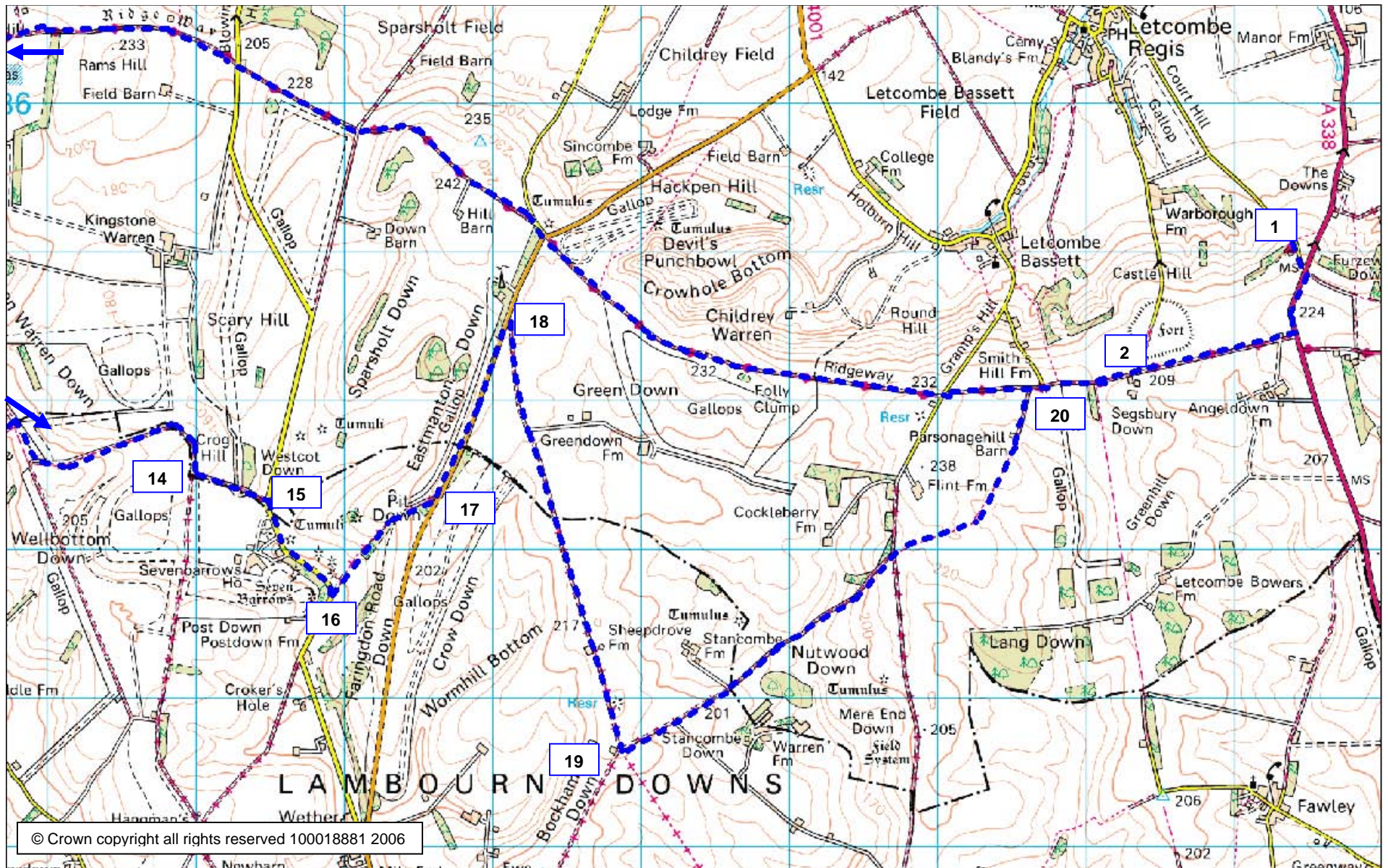
