

NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2016

ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

AGM 2016

Saturday 1st October

SUNDON VILLAGE HALL
Streatley Road
Upper Sundon, Bedfordshire
LU3 3PQ

**Meet at the Hall for a walk
 along part of the Icknield Way
 in the Bedfordshire Chilterns
 at 10.30am.**

**Re-convene at the Hall at 2pm
 for a special talk, our
 annual meeting and tea.**

Our AGM this autumn returns to a location at the western end of the Icknield Way where our path enjoys some wonderfully undulating countryside given to us by the chalk landscape of the Chilterns. We have not held an Annual Meeting in this area since 2007, so this will be a good opportunity to re-visit this very attractive part of Icknield Way country. We look forward once again to seeing local members and hopefully some visitors at our meeting.

This year we are delighted to welcome Ian Ritchie to our meeting. Ian is Chairman of the Ridgeway Partnership, a new organisation established to steer the protection, maintenance and promotion of the Ridgeway National Trail. He will be telling us about the important developments that have been taking place along the Ridgeway and how he sees the future of this long-established section of the Great Chalk Way, of which the Icknield Way forms the vital central section.



Looking towards Sharpenhoe Clappers from Sundon Hills Country Park

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New Members

Welcome to Chris Stott (Potters Bar) and Fiona Dowson (Norwich) who have joined IWA recently

But before our talk and meeting, we will set off on our traditional morning walk to explore the local countryside. Each year, the walk is led by a member of the committee or the voluntary warden and the meeting always benefits from local knowledge, not only of the countryside but also of the local lore, history and archaeology which together contribute so much to our understanding of our Icknield Way.

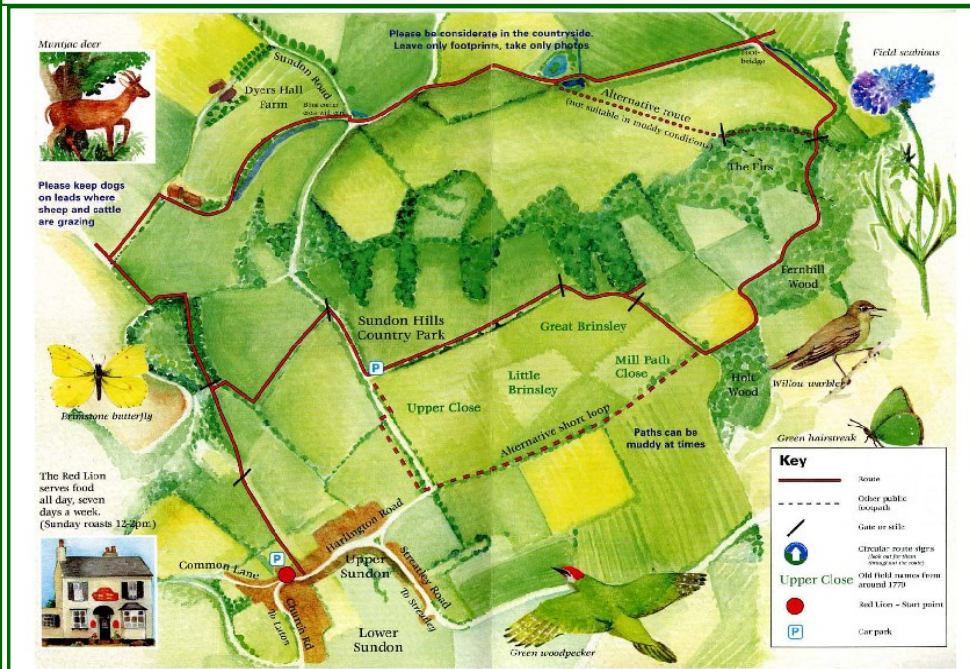
The Sundon Hills are one of the highest points in Bedfordshire rising to between 100-150m. They comprise steep slopes facing northwest across the Vale of Aylesbury underlain by chalk. There are woods and grasslands supporting several uncommon wildlife species as well as attractive open spaces for local recreation.

So, please do put **Saturday 1st October** in your diaries and come and join us for a most enjoyable day.

