

Maggie's Icknield Way – walk diary

I have completed a long-distance walk along the Icknield Way to raise awareness and money for Luton Foodbank. Please donate, to help ensure no-one in Luton goes hungry.

Story

Please sponsor me and my rescue dog Kiwi as we walk the 110-mile Icknield Way to raise money and awareness for the work of Luton Foodbank.

[Luton Foodbank](#) just giving page, or directly to lutonfoodbank.org.uk



I intend to walk with Kiwi my rescue dog all 110 miles of the Icknield Way footpath between April 20th and May 4th, 2024. My walk is to raise money and awareness for the work of the Luton Food Bank, always there for those in need.
No one should be hungry.



<https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/maggie>

DAY 1: SATURDAY 20 APRIL 2024

On Ashridge we met a large group of young people; all of them were doing their Duke of Edinburgh Award and each had a large map and a huge rucksack. I asked if they knew where they were going and they said 'No idea'

And we walked on to Whipsnade Zoo (no animals to be seen anywhere), the Tree Cathedral, and finally to Dunstable Downs where white gliders flew soundlessly. And a chill wind made our fingers cold.

And we discovered the elastic mile. Ordinary miles are recorded on mobiles. Elastic ones are a feature of the Icknield Way path and are Very Long Indeed.



Mike, John, me, and Astrid. Lunch near the Tree Cathedral in the cold outside because we were all Very Muddy and the dogs both stank after rolling in something.

DAY 2: SUNDAY 21 APRIL - "Modern Monstrosities; Ancient Mysteries"

To-day we soon approached a new Amazon Warehouse with multi storey carpark. Kiwi's ears went down; his tail went down as we plodded past the Amazon carpark along a dusty track,. "Why here Maggie?" he clearly asked.

We left the warehouse and walked on to Chalgrave Church sheltered among trees: what stories does this ancient church hold of the christenings, weddings and funerals held here during the six centuries since it was built?

We continued through deep, thick, squelchy, sticky mud and made our way onto another new massive build – an electric substation surrounded by tall pylons. We negotiated a bridge over the M1, another over a railway line until at last we found fields and gentle hills again.

And peace.



Above: Mike with fitness apparatus near Amazon Warehouse.

Below: Chalgrave Church



DAY 3: MONDAY 22 APRIL - "Sundon Hills with friends"

Sundon Hills are special. We began our walk high up and even on a cloudy, windy day like today we could see far over the Bedfordshire countryside: there were copses of trees; mysterious, dramatic folds in the land and newly ploughed fields.

Our walk ended when we had lunch in the pub and we all sang Happy Birthday tunelessly to celebrate our friend's special day.

Happy memories.



Happy birthday lunch for Eddie.

DAY 4: TUESDAY 23 APRIL - "Green lanes; Cold day"

We walked to Pirton village where legend claims that the Devil himself prevented the building of a church by removing the foundation stones each night. So they built a motte and bailey on the same site instead. No problem with the Devil.

For most of today we walked along straight green lanes often bordered by ancient hedges and the woodland was carpeted with bluebells.

And at Ickleford we passed a bricked up railway bridge with a steam train heading through a tunnel painted on it – a memorial to the railway line closed long ago which once ran under this bridge.



Our day ended with a pub lunch. I asked for the fish finger sandwich and it arrived- fish fingers arranged over a bowl of salad. Is the breadless sandwich the latest, healthy trend?

But we loved our green lanes on a cold day.

DAY 5: WEDNESDAY 24 APRIL - "An out of the ordinary day"

A small herd of bullocks supervised us grouped closely behind the gate we need to open. We looked at the bullocks: they looked at us. Dougi, the cockerpoo, barked his loudest. To no effect.

So we made up our own 'avoiding bullocks' route and were relieved to join the Icknield Way path safely.



We crossed bridges; negotiated kissing gates, chatted and enjoyed our walk. We had lunch at the most miserable pub in England. We sat outside, chilly, but then we had two dogs with us. The proprietor came to order us out, 'No dogs allowed on the premises' but we had already paid for food so we were grudgingly allowed to stay.

But I was stuck inside a toilet until a kindly guest rescued me with the help of a knife. The paninis were stale and almost inedible. So we began to laugh and laugh and we left still laughing but less hungry.

DAY 6: THURSDAY 25 APRIL - "Lucky escape"

Walking was good today. Bluebells in the woods were the deepest intense blue and the day was clear and bright. Astrid and I left our waterproofs behind because the weather was warm for the first time! And the sky blue. Jenni wisely kept hers!

