

## **Dunstable** (Bedfordshire) The White Swan Inn.

*A walk with spectacular views from Dunstable Downs, the highest view point and the largest stretch of chalk downland in Bedfordshire.*

Sited at the crossing of the Icknield Way and Watling Street, Dunstable has a long history as an important staging post for travellers.

The White Swan, affectionately known to its regulars as 'the mucky duck', dates back to before 1769, when it was sold and described as 'late The Two Black Boys'. At some time in its history part of the cellar was used as a town lock-up, complete with brick 'bunks' and small iron grills to the pavement above. Today, the establishment is run as an attractive town pub by a landlord who takes pride in its success at every level – as witnessed by the numerous sporting trophies on display. Sporting prints also decorate the walls, whilst an open fireplace puts the finishing touch to a comfortably furnished, open-plan interior.

Home-cooked meals served at lunchtimes include soups, the popular Dirty Duck Delight – a hearty, mixed grill – and lighter dishes such as Spanish omelette. A wide variety of sandwiches with generous fillings are regarded as a house speciality. Children are welcome and there is a choice of food for vegetarians. Meals are not available on Sundays, except for a barbecue during the summer months – weather permitting. There is a pleasant garden to the rear of the pub in spite of its proximity to the town centre. Dogs are not allowed indoors.

The White Swan is a free house and serves Marston's Pedigree Bitter, Boddingtons Bitter and Webster's Yorkshire Bitter. Courage Best Bitter, cider and five lagers are also available on draught.

Opening times are Monday to Saturday from 12 noon to 3 pm and 6 to 9pm; Sunday from noon to 5pm.

Telephone: 01582 667833.

*How to get there:* Dunstable is on the main A5(T), just west of Luton. The pub is close to the centre of the town on the A5(T) Watling Street.

*Parking:* Roadside parking is usually available on the slip road in front of the pub.

*Length of the walk:* 4 miles. Map: OS Landranger 166 Luton, Hertford and surrounding area (inn GR 023216).

### **The Walk**

From the pub the walk crosses over the pelican crossing and turns right, along the High Street. Shortly, what was once an overhanging inn displays a sign for Carpenter's dental practice. After about 150 yards past the turning for Friars Walk the path bears left and passes the Methodist church then enters a small shopping precinct. Between here and the modern crossroads once stood no less than five inns and beer houses and, although these have long since disappeared, the town still boasts twelve pubs!

Past the church, the walk turns left past Wilkinsons store and bears right, across the car park, then left, past a chapel and up to a T-junction to the right of the Salvation Army Community Centre. At this point it crosses the road and turns left along a fenced path which runs behind houses, then up the side of a recreation field to another road. Here, it keeps ahead, across the road, to follow a track running past allotments and a cemetery up to a road, along which the walk turns left. At a T-junction it turns right, and where the road bends left, it keeps ahead up a tarmac path. At a fork, it bears right and follows a path running uphill through scrub and, eventually, emerges on the edge of the fairway of Dunstable Downs Golf Club. From here the path continues ahead, aiming to the left of the clubhouse. Keeping the clubhouse on the right go through the main car park to a way marked path.

Along this stretch there are good views of Blows Down and north-east, across Dunstable and Luton, to the Warden Hills. After a small car park, the walk keeps ahead across the upper reaches of the golf course before running through more scrub to reach the road along the top of Dunstable Downs.

Here the walk crosses the road diagonally to the left of a small carpark to the National Trust visitors' centre (Café and shop) which can be seen ahead to your left. Ahead and below, the London Gliding Club provides a fascinating free show as gliders are winched and towed aloft. To the west, the view along the line of the hills extends beyond Ivinghoe Beacon, the start of the Icknield Way Path, whilst ahead, the downs continue for almost a mile as far as the Bronze Age burial mounds known as the Five Knolls. From the Information Centre the walk turns right and follows the Icknield Way Path scenic route along the line of the downs. Through a swing-gate it continues along a stretch regularly used for launching hang gliders, beyond which the path leads past the Five Knolls tumuli, the northernmost of which was used in medieval times as the site for a gallows. Through another swing-gate, a grassy slope leads down to a roundabout where the Icknield Way Path crosses over the road, but the pub walk turns right, down West Street.

Past the main entrance to the cemetery the Pheasant pub is on the left and further down on the right is the Victoria. Nearer to the cross roads on the left is the Nag's Head. The walk arrives at the crossroads in the centre of Dunstable where it turns right for a few yards then left, over a pelican crossing. Having crossed the road, it turns right, past the entrance to Priory Gardens and the Priory House Heritage Centre and Tea Rooms. A short detour will take you to the Church of St Peter, all that survives of the Augustinian Priory founded around 1131 by Henry I. The church's impressive west front dates from Norman and 13th-century times. The Icknield Way (Historic Route) continues from the rear of the church, but the pub walk keeps on along the High Street, past the Saracen's Head, once three inns and Dunstable's oldest surviving pub. Other buildings of historic interest passed along this short stretch of the High Street include a row of 18th-century almshouses, and Chew's House, originally a school for 40 Church of England boys, beyond which the walk arrives back at the pub.