SUNDON HILLS WALK MAP

A consortium of organisations in Bedfordshire including Central Bedfordshire Council and the Forest of Marston Vale has produced a series of walks guides under their 'Let's Go' banner and the Walks on the Wild Side No.1 describes a 4½ mile circular walk from Upper Sundon through fields, woods and meadows with plenty of views. The suggested start point is the car park at The Red Lion public house where Common Lane and Church Road meet at TL045277.

The information published on the Let's Go website is gratefully acknowledged.



CIRCULAR WALKS

Six circular walks are now included on the Icknield Way website. Why not check out the walks page for more information?

www.icknieldwaypath.co.uk/walks.html

Dunstable - Dunstable Downs
A 4 mile circular

Sundon Hills—Toddington
A 7.2 mile circular

Sharpenhoe Clappers
A 4.3 mile circular

Lilley
A 5 mile circular

Therfield
A 6.7 mile circular

Linton
A 3 mile circular

Please send us your suggestions—especially for walks in the centre and eastern sections of the IWP.

A RENEWED 'PUSH' FOR TRAIL STATUS

Clive Beckett was welcomed to his first meeting of the Executive Committee in March. Clive is a very good 'catch' for the Association and we are delighted that he has agreed to help us prepare a refreshed plan to attract funding and support for gaining National Trail status for the Icknield Way. As a former Rights of Way and Countryside Access Manager for Central Bedfordshire, he has a long-standing ambition to secure national recognition for our historic route. Clive was the prime mover behind the publication of the first folding promotional leaflets for the Icknield Way.

Over the course of two meetings during 2016, the committee has discussed how we are to build our campaign at a time when Natural England is a very different organisation, when demands on the Heritage Lottery Fund are always increasing, when pressure on our countryside is more visible and the need to protect our heritage at the same time as encouraging people to enjoy it becomes ever more challenging and expensive.

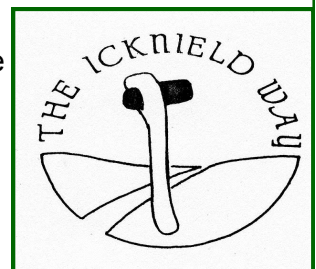
Clive, supported by our Chairman Tom, have together begun to establish new contacts with Natural England and with the six local authorities along the route. It is essential to ensure through one-to-one meetings that

the local authorities are aware of the existence, importance and potential of the Icknield Way.

The committee is looking into how we can generate an OS map of the entire Icknield Way route. Without this, it is difficult to convey the geographical significance of our path across not only East Anglia, but linking as it does the recreational and historic routes along the entire chalk ridge of lowland England.

In order to gain national recognition, a fundamental shift would be required from the IWA's original purpose of providing a walkers' route to promoting a route suitable also for cyclists and horse-riders.

A high-profile charismatic person to head our campaign would be essential. We are still looking for that person, so if you have any ideas on this, however unlikely or remote the possibility, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Tom or Lesley.



JULIET'S CHALK WALK

At the beginning of last autumn, Lesley Blundell, our Secretary was contacted by Juliet Greer of Haslingfield in Cambridgeshire:

"I thought that I would let you know that I am planning to walk the length of the Icknield Way Path over the coming months, using the suggested 8 stages detailed in the guidebook that I bought a few weeks ago. This is partly because I have wanted to walk this path for some time, but also because I wanted to do it as a fundraiser for a local family support charity - Home-start Royston & South Cambs www.hsrsc.org.uk.

I have been a trustee of this charity for a number of years and we have recently lost all our statutory funding so there is an urgent need to raise funds from other sources.

I plan to start the walk at Ivinghoe Beacon on Saturday 3rd October and then do one stage each first Saturday of the following months, except during January. I hope that friends and colleagues will join me for some or all of the way."

On 2nd June, we heard from Juliet again:

"I have completed 7 out of the 8 stretches of the path, following your guidebook all the way - it has been very useful. The final leg is on Saturday from Icklingham to Knettishall Heath. I think I am going to miss it!"



