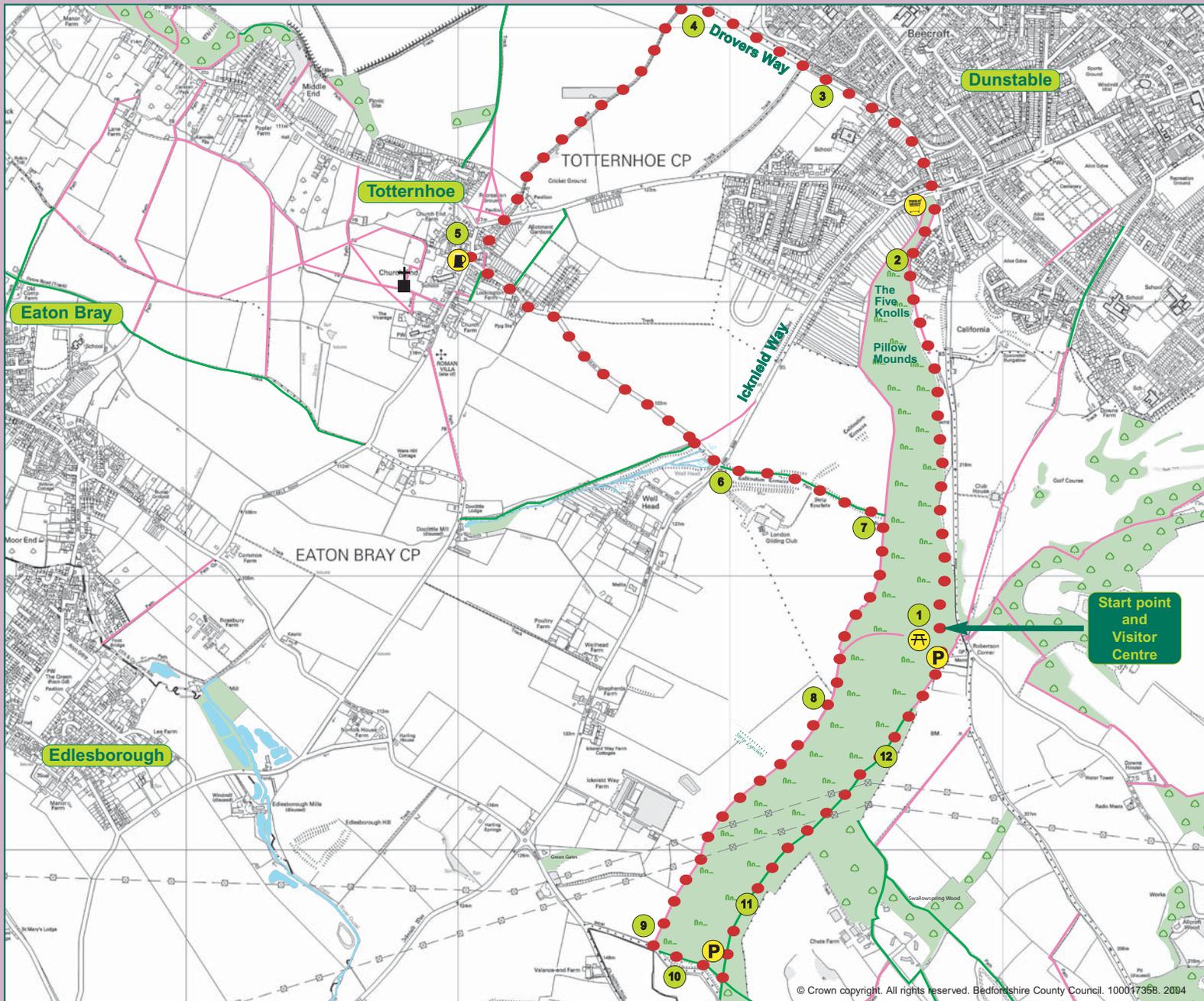


# The walk

Approx 6½ Miles / 10.4 km Time: 3½ hours



	The walk			Church		Local shop
	Footpath		Parking		Picnic area	
	Bridleway		Public house		Woodland	

