



ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2026

AGM 2026

Save the Date!

SATURDAY 10TH OCTOBER

11am: (optional) Morning Visit to West Stow Saxon Village and photo launch of Great Chalk Way board.

1.30pm: Re-convene at Red Lodge Community Hall

2pm: presentation about West Stow

Refreshments

3.30pm: AGM

5pm: Meeting closes

(Details to be confirmed on the website and in Autumn Newsletter)

Welcome to our Newsletter!

After a winter of seeming never-ending rain, we had several weeks of drought and then a heatwave! Warm Spring sunshine is a welcome treat for walkers and has helped to dry out sodden land on the clay, but the dry land in the east of England could now do with more rain. How contrary is our weather—and becoming ever more so.

In this issue, you can read about three people who have enjoyed walking (in mixed weather) along our wonderful Icknield Way or its associated extension along the Great Chalk Way in Wessex. All of them have come away with never-to-be-forgotten memories of open rolling landscapes and a keen appreciation of the deep history of the land they are passing through. Such is the effect of the Great Chalk Way!

We continue to press the powers-that-be for National Trail status for this marvellous route and hope to be making representations at the House of Commons later this year.

We welcome our new members in Melbourn (Cambs) and Hitchin (Herts) and hope to hear from them, especially if they have had an enjoyable time walking along the Way.

Our Walkers Guide to the Icknield Way continues to sell steadily—more than 60 copies during the last few months. Thanks to Tom, our Chairman, for packing and posting!

And speaking of Tom: Tom has advised the Executive Committee that he will stand down at the next AGM. So we are looking for a new chairman. Anyone who is interested in what the role might entail should go to <https://icknieldwaypath.co.uk/2026/03/seeking-a-new-chairperson/>

Chris



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AGM AT TODDINGTON

Attendance at the AGM back in October was very small, and especially disappointing after the success of the fortieth meeting at Royston. Sadly our invited speaker, Dr Wendy Morrison, was unwell so her talk was unavoidably cancelled at the last minute. We were looking forward to hearing more about the Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Project. As a quick change of plan, our Chair, Tom Chevalier and Doug Landman, Development Officer introduced the Icknield Way and hosted an informal discussion.

Tom gave a short introduction to the history and purpose of our Association and the routes that we promote. This included the relationship between the modern path and trail and historic braided routes. Tom also gave examples of how the Icknield Way is used now for leisure purposes.

Doug conducted a short survey of attendees. He then gave a short talk about the links between the Icknield Way and the wider Great Chalk Way and the historic use of the different routes. Doug also gave an update on our recent developments to seek National Trail status with MPs along the Way.

We had a number of questions including about the work of the IWA, how the route has changed, where the Icknield Way and Great Chalk Way names come from, and which sections are most enjoyable to walk.

Thankfully we had a number of pictures to support these impromptu talks, including photos of the new Great Chalk Way information boards that were erected during 2024-25 and the much older Icknield Way stone plinths that were installed at each end and the middle of the route when the Path was launched in the 1980s, along with other photos of sites along the way.

Our secretary, Laurence Rix had also created an impromptu display of photos of the walk and trail around the walls of the hall and Tom was able to show the audience all 375 miles of the Great Chalk Way family of routes. This worked well and attendees were very engaged and interested.

Out of all this came a realisation that the Committee does not have a 'ready-to-use' presentation promoting our wonderful long-distance trail and its excellent guide book!

A new member who joined on the day suggested we prepare a pack for schools. We would love to work with an interested supporter with an educational background to help us do this.

Officers' reports presented at the AGM can be found on our website: <https://icknieldwaypath.co.uk/information/icknield-way-association/aggm-2025/>

We thank everyone who did join us at Toddington and look forward to seeing more of you in 2026.

Tim Johnson

IWA ACCOUNTS

The Association's finances remain in a healthy position despite some significant spending during the year.

Income from guidebook sales, subscriptions, bank interest set against operating expenses gave rise to a surplus of £615.91. However, the special expenditure on the Great Chalk Way Launch and information boards, together amounting to £4,500, appeared on the 2024-25 Accounts (as explained at the 2024 AGM) leading to an overall deficit for the year of £3,884.09.

