



*Impressive views across the valley as you head up Pitstone Common.*

## *11 Ashridge Estate*

6.8 miles / 10.9km

**A** stunning walk following the edge of the Ashridge Estate's beechwoods, with far-reaching views across the rolling Chiltern landscape, including Incombe Hole and the Ivinghoe Hills. You could also extend the walk by a mile for a 'there and back' trip to the top of Ivinghoe Beacon. The Ashridge Estate is managed by the National Trust and this walk starts by the towering granite Bridgewater Monument, where there is ample parking, a gift shop, café and toilets, making it a very useful starting point. If you have some energy left at the end of the walk, on weekends from April to October you can climb the Monument's 172 steps, to be rewarded with a view stretching as far as Waddesdon Manor and Wendover Woods. The area is very popular with local dog walkers, so if you have your four-legged friend with you they will have plenty of company. The Icknield Way leads you back towards fields grazed by sheep, so around point 6 they'll need to be on a lead. This landscape has been farmed for centuries, with grazing animals creating the perfect conditions for wild flowers and butterflies. Look out for the black wooden Pitstone Windmill, balanced on its white base as you walk. It is a very rare early form of a post mill, dating back to the early 17th century. The leaves in Ashridge blaze with colour in autumn, although it would be worth paying a visit in spring too, to see the woodland floor carpeted with bluebells.

**Terrain** You don't need to climb to admire the views on this walk as, other than a series of wooden steps at point 5, it is mainly level ground. The first section through the Ashridge Estate follows very well maintained gravel tracks that make walking easy at any time of the year. The return route through the woods is along a footpath that is also a bridleway, so can be muddy. There are no stiles or road walking.

**Map** OS Explorer 181 Chiltern Hills North.

**Starting point** Bridgewater Monument, Ashridge Estate. (GR SP 970131).

**How to get there & parking** The National Trust Visitor Centre, and its free car park, is off the B4506 between Berkamsted and Dagnall. **Sat nav:** HP4 1LT.

**Refreshments** Brownlow Café, next to the Visitor Centre, has a large outside seating area with some cover from the elements. They serve breakfast and lunch, delicious cakes and hot drinks, and dogs are allowed in this area ([brownlowcafe.co.uk](http://brownlowcafe.co.uk)). There is often an ice cream and coffee van in the car park as well.

## The Walk

**1** Standing in front of the monument, turn right and follow the wide path signed '**Duncombe Terrace**'. Follow this main path straight on through **Pitstone Common**, crossing a wooden footbridge. The path starts to go uphill for a stretch, passing a sign on the right marking the end of the mobility route. Go through a gate next to **Clipperdown Cottage**.

