



ON YOUR BIKE OXFORDSHIRE
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16. Wantage and the Ridgeway 10 miles

There are spectacular views on this ride, which starts by the statue of King Alfred in the Market Square in Wantage and goes south to the attractive village of Letcombe Regis, which lies along the lovely Letcombe Brook. It then heads to the Ridgeway, some 360ft above the village. The effort is worth it because you will emerge in the middle of the Iron Age hill fort of Segsbury.

Cross the far ring ditch and you will reach the Ridgeway itself. On a clear day the views back into the Vale of the White Horse and beyond are fantastic. The route then heads west along the Ridgeway before descending into the picturesque village of Letcombe Bassett. A short climb out of the village is followed by a descent into Childrey, where we pick up a track to East Challow and then return on-road to Wantage.

MAP: OS Landranger 174 Newbury and Wantage (GR SU398879).

STARTING POINT: The route starts from the Market Square in Wantage, which is located on the A417, some 10 miles west of Didcot. There is short-term parking in the Market Square, but for long-term parking we recommend using the pay and display car park off the B4507 (Portway) to the south of the Market Square. Toilets are available here, and parking is free on a Sunday. To get to the Market Square from the car park, exit with the Civic Centre on your left.

Turn L onto Portway and **Turn L** again at the traffic lights (signed Town Centre). This road will lead you to the square.

REFRESHMENTS: The Greyhound Inn in Letcombe Regis serves food, but if the weather is good we suggest that the best option is to carry a picnic to eat either at Segsbury Castle or somewhere up on the Ridgeway. If it's a bit windy (not unknown) descend the hill and spend some time exploring Letcombe Bassett which is full of interesting old cottages, including Arabella's Cottage, featured in Thomas Hardy's novel, *Jude the Obscure*.



THE ROUTE:

This route is short but hilly with one long and very steep climb from Letcombe Regis to the Ridgeway. Don't let this put you off and you will be amply rewarded with spectacular views.

To leave Wantage Market Square, ride clockwise round the square and leave to the west following the 'Through Traffic' sign (Mill Street). **Turn L** at the next mini-roundabout (signed Ashbury B4507). **Turn R** at the T-junction (signed Ashbury B4507) and soon turn L (signed Letcombe Regis, etc). Ride into Letcombe Regis and follow the main road as it twists through the village. **Turn L** near the church, where the road bends sharp right (signed Village and Downs Only). After 1 mile you will come to the very steep part of the climb. Keep on up and as the

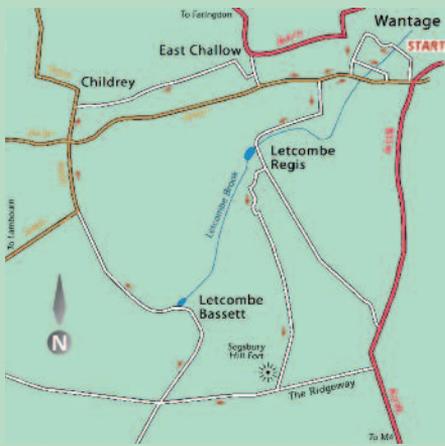
gradient flattens out you will see that you are inside the hill fort, surrounded by a large ditch and bank. You will get better views of the defensive ditch and bank when you cross it again on your way to meet the Ridgeway.

Turn R onto the Ridgeway. After nearly 1 mile a tarmac road crosses the track. **Turn R** onto the road (signed Letcombe Bassett) and carefully descend the steep hill into the village. **Turn L** at the T-junction in the village (signed Childrey/Lambourn) and leave the village up a short sharp hill. **Turn R** at

the next T-junction (signed Wantage/Childrey) and go straight ahead at the crossroads with the B4507 and descend gently into Childrey. **Turn R** by the Hatchett pub (Stow Hill).

Turn up a tarmac bridlepath between houses (signed as a No Through Road) and climb gently. Go straight across, still on a track where it crosses the minor road. Enter East Challow passing a school on your left and **turn R** onto Windmill Place. Take the second **turn L** (High View) and **turn R** at the T-junction opposite the cricket ground (Vicarage Hill). **Turn L** back onto the B4507 (not signed) and coast gently down into Wantage.

Turn L onto Ham Road (signed Oxford/Grove A338) and soon



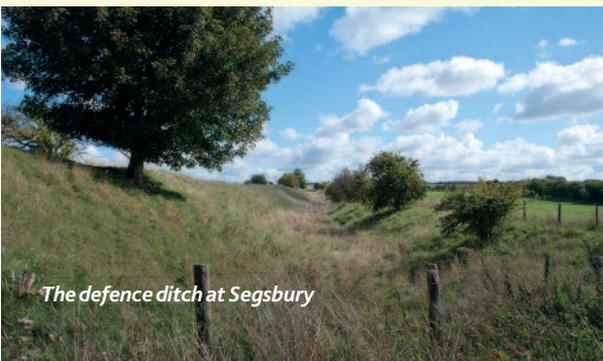
turn R onto Locks Lane. Descend carefully as there is a deep ford at the bottom. Cross the ford on the footbridge and continue up Locks Lane following the one-way system. **Turn L** onto Portway. The turning to the car park is soon on your left. To return to the Market Square, follow Portway and **turn L** at the traffic lights (signed Town Centre, etc.) and follow the road back to the square.

THE RIDGEWAY

The Ridgeway has been described as the 'greatest, lengthiest and noblest in appearance of all prehistoric roads'. It may well be among the oldest roads in the world. Today its status is byway not bridlepath, reflecting its ancient usage. It runs along one of the six ridges that radiate from Salisbury Plain, through Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire. All along its length there is ample evidence of the prehistoric people who first trod it. There are earthworks aplenty, hill forts and the beautiful and ancient chalk hill figure, the Uffington White Horse.

SEGSBURY HILL FORT

The Segsbury hill fort has an extensive ditch and rampart system with four 'gateways'. The site was first excavated in 1871 by a Dr Phene. He discovered a cist grave on the south side of the hill fort rampart. The grave was floored with stone slabs and the sides were walled with flint. Finds included a shield boss and fragments of an urn or drinking cup. Among other finds were human bones and flint scrapers and it has been suggested that this was a secondary Anglo-Saxon burial. Reuse of an ancient site for such a purpose is not unusual.



The defence ditch at Segsbury