Accumulated Funds on 31st August were £8,339.47 held in the bank accounts and £242.88 held as stock of guide books.

The Association's Accounts for 2024-5 can be found at [IWA accounts 202425 \(TJ\) Oct 25.xlsx](#)

INFORMATION BOARD AT WEST STOW FOR GREAT CHALK WAY



**New board at West Stow Country Park
(Photo: Suffolk County Council)**

We are delighted to hear that another information board for the Great Chalk Way has been installed at West Stow Country Park in Suffolk which is marvellous news. This board has been funded jointly by Suffolk County Council and the Brecks & Fen Edge Rivers Partnership and we thank them for their support.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE DYKES—AN UPDATE

Along the Icknield Way there are many historic sites, including the Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire Dykes. These are linear earthworks formed of a bank and a ditch. We do not know for certain why or when they were created. Most people see them as defensive or territorial borders, acting as boundaries to control land, livestock, trade and transport. They seem to divide the land into territories, often with nearby hillforts and barrows. Many form parish boundaries today. Whilst excavation evidence has dated the Hertfordshire dykes to the Iron Age, the Cambridgeshire Dykes are dated to the Saxon period. New evidence suggests these dykes also have an earlier phase in the Iron Age period.

One of the Cambridgeshire Dykes was dated about 30 years ago when the A11 road was widened. Tim Malim and colleagues used radiocarbon dating to establish that Fleam Dyke was built in stages. They dated the first phase of construction to between 330 and 510 AD and the last between 410 and 640 AD (Malim et al, 1997). This is the period of the early Saxon migrations from modern day Germany and the end of Roman rule in Britain. It is thought that Fleam Dyke was built by these early Saxon invaders to protect the area to the north east from pushed out Romano-British tribes.

However, Malim and his coauthors noted that the origins of the Cambridgeshire Dykes may lie further back in time. Ladd and Mortimer (1997) agree, arguing that they originate in the Iron Age. Recent evidence confirms a Roman phase for the Bran Ditch (Ladd, 2025). New funding has produced radiocarbon dates from two skeletons in separate cemeteries close to each other along the Ditch. Whilst one was dated to the Saxon period, between 676 AD and 878

AD, the second was dated to between 43 BC and 201 AD. This confirms a Roman phase along the Bran Ditch and implies a pre-existing ditch line or precursor dyke (Ladd, 2025).

Prehistoric boundaries are often reused and enlarged over time, and many were built during the Bronze Age (Historic England, 2018). It is quite possible that all of the Cambridgeshire Dykes had precursor dykes built in the Iron Age or earlier. If so, these would have been visible when the Romans and Saxons arrived. After all, we know the Romans built a road on top of a key section of the prehistoric trackway we call the Icknield Way. And modern man has done the same, building the A11 on top of this. In this way human history continues, building on the footprints of the past.

References

Historic England, 2018, Prehistoric Linear Boundary Earthworks: Introductions to Heritage Assets. Swindon, Historic England.

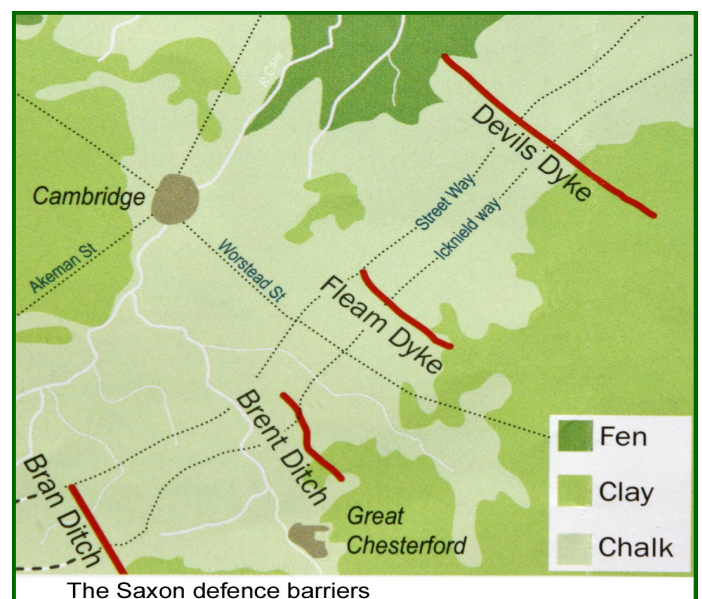
Ladd, S 2025, Short Report: Dating the Bran Ditch skeletons. Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society 114, 135-139.

