

A NETWORK OF SIGNED
CYCLE ROUTES ON RURAL LANES
IN NORTH BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
AND OXFORDSHIRE



DISCOVER
BERNWOOD FOREST
BY BICYCLE

SIX ROUTES - 135 MILES OF CYCLING



SIX ROUTES - 135 MILES OF CYCLING

Originally named and established for hunting by the Anglo-Saxon kings, the designation of 'Barne Woode' as a royal forest was developed by the Norman kings, reaching its peak during the reign of Henry II in the late 12th century. But since medieval times, the forest has been forgotten. Yet it has left a subtle legacy that has been important in shaping the landscape of north-west Buckinghamshire and south-east Oxfordshire.

This map shows the way and provides information about the areas through which the routes pass. Please note that the routes are all on highways with verified public access, mainly using lightly-trafficked rural lanes with some major road crossings. Safety should nevertheless be of paramount importance when using the routes, which are not suitable for unaccompanied children.

When particular care is required, there is a red triangle indicated ▲ on the map, which is repeated in the appropriate place in the details.

THE PROJECT IS THE RESULT OF
COOPERATION BETWEEN THE FOLLOWING:

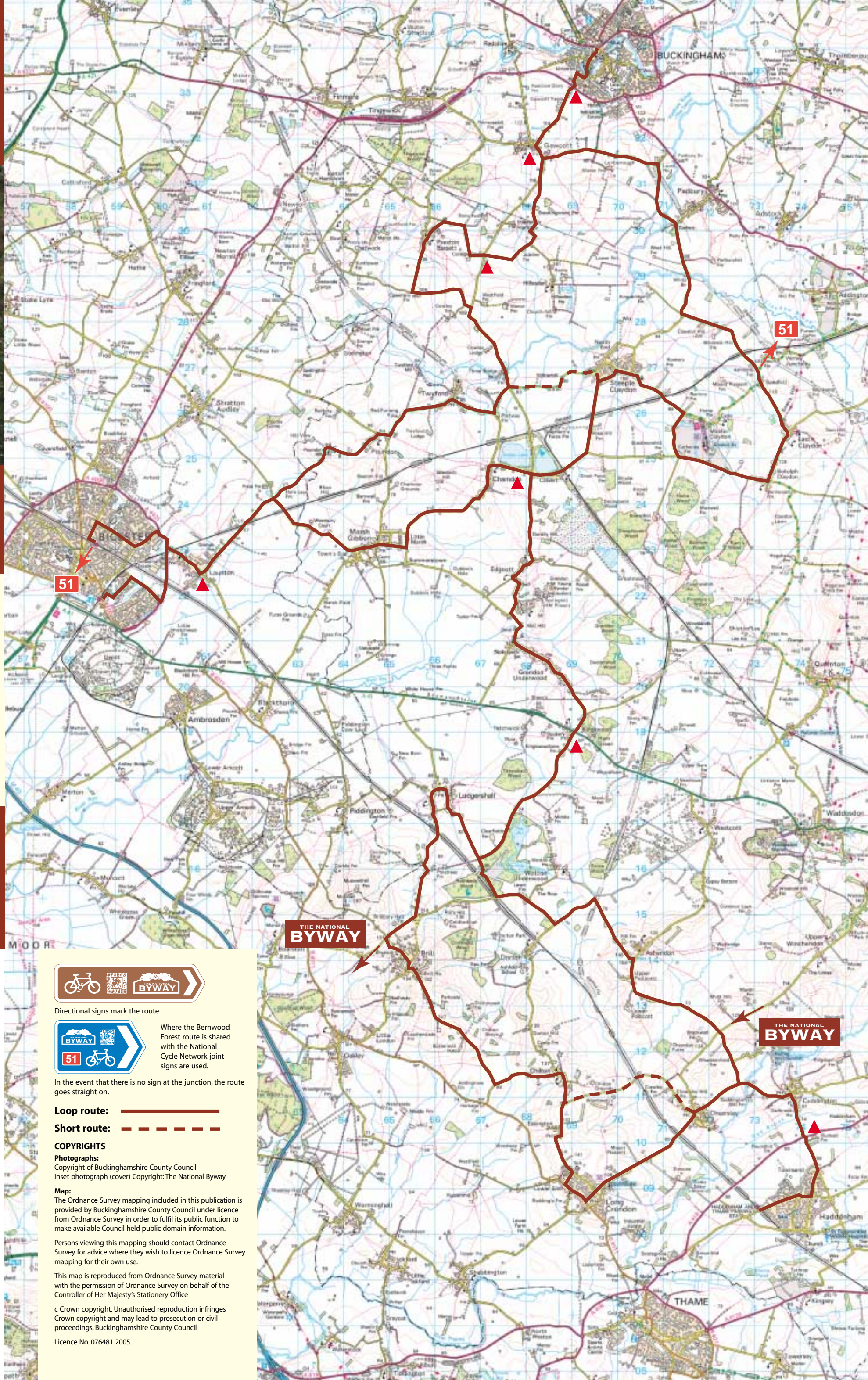
FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS:



