

OXFORD PRESERVATION TRUST

OPT circular walks

Since its foundation in 1926, Oxford Preservation Trust has sought to protect the city's beautiful green setting. Over the years, by purchase and through gifts, it has become the owner of 650 acres of land, some let to tenants and some maintained by the Trust as a public amenity. In the case of tenanted land, wherever compatible with agricultural use, public access is preserved, and these routes through Trust-owned land and on public and permitted footpaths have been devised to encourage everyone to enjoy a walk in the countryside.

Please be careful to shut gates and to keep dogs under control, particularly where there is livestock.

Dreaming Spires Walk

This circular walk is about 2½ miles and takes about an hour at a steady pace.

Getting to the start

Boars Hill lies to the south of Oxford. At the right road junction with the A34 to Abingdon take the road signposted Boars Hill and Wootton (Hinksey Hill). At the top of the hill turn off to the right, signposted Wootton, and after about 1 mile turn right into Berkeley Road, signposted Old Boars Hill and Youlbury. Park in the layby either next to Foxcombe Hall in Berkeley Road, or a few yards further on, on the left at Bus Stop Corner, just after the gates to The Ridgeway private road.

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.

Join us by becoming a member

www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk

OXFORD PRESERVATION TRUST

The route

1 Start at the kissing gate into the Old Berkeley Golf Course by the Oxford Preservation Trust information board, opposite the campus for Peking University's Business School. 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 of 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.

Join us by becoming a member

www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk

OXFORD PRESERVATION TRUST

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?—
Thyrsis, 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 *Thyrsis*:

"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.

Join us by becoming a member

www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk

OXFORD PRESERVATION TRUST



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.

Join us by becoming a member
www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk