THE CHESS VALLEY WALK

THE CHESS VALLEY

The Chess Valley has some of the most attractive countryside in the Chilterns, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This is a landscape rich in wildlife, with a long and fascinating history. Along the way there are historic buildings and estates, water meadows, ancient field systems and nature reserves.

The Chess is a ‘chalk stream’. They are fed by groundwater, which is stored in the aquifer – layers of chalk rock which work like a sponge, soaking up water until it emerges at ground level. Regular winter rainfall is needed to recharge the aquifer and keep the chalk streams of the Chilterns flowing throughout the year. Typical chalk streams, like the Chess are shallow, narrow streams, with gravel beds and clean warm water. We take our water from the aquifer too, so we need to use water wisely in order to reduce our impact on chalk streams and their wildlife.

The wildlife of the Chess Valley is as diverse and exciting as its history. You might see kingfisher, water vole, brown trout, little egret or even the spectacular banded demoiselle damselfly, amongst many other species of birds, plants and animals.

HISTORY & POINTS OF INTEREST

A Rickmansworth: The town’s history spans more than 1,000 years. Its three local rivers, Colne, Chess and Gade, supplied water for industries including papermaking, milling and watercress growing.

B Royal Masonic School: One of the oldest girls’ schools in the country, the Royal Masonic School was founded in 1788 in East London to educate the daughters of poor Freemasons. It moved to Rickmansworth in 1934.

C Glen Chess: This imposing house was built by Herbert Ingram who owned and operated the nearby Loudwater Paper Mill. He founded The Illustrated London News in 1842.

D Loudwater: An old name for the River Chess. Local archaeologists have found evidence of a settlement here dating back to the 4th century.

E Chorleywood House: Bought in 1892 and modified by Lady Eliza Russell, the estate came in to Council ownership in 1939. It was designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 2007.

F Lynchetts: The terraced field rising up the valley side is thought to date from the 9th Century. The characteristic steps known as lynchetts, were formed by ploughing along the slope over many years.

G Watercress Beds: Watercress is one of the oldest green vegetables known to man. The River Chess, with its clean mineral-rich spring water, is ideal for producing this wonderful superfood. The watercress beds at Sarratt Bottom are the last representative of a once major industry in the Chilterns.

H Frogmore Meadows: This Nature Reserve, managed by Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust is a rare example of a lowland meadow which supports an abundance of grasses, orchids and wildflowers as well as water voles. The water vole is Britain’s fastest declining mammal. Once threatened with extinction, the population on the Chess is now healthy again thanks to the efforts of landowners and conservation groups.

I William Liberty’s Tomb: William Liberty, a local brickmaker and relative of the founders of Liberty’s of London, asked to be buried alone, out of fear that he would not be able to identify his bones when the time came to be reburied. Below is the site of the original village of Flaunden where an information board explains its history.

J Latimer: The village is made up of a number of 17th and 18th Century houses around a village green. Latimer House (Place) was built in 1863 after the original Elizabethan house was demolished around 1860. Once the seat of the Cavendish family, the current house dates from the 1st Century and was the site of a Roman farm villa.

K Blackwell Hall: The site of the ancient manor of that name, the current house dates from the tudor period. From medieval times, the manor had its own corn mill the last of which was demolished around 1860.

L Weirhouse Mill: This is the most complete and well preserved mill on the river. Besides corn milling it was also used for the manufacture of paper.

GETTING THERE & BACK

Directions: The walk starts from Rickmansworth Station and finishes at Chesham Station.

Trains: Rickmansworth is served by both the Metropolitan Line from Aldgate and Baker Street and the Chiltern Line from Marylebone to Aylesbury.

From Chesham there is a direct Metropolitan Line service to London that stops at Rickmansworth. For the Chiltern Line change at Chalfont and Latimer.

