

Ivinghoe Beacon self-guided walk

This 3-mile walk will take you through part of the scenic Ivinghoe Hills Nature Reserve. The chalk grassland on this area is nationally important for wildlife and is home to many species of plants and insects especially butterflies. Some of these are nationally rare. The mix of open grassland, scrub and woodland also supports a wide variety of birds at different times of the year. The walk although short, is fairly strenuous with a couple of hill climbs.

Park at Step's Hill car park. This is the large grassy car park West of the road from Ringshall to Ivinghoe Beacon. (Grid Ref. SP 963 156).

a From the middle of the car park walk carefully across the road and continue down a stony track past a National Trust sign to a field gate.

b Climb over the stile next to the gate and follow the track downhill, enjoying the view across the valley towards the lion chalk figure at Whipsnade Zoo. The woodland to your right is Coombe Wood, which is home to many rare species of insect.

c At the bottom of the hill, bear left towards a gate at the corner of the field.

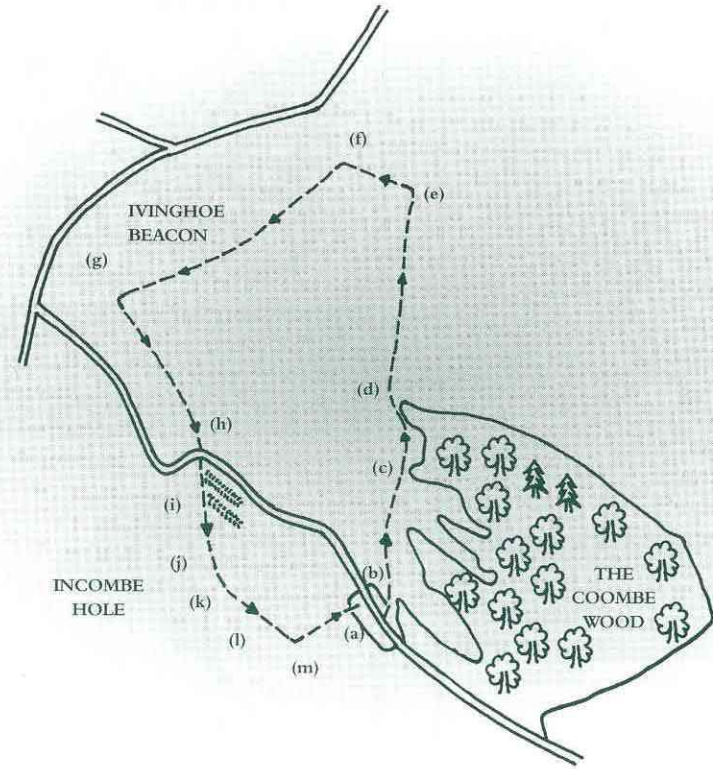
d Go through the kissing gate and turn right along the Ashridge Estate Boundary Trail. Follow a track through fields.

e When you reach a belt of trees on the right, turn left on a path up the hill and over a stile. Continue to the top of the ridge.

f Turn left up the ridge. Migrating birds such as Wheatear or Ring Ouzel sometimes use this ridge in Spring and Autumn. Continue to the summit of Ivinghoe Beacon (the highest point on the ridge).

g The Beacon is the site of an Iron-Age hill-fort and commands spectacular views across the Vale of Aylesbury and into Oxfordshire. Turn left and walk down a steep hillside on a white eroded path and continue past two small hills on your right. The chalk grassland here is exceptionally rich in plant and insect

life and during the summer, it is possible to see a wide variety of butterflies and wildflowers, including orchids.



h Turn right and cross the road carefully. Follow signs for the Ridgeway National Trail and Ashridge Boundary Trail and up onto Step's Hill.

i After approx. 50 yards, fork right onto the Ridgeway National Trail (Acorn sign), and Ashridge Boundary Trail. (Not the wide chalky track).

j Go through a kissing gate and turn left, still following the Ridgeway and Ashridge Boundary Trail.

k Follow the Ridgeway along a well-beaten path through a belt of Hawthorn scrub.

l After emerging from the scrub, walk on approx. 100 yards and you will see the steep valley of Incombe Hole on your right. Turn left over the stile next to the field gate.

m Cross the rutted track and take the small path opposite. This will take you through scrub woodland back to the car park.

*A glow-worm larva
with its prey:
a Banded snail*

