

Welcome to the new series of **20 circular pub walks on The Ridgeway National Trail**. These walks have been designed by Charles Whyne-Hammond and the Friends of the Ridgeway.

Woolstone: The White Horse

This is classic Ridgeway walking: full of interest encompassing an ancient earth carving, a Celtic hillfort and one of the most impressive long barrows in the country. Journey along footpaths and a chalky track through pastures that give access to far-reaching views.



Wayland's Smithy

Distance: 9.1 km (5.7 miles); distance on Ridgeway: 1.9 km (1.2 miles)

Maps: OS Explorer 170 West sheet, OS Landranger 174

Accessibility: Moderate with stiles and a kissing gate.

Parking: Woolstone is 8 miles west of Wantage and 14 miles east of Swindon, just off the B4507 that runs along the northern edge of the Lambourn Downs. The White Horse has a large car park for patrons across the road from the pub, but parking in the village is difficult due to narrow lanes. There is also a car park south of the B4507, below Uffington Castle.

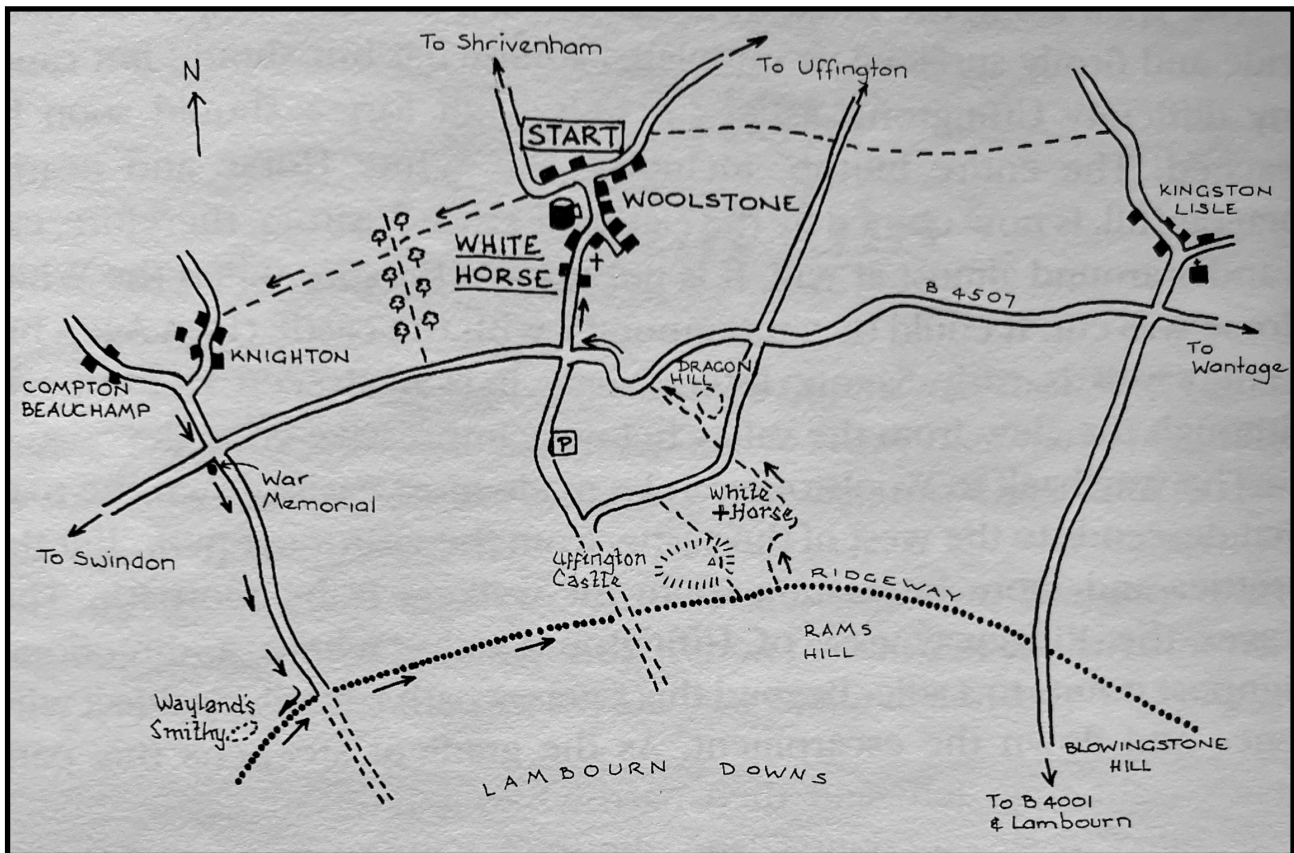
Highlights: Wayland's Smithy and the Uffington White Horse and Castle