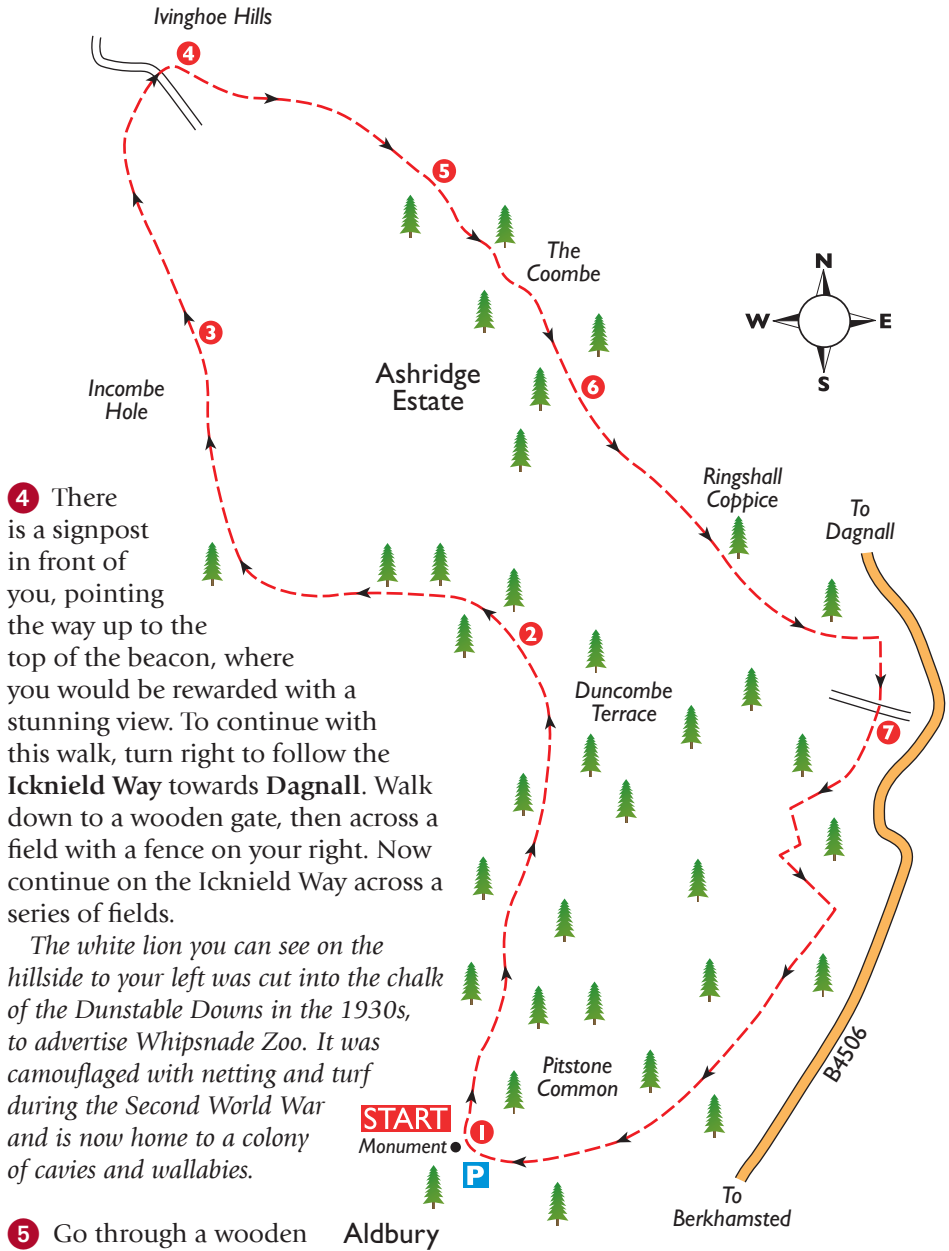
**2** Turn left and follow the track, admiring the view on the left towards **Pitstone Hill**. Stay on this main path and soon you will spot Pitstone Windmill across the fields. Cross a cattle grid with a gate next to it, then almost immediately after this, take the left turn down a path, marked with a National Trust horseshoe.

**3** The path ends with a spectacular view ahead of you over **Incombe Hole**. Go through the gate on your left then turn immediately right to follow the **Ridgeway**, with the ground sloping away to your left. This narrow path leads you through an area of scrub from which you emerge to see the chalk path snaking up to **Ivinghoe Beacon** ahead of you. Look out for kestrels here, hanging in the air as they hunt for insects and small mammals in the chalk grasslands. Walk down to the road and cross with care as you are on a bend.



autumn

## THE CHILTERNS Year Round Walks



**4** There is a signpost in front of you, pointing the way up to the top of the beacon, where you would be rewarded with a stunning view. To continue with this walk, turn right to follow the **Icknield Way** towards **Dagnall**. Walk down to a wooden gate, then across a field with a fence on your right. Now continue on the Icknield Way across a series of fields.

*The white lion you can see on the hillside to your left was cut into the chalk of the Dunstable Downs in the 1930s, to advertise Whipsnade Zoo. It was camouflaged with netting and turf during the Second World War and is now home to a colony of cavies and wallabies.*

**5** Go through a wooden gate into the dark pine trees of **The Coombs**, then come to a short series of wooden steps that take you up to higher ground. Go through a swing gate, then cross the field to

another gate, with **Wards Hurst Farm** on your right.

**6** Now you leave the Icknield Way behind, and head straight on, following a public footpath to the left of a large shed. Walk across a series of fields, following the footpath signs. There are often sheep in these fields. Go through a wooden swing gate signed '**Ashridge Estate Boundary Trail**', then walk along a fenced path with **Ringshall Coppice** on your left. Go through another gate then walk by the side of a large field towards a house. Go through the gate and follow a wire fence round an underground reservoir, then down the concrete drive to the road.

**7** Cross the road to follow the public footpath through the woods, passing a car park on your right. Continue ahead as the path veers to the left. When you come to a cross track, turn right for about 100m, then at a junction of paths with a post on your left, turn left to follow the public footpath along a wide glade. When you can see a road ahead, turn right at the post and follow the public footpath, now heading south-west. When you come to another crosstrack, turn right and follow the purple sign for a short distance to arrive back at the monument.

### *What to look out for –*

The warmth of summer followed by autumn damp creates an explosion of mushrooms on the woodland floor and fallen logs. They are the fruiting part of fungi and appear throughout autumn to spread their spores. Some mushrooms are fatally poisonous, so better to admire them and leave them where they are rather than picking them. Fungi are nature's recycler, helping to decompose wood and return its nutrients back to the soil.

