

# Welcome to the Chilterns



The Chilterns National Landscape stretches across Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire. For thousands of years, this landscape has been shaped by the people who've lived and worked here, and farmed the land.

The result is a beautiful countryside area known for its breathtaking views, ancient woods, great walks, grand houses, and bustling market towns. It has been protected by law since 1965 because of its special geology, wildlife and heritage.

While you're out in the Chilterns, take time to notice what's around you. Listen to birdsong and the breeze in the trees.

Feel the textures of tree bark or the crunch of leaves underfoot. Breathe in the scent of bluebells, freshly cut meadows, or autumn woods. Take in the many shades of green – and everything in between.



## Did you know?

The Chilterns is famous for its beech woods. Mature trees can grow to more than 40 metres high!

# Walking and outdoor activities

With miles of paths, cycleways and bridleways, the Chilterns offers walking and cycling for all ages and abilities. Easy-access trails lead through peaceful nature reserves, while longer hikes and rides follow ancient routes shaped by generations past.

Need facilities along the way? Start your walk from a visitor centre or market town, or stop at a welcoming pub or tearoom.

There are plenty of other ways to enjoy the outdoors too – from kayaking, boating and wild swimming to map reading, foraging or tree-top adventures.

For a slower pace, find peace in the bluebell woods of Wendover Woods or among the scented wildflowers of Warburg Nature Reserve. Pack a picnic and enjoy time in nature.



## Did you know?

The jelly ear fungus lives up to its name! This brown, rubbery fungus looks just like a human ear and is found growing on dead wood.

# Family days out



Whether your family enjoys walks in the woods or exploring the shops, the Chilterns offers a huge range of great family days out. There are gardens and playgrounds surrounding splendid houses, treetop adventure trails in beautiful woodlands, and galleries offering fun exhibits for all ages.

On rainy days, there's lots of museums and indoor play areas dotted throughout the market towns. If you're on a budget, why not rediscover some simple outdoor pleasures? Look for wildflowers in the grasslands of Aston Rowant Nature Reserve, or go fungi-hunting at Burnham Beeches in autumn.

Spot red kites all year round at Watlington Hill, build dens at Cowleaze Wood, go blackberry picking along hedgerows, or enjoy picnicking in the shade at Whipsnade Tree Cathedral. For watery fun, head to Wallingford for a paddle in the river or a swim in the heated outdoor pool at Riverside Park and Pools.



## Did you know?

Chalk grassland is sometimes called "the rainforest of Europe" because of how many plants and animals it supports. You can find more than 40 species in an area the size of a bath towel!



# Chilterns National Landscape visitor guide and map

Discover, Explore, Enjoy



# All about the landscape

The Chilterns National Landscape is an area of land that is protected because it is nationally important for its natural beauty. Natural beauty is not just about the way the landscape looks, but also about its geology, plants and animals, and human history.

The Chilterns National Landscape is looked after by the Chilterns Conservation Board. We don't own or manage land ourselves, but work closely with the people who do, such as farmers, conservation organisations, communities, local councils and developers. Together, we find ways to look after the wildlife and history of the area, and to help people discover and enjoy it.

We run projects to study local wildlife, protect ancient monuments, support nature-friendly farming, and inspire the public to love their landscape. We also encourage green tourism and business, and influence planning to make sure that decisions about land in the Chilterns are right for everyone.



## Did you know?

In the 1800s, red kites were persecuted to extinction in England. But thanks to a successful conservation programme, these beautiful birds are back in the Chilterns – look for them flying above woods and meadows.



# Discover our heritage

The Chilterns has an impressive history full of ancient sites, significant buildings, old trade routes, and interesting culture. One of the best ways to explore our history is slowly: on foot, bike, horseback, or even immersed in the age of steam on the Chinnor and Princes Risborough Heritage Railway. Like this, it is easy to see the hidden churches, pubs and villages that nestle into the landscape of chalk and woodland that attracted so many to make a home here.

The Chilterns is very close to London, so has many grand stately homes and gardens, such as Chenies Manor where royals once stayed. Step further back in time and follow in ancient footprints along the Ridgeway National Trail – or the Icknield Way Trail.