Refreshments: Woolstone, nr. Faringdon Oxon SN7 7QL Tel: (01367) 820726

Walk Directions

Turn left outside the White Horse to reach the next bend in the road. At this point, close to Upper Farm, a footpath signpost points the way ahead. Go through a galvanised

pedestrian gate and pass to the left of double telegraph poles. Keep close to the hedge on the left and go through a gate into the next field. Maintain direction and cross a stile to a junction with another path that runs down through a belt of trees. Cross this path, turning left and immediately right and cross a footbridge with a kissing gate. Turn immediately left, then right in the field corner for a few metres to cross a stile.



Turn right onto the path, soon right - next to the fence on the right. Cross a stile in the corner and keep ahead, with a hedge on your right. Turn right into the next field, then immediately left to walk beside the hedge, now on your left. Cross a stile in the corner to meet the road through Knighton. Turn left to walk through the hamlet, along a lane which curves its way past some thatched cottages. At the next junction, close to a pair of magnificent weather-boarded and thatched barns, turn left to reach the B4507.

The views north across the Vale of the White Horse and south to the steep slopes of the Lambourn Downs are amazing. You may already have seen the dragon-like shape of the White Horse. But now, from this road junction onwards, the views just get batter and better and on clear days you can even see the Cotswolds. Before taking the long, steady climb up the lane opposite, notice the unusual stone war memorial on the right.

The walk up the lane to the Ridgeway is about a mile long, but there is very little traffic as the road is a dead end. When it reaches the Ridgeway the tarmac ends. Turn right (west) to visit Wayland's Smithy. This Stone Age burial chamber is some 5000 years old and an information board tells the story. The present name comes from a Saxon legend that this was the forge of the god who shod the Uffington White Horse.

Retrace your steps to the Ridgeway and continue eastwards. The walking is easy, the trackway here being wide and firmly surfaced. Uffington Castle is not far off. Uffington Castle is a Celtic hill fort which also hosts the White Horse. It is not known for certain when the latter was cut; it could be contemporary with the Castle (Iron Age), but some

say it is early Saxon. It is best seen from above, although the view from the valley below is impressive enough. The entire hilltop, including nearby Dragon Hill, is now owned by the National Trust, so visitors can therefore wander around almost at will.

The walk back to Woolstone can be done most easily down the road that descends to the west of the castle at a crossroads of tracks. But the prettier and more interesting route for walkers is by footpath. This leaves the Ridgeway beyond Uffington Castle with a left turn over a stile, having passed a bridleway which is also on the left. Stay close to a wire fence on the right and descend the escarpment, with magnificent views stretching out before you. As the gradient steepens the path bends right then left, and narrows to follow a chalky gully downhill. Crossing a country lane (the road to the White Horse car park for blue badge holders) the track continues through long grass, skirting round to the left of Dragon Hill (identified by the flight of steps leading up to its flat top). According to legend, Dragon Hill is the site where St George slew the dragon. It is said that where the blood spilled on top of the mound, nothing now grows.

The route passes through a kissing gate and over a stile before descending diagonally towards the B4507. Turn left though a gate then take the stile at the next gate onto the road. Turn left uphill to a turning to the right, bringing you back to the White Horse pub.



With thanks to Countryside Books, Charles Whyne-Hammond author, Glenys Jones for the maps and Tim Lewis of Friends of the Ridgeway. Photo credits Mary Tebje.