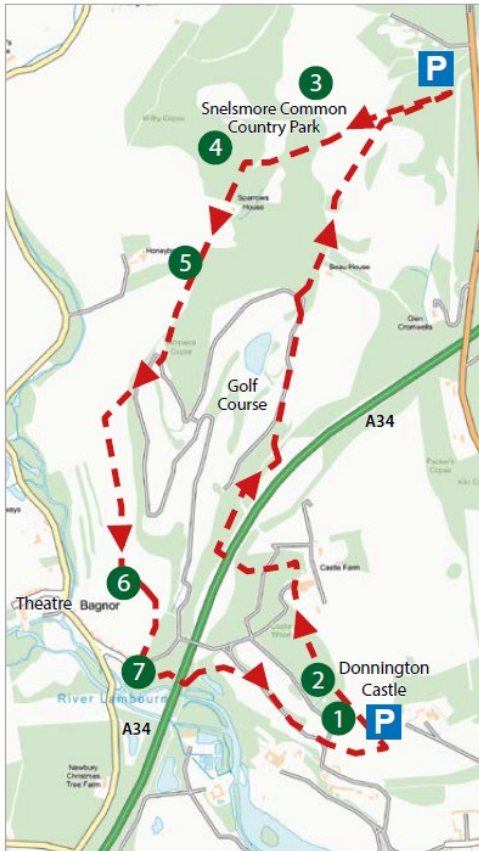


Castle, Heath and River

About 3¼ miles or 5¼ km

Exploring Donnington Castle, Snelsmore and the River Lambourn. Starting and finishing at Donnington Castle car park. There is a short steep hill from the car park to the castle and a long moderate hill from Bagnor back to the castle. There are pubs in both Bagnor and Donnington.



Donnington Castle from the car park

1. **Donnington Castle** occupies both a strong tactical position on its steep sided ridge and an important strategic position at the junction of the east-west route from London to Bristol and the south-north route from Southampton to the midlands. There has probably been some sort of castle here since at least 1086. It was a key site during the Civil War (1642-46) and was besieged by the Parliamentary forces for twenty months. The earthworks around the castle were constructed by the Royalists

at the beginning of the siege. The castle was not important during the first Battle of Newbury on 20th September 1643 but played a key role during the second Battle on 26th and 27th of October 1644.



The Civil War fortifications



Ancient Pollard

2. This **Ancient Pollard** has a girth of 6.5m and is about 500 years old. It would have been here during the siege.

3. **Snelsmore Common Country Park** is a lowland heath and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a rarity not only in West Berkshire but nationally. The acid gravelly soils lying over clay have ensured that the Common was never cultivated but it has been important to the local communities as a source of fuel and grazing for thousands of years. The grazing prevented the regrowth of trees. During World War 2 the Common was used to store ammunition and equipment – hence the concrete roads. Gravel was quarried to make the concrete and 'Spooky Hollow' was a result! The Common is rich in wildlife.

The flora has several heathers and some unusual flowers. There are nightjars, roe deer and adders and in the wet mires there are newts and sundews.



Spooky Hollow

4. **Spooky Hollow** is a sheltered spot for a coffee break. Sadly, the benches are gone.

5. The **sunken track** past Ashridge Copse is the ancient link for Bagnor people using the Common for grazing and other resources. Note the large oak, ash and hazel coppice stools growing on the bank. Some of these are hundreds of years old.

6. **Bagnor** existed in 1086 and had one watermill. The Watermill Theatre was opened in an abandoned mill in 1969.

7. The **River Lambourn** is a chalk stream. There are only 200 chalk streams in the whole world and they have very special communities of plants, fish, insects and other wildlife. We shamefully neglect and abuse our chalk streams. The Winterbourne joins the Lambourn here.



The River Lambourn

Dick Greenaway, Terry Crawford