



Avebury lies on the A4 between Marlborough and Calne. Turn into the village at the Beckhampton roundabout and park in the National Trust car park. This walk is c6 miles and should take you about 3 hours. Ready? Let's go...

Avebury was first settled in Neolithic times, c4,600 years ago. The ancient landscape has been actively managed for millennia, but is increasingly under threat: in the 19th century c18% of the North Wessex Downs was chalk downland - today this has reduced to just c3%.

The stone circles you will see on this walk are thought to be part of a circle-building tradition in Britain, Ireland and Brittany in the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (3300-900 BCE). Nobody knows exactly why they were built, but archaeologists have wondered if the stones symbolised mystical beings for the builders.

1. From the car park, walk towards the henge (well signed). Turn right into the High Street, enter the henge via the first gate on your right and follow the sarsen stone and ditch circle. What does the word 'henge' actually refer to?
2. Cross the road and head along the fence past the trees. Go through the gate, cross the road to reach the lines of stones, West Kennet Avenue. These led to a second timber and stone circle, the Sanctuary. What is the connection between the Avenue and marmelade?

3. At the end of the reconstructed section of the Avenue, cross the road and follow the footpath straight ahead. Look out for the only remaining stone of Falkner's Circle in the hedgerow on your left. Who was Falkner?
4. Continue on this footpath until you reach a crossroads. Follow the marker pointing right and up along the track. As you climb the slope, you should be able to see Silbury Hill. Silbury is a prehistoric artificial chalk mound standing 129ft high, the tallest prehistoric man-made mound in Europe and one of the largest in the world. Do you know any of the legends associated with it?
5. Around you, you can see several clumps of trees planted on the brow of the hills. 19th-century landowners planted these trees – do you know what their local nickname is?
6. Stay on this path until it meets the Ridgeway. This ancient track, believed to be in use for more than 5,000 years, runs from Avebury across the Thames and along the ridge of the Chilterns as far as Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire. It has always been used as a droving route to take animals from the country to London and the Midlands. During the Iron Age, local people built hill forts along it to help defend it as a trading route; after the Romans left Britain, the route was often used by armies. When and why was the current track's route laid down?
7. Turn right for a short detour to explore Overton Hill barrow cemetery. Barrows are earth burial mounds – these ones date from c4,200 years ago and are

some of the best preserved in the UK. Do you know the Latin name for barrows?

8. See if you can spot the path of a Roman road running across the field, then turn back along the Ridgeway, going towards the junction with the *Herepath*, an Anglo-Saxon term for an army road. Turn left, heading downhill. What is the other name for this road, and why was it important?
9. Passing through the banks of the henge, go through the gate on your right into the north-east sector of the henge. Cross the road at the gateway behind the huge Cove stones round the north-west part of the henge. Can you guess the approximate weight of the largest Cove stone?

Back in the farmyard, turn left onto the footpath to return to the car park, or right to explore the Alexander Keiller museum.

Congratulations - you've reached the end of this CPRE walk! If you enjoyed it – do check out more walks at:

<https://www.cprewiltshire.org.uk/category/days-out/>

Many thanks to the members and volunteers of CPRE Wiltshire who kindly contributed their expertise to this local walk.



~ ANSWERS ~

1. The henge is the huge round bank and ditch which wraps around the stone circle. At one time the henge's ditch had sides more than 30ft deep and a bank 13ft high.
2. The Scottish archaeologist Alexander Keiller was heir to the marmalade business of James Keiller & Son, and also a pioneering aerial photographer, businessman and philanthropist. He used his inheritance to buy 950 acres of land in Avebury for preservation, and in the 1930s led excavations, re-erected stones and created the museum.
3. The earliest known report of the Falkner's Circle site came from a Mr Falkner, who discovered it in 1840 while riding nearby. Only one stone of the original 12 remains, the others were removed in the last century to improve the opportunities for farming.
4. There are several legends linked to Silbury Hill. It is said to be the last resting place of a King Sil, represented in a lifesize gold statue and sitting on a golden horse. Another story claims that the Devil was carrying a bag of soil to drop on the citizens of Marlborough, but was prevented from doing so by the priests of nearby Avebury!
5. They are known as 'hedgehogs' for obvious reasons!

6. The current track was marked out in the 18th century when the open downland was split up into fields.
7. The Latin word for barrow is *tumulus* (plural *tumuli*), meaning a mound of earth and stones raised over a grave or graves. Tumuli are also known as burial mounds or kurgans. The word comes from the Latin for mound or small hill, and shares the root *tum-* "to bulge, swell," with the word *tumour*.
8. The road was also known as Green Street and first appeared on the *Gough Map* in the 14th century. It was important because it was a means of transporting cloth and wool from Wiltshire to London and eastern England. Once coach travel began, the road became even more important as the link between London and Bath (the first advertisement for the coach journey appeared in 1657). By the 18th century, there was so much traffic, the Bath road was one of the first Wiltshire roads to charge a toll at a turnpike.
9. The largest Cove stone weighs at least 100 tonnes; both are made from a tough sandstone called *sarsen*.



The countryside charity
Wiltshire

COUNTRY WALK: AVEBURY

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