

Pegsdon and Deacon Hills
By Louis Upton, Chiltern Society

Summary

From Pegsdon, climb steadily into the Pegsdon Hills Nature Reserve where you can see rare chalkland plants and butterflies. From the top you can enjoy some of the best views in the North Chilterns. Visit Deacon Hill with its ancient earthworks then walk along the edge of a mature beech wood before emerging above Knocking Hoe reserve.

Length: 3.5 miles

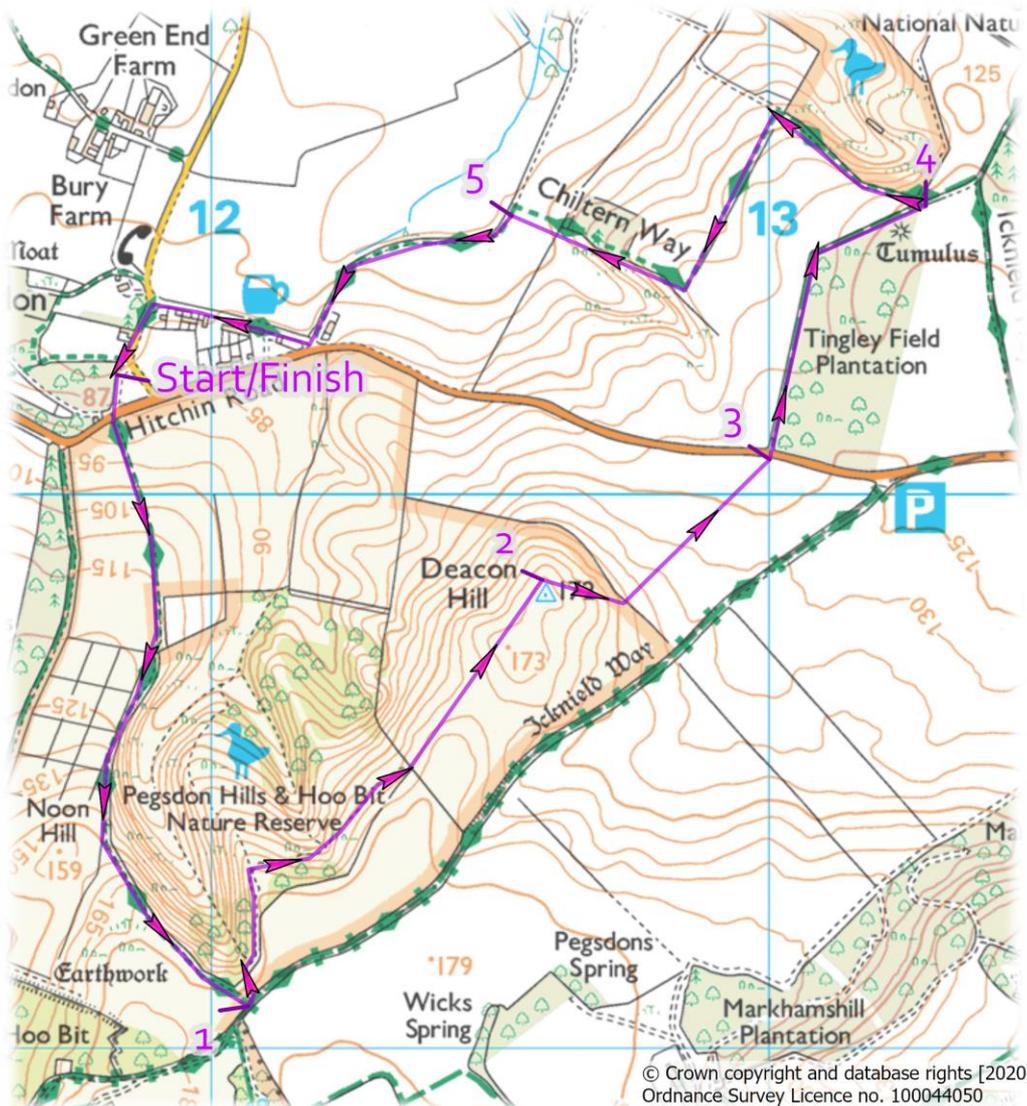
Terrain: Good grassy paths or broad dirt tracks. One long steady ascent and a steep descent. One stile and 6 gates

Start & finish: An old road west of Pegsdon SG5 3JS TL118301

Food & drink: The Live and Let Live pub in Pegsdon. None on route

Maps: OS Explorer 193, Chiltern Society 26

Parking: Turn off the B655 Barton Road towards Pegsdon and Shillington and take the first left to park in the old road. If full, there may be other spaces in the village. If the pub is open and you plan to use it you may also be able to park there



Route

Head along the old road towards the B655 Barton Road. Cross it and enter the Pegsdon Hills Nature Reserve through the gate opposite. Take the path straight ahead uphill, climbing steadily across the field. Go through a gate and continue, now with a fence on your left. As you near the top of the hill, the fence curves left and views open up.

Waypoint 1 - Where the fence turns sharp-left, follow it and shortly after pass left through the fence then turn right and continue along the top of the slope, now to the left of the fence. Pass through a gate and continue straight ahead climbing steadily across open grassland. Head to the Deacon Hill trigpoint.

Waypoint 2 - From the trigpoint, bear right and follow the steep path downhill. As you near the bottom of the steep part of the slope, take the gate through the fence on your left. Cross the meadow to a stile near the left edge of the woods you can see over the B-road.

Waypoint 3 - Cross stile and B-road and take the bridleway running along the left edge of the woods.

Waypoint 4 - You emerge from the trees at a path junction above Knocking Hoe nature reserve. Turn sharp left on a broad, grassy footpath alongside the reserve. Follow the footpath left and later right along field edges. The path descends to a lane.

Waypoint 5 - Turn left on the lane, walk through Pegsdon village then turn left when you reach a T-junction to return to the start.

Points of Interest

Pegsdon is a small hamlet, part of Shillington parish. At the time of Domesday it belonged to Ramsey Abbey and was worth ten hides.

Pegsdon Hills and Hoo Bit Nature Reserves are part of the Deacon Hill SSSI and belong to the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust. They are one of the jewels of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and have some of the most stunning views in the area. Look out for birds such as red kite, buzzard, fieldfare, grey partridge, lapwing, meadow pipit, redwing, skylark, turtle dove, wheatear and yellowhammer. You may also see brown argus, dark green fritillary, green hairstreak and small heath butterflies, and glow-worms, as well as plants like autumn gentian, fragrant orchid, milkwort, rock rose, common spotted orchid, cowslip, eyebright, harebell and wild thyme. The Wildlife Trust has reminded us that there are livestock on their Reserve at Pegsdon all year round; signs are posted round the site giving instructions to protect animals and aid conservation management.

Deacon Hill is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a fine example of chalk downland. On the slopes there are medieval cultivation terraces, known as strip lynchets.

Knocking Hoe is a National Nature Reserve which contains large populations of rare plants, including such chalk downland varieties as rock rose, dwarf thistle, clustered bellflower, lady's tresses and hoary plantain. There are also large populations of pasque flower, fleawort, burnt-tip orchid, as well as the very rare spotted catsear and moon carrot.