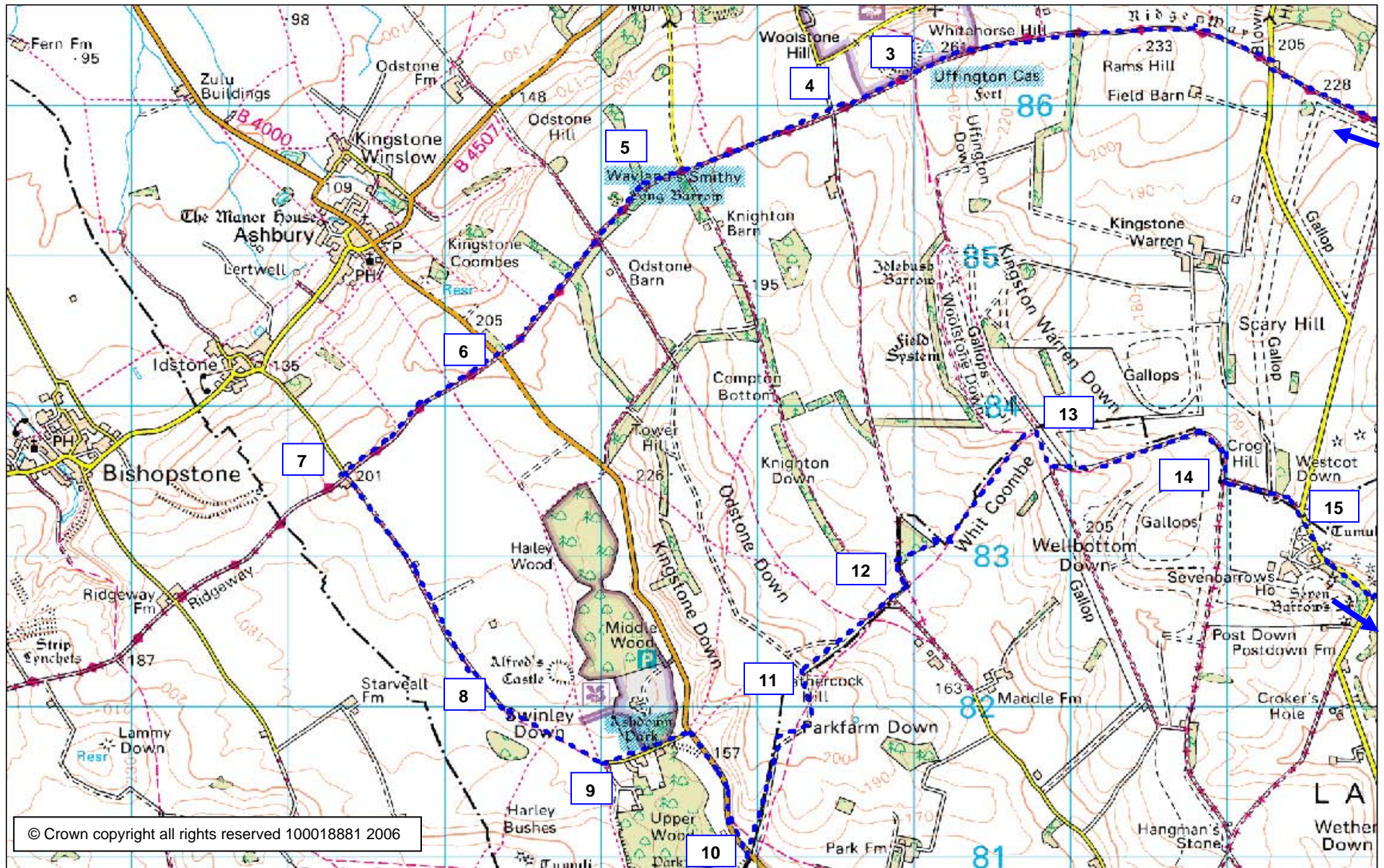


