

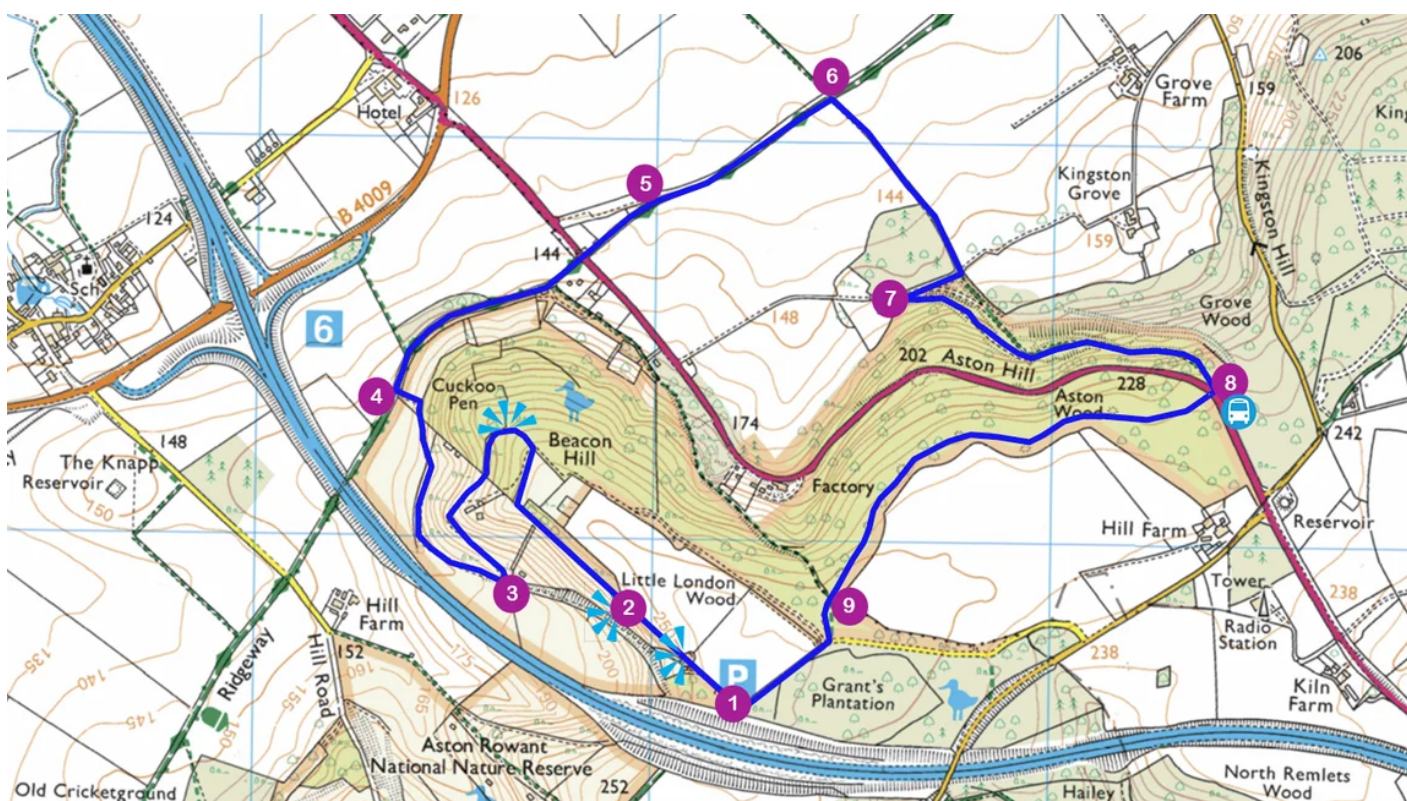
OXFORDSHIRE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE & BERKSHIRE

Beacon Hill, Juniper Bank and Aston Wood walk

Starting at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve, located high on the Chiltern Escarpment and offering views over the Vale of Oxford, this walk will take you through acres of chalk grassland with wild flowers. Moving on to the woodland areas of Juniper Bank and Aston Wood, you'll encounter an altogether different landscape, with chances to spot a wide range of flowers, butterflies, birds, deer and unusual fungi.

Walking in history

Since the Roman era, people have faced the test of transporting people and goods from the lowlands of the Oxford Vale, across the steep Chiltern Escarpment, to London. This walk explores various ways in which this challenge has been tackled over time. Steps 4 and 9 are part the Aston Rowant Discovery Trail (ARDT).



