

Berkhamsted

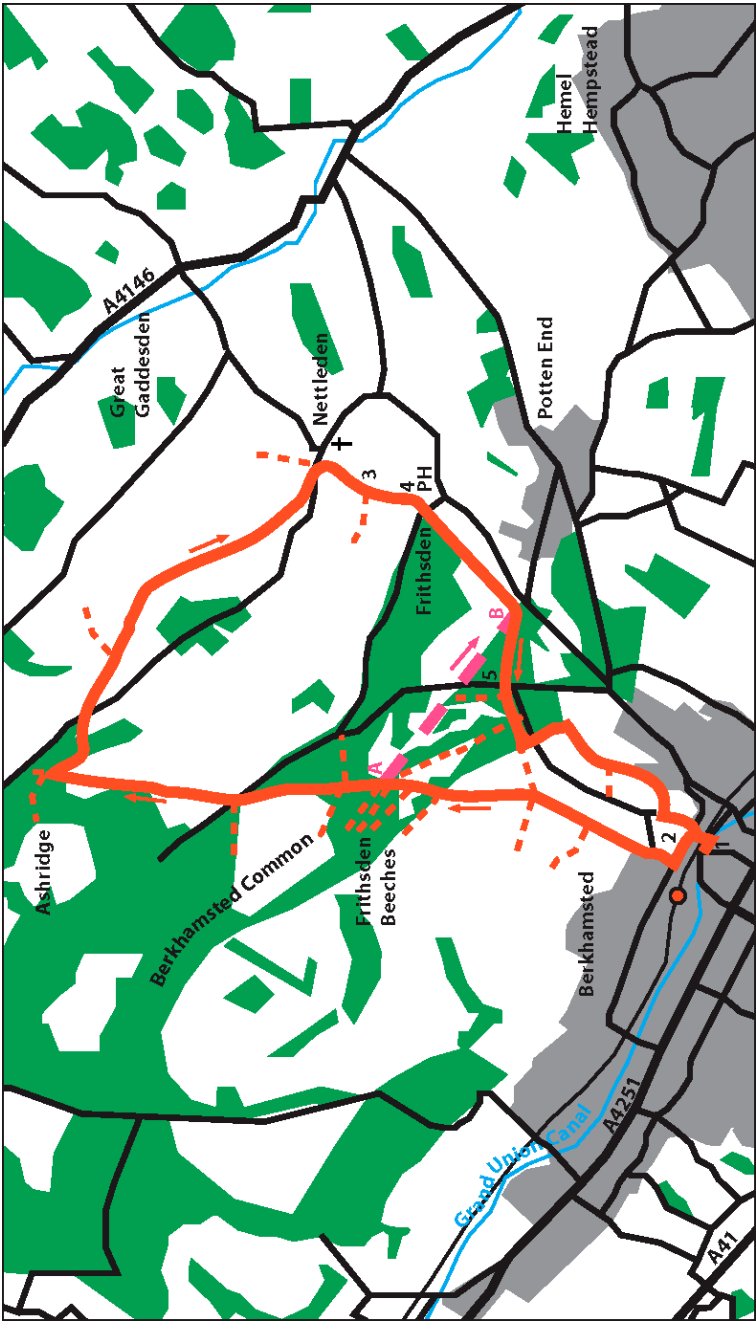
Totem Pole, Berkhamsted Castle, 'Roman Road', Frithsden Vineyard



Totem Pole, Grand Union Canal

The reason why the birthplace of the novelist Graham Greene is more than just a pleasant dot on the map is that two of the nation's major industrial arteries pass through the town on their way to Birmingham and London. The Grand Union Canal, built between 1793 and 1805, played an important part in the country's industrial growth and survived as a commercial concern until the great freeze of 1963. Today it is an attractive backwater winding through the town adjacent to George Stevenson's railway - the latter, little more than a generation later, again connected the nation's two largest cities but this time at much greater speed.

The totem pole (1) is erected next to the Grand Union, on the former J Alsford Ltd site. The company was a fencing contractor to the railway and the pole was a gift to the company from their Canadian wood suppliers in British Columbia.



From the totem pole (opposite you have the Crystal Palace pub, designed by the same Paxton who was responsible for the one in London) go over the canal bridge and left along Lower Kings Road.

Turn right on Brownlow Road under the railway and you reach the remains of Berkhamsted Castle (2). This motte and bailey construction was built by Robert, Count of Mortain, a brother of William the Conquerer. The castle was originally surrounded by a double ditch and two moats fed by spring water but suffered from the onset of industrialization with one of the moats drained for the canal and the outer defences damaged by the arrival of the railway. Today the motte remains impressive at 50 ft / 15 mtrs high and has a fine view for anyone fit enough to climb it.



From the castle continue along Brownlow Road. When it bends right, go straight up Castle Hill and, when that road goes left, continue straight on - following a sign marked 'Berkhamsted Common 1'. This directs you through a car park, past tennis courts and onto a grass



track in between sports pitches. Continue straight, ignoring one public footpath that goes left, until reaching Well Farm. Here go straight over a crossing footpath and past the farm, keeping to the left of a hedge. You will reach a field boundary with a sign for the Grand Union Circular Walk.

