



Wansdyke

North of Devizes the Mid Wilts Way joins the Wansdyke Path and continues eastwards along it for about five miles.

Wansdyke is an ancient earthwork, a wall and ditch, which runs in a shallow arc for some 50 miles across the north of what was the Kingdom of Wessex. Mystery and controversy surround its construction and purpose. It was built at some time in the Dark Ages, probably soon after the Romans left Britain in the mid 5th century. The ditch is on the north side of the earth wall and evidently Wansdyke was built to defend against an attacker from the north, possibly the West Saxons who created Wessex.

What is more certain is that the earthwork was built in two sections. The western section began to the west of Bath. This part of Wansdyke belongs to the eastern section - exactly where the eastern section ended is disputed. Although most modern sources show Wansdyke ending in Savernake Forest (see **Savernake Forest**), there is evidence of the earthwork continuing to the foot of the Ham Hill escarpment (see **Ham**) and this may have been a later addition to the main element of the eastern section.

Wansdyke is a corruption of Wodin and dyke. Wodin, or Odin, was the Norse god of heaven and earth and the worship of Wodin was widespread in pre-Christian Saxon Britain, the high ground above the Vale of Pewsey being one of the centres of this cult. Wodin also gave its name to Wednesday (*Wodnesdaeg* in Old English).



Wansdyke above All Cannings