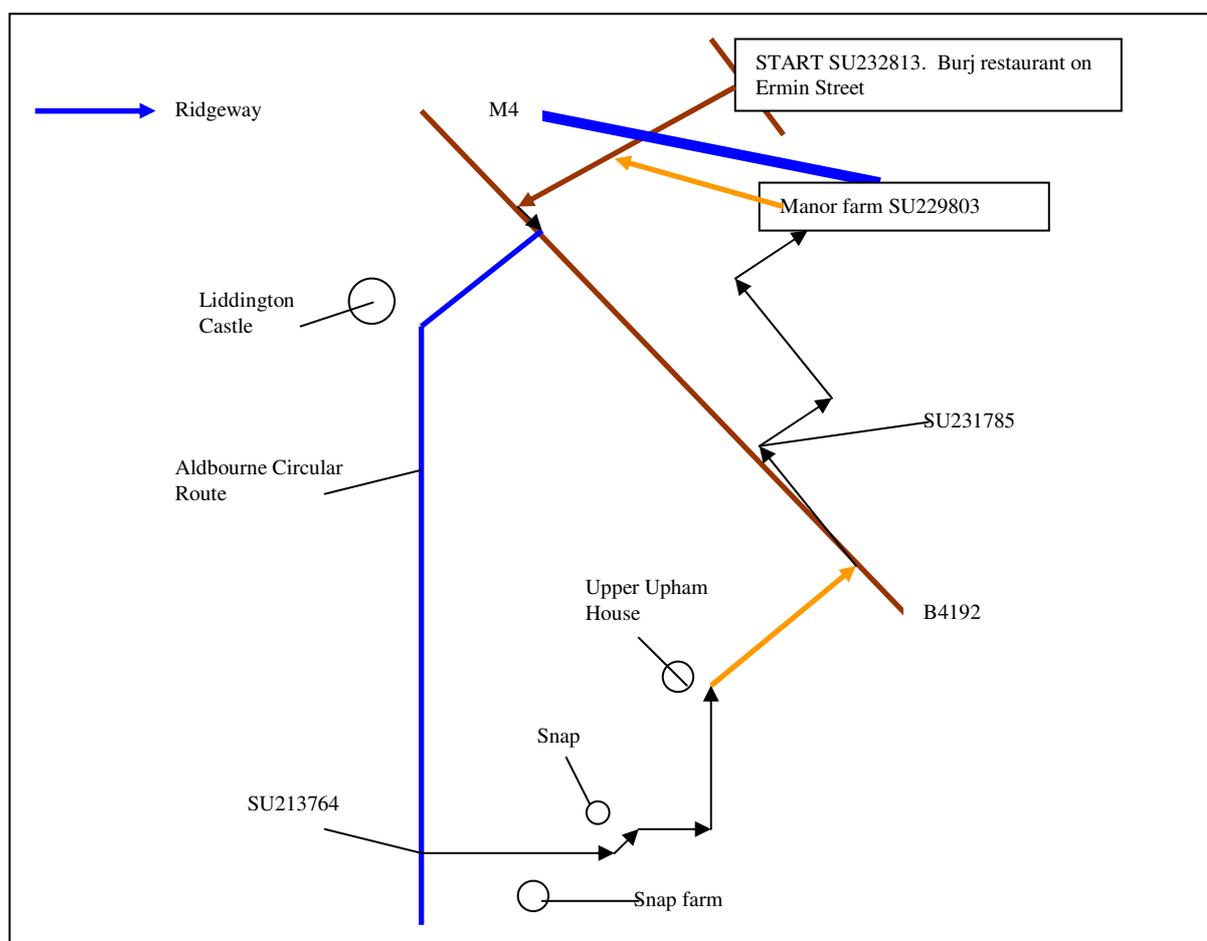


The Ridgeway. Part 22 from ex-Shepherd's Rest pub (SU232813) to Snap crossroads (SU213765). 29 August 2011

Maps OS Explorer 157 & 170. For the sake of completeness (of coverage of the Ridgeway) this section starts with an unattractive stretch on roads to reach the Aldbourne Circular Route past Liddington Castle and on to the turn off from the Ridgeway to the disappeared village of Snap. The return heads back E and N and passing by Upper Upham before taking in a bit more of the unloved B4192, then climbing Sugar Hill and passing through Manor farm to return to the start. 14 km.