MYTHS & MAGIC RIDE (from YHA Courthill Ridgeway Centre) – map of eastern half of route (map of western half and route description below)



MYTHS & MAGIC RIDE (from YHA Courthill Ridgeway Centre) – map of western half of route



MYTHS & MAGIC RIDE (from YHA Courthill Ridgeway Centre) – route description

Introduction

A 23 miles (37km) ride through spectacular downland scenery with tremendous views and enormous skies. There's also a feast of prehistoric monuments and several places where there are racehorse gallops (horses are not usually out training on a Sunday). The route mostly follows downland tracks that can be muddy in places during and after wet weather and also somewhat rutted. There are no refreshment stops on the route, but a couple of villages below The Ridgeway have pubs - these have been indicated in the text.

The relevant Ordnance Survey maps that cover this route are:

Landranger (pink cover at 1:50 000 or 2cm to 1km) - 174 Newbury & Wantage

Explorer (orange cover at 1:25 000 or 4cm to 1km) - 170 Abingdon, Wantage

Route description

1. Turn right out of entrance of Courthill Ridgeway Centre and then right onto A388. Turn right onto Ridgeway after 400m.
2. After $\frac{3}{4}$ mile (1.2km) you'll see the Iron Age fort of Segsbury Camp in the field to your right. You may explore it on foot by going right down the track to Letcombe Bassett.
3. Continue along The Ridgeway for almost 6 miles (nearly 10km) and you'll reach the entrance to the second Iron Age fort, Uffington Castle, on the right at the top of a slope. You may explore this National Trust area on foot. It includes the famous Uffington White Horse (374 feet long) dating from the late Bronze Age around 3,000 years ago; Dragon Hill below, where St George allegedly killed the dragon - no grass will grow on top of the mound where the blood was spilt; and The Manger where cheese rolling competitions used to be held during the Scouring of the White Horse that took place every 7 years.
4. Less than half a mile further on, turn right to the village of Woolstone if you wish to visit the White Horse Inn. It's $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles (2km) north of The Ridgeway and steeply downhill, meaning it's a climb back up! If not continue along The Ridgeway.
5. After a mile ($1\frac{1}{2}$ km) you reach Wayland's Smithy, 100m off The Ridgeway to the right. This is a fine example of a New Stone Age long barrow built over 5,000 years ago as a burial chamber and named by the Saxons after Wayland their mythical smith god. Local legend says that Wayland's magic forge is contained in the barrow and that if you leave your horse here overnight with suitable payment by the tomb then the animal will have been re-shod on your return the next day. We don't think he repairs bike punctures!
6. Turn right here if you want to visit The Rose and Crown Inn in Ashbury. It's $\frac{3}{4}$ mile (1.2km) away, steeply downhill, and therefore steeply uphill on the return! Otherwise continue along The Ridgeway.
7. After 0.8miles (1.3km) turn left leaving The Ridgeway at the track junction amongst farm buildings. There is a drinking water tap here, the only place on the route to replenish your supplies.

8. Just over a mile (1.8km) from here continue straight ahead where the track you've been following turns sharp right towards a copse of trees. To your left across one field you can see the raised bank of Alfred's Castle, your third Iron Age fort of the day.
9. Continue straight ahead when the track joins a metalled road and ignore any drives off to the right until you reach the B4000. You pass Ashdown Farm on the right and Ashdown House to the left. This delightful late 17th century house was built by the 1st Earl Craven for Elizabeth Queen of Bohemia, the sister of King Charles I, to escape to from plague-ridden London. By all accounts however, Elizabeth died without ever seeing the house finished. This is a National Trust property and is open from April to end of October on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 2 - 5pm. To visit turn left on B4000, otherwise turn right.
10. Follow the B4000 for 0.6miles (1km). Turn left onto a track by the Berkshire County sign opposite where two tracks leave on the other side of the road.
11. Climb up the hill and when you reach the tall white post and two sarsens stones further along the track bear right down the slope. After ½ mile (800m) continue straight ahead at a crossing of tracks and then follow the track as it bears left after a further 200m.
12. After a few metres, turn right on to the track in front of the copse of trees and follow it downhill. At the end of the copse continue on the track up the slope opposite.
13. Turn right at the top of the hill and after 350m turn left. Follow this track, with a fence to your left and gallops (well managed grass strip for training racehorses) to your right, and follow this for 0.8miles (1.3km)
14. Just after the bend to the right take the first track off to the left. You reach a minor road in just over 0.3 miles (½km).
15. Turn right and follow the road for ½ mile (800m).
16. Turn left onto the track when the road bends to the right. This is Seven Barrows, a Wildlife Trust nature reserve with numerous round barrows dating from the Bronze Age to your left.
17. After 0.6miles (1km) uphill you reach the B4001 where you turn left.
18. Follow the B4001 for 0.8miles (1.3km) and turn sharp right just before the telecommunications mast on the left. Follow this straight track, which has a private tarmac drive parallel to it, for almost 2 miles (3.1km)
19. At the junction of tracks by the single barn turn left and follow this track for 2.4 miles (3.9km). Go straight over at the junction of tracks after 2 miles.
20. Turn right at the junction with The Ridgeway and retrace your route for a further 1¼ miles (2km) back to the Courthill Ridgeway Centre.