PARTNERS:

Cyclists' Touring Club
Oxfordshire County Council

Sustrans
The National Byway



Directional signs mark the route



Where the Bernwood Forest route is shared with the National Cycle Network joint signs are used.

In the event that there is no sign at the junction, the route goes straight on.

Loop route: —————
Short route: - - - - -

COPYRIGHTS

Photographs:
Copyright of Buckinghamshire County Council
Inset photograph (cover) Copyright: The National Byway

Map:
The Ordnance Survey mapping included in this publication is provided by Buckinghamshire County Council under licence from Ordnance Survey in order to fulfil its public function to make available Council held public domain information.

Persons viewing this mapping should contact Ordnance Survey for advice where they wish to licence Ordnance Survey mapping for their own use.

This map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office

© Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Buckinghamshire County Council

Licence No. 076481 2005.



BICYCLING IN BERNWOOD FOREST

SIX ROUTES – 135 MILES OF CYCLING



▲ EXTREME CAUTION REQUIRED – TRAFFIC HAZARD

The routes shown on this map combine a network of cycling routes in the Bernwood area with part of the Buckinghamshire section of The National Byway which enters the county west of Woburn and leaves it west of Boarstall, and sections of Route 51 of the National Cycle Network between Bicester and Milton Keynes. The six routes, which range from 12 to 34 miles in length, will be sign-posted during summer 2005 and are designed to provide interesting cycling outings in the Bernwood Forest area.

The cycling routes in Bernwood have been developed to help raise awareness and develop appreciation of the forest area. This map has been produced for anyone wishing to explore Bernwood by bicycle, guiding you to some of the most interesting aspects within and around the former forest's ancient boundary.

Buckinghamshire is a county of contrasts: its southern boundary on the banks of the River Thames is a world away from the wooded Chiltern hills, and the limestone towns and villages to the north. Bernwood Forest, once situated in the rural Vale of Aylesbury, was originally named and used for hunting by the Anglo-Saxon kings. The forest entered written history in the early 11th century when King Edward the Confessor established a royal palace within its boundaries at Brill. At its zenith during the reign of Henry II, the forest covered an area of about 50 parishes in modern day Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. It fell within the boundaries of the River Great Ouse, Padbury Brook, Claydon Brook and the River Thame, and reached as far north as Buckingham, west towards Oxford and south to Aylesbury.

Bernwood was not just a place of trees, it was a rich mosaic of pastures, arable fields, meadows, heathland, busy settlements and woodland. The land was protected by harsh forest laws for the sole purpose of the King's hunt. Eventually, in the early seventeenth century, disafforestation (abolishment of the legal status of the Forest) took place and Bernwood as a legal entity was no more. Yet it had played a critical part in the shaping of the landscape as it can be seen today.

Six of the best-preserved open field systems in Middle England can still be observed, as can the earthworks of abandoned medieval villages. Floodplain meadows and ancient semi-natural woodlands are still hereabouts. A rich network of hedgerows and historic parklands also survive. And many historic villages remain, with their listed buildings and relaxed rural way of life.

It all adds up to a fascinating and beautiful area to explore and enjoy. What better way to do so than by the ubiquitous bicycle, transport which is pollution-free and contributes to the health and well-being of its rider. To guide you along your way, a series of circular loop routes of various distances has been designed and these are detailed below.

HADDENHAM – LUDGERSHALL LOOP

25 MILES
(SHORTER VERSIONS 12 & 16 MILES)

Haddenham is an ideal place to start a ride into the countryside. Its railway station, Haddenham & Thame Parkway provides easy access from London, Bicester and Banbury, and is close to the local towns of Aylesbury and Thame. It is a village of considerable charm at its older southern end with green, duck-pond, handsome 13th century church and old houses, worth visiting before setting out onto the road. Just beyond the village the busy A418 road must be crossed ▲ and care should be taken before arriving in **Cuddington**. A former winner of the "best kept village" competition, some of its houses are unique, built of 'witchert', a mix of chalk marl mixed with straw.

