

I'm 44 and did the walk alone. I'd enjoyed walking the Ridgeway in 2009, but have had health issues which prevented me from long distance walking for a while. I carried ultralight gear (under 12lb pack) and intended to bivouac en route, carrying a small stove to brew up.

I live near Bedford and used public transport to get to the start-finish points of the legs. The traveline website was very useful to plan this. A friend gave me a lift back from at Thetford by car.

Timing: I planned to walk a couple of separate days to build up stamina, then complete the remaining walk in one go. Having had an uncomfortable night (wrong gear selection) I returned home to dry my kit and then completed the walk the following week: Tring-Dunstable 21 May (planned to Leagrave, but wayfinding took longer than planned)
Dunstable-Letchworth 26 July Letchworth-Linton 10-12 August (10 Aug B&B at Fox & Ducks, Thurfield) Linton-Thetford 19-20 August

Planning/guidebooks: I got the idea of walking the Icknield Way from Ray Quinlan's The Greater Ridgeway (Cicerone), then purchased your Icknield Way Walkers' Guide online, getting the link from the National Trails website.

After the surprise of the first day (see below) I used Google Maps to run through the route and check directions. I also checked out pubs, shops and early closing days online.

The directions and maps in the IW Walkers' Guide were first class, very clear and accurate. I even completed 2 sections at night (2 miles to Linton, 4.5 miles to Tuddenham). I found that supplementing them with the OS map extracts in Quinlan aided my positional awareness, by being able to see the shape of woods etc. I carried no other maps.

The information about pubs and shops was useful and accurate. NB The Chequers in Gazeley is under new management and currently closed for renovations.

The background info on sites, history, wildlife etc was interesting and stimulated my planning

Wayfinding: My first day on the trail was a shock - after being babied on the Ridgeway it took a while to realise that the IW markers were not the newest out there, and some sections of the track were marked just as footpath, or various other linear/circular walks, as these had been marked up since the IW. In places the IW markers are so faded you can't see the arrows! The new waymarks (including the IW) put in by Suffolk CC are excellent.

I was also surprised that the OS map shows several tracks as the Icknield Way, and indeed that Quinlan's route diverges from the IWA's at Dunstable Downs to go via Leagrave.. This made me sit down at home and run through the route on paper and Google maps.

The map boards at Roe Green and Sandon were very useful - thank you IWA! (perhaps they could be included in the 6th Ed of the Walkers' Guide?)

Route: I enjoyed the views in the early part of the walk, and the experience of walking on green lanes and Roman road sections. I'd dreaded the stretch through Thetford forest but found it beautiful (I'd expected it to be far more 'managed' and monotonous). The worst sections were around stud farms where you're funnelled between fences/high hedges like a rat in a maze.

The route was generally free from undergrowth, except the path from Dunstable Downs via the golf course to Dunstable (Quinlan's route) - becoming overgrown, and the Roman road W of the M11 into Gt Chesterford - v overgrown.

Other users: Along the route I saw only a few other users (under 3 a day). These included a day cyclist, a pair of touring cyclists, a couple of riders, a few day walkers, and 2 people on scramble bikes.

All in all a great experience. Thank you to the IWA for planning, marking and championing the route.