

Walking part of the Icknield Way

Day 1 - I set out on Monday 2 September 2024 from Ivinghoe Beacon, having my sister drive me from her home near Thame. We took both cars, and I dropped mine off at the White Lion at Chalk Hill. As I was going to be walking mostly on my own and not able to carry any heavy rucksack, I was going to walk back to my car each day. I parked my car at the White Lion PH at Chalk Hill. It is worth knowing you can park here, having checked with the pub. I thought I would have a meal there at some point. Unfortunately, this was not to be possible.

My walk began from the IW Milestone rather than the top of Ivinghoe Beacon. I had been to the top on a previous visit and didn't feel the need to do it again. I wanted to get on my way.



Setting off

My sister and her two dogs joined me for the first three and a half miles. I used the Icknield Way Association live map to track myself and have to say it never took me on a wrong turn for the whole walk. Highly recommended. I did, of course, have the pages from the Icknield Way Walk book and some ordinance survey maps on my phone. The IWA map and signposts were by far the best all the way!

We cut across the first field, and it was the perfect day to walk. Warm, but not too warm. And the forecast for the week was good. We followed the contour of the hill round slightly to the right and headed for the wood entrance. Easy so far.

Walking through the wood was nice as it always is in woodland. A bit bare and hardly any birdsong to be heard, but a wood nonetheless. At one point, not mentioned in the book, the track forks straight on *and* slightly uphill to the right. I followed the IWA live map and then discovered the two forks meet up a short way later anyway. We found the steep steps, and yes, they are steep, but manageable. This got our heart rate up, which is always good for fitness.

We followed the farm path all the way to the A4146. We did come across some very aggressive dogs but fortunately they were behind a large gate. Boy, did they bark. Along this part of the Way we saw a buzzard and then three young deer running across a golden field. We are both nature lovers and felt very blessed.



The Golden Field – just before Dagnall

This is the point my sister turned back, after all, she had to walk back the three and a half miles to Ivinghoe Beacon to her car.



Support Team!

I continued along my own merry way, thoroughly enjoying my walk through Dagnall, and round the perimeter of Whipsnade Zoo. Did not see any zoo animals unfortunately. I took a break for a snack at the Tree Cathedral. Definitely worth making time for a visit if you have not experienced this. I would say, give yourself 45 minutes to walk round it to savour the beauty.

Although I did know this part of the Way from previously walking it when house and pet sitting in the area, the book directions were extremely clear, and I ended up with fabulous views across the Chilterns. Now, if you want a loo break (rather than behind a bush), you will come upon the

Chilterns Gateway Centre. This is where people fly their kites – a sight to be seen – *and* you can get a cup of tea!



Looking over The Downs path leading from Tree Cathedral

The next part of the walk felt very, very, long. Eventually coming into a Green Lane and another Green Lane across the Dunstable Downs, it made for easy walking.

Past the Five Knolls, round the Maiden Bower and on to Sewell Lane. At this point I decided to continue straight down Sewell Lane to the White Lion PH on the A505. There is an alternative route that goes off to a footpath on the left and through a field, but fortunately I did not take this today. See last day of this blog as to when I did walk it, with difficulty.

Whilst planning my route along the IW, one of the things that proved difficult was finding BnBs to stay in that were close to the Way. The first night, and lucky I had the car, I stayed at Redwings on Watling Street in Hockcliffe. This would be too far out of the way if you did not have transport, although you could probably get a bus a bit closer to it. Not cheap, cheap, but clean, friendly and included breakfast for £63 (for two people), so not really that bad. And did I so need the luxury of a bath, a big bed and breakfast. My legs were feeling it. 10 miles – my max per day for any part of the walk.

Due to the difficulty in finding BnBs near the Way, I have drawn up a list of those I feel would be most suitable and as close to the Way as possible, which I hope walkers will find useful in their own planning.

Day 2 – My partner had joined me last night so he could walk today with me, giving me more support, which is always lovely. Because we were having to travel by my car, we had to walk a distance and then walk back. It was not so disheartening as I thought it might be. And it gave us time to really get to know the Way, which we both thoroughly enjoyed.

Once again, I parked at the White Lion with the intention to have a meal there on our return. We walked from Chalk Hill to Upper Sundon. The IWA map did us proud again. I thought the new addendum directions in the book were a little confusing and although we may have gone slightly off piste leading to Chalgrave for a short time, we certainly ended up where we needed to be and crossed the M1. I can't say that this particular part of the walk was nice but it certainly improved once we reached the Red Lion at Upper Sundon. The landlady was very welcoming, as were other customers. They helped us to get a bus route back to Chalk Hill – it was the first day of a new bus route and they were all excited about this, and the stop was right opposite the pub. We took the bus to Luton and then got a bus to Chalk Hill. Easy, especially now I have my free bus pass this year!



The M1 on a quiet day

Tonight, I was staying in an Airbnb at Bellingham Gardens in Houghton Regis, which was for women only. In fact, I was going to stay there for a few nights and use it as a base as I had the car. My partner was going back to London, to return later in the week to join me again.

