

Access Opportunities on the Defence Estate

Salisbury Plain Wiltshire



A long distance circular walk around the Imber Live Firing Range giving views across Salisbury Plain and the surrounding Wiltshire and Somerset countryside.

Distance: 30 miles (48km)

Duration: Two/three days to walk the complete circuit

Grade: ▲▲▲ (if attempting the whole circuit over a two/three day period)

OS map sheet(s)

OS Landranger Sheets 183 & 184 (1:50,000)

OS Explorer Sheets 130 & 143 (1:25,000)

Starting Grid Reference: GR 893 509

Site description / history

Salisbury Plain Army Training Estate (ATE SP) is one of the most well known areas of all the MOD land. The Army has been connected with Salisbury Plain since 1897 and the total area of the current estate is just over 38,000 hectares. It is 25 miles by 10 miles (40km by 16km) and occupies about one ninth of the area of Wiltshire. In terms of land use, much of the land is let to farmers or is grazed under licence. Approximately 12,150 hectares of the land is used for live firing and as impact areas. Public access is permanently restricted in certain areas for safety reasons. This includes the Imber Live Firing Area which is closed permanently, although the roads from Gore Cross to Warminster and Bratton to Heytesbury via Imber are opened to the public on a number of days each year. Also, a church service is held in Imber village every September.

ATE SP provides walkers with the opportunity to see an archaeological landscape which is of unparalleled importance in Northern Europe. On the whole of ATE SP, there are some 2,300 ancient monuments including features dating back to 4000 BC, with more recent Roman settlements. The most important of these are given protection by 12 Archaeological Site Group management plans, covering one third of ATE SP. Salisbury Plain has one of the densest concentrations of long and round barrows in Britain.

Salisbury Plain is especially important for its ancient 'flower-rich' chalk grassland and contains 40% of the remaining area of this habitat in the UK. ATE SP also provides a refuge for rare plants such as the purple milk-vetch and tuberous thistle and uncommon fauna including four rare species of butterfly and the Fairy Shrimp, a crustacean of national importance. There are six Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the area and the majority of ATE SP falls within these and an area of Special Landscape Value. Roe deer are numerous and are often seen by day.

Walk description

The 30 mile (48km) circular walk follows the perimeter of the Imber Firing Range Danger Area (Imber Range Perimeter Path - IRPP). The route is marked with waymarkers following mostly defined tracks and paths. However, it is strongly recommended that an OS 1:25,000 map is used at all times along with this website as there are certain sections of the walk where the route is not entirely clear on the ground or waymarked. It must be noted that there are additional concrete MOD roads on the ground not shown on the OS Explorer maps, so care should be taken to ensure that you are on the designated route. It is possible to start the walk from various points along the route where there are car parking facilities and access to local transport. This description starts from the ridge above the Westbury White Horse **A** and describes the complete circuit. It is possible however to just do short sections of the circuit.

Section A-D

Starting just above the White Horse **A** (GR 893 509) head southwestwards along a gravel track past the chalk quarry for about 1.25 miles (2km). At Upton Cow Down **B** (GR 878 488) cross a stile and head southeastwards down the field until you link up with another gravel track. The route is signposted at this point. Continue along the gravelly and grassy track until you reach the golf course on Cradle Hill. The route takes you along the edge of of the golf course,



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traversing the hill. Descend through a narrow wooded path to meet a small road junction **C**. Bear left at this junction and continue along the road until you see signs for Elms Hill. This takes you through the residential area of Warminster Camp. On reaching the main road into the Camp, turn left and follow the road up the hill. There are signposts for the IRPP on the right, which directs you up and across Oxendean Down. Traverse around Oxendean Down, continuing on to Battlesbury Hill and eastwards on towards Middle Hill. The route traverses around the southern side of Middle Hill and then descends down to a road. From here the route is signposted, and directs you around the southern side of Scratchbury Hill, gently ascending the hill. Continue to follow the signs for the IRPP southwards across fields towards Cotley Hill. Continue in a southeasterly direction on towards a woodland and then on down to a road **D**. At this point it is possible to continue on the route or head right towards Heytesbury.

Section D-G

From **D** the route continues left along the road heading up towards West Hill. Just before East Hill Farm, the route directs you to the right along a track. Continue along this track until you reach a concrete road (this road is not marked on the OS Explorer map Sheet 143). Follow this concrete road until the crest of the hill where the road begins to bend and there are some white bollards. At this point take the grassy track off to the left. The route is signposted at this point. Care should be taken as the route follows the Danger Area boundary closely here. Stay on the grassy track and continue easterly past Knook Barrow and Knook Castle crossing over a byway, and a concrete road (not shown on OS Explorer map Sheet 143). At GR 970 448 the path heads southeasterly across Breakheart Hill down through a wooded area and on to Chitterne **E**. At Chitterne, turn left on to the B390 through the village until you reach a road junction signposted left to Tilshead. Follow this route towards the church. After a few hundred metres you will see a signpost directing the IRPP to the right. Continue along the track gently ascending the hill through a residential area.

