



Ampthill and Houghton Conquest

A town and country walk with some gentle gradients on the Greensand Ridge. Visit an area of rare native heathland, a medieval wood and John Bunyan's 'House Beautiful'

Essential Facts

- Route distance: 12.0 km (7.5 miles)
- Approximate time: 3 hours 15 mins
- Approx. total ascent: 130 metres
- Start point Grid Ref: TL 024 381
- GPS Ref: TL 02425 38189
- Recommended O.S. Map: Explorer 193 & 208
- Toughness Rating: The Chilterns 3

Please see the notes on Toughness Ratings at the end of this report

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CHALLENGE ?**

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THE ROUTE

The walk starts at Ampthill Great Park car park, just off the B530, as does our walk to Marston Country Park.

From start point, **S**, walk south to the B530. Turn left along the road. Reaching the far end of the rugby ground opposite, cross the road and enter a wood on a path behind the rugby club buildings. Enter Cooper's Hill Nature Reserve. After 400 metres, at a yellow waymark post, turn sharp left, at **A**. Cross this rare area of unspoilt heathland. Continue ahead to leave the nature reserve via a kissing gate and follow the path down an avenue of trees to reach a road. Turn right, into the town of Ampthill. At the crossroads in the town centre continue straight ahead into Church Street. Turn left opposite Church Avenue, at **B**. Follow a path to the left of the church. At a footpath junction, keep right and almost immediately turn left onto an enclosed footpath. Cross a stile into a field and veer right, heading downhill. Cross a double stile into the next field and continue to the corner, leaving the field over a stile and a plank bridge. Turn left onto a track, and very shortly turn half-right at a footpath sign. Continue uphill to the right of farm buildings. Cross a stile and continue uphill towards a phone mast.

Cross a concrete road, pass through a hedge and immediately turn right along a track. Continue to the edge of a wood. Follow the path to the right of the wood and continue around the edge of the wood for 800 metres to a kissing gate. Continue ahead and downhill, through an area of scrubby bushes, with the wood still on the left. (A permissive path through the wood may be preferred. On leaving the wood turn right to rejoin the public footpath, at **C**.)

At the bottom of the hill turn right, at **C**. Follow a mud track for 150 metres then turn left into a field, through a wooden gate. Follow a path beside a hedge. At the end turn right, pass through the hedge, and turn left. After 350 metres, at a public footpath sign, turn left along an enclosed path. Reaching a lane, turn right into the village of Houghton Conquest.

Just past a chapel on the left, turn left along a tarmac path and emerge onto a road opposite All Saints Church. Turn left, passing the Knife and Cleaver pub. After 650 metres, where the road turns sharp right, continue ahead, following a footpath across a field. After a short enclosed section, you reach a lane and turn left. At the end of the lane continue ahead on what appears to be a private driveway to 'Field Farm'. Where the driveway turns left, continue ahead through a gate and enter a field. Cross a stile and continue ahead on a footpath along a field hedge, with views of the ruins of Houghton House to the right.

Cross a plank bridge and pass through a hedge. Turn left on a footpath and after 100 metres turn right following the edge of a field. Pass over a wooden bridge and continue ahead uphill across a field. Leave the field through a gate and continue half right. Cross a stile by a pond on the left and continue uphill on a concrete track. (At the top of the hill a gate on the right gives access to the ruins of Houghton House.) Continue along the concrete track to a road. Turn left and cross the road, continuing downhill. At a gate turn right into a wood. Keep generally right until you reach a waymarker post and then follow signs for the Greensand Ridge Walk. Leave the wood at a kissing gate and continue briefly right and then along a path following the top of the ridge. Shortly after passing the Katherine's Cross monument, turn left to return to the car park at **S**.



Houghton House



Sherrington



Houghton Conquest Church

Refreshment

The White Hart Inn
Public House
Dunstable Street, Ampthill
Tel: 01525 406863
Meals and bar snacks

The Queens Head
Public House
Woburn Street, Ampthill
Tel: 01525 405016
Meals and snacks

The Knife and Cleaver
Public House and
Restaurant
The Grove, Houghton
Conquest
Tel: 01234 740387
A la Carte menue & bar
snacks



The White Hart

LOCAL INFO

Amphill Great Park stands on top of the Greensand Ridge, with impressive views across the Vale of Marston. Although most of the park as it appears today is the work of Capability Brown, in the 1770s, it was the site of a former fifteenth-century castle and a favourite hunting lodge used by Henry VIII. **Katherine's Cross**, the more westerly of the two commemorative crosses on the ridge, is named after Katherine of Aragon, who was sent here by Henry while their marriage was being annulled. He later moved Katherine out and returned with his new wife, Anne Boleyn. He enlarged the park and built a new lodge, allowing the original castle to fall into ruin.

Katherine's Cross later gained notoriety as the location of a hidden treasure, a golden hare, which was buried here by the author of the book *Masquerade*, which contained elaborate clues to allow readers to track down the treasure

Houghton House is a former stately home originally built for the sister of Sir Philip Sidney in 1621 by an architect called John Thorpe. She died in 1624 and the property passed into the hands of the Bruce Family – Earls of Elgin. It was the favourite home of Robert Bruce, 1st Earl of Ailesbury and 2nd Earl of Elgin. The Bruce family improved Houghton House and made it a permanent residence. They added a hand-carved staircase made in 1688 and possibly built by Christopher Wren. This was rescued when the building was stripped of its furnishings and had its roof removed in 1794. The staircase is now in the Swan Hotel in Bedford.