Information

Address: Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve car park, Oxfordshire, HP14 3YL

OS map: OS Explorer 171

Activity: Walking

Moderate: This walk comprises a range of surfaces and gradients. For further details, please see Terrain section.

Dog friendly: Dogs are welcome but must be kept under strict control to protect the wildlife that may be encountered along the route. In places where livestock is grazed, please keep your dog on a short lead at all times.

Full trail: Miles: 4.5 (km: 7.2)

Duration: 2 hours

Terrain

The walk is almost entirely on soft footpaths, with one short stretch on a quiet country lane. There is one long

Total steps: 9

Start point: Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve car park. Grid ref: SU731965

1. From the car park, there are two paths into the nature reserve. Take the right-hand path between the wooden noticeboard and the litter bin. Follow the path to a concrete-floored viewpoint with benches. From here, continue along the path that runs to the right of the information board about red kites. Go through the gate and take the right fork uphill. During wet weather, this path can be a bit slippery due to the drop-off of the slope to your left. (There's an alternative path from the car park that runs downhill to the left, leading directly to Step 3. This may be a safer option when the ground is wet.)
2. Continue along the level path and through a second gate. The path then curves to the right, passing a metal seat sculpture and eventually leading to a third gate. Go through this gate and continue straight ahead until the path forks left towards a wooden sculpture of a red kite. At the sculpture, turn left downhill, following a clear, partly sunken path (ignore the two sets of metal gates on your right). Go straight through the next metal gate and follow the clear path across the chalk grassland. After about 55yds (50m), you'll see a bench on your left, below a large yew tree. From here, you'll get a great view of the Chiltern Escarpment to the south-west. After another sunken section of path that curves left, continue downhill towards a wooden gate.

descent through the Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve, and one long ascent up Juniper Hill. You'll need to cross the A40 main road twice. There are no stiles but you'll have to pass through a number of gates. Stout walking shoes or boots are recommended after wet weather, as some paths can become muddy and slippery.

Please note that parts of the route between Steps 1 and 7 are not on National Trust land. As such, the Trust does not check for hazards on these sections.

3. Don't go through the gate but take a sharp right, following a clear path gently downhill with the reserve's boundary fence on your left. Continue along the path, through an area of scrub woodland. Go through a wooden gate, then fork left and downhill to reach two more sets of gates. Go through the wooden gate, then the metal kissing gate, and you'll come to the Ridgeway long-distance footpath, which is part of the Icknield Way. Between the two gates, there's an information board about the Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve.
4. Turn right onto the Ridgeway path and follow it for about 660yd (600m) until you reach the A40. Take care crossing the road, then continue along the Ridgeway path on the opposite side. After another 275yd (250m), the Ridgeway is joined on its left side by a narrow belt of trees and scrub vegetation. This is the abandoned route of the former Watlington and Princes Risborough railway. The path here can get quite muddy during wet weather, but it's generally wide enough to allow visitors to avoid the worst parts.
5. After another 495yd (450m), you'll come to a signpost next to a small Aston Rowant Discovery Trail noticeboard. Turn right onto the crossing bridleway.
6. The bridleway initially follows a field boundary, but soon becomes hedged on both sides. Continue along it, uphill, into an area of woodland. Follow the white arrows on the trees until you reach a National Trust sign announcing Juniper Bank. Here, turn right off the bridleway, following the route of the Aston Rowant Discovery Trail.
7. As you approach a double metal gate, take a sharp left up a wide, gently sloping track. You're now on the route of the medieval London Wye and the abandoned Stokenchurch turnpike road. Continue up the track for 0.6 miles (1km) until you reach the A40. Turn left, following the narrow path alongside the road for about 165yd (150m). When you're opposite a lay-by, cross the road and go through a gate into the National Trust-managed Aston Wood.
8. Immediately after the gate, take the left-hand fork and follow the woodland path, the route of which is marked by white arrows on the trees. In winter, you'll be able to see the Oxford Vale through the trees on your right, but this is largely obscured when the trees are in leaf.
9. On reaching the far side of Aston Wood, go straight ahead, ignoring a right-hand footpath. You'll soon reach a lane. Turn right and follow it back to the car park.

End point: Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve car park. Grid ref: SU731965