Soon after leaving Cuddington the ride joins The National Byway main route on its way through Buckinghamshire. A mile along this road is the next fascinating village: **Chearsley**: more thatched cottages with walls of witchert and another 13th century church which is of particular interest as it appears to have escaped the ravages of Victorian restoration.

The cycling has been easy so far, on undulating roads, but the route does begin to climb now, past a laneway leading to Notley Abbey, a private house which was once the home of Sir Laurence Olivier and his film-star wife Vivien Leigh. And ahead is yet another interesting place, in the village of **Long Crendon**, where 6 miles have been cycled so far. Here stands the 14th century Courthouse, where the stewards of Henry V's wife Catherine held court, otherwise known as Staple Hall once used for the storing of wool. The building is owned by the National Trust and is sometimes open to the public. If it isn't, the stately church probably is. Here medieval mystery plays are presented every Easter.

Heading north from Long Crendon, the road continues to rise to **Chilton**. On the way there is a minor road turning to the right, which provides a shorter ride, taking the



Long Crendon Court House

cyclist back to Chearsley 2 miles away and so back to Haddenham on a ride totalling just 12 miles. In Chilton itself, there is another opportunity to shorten the ride, going straight on instead of turning left, through **Dorton** to rejoin the longer route on its return from Ludgershall, a 16-mile trip.

Staying on the 25-mile route, turn left in Chilton and the road drops down before climbing again towards **Brill**. On the climb, away to the left of the road, is the deserted Leatherslade Farm, where the Great Train Robbers hid out after carrying out their infamous looting of the mail train 17 miles from here on 8 August 1963. At Brill Edward the Confessor established a royal palace in the days when Bernwood Forest was in its ascendancy. There is little sign left of that palace, some earthworks near the cricket pitch are thought to have been part of it. A 17th century windmill stands to the west of the village, from where there are excellent views across to the Cotswold hills.

A mile or so off the route is **Boarstall** with its stone gatehouse and moat, another National Trust property, which is the only complete medieval fortified building in the county. It is worth taking the short detour to visit this place, which has strong associations with the Chief Forester of Bernwood and was defended by the Royalists during the Civil War in the 17th century.

Back on the route, the road drops away gradually as it approaches the most northerly point on the ride at **Ludgershall**, where 12 miles have been covered so far. The village is linked in legend with King Ludd, a semi-mythological pagan king. Entering the village there is an earthwork to the left which is associated with him. Just beyond is the classic Norman church, which was damaged during the Civil War in the 17th century when the Roundheads stayed here before going on to besiege the Tower at Boarstall.

Swinging round to the right in the village past the green, the ride now heads south towards Wotton Underwood. On the way there is a road junction, the road off to the left is part of a spur which joins up the two circular rides featured on this map. Details of this way through to the second loop follow below.

The route is not signposted to **Wotton Underwood**, which stands at the end of a minor dead-end lane, estate cottages standing respectfully attendant upon the splendid privately-owned 18th century house and its magnificent grounds in the style of the original Buckingham Palace. But it is worth making the detour.

Back on the route, the road climbs again, steeply up towards the village of Ashendon. Turn left off the route to enter the village by a small ancient earthwork to visit its church, before returning to descend then climb again to drop down to the River Thame, rejoining The National Byway main route briefly. Then the loop is complete. Return through Cuddington and on to Haddenham, where a total of 12, 16 or 25 miles have been covered depending upon the route selected.

BICESTER/BUCKINGHAM LOOP

34 MILES
(SHORTER VERSIONS 20 OR 22 MILES)

This second circular ride round the ancient Forest of Bernwood can start or finish in either of these two towns. For the purposes of this leaflet, the route starts and finishes in **Bicester**. Roman in origin, Bicester seems to have always had a connection with the military, as it still does today. And it still maintains its market town atmosphere, with venerable buildings in Market End and Sheep Street. The 12th century church of St. Edburgh is also worth visiting, before setting out on the road into the ancient Bernwood Forest area.

The ride starts at either of the town's two railway stations, Bicester North or Bicester Town, which provide access to the Bernwood Forest area from London or Banbury. They are situated on a short three-mile spur to and from the circular rides of either 20 or 34 miles and the route here is shared with the National Cycle Route 51.

After passing through **Launton** ▲ the spur ends as it turns right onto the circular route to **Marsh Gibbon**, whose church is partly 13th century. There is a large and impressive manor house in the centre of the village. Areas like Marsh Gibbon and Ludgershall visited on the other ride, formed part of the agricultural heart of Bernwood Forest. It is an area still dominated by agriculture.