Follow the GUCW along the hedge up to a kissing gate into trees. Keep straight following the bridleyway and GUCW signs. Climbing uphill, you follow the same signs when reaching open ground.

On entering more trees you will pass a line of three yellow topped posts. Fork right at the second post and follow the third to reach another two posts. Cross a bridleyway following a GUCW sign and you'll get to a further crossing bridleyway where there is a finger direction post. This is Point A.

Short Walk from Point A

Turn right onto the crossing bridleyway (still marked Grand Union Circular Walk and now also Ashridge Boundary Trail and Hertfordshire Way). You will go between the 7th tee and an adjoining green on Berkhamsted golf course and enter trees where the bridleyway is marked with yellow topped posts. A signpost will eventually direct you across the 4th fairway to another stake. You quickly cross the Ashridge – Berkhamsted road, continuing on the Hertfordshire Way and GUCW. Follow a fairway until, just after a footpath on the left, you take a bark path past the 16th tee. The path will go downhill through more trees towards the Nettleden Road and a path comes in from the left. This is Point B.



The long walk continues straight, along the bridleyway that eventually widens through Frithsden Beeches. After crossing another bridleyway (Icknield Way Trail), you get to a large expanse of open land at Berkhamsted Common and bear right on a gravel track that runs along its edge. This

becomes tarmac and, when it bends downhill to a car park, you keep straight on the marked bridleyway. At the next post go right to the road and cross over following the 'Little Gaddesden 1' sign.

The route is now practically straight as an arrow for ¾ mile / 1.25 kms.

The drive you initially take is also a Permissive Bridleyway that will fork right, but you keep straight on and, when past Rodinghead, you follow a barbed wire fence. When this fence ends at a kissing gate keep straight, passing a tree trunk bench on your left.



This is the Golden Valley where you slowly descend along the valley side to a gate that's marked with a National Trust badge. Continue straight on and, at the bottom of the valley, you will reach a yellow topped post.

Here take the National Trust bridleway and Ashridge Estate Boundary Trail, ½ right uphill through trees and behind a fenced off area. When the track bends sharply left look out for a footpath off to the right. After clambering up the embankment you follow the path up to a recreational area, go ½ right to a garden fence then follow the path a short way before turning left through a small group of houses to the road.

Go through the gate opposite and ½ right marked 'Nettleden 1¾'. You now descend to and follow another glorious valley all the way to Nettleden. Entering Nettleden you turn first right past Pightle Cottage.



After the tarmac ends you continue uphill on the Icknield Way Trail, known locally as the 'Roman Road' (3), ignoring a footpath that forks left. Thought to be haunted by a monk, the high walls do add a certain spookiness. The bridge you go under was built by the Duke of Bridgewater as a short cut to Ashridge.

Keep straight over the top of the hill and descend to the Frithsden Vineyard (4). Originally planted in 1971, it was re-established in 2005. The wine is grown, pressed and bottled on site and sold in their shop that's open from Friday – Sunday.



A little further on is the Alford Arms (PH), a modern country pub that does excellent food. Now cross the road and follow the bridleway uphill until you reach a large house called The Grange. Cross to the footpath opposite. When the gardens end, go through a horse barrier and bear right and then turn left onto a bridleway. This is Point B.

Long and Short Walk from Point B

Go downhill to Nettleden Road and then practically double back on yourself on another bridleway. You now meander up to Berkhamsted golf course. When you reach the open go straight across a fairway into trees. Pass the 18th tee, then cautiously over two fairways following yellow topped posts to the war memorial (5). You might catch sight of the top of the memorial some way before reaching it.



The memorial commemorates the Inns of Court Training Corps who put 12,000 soldiers through their paces during the Great War. 2,000 didn't return.

From the memorial, cross over the road to the car park opposite and take the bridleway downhill. Quickly ignore a bridleway and footpath off to the right, continue downhill parallel to the road. Don't take the first bridleway on the left, turn left on the second (when the one you're on becomes a footpath) to the road. Cross and go uphill. Continue

straight on the clear path even when the bridleway forks left and, at the top of the hill, turn right on Public Footpath 2 that tells you that Berkhamsted Station is 1 mile away.

Now go along the top of the field passing an old cattle grid and continue with the hedge / fence on your left and Berkhamsted clearly in view. When you reach a white building, that you will partially see in the distance, you have to go right downhill along a beech hedge, then along a further row of trees to the road. Here turn left along the footpath that follows the edge of the castle back to the town.

Starting Point: Totem Pole (nr Castle St. bridge over Grand Union)

SP994080

Explorer Map 181

Chiltern Hills North

Length:

Long Walk: 7¼ miles / 11.7 kilometres

Short Walk: 4 miles / 6.4 kilometres

Terrain:

Farmland changes to attractive woodland followed by beautiful valleys.