**Enborne Valley and Greenham Common**

**Midgham station - Wasing - Brimpton Common - Ashford Hill - Greenham Common - Thatcham station**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length:</th>
<th>11 miles (17.8km)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Underfoot:</strong></td>
<td>Field and riverside paths have the potential to be squelchy at any time of year - good footwear is recommended. After poor weather, the path through Ashford Hill nature reserve could be very muddy - an alternative route is described in the text.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Terrain:</strong></td>
<td>Rolling countryside, with generally very gentle climbs and descents throughout.</td>
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<td><strong>Maps:</strong></td>
<td>1:50,000 Landranger 174 Newbury &amp; Wantage; 1:25,000 Explorer 158 Newbury &amp; Hungerford</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Getting there:</strong></td>
<td>Midgham is generally only served by local services, meaning that a change is required to get there from London. Trains run hourly (around every 2 hours on Sundays) from Reading to Midgham (17 mins). There are frequent services from London Paddington to Reading (36 mins), meaning that the full journey normally takes around 55 mins.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Useful websites:</strong></td>
<td>The route passes through Ashford Hill National Nature Reserve and Greenham Common Nature Reserve (map here).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Getting home:</strong></td>
<td>Monday-Saturday, Thatcham is served by an hourly service to London Paddington (54 mins). In addition, there is a daily hourly service to Reading (24 mins) for frequent connections to Paddington (30 mins).</td>
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<td><strong>Fares:</strong></td>
<td>An off-peak return to Thatcham for £20.00 (child £10.00, railcard £13.20) will cover both journeys.</td>
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**Route description**

Contrary to the name, Midgham station - a halt on the main line to south west England - actually sits in the village of Woolhampton. Midgham itself is a hamlet around two kilometers up the hill from here. On opening in 1848, the station was called Woolhampton, the renaming in 1873 due to (according to legend, at least) to avoid confusion with Wolverhampton. Woolhampton has long served a transport role, once being famous for its coaching inns on the Bath road.

- Exit from the platform next to the level crossing and turn right along the road, passing attractive cottages to reach the swing bridge over the Kennet & Avon Canal. Cross and continue ahead, past the 18th century Rowbarge pub.

- Just past the pub car park squeeze past a metal barrier to head right on a track marked as a public footpath. When you reach a small brick water board building on the right, turn L opposite, leaving the track, on a footpath heading towards a lake ahead.

This group of lakes - known as the Woolhampton Lakes - are former gravel pits, now flooded both for fishing, and to provide a habitat for a wide range of waterfowl. They have become a popular stopping off point for migrant species. There is a fine view across the lakes to the spire of Brimpton church.

- Keep ahead beside the lake, keeping to the paths and tracks closest to water’s edge, until you have curved right round the lake to face west. Pass left through a new wooden kissing gate to pass across a narrow field to a second gate onto a fenced track, turning right.

- At a track junction at the corner of giant reedbed - part of the 6 hectare Woolhampton Reed Bed Site of Special Scientific Interest - (with another small lake ahead), head left on the track heading towards Brimpton spire on its low rise. When you reach a gate where the main track veers right, instead turn left on a fainter track alongside the hedgerow. Passing another small ex-gravel pit lake behind trees to your left, you exit through a gateway onto a road, turning left.

- You very soon reach a road junction, where you keep right towards Aldermaston, crossing the brick arch of Shalford Bridge over the placid River Enborne. At the road junction after the bridge, turn left then immediately right by the lodgehouse on a signed footpath along Wasing Park’s tarmac driveway (ignore misleading signs which imply the public right of way is to Wasing church only).

- Follow the driveway through tree-studded parkland, climbing gently. On reaching a junction at the top of the hill, keep straight ahead (following a footpath sign). Passing through a gateway, ignore the 'Private, No Entry' sign. You soon arrive beside Wasing chapel and graveyard, with Wasing House visible just beyond.

The little hamlet of Wasing is built around Wasing House, a small mansion built in 1770 by a London nautical publisher named John Mount, and has been in the hands of the same family ever since. The House was rebuilt after a major fire in 1945. The little chapel of St Nicholas forms the parish church for the village.

- Follow the footpath sign right through a kissing gate into the field. From here, signs lead you onto a faint track through young woodland, deer often bounding ahead of you as the route descends slightly into pine woods. At a junction with a much clearer track, turn right to immediately reach a gateway and a second track junction by a small brick cottage. Turn left.
- Keep to the track as it crosses a small stream and climbs slightly to the houses of Brimpton Common. At a track junction, turn right (following a byway sign) to pass further cottages, and emerge on a busy road.

- Cross the road and take public footpath opposite. This cuts between fields to emerge on a second road opposite the thatched Pineapple inn.

The Pineapple inn sits at the heart of the scattered village of Brimpton Common, and is over 900 years old - warranting a mention in the Doomsday Book. The pub’s name is probably less exotic than it sounds - a 'pineapple' was a local name for a pine cone! Brimpton Common’s claims to fame include being the birthplace of Ruth Ellis, the last woman to be hung in England; and for having been the holiday retreat of Aneurin Bevan and Jennie Lee.

- (If the weather has recently been very wet, the route through Ashford Hill may be flooded. As an alternative, turn right at the Pineapple inn to a road junction. Take the minor road - Hockford Lane - almost opposite by the post box. Follow this quiet lane for around a mile, until just after Woodhouse Farm you rejoin the main route by turning right on footpath down to the River Enborne.)