The House is now a ruin maintained by English Heritage but some of the information boards show pictures of how it once looked in its former glory and it is reputedly the inspiration for John Bunyan's 'House Beautiful' in *Pilgrim's Progress*.

AMPTHILL AND HOUGHTON CONQUEST G.P.S. WAYPOINTS

WAYPOINT NAME	MAP REF	CO-ORDINATES	ELEVATION: Metres
AMP S	S	TL 02425 38189	105
AMP A	A	L 02766 37558	108
AMP B	B	TL 03694 38201	100
AMP C	C	TL 04595 40550	65



MAP LEGEND					
	Great Walks route		Church with tower		Spot height - metres
	Motorway		Church with spire		Information centre
	Main road		Other place of worship		Parking
	Secondary road		Cathedral / Abbey		Public convenience
	Minor road		Building		Public house
	Other road		Built up area		Picnic site
	Track		Woodland		Camp site
	Footpath		Sand, shingle or mud		Major tourist feature
	Bridleway		Water feature		Other tourist feature
	National trail				
	Railway				

Safety First

Safety should always be your first priority in planning and undertaking a walk, whether on your own or leading a group. Please read these Safety First and Walking Our Routes notes.

Lead a group of other walkers only if you have leadership and navigational experience adequate for the 'worst case' conditions which may be encountered on the particular walk, bearing in mind the terrain, possible weather and navigational demands.

Weigh up the capabilities of your party, in terms of fitness and walking speed. Adjust your time expectations accordingly.

Ensure all your party are adequately clothed for the weather and conditions. Footwear is particularly important. Clothing must protect against cold, wet or strong sun according to the time of year.

Emergencies are quite rare, but it is essential to think ahead about what to do if someone in your party sustains an injury. Will you have a First Aid kit? Is there a qualified First Aider in the party? How could help be summoned in a serious eventuality?

Refreshment, particularly water, can be vital. Dehydration in hot summer conditions can be rapid, and frequent intake of fluids is essential.

On tougher walks it is a good idea to tell someone where you are planning to go – and when you expect to be back. Remember - mobile phones often lose reception in mountainous or isolated areas.

All our walks use legitimate routes: Public Rights of Way, Public Footpaths, Bridleways, Permissive Paths, Access Land, Byways and Roads.

Road walking calls for particular care. When there is no defined footpath or verge wide enough for safe walking it is usually best to walk on the right – facing oncoming traffic. An exception may be a tight bend, where walkers would be more visible on the left.

Occasionally you may find a public footpath blocked or unuseable. It is perfectly in order to take the shortest available diversion without damaging crops, perhaps around a field margin.

It is courteous to close gates after passing through, sometimes even if the gate was open when you arrived – particularly if it is obvious livestock may escape.

Mutual respect for farm animals is to be encouraged! Don't frighten or annoy them, but equally don't put your party members in danger or discomfort. You certainly wouldn't be the first walkers to go round the outside of a field of frisky bullocks.

Dogs should always be kept on a lead anywhere near farm animals, and under close supervision elsewhere in the countryside.

Walking Our Routes

Our walks are designed to be negotiated using the route directions in conjunction with the map section provided. We suggest walkers also take the Ordnance Survey Explorer or Outdoor Leisure map recommended for each walk.

On mountain, moorland and open heathland walks it is **ESSENTIAL** to have navigational expertise and tools, including the recommended Ordnance Survey map(s).

Take care to observe any cautions in the route description; exposed paths, areas liable to flooding etc.

Consider conditions before setting off. Will heavy rain have made a water meadow impassable? Will frost or snow make a path slippery?

When navigating the route look for clues to confirm you are in the right place. Are map features where you would expect on the ground? Are features mentioned in the text where expected? If you suspect you may have taken a wrong turn, take action sooner rather than later. It is better to re-trace to a known point rather than carry on regardless with the possibility of becoming increasingly confused.

All our routes are carefully checked before publication, but features can change on the ground – sometimes surprisingly quickly. Footpaths may be re-routed, buildings can appear or change significantly and these days pub names seem to change frequently.

The approximate time given for each walk is based on an average walking speed of 2.5 miles per hour (4 km/hour), plus an allowance for ascent, descent and any difficult terrain.

Total ascent is the approximate total ascent over the whole walk.

GPS users can enter in the waypoints provided in each of our walk reports. It is important to read our guide **Introducing GPS for Walkers**, available as a PDF file from the Great Walks in Britain web site.

Remember that GPS is a great navigational tool, but only one of those available to the navigator. Never dispense with conventional map and compass – and the training and skills to use them, especially on mountain, moorland or open heathland walks.

TOUGHNESS RATINGS

All our **Chilterns** routes can be undertaken by reasonably fit walkers able to utilise our map segments, together with the route guidance notes. Always consider recent and forecast weather.

Each walk has been allocated a **Toughness Rating**:

1. Easier walks with modest ascent and generally on well defined paths. There may be stiles or narrow gateways to negotiate.
2. Routes which are more demanding. They may include more ascent and possibly paths which are looser or more difficult underfoot.
3. More strenuous walks with some steep sections, higher paths or places which may be wet and boggy.
4. The most demanding walks in this edition. There may be prolonged steep ascents. Conditions may be challenging underfoot.

Toughness Ratings are allocated in the context of the terrain in the edition area. For example a walk rated as demanding in the Chilterns may be equivalent to an easier or moderate route in the Brecon Beacons.