

A walk in North Herts, devised for Stile readers by North Herts Group

This walk has been provided by Harold and Carol Stokes

5 ½ miles, starting from Radwell Meadows car park in Norton, outside Letchworth (TL 235349). There is one pub (the Chequers in Stotfold), passed in the second half of the walk, and one village store (Norton) about half way. There are two stiles.

This walk, on the Herts/Beds border, introduces the walker to two, very different, long distance paths: the Kingfisher Way and the Letchworth Garden City Greenway. The Kingfisher Way, 21 miles long, runs the length of the River Ivel, from its source to its confluence with the River Ouse at Tempsford. This river has been renowned since mediaeval times for its reliability of flow, the result being an exceptional number of mills: indeed the Ivel claims to have had more mills per mile along its length than any other in England. Our walk passes close to three (Norton Bury, Radwell and Stotfold). And, of course, you may be lucky and catch a glimpse of a kingfisher. Leaflets describing the Kingfisher Way are available, but, unfortunately, no website.

The Garden City Greenway is an inspired idea of the Letchworth Heritage Foundation (LHF): a 13.6 mile circuit of Letchworth on a well maintained path, suitable for most of its length, for pushchairs, wheelchairs, etc., and formally opened only in 2003. Our walk does not spend much time on the Greenway itself, but the walker gets a good glimpse of the quality of this work. We also pass several detailed information panels, all well worth a stop. LHF has been generous in the provision of walking access over much of its land: the walk deliberately uses several LHF paths which cannot be found on any OS map. For background, maps, etc. see www.greenway.org.uk.

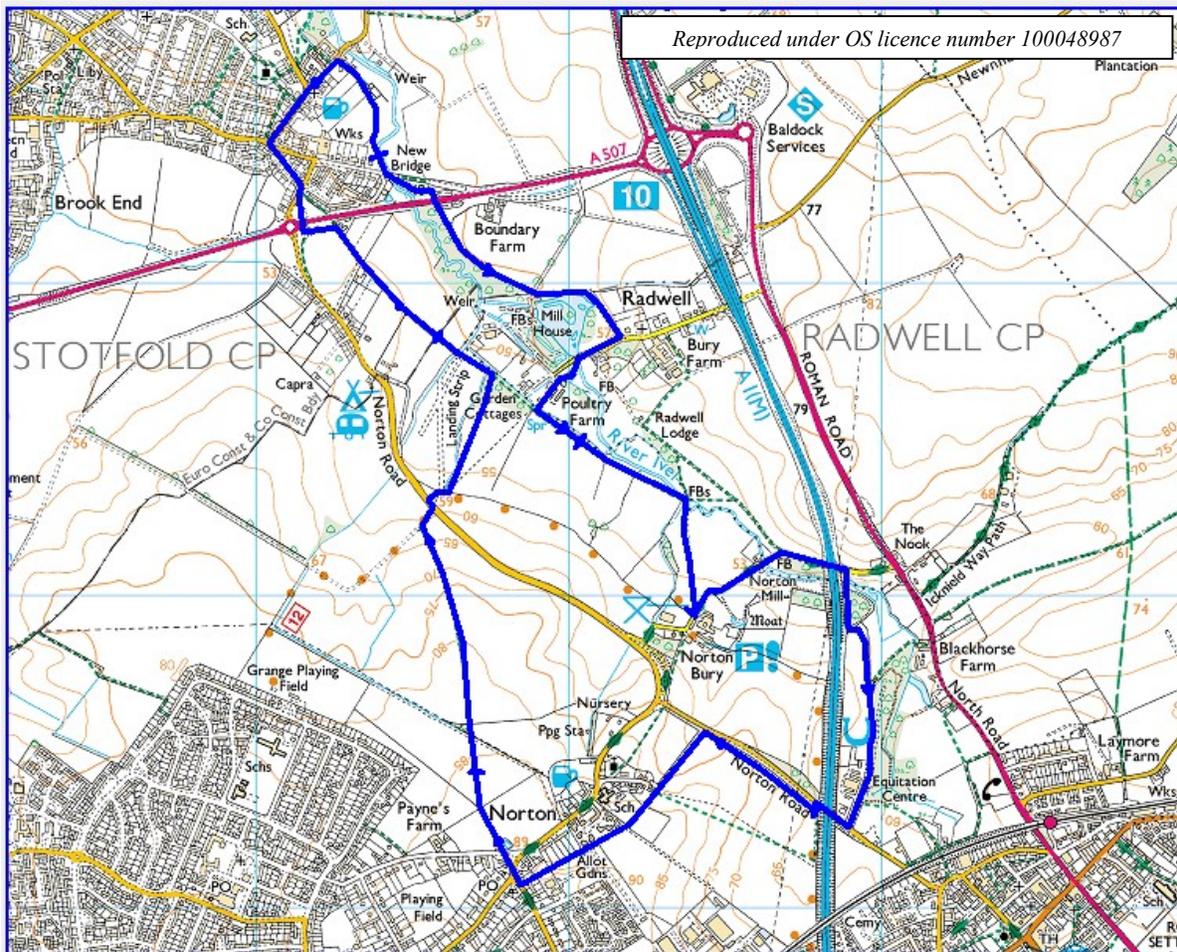
Another feature of the walk is its easy access from the A1 (M). Leave the motorway at Junction 10 taking the A507 (West) to Stotfold. Turn left at the first roundabout (to Norton). After one mile turn left along Norton Bury Lane, then immediately left again. Follow the road round to Radwell Meadows car park.