This track continues up the hill and on towards the mock German Village. Continue, keeping the telegraph poles and village on your left. There is no obvious

track through the grass, but you should stick to the grass rather than to the tracks as they could be in use by military vehicles. Continue past the village and shortly after it bear north easterly, crossing a track and continue through the scrubby grassland. The path is not well defined on the ground at this point, but there are signposts further along the route. Continue past the Trig Point on your right and on to a dirt track which takes you down towards Tilshead **F**. Accommodation is available in Tilshead.

At Tilshead **F** turn left on to the A360 and continue through the village until reaching the road to Chitterne to the left. Continue along this road gently ascending, until you reach a sign for the IRPP to the right. Continue westwards through the field until GR 020 476 when the route heads northwards. Care should be taken at this point to stick closely to the path and not to deviate to the left handside of any of the Danger Area signs. There are also a lot of concrete tracks on the ground, which are not shown on the OS map Sheet 143, so careful map reading is required. At GR 014 493, the OS map shows the path directed to the left. There has since been a route diversion and the path continues straight ahead at this point towards Lavington Down and on towards Gore Cross **G** (GR 009 508). At Gore Cross, there are bus routes which can take you up to West Lavington where you can find accommodation.



Section G-A

At Gore Cross **G** (GR 009 508) turn left on to the A360 and continue for a few hundred metres, turning left on to a track and then right following the signs for New Zealand Farm. Continue along this metalled road, up the hill. Follow the road along the boundary of the Danger Area for about one hour. You will pass New Zealand farm on your left. The IRPP is signposted along this road. At GR 950 530 you will come to a road junction; take the gravel track to the right and continue along here. At GR 942 530, the path bears



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off to the left **H** and takes you across a stile following closely the field boundary for about 5/8 mile (1km). At the end of the field turn left on to a road, then right to follow a track up a hill past some farm buildings. Shortly after these buildings the path takes you left along a grassy track for about half a mile (0.8km) towards a checkpoint at the boundary of the Danger Area **I**. At this point turn right and continue along the road for about another 2 miles (3.2km).

This brings you to another checkpoint. Turn right here and continue past the start of the chalk quarry on your left back to the start of the walk **A**.

Points of interest

- The impressive Iron Age hillfort of Battlesbury, Bratton Iron Age Hill Fort **A** and Scratchbury Hills.
- Battlesbury and Scratchbury overlook Warminster and are adorned by prominent hillforts guarding the entrance to the Wyle Valley.
- The White Horse carved into the hillside at Westbury **A**, dating from 1778. There is evidence of an earlier, more primitive design before the existing one.
- Superb views across Salisbury Plain and the surrounding countryside of Wiltshire and Somerset.
- There are attractive villages near the route which have various pubs and shops including: Tilshead **F** which has good examples of buildings with flint and stone chequer pattern; and Edington, which is said to be the site of the Battle of Ethandune where King Alfred defeated the Danes.
- In summer there is an abundance of flowers including wild orchids. All year round there is a good variety of birds with Stonechats and Tree Pipits in the summer; and occasional Hen Harriers and Barn Owls at dusk in the winter.

Restrictions / access times

Access is available at all times to the IRPP. However, no access is allowed to the Imber Live Firing Area and all Danger Area notices and safety signs must be obeyed at all times. You may meet Army personnel engaging in military exercises whilst out walking. These activities are unlikely to affect your walk, but please follow any instructions from military personnel. Byelaws and safety points are posted regularly around entry points to the Range. The local press, parish notice boards and magazines also carry access information.

Safety

- Please follow the IRPP symbols at all times:
- Visitors are asked to comply at all times with the Byelaws which are displayed on the Range Warning Noticeboards at various points around the IRPP.
- No public access is allowed to the Imber Live Firing Range Danger Area. Sections of the perimeter path follow the edge of the Danger Area and care should be taken to follow the defined route and not go past the warning notices into the Danger Area.
- Visitors must comply with the instructions of military personnel at all times.
- No camping or fires are allowed.
- Please keep away from all buildings unless marked otherwise.

How to get there

For information on local public transport, call Traveline on 0870 608 2608 (local call rate) or www.traveline.org.uk

Local facilities

There are car parking facilities at: Bratton Iron Age Hillfort (White Horse) **A**; Heytesbury **D** and Tilshead **F**. If completing the whole circuit to and from Westbury, it is not advisable to leave your car at the White Horse car park for a long period.

