

## WALK 3

### *The Bedwyns*

<b>Distance</b>	13 miles (20.9km) or 9½ miles (15.3km)
<b>Time</b>	5½ hours or 4 hours
<b>Grade</b>	2
<b>Map</b>	OS Explorers 157 and 158/Landranger 174
<b>Start/finish</b>	Great Bedwyn Wharf car park on east side of canal (SU281644)
<b>Public transport</b>	Trains to Great Bedwyn, bus links to Hungerford and Marlborough
<b>Refreshments</b>	Little Bedwyn – The Harrow Inn (01672 870871); Shalbourne – Plough Inn (01672 870295); Wilton – Swan Inn (01672 870274); Crofton – shop selling refreshments at museum (opening times only); Great Bedwyn – The Cross Keys (01672 870678); The Three Tuns (01672 870280)

A fairly level route starting out from Great Bedwyn and passing through both Little Bedwyn and Shalbourne before heading through the wooded countryside of Bedwyn Brail, a remnant of Savernake Forest, to reach the little village of Wilton. The return leg follows the Kennet and Avon Canal from Crofton, which runs parallel to the railway line from London to the Westcountry. During the walk there is the opportunity to look at Wilton Windmill and the Cornish beam engines at Crofton, both of which are open to the public.

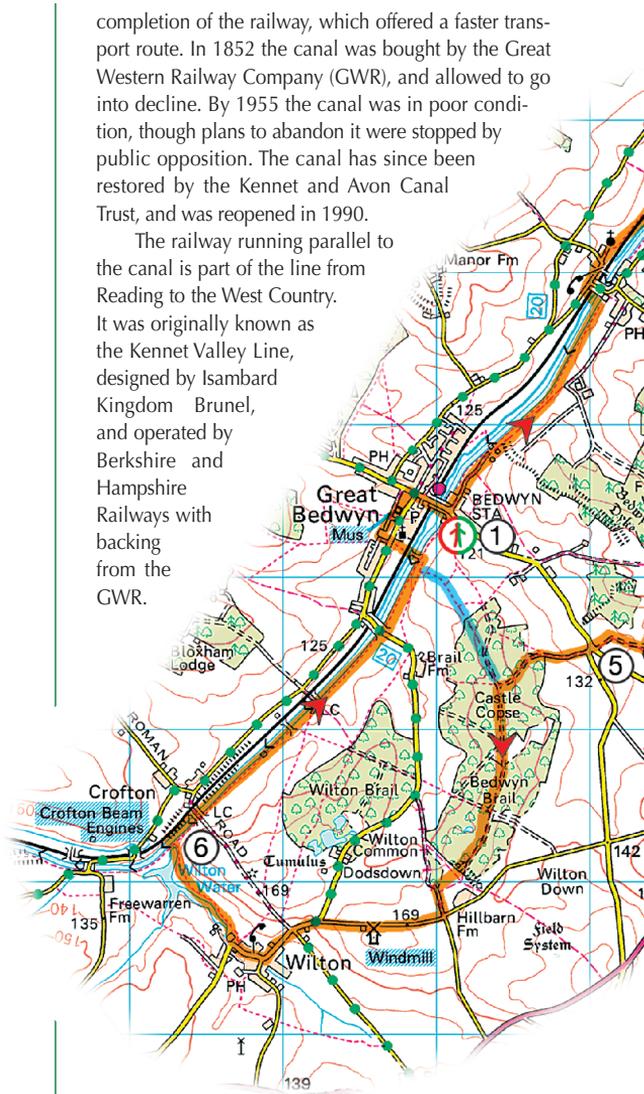
The **Kennet and Avon Canal** was formed by the joining of two waterways in the early 19th century. The Kennet Navigation from the Thames at Reading to Newbury was built in 1724, and the Avon Navigation from Bath to Bristol was completed three years later. In 1794 an Act of Parliament authorising the building of the connection between Newbury and Bath received Royal Assent, and in 1810 the canal was completed. Transporting goods along the canal proved successful for 40 years until the

This walk can be shortened by missing out Wilton and Crofton.

