East Garston, Eastbury  
Two Lambourn Villages

Distance: 10½ km=6½ miles  
Region: Berkshire  
Author: MacMeadow  
Refreshments: East Garston, Eastbury  
Map: Explorer 158 (Newbury) but the map in this guide should suffice

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Woodland, meadows, views, historic villages

In Brief

This is a walk through two of West Berkshire’s prettiest villages beside the River Lambourn, with two good pubs, at least one terrific view of the Lambourn valley and the Downs, gentle meadows and woodland. It begins on a Roman road, appropriately since this area was settled by them. The Plough in Eastbury serves excellent lunches at reasonable hours; to enquire, ring 01488-71312.

There are some patches of nettles in high summer, many avoidable if you have a stick. Strong sensible shoes or trainers should be adequate. There are one or two stiles on the return from Eastbury which are not suited to a large dog because they have no gap or dog gate.

The walk begins in Ermin Street in the village of Woodlands St Mary, near Hungerford, Berkshire, just off the M4 motorway, postcode RG17 7ST. At the start of the village, look for a side lane with a signpost on the right for Eastbury. Park on the grass verge here, preferably a short way along just before a house on the left. Note that traffic runs very fast along this straight main road, without leaving much space. [Some walkers report problems parking on the grass verge, especially in wet conditions. Alternative places are: (1) in the narrow lane opposite (Eastbury Shute): there is space on the verge a short way down but this may be in the way of farm vehicles (2) outside the village hall (social club) about 450m along the road (it’s normally unused in the daytime) (3) in one of the villages, although this spoils the idea of an excursion to the villages and back.] For more details, see at the end of this text (Getting There).
The Walk

1  Go to the junction with the side lane signposted Eastbury and take a signed footpath diagonally in the corner. Follow this winding path through woodland, ignoring a path on the left, coming out to a crop field. Cross straight over the field, heading for the right-hand corner of the wood ahead. At the corner, keep ahead with the wood, a cypress plantation, on your left. Turn right in the corner and, after only 20m, turn left through a band of conifers and then veer right, as directed by a fingerpost, along the right-hand side of the next field. In the next corner, go through a narrow gap at a wooden post onto a wide track, also marked as a footpath. Veer left on the track, thus keeping the same general direction. Where the field on your left ends and the cinder track curves left, keep straight on along a narrower track, beside the woodland of Peaks Copse on your left. Follow the fingerpost into the next large field and continue in the same direction. In the far corner, you reach a band of trees. Keep ahead through the trees, for only 50m, going down a rather untidy bank, to find a stile in the fence ahead.

2  Cross the stile, ignoring footpath arrows pointing left and right to find yourself in a large sloping meadow with fine views ahead and to your left. This is House Hill. Veer a fraction right so that you are walking the length of the hill, along the contour, not far from the woods on your right. The large village on your left, about 4 km distant, is Lambourn, the local capital of horse racing. About half way along the hillside, in the trees, you will see a small metal gate. Go right through the gate onto a narrow path, almost doubling back.
3 The path leads up to a field. Continue up the left-hand side of the field. In 200m, at the top, go left through a gap and veer left again on a wide path that gradually curves round to the right across the centre of the field. At the edge of the field, before the start of a line of trees, by a partially hidden marker post, turn left on a path, heading for a downward slope. The path follows a line of oaks downhill beside a field on your right. In the far corner, keep straight on along a path through a long strip of woodland. The path is reinforced by a track, still under trees, and comes down to a road in East Garston. Turn right on the road and continue past a road junction on the right, quickly reaching the Queen’s Arms, a real gem.

The Queen's Arms is an upmarket pub-cum-hotel-cum-restaurant, positioning itself with the Lambourn horse training set, although the food and drink are not over-priced. It specialises in English wine and has a seductive patio and garden.

4 Immediately after the pub, turn left at a road junction, going past racing stables and crossing the Lambourn River. Follow the lane as it bends left and runs through the village, passing timbered and pastel cottages for which this village is renowned.

