

# The Wendover Arm

A 6 mile canalside walk with facilities for wheelchair users and pushchairs and a series of circular walks based on the Wendover Arm

## Linear & Circular Walks

### Features of Interest

Water was to the 18th -19th century trade what tarmac is today; the rapidly expanding canal network provided the bulk transport routes equivalent to the motorway of the modern day haulier.

For the planned trunk route from London to Birmingham (formerly called the Grand Junction Canal and now the Grand Union Canal) to be successful, it was essential to find a good supply of water to feed the summit at Tring. Work started on the Wendover Arm in 1793 to provide just such a supply. The source of the water was to be the diverted flow of the Well Head in Wendover. It was quickly realised that at little extra cost, the Arm could be built to carry boats, linking Wendover and the Vale of Aylesbury to markets throughout the country.

By the Spring of 1797 the 6 and 3/4 mile branch canal was transporting goods and essential water to the Grand Union Canal and beyond.

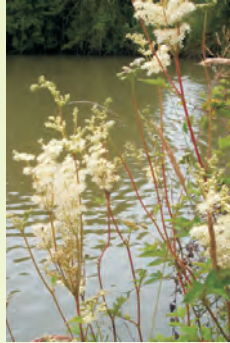
John Westcar, a local farmer, pioneered the transport of cattle by canal. At the first Smithfield fat-stock show in 1799, one of his Oxen, which was transported from Wendover Wharf on the canal, won first prize and sold for an enormous sum of £100, vividly showing the commercial benefits of better transport.

The concrete foundations of the bridge which carried the branch railway line to Halton are still visible on both sides of the canal. The development of the railway was not the only competition which the Wendover Arm had to face. In 1814 the Aylesbury Arm was opened, ending the Wendover Arm's monopoly in bulk transport between London and the Aylesbury area.

The scarp slope of the Chilterns is a naturally dry area. The cutting of the canal through this dry landscape provided a waterway and haven for many species of wildlife which depend on water.

Whilst dragonflies, damselflies and moorhens can hunt over large areas opened up by the presence of the Arm, many more species live in the water itself or along its wet margins. When the canal was first flooded, 'the wide' was an open stretch of water, but reeds soon crept in and trapped silt and raised the soil level. Other plants such as willowherb and reedmace further dried the soil and eventually willow and other damp loving trees completed the progression from open water to dry land.

The Chilterns scarp has hosted transport routes since at least the Neolithic times. The line of the Lower Icknield Way passes through the fields just 200 metres below the canal but today there is little sign of the myriads of commuters, merchants and military men who have crossed this land since perhaps 2000BC.



- 1 Just downstream from Halton Village the canal is crossed by a resplendent iron-work bridge, complete with the Rothschild monograph. The bridge was built to connect the two halves of Halton park, enabling Baron Alfred de Rothschild to indulge his passion for driving his zebra drawn carriage around the grounds, a startling sight for unsuspecting boaters leading their draft horses.
- 2 During the the First World War (1914-18), the Halton Estate was used as a military training camp. After Alfred's death in 1918 it was taken over permanently by the RAF and the house is now used as the officers mess.  
A mixture of clay and chalk, 'Marls' have long been exploited by arable farmers to lower the acidity of soils and to increase their productivity. Marls can also be used in the manufacture of cement.
- 3 Several Marl pits can be found locally, particularly in Marl cove and further downstream, at Cobblers Pits.  
The chalk of the Chilterns allows water to soak through but the Marl is impermeable, stopping the downward flow and bringing the water to the surface as springs. The presence of these springs attracted the engineers to developing the Arm. However, to flow into the Grand Union canal the Arm needed to follow the 390' contour line. This meant building on the chalk, despite the problems this would cause in preventing leakage.

A mere 5 years after opening it was obvious that the Wendover Arm would not be able to supply sufficient water for the main line. The problem was compounded by leakage.

Several attempts were made to stop the leaks, including drainage and partial relining in 1803 and 1856 but to no avail. By 1894 the Arm was actually draining the Grand Union Canal which it was meant to supply. The persistent leaking left to the abandonment of the Arm in 1904 and the diversion of the water into Wilstone Reservoir. Leakage from the canal caused problems for Sir



### Follow the 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

### Further Information:

Rights of Way & Access, County Hall, Aylesbury, HP20 1UY  
Telephone: 01296 382171

Email: [row@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:row@buckscc.gov.uk)

or visit our website at [www.buckscc.gov.uk/rights\\_of\\_way](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/rights_of_way)



Anthony de Rothschild in the now demolished Ashton Clinton Manor. The brick wharf bore witness to the usefulness of the canal for deliveries but the water seeping into his dining room was less welcome.