Heading on eastwards through **Charndon** the route arrives at a crossroads ▲ where the spur south to the Haddenham loop joins, then on to **Calvert** and **Steeple Claydon**, where 9 miles have been ridden. The village is one of four in the three parishes in the immediate area carrying the name of Claydon, derived from the Saxon clægigan dun meaning 'clayey hill'.

Arriving in the village a decision must be taken. Turning left will take the rider back towards Bicester and completion of a 20-mile route. Details of the rest of this ride can be found below. Going through the village and on to Buckingham before returning to Bicester will provide a longer ride of 34 miles.

Roman remains have been found in Steeple Claydon, and there is evidence that the village was created during the 7th century. There are also signs of English Civil War activity. Cromwell's army camped here. **Middle Claydon**, just a mile to the east, is the site of Claydon House, a National Trust property which has associations with Florence Nightingale and the Verney family who have lived here for more than five hundred years. Sir Edmund Verney was royal standard-bearer to Charles I. He was killed at the battle of Edgehill during the Civil War and legend has it that he was clutching the standard so tightly that his hand had to be cut from his body to release it. His ghost, so they say, still haunts the great house when troubles threatens the country or his family.

After passing to the south of Claydon House grounds, the ride now turns northwards to head towards Buckingham, once again sharing route with National Route 51 for much of the next ten miles. After climbing through **Botolph Claydon** whose unusual mushroom seat provides an ideal resting point and dropping down through **East Claydon** whose church has an interesting history, the ride meanders on over the Claydon Brook, past an ancient earthwork at the junction for Padbury and so on to **Gawcott**, turning right ▲ onto a spur into **Buckingham**, with 20 miles ridden.



Claydon House

Formerly the county seat, Buckingham is a charming medieval town. Most of its houses are 18th century, built after the fire of 1725. It has a friendly feel about it and is a nice place for a cyclist to stop off – or to start and finish a ride on the circular Bernwood rides. The way in and out of town passes the university buildings and crosses the very busy A421 at a roundabout where extreme caution is required ▲.

On leaving Buckingham, the route returns to Gawcott and turns right ▲ onto a busy road before returning into the quiet lanes and byways of the forest area. Shortly after Gawcott the route heads left off the main road, along a delightful byway towards **Hillesden**. It turns westwards before this hamlet but it is worth the short detour to visit its lonely but most interesting church of All Saints, all late Gothic with a 16th century stained glass window which tells the story of St. Nicholas. The church was damaged during the English Civil War and bullet holes can still be seen in the stone. After rejoining the route and crossing the busy road again ▲ it is on to **Preston Bissett** where 25 miles have been covered.

On south through mainly flat countryside, much of which has changed little during the past four centuries, to the second loop junction of the day. Turning left here into Steeple Claydon will provide a rider starting from Buckingham with a 22-mile route. Turning right leads back towards Bicester by way of **Twyford**, a little haven of peace, most of the little village being on a dead-end road off to the right. The church here is interesting, embracing all periods from the 11th century to the present day. From here there is a drag up through **Poundon** village to Poundon Hill before descending across the Oxfordshire border to another junction. Turning left will take the route back to Buckingham and provide a 22-mile ride. Riders originating and returning to Bicester proceed straight ahead for another 3 miles to the end of their day.

THE LOOP LINK ROUTE

6 MILES

The two loop rides detailed in the descriptive copy above are joined together by a short link which increases the number of alternatives from which the cyclist can choose when touring the Bernwood Forest area. The start of this link lies just south of **Ludgershall** at the north end of the Haddenham loop. It joins up with the Bicester/Buckingham loop six miles to the north near Steeple Claydon.

After turning off the loop near Ludgershall, the link route approaches the very busy A41 main road and particular care must be taken when crossing here ▲. Peace then returns and the route passes through the village of **Grendon Underwood** in whose lovely old inn William Shakespeare is reputed to have stayed regularly, basing some of the characters in his plays on local people. Business traffic from the Springhill Prison makes for busy roads again for a mile or two, then tranquillity returns once again as the link joins up with the Bicester/Buckingham loop at a crossroads where care should be taken ▲.



Ludgershall Parish Church

SAFETY FIRST

- Check your bicycle regularly including tyre pressures, or have it done by a reputable cycle dealer
- Be visible to other road users: bright-coloured or reflective clothing should be worn
- Always wear a cycle helmet
- Follow the Highway Code
- Be courteous to other road users as you expect them to be to you
- Ride positively and decisively
- Ride in single file when the road is narrow
- Keep ears as well as eyes alert