Buses: Please go to www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk

By Road: Rickmansworth Station is 1.5 miles from Junction 18 of the M25

Maps: Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps 172 + 181 and Chiltern Society Maps 6 + 17 +28

This walk and leaflet is supported by:

Chilterns Country walks or visit www.chesham.gov.uk.
A 10 mile walking following the River Chess in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

### Rickmansworth

1. From Rickmansworth station entrance turn right, go down the hill and up the other side. Take the steps to the left of Waitrose and turn left at the top. Cross the bridge, go straight ahead over the grass to the trees and turn right along the path. Go down to a driveway, past a school and, where the road bends right, take the path straight ahead. Follow it past a sports ground to meet the River Chess. With the river to the right, stay on this wide path for nearly a mile to eventually climb some steps to a lane.
2. Cross to a driveway opposite, turn left along the path and follow it for 400m to a fork. Take the right-hand path signposted to Chorleywood. Cross straight over a lane and follow the path to join a surfaced access road. Where it bends to the right, continue forward between the fences and through a gate below the M25. Follow the path to a driveway and up to a road. Turn left over the M25.
3. Continue uphill on the pavement and turn right on a surfaced track signposted to Sarratt Mill and Sarratt Green. Follow the track for over 400m and, where it bears to the right, keep straight ahead on the grassy path towards a wooden footbridge over the river.
4. At a junction of paths, turn right over the footbridge and walk through a small wood to a lane. Take the track opposite and, at the houses, pass through a gate on the left into a field. Stay straight ahead for over 600m to the end.
5. Where the lane turns right uphill, turn left along the concrete driveway signposted to Latimer. At the watercress beds do not cross the river but take path ahead past the metal rails. Continue on the wooden walkway past the orientation boards for Frogmore Meadow Nature Reserve. The path passes through a gate into a field. Follow the grassy track ahead through a further gate and between fences to a lane. Turn left along the lane for just over 100m to a gravel driveway on the right at Mill Farms Barns.
6. Turn right and, where the gravel section ends, go left through the gate. Stay on this path for over a kilometre to a gate on the right just before the road into Latimer village. Go through it and the next gate, cross the road, through the gate opposite and straight up the hill ahead. Pass through the next gate, over the access road and take the path opposite past the front of Latimer Place. This section has the finest views of the whole walk. Go through the next gate, turn right uphill and follow the path around the top of the field. As the path starts to descend, look for a gap on the right. Go through, turn left and continue downhill to pass through a further gate into a field. Stay straight ahead, keeping to the right of the hedge, all the way to Blackwell Hall Lane. Turn left down the lane.
7. Just before the left-hand bend, turn right along the gravel driveway to Blackwell Lodge. Go around to the left and through a gate into a field. Continue in the same direction through a series of gates to drop down to a bridleway. Turn left onto a busy road and then left along it past the recycling centre.

### Chorleywood Option

From the main station entrance, cross the access road and go down the steps opposite to Bedford Avenue. Turn left and first right up Chinnery Avenue. At the junction with Elizabeth Avenue go straight across, walk all the way to the end and turn left along the road. Cross the road with care and through the gate opposite. Cross the field, through the next gate and along the drive ahead. Go over the bridge and follow the drive uphill towards a lane. Near the top, turn left through a gate to join the main Chess Valley Walk.

### Chorleywood & Latimer Option

From the main entrance in the road, cross the access road and go down the steps opposite to Bedford Avenue. Turn left and first right up Chinnery Avenue. At the junction with Elizabeth Avenue go straight across, walk all the way to the end and take path past the pond on the left-hand corner of the car park, go past the information board and turn left on a path that runs parallel to the road. Go past the pond on the right and bear right across the Common towards the woods. Ahead are two broad avenues. Take the left-hand one towards a white building in the distance. Cross the main road and go through the entrance to Chorleywood House Estate on Lady Ela Drive. Keep straight ahead along the Drive for over 300 metres to a T-junction. Turn right for a few metres and bear left along a wide path. Follow this path as it drops down to a junction at the bottom. Turn left to join the main Chess Valley Walk.

### Route to the Bedford Arms

At the watercress beds, cross the river by the footbridge alongside the ford, and walk up the lane. 100m after the right-hand bend take the footpath to your left towards Chenies village. Follow the path past some farm buildings, cross the narrow lane (Mouthwood Farm Lane) and continue straight over to emerge onto a road by the Red Lion Pub. Cross the road and turn right along the grass verge to the Bedford Arms. To return to the Chess Valley walk, retrace your steps to Mouthwood Farm Lane and turn left. At the end of the lane cross the road and the village green and take the gravel drive opposite towards Chenies Manor and St. Michael’s Church. Pass the church and turn right in front of the Manor gates onto a footpath. Follow the path between the Church and Manor, downhill through a gate. Cross the road and follow the lane opposite over two river bridges. Immediately after crossing the second bridge, turn left to re-join the main route.