

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

The Harrow at West Ilsley

What could be more traditional than a country pub with cricket green views? Nestled in the idyllic hamlet of West Ilsley, West Berkshire, just 2.5 miles from the famous Ridgeway. This elevated walk offers a beautiful panorama from the downland edge and a glimpse into the world of horse racing. Suitable for year-round walking.



The Ridgeway National Trail at West Ilsley

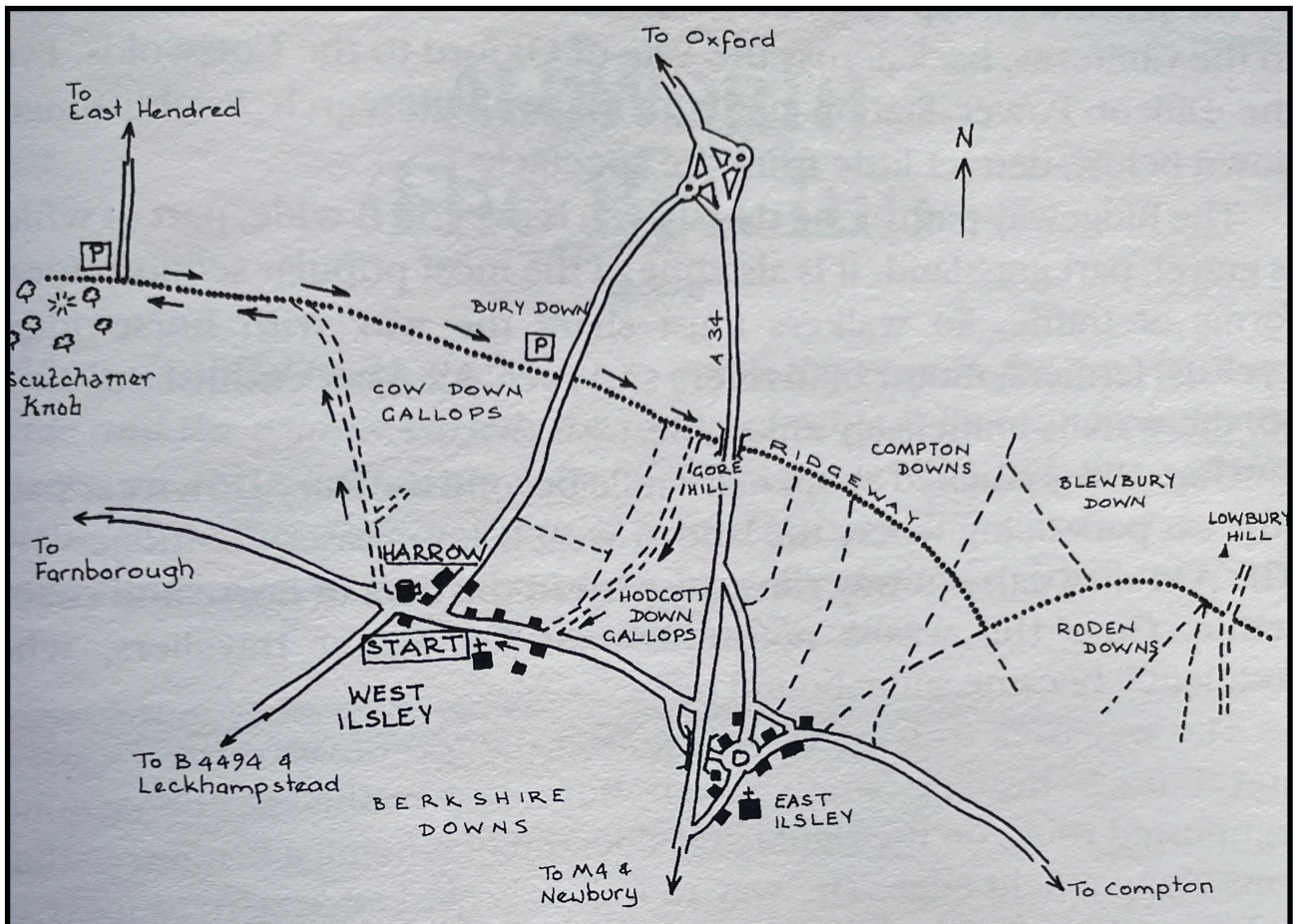
Photo credit: John Tippetts

- Distance:** 10½ km (6½ miles); distance on Ridgeway: 3.7 km (2.3 miles)
- Maps:** OS Explorer 170 East sheet, OS Landranger 174 and AllTrails.com
- Highlights:** Scutchamer Knob has a rich history as an Iron Age burial barrow that became a major Anglo-Saxon assembly site and a place of legend, linked to Saxon kings and Viking prophecies.
- Accessibility:** Moderate with some climbing and descents
- Getting there:** West Ilsley is 5 miles south-east of Wantage and 10 miles north of Newbury, just off the very busy A34. The Harrow is at the western end of the village. The no.6 bus takes 30 minutes from Newbury.
- Parking:** There isn't a pub car park, but cars can be left near the pub. Please be considerate when deciding where to park.
- Refreshments:** The Harrow, Main Street, West Ilsley, West Berkshire, RG20 7AR

Walk Directions

The path that leads up to the Ridgeway, a broad gravel bridleway, is just a few metres to right of the Harrow as you leave the main entrance, and is signposted Main Street.

Keep to this track all the way to the Ridgeway, a distance of 1½ miles, ignoring all other paths and tracks going off to the right. To the left is the Hendred Estate farmland, and a view across the rolling Berkshire Downs. To the right are the Cow Down racehorse gallops. Depending on the time of year, you can hear skylarks, or the call of curlews.



In due course you reach the top, the steady ascent culminating in a view northwards across the Vale of the White Horse. Here you join the Ridgeway, at an angle. Turn left along it to reach Scutcher Knob, just 0.4 km (¼ mile) away. You will find it some 200m along the Ridgeway beyond the parking area where the lane to East Hendred village begins, accessed by a rusty gate to your left.

