

North Wessex Downs AONB

The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) includes some of England's finest and most ancient landscapes - from chalk downland and river valleys to arable farmland, ancient woodland and world-famous historic sites. The AONB is ideal for walkers, cyclists and riders to enjoy panoramic views along open chalk escarpments, as well as rights of way through woodland and alongside rivers and parts of the Kennet and Avon Canal. Visitors can follow routes that include the Ridgeway National Trail, the White Horse Trail and the Wayfarer's Walk, taking in attractive rural towns and villages that offer opportunities to enjoy local produce and hospitality.

For further information about the North Wessex Downs AONB, please visit www.northwessexdowns.org.uk

Transport options

There is a regular train service to Hungerford and Newbury stations.

East Garston is served by the following bus services;

No. 4 Newbury - Lambourn (Mon-Sat)

No. 90 Hungerford – Lambourn (Mon-Fri) *

No. 82 Wantage - Great Shefford (Mon-Fri) **

For further details please visit

www.traveline.org.uk or call 0871 200 2233

* request stop – call 0118 975 3070 to book

** one service daily

The Country Code

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
- Guard against all risk of fire
- Leave all gates as found
- Keep to public rights of way across farmland
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls
- Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone
- Take your litter home
- Help to keep all water clean
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees
- Take special care on country roads
- Make no unnecessary noise

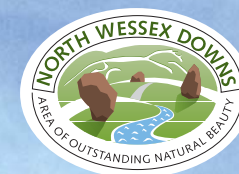
For further information contact:

Berkshire Geoconservation Group
c/o TVERC, Signal Court
Old Station Way
Eynsham
Oxon OX29 4DT

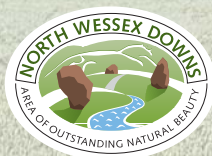
01865 815415

www.berksgeoconservation.org.uk

WALKS IN THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

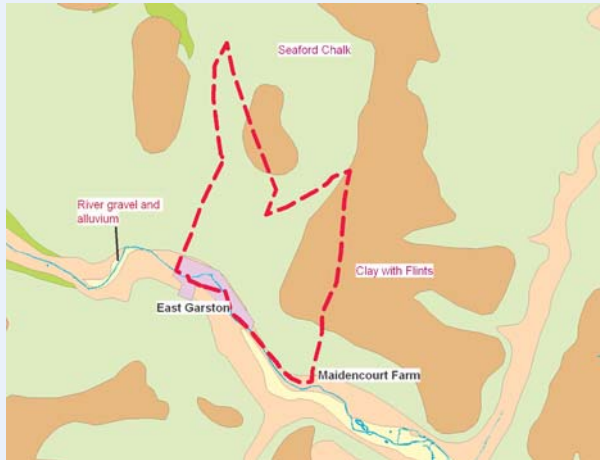


CHALK HILLS & LANDSCAPE AROUND EAST GARSTON



4.5 miles/7.2 km
Easy walking on tracks
and footpaths. Some slopes.
Starting and ending at East Garston

This walk through the Berkshire Downs gives an opportunity to explore how the chalk downland of this part of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) developed. There are two points where the walk encounters deposits of clay with flints, seen clearly from the change in the soil colour and drainage. East Garston village contains many buildings using local building material and opportunities for refreshment.



Simplified geological map

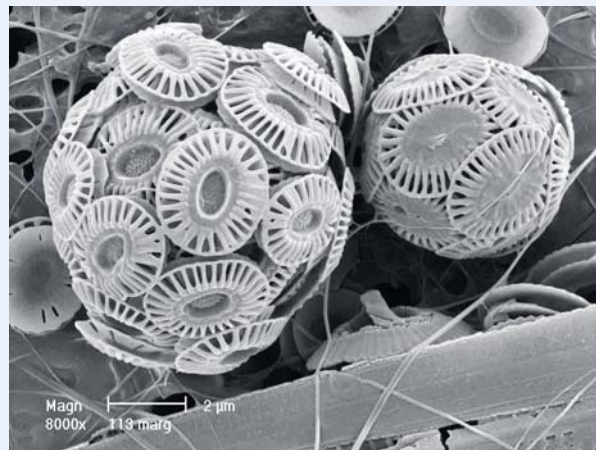
Landscape and Geology

The rolling Berkshire Downs, formed from the Upper Cretaceous Chalk, mark the north western edge of the London Basin, a large geological 'dish' that dominates the geology of the Home Counties. During the Cretaceous period from between 95 to 80 million years ago much of what is now southern Britain was covered by sea. Chalk is comprised of micro-organisms called coccoliths which accumulated on the sea floor and today forms the rolling and open expanses of the Berkshire Downs. Much of the chalk outcrop forms an elevated gentle, southerly dipping plateau, dissected by a network of dry valleys. In places on the Downs, areas of chalk grassland with characteristic plants such as orchids, thyme and harebell still survive.

Forming the Landscape

Over the last two million years the climate of Britain has seen periods of temperate climate interrupted by repeated advances and retreats of glacial ice sheets, collectively known as the Ice Age (we are still in one of the temperate phases). Such conditions have been instrumental in forming the landscape we see today.