- 1** Leave the car park by the Visitor Centre and walk slightly downhill over the grass area, then turn right following the path along the top of the slope past the site of the medieval warren as far as the five knolls tumuli.
- 2** Continue downhill to West Street, which runs along the line of the Icknield Way.
- 3** Cross West Street (with care) on to Green Lane opposite, this is also known as Drovers Way. As you follow the Drovers Way look for the northward facing promontory of Ivinghoe Beacon in the distance to your left, its summit occupied by the defences of an Iron Age hill fort. Looking back towards the Downs, the Five Knolls are visible as bumps against the skyline, just to the left of the highest part of the hill. When the chalk mounds were first built, they would have been prominent landmarks to travellers on the Icknield Way.
- 4** Continue as far as a crossroads of Green Lanes. In the field diagonally to the right, the line of trees marks the rampart of Maiden Bower, another Iron Age hill fort. At the second crossroads, turn left along the Houghton Green Highway into Totternhoe village.
- 5** Cross Dunstable Road and follow Furlong Lane, turn left on to Church Road and left again on to Well Head Road. Follow this as far as the B489 (Icknield Way) near Well Head. On the right hand side of the road are a series of springs which give rise to the River Ouzel; this joins the River Great Ouse at Milton Keynes.
- 6** Cross the road (with care) and follow the bridleway opposite, passing the London Gliding Club on the right, as far as the base of the Downs.
- 7** At the end of the bridleway, turn right and follow the footpath at the bottom of the slope, through the stock fence, until a trackway is reached on the left. Should you wish to take the shorter walk this leads uphill back to the starting point along an ancient hollow way.
- 8** Follow the sunken waymarked path downhill in a south-west direction. This path is an old 'cut way' which would have offered an easier route up the slope particularly for the people of Totternhoe parish, who grazed their animals on this part of the Downs.
- 9** At the bottom of the Hill, turn left and follow the footpath as far as the foot of Bison Hill (B4540). There are two stiles to cross in the fence line along the way.
- 10** Turn left at the road and follow the bridleway to the right, uphill, parallel with the road for 20 yards.
- 11** At the top of the hill, near the Bison Hill car park follow the bridleway that leads to the left, entering a pasture via the bridle gate. Cross this large field keeping roughly to the same contour. There are superb views over the surrounding countryside, including the vale of Aylesbury.
- 12** The bridleway emerges in an area of scrub, and the walk continues straight ahead, returning to the Visitor Centre.



**Approx 6½ Miles/ 10.4 km**  
**Time: 3½ hours**

Set within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) the Downs has much to offer for recreational purposes as well as nature conservation.

### Dunstable Downs

Dunstable Downs is owned by Bedfordshire County Council and jointly managed with The National Trust. It was formed by chalk deposited on the seabed when the area was still underwater about 70 million years ago. Fossils of sea urchins, molluscs, and dart shaped fossils called belemnites are occasionally found where the chalk is exposed. The highest point of the Downs is now approximately 800feet/243m above sea level.

The chalk has affected the way the Downs have been used since humans first settled there. Rainwater passes easily through the chalk which makes the land difficult to cultivate, so since farming began there about 5000 years ago the Downs have been used principally for grazing sheep rather than growing crops.

### Flora and Fauna

Over the centuries grazing of the seeding hawthorn scrub has resulted in an area of chalk grassland that supports an abundance of flora and fauna characteristic of the habitat. Many uncommon species of plants and butterflies have been recorded at the site including Great Pignut, Chiltern Gentian, Chalk-Hill Blue and Duke of Burgundy. The decline in sheep grazing since World War II as well as the reduction of the rabbit population due to myxomatosis has resulted in scrub invasion which has threatened the grassland

communities but recent scrub clearance and the reintroduction of grazing over part of the site has ensured a continuation of this rare landscape.