Or why not visit the grassy slopes of Dunstable Downs? See the Neolithic barrows at Five Knolls, picnic or fly a kite on the hills, or enjoy a warming coffee at the visitor centre.



Teal

## Did you know?

Winter is a great time to spot ducks, such as wigeon and teal, as they arrive from colder places. Watch for them from the fully accessible hide at College Lake Nature Reserve.



# Access for all

We believe everyone should be able to explore and enjoy the Chilterns. There are many stile-free, easy-access routes and surfaced trails suitable for wheelchair and pushchair users. Several larger countryside sites also feature visitor centres and cafés with accessible facilities. Some also offer the hire of all-terrain mobility vehicles (trampers), giving you the freedom to explore the countryside.

Accessibility isn't just about mobility – it's about creating inclusive spaces for all. Burnham Beeches Sensory Trail invites you to touch, listen to and sit on its sculptures. Lindengate Charity's open garden provides a peaceful space for reflection and wellbeing courses, while the Chiltern Open Air Museum provides sensory back packs and ear defenders for neurodiverse visitors. Come and discover the Chilterns, a place for everyone to enjoy.

For further information on accessible countryside sites and attractions visit our website at [www.chilterns.org.uk](http://www.chilterns.org.uk)



## Did you know?

The Chiltern gentian is one of the rarest flowers in the UK and can only be found at a handful of grassland sites.



# How to get here

The Chilterns is a great place to enjoy the countryside and is easy to reach from cities like London, Oxford, Reading and Milton Keynes. With 20 railway stations, four train lines, an Underground line and plenty of bus routes, it's simple to get around without a car. Many of our walks and bike rides start and finish near train stations – perfect for a day out in nature.



## Plan your journey

**Trains**  
[www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk)  
03457 48 49 50

**Buses**  
[www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info)  
0871 200 22 33

**All transport**  
[www.omio.com](http://www.omio.com)



## THE COUNTRYSIDE CODE: RESPECT, PROTECT, ENJOY

The Countryside Code provides useful guidance for people visiting the countryside, including the rules about dogs, what the different signs mean and tips about travel and parking. By following the Countryside Code, you will be helping us to care for the Chilterns.



Access for All programme



# Discover the Chilterns National Landscape

Explore some of the Chilterns' most beautiful and accessible countryside – free to visit, with level, step-free paths and breathtaking views for everyone to enjoy.

Countryside site facilities and features

Accessible and regular parking available

Regular Parking only

Tramper and wheelchair hire (must be pre-booked)

Information/Visitor Centre

Café

Hilltop viewpoint

Accessible and standard toilets on site

### 1 Sharpenhoe Clappers

Ancient woodland and chalk grassland site with traces of an Iron Age hillfort and medieval rabbit warrens that once provided meat and skins.

### 2 Sundon Hills Country Park

One of the highest points in Bedfordshire with stunning views over Sharpenhoe Clappers. Waymarked trails, picnic areas, and lots of nature to see and explore.

### 3 Galley and Warden Hills Nature Reserve

A chalk grassland common with Bronze Age barrows (burial mounds) and ditches. Choose from three routes, including a level one, and look for wildflowers and butterflies.



### What is a Chalk Stream?

There are eight major chalk streams that have their source within the Chilterns National Landscape and flow south eastwards down the gentle slope of the Chalk escarpment. In addition, there are many small chalk streams that rise from springs along the base of the steeper north-west facing slope - from the Ewelme Brook near Wallingford in the south, to the Barton and Burwell springs north of Luton. Together, they form around 150 km of chalk stream habitat, supporting diverse wildlife such as water voles, otters, kingfishers, and banded demoiselles (damselflies). These streams also have a rich heritage, supporting the development of important local industries including watercress farming and milling.

### 4 Chiltern Gateway Centre at Dunstable Downs

On the Chilterns ridge, Dunstable Downs is the highest point in the east of England. Enjoy miles of open grassland, fly a kite or have a picnic.

