

Tour in the Footsteps of Richard Jefferies

This literary tour includes Coate Museum, Day House Farm, Liddington, Chiseldon, Barbury Castle, Burderop Down, and the Gamekeeper's Cottage at Hodson. The journey is about 18 miles (29km) long. There are optional detours to Draycot Foliat, Marlborough, Savernake Forest and Uffington. The roads mainly used in this guide are small country lanes. It is recommended that you follow Ordnance Survey Explorer maps 169 and 170. Some of the illustrations are copied from oil paintings by Kate Tryon, an American visitor who travelled around Jefferies Land in 1910. The quotations are taken from Richard Jefferies' writing.



The memorial stone on Burderop Down



Richard Jefferies, pictured left at the age of 23, was born at Coate Farm near Swindon on 6 November 1848. The author drew inspiration from the north Wiltshire countryside and was a keen observer of nature and wildlife. He travelled mainly on foot, walking miles to visit the Marlborough Downs and to villages that include Hodson, Chiseldon and Liddington. He left Swindon when he was 28 years old and died of tuberculosis ten years later. He is buried in Worthing cemetery. During his short life he wrote hundreds of essays and about twenty books . Coate and the

Downlands were never far from his thoughts.

Jefferies has been described as a “many sided genius”. Historians cite him as an authority on agriculture and rural life in Victorian England. Major studies of mysticism have anthologised his work and discussed his ideas, particularly those expressed in *The Story of my Heart*. He wrote one of the great novels for boys, *Bevis*, as well as several highly original novels for adult readers. He is recognised as one of the greatest nature writers in the language and he topped a *Guardian* 2005 poll for favourite country writers.

His birthplace is now a Museum. It is open to the public, without charge, on certain days of the year.

For more information about Richard Jefferies, his books or the Museum, apply to: Honorary Secretary by email: info@richardjefferiessociety.co.uk. Web site: <http://richardjefferiessociety.co.uk>

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(1) Start your tour from Day House Lane off the Marlborough Road next to COATE FARM (JEFFERIES HOUSE & MUSEUM)

The old house at Coate, a little hamlet in Wiltshire, was shut off from the road by a solid stone wall, the general entrance being through double doors. They were called the blue doors, as that was the colour of the paint, and were between six and seven feet high.

The Old House at Coate, Chapter 1.

The high blue doors have been replaced with garden gates, but Jefferies would still recognise many other features of the house and outbuildings along with the old stone wall and some original trees.



From an original water-colour by Geoff Moss, 1990

In the field opposite the farm, across Day House Lane, there is a scheduled Bronze Age burial mound (unmarked) and there are views to the south-east of Liddington Hill, Jefferies' favourite haunt.

(2) Continue along Day House Lane about 500m. On the left, observe the remains of a NEOLITHIC STONE CIRCLE opposite Day House farmhouse.

There may be seen on the left side of Day-house Lane, exactly opposite the entrance to a pen on Dayhouse Farm, five Sarsden stones, much sunk in the

ground, but forming a semi-circle of which the lane is the base-line or tangent. There was a sixth upon the edge of the lane, but it was blown up and removed, in order to make the road more serviceable, a few years ago. Whether this was or was not one of those circles known as Druidical, cannot now be determined, but it wears that appearance. It would seem that the modern lane had cut right through the circle, destroying all vestige of one half of it.



From an early article by Jefferies, reprinted in *Jefferies Land* Chapter 6.

(3) DAY HOUSE FARM was the home of Jessie Baden, who became Jefferies' wife in 1874. The fields, next to Coate Water, feature in the 'Battle of Pharsalia' in *Bevis, the Story of a Boy*.

Just past the thatched outbuildings of Coate Farm, a by-road, bordered by elms and good ash trees leads to Day House Farm, its elms and pollard willows, and a half a hundred moles nailed to the pigsty wall.

Richard Jefferies, his Life and Work. Edward Thomas. Chapter 1.



Dayhouse Farm

Kate Tnyon

Day House Copse is across the lane from the farm. It is an ancient oak woodland and local nature reserve, thought to feature in *Wood Magic*.

Continue along Day House Lane for 800m. The thatched cottage, to your left, is on the site of a significant Medieval settlement.

(4) A little further up the same line is a place known as Badbury Wick. Wick is an old Saxon word having a loose meaning, but generally indicating a habitation. Here, on the left-hand in a field, there are deep and wide grass-grown fosses, having a remarkable likeness to a moat.

From an early article by Jefferies, reprinted in *Jefferies Land*

Pass under the A419 Trunk Road and then alongside the M4 Motorway (both built in the 1970s). The lane bends sharply left by some houses at Medbourne and meets a T-junction. Turn right to Liddington.

(5) **BADBURY COOMBE** This was once the location of Tibbald's Mill. Jefferies mentions the mill in many of his books.