This walk is a mixture of low and high points. The low, only precipitated by a 'difficult-to-explain' preference to complete the *whole* of the Ridgeway, is the road walking. The B4192 is particularly unpleasant. But so, too, is the section from the start point (the Burj Restaurant at SU232813) across the M4 to the connection with the Aldbourne Circular Route¹ at SU218804. The highs include Liddington hillfort (Castle on the map), sites of medieval villages and spectacular views often with tumuli on the skyline.

From the restaurant on Ermin Way, the Ridgeway follows a B road over the M4 to reach the B4192 and follow it a short distance to join the Aldbourne Circular Route and pass by Liddington hillfort. But first look N to a small clump of trees where you will see a defensive pillbox of WW2 origin. And then on to the hillfort, via a permissive path detour from the Ridgeway. Liddington Castle is a 3 ha hillfort dating from the late Bronze and early Iron

¹

Ages, first occupied in the 7th Century BC. It commands outstanding views and the steep slopes to the NW, coupled with their associated updrafts, make it a popular paragliding site. The protective banks are built from packed chalk and so make an ideal habitat for chalk-loving flowers. Pignut and dwarf thistle are still to be seen, but the site must be near perfect in early summer.



Pill box near Liddington Castle



Trig point at the Castle



Pignut



Dwarf thistle

From Liddington Castle the Ridgeway heads S. Late summer flowers still line the path, corn sow-thistle is one example. And the rain has brought out the usual crop of snails (including a brown-lipped one hiding on a Plaswood Ridgeway sign). One beech tree displayed a splendid (but not for the tree) rack of Dryad's fungus fruiting bodies. The path reaches a crossroads at SU213764 and here the return route turns left and E. The path through the all-but obliterated village of Snap keeps N of the Snap farm buildings, but it was not very clear. I have asked Wiltshire Council to clarify the status of this track (which is also on the Aldbourne Circular Route referenced in the footnote). But, to date, have not had a reply. However, follow the route as shown on the OS map and you will emerge to the S of a small wood and by a disintegrating windpump. Near here (at SU225765) there should be a footpath cutting diagonally NE across a field. It had been ploughed out and, with the recent rain, taking it would have meant suffering the 5 kg boot treatment. So we took the tracks forming the other two sides of the triangle to reach the outskirts of Upper Upham hamlet and soon reached Upper Upham House in its silvo-pastoral parkland.



Corn sow-thistle



Brown-lipped snail



Dryad's saddle



Upper Upham House

The return now takes the country lane NE down to the B4192 with views across to the Four Barrows Bronze Age cemetery dating from around 2500 BC.



Hurry along the B4192 NW for a little more than a kilometre to reach the crossroads at SU231785 where you can thankfully turn right and climb ENE up Sugar Hill. However take a moment to look at the impressive tumulus on your left as you walk along the road, and also the medieval settlement earthworks below Upper Upham.



Medieval settlement earthworks of Upper Upham

The path NW along the top of Sugar Hill is a Saxon *herepath* or army road and to its left there is a magnificent stretch of flower-rich meadow with signs of pillow mounds, 17th Century humps of soil made for rabbits (conies) to burrow into. A landslip shows how the flint layer lies under the chalk horizon giving an idea of how flinty chalk land fields have been formed by the erosion of the topsoil and the consequent accumulation of flints on the soil surface of cultivated land. More reason for no-till agriculture to take hold in our arable fields.



◀ **Flint layer under calcareous upper horizon**

▶ **Woolly thistle (*Cirsium eriophorum*)**



The return follows the *herepath* to SU227797 and then turns NE to reach Manor farm. Unfortunately the M4 has blocked the direct return to the start point (which is now the domain of muntjac deer and pheasants) and it is necessary to follow the country lane NW to reach the B road used at the start and so return to Ermin Street and the ex-Shepherd's Rest.