

OXFORDSHIRE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE & BERKSHIRE

Coombe Hill and Chequers trail

This is a moderately energetic circular walk offering panoramic views across the Aylesbury Vale. You will see rare chalk grassland, beautiful woodlands, the pretty village of Ellesborough and the Prime Minister's country retreat at Chequers. You will taste the fascinating history and pre-history of a part of the Chiltern Hills that has been inhabited by people for thousands of years.

Map recommended

We strongly recommend using the local 1:25 000 Ordnance Survey map in addition to these instructions.



Information

Address: Coombe Hill, near Butlers Cross, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire

OS map: OS Explorer 181 - Strongly recommended

Activity: Walking

Challenging: Some paths can get slippery. Includes a fairly steep climb that can be bypassed. For further details, please see Terrain section.

Dog friendly: Dogs are welcome, but must be kept on a lead as sheep and cattle are grazed in some areas.

Full trail: Miles: 7 (km: 11.2)

Short trail: Miles: 5 (km: 8)

Duration: 2 hours 30 mins - 3 hours 30 mins

Terrain

There is one fairly steep climb from Ellesborough to Beacon Hill, which can be bypassed. There are three road crossings and two very short stretches of country road.

Some paths can be muddy and slippery after prolonged or heavy rain. Stout walking shoes or walking boots are

Total steps: 14

Start point: Coombe Hill car park, grid ref SP 851062

1. Enter the National Trust property through the main gate by the entrance to the car park. Take the path bearing diagonally left away from the path next to the picnic area fence. The path soon enters an area of heathy grassland. Continue in a more-or-less straight line across this, heading for a gap in the trees ahead. Continue through this gap and bear half right across open grassland towards the Boer War Memorial ahead of you.
2. At the Boer War Memorial, enjoy the excellent views of the Aylesbury Vale. To continue, turn back, as if to retrace your steps, but instead follow an almost parallel path to the right of two footpath markers and a tree. Just after a bench, and only 50m from the Memorial, bear right again on a narrow path. This heads diagonally downhill across chalk grassland with Chequers straight ahead of you. Towards the end of this path, the grassland on your left is festooned with anthills.
3. Approaching the boundary fence and woodland ahead, look out for a path on your right (opposite a way-marker post on your left) and follow it steeply downhill through an area of woodland. Take great care as you descend, particularly after wet weather, as this steep path is uneven and can be slippery. At the bottom of the slope, turn left on to a clear bridleway. Follow this, with Ellesborough Golf Course on your right, until you reach the corner of the National Trust property. Turn right, through a wooden gate and follow the path downhill, into a track, which leads to a road. Cross this, and turn right along the footpath. After about 2 minutes (100m), turn left onto a sign-posted

strongly recommended.

Please note that parts of the route between points 3 to 11, and from point 12 onwards, are not on National Trust land. As such, the National Trust does not check for hazards on these sections of the walk. Walkers therefore follow this route at their own risk.

footpath that crosses a field in a straight line. Follow this path until you reach a crossing track.