## WALKING IN THE THAMES VALLEY

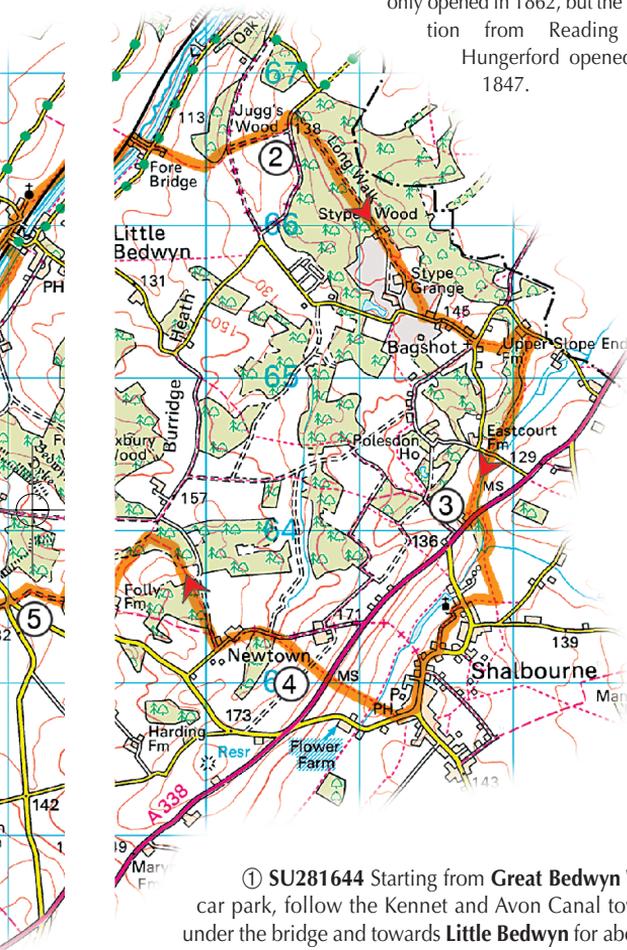
completion of the railway, which offered a faster transport route. In 1852 the canal was bought by the Great Western Railway Company (GWR), and allowed to go into decline. By 1955 the canal was in poor condition, though plans to abandon it were stopped by public opposition. The canal has since been restored by the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust, and was reopened in 1990.

The railway running parallel to the canal is part of the line from Reading to the West Country. It was originally known as the Kennet Valley Line, designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, and operated by Berkshire and Hampshire Railways with backing from the GWR.



**WALK 3 – THE BEDWYNS**

The section from Hungerford to Devizes only opened in 1862, but the section from Reading to Hungerford opened in 1847.



① **SU281644** Starting from **Great Bedwyn Wharf** car park, follow the Kennet and Avon Canal towpath under the bridge and towards **Little Bedwyn** for about 1¼ miles (2km). Cross over the canal and railway using the footbridge and turn right along the road; at the junction bear right towards **St Michael's Church**.

## WALKING IN THE THAMES VALLEY



*The Kennet and Avon  
Canal at Great  
Bedwyn*

**Little Bedwyn**, a small village straddling the River Dun, Kennet and Avon Canal and the railway, was known as Estbedwinda in 1177 and Lyttelbedwyn in 1547. St Michael's Church dates from the 12th century, though most of what is seen today is 15th century with 19th-century alterations. Much of the village was built around 1860, just before the arrival of the railway.

Just before the churchyard, turn right through the kissing gate and follow the hedge round to the left, keeping the church on your left. Continue ahead through Sandy's Wood, cross the stile and follow the path along the right-hand field edge. Turn right at the field corner, cross the railway line (*with care*) and go over the canal. Continue straight on across the road following a gravel track, later a path, up past **Jugg's Cottage**. Keep to the slightly sunken path as it first climbs and then descends, bearing left round **Jugg's Wood**. At the track junction go straight over, heading eastwards up along the hedged bridleway.

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② **SU305666** At the T-junction go left along the track, and shortly after the right-hand bend turn right over two stiles to follow a gravel track, **Long Walk**, gently uphill through **Stype Wood**. Shortly after passing a house on the right bear slightly left, away from the track, to reach a gate. Follow the white posts across the open field, keeping left of **Stype Grange**, and cross a stile in the field corner just right of some cottages to join a lane. Turn left and, at the junction, cross slightly to the left and follow a path over the field before bearing half-left through trees. Continue between the disused farm buildings and turn right along the lane for a short distance, and just after the last barn go right at the gate (overgrown stile). Follow the path, keeping close to the edge of **Westcott Copse** on the right and, at the end of the wood, keep ahead over the field to cross two stiles either side of a metallised drive. Follow the right-hand bank of the **River Shalbourne** and bear left at the junction, just before some buildings, to reach the road (A338).

③ **SU317641** Cross the road and turn left over the bridge, then right to follow a path along the left-hand bank of the river. At the overgrown stile in the field corner cross the footbridge and continue through the field with the ditch on the right. At the junction turn right over the field aiming for the church. Cross the stile and follow the drive past the house down to Mill Lane in **Shalbourne**; continue along the lane opposite, up towards **St Michael's Church**.

The name **Shalbourne** is derived from the Anglo-Saxon words *scealde burna* meaning 'shallow stream', and watercress was once grown here in the clear waters. The oldest part of St Michael's and All Angels Church is the nave with two 12th-century lancet windows and a Norman doorway. Inside there are several interesting monuments, including a plaque commemorating Jethro Tull (1674–1741). Tull, who was born at Basildon and lived at Prosperous Home Farm, was a pioneer of British agricultural

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reform and invented both the horse-drawn hoe and drilling machine, forerunner of the modern seed drill.

Turn left at the church along the fenced path to reach **Kingston Lane** next to a school. Go right along the road through the village, and bear right at the Y-junction along Burr Lane; the **Plough Inn** is ahead on the right. Immediately after the last house cross the stile on the right, and follow the right-hand field edge; cross another stile and footbridge at the far side of the field. Continue uphill to the right of the hedge and then go through a hedge gap to reach the road (A338).