'Our time be almost gone by', said the miller looking up from his work and laying aside the millpeck for a moment as he rubbed his eyes with his white and greasy sleeve ... 'We be too fur away up in these here Downs. There! Listen to he!' A faint hollow whistle came up over the plain, and I saw a long white cloud of steam miles away, swiftly gliding above the trees beneath which in the cutting the train was running.

Round about a Great Estate. Chapter 9.

Go up the lane to Liddington (6) and, on reaching the main road [B4192] to Aldbourne, turn right. Continue up the B4192, crossing over the M4 and the staggered cross-roads. On the right, about 400m, further along the B4192, there is a cart track (the Ridgeway footpath). Park on the grass verge and continue on foot along the Ridgeway path for about a kilometre, following the hedges (7).





LIDDINGTON 'CASTLE' is in a private field just off the Ridgeway path but there is a permissive path to it. This iron-age hillfort was much loved by Jefferies and is marked by the triangulation pillar (pictured above) once inscribed to Jefferies and Alfred Williams. This plaque is now in the Coate Museum. As a Millennium project Liddington Parish Council erected the stone, that bears new dedication plaques and a direction marker, next to the Trig point.

Moving up the short sweet turf, at every step my heart seemed to obtain a wider horizon of feeling; with every inhalation of rich pure air, a deeper desire. The very light of the sun was whiter and more brilliant here. By the time I had reached the summit I had entirely forgotten the petty circumstances and the annoyances of existence. I felt myself, myself. There was an entrenchment on the summit, and going down into the fosse I walked round it slowly to recover breath.

The Story of my Heart. Chapter 1.

LIDDINGTON CLUMP is a group of trees North East of Liddington Castle. It is a well-known landmark that can be seen from miles around and is a much treasured view from Coate Water.

Here ... on the same ridge as the earthwork and not a quarter of a mile distant, is a small clump of wind-harassed trees, growing on the very edge. They are firs and beech, and, though so thoroughly exposed to furious gales, have attained a fair height in that thin soil.

Wild Life in a Southern County. Chapter 2.



OPTIONAL DETOUR (approx 16 miles, 26km return). Progress to (10) to avoid the diversion. Take the Downs Road across to Oxfordshire to visit Wayland's Smithy, White Horse Hill and Uffington 'Castle', another iron-age hill fort. **Turn right at the staggered cross-roads following the road signs to Bishopstone and Ashbury. At Ashbury, cross to the B4507 and the Downs road towards Wantage.**

(8) WAYLAND'S SMITHY

At the Knighton cross-roads (about 2.5km from Ashbury), turn right and follow the unmarked track up to the Ridgeway. Some parking. Walk right (west) along the Ridgeway for 250m to Wayland's Smithy.

This monument is now hidden in a beech-copse and consists of three stones set on the edge supporting a fourth – a broad covering-stone. More are scattered round, forming an oval. The country people call it Wayland Smith's cave, and tell a story of an invisible smith who shod travellers' horses, on condition of their laying a groat upon the altar-stone, and then retiring out of sight – whistling when hid, as a signal, and leaving the horse near. Presently, there

would be a tinkling of hammers, and on returning to the spot, the horse would be found shod, and no one in sight.

From an early article by Jefferies, reprinted in *Jefferies Land*.



UFFINGTON CASTLE, THE WHITE HORSE & DRAGON HILL

(9) White Horse beneath Uffington Castle overlooks Dragon Hill. The chalk carving is over 2000 years old. **By road: return to B4507, turn right and take next right hand turn up the hill to car park. Or take a 2km walk from Wayland's Smithy along the Ridgeway path to Uffington Castle.**



This sculptured White Horse is of a gigantic size and is represented at full gallop. It may be seen fourteen or fifteen miles off, it being formed by cutting away the turf down to the white chalk... Immediately beneath the figure of the horse is a conical mound, or barrow, known as the Dragon's mound; from a tradition that here St. George slew the dragon, whose blood was of so poisonous a nature that nothing has since grown upon its summit, which is bare, exposing the chalk.