Ladd, S and Mortimer, R 2017, The Bran Ditch: Early Iron Age Origins and Implications for Pre-Historic Territories in South Cambridgeshire and the East Chilterns. Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society 106, 7-22.

Tim Johnson

AMY'S PILGRIMAGE

Back in the autumn, Amy Ellis contacted us. She wanted to tell us about her 'pilgrimage' along the Icknield Way, undertaken at the end of July. Amy's walk helped her grieve for a beloved husband who had sadly passed away far too soon from a rare cancer. With a friend to share her experiences (generally excellent!) along the Way and family members helpfully delivering food and kit at pre-arranged locations Amy achieved the walk in 10 days. She kindly sent us her 72-page journal in which she describes the varying stages of healing of mind, body and soul as she walked along the beautiful paths and tracks that together make up the Icknield Way. This is being shared with friends and family.



With thanks to the Friends of the Roman Road &
Fleam Dyke for this image

WALKING THE WESSEX RIDGEWAY

Doug Landman writes:

My son, Jay, and I have been walking chunks of the Great Chalk Way, even before it was so-named, over the past 21 years - since he was 10 years old. We started with the Icknield Way from Ivinghoe Beacon, as it is on our doorstep. This Easter we finished the last 68 miles of the last stretch of the Great Chalk Way from Milkwell in Wiltshire to Lyme Regis in Dorset along the Wessex Ridgeway. The first 3 days included Jay, our Tibetan Spaniel Sunny (who climbed Ben Nevis with us last year), and I. Sadly, Sunny had to opt out of the rest of the walk due to hot days and much tarmac.

Day 1: Milkwell to Iwerne Courtney (also known as Shroton) - 12.5 miles.

This took in Win Green (part of Cranbourne Chase) and, because it was a steep and wet descent from there, I slipped. This was the only time I had a painful walk for the rest of the day. Overnight recovery was swift and I had no subsequent problems - or blisters!! - over the rest of the walking week. Tollard Royal was a good place for lunch and had an attractive village pond. We left Wiltshire and crossed the border into Dorset just before the beautiful village of Ashmore. A mile further south and we were enjoying four square miles of the most enchanting and intoxicating sea of bluebells that we have ever been in. This was in Ashmore Wood.



A sea of Bluebells in Ashmore Wood

Photo: Doug Landman

Dorset is well-known for its steep climbs and there were a few of these every day. Once in Shroton we settled at a pub for some well-deserved beers and awaited our pick-up, courtesy of my wonderful partner, Alex.

Day 2: Shroton to Woollan Hill - 8.5 miles.

First thing in the morning we started on the first big climb up Hambledon Hill, known for its Neolithic settlement, Iron Age Hillfort and panoramic views of 20 miles or more. We crossed the River Stour at a splendid new wooden bridge, headed into Shillingstone and, shortly after leaving there, got lost!

The Wessex Ridgeway has no association looking after it so some signage is non-existent and, despite having a guidebook, OS maps, mobile apps, compass and binoculars, some paths are still not obvious, are overgrown, misleadingly signed or have been re-designated or fenced off, so we have always had to think on our feet and look for alternatives that get us back on track. On this occasion, we did this via the very busy A357 and Blandford Forest. We lunched in the picnic area in the Okeford Hill car park (where one of the Great Chalk Way information boards is situated) and were then rewarded with some grand miles of high ridge walking and views of the Isle of Wight to finish the day.



**A view south-westwards from near Okeford Hill
—with hillforts on the skyline
Photo: Doug Landman**

Day 3: Woollan Hill to Sydling St. Nicholas - 13 miles.

