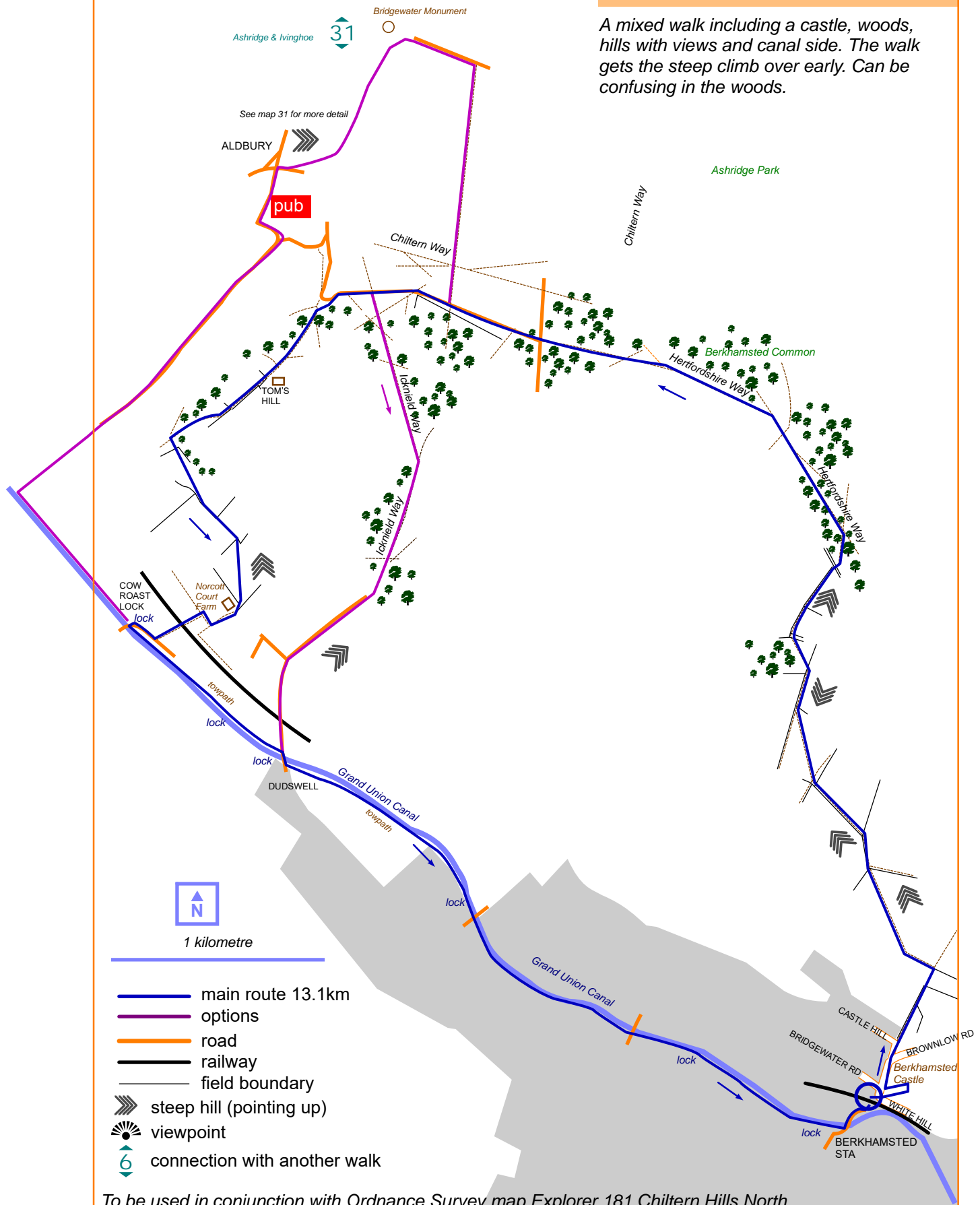


Berkhamsted, Ashridge, Grand Union Canal

A mixed walk including a castle, woods, hills with views and canal side. The walk gets the steep climb over early. Can be confusing in the woods.



To be used in conjunction with Ordnance Survey map Explorer 181 Chiltern Hills North

walk notes

Berkhamsted, Ashridge, Grand Union Circular

Unfortunately this walk does not start from the London Transport area. After visiting the ruins of the castle, this 11 km walk is split between a high walk through the southern edges of the Ashridge Estate and a return along the Grand Union Canal, providing much variety. An copy of the ordnance survey map (Explorer 181 Chiltern Hills North) is essential for the first half of the walk.

Berkhamsted Castle

Berkhamsted castle is one of the oldest motte and bailey castles in England, being built in 1066 in order to control routes to the Midlands. It belonged to William the Conqueror's half brother Robert of Mortain. Expanded in the mid-12th century it has a lot of connected history but fell into disrepair in the late 15th century.

The Anglo-Saxons surrendered the crown of England to William the Conqueror at Berkhamsted in December 1066. After William defeated and killed Harold at the Battle of Hastings, he failed in an attempt to capture London from the south. He led his army around London, crossing the River Thames at Wallingford, "laying waste" while travelling through southeast England. At Berkhamsted, he received the surrender of Edgar the Ætheling (heir to the English throne), Archbishop Ealdred, Earl Edwin, Earl Morcar and the leaders of London.

After the abandonment of the castle, Berkhamsted declined, but recovered with the traffic induced by the industrial revolution, typified by the canal.

The Canal

The Grand Union Canal is the longest canal in the UK at 286 miles. The canal was never constructed as an entity, but is the result of amalgamations between 1894 and 1929 of several independent waterways — the oldest being the navigations around the River Soar in Leicestershire; part we walk along was the Grand Junction Canal, built between Braunston (between Daventry and

Rugby) and the River Thames to improve the communications between Birmingham, the Midlands and London. It was fully opened in 1805. Branches were added to Paddington, Buckingham, Northampton, Aylesbury and Slough. In 1894 the Grand Junction bought the canals comprising the 'Leicester Line', and in 1929 the Regent's, Grand Junction and the Warwick Canals merged to create the Grand Union Canal. The new company embarked on a large-scale modernisation programme completed in 1937. Traffic increased in the short term, but after the war the long-term downwards trend was relentless.

Today, the canal is alive with pleasure boats, walkers, cyclists and day trippers.

Ashridge

The Ashridge estate consists of 5000 acres of outstanding natural beauty. In 1283 Edmund of Cornwall founded a monastery for the Bonhomme monks. With the dissolution of the monasteries the land passed to the crown and then on the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, to her Lord Chancellor, Thomas Egerton. His son John was created Earl of Bridgewater. In 1823 the titles passed to the eighth Earl a patron of science as well as a great eccentric. He never married and on his death in 1829 his titles became extinct. In 1921 the land passed to the National Trust. The house in neo-gothic style was built on the site of the priory in 1814. It is in private hands but tours of the house and grounds are available at certain times of the year. The 108ft high Bridgewater Monument was built in 1832 in memory of the third duke, designer of the Bridgewater Canal in 1761, Britain's first proper canal. Ashridge is rich in butterflies - speckled woods, gatekeepers, meadow browns, ringlets and small Essex and large skippers, brimstones, commas, peacocks, dark-green fritillaries, painted ladies, Duke of Burgundies, chalk blues, small tortoiseshells, common blues, small heath, brown argus, marbled white and red admirals at the right time of year.