East Garston is not east of anything: its name is derived from “Asgar's tun” after a Saxon warrior who fought the Normans at Hastings. Before then, under Edward the Confessor, he was procurer of the king’s horses (just like some of the present inhabitants nearly 1000 years later). The Romans had settled in East Garston, since it lies close to Ermin Street (at the start of this walk) linking the important Roman regional capitals of Silchester and Cirencester. Their remains are all around, including a villa near Lambourn. Alfred the Great was born nearby, in Wantage, and defeated the Danes in a pyrrhic victory at Ashdown close to here.

At a road junction, keep straight ahead, following the winding road through the village. At the far end, after a terrace of timbered cottages with bridges across the Lambourn River, turn right with the road. Just before some white fence posts, your route is left on a narrow path. But first you may wish to visit the church, which is on the left just after the white posts. All Saints church is late Norman (around 1190), much restored, although the old paintings of nine saints and archangels have been set in the wall. It is a first choice of many couples wanting to get married.

5 Having turned left on the path, follow it through a swing-gate and under trees along the route of the old railway. This nice easy path ends at steps, going up left through a wooden gate and into a field. Turn right and, on meeting a crossing track, go right and immediately left on a grassy path, with a field and later small meadows on your left. Your path takes you down steps to a tarmac lane. Turn left on the lane, passing thatched barns, to a road in Eastbury, another pretty Berkshire village. Turn right on the main road through the village. Continue, passing many attractive properties, until you reach The Plough on your right. The “Plough” is a little gem with excellent food, most of it sourced locally. It closes from “3.30ish” (“4ish” on Sunday) and on Sunday evening.

6 After possibly exploring a little further along the road, turn left just after the pub over the Lambourn on a tarmac lane which immediately bends left again, beside the river, passing more charming timbered cottages and the church. After the black-and-white Eastview Cottage, ignore the first small wooden gate marked Poors Furze. Go another 50m and go right through the second small wooden gate, also marked Poors Furze, just before a brick-and-flint house. Go over a stile and up a wide grassy path.
At the top, go over a stile and follow a path through a section of woodland [jun 2018: a walker did not find this path and walked along the field edge instead]. Your path soon goes up more steeply and eventually bends left into a large field. Turn right and right again, walking beside the woodland on your right. Your path gradually curves left up the gentle gradient of Shrags Hill on a nice wide green field edge. About 30m after the path begins to descend, you come to a wide gap in the trees. Turn right through the gap by a marker post with a yellow arrow, out into the next field and immediately turn left onto a path that runs in the trees, parallel to your original path. The entry to the path is rather overgrown and netty but, as soon as you find a way into the trees, you are on a better wide path running under leaning hazels.

Your path emerges from the wood into tall grass, near a wire fence on your right. The path leads to a fingerpost on a wide track. Turn left here. Ignore a muddy path that joins from your right, continue straight ahead, passing another fingerpost [Nov 2018: missing] on your left, soon reaching a field. Proceed along the right-hand side of this sloping field with woods on your right. Where the wood ends, at a 4-way fingerpost, wheel sharp right round the edge of the wood, up a long narrow meadow, about 30m wide with woods on each side. Keep to the centre and, at the top, go through a narrow gap and continue along the centre of a similar slightly smaller and rougher narrow meadow. As you near the far end, take either the left-hand narrow path under two trees or the wider right-hand vehicle path: it makes no difference as they quickly re-merge.

Keep left at the end to veer left past a yellow arrow on a post into woods. Keep straight ahead at all times through the wood, going very steadily uphill, passing numerous gamebird feeders. [2018: after 200m, a large tree has fallen across the path; walkers have forged a path round to its right; be sure to wheel left to rejoin the path; immediately, there is another large tree across the path and walkers have carved an even wider path around it to the right; be sure to wheel left back to the main path; look for a post with a yellow arrow as a guide.] Your path goes under wires, zigzagging left and right through a band of trees and out into a crop field. Your direction is a fraction left, as directed by a fingerpost, on a very wide grassy track between fields. The track elbows right and passes a wood on your left. At a post with a yellow arrow keep right beside a horse pasture with new birch trees. The path ends through a small wooden gate to the road where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Take the M4 and come off at exit 14. Turn right, signposted Wantage, and take the first road on the left, signposted Lambourn, passing the Pheasant Inn. The village of Woodlands St Mary is reached in just over 1½ miles.

By bus/train: Bus no. 4 goes from Newbury to East Garston and Eastbury. Not Sunday. Check the timetables.

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