- Turn left along the road (the B3051), and after about 100m veer R on a clear, signed bridleway. At the end of the playing field on the righthand side of the path, follow a footpath sign to the right onto the gorse-heavy common, the path cutting between high bushes. Keep to the path paralleling the boundary of the common to eventually emerge on the corner of a small tarmac road.

- Take the footpath signed to the right. This crosses a large field and enters Redlands Copse, where you immediately take the descending track to the right. The track soon becomes a path and descends through the delightful woodland, keeping a small stream valley close to the right. At the bottom of the hill, the path passes through a kissing gate onto the valley floor, entering the Ashford Hill National Nature Reserve.

Ashford Hill is a 23 hectare reserve of lowland grassland, an increasingly threatened ecosystem. The grassland here is managed through grazing and hay-cutting. The valley floor hosts an important range of habitats for wildflowers (including water violet and stichwort) and butterflies (including purple emperors).

- Keep to the faint path which heads right across the tussocky meadow. Pass through a second gate and cross the boggy field to a footbridge, from where you keep close to the lefthand bank of the stream to reach the B3051. A pub, The Ship Inn, is just over the bridge to your right.

- Take Old Lane opposite, passing through the cottages of the hamlet of Ashford Hill. At a t-junction, turn right (following a bridleway sign), along the track to large, modern Henwood House. From the house, a hedged path leads straight ahead to a pair of cottages and Woodhouse Lane. Turn right.

- After 100m, turn L at a footpath sign. The path follows the righthand field boundary as it curves north to drop into the shallow valley of the Enborne. After passing through a small wood, follow the footpath signs left along the valley floor and onto a track beside the small river.
- On reaching a concrete track, turn right, then immediately before the bridge over the river, left on an unsurfaced track. The right of way very quickly turns left, through a kissing gate to cut across the field. A second gate leads onto a path along a wooded strip which you follow uphill to road.

- Follow the busy road right for around 500m past the houses of Goose Hill. Just after passing the drive on the left to the fine buildings of Stark House Farm, turn right through a gate (the footpath sign is missing at the time of writing) to descend a field track to the edge of the wood ahead. From here a well signed path cuts downhill through the wood and across 2 fields to rejoin the Enborne by a footbridge.

- Do not cross the footbridge, but turn left on a path along the river bank. The path clings tightly to the meandering river - which marks the border between Hampshire and Berkshire - for over a kilometer (it is sometimes unofficially possible to cut off some of the more extravagant meanders!) to eventually reach a small road.

- Turn right to reach a ford and footbridge. Cross the river and climb to a much more busy road. Turn left and very quickly right onto little Old Thornford Road. Follow this uphill through the woods, passing Loxley house.

- By a small lay-by just before the hilltop, turn left through a footgate onto the common. Veer right up a rise, then left on the clear, straight path climbing slightly westwards. Breasting the rise, you arrive at a triangular path junction next to a gravel mound.

You are now on Greenham Common, a huge area of grazed common land, reclaiming the site of the air base, which became famous during the 1980s as a base for US nuclear cruise missiles, and the permanent peace camp which accompanied them. The airfield on this site was opened by the RAF in 1942, and turned over to the USAF a year later. As the Cold War heated up following the Berlin blockade, work was undertaken to allow Greenham to be used for modern jet bombers, including creating the 3km-long runway, whose course you can still faintly see. In response to the increased range and accuracy of Soviet Missiles, it was announced in 1980 that the US would base 160 nuclear missiles in Britain, including 96 at Greenham. The first delivery of missiles were flown in during 1983, but their presence was relatively short-lived. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, signed between the US and USSR in 1987, agreed the removal of missiles from Greenham, with the final warheads being removed in 1991. The base closed in 1993 and the runways and taxiways returned to nature, whilst the base’s buildings became a business park - visible in the far distance from here. The bunkers for the nuclear missiles were also at the far end of the runway.

- Turn right, on a path leading across the faint track of the airfield runway. Looking back from here, there are fine views of the high escarpment of the North Downs to the south. At the next path junction, head left, the path running west broadly following a former taxiway.

- Just past a large hollow on the right marked by a lifebelt (the hollow is probably the remains of an aviation fuel reservoir), veer right on a faint gravel track (with a faded waymarking post). You soon joining a broader path and head right through the trees, before heading left along the side of a pond-dotted depression. The path soon starts to parallel the airfield perimeter road.
As you leave the ponds behind, pass left through a footgate, cross the road and take the track opposite (marked by a bridleway sign). The track descends steadily through Ashen Copse, reaching the valley floor at smart Chamberhouse Farm. Here you cross the Kennet and keep straight ahead through the farm buildings. The track leads straight across the flood plain to reach a swing bridge across the canal.

Whilst today forming part of the Kennet and Avon canal, this stretch of waterway in fact significantly pre-dates it. This is the Kennet Navigation, completed in 1723, running between Reading and Newbury - parts of this are canalised sections of river, others - as here - are artificial channels cutting off curves and weirs in the river. Work on the cross-country Kennet and Avon canal, linking Newbury with the Avon at Bath, began in 1797 and was completed in 1810, transforming this into a major east-west trade route. Post-war, much of the canal fell into disuse, gradually being restored in stages. The Reading-Newbury section was re-opened in 1990.

Once across the canal, turn right on the towpath. Pass Monkey Marsh Lock and the junction with a feeder channel from the Kennet.

Monkey Marsh Lock is notable for being turf-sided, rather than the usual brick walls, and is one of only two such locks operational on the Kennet & Avon - due to this it is a listed monument. A ceremony to mark the re-opening of this section of canal was held here in 1990.

At the road bridge turn left over a level crossing to access the London-bound platform at Thatcham station (the Swan pub can be reached just ahead).