.), turn left.

West Ilsley House is a notable local building built in the 18th century. It was home to the Morland family and birthplace of Morland's beer.

The track climbs up Hodcott Down. More training gallops are on the right of the path. At the top of the hill, The Ridgeway comes into sight. Turn left along The Ridgeway, back to Bury Down Car Park and the end of the walk.



St Mary's Church, West Ilsley

The Country Code

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
- Guard against all risk of fire
- Leave all gates as found
- Keep your dogs under close control
- Keep to public rights of way across farmland
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges & walls
- Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone
- Take your litter home
- Help to keep all water clean
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees
- Take special care on country roads
- Make no unnecessary noise

Public Transport

Alfa Travel (tel: 01635 248423) runs service numbers 130/134 from Newbury to East and West Ilsley. Stagecoach (tel: 01865 772250) runs service 44 from Newbury to Oxford via East Ilsley.

Car Parking

Bury Down Car Park



This leaflet was produced by West Berkshire Council with financial support from Vodafone.

For further information about this and other leaflets, please contact West Berkshire Council, Countryside and Environment, Faraday Road, Newbury RG14 2AF, telephone (01635) 519808.