

# Memorable MG Routes

## Places to visit – check opening times

### Highclere Castle

Probably the finest Victorian house in existence built by the third Earl of Carnarvon and designed by Charles Barry. The interesting interior was finished by the fourth Earl. The Georgian pleasure grounds were laid out as parkland by Robert Herbert.

[www.highclerecastle.co.uk](http://www.highclerecastle.co.uk)

01635 253210

### Savernake Forest

It is the only privately-owned forest in Britain but the owners permit extensive public access on foot. The Grande Avenue stands in the Guinness Book of Records as the longest avenue in Britain.

[www.savernakeestate.co.uk/](http://www.savernakeestate.co.uk/)

01672 512161

### Avebury Stone Circle

One of the most important megalithic monuments in Europe dating back to around 3,000BC. The Great Stone Circle is roughly a quarter of a mile across, enclosing part of the village.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

### Silbury Hill

Built around 2,500 BC and standing 130ft high, it covers some 5 acres. It is estimated it took 500 men about 15 years to complete. A continuing mystery.

[www.kennet.gov.uk](http://www.kennet.gov.uk)

### Wroughton Aerodrome

The Science Museum Swindon is located at Wroughton Aerodrome just off the A4361 south of Swindon. The collection is wide and varied covering land, air or water transport, space technology and firefighting and is held in seven giant aircraft hangars. The exhibits range from the giant Lockheed Constellation airliner and other interesting aircraft to early bicycles, computers, MRI scanners and the first hovercraft. From the A4 at West Kennett, some 5 miles west of Marlborough, it is about 9 miles north on the B4003 to Avebury and then north over the chalk uplands on the A4361.

[www.voteinspired.org.uk/](http://www.voteinspired.org.uk/)

01793 846200

### Bowood House

Located just over 2 miles west of Calne, just off the A4 at the Derry Hill village, is an 18<sup>th</sup> century building set in a beautifully landscaped park by Capability



## Newbury to Castle Combe along the old A4

Before the M4 motorway was built, slicing its way through the Berkshire Downs and into Wiltshire, the route for all road traffic between London and Bath was the A4. In many places it was known as the "Bath Road" and it carried heavy volumes of lorries and cars through towns and villages like Reading and Newbury. Now the road is far quieter and is a route which is a pleasure to drive in an MG.

There is a great deal of interest along the route from Newbury to Chippenham and on to Castle Combe. The A4 passes through some magical scenery with the downs to the north and areas like Savernake Forest to the south. It passes through many roadside hamlets and villages, like Froxfield and Fyfield, as well as the majestic town of Marlborough and the market towns like Calne and Chippenham.

For sheer driving pleasure, the A4 at times of relatively light traffic, takes a great deal of beating. In many places the road is open with long sweeping bends and in places you can still see the characteristic "three lane" feature so familiar from an earlier age. But Memorable MG Routes are not simply about the tactile pleasure of driving the road, particularly in an MG, but also the interest along the route from the views on the road, places to visit, sights to see and of course refreshment at tea shops and pubs! Yes that is the theme of this series – a hedonistic approach to MG motoring in all senses.

**As you leave the old market town of Newbury**, now a hi-tech centre on the western end of Silicon Valley, and pass beyond Speen, the A4 opens up to the west along the Kennet valley. To the south is the attractive Kennet & Avon canal running through the picturesque village of Kintbury. To the south of the A4 at Hungerford is the open space of Hungerford Common with cattle grazing and views across to Inkpen, the high point in the area.

**Highclere Castle** south west of Newbury on the A343 to Andover is a very worthwhile diversion as it is probably the finest Victorian house in existence. Many Club members will know Highclere as it was the location a few years ago of one of a splendid series of Summer Days Out organised by the Abingdon Works Centre. It is a relaxing location and a most interesting house and grounds to visit.

**Some 11 miles on there is Savernake Forest**, just off to the south as you approach Marlborough. It is the only privately owned forest in Britain and extends to some 4,500 acres. Running right through the middle of the Forest is Capability Brown's 'Grand Avenue' of beech trees - now a private road. This was laid out in the late 1790's, and at just over 4 miles long it stands in the Guinness Book of Records as the longest avenue in Britain.