④ **SU308631** Cross over and up the bank to follow a waymarked path over the field. Turn left along the concrete track passing the wood and bear left and right round the front of **Newtown Farm**, then left along the lane. Turn right along the metalled bridleway; ignore the bridleway off to the left, and continue ahead through the wood. Just after passing the open field on the left, turn left along the bridleway through the wood. On emerging from the trees, turn left along the field edge and at the corner go through the belt of trees and turn right along a path. Keep straight on to reach a field and then follow the edge of the pine plantation on your left downhill, bearing left. At the bottom of the field bear slightly right across the field to pass between the two stands of trees, and continue towards **Folly Farm**. Turn right along the lane (bridleway) to reach a road at a Y-junction.

⑤ **SU290635** Cross both roads and follow a path on the left-hand side of a stand of trees, with hedges/fences on either side. Keep to the path as it bears left into **Bedwyn Brail** woodland and reach a cross-tracks junction.

**Bedwyn Brail** Several places in the area bear the name 'brail', a word used to describe an enclosed park, or wood, stocked with deer; Bedwyn Brail was once part of the great hunting forest of Savernake. The brail is the site of a home that Edward Seymour, Warden of Savernake and Lord Protector 1547–49 in the reign of

*WALK 3 – THE BEDWYNS*

*Wilton Windmill built in 1821*



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Edward IV, was building at the time of his execution in 1552, and also of a former Roman villa; nothing remains of either.

### Shorter walk

Turn right along the track and keep left at the split; leave the wood and follow the left field boundary. Later walk downhill and bear right to join the canal towpath beside a bridge, where you pick up the final section of the main walk.

To continue on the main walk, turn left along a well-defined track signposted to the windmill, ignoring any tracks off to right or left for about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile (1.2km). Go through the gate and turn half-right for about 40m to where the track splits; take the left-hand path, keeping close to the fence on the left. At the T-junction turn left along the track and then right along the road towards Wilton, passing Wilton Windmill on the left.

**Wilton Windmill**, which stands on a chalk ridge at 170m (550ft), was built in 1821 and is the oldest working mill in Wiltshire, still producing stoneground wholemeal flour (on sale). Built from brick, the mill has a fantail that keeps the sails aligned with the wind, acting as an automatic rudder. The mill is open from Easter until the end of September on Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays 2–5pm (01672 870202).

Continue down to **Wilton** with its thatched-and-timber-framed cottages, and bear right past **The Swan Inn** along the road for Grafton and Burbage. Just before the left-hand bend, next to the duck pond, turn right for a few metres through the hedge gap and then left, following a track past **Wilton Water** to reach the canal.

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**Detour**

Take a detour to visit the **Crofton Pump House Museum** (shop selling refreshments when open). Turn left and cross the canal via the lock gates, then follow the path under the railway and up the steps to the pump house, which was designed by John Rennie, the Kennet and Avon Canal company's chief engineer. The two Cornish beam engines, built in 1812 and 1846, are driven by steam from a hand-stoked coal-fired Lancashire boiler, making them two of the oldest working steam-driven pumps in the world. They were originally used to pump water up from Wilton Water (a small lake built in 1836) to the summit of the canal. After a considerable amount of restoration work, Crofton was officially reopened by Sir John Betjeman in 1970. The museum is open at weekends from Easter to October; on Bank Holidays one of the pumps is usually 'in steam' (01672 870300). Retrace your steps back across the canal to rejoin the route.

*Crofton Pump House  
on the Kennet and  
Avon Canal*

⑥ **SU263622** Follow the towpath northeast towards **Great Bedwyn** for 1½ miles (2.4km). On reaching Great

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Bedwyn Bridge, just after passing Lock 64, leave the tow-path and cross the bridge over the canal (**shorter walk rejoins here**). Go through the gates either side of the railway line (*care required*) to follow a path across the field and then along the side of the churchyard wall. Go over the V-stile on the right and continue past the **Church of St Mary the Virgin** and the well-preserved preaching cross.

In Saxon times **Great Bedwyn** was known as Bedanheaford – meaning ‘the graves head’ – and was the residence of the Saxon chief Cissa. By the time of the Domesday Book (1086) the town was known as Bedewinde and was held by the king. The Church of St Mary the Virgin (dating from 1092, though most of what is visible is from the 12th/13th centuries) is one of the largest in the area. Inside is an impressive monument to Sir John Seymour, father of Jane Seymour who married King Henry VIII in 1536. She died in 1537 shortly after the birth of their son, who later became Edward VI. The church also holds the stone figure of a knight, believed to be Sir Adam de Stokke (d. 1313), and the tomb of Sir Roger de Stokke (d. 1333), son of Sir Adam. Also in the village is Lloyd’s Stonemason’s Museum. Run by the descendants of Benjamin Lloyd, the original mason to the Kennet and Avon Canal Company, the museum traces the fascinating history of stonemasonry. The museum is open to members of the public during work hours.

Go through the gate and along the road towards the village, passing the Stonemason’s Museum on the left. At the T-junction, with **The Cross Keys** pub ahead, turn right down **Brook Street**, passing the railway station on the left. Cross over the railway and canal to reach the car park on the right.