The clouds became darker and heavier; the wind became stronger and colder. The exact moment we scrambled into the car was also the moment the storm erupted. Cold freezing rain deluged and we watched, horrified, in the dry warmth of the car beside the church.



This church represents all the ancient churches we have seen on our walk. All once part of communities long gone.

DAY 7: FRIDAY 26 APRIL - "Removal day"

A polite young cyclist jumped off his bike and stood aside for us in the tall nettles as we walked precariously past him down a narrow, muddy, sloping ditch. He said he had often cycled this path but he had never before met a single person coming the other way: now he had met Jenni, Kiwi and me!



And the sunshine was so warm that Jenni removed her grey woolly hat! And we removed from home to stay at Thetford Forest for the week.

DAY 8: SATURDAY 27 APRIL - "Second soggy day"

We were kitted out in waterproof trousers and hats and stepped and slid out into a rainy day and yet more mud. But a watery sun appeared when we arrived at Balsham to see the Icknield Way milepost from many years ago.



We made our way along a path from Roman times and were proud to realise we had now walked 72 miles.



DAY 9: SUNDAY 28 APRIL - "Dreadful beginning, brilliant ending"

It had rained heavily all night so we kitted up waterproofed from top to toe. There was a bitter wind but we squelched onwards to a well earned lunch in a friendly pub.

The publican chatted with us and I said I was walking for Luton Foodbank. 'I used to run a pub in Luton,' he responded. I replied that there were too many people at Luton Foodbank and not enough in the pubs. 'That's what I like to hear' he said 'There should be more people in pubs.'

And we walked on in friendlier weather and saw graceful racehorses in their paddocks who watched us as we passed by. Then our footpath led us past a gallop and Jenni said 'Look horses!' And there they were thundering past. And I waved and a jokey waved back and gave me a thumbs up sign.



It was a brilliant unexpected end to our day.

DAY 10: MONDAY 29 APRIL - "A day of rest"

Today is a rest day

A no walking boots day

A no squelching in the cold and mud and rain day

My rest day is a warm sunny day

A Kiwi sleeping quietly day

A reading my excellent book day

Today is a realisation day

Our walk will be soon over day

But today is just a rest day

DAY 11: TUESDAY 30 APRIL

We began with a disaster

We missed out a right turn and ended up walking backwards.

So much for a day off!

It became worse. Kiwi did not want to know as we walked through nettles and brambles beside a very busy A road with speeding traffic.

And we turned off to find a HUGE industrial estate.



At the very end our day was rescued as we walked over fields and through woodland to a village – miles completed, walk ended.

DAY 12: WEDNESDAY 1 MAY - "At last it's warm!"

Even Jenni left her woolly hat, her fleece and her jacket behind. And we both were happy to enjoy the sunshine.

Until we missed a right hand path. Our second mistake of the walk.

But in the afternoon we made our way through forest and we heard a cuckoo calling, our first of the summer – and the skylark sang high in the sky.

For Kiwi it was the best day of the entire walk. He ran and ran in huge circles, exploring the woodland and returned to the path to paddle in puddles and then wallow in a pool of cool, sandy water.



And now we had walked 99.5 miles: only 10.5 to go!

Day 13: THURSDAY 2 MAY - "Journey's end"

We walked briskly in the warm morning sunshine.

We negotiated a terrifying A road with no footpath, just a white line to indicate the edge of the road and beyond it a few inches of crumbling tarmac. Kiwi walked closely to heel on the tarmac; I was his only protection from endless speeding cars, lorries, ambulances and even a police car.

But later we enjoyed a delicious pub lunch and we were soon on to the final stage and looking out the final ancient Icknield Way Milestone.

Except the milestone to celebrate the end of our 110 mile walk had gone; lost in the mists of time.

So we made do with a modern wooden signpost to Ivinghoe Beacon instead.



But friendships and memories of our walk to keep.

Please help Luton Foodbank support those in need.

No-one should be hungry.

Luton Foodbank supports families, the old, the young, the ill, the disabled, and those who are homeless, despairing, or fearful.

Over the past year 15,000 food parcels have been distributed in Luton and 3,500 have been for children.

And now Breakfast Packs are being made available to local primary schools so that no child need begin a day at school hungry.

A photograph of an elderly woman with short grey hair, wearing a white t-shirt with the Luton Foodbank logo and a red turtleneck, walking a brown and white dog on a red leash in a grassy field. The background shows a clear blue sky and some trees in the distance. The image is framed with a green border.

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