**Marlborough**, a longstanding market town with a royal charter in 1204, has a majestic feel. It is on the old coaching route midway between London and Bristol. It also has particularly attractive refreshments in the Polly Tea Rooms on the wide high street. As you leave the town you pass Marlborough College. The road opens up again and a few miles on you approach Overton Hill and then West Kennett where you can divert north

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Brown. Internally the rooms include Robert Adams' famous library.  
[www.bowood-house.co.uk/](http://www.bowood-house.co.uk/)  
01249 812102

## Lacock Abbey

Just south of Chippenham, it was founded in 1232 and became a country house around 1540. The medieval cloisters, a sacristy, chapter house and monastic rooms of the Abbey have survived largely intact. There is also a beautiful Victorian garden.  
[www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)  
01249 730459

## Tea shops and pubs

### Polly Tea Rooms

Located on the wide high street in Marlborough, this well known tea shop serves homemade cream teas and cakes, with ice cream a speciality.  
[www.thepolly.com](http://www.thepolly.com)  
01672 512146

### The Bell Inn

Just to the east of Lacock village at Bowden Hill this pub is well known to MG enthusiasts as a Club natter is held here. Good lunch snacks and cooking. Beer lovers will note the pub won the North Wiltshire CAMRA pub of the year award in 2007.  
01249 730308

### George

An unspoilt and honest pub in Lacock village with Wadsworths beers, wines and bar food and a restaurant. The George has a garden for fine days.  
01249 730263

### White Horse

Biddestone is the quintessential English village with a spacious green and duck pond, surrounded by mellow stone houses. This friendly village pub has tables outside overlooking the green. There are some eccentrically named dishes on the menu like Woolly Bully pie described as tender chunks of lamb cooked slowly in a minted sauce with onion and topped with flaky pastry.  
01249 713305

### Route data

Route is 44 miles (80 miles with the visits) and the approximate driving time is 1 hr 30 minutes. Full route details and additional information are available at [www.v8register.net/mmgr/mmgr.htm](http://www.v8register.net/mmgr/mmgr.htm)

for the Science Museum Swindon high up on the chalk downland.

**The Science Museum Swindon at Wroughton Aerodrome** is some 9 miles from the A4 and has a collection of exhibits that range from the giant Lockheed Constellation airliner and other interesting aircraft to early bicycles, computers, MRI scanners and the first hovercraft. Check for opening times beforehand though.

**The Avebury Great Stone Circle and Silbury Hill** are near the village of West Kennett and are monuments which simply draw your attention. The Stones are at Avebury village and the Hill is alongside the A4 before you reach Beckhampton. Recent collapses of tunnels made by archeologists in the Hill over the last 300 years have required stabilization works, so access may not be possible whilst they are in progress. But even from the roadside, Silbury Hill is a stunning sight standing 130ft above you.

**Calne is the next town on the A4.** It is one of the oldest market towns in Wiltshire. It prospered from when an enterprising local family, the Harris's, developed a revolutionary curing method for bacon and, as their success grew in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the town developed. Sadly in 1983 the Harris Company closed the large factories which had dominated the town as employers and architecturally for over 200 years but the town has gradually recovered.

**Bowood House is a worthwhile diversion south west of Calne.** The interesting 18<sup>th</sup> century building with its landscaped gardens by Capability Brown is just off the A4 at the village of Derby Hill. It is privately owned by the Landsdowne family and has been open to the public since 1975 providing a range of events and interests for visitors. The present owner relates the tale of taking over the property when his father retired in 1972 to his home in Perthshire with the memorable words: *"You may find maintaining the house and estate quite a challenge."* Quite an understatement as the owner says it has been, but at the same time, hugely rewarding.

**Chippenham is soon seen on the western horizon as you continue along the A4.** It is a major town which grew following the arrival of the railways and engineering works in the 1800s and then the expansion of the Westinghouse

engineering business. It is here that the route leaves the A4 and care will be needed navigating clockwise around the town to the south and west to reach the A420 northwest signposted to Bristol East and then the B4039 for Castle Combe.



**Castle Combe motor racing circuit** is reached shortly after the small village of Yatton Keynell and is a circuit that still retains the feel and look of motor racing some forty years earlier. It is a friendly place with a compact paddock, good spectating facilities and sees some of the most exciting MG racing. The tea room there is staffed by charming ladies who offer their homemade cakes and excellent tea – no packaged “shop cakes” there! Only a limited programme of motorsport events is held at this circuit as it is close to Castle Combe village to the west.

**The picturesque Castle Combe village** has the accolade of the “the prettiest village in England” and is much photographed by its many visitors. For refreshments at this stage the White Hart is a welcoming pub but you will find you have to park well outside the village and walk in. A better alternative is the White Horse at Biddestone, just turn down Biddestone Lane in Yatton Keynell.



**The White Horse on the green in Biddestone is a welcome sight for lunch.** There is plenty of parking near the village pond alongside the stone built pub which serves a selection of ales with lunches and bar snacks – what a way to end a Memorable MG Route! But of course you might also stop off at The Polly Tea Rooms on your way home!