### Medieval Warren

Warrens were areas of land set aside for breeding and management of rabbits to provide a constant supply of fresh meat and skins.

The Downs warren consists of two pillow mounds first noted by W.G. Smith in 1894. At the time they were thought to be prehistoric burial mounds but, it is now considered that their form and location indicate the site of a warren, possibly constructed and managed by the Augustian Priory at Dunstable.

### Five Knolls

The Five Knolls Round Barrow Cemetery is the only such site known in Bedfordshire. Barrows are burial mounds constructed in chalk over individual burials with later burials (usually cremations) dug into the outside of the mounds. First noted by William Stukely in the 18th century they were partially excavated in the 1850's and 1920's the results showed that the cemetery originated in the late Neolithic (3000BC) and Bronze Age (2000 – 700BC) and re-used for burial in the Roman period. The northernmost barrow was used in medieval times as the site for a gallows.

### The Icknield Way

Unique among long distance tracks because it can claim to be the oldest road in Britain. The Icknield Way was ancient when the Romans arrived. Extending from Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire to Knettishall Heath in Norfolk, a distance of 103m/166km it consists of prehistoric pathways dotted with archaeological remains. Originating in the Neolithic Period as a means of communication from Wessex to East Anglia it ran along the foot of the chalk hills above the marshy ground of the spring line. In later prehistoric times, when demand for agricultural land increased, this broad belt narrowed down into a defined trackway.

### Drovers Way

Part of a network of green lanes in the area which would have traditionally been used by drovers taking stock, especially sheep, to market in Dunstable, and probably also of ancient origin.

### Strip Lynchet

This is an artificial terrace cut into the slope to form a platform and was usually created in the middle ages when every piece of land was being utilised for cultivation. The bridleway runs along a strip lynchet and the strip of woodland in the grounds of the gliding club is growing on another series of lynchets.

# Dunstable Downs

## Planning your walk

Dunstable Downs car park is the suggested starting point and the walk is described in an anti-clockwise direction. However it can also be started from the National Trust car park on Blison Hill (see map) and the walk can be shortened to approximately 4½ miles / 7.2km details shown on map.

## Refreshments, Parking and Toilets

You can park at the Dunstable Downs and the National Trust Blison Hill car parks throughout the year and there are toilet facilities and refreshments available at the Visitor Centre during the opening times displayed.

## Public Transport

For information contact Traveline 0870 608 2 608 or [www.travelsmartuk.com](http://www.travelsmartuk.com)

The nearest train station is at Luton, on the Bedford to St. Pancras Thameslink Line contact Traveline or [www.thameslink.co.uk](http://www.thameslink.co.uk)

## Ordnance Survey Maps

The route is covered on Ordnance Survey Landranger Series map 166. It is also shown on Explorer maps 181 and 193. Both are available from local bookshops and some petrol stations.

## Countryside Code

- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home

- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people

[www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk)

## Tips for enjoying your walk

Parts of the walk can become muddy and slippery especially after heavy rain, so strong waterproof footwear is recommended. Take care where conditions are rough and do let someone know where you are going. Please be aware that much of the walk is unsuitable for wheelchairs and difficult for pushchairs.

## Did you enjoy the walk?

If you have any comments about the walk or encounter any problems please contact the Rights of Way Section, Bedfordshire County Council, Access & Partnerships, County Hall, Bedford MK42 9AP or email [row@bedscc.gov.uk](mailto:row@bedscc.gov.uk)

This is one of a series of circular walk leaflets produced by Bedfordshire County Council. For further information and availability please contact us on 01234 228324

## Other walks

Find out about more of Bedfordshire's walking and riding routes as well as nature reserves and country parks, by visiting [www.lets-go.org.uk](http://www.lets-go.org.uk)



For other activities and attractions in the Chilterns countryside log onto [www.chilternsaonb.org](http://www.chilternsaonb.org)

PHOTO: BEDFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, CHRIS VALENTINE, COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY



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Time: 3½ hours



Bedfordshire  
county council