Juliet (seated with sunglasses) with well-earned beverage at The White Hart at Tuddenham—on Day 7 Cheveley to Icklingham

And now, at the end of August, we have heard the good news that Juliet reached Knettishall Heath after a long and hot walk - best if we let her give her overall impressions of her wonderful effort to help those families who face difficulties at any time:

"Walking the Icknield Way has been a great experience. Although at times quite challenging (often because of the weather), I have really enjoyed walking along this ancient path. Discovering new parts of the countryside, and revisiting some familiar spots has reminded me that

there is a lot to see and enjoy not far from home. And we have observed how the landscape changes, from the rolling chalk hills and beech woods of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, through South Cambridgeshire and on to the sandy soils of the Brecklands and Suffolk. I have also enjoyed walking through the changing seasons.

When I set out on this walk, I imagined that I would be walking some stretches on my own, but every single month, whatever the weather, I have had willing companions joining me. Some have travelled from far and wide (North Berwick!). The camaraderie has been fantastic. An enormous thank you to you all.



Juliet and some of her companions on the bridge at Dalham

I am very grateful to the Icknield Way Association too, for producing such a useful and informative Walkers Guide, which I recommend highly.

And finally, a big thank you to all the donors – you have been very generous and have helped me to exceed (with Gift Aid) my fundraising target of £2,000."

What better way to celebrate the end of her walk than by enjoying a cream tea on the heath at Knettishall, thoughtfully provided by her husband and son!



It is heart-warming to hear of people walking the Way for a good cause. If you would like to donate, please visit Juliet's Donate page: www.mydonate.bt.com and type "Juliet Greer" in the "Sponsor a Fundraiser" box.

TIMES PAST—or are they?

A description of the Icknield Way between Lackford and Thetford, taken from the book 'Breckland' by Olive Cook, published originally in 1956 by Robert Hale Ltd.

Now there is no sign of human life on the green track which, leaving all uncertainties at the river bank, climbs the ridge above the Lark valley and snakes its way towards Shelterhouse or Sheltereye Corner. Every step along the close-cropped turf seems to lead both deeper into the country and further back in time. Here and there, bracken, furze and heather pierce the grass, poor stunted growths that seem to have been pressed down by the feet of the past. After passing across high heathland, the Way enters a sombre plantation. Regular shafts of light slant between the evenly spaced conifers and illuminate the serrated leaves of brilliant ferns. Where golden rays quiver on the high tree-tops, they make rainbows in the spiders' webs. Livid fungi line the path and a pair of stock-doves glide noiselessly between tall, straight trunks.

Soon the Way meets Weatherhill Heath and still running along the edge of the plantation but commanding views over to Berners Heath on the other side, it reaches the Wordwell road at Elvedon Gap because the Way formerly cut here through a parish boundary bank.



Berners Heath today

Between the Wordwell road and Marman's Grave, the Way is a wild, partially obscured path, a meeting place for rabbits seldom disturbed by the tread of human foot. Straggling hawthorn branches push back the traveller, brambles clutch at his ankles, hillocks of blown sand matted with Sand Sedge confuse his direction.

The black and white plumage of magpies glitters above ragged bushes of elder and dog-rose. The noble sweep of heath and breck on either hand, unbroken by hedges or boundary stakes, can scarcely have changed since the Way was made.

Where it reaches the edge of the Elveden Estate, fringed by gigantic pines and oaks, the track grows smoother and begins to incline very gently towards the road from Barnham to Elveden. A stone marks the lonely crossing and the place where Marman is buried. His identity is un-

FANCY A WALK?

**Wednesday 12 October
Pirton, Hertfordshire**

6 miles
Start 10am at Recreation ground
Walnut Tree Lane TL 150315



Bob
01482 738754
Lea & Icknield Ramblers

**Saturday 22 October
Hexton, Hertfordshire**

7 miles
Start 10am Hexton School Car Park
TL105303



Robert Cato
01582 580855
Lea & Icknield Ramblers

**Sunday 6 November
Lilley, Hertfordshire**

9 miles
Start 9.30am at Woodside Car Park in
Hitchin TL 188239 SG4 9SP



Leon
07525 796814
North Herts Ramblers

E-walk 106 can be downloaded from
www.northhertsramblers.webs.com/ourwalks.htm

GUIDE BOOK SALES

The IWA is very pleased to report that, at the end of July, 923 copies of the sixth edition of the Walkers Guide Book had been sold. This is a higher number than any previous edition.