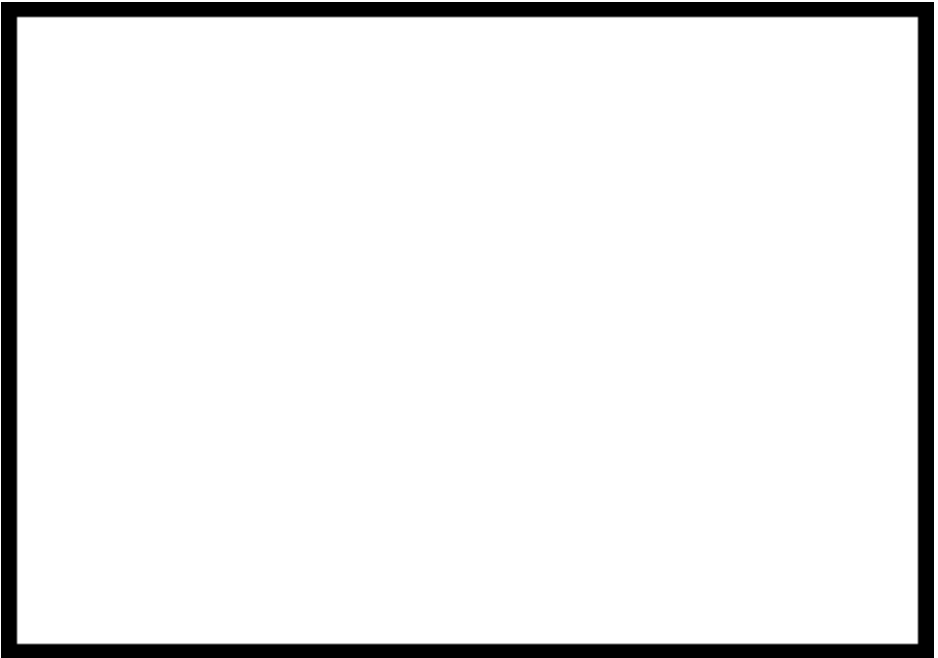
From an early article by Jefferies, reprinted in *Jefferies Land*. Chapter 4.

CHISELDON

(10) Retrace your steps to the staggered cross-roads by Liddington Hill (B4192) and follow the road signs to Chiseldon. This small Downs road also looks across to Coate and Coate Water and meets up with the A346 road to Marlborough. Turn right into the main road and take the second road on the left into Chiseldon, signposted 'Butts Road.' Follow the road round to the church on the right where you can park. Richard Jefferies and Jessie Baden were married here in 1874. There is a group of three Jefferies family box tombs on the north side of the church and another to the south.

Near the edge of the hill, just above the washpool, stands the village church. Old and gray as it is, yet the usage of the pool by the shepherds dates from still earlier days. Like some of the farmhouses further up among the hills, the tower is built of flints set in cement, which in the passage of time has become almost as hard as the flint itself.

Wild Life in a Southern County. Chapter 4.



There is an optional visit to nearby **DRAYCOT FOLIAT** (origins of Jefferies' paternal family) and to continue along the A346 to **MARLBOROUGH** and **SAVERNAKE FOREST**. The forest is some ten miles away but it gives an indication of just how far Jefferies would walk. Alternatively, continue your journey from Chiseldon church to Burderop Park and the Downs taking the B4005 road to Wroughton (12).

(11) Return to the A436, turn right and carry on until you see a turn marked Draycot Foliat (second right). The farm that belonged to Jefferies' forebears has been demolished. However, this is where they once owned land. Members of the family are buried at Chiseldon.

But, though out of sight, there was a farmhouse behind a small copse, and clump of elms full of rooks' nests, a short way from the foot of the Down. This was The Idovers, once the residence of old Jonathan; it was the last farm before reaching the hill district proper ... They prided themselves then in that hill district that they had neither a cow nor a poor married man in the parish... The whole resident population was not much over a score, and of the labourers they boasted not one was married. For in those old times each parish kept its own poor, and consequently disliked an increase of the population.

Round about a Great Estate. Chapter 6.



THE ORIGINAL HOME OF THE JEFFERIES FAMILY.

(After an old sketch by John Luckett Jefferies)

MARLBOROUGH TOWN HALL

Marlborough was the Overboro' of *Round about a Great Estate*

Hilary believed there was an old book – a history of the Overboro' town – which might perhaps contain some information, but where it could be found he did not know. After some consideration, however, he thought there might be a copy at the Crown, once an old posting-inn, at Overboro' ... So one warm summer day I walked into Overboro', following a path over the Downs, whose short sward affords the best walking in the world.

Round about a Great Estate. Chapter 9.

SAVERNAKE FOREST

A privately owned forest close to Marlborough to which the public have access.

Perhaps it is because no such outbursts of human passion have swept along beneath its trees that the 'Forest' is unsung by the poet and unvisited by the artist. Yet its very name is poetical – Savernake – i.e. savernes-acres – like the God's-acres of Longfellow. Saverne – a peculiar species of sweet fern; acre – land. So we may call it 'Fern-land Forest', and with truth, for but one step beneath those beeches away from the path plunges us to our shoulders in an ocean of bracken.

'Marlborough Forest', *The Hills and the Vale*

(12) From Chiseldon church (it is easy to get lost!) turn round, turn right and go down the steep hill past the Elm Tree Inn across the staggered cross-roads . Turn right at T-junction into New Road and bear right following road signs to Wroughton [B4005]. After about 1.5km, on the right, there are glimpses of **BURDEROP HOUSE & PARK**. In Jefferies' time this great estate was in the possession of the Calley family. It is now owned by Halcrows and not open to the public.