- 4 Opposite the wharf is Cobblers Pit through which runs an old road, now truncated by the Wendover Arm. This road used to cross, via a swing bridge, to the grounds of what is now Green Park. Delving further into its history it is thought that the road might be an ancient track which once connected the Upper and Lower Icknield Ways.

The Wendover Arm towing path connects with the Grand

Canal Walk at Bulbourne and provides 145 miles of traffic free walking between London and Birmingham



## Alternative Route Direction

### Halton to Weston Turville – 3km (2 miles)

From Halton Lane take the footpath past Perch Cottage, a decorated Rothschild building, towards Weston Turville. At the end of the plantation a detour can be taken to the Berks Bucks Oxon Wildlife Trust nature reserve at Weston Turville Reservoir. The main interest here is in the extensive reed bed and marshy fen which fringes the water. The reservoir was built to provide compensation water to the millers downstream of the Wendover Arm.

Weston Turville church now lies to the south of the village. Its unusual 18th century lychgate gives access to a path through the churchyard offering good views to Halton House. From Church Walk take the footpath alongside the stream into Weston Turville and turn right onto Church Lane. Ignore the public bridleway sign a little way along on your right and take the public footpath shortly afterwards.

The village was long a centre for the rearing of Aylesbury Ducks to be sold in the London markets. Cross the stream again. This stream powered the water mill at Mill Farm until as late as 1950. Thereafter, the mill remained in business with the aid of water supplied from the reservoir.

The path back to the canal runs straight towards the Chilterns passing through old orchards as it leaves the village. The ditches alongside the path often run with water, much of it perhaps leaking from the Wendover Arm.

At the canal turn right, back towards Halton, leaving the canal at Perch Bridge.

### Aston Clinton – Wendover Woods – Halton Camp (8km (5 miles))

From the car park follow the verge of Stablebridge Road and carefully cross the Upper Icknield Way. The path leads across the Chiltern Forest Golf Club, passing in front of the club house, and on up into Wendover Woods. Keep following the top of the embankment of what is an old holloway or possibly a fortified road. Ignore the paths leading off until the embankment joins a track at Aston Hill. Turn sharply right, back to the road, crossing over to the footpath beside Aston Hill Lodge. Follow the track round past the driveway to 'The Chalet' joining a tarmac surfaced forest drive after about 600 metres.



The woods were once part of the Halton House Estate, later passing to the Ministry of Defence before being transferred to the Forestry Commission in 1939. Much of the then derelict woodland was replanted with beech and some conifers in the 1940's and 50's.

Numerous walks have been laid out by the Commission and a leaflet giving details is available from the Forest Office, upper Icknield Way. Just before the car park and picnic area our walk turns right off the road, down past to the Upper Icknield Way.

At the main road cross with care to the footpath opposite running on the camp road. After 150 metres the path bears right between large concrete blocks. The path rejoins the camp roads at the bend in McEwen Ride to the end of the right. The path runs through mature trees for 100 metres before turning left to Halton Church. From the Church, follow the road to the canal and join the towing path on the Wendover Arm. Look out for the Rothschild Bridge, Marl Copse and Cobblers Pit on your 2km (1-1/4 miles) walk back to Stablebridge Road car park.

### Aston Clinton-Drayton Beauchamp – Wilstone – Aylesbury Arm – Buckland 9.5km (6 miles)

From Stablebridge Road car park the walk heads east along the towing path downstream to the A41 crossing. Take great care crossing this busy road, note that the towing path swaps to the north side of the canal for the rest of the way to Drayton Beauchamp.

Leave the canal and take the path past Drayton Beauchamp Church. If you have the time it is well worth getting the key to the Church to have a look at what has been described as 'the best church monument in England' – a sculpture by William Woodman of Lord and Lady Newhaven carved in 1728.

