

A short history of the Westbury White Horse!

The image of the white horse carved into the chalk below Bratton Castle is visible for miles around, but its true origins are unknown. It is also one of the best situated, being high on a very steep slope and overlooking a marvellous panoramic view.

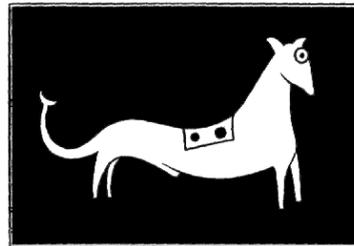
Local legend tells that it commemorates the Battle of Ethandun in 878 when King Alfred the Great defeated the Danes.

It is known that the present outline was formed in 1778 and replaced an earlier, cruder, version which faced the opposite way. The new carving was carried out on the orders of Mr Gee and may have been to provide a more aesthetic view for the owner of Heywood House. Cut into the chalk, the horse originally had to be scoured regularly to keep it white. The last recorded scouring took place in 1853 but in the late 1950s, the horse was “preserved” by covering it in white-painted concrete which was repeated in 1995.

The earliest reference to the horse comes in the early eighteenth

century and may support the other theory for its origin; that it was created to show loyalty to the Hanoverian succession – a white horse being the symbol of the House of Hanover.

Next to the White Horse is Bratton Camp. The earthwork defences of an Iron Age fort were built at Bratton Camp over 2,000 years ago.



The original horse as recorded in 1772

Westbury Heritage Society was formed in 1992 and is a key component in making residents and visitors aware of the rich history and heritage of this former mill town. Its principal aim is to provide a variety of ways for the community to best engage with its heritage.

Find us in the historic Westbury Library in Edward Street where visitors can access the society's interesting collections, artefacts and the archive of old photos and newspaper clippings.



White Horse Walk

An exhilarating downland walk to a famous white horse

Distance: 4 miles (6.4 km)

Level of difficulty: Medium

Minimum time: 2 hrs 30 min

Ascent/gradient: 557 ft (170 m)

Paths: Field paths and downland tracks, 1 stile

Landscape: Downland

Suggested map: aqua3 OS Explorer 143 Warminster & Trowbridge

Start/Finish: ST 914523 (Bratton)

Dog friendliness: Let dogs off lead at top of Westbury Hill

Parking: Jubilee Hall in Tynings Lane, Bratton, just off B3098

Public toilets: None on route



Directions

1. In Bratton, turn right out of the car park to the B3098. Turn left, then almost immediately left again up Butts Lane.

Fork right into Upper Garston Lane by the Oratory of St. Giles then, just before the lane dips, take the path left, waymarked to the church.

Descend steps, cross a brook, then climb steps to the church gates. Take the narrow path right and ascend through trees. Ignore the stile on your left and climb the stile ahead into pasture at the base of downland.

2. Follow the permissive path half-right up the field, passing through a belt of trees, then climb diagonally up the scarp slope to the fence at the top. Keep right alongside the fence, go through a gate, then turn right through a metal gate to follow a sunken track around the top of Combe Bottom.

At the lane, turn left uphill and soon take the track, right on to the outer rampart of Bratton Camp. Bear right to follow the outer rampart path to reach the Westbury White Horse hill figure.

3. Shortly, leave the rampart and pass through a gate on to Westbury Hill. Keep to the path, passing benches and a viewpoint pillar and soon reach a track. Turn left, pass the car park entrance and turn right at the T-junction. Pass White Horse Farm and turn left along the track to join the Imber Range Perimeter Path.

4. Keep to the track for 3/4 mile (1.2 km) to a barn and take the bridle path left through a gate. Follow the track past a copse into a field and keep to the left-hand edge to a gate. Bear right steeply

down a sunken track towards Bratton. Go through a gate and descend through trees and keep ahead on reaching a metalled lane. Turn left at the T-junction, then bear left up a cobbled path (The Ball) between cottages. At the road, keep left back to the hall and car park.

What to Look For:

Make sure to pause at the viewpoint pillar on Westbury Hill, especially on a clear day, as you will be surprised just how far reaching the view is. Walk this way in spring and early summer to see the grassy downland summit and slopes alive with chalk-loving plants, such as bird's foot trefoil and butterflies like the Chalkhill Blue.

While you're there:

Make the short trip east along the B3098 to Edington to see the impressive cathedral-like Church of St Mary, St Katherine and All Saints. It is an architectural treasure, built in 1351 as part of a priory founded by William of Edington, Bishop of Winchester, for Augustinian monks. There is much to marvel at including a rare wooden screen of 1500 and one of the oldest clocks in England.