



This is a supplementary information sheet on the geology, history and archaeology along the Chinnor Circular Walk, to accompany the main walk leaflet. See the main walk leaflet for route directions.

About the Chinnor Circular Walk

This is a walk through a classic Chilterns landscape, beginning at the foot of the Chalk scarp, then climbing the steep hill to explore the wooded top and dip slope. From the top you can fully appreciate how geology makes scenery! The route also shows the variety of ways in which people have used the landscape – and geology – for thousands of years: flint for tools and building; chalk for cement, springs to supply water and the soil itself for farming.

The rounded hills and deeply dissected dry valleys of the Chilterns are actually very recent, sculpted by melting glaciers about 450,000 years ago. Stone Age hunters and gatherers lived in the Chilterns. Neolithic settlers cleared trees to grow crops, leaving behind their burial mounds and starting the process that created flower-rich chalk grassland. The Anglo-Saxons knew this area as *Cilternsetaen*, a 'god-forsaken place that no-one in their right minds would want to settle'. But settle they did, leaving Anglo-Saxon names such as Goring, Bledlow, Wycombe, Chesham and Luton to remind us of the many groups of people who have lived, farmed, traded and died in the Chilterns.

Background Information

The Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a unique place of great beauty and wildlife interest. It incorporates a wide range of landscapes shaped by its geology and history. The Chilterns geological story began c. 100 million years ago when sea levels rose more than 300m due to global warming. The chalky muds deposited on the sea floor eventually became today's chalk.



Chilterns Country

Chinnor Circular Walk

Features of interest along the walk

1 Chinnor: Place names preserve a surprising amount of ancient history. For example, Chiltern is derived from the Celtic Cilterne meaning 'land beyond the hills'. Chinnor is derived from Ceonna, an Anglo-Saxon man's name, and ora, a flat-topped hill. So 1500–1000 years ago the village was named after a person and the shape of the hill towering above it.

2 Chalk scarp: The scarp shows the boundary between the harder chalk and the soft clays and sands of the Vale. Originally the scarp would have been further north: millions of years of erosion have worn it back to this place. The scarp slope exists because the chalk was tilted, forced up by the same event that produced the Alps and the Taurus mountains (50 to 10 million years ago)!

A Roman villa lies beneath Lower Wainhill. The Romans inherited their landscape from Iron Age or Bronze Age farmers.

3 Bledlow is named for the burial mound (locally known as the 'Cop') on the hill overlooking the village. Bledlow is derived from the Anglo-Saxon Bledda, a personal name, and hlaw, a burial mound. Bledda must have been someone very important to have deserved such a significant burial monument.

4 The Lions at Bledlow. This 17th-century pub is a good place for lunch and a must for Midsomer Murder fans, who will recognise it as the 'Queens Arms'. 'Badgers Drift Church' is just up the road! The pub was originally two adjoining pubs: the Red Lion and the Blue Lion. When they merged the name changed to 'The Lions', but you can still see the two front doors.

5 The Cop: Today the burial mound on the hill overlooking Bledlow is almost hidden within the trees, but when it was built the hillside was probably treeless, wood being in great demand for huts, equipment and fire-wood. The mound would have been higher, possibly surrounded by a ditch which has since filled with silt. Barrow burials such as this are often sited high in the landscape, on the sides of hills with a good view (to be seen by the people living nearby, rather than for the deceased!).

Many of these burial mounds (often marked tumuli on maps) are early Bronze Age in date, but Anglo-Saxon and, less often, Romano-British mounds may look very similar. The Cop is probably Bronze Age, from 4,600 to 3,600 years old, but some people think it Saxon (after 410 AD). The Saxons seem to have known the name of the deceased (Bledda), so it's possible.

6 The Chinnor Hill Barrows are Bronze Age burial mounds between 4,600 and 3,600 years old. Burial sites such as this were still recognised as significant places many years later: an Anglo-Saxon was buried in a grave dug into the side of one of the mounds. Even after centuries of erosion the two barrows remain an impressive sight (23m and 24m across and just over 1m high) and if you look carefully you may be able to see that they are surrounded by a ditch forming a figure-of-eight pattern. The ditches are about 1.5m wide, but now only about 30cm deep, having filled with silt over the many, many years since they were created.

7 The view across the Vale: the whole of Chinnor and a patchwork of fields is laid out before you. Chalk is a relatively hard rock in this area, so has resisted erosion to form the Chiltern Hills. The softer and older rocks beneath the chalk lie under the surface of the flat vale in front of you.

From here, the further in the distance, the older the strata. On a clear day you may just see some small 'bumps' along the horizon. These small hills are the Jurassic rock of the mid-Vale Ridge underlying villages such as Long Crendon, Chearsley, Upper Winchendon and Brill.

8 Chinnor Hill Nature Reserve:

2,500 years ago you would have walked past an Iron Age village near the present-day car park.

Chinnor Hill is a rich environment for wildlife. The reserve consists of chalk grassland on the scarp slope, juniper scrub, and beech woodland at the top of the hill. The grassland is full of colourful wildflowers in the spring and summer months – primrose, cowslip, both spotted and pyramidal orchid, twayblade, rock rose and agrimony. Juniper is more than flavouring for gin: it's a rare plant, home to a diverse insect fauna including rare insects such as the juniper shield bug.

The beech woodland sits on the clay-with-flints that caps the hill. The many irregular pits and depressions in the ground were dug by people quarrying flint. In summer violets and white helleborine flower on the shady woodland floor. If you explore you may find two ancient tracks worn hollow over time by feet and wheels. They may even have led to the Iron Age settlement.

9 The Ridgeway: this 87 mile (139 km) route along the Chiltern Hills has been in use since the Neolithic period 5,000 years ago. Originally much of its length was a wide route across grassland; hedged boundaries restricted its width after the Enclosure Acts of the mid-1800s.

10 Chinnor Cement Quarry: chalk has been extracted for cement-making from this quarry since 1908. At the height of production the quarry manufactured 5,600 tonnes per week. It closed in 1999, its life extended by a sudden need for more cement for the Channel Tunnel! In fact, the boring machine was tested here before tackling the tunnel. Cement requires a vast amount of Lower Chalk which, unlike the Middle and Upper Chalk, is not hard, but is a soft chalky clay. Extraction leaves large pits that fill with rainwater which looks blue due to fine particles in suspension. (Caution! DO NOT enter the quarries: they are dangerous and privately owned).



Chinnor Cement Quarry

Further Information

This information was collated by Chilterns Archaeology. This group aims to promote awareness and increase knowledge of the archaeology of the Chilterns and membership is open to all. Chilterns Archaeology organises working parties, talks and events in the Chilterns.

For further information visit www.chilternarchaeology.com or email chilternarchaeology@btopenworld.com

You can download more Chilterns Walks at www.chilternsaonb.org