This was the hardest day, although it started with a lovely descent passing through a wonderful hillfort on Bulbarrow Hill called Rawlsbury Camp. One of the true highlights of the entire Great Chalk Way is to be found at the Dorsetshire Gap where we lunched. It is a very old and very deep hollow-way crossroads with the medieval village of Melcombe Horsey sitting just below it. It has a travellers' log book at the crossroads in a box, which we duly signed. After lunch, the day got hotter and the route got drier, so the last couple of miles along dead-straight farm tracks were not fully appreciated, despite the agreeable views of the surrounding vale. Our arrival at the village green of Sydling St. Nicholas was very welcome indeed.

Day 4: Sydling St. Nicholas to Minter's Hill - 12 miles.

The day started with another steep climb, this time up an enchanted hollow-way called Break Heart Hill, then across the Roman road into Maiden Newton and the extremely beautiful and serene Frome valley. The mile walk along the river in the floodplain to Chillfrome was peaceful and enchanting. This was a great day. We lunched on Rampisham Down with some inquisitive and friendly young heifers - an absolute joy - and ended the day at Minter's Hill, a mile above Beaminster.

Doug's account continues:

Day 5: Mintern's Hill to Holway - 10 miles.

Today's walk started with the mile *down* into Beaminster which is a lovely old market town, then out again through a beautiful small wood and *up* a very steep hill to another wood. In fact, this day was a series of very steep hills including the highest point on the Wessex Ridgeway, Lewesdon Hill. At 279m this hill is also the highest in Dorset and is ancient, wooded, and serenely beautiful. We descended from here to circumnavigate Pilsdon Pen, the second highest Dorset hill at 277m. (Together these two hills are known to mariners as the Cow and Calf.) Having walked around the Pen, we then climbed it. This was the hardest climb of the entire route undertaken on the hottest day but the reward for our effort was lunch in this hillfort with my partner, all our children and Sunny overlooking great views of Lyme Bay. Jay and I then continued after our respite, down off the Pen into the coombe then up Blackdown Hill and, finally, to finish our day at Holway, knowing that the following day would take us directly due south to Lyme Bay.

Day 6: Holway to Lyme Regis - 12 miles.

This took us via the last 2 hillforts en route: Lambert's Castle lies just inside the Devon boundary so here is the only tiny (one mile) section of the Great Chalk Way within this county, lying in the northern shadow of the fort. We had lunch here before continuing to Coney's Castle, less than a mile south. Once we crossed the busy dual carriageway at Penn Hill we were downhill all the way via a long stretch of woodland into the Lim valley which we followed to the English Channel. We had made it! The last observation being that Lyme Regis (Lyme to the locals) should properly be pronounced Lim Regis.

GREAT PUBLICITY FOR THE GREAT CHALK WAY IN 'COUNTRYFILE' MAGAZINE

A big 'thank-you' to author and travel writer, Dixe Wills, for his excellent promotional article about the Great Chalk Way in the April edition of 'Countryfile' Magazine.

The section he chooses for his walk leads north-east from near Devizes to Avebury and then on to Uffington Castle. There is a very pleasing historical bias to the article with its inclusion of stone circles and hill forts and long barrows. As he says 'the joy of the Great Chalk Way is that any stretch you choose will almost certainly take you time-travelling back into antiquity'. And, judging by the lovely photos, Dixe enjoyed perfect weather for his brief exploration of part of the GCW. He even includes a photo of one of our Icknield Way stones! Marvellous!

Dixe was very usefully 'led' to Doug Landman via Paul Whitewick's YouTube video "The Ridgeway Mystery: You never knew". Doug was able to tell him all about our campaign to gain National Trail status for the Great Chalk Way – and how the Icknield Way is a key part of it (along with the other parts!).

Thanks very much, Dixe Wills!

NEW WAYMARKING AT STREATLEY

Finding the way along the Icknield Way can sometimes (not often!) be a challenge. At the western end of the route, Central Bedfordshire Council often works with local volunteer groups to install waymark posts—to which our distinctive Icknield Way discs can be attached. Following some helpful suggestions /requests, our friends in the Flitwick Parish Paths Partnership (P3) group have been busy replacing some fallen waymark posts along the route at Sharpenhoe Clappers and across South Beds Golf Club.

