Dreaming Spires Walk
A new circular walk on Boars Hill created by Oxford Preservation Trust

As with any circular walk, you can start following the route from a number of places. For the purpose of this narrative, we have started on Berkeley Road, Boars Hill. Please refer to the map in this document when exploring this walk.

Description of the route
The route follows paths and bridleways across fields. There are gentle slopes but the route is stile-free. Some paths can be muddy in places, especially after wet weather. Wear suitable footwear and allow time to rest and enjoy the varied views.

1 Start at the kissing gate into the Old Berkeley Golf Course by the Oxford Preservation Trust information board, opposite the Open University's Foxcombe Hall campus. There is a map on the board detailing the route you will be taking.

The Old Berkeley Golf Course was the very first piece of land bought by OPT, acquired in 1928 to preserve the stunning view Oxford which at the time was threatened with the possibility of housing development. This spot is really very special and provides one of the best vantage points to enjoy uninterrupted views over the city of Oxford.

The land was once part of the Estate of Lord Berkeley who created it as a private golf course, hence the name. Today the fields are managed as grassland which is grazed by sheep and cattle. The area is an environmental and cultural gem and continues to attract and inspire painters, photographers, poets and, occasionally, film crews.

2 Walk to your right, following the well-worn path that initially runs parallel with Berkeley Road. The path bends to the left towards an impressive stand of Scots Pine trees before heading down the gentle slope to a gated pedestrian footbridge.

3 Cross the bridge and walk straight across the field to another pedestrian footbridge.

4 Walk diagonally right to a gate on the bridleway. Follow the bridleway and go through a second gate.

The fields around you were acquired by Oxford Preservation Trust in 2005 when Chilswell Farm came on the market. These fields adjoining the Old Berkeley Golf Course were bought for their landscape and views, and acquired thanks to support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, local charitable trusts and some key individuals.

5 Bear left and walk to a gateway in hedge. Once through the gate, walk up the gentle slope to the crest of the hill – aim for the right hand end of a stretch of hedge.

6 When you get to the top of the hill you will see the Signal 'Elm' tree, really an oak, which inspired Matthew Arnold when he was out walking.
Runs it not here, the track by Childsworth Farm,
Up past the wood, to where the elm-tree crowns
The hill behind whose ridge the sunset flames?

The signal-elm, that looks on Ilsley Downs,
The Vale, the three lone weirs, the youthful Thames?—
_Thyris_, Matthew Arnold, 1865

The tree, now a magnificent veteran, grows in the field boundary near the crest of the hill is fenced to protect it from damage by livestock.

7 Before going up to the ‘Signal Elm’, walk along to the bench on the crest of the hill and enjoy the views of the ‘dreaming spires’ made famous by Matthew Arnold in _Thyris_:

“And that sweet city with her dreaming spires.
She needs not June for beauty’s heightening”

8 Return to the ‘Signal Elm’ and walk through the small enclosure. Walk straight ahead, parallel with fence on your right, to join the bridleway at the end of the field.

Oxford Preservation Trust bought this field from All Souls College in 2009 to preserve it, the famous tree and the wonderful views for future generations.

9 At the bridleway you can either
(a) turn right and follow the path down to Chilswell Farm; or
(b) turn left and follow the path uphill to The Ridgeway.

9a) Follow the bridleway down through the field to Chilswell Farm. At the bottom, do not leave the field but turn right and walk with the hedge on your left. This is the bridleway you walked along earlier. Go through a gate and keep to the path with the hedge on your left. When you reach the second gate (mentioned in point 4) above, re-trace your steps back to the starting point.

9b) Follow the bridleway between the fields. It then goes down and up in some woodland. After a walking next to a stretch of brick wall on your left, you will come to The Ridgeway, a private road. Turn left and walk with care to the end of the road near Foxcombe Hall and the starting point.

Note
This route can also be included as part of a longer walk using the network of public rights of way in the western hills. These are shown on online maps and on the Ordnance Survey map for Oxford, sheet 180.

How to get to the start
There is no longer a bus service to Boars Hill.

You can walk to Boars Hill from South Hinksey, or from Harcourt Hill from where there is a regular service with the Brookes Bus.

Parking
There is informal parking available at the end of The Ridgeway near Foxcombe Hall and along Berkeley Road. Please be considerate - do not park on the verges or obstruct the residents’ access.
We would like to thank our funders, TOE2, Grundon Waste Management, the Cooper Charitable Trust and our local supporters for their generosity which made it possible to create this walk.