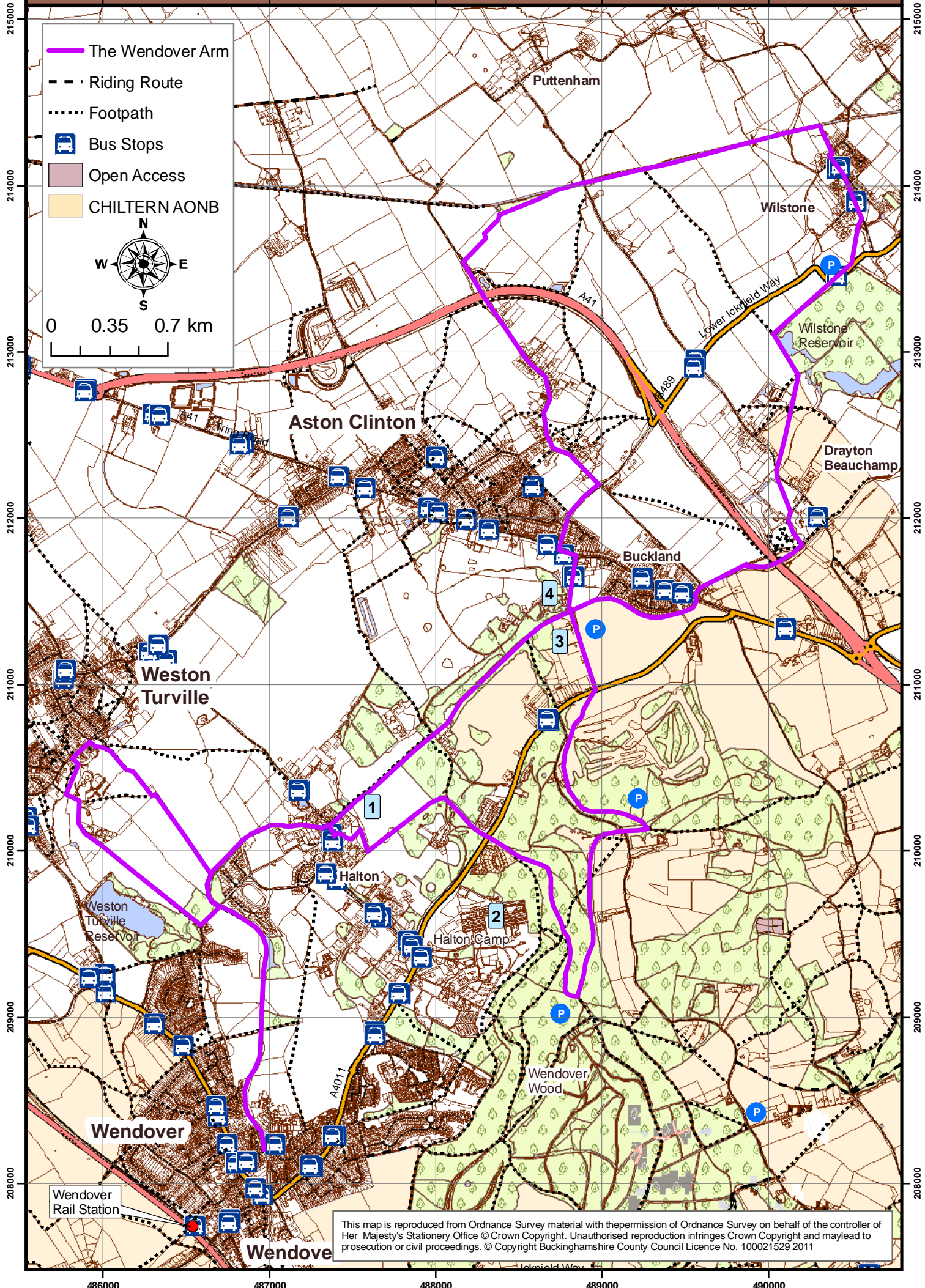
Passing moated sites, the path runs across fields to Wilstone Reservoir. The reservoir was built in 1802 to augment supply to the Grand Union Canal and was expanded several times before reaching its current size in 1839. Follow the dam wall almost to the northern most corner before descending and carefully crossing the Lower Icknield Way and taking the path opposite to Wilstone Village.

Walk through the village and follow the path past the recreation ground to the Aylesbury Arm of the Grand Union Canal which was opened in 1814 and without the problem of being built on chalk, is still fully operational today.

Turn left, passing three locks, leaving the canal after 1.5km (1 mile). Shortly after the road bridge, take the footpath to the left down to Buckland Road. Follow this quiet country road on through the village to the cross roads with the Lower Icknield Way. Turn right and follow the line of this ancient trunk route to its junction with another great imperial highway – Akeman Street, now more commonly known as the A41. Crossing carefully, it is just a short walk past the entrance to Green Park back to the Stablebridge Road car park.



# Wendover Arm Route



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