

Aston Rowant Discovery Trail

Aston Rowant – Aston Hill – Beacon Hill – Lewknor – back

Description:

The walk was developed by Aston Rowant Parish Council and is called the Aston Rowant Discovery Trail. The Trail is stile free and fully way marked. The circular route is 5.3m but with the extension to a pub and hotel it's 6.2m.

Starting at the little village of Aston Rowant, close to the M40 and the escarpment of the Chilterns, the walk starts with a simple, level walk across farmland until the steep slopes of the Chilterns are reached. At the top of the hill the walk takes you through the woods of a nature reserve to the views at the top of Beacon Hill. After the descent the walk passes through the village of Lewknor, with a handy pub, before continuing back to the start.

Access info:

From Junction 6 on the M40, take the road eastwards, signed Chinnor and Princes Risborough. Cross the A40 and then, after the 30-mile an hour sign, take the next left to Aston Rowant. Find somewhere to park after you pass the church, from where the walk starts.

Additional info:

1. Aston Rowant has an 11th Century Church (St Peter and St Paul) with two Romanesque Windows. Church Lane is thought to be part of the London Weye - a route to Oxford used in the Middle Ages. The future Queen Elizabeth 1 passed this way in 1554 when released from the Tower of London and banished to country confinement in Woodstock.
Aston means the eastern farmstead or estate, whilst the name 'Rowant' is from Rohant family, lords of the manor in the 14th century. There used to be a fine manor house in the village said to have been 'one of the remarkable seats in the county', with its park and gardens and a two and a half acre lake. The house was built in 1352 but eventually burned down in the mid-20th century. Now the park and walled kitchen garden have been built on.
2. The Ridgeway National Trail follows the ancient Ridgeway from Overton Hill, near Avebury, to Streatley, then follows footpaths and parts of the ancient Icknield Way through the Chiltern Hills to Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire. The National Trail is 87 miles (140 km) long and has been a drovers' route for 300 years.
3. Swan's Way is a long distance bridle route and footpath in Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, England. It runs 65 miles from Salcey Forest, Northamptonshire to Goring-On-Thames, Oxfordshire.
4. The ancient route known as the Icknield Way also overlaps with the Ridgeway and Swan's Way for a distance here, although the modern walkers' Icknield Way and the riders' Icknield Path actually start further east, near Ivinghoe Beacon.
5. The Princess Risborough to Watlington passenger and goods railway opened in 1872 and finally closed in 1961. Some trains ran through to London. The Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway is a preserved heritage railway with its headquarters and only station at Chinnor. It runs along the foot of the Chilterns escarpment.
6. The Aston Rowant Nature Reserve
 - a) The National Trust Juniper Bank. The London Weye passed nearby. The area is riddled with loggers' routes. The original London to Oxford Turnpike (1718 Stokenchurch to Wheatley Turnpike Trust) took a steep route down the Chiltern Escarpment here.
 - b) The National Trust Aston Wood. Watch out for Red Kites, Buzzards, Fallow Deer, Muntjac and Bluebells. The beech woods were planted for the local furniture trade and firewood. Materials were used for house and road building from the flint and chalk pits.

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7. Many of the cottages in Lewknor are built using flints and some of the newer construction has been sympathetically built in a similar style using the same materials. At the centre of the village is the remnant of Town Pond, which at one time was used for watercress growing. The cress was sent to London by train from the nearby halt on the Watlington to Princes Risborough branch line (now no longer there).

The flint church of St. Margaret's was rebuilt and enlarged in the 14th century and the tower was added in the 15th century. Access to the church is through the village school playground.





8. The M40 motorway between London and Oxford was constructed in stages between 1967 and 1974. The section northbound from J5 to J8 was completed in 1974. Since the construction of the motorway the B4009 has become a bypass for Lewknor and the motorway has blocked the direct road from the village to Aston Rowant.

9. The Talking Trail is made up of six unique sculptures with built in audio players, each with six channels to enable a new and flexible visitor experience for all ages.







The trail aims to reveal the wildlife and human history of the reserve, as well as creating new folklore and reflecting the experiences of those who took part in the project.