The Walk

The walk starts from the Radwell Meadows car park. Leave the car park and turn left along the road, which after several bends passes under the motorway. Turn immediately right onto an unmapped footpath (the Kingfisher Way) running south beside the motorway. After 300 yards the path doubles back away from the motorway, and then turns sharp right over a stile, and across a more open meadow. Follow the field edge path with the hedge on the left. Turn left through a kissing gate into woods and then right, up some steps. Where the Kingfisher Way turns left, carry straight on, passing Ivel Springs (the true source of the River Ivel) on your left, followed by an equestrian centre to your right between you and the motorway. Go straight on to the road (Norton Road) turn right, and cross the motorway.

Once over the bridge, continue for another twenty yards and cross the road at Cycle Route 12. Go through the gate and turn right on another unmapped path. Here you are walking northwest, with Norton Road to your right (the other side of the hedge). The path climbs and then falls for 500 yards before turning left. (Baldock Church and the Weston Hills can be seen behind from the highest point) After another 500 yards uphill, catch a final view of Baldock to the left. The field edge path becomes enclosed, with houses on the right, allotments on the left. Eventually you reach a road, with a Post Office and Village Store opposite.

Turn right. Cross the next road, and walk diagonally right across the short grassy area. Cross the road (Croft Lane) to enter the Greenway, with Norton Pond on your right. This pond, at the highest point of the walk, contains virtually unpolluted water via springs arising from a localised "perched aquifer" lying on impermeable clay deposits. It supports a host of wildlife. Where the Greenway turns left, continue straight ahead, past the telecoms tree (fine views ahead, including the Greensand Ridge in the far distance, the Langford water tower and the Sandy TV aerial) and continue downhill for about a kilometre. On reaching a cross track, (the Greenway again) turn right. Follow the track left and then right to cross the road. After fifty yards, as the Greenway swings right, turn left onto a narrow (unmapped) path in a wood. Where the path swings right,



take the path to the left, straight ahead, keeping just inside the wood, with a wire mesh fence to your right. Continue to the end of this path to a T-junction. Turn left (north west) on the footbridge over the river, cross a field with a grass landing strip, and carry on for 400 yards to reach a gate. Go through it and continue along the road in the same direction. Where the road swings right, go straight ahead on a path which curves down to a footpath tunnel beneath the A507 roundabout.

Go through the tunnel, cross the road and turn left into Murrell Lane. At the end, cross the road (Baldock Road), and walk down Queen Street. Opposite The Chequers on your left, turn into Mill Lane. After 200 yards, find the Kingfisher Way footpath on your right. (*A brief diversion ahead will take you to the recently restored Stotfold Mill.*) This takes you beside a new housing development on your right, the River Ivel on your left. Eventually the houses peter out, and you are left with just the river. At the road (this is the original main road, now disused) turn left to cross the river, and then right on an unmapped path through the woods beside the river. Follow the twisting path, turning right at the T-junction, to reach the main road (A507). This is a busy road, so the crossing is not easy. Continue ahead, the brambles disappear, and you are on the right hand edge of a large field, the river still on your right. Cross the spectacular avenue of horse chestnuts, and continue ahead through the wood and then along the left hand edge of a field, to reach the road. Turn right (southwest), to reach the magnificent millpond of Radwell Mill (with its fine display of aquatic bird life) on the right. Cross a small car park on the left and follow the footpath signs to Stotfold through a wooded area (still on the Kingfisher Way), across a farmyard (with drinking water tap), then out into an open area, and on to a T-junction. Turn left (south east) and continue ahead for about 400 yards to reach a gate on the left. Go through the gate, and cross the meadow on a clear path parallel to the left hand edge of the field, towards a gate in the far corner, crossing a couple of bridges over drainage ditches. Go through the gate, leave the Kingfisher Way (which takes the iron footbridge) by turning right (south) through another gate, which takes you across two meadows and back to the Radwell Meadows car park.