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Long stay parking is available in Westbury and Warminster.

There are footpath links to the towns and villages on the route, where pubs, shops, toilet facilities and places to stay can be found, as well as access to local transport services (see above).

There is limited accommodation along the route in Heytesbury, Tilshead, Chitterne, West Lavington, Westbury and Warminster. For further information contact the local Tourist Information Centres.

Useful contact details

For information on live firing and access call 01980 674763 (Recorded message).

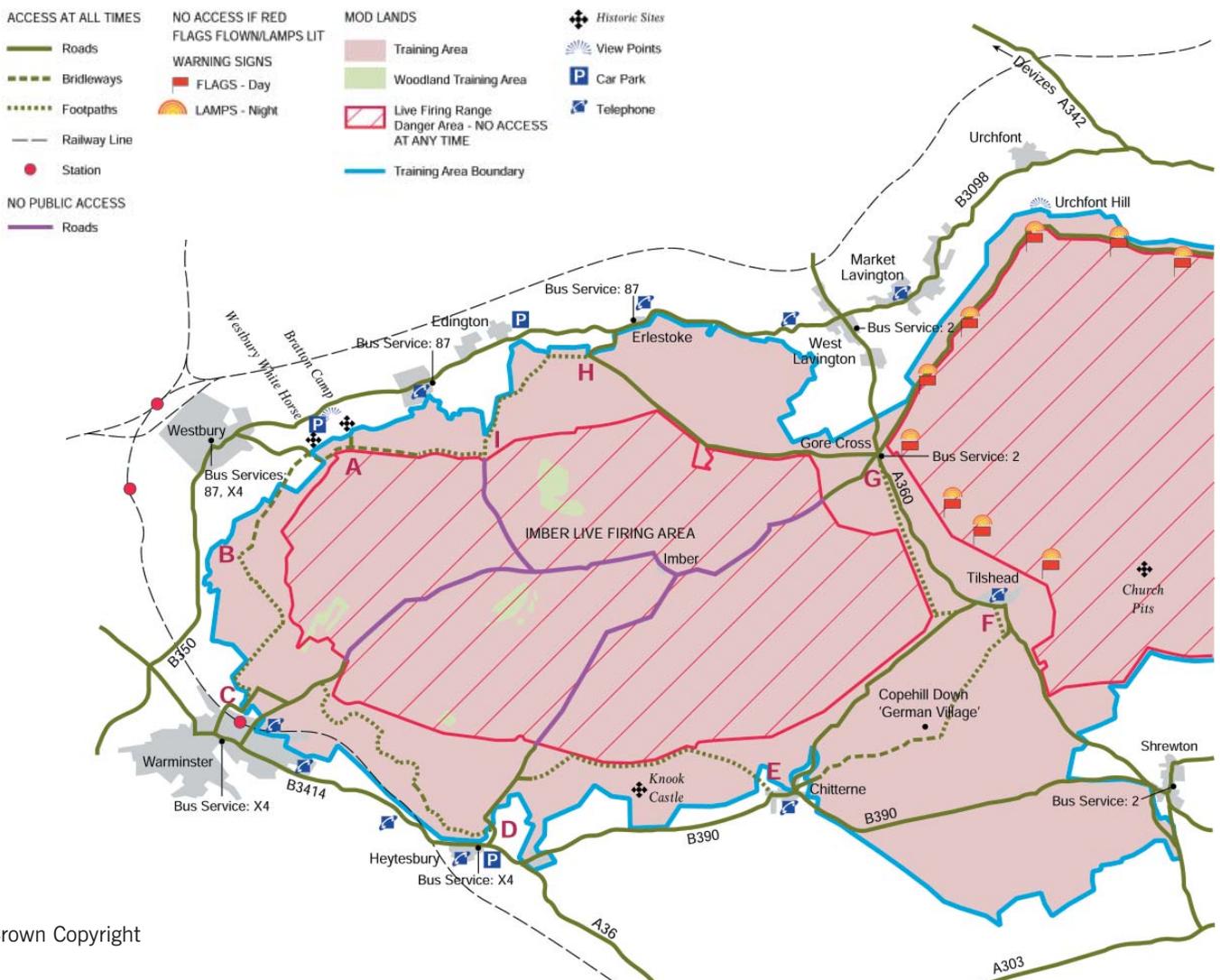
For more information on the area and places to stay en route contact the local tourist information centres:

- Westbury Tourist Information Centre on 01373 827158
- Warminster Tourist Information Centre on 01985 218548
- Salisbury Tourist Information Centre on 01722 334956

Other useful publications

Wiltshire County Council The Imber Range Perimeter Path Leaflet

Army Training Estate Salisbury Plain Training the Army and Protecting the Environment Leaflet



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