4. Turn right onto the track, following the public footpath sign until you will reach the road and the village of Ellesborough. If you wish to cross the road to visit the parish church of Saints Peter and Paul, take great care crossing at this hazardous spot. Turn left along a narrow footpath. Pass a bus stop, and after about 30m enter a field on your left through a wooden kissing gate. Follow a path heading diagonally across the field towards a gap in a hedge. Go through a kissing gate to another field - an area of access land surrounding Beacon Hill.
5. The walk now takes a steep ascent up Beacon Hill. (You can avoid this if you wish by taking the public footpath to the right of the free standing metal gate and around the Hill until you reach a gate.) To climb Beacon Hill, take the narrow path to the left of the metal gate, and head straight uphill. Continue towards a small clump of trees at the summit.
6. To descend from the hill, just before you reach the trees; look on your right for a narrow path downhill that almost doubles back on your upward route. It initially follows the contours and then heads more directly downhill until it meets the public footpath. Directly ahead, but hidden in the trees beyond, is Cymbeline's Castle. Turn left on the public footpath towards trees until you reach a gate.
7. Continue through the gate into Ellesborough Warren. Go up a series of steps, through a gate then follow a path across a field. Shortly after the path is met by a wire fence on the right, go through a gate in a corner of the field, and follow a clear track through woodland. Cross over a surfaced track to reach a further gate.
8. The walk now starts a loop around and up Pulpit Hill. (To miss this out, and to shorten the walk by some 2.5k m/1.5 miles follow the grassy path on the left side of the field, with woodland and a fence on your left. You will soon meet the Ridgeway path. Turn left to meet a gate. Then go to straight to Step 12.) To continue on the longer route, bear right and follow a path that runs beneath the trees, signposted Outer Aylesbury Ring (OAR) on the gate post. When you emerge from the trees, head for a wooden gate in a wire fence. Go through the gate into an area of Access Land, and bear left up a short slope opposite. Turn left at the top. You will soon see views to your right across Great Kimble Common, Happy Valley and the Aylesbury Vale. The path now drops to the right below the ridge. Go past a wooden field gate, until you reach a kissing gate.
9. Go through the gate and turn right onto the Ridgeway path, with a steep wooded slope on your right. As the path soon enters more open grassland, keep left following the well-used path. The Ridgeway here is locally called the Cradle Path. Continue to follow the waymarked Ridgeway path until, just 15m after crossing another path and directly opposite a Ridgeway path marker, turn onto a grassy path branching off to your right, leading uphill to a flat-topped mound called Chequers Knap.
10. Turn back, taking the right hand path that descends Chequers Knap back to the Ridgeway, meeting it near a large beech tree by a metal kissing gate. Go through the gate and turn right down a sunken path. After 30 metres turn left, down some steps and through a kissing gate. Follow the Ridgeway path downhill and then up again. After 4 minutes (200m) and 30m past a bench and at the top of the rise, turn off the Ridgeway onto a branching waymarked path on your left that follows the contours. Continue until you join a sunken track (bridleway) merging from the right.
11. Continue on this until you meet a metal, horse-friendly gate. Just after the gate, turn sharp left uphill following a sign to 'Pulpit Hill Fort - 500m'. Follow two further Pulpit Hill signs making one sharp left and one sharp right turn. Eventually, in a small opening in the trees, you see the degraded ramparts of the ancient hillfort, protected by some low hazel hurdle fencing. Turn left through a gap in this fencing to cross the rampart and enter the fort. The path crosses the fort for about 100m then turns right at a T-junction. Go gently downhill, straight across a crossing path, and then through a kissing gate. Continue downhill, coming into open grassland, eventually following a wire fence on your right. At a crossing of paths, turn right through a metal gate onto the Ridgeway path, and across a field to a gate.
12. Go through the gate, following the Ridgeway, with fields and a view of Chequers on your left and woodland on your right. After 11 minutes (550m) take a sharp left through a gate, following the signpost for the Ridgeway. Continue through the grounds of Chequers in a roughly straight line across an open field, over the main driveway, through another field and a gate to reach a road.
13. Take great care crossing the road here; it is on a blind corner with fast moving traffic. It can be particularly difficult to hear approaching traffic in windy weather. On the

opposite side, head to your left. Follow the track uphill signposted Ridgeway Bridleway to a signpost showing the South Bucks Way. You are now in a woodland area with numerous crossing footpaths. Continue to follow the Ridgeway signs and ignore any other signs, including any further bridleways. The waymarks on posts (with the acorn symbol) will also help you keep to the route. Eventually you will emerge onto a road with a private driveway on your right.

14. Turn right onto the road and follow it uphill for 3 minutes (150m), then left at the Ridgeway Footpath sign at the brow of the hill. Follow the Ridgeway until you reach a metal kissing gate. Go through the kissing gate and turn immediately right to follow a path, with a fence and field on your right that leads to the gate where you started the walk.

End point: Coombe Hill car park, grid ref SP 851062