### 5 Whipsnade Tree Cathedral

Created after WWI to remember those who died. Wander peaceful grassy paths lined with trees planted to form the shape of a medieval cathedral.

### 6 Totternhoe Knolls

Totternhoe Knolls is a historic site. Once a castle and later a quarry, it is now a flower-rich chalk grassland nature reserve where large anthills are visited by hungry green woodpeckers.

### 7 Ivinghoe Beacon

This chalk grassland site is home to a Late Bronze Age hillfort and stunning views. As part of the Ashridge Estate, it offers walks for all ages and abilities.

### 8 Ashridge Estate

Ancient woodland, rolling chalk hills and lush meadows are just some of the highlights of the Ashridge Estate. Visitor facilities and easy routes make this a popular spot.

### 9 College Lake Nature Reserve

A former chalk quarry transformed into a haven for both wildlife and people. Accessible walks and bird hides help everyone to enjoy the lakeside views and visiting birdlife. Dogs are not allowed at the reserve (other than Guide Dogs).

### 10 Tring Reservoirs

Built to serve the canal system, these four reservoirs – all close together – are some of the best birdwatching spots in southern England. There are easy access walks along the reservoirs and Grand Union Canal towpath.



### 11 Wendover Woods (& Go Ape)

Beautiful woodlands with family-friendly trails, a café and adventure playground. For those who fancy a challenge, try Go Ape – a treetop forest adventure.



### Aston Rowant Nature Reserve

### 14 Whiteleaf Hill Nature Reserve

Rising above the market town of Princes Risborough, Whiteleaf Hill is full of historic features, including a huge chalk cross, a Neolithic barrow and WWI training trenches.

### 15 West Wycombe Hill and Estate

West Wycombe Hill, the site of an Iron Age hillfort, offers stunning countryside views over the village's historic cottages, pubs, cafés, and shops. Below the hill, West Wycombe Park has several wheelchair-friendly walking routes, and there is accessible parking at the nearby Walled Garden Café.

### 16 Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve

Perched high in the Chilterns, the reserve contains flower-rich chalk grassland, woodland and juniper scrub. There are fantastic views with red kites soaring overhead.

### 17 Cowleaze Wood

This woodland site offers lovely vistas and pretty bluebells in May. There are lots of paths to explore, and areas for picnics and children to play.

### 18 Watlington Hill

A chalk grassland site with panoramic views over Watlington. There's short turf, scrub and yew woodland. Look out for butterflies and red kites while you picnic.

### 19 Warburg Reserve

Warburg is a remote spot, full of exciting plants and animals all year round. The orchid-filled grasslands in the valley give way to woodlands on the slopes.

### 20 Black Park Country Park (& Go Ape)

A large site with woodland, heathland and open space. Enjoy family friendly attractions, such as Go Ape, miles of woodland tracks and trails, and wildlife spotting.

### 21 Box Moor Trust

Free to explore, with regular events. Accessible parking and toilets available by booking or prior arrangement.



### What is a hillfort?

A hillfort is a prehistoric site enclosed by earthworks, such as ditches and banks. In the Chilterns, hillforts were built between the Late Bronze Age and the Middle Iron Age (3,100 – 2,300 years ago) by local farming communities. Hillforts served many purposes, including protecting livestock and defending places for people to live. There are 20 hillforts in the Chilterns National Landscape, many of which are still visible today as raised earth structures. We've highlighted the most accessible sites so everyone can explore these fascinating remnants of the past.

### 22 Burnham Beeches

Large countryside site with wonderful ancient woodland and plenty of wildlife. Lots of waymarked paths and visitor facilities, including a café and sensory trail.

### 23 Rickmansworth Aquadrome

A beautiful site with two lakes that are home to lots of waterbirds. There are accessible pathways, an exciting play area and a welcoming café.

### 24 Woodoaks Farm

This Soil Association organic farm has a café and walks around the countryside offering sweeping views. Look out for nature walks and family friendly events. Accessible toilets available if you've booked a Tramper or contacted Woodoaks Farm in advance.



Visit our website for more details on the featured sites and to access an audio description of the map and guide.