Day 3 – Today I was walking on my own. I had built up the confidence now, having my sister and then my partner walk with me for the first two days. I was ready to get going. We had asked the landlady at the Red Lion if I could park there today and do my five miles each way. This was the perfect place as the IW runs right alongside the pub.



A very friendly lot at the Red Lion

Once again, the weather was perfect for walking. I thoroughly enjoyed myself walking alone through the countryside, with stunning views. I hardly met anyone else out walking – this was a bit of a theme throughout the week. But see what happens on Day 5!

There was one part of today's walk that was really lovely – a green mile. So peaceful, off road and wonderful to walk. I must have been by passing Smithcombe Valley. Once again, the IW map and the signs with the axe on were of such a great help – this is because a lot of the signs have faded, and it is hard to see which way the arrow is pointing at tricky spots.

I finished at Streatley (pronounced Stretley apparently). Here I could gage where I might park the car tomorrow – at The Chequers PH. I took a while sitting in the churchyard where it was warm

and sunny. And then I walked the same route back to my car at The Red Lion in Upper Sundon for a nice cider and black along with a cheese board lunch. Delicious and well earned!

Day 4 – I haven't mentioned why I am walking the Way. I am not walking for any charity. I was born in Hertfordshire and actually lived on Lower Icknield Way in Aston Clinton as a child. Secondly, my ancestors were straw plaiters from Hertfordshire so they must have walked some of this route at some time, surely. I now belong to Iceni Magna – a [Goddess Temple in East Anglia](#) – and we are always interested in what the Iceni Tribe may have done with Boudicca at the helm. Would they have walked this way? Surely, even if not that far.

I drove to Streatley and parked up with the view to having a meal at the pub on my return. I always like to check if it is ok, but no-one was around.

Back in the churchyard where this next part of the walk begins, I started out. A fairly straightforward walk, through fields, *many* gates and a tiny bit of George wood. Out past Betty Robinson House, a hospice, and I decided to take the easy route around the golf course – I tend to lose my bearings on these courses and think I am going to get hit by a golf ball! Although it was a straight walk, I enjoyed the length of it, up past Maulden Firs and over the boundary into Hertfordshire, my home county. I finished up at Lilly Road at the beginning of the Green Lane leading to Telegraph Hill. And yes, you guessed it, I turned round and walked all the way back to the pub and the car. The pub meal was superb and a very popular pub for a Thursday. I felt refreshed before driving the fairly short distance back to my Airbnb.

Day 5 – Today my partner was joining me again and we were moving Airbnb – still at Houghton Regis. I picked him up from Leagrave Station and we drove to Pirton. This time we were going to walk *back* to Lilly Road and then back to Pirton. The reason being, there was nowhere to park at Lilly Road that was safe. Again, we parked in a pub car park - The Motte and Bailey. This walk was just about all along a Green Lane. And here is the surprise. As we were walking along, chatting, we saw someone walking towards us with his hiking stick, rucksack on his back and NO clothes on! The Naked Walker, we called him. We stopped and had a chat and went on our merry way. On the way back, we met him again. This time we enquired about why he walked naked. It's not common, but there are quite a few naturists around apparently. He was certainly well tanned *ALL* over and very chatty. I think he liked the fact that we were genuinely interested in his hobby.

Day 6 – It was nice having company again and today we started at Pirton going the 'right' way. We didn't really have a plan on where we would end today before turning round. As it happened, we made it to just before Letchworth Railway Station – perfect for when we continue our walk next spring, without the car and going in one direction only, thank goodness. I reckon in all I walked 33 miles along the Icknield Way, however, I actually walked 46 with the to-ing and fro-ing. Not bad for someone waiting for an MRI on the back of her knee!



Just before Letchworth Railway Station

Day 7 – Back to Sewell Lane. I had missed out the footpath part of this section of the walk going off Sewell Lane. This morning it had been raining hard but by the time we started out, it had stopped. We parked at the White Lion, *again*, and walked to the end of Sewell Lane, where there is a footpath bearing off to the right. It takes you down a very narrow track around the back of a house and out into a field with horses. It is a little tricky to work out which way to cross the next paddock, but we got there. This is where it became more difficult because the farmer had planted corn right up to the footpath, which was all lumpy and bumpy and very difficult to walk on. We eventually made it, fairly slowly, to the very steep steps which brings you out on the A505 (literally). You can walk a few feet along a verge but then you *have* to climb over the barrier onto the road for a few more feet to the BP garage entrance. Not a route I would want to take again, and walkers need to be advised this is not a pleasant route and to be honest, is not really necessary. Did the Icknield Way really go round that way? You have to make your way to almost to the beginning of Sewell Lane to cross over at Chalk Hill anyway.

Although I did not reach as far as I had initially planned, I felt I had achieved a lot and really enjoyed myself. I aim to plan the next section from Letchworth Railway station for next spring and I know what to expect of my own ability now and enjoyment.