Naturally, we are hoping that the total will look more like 1,000 by the end of the year, so please do what you can to help this along by promoting the Way, the Walk and the Book.

It is easily available via the Icknield Way website

www.icknieldwaypath.co.uk/iw%20guide.html

The Icknield Way Path

A Walkers' Guide
Sixth Edition



110 miles along the 'oldest road in Britain' linking the Ridgeway Path to the Pedlars Way following footpaths close to the ancient route

The Icknield Way Association

“THE ICKNIELD WAY”

**An illustrated lecture
to be given by
Keith Fitzpatrick-
Matthews**

**(Keeper of Archaeology
North Herts Museum)**

**THURSDAY 27TH OCTOBER
8PM**

Ickleford Village Hall

**To help raise funds to build a
community hall at Ickleford**

THE ICKNIELD WAY DYKES

This article was originally contributed by the late Dr James Dyer of Stopsley, Luton and appeared in our Autumn 1988 News.

Although it is considered by some that the builders of the dykes and their date of origin remains largely a mystery, it is possible to be a little more informative about the earthworks that lie across the Icknield Way.

There are two groups of dykes to be considered, one of which is Iron Age and the other, Saxon. Both employ the same strategy of running from what was once un-drained fen in the north to forest in the south across the much more open belt of country occupied by the Icknield Way, the northern ends often beginning from marshy ground or springs and streams.

The Iron Age dykes are in the west between Luton and Royston and their age has been proved by excavation. Some six earthworks have been identified aligned north-south along the east-west carriageway. These dykes seem to divide the land into territories, often with hill-forts apparently controlling the area. Only three are now clearly visible:

Dray's Ditches, below Warden Hill, Luton (TL 086264)

Excavation has shown that three ditches 10 feet (3m) deep and 20 feet (6m) wide, with massive stockade posts in between, formed a barrier over one mile (1.6Km). The earthworks have been severely destroyed and only a single bank and ditch remains beside Turnpike Drive and on the golf course. It is likely that the construction of a bypass in the near future will destroy more of this dyke.

Telegraph Hill, north of Lilley (TL 116291)

A single bank and ditch remains on the Hertfordshire-Bedfordshire coun-

ty boundary, running down a dry valley.

Mile Ditches, Royston (TL 333402)

Three ditches descend the hill from a barrow on Therfield Heath and are visible as darker, more luxuriant grass growth as they approach and cross the dual carriageway. They are visible at all times of the year. These ditches extend for at least half a mile (0.8Km) north of the A505.



In Cambridgeshire are four large defensive dykes of Saxon date, built by early Germanic invaders to protect the area to the north-east from a south-westerly attack by British tribes. Various dates have been suggested for their construction and it is clear that they have been added to from time to time. The most probable date is soon after the battle of Mount Badon in the early 6th century.

Bran or Heydon Ditch (TL 421419)

This monument extends from Black Peak (26m) at Fowlmere in a straight line for just over 3 miles (5Km) south-east to Heydon village, crossing the A505. Along much of its length, especially at the north end, the dyke has been much eroded but a low bank remains on the section followed by the Icknield Way Path north of Heydon.



Brent Ditch, Pampisford (TL 515474)

This dyke extends from the grounds of Pampisford Hall, close to the A505, in a south-easterly direction for 1.5 miles (2.4Km) crossing the A11. A good section lies under the trees beside the lay-by on the A11. Unlike its neighbours, it faces east.

Fleam Dyke, Fulbourn (TL 548540)

This is a massive bank with a ditch on the south-west side extending for 3.5 miles (5.6Km) from fenland at Shardelowes Well, east of Fulbourn, across the A11 towards Balsham. The dyke is overgrown close to the A11 but open stretches exist after short walks north and south.

Devil's Ditch (Good sections at TL 580648, TL 600630 & TL 620614)

This great barrier runs for 7 miles (11.26Km) from the fens at Reach to Woodditton. The busy A11 and A45 make parking difficult so it is best explored from the B1102. Walk south for ¼ mile to the crest of the first hill and see the massive earthwork plunging north and south.



We believe this article is still essentially accurate and useful but please do contact us if you consider that it contains any misleading information.