<p>01</p> 	<p>The starting point is Aston Rowant church. With your back to the church, turn right, bear left and then head straight along the "main" road out of the village, until you reach the B4009 (Chinnor Road)</p>
<p>02</p> 	<p>Cross (carefully) straight over, taking the gate to the left of the large gate, labelled "Racehorse Gallop Ahead". A long straight track lies ahead, towards the woods and the escarpment. You pass Woodway Farm on the right and Woodway Cottages on the left and then you're in the open. You may be lucky and see horses being exercised in the paddock on the right.</p>
<p>03</p> 	<p>The first crossing you meet is the Ridgeway. It coincides here with Swan's Way and the Icknield Way (see Add. Notes) and the path of the Princes Risborough to Watlington railway (see Add. Notes) also used to run along this stretch of the path for about a mile. Keep straight ahead, between the hedges and eventually into the wood. The path becomes narrower and sunken here. After a short while you come to a fork in the path at the sign for "National Trust - Juniper Bank".</p>
<p>04</p> 	<p>[Those who enjoy a good climb may take the left fork, arrowed, which joins the easier route at WP06. There you should turn left.] For an easier route turn right here until the track appears to end at a private house.</p>




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<p>05</p> 	<p>In fact the track continues with a very sharp turn to the left. It continues at a steady slope to where the "climbers" would meet this path at WP06.</p>
<p>06</p> 	<p>The picture shows why the climb is not for the faint-hearted. Now you (all) climb slowly onwards – the sound of the A40 soon becomes apparent and at the top of the hill you come out alongside the road. Continue along the verge for a short way until you see a lay by opposite and the entrance to The National Trust Aston Wood.</p>
<p>07</p> 	<p>Cross carefully and enter the wood to the left of the big gate. A white arrow on the gatepost is the first of a set that will guide you through the wood to the next waypoint (although the route is quite clear). You start slightly left and then weave your way along a wide footpath. After approx 3/4 mile ignore the Public Footpath to the right, which leads down the hill. At the southern limits of the wood you meet a very minor road at a small clearing.</p>
<p>08</p> 	<p>There is an information board here and leaflets about the Talking Trail. You will visit most of these sculptures on the next part of the walk (sculptures 1 to 5, but not 6). With your back to the road, take the path to the left (you came up from the right). The path skirts fields to the left. You'll pass sculptures 1 and 2 on this stage. Eventually you come to a fork.</p>
<p>09</p> 	<p>Take the left fork here – slightly up – rather than the right. [If you want to see sculpture 6, you need to go down to the right and then return here afterwards]. The path rises to go close to the fields on the left and eventually to a gate to take you out of the wood.</p>
<p>10</p> 	<p>Sculpture 3 is immediately on your right, after the gate. Keep to the path across the open grassland, bearing right slightly to keep fairly close to the hedge. Eventually the path slopes gently downwards, to give great views and lead you to sculpture 4 – The Flying Machine.</p>

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<p>11</p> 	<p>This is about the halfway point and a good spot for a rest or a drink. Then take a right turn alongside the fence and very soon you'll see sculpture 5, just before a gate.</p>
<p>12</p> 	<p>Once through the gate, the track starts to descend steadily down the escarpment. When you reach a T-junction, take the sharp left turn.</p>
<p>13</p> 	<p>Take this path gently down for some way, through a gate or two, until the M40 can be seen clearly ahead and to your left. Just before the path bears left towards a gate, turn right, down the slope of the hill on a wide grass track, aiming for a pair of double gates.</p>
<p>14</p> 	<p>Pass through both sets of gates and you are back on the Ridgeway again. Now comes the time to choose whether to take the shorter walk, back to Aston Rowant, or the longer one via Lewknor. a) To head straight home, take the path to the RIGHT, cross the A40, and after a little while you'll see the footpath crossroads at WP03. So now turn left and retrace your steps – almost a straight line back to Aston Rowant. b) To continue, turn LEFT and take this straight track until you reach a minor road.</p>
<p>15</p> 	<p>Turn right at the crossroads and take the (very) straight road ahead (Hill Road), past the reservoir on the left, until the road slopes downwards to the B4009, opposite Lewknor.</p>
<p>16</p> 	<p>Directly across the road is a very narrow gap, which you can take, but a few metres to the left is the "official" footpath, down some steps and onto a minor road into Lewknor. Follow this a short way and you arrive at the welcome sight of The Leathern Bottel.</p>

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<p>17</p> 	<p>It goes without saying this might be a good time to consider a little snack or more. I found their baguettes a treat and the beer. When you're ready, continue into the village, initially with the pub on your left. Where the road ends, with the playing field on your right, you come to the M40. For some reason, the underpass is not directly ahead, where the old road used to go unimpeded, but you need to take the path to the left.</p>
<p>18</p> 	<p>A left, right, right and left takes you back on the old road again. Continue ahead until you reach the A40 (London Road) - much quieter since the M40 was built! On the corner is the Lambert Arms - another possible place for refreshment, though you are nearly back to the start!</p>
<p>19</p> 	<p>The road continues ahead, across and slightly to your right (Butts Way). After a little while the B4009 joins from the right, after its diversion south to form the "Lewknor bypass", and you continue straight along the pavement until you reach WP02, where you turn left and head straight back towards Aston Rowant.</p>