

A Bracing Walk above Compton

4.5 miles/7k of well-defined tracks over the Downs from Compton. Park in the village or, if using it, in the car park of The Swan at Compton opposite the village shop SU520 799 uttering.warms.wishes OS Explorer 170

From the Swan/village shop, follow Horn Street to the east of the pub, bearing right into Wallingford Road at the junction.

1. The pleasant cottages of Compton line Horn Street as it runs north to reach Roden House (once Stokes Manor), following the lowest part of the northern source of the River Pang. Behind the old roadside wall with its handmade bricks is the flat area of the Great Pond (probably once a mill pond) where withies were once cut for basket making. In very wet winters, springs still rise here and occasionally flood the road.

Walk along Wallingford Road until a railway bridge can be seen on the right. Pass under the bridge bearing left on the track. Follow this as it then bears right and rises gently uphill to the Downs.



© Geograph – Graham-Horn

2. The Didcot Newbury and Southampton Junction Railway was built around 1880. In both World Wars it carried heavy military traffic to the south coast ports. It closed in 1964. Part of the track now forms the Eling Way path between Hampstead Norreys and Hermitage.

3. The Slad (the valley through which the stream and railway run north/south) was carved by glacial ice and water and

held an extensive Romano-British settlement. There was almost certainly a Roman villa in the immediate area but no site for this has yet been found.



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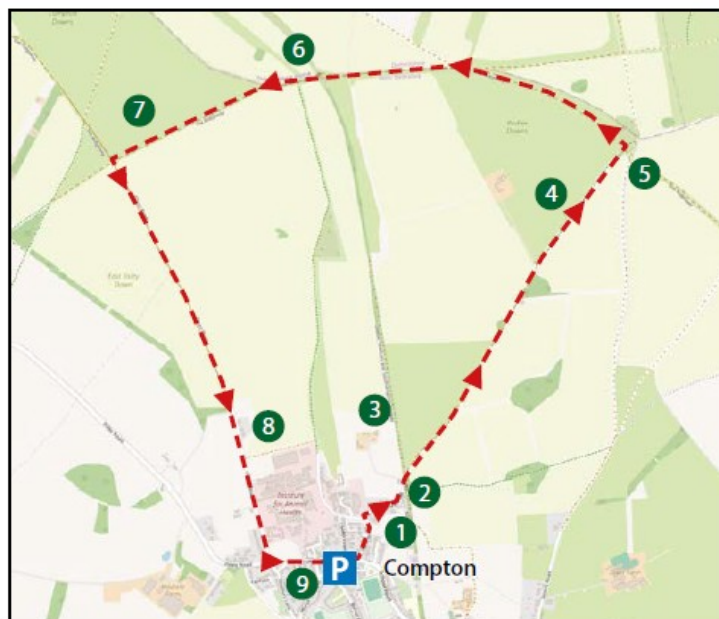
4. Roden Down is the site of a Roman cemetery where coins and skeletons in lead and wooden coffins have been excavated. The surprisingly intimate landscape around the trees and spinneys, and the wide views to the west over the Berkshire Downs, once made this a popular picnic spot.

At the major junction of tracks, turn left to take the Ridgeway Trail to the west.

5. The wide trackside verges here have a rich chalk grassland flora with many insects and birds to be seen and heard. Lowbury Hill, with its Roman temple site and Saxon burial mound, is a short detour to the north-east.

Where a track from the right (the Fair Mile) joins, keep left downhill and fork left at the next junction.

6. Ahead in the near distance are the buildings of Churn Rifle Range and to the right as you cross the old railway line the widened area of track bed marks the position of Churn Halt. This very isolated single platform was built as a temporary stop to accommodate a shooting competition in 1888. Subsequently, military summer camps were established nearby



using the halt as the only access. Trains would not call at Churn unless prior notice had been given to the Didcot stationmaster.

Cross the disused railway on the bridge and walk on up the Ridgeway keeping straight on (right) at the first junction and left at the next, to walk beside gallops to your right.

7. The gallops belong to one of the many stables in the area training horses for the 'Sport of Kings'. The open downland makes ideal terrain for racing practice where trainers can assess horses' potential and fitness levels.

On reaching the farm track turn left and follow it back to the village.

8. The road passes Superity Farm and the site of a long-established agricultural research station (now defunct), which in latter years housed the Institute of Animal Health.

9. The history of the village of Compton (from the Old English cumb and tun – valley with enclosed settlement) can be



© Geograph – Stefan Czapski

traced from at least as far back as the Bronze Age. In Saxon times, two manors existed with about 30 tenants and 8 slaves recorded in the Domesday survey working 450 acres. West Compton Manor (c.15th century) is passed on the left of the High Street, to the south of which flows the West Pang. This water source and the sheltered valley site probably allowed the development of the large village and its manors.

Turn left on the High Street to return to the pub/village shop.

Margery Slatter

**A Merry Christmas
and Happy New Year
to all our members
and readers!**