The Icknield Way Association is very grateful to the volunteers in all the counties traversed by the Icknield Way who help maintain our route, in whatever way. If you find any concerns with the rights of way network along the Icknield Way, you can report using the links on our [contact page](#).

Tom Chevalier



One of South Bedfordshire Council's new waymarking posts near Streatley with its bold yellow top and (just visible), the Icknield Way blue arrow with hand-axe logo pointing to the right.

(Photo: Ian Cook)

VOLUNTARY ROUTE WARDENS

Maps 1-3	Ivinghoe Beacon to A505	VACANT—PLEASE CONTACT LAURENCE IF YOU CAN HELP	
Maps 4, 5(part)	A505 to Sundon Hills Country Park	Tom Chevalier	info@icknieldwaytrail.org.uk
Maps 5-6	Sundon Hills to Hexton-Lilley Road	Colin Muskett	colinmuskett@yahoo.co.uk
Map 7	Lilley Road to Pirton	Colin Muskett	colinmuskett@yahoo.co.uk
Map 8-9	Pirton to Wilbury Hill	Alex Goldie	kathy_alex.goldie@mac.com
Map 10	Wilbury Hill to Baldock	Laurence Rix	rix.laurence@googlemail.com
Maps 11-15	Baldock town centre to Heydon	Alec Gallagher	alecgallagher701@btinternet.com
Maps 16-19	Heydon to Linton	Matt Allen	mattyal@hotmail.com
Maps 20-21	Linton to Willingham Green	Neil Summers	neil336@googlemail.com
Maps 22-27	Willingham Green to Icklingham	Phil Prigg	phil@prigg.co.uk
Maps 28-29	Icklingham to D-house	Laurence Rix	rix.laurence@googlemail.com
Maps 30-32	D-house to Knettishall Heath	Laurence Rix	rix.laurence@googlemail.com
Maps 33-34	Toddington Alternative	Tom Chevalier	info@icknieldwaytrail.org.uk
Maps 35-36	Thetford Link	Laurence Rix	rix.laurence@googlemail.com

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WALKS ALONG THE WAY

Tuesday 16th June

10:00am Pirton 12 miles. Meet at Great Green, near Motte and Bailey PH. SG5 3QD (TL 146 316).
 Leader: John N 07950 708087

Sunday 21st June

10:00am Royston 12 miles. Meet at Therfield Heath Sports Centre CP, Baldock Road. SG8 5BG (TL 348 405). Leader: John N 07950 708087

Saturday 27th June

10.00am Lilley 7 miles. Meet near pub West Street LU2 8LN (TL 118 265)
 Leader: Maggie Killingbeck 07759 128914

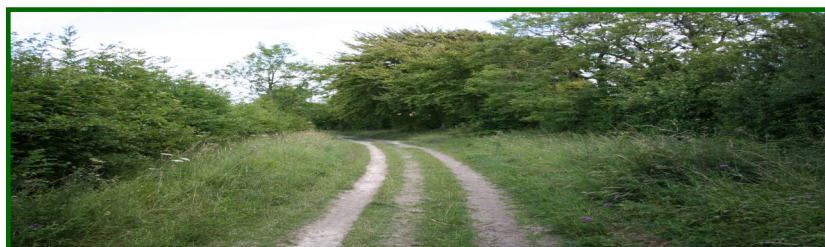
Tuesday 14th July

10.00am Thorpe Forest & Peddars Way 6 miles. Meet at Forest Retreat Café IP24 2RX (TL 94569 83986). More info: Chris F 07990 973960

Tuesday 25th August

10:00am Pegsdon 12 miles. Meet at layby near gates to Hexton Manor. SG5 3JS (TL 118 302).
 Leader :Tom C 07743 128645

The above walks are led by individual walking groups so anyone interested in joining them should contact the leader for more information.



**The Icknield Way near Pegsdon, north Hertfordshire
 —a fine green track along the chalk.**

Photo: Chris James