Ice did not reach the Berkshire area during the Quaternary (the last 2 million years), although tundra-like conditions would have prevailed. Under these arctic conditions the dry valleys of the chalk probably formed. These features occur when, during the various glacial periods, deep permafrost would have made the ground impermeable and allowed gradual erosion of the frozen soil surface to occur, particularly during summer thaws.



Coccolith

Sarsen Stones

Sarsen stones are natural sandstone blocks of Palaeogene age (about 55 million years ago) that were left behind following erosion during the last Ice Age. They have been used as a building material in the area for thousands of years, serving as corner-stones, gate-posts and stepping stones or supplementing other building materials in walls. Close inspection will often reveal holes in them caused by the roots of plants growing at the time of deposition.



Sarsen stones

Clay-with-Flints

In many areas the surface of the chalk is covered by clay-with-flints. This was left after the prolonged erosion and weathering of the chalk, and has probably been formed over many millions of years. The clay-with-flints often gives rise to more acidic soil conditions contrasting with the calcareous soils derived from chalk bedrock. It has a much more reddish brown colour and is sometimes used for brickmaking.

Directions and guide

1 East Garston Village (Grid Ref. 363768)

- Park at the community shop which is located next to the village hall, and is open daily and useful for refreshments.
- From the shop turn west along Back Street, then turn right at the war memorial.
- Cross the River Lambourn and bear left along Station Road.

East Garston has many fine buildings constructed from local materials which include flint, sarsens, chalk, brick and tile.

Bricks in this area are typically red but a 'blue' glaze used for decorative purposes can be applied by firing at a higher

temperature along with glass bottles, salt and bracken. The War Memorial, dedicated in 1920, is a coarse grained, pale coloured, Cornish granite with large feldspar crystals visible.



War Memorial

2 All Saints Church (Grid Ref. 362771)

- After about 100m the road bears to the right, continue in this direction.
- All Saints Church can be seen on your left.

There has been a church here since the 12th Century with additions in the 14th and 15th Centuries and major modernisation carried out in 1876. The church walls include chalk block, sarsens, flint and brick whilst the quoins are of Jurassic limestone probably from the Cotswolds. The fine 18th century cob wall with weathered red tile capping to the north of the churchyard follows the old Devon maxim that if a cob wall has a 'good hat and pair of boots' it will remain sound.



Cob Wall

3 East Garston Ditch and Enclosure (Grid Ref. 363780)

- Pass Manor Farm and follow the footpath over a ridge for about 800m.
- At grid ref 365778, where the path forks take the left path up the hill.

After leaving the village the track climbs to the north towards along linear earthwork, known as the East Garston Ditch.

Archaeological excavations

uncovered two decorated sherds dating to the late Bronze Age (1600-1050BC). A fair-sized rectangular enclosure can also be seen at Winterdown Bottom, to the south of the linear earthwork. This is likely to have been a medieval sheep fold for gathering flocks.



4 Viewpoint (Grid Ref. 366785)

- Turn right at the top of the ridge where the footpath crosses a byway.

Winterbourne Bottom Down is an area of chalk grassland adjacent to gallops. It is home to important species such as clustered bellflower, dropwort, mouse-eared hawkweed, chalk milkwort and saw-wort. Characteristic 'dry valleys' formed during the Ice Age can be seen where meltwater, prevented from soaking into the frozen chalk bedrock, instead cut into the hillside.

5 Jimmy's Farm (Grid Ref. 370775)

- Turn right onto the byway down the hill to Jimmy's Farm, turning right where it joins the road.
- After 100 metres, turn left on to the Bridleway, running north east.

The higher parts of the slopes around Jimmy's Farm and Furze Border are of clay-with-flints. At most times of the year the soil can be seen as much darker and a reddish brown. This is where the clay is capped by a thin loamy topsoil. It is likely that material from here was used for some of the early brick building in the village.



Reddened soil

6 Furze Border (Grid Ref. 376775)

- Turn right (south) onto the byway after climbing the steep hill.
- Walk south through Furze Border, in the direction of Maidencourt Farm.

A lynchet is a feature of ancient field systems, where soil disturbed by ploughing has moved down the slope to rest against a boundary feature. Now grassed over, such terraced effects can be seen along this section of the walk.

There are records dating from the 12th Century of a farm and manor on the site of Maidencourt Farm. The current red brick building, with blue brick detail and Welsh slate roof dates from the early 19th Century.

7 River Lambourn (Grid Ref. 373760)

- Turn right at Maidencourt Farm, following the Lambourn Valley Way.

The upper reaches of the river Lambourn are seasonal, fed by a chalk aquifer from a number of springs located upstream of the village of Lambourn. In the summer months, the stream is dry, but between November and March, when the water table is high the source of the river migrates upstream. This is known as a Winterborne stream. The footpath along this section follows the line of the Lambourn Valley Railway, which connected with the mainline Devon to London line, closing in 1960.

8 East Garston

- Return to East Garston along Front Street.

There are a number of splendid buildings to be seen, including Mask Cottage, dating from the 14th Century. The original building is timber framed with render and brick infill and there are later brick extensions. Other buildings demonstrate the use of local red and blue bricks as well as sarsens and flint.



Local building styles