The great house at Okebourne Chace stands in the midst of the park, and from the southern windows no dwellings are visible. Near at hand the trees appear isolated, but further away insensibly gather together, and above them rises the distant Down crowned with four tumuli... In the enclosed portion of the park at Okebourne the boughs of the trees descended and swept the sward. Nothing but sheep being permitted to graze there, the trees grew in their natural form, the lower limbs drooping downwards to the ground.

Round about a Great Estate. Chapter 1.



Burderop House

(13) BARBURY CASTLE & BURDEROP DOWNS

At the T-junction, about 500m further on, turn left and continue for 4 km onto the Downs. At the top of the hill, on the right, is a large, free car park with toilets. Refreshments are available at the nearby farmhouse. Follow the path on foot near the toilets for about 1 km to Barbury Castle, a pre-historic camp. You can continue (on foot) for miles to Avebury along the Ridgeway. Jefferies describes the course of the **RIDGEWAY** from Uffington Castle westwards across Chiseldon Plain as far as Barbury Castle.

A broad green track runs for many a long, long mile across the downs, now following the ridges, now winding past at the foot of a grassy slope, then stretching away through cornfield and fallow. . . . You may walk for twenty miles along it over the hills. . . The origin of the track goes back into the dimmest antiquity. . . Dry shallow trenches full of weeds, and low narrow mounds, green also, divide it from the arable land, and on these now and then grow storm-stunted hawthorn bushes, gnarled and aged. On the banks the wild thyme grows in great bunches, emitting an exquisite fragrance—luxurious

cushions these to rest upon beneath the shade of the hawthorn, listening to the gentle rustle of the wheat as the wind rushes over it.

Wild Life in a Southern County, Chapter 3.

BURDEROP DOWN MEMORIAL STONE (pictured on the cover) Walk back to the entrance to the car park, turn left down the road. After 80m go through the 5-barred metal gate on right . The Memorial Stone (14) is about 50m from the gate. The stone was erected to Richard Jefferies and Alfred Williams on 14 December 1939, largely through the efforts of J B Jones, a Swindon schoolmaster and scholar. The monolith weighs three tons and bears two bronze plates with these inscriptions:

RICHARD JEFFERIES 1848-1887
IT IS ETERNITY NOW.
I AM IN THE MIDST OF IT.
IT IS ABOUT ME IN THE SUNSHINE.

The Story of my Heart. Chapter 3.



ALFRED WILLIAMS 1877-1930
STILL TO FIND AND STILL TO FOLLOW
JOY IN EVERY HILL AND HOLLOW
COMPANY IN SOLITUDE.

'On the Downs', *Songs in Wiltshire*

GAMEKEEPER'S COTTAGE, HODSON

(15) Retrace your journey down the hill. Turn right towards Chiseldon. After 1km turn left into Hodson passing the Calley Arms public house on your right. This road is narrow and winding. The Gamekeeper's cottage is at the far north end of the village on the left, at Hodson Bottom. Jefferies became friendly with the keeper. The thatched cottage appears in many of the author's books. It is the witch's cottage in *Bevis* for instance. Nearby Burderop Woods has a fine show of bluebells in the spring. Some parts of the woods on the Burderop Estate can be visited.



The keeper's cottage stands in a sheltered 'coombe', or narrow hollow of the woodlands, overshadowed by a mighty Spanish chestnut, bare now of leaves, but in summer a noble tree ... The cottage is thatched and oddly gabled – built before 'improvements' came into fashion – yet cosy; with walls three feet thick, which keep out the cold of winter and the heat of summer. This is not solid masonry; there are two shells, as it were, filled up between with rubble and mortar rammed down hard.

The Gamekeeper at Home. Chapter 1.

Kate Tryon (photographed below) painted the bluebells in Hodson (Burderop) Woods in 1910. She was a great admirer of the works of both Richard Jefferies and South Marston born writer Alfred Williams, who shared Jefferies' passion for the Downs and countryside.



We have still the woods, with here and there a forest, the beauty of the hills, and the charm of winding brooks. I never see roads, or horses, men, or anything when I get beside a brook. There is the grass, and the wheat, the clouds, the delicious sky, and the wind, and the sunlight which falls on the heart like a song. It is the same, the very same, only I think it is brighter and more lovely now than it was twenty years ago.

'Notes on Landscape Painting', Life of the Fields.

Carry on along the road, over the M4 into Broome Manor Lane and past the far south-west corner of Coate Water. At the roundabout, return to Coate Water by turning right or turn left to go to Swindon Old Town.



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A MAP OF THE RICHARD JEFFERIES COUNTRY