Set amidst the trees of a small hilltop wood, Scutcher Knob is a large burial mound, thought to be Bronze Age in origin. Sadly the place was devastated by Victorian archaeologists, who found just a few fragments of Celtic pottery and an iron buckle. Legend has it that Scutcher was the burial place of the Saxon king Cwichelm of Wessex, who died in 593 AD. Retrace your steps to continue the walk eastwards along the Ridgeway. This section, from Scutcher Knob to Gore Hill, offers some of the finest views in southern England. The downland ridge here is 180m (600 ft) above sea level, and the panorama on clear days is superb. To the left is a sweep of distant hills, looking forward across the Thames valley to the Chilterns, and back across the Vale of Oxford to the Cotswolds.

Even the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus down below detracts little from the spectacle. The Ridgeway along this stretch is 15m wide, and is one of the most popular sections for all forms of traffic. Even so, the walk is immensely enjoyable.

Gore Hill is reached about 0.8 km (½ mile) beyond the Bury Down car park (which is where the lane to West Ilsley crosses the Ridgeway). In the days of horse and coach traffic, Gore Hill was notorious for winter travellers, who frequently became snow-bound.

The way back to West Ilsley begins at the top of Gore Hill, where a restricted byway (signposted) forks right off the Ridgeway. This is the third track to the right after leaving the Bury Down car park. Walkers who wish to avoid 1.1 km (0.7 mile) of road walking at the end of the walk should instead take the first or second track on the right instead, as they both deposit them at the easternmost end of the village. Assuming the full route is being followed, stay on the restricted byway as it veers right, left and right again, with the traffic on the A34 to the left now both audible and visible. The path becomes very grassy only a few metres after leaving the Ridgeway, but as you descend it becomes clearer, and a racehorse gallops soon appears on the right. Eventually it arrives at a road, where you turn right and walk 1.1 km to West Ilsley. The Harrow is at the end of the village.



The Harrow pub

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