



# Baldock Circular walk

A flat walk across vast Hertfordshire farmland fields in an area filled with clues to Britain's Iron Age and Roman past. Follows part of the Icknield Way.




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**Length** 19.6 km (12.2 miles)

**Time:** 4 hrs 30 mins. For the whole outing, including lunch, allow 8 hours

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**Toughness** 4 out of 10

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**Transport** Trains from London Kings Cross and London St Pancras to Baldock. Take the train nearest to 10 am. Journey time 39 to 52 mins. Return trains run twice an hour. The lunchtime village comes 9.1 km (5.7 miles) into the walk - just over 2 hours of walking.

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**Maps** OS Landranger 153: OS Explorer 193

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**Walk Notes** Iron Age and Roman Settlement, Ashwell and the source of the River Cam and the Icknield Way: this is an almost flat walk across vast Hertfordshire farmland fields between villages in an area filled with clues to Britain's turbulent and colourful past. Follow part of the Icknield Way, Britain's oldest, long-distance footpath on this walk exploring the far north of Hertfordshire. Once a Roman road, the footpath takes you between the ancient village of Ashwell, an Iron Age and Roman settlement abandoned in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century but reclaimed in medieval times. In Ashwell, mentioned in the Domesday Book, the Parish Church dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> century and

there are inscriptions relating to the plague. The Church tower is the highest in Hertfordshire and is a prominent landmark for many miles around. There is also a museum and the Springs in Ashwell are the source of the river Cam.

**Warning** This walk should not be undertaken after prolonged periods of rain, given much of it is along field edges and over vast fields, which could be very muddy. In the dry, this walk is a relaxing amble through flat Hertfordshire countryside, with big vistas and big skies. The walk makes no pretence at incorporating large woods, steep hills, or extensive water features. Those more used to walking in Kent or West Sussex or over the South Downs might find the countryside on offer on this walk a little dull. It isn't, it is just different, with charms of its own. If you accept it as such you should enjoy a relaxing, enjoyable, easy day's walking.

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## History

**Baldock** This historic market town in North Hertfordshire is 33 miles north of London. Rich in archaeological heritage - Paleolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements show that Baldock has been occupied since prehistoric times. The current town dates from medieval times and its present day layout dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century when the old Great North Road and the Icknield Way crossed, making the town a staging post for travellers, who supported a large number of old coaching inns, many of which survive today as public houses.

**Ashwell** is a village with a wealth of architecture spanning several centuries. Twice a year the village, with its population of only 2,000 (2011 census) puts on an impressive village event. Early in May on a Sunday (usually the second Sunday in the month) villagers open up their properties and gardens for **Ashwell at Home**, when Morris Dancers and Tudor dancers entertain as you visit interesting and historic homes and buildings in the village. Pop-up eating places add to the cuisine on offer at the three pubs. Passes to all events cost £ 9 (2024) when booked in advance, or £ 10 on the day. Due to Covid-19 the 2020 and 2021 events were cancelled, but this delightful event returned in 2022. This year (2024) the event is on Sunday 12 May. Then on August Bank Holiday Monday Ashwell stages its **Ashwell Show** in a large showground just to the north of the church. Events include gymkhana (horse and pony show jumping), dog displays, vintage car displays, lots of childrens events, music, pop-up shops and much more. Entry to the showground is £ 10 (£ 5 for seniors). The 2020 and 2021 events were cancelled due to Covid, but returned in 2022. Next show is on Monday 26 August 2024. To get the best out of the Baldock Walk we recommend it is posted to coincide with one of these two village events.

**Caldecote** is the smallest village in Hertfordshire, with a population of a few dozen. The village covers an area of 300 acres and comprises a cluster of cottages around a former Manor House - and the tiny **Church of St Mary Magdalene**, which dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries, built in the Perpendicular style. The church was declared redundant by the Church of England in 1978 and began to fall into total disrepair until it was rescued by that wonderfully named organisation, **Friends of Friendless Churches**, who - with support from the local **Friends of Caldecote Church** - completely restored the church. Do have a look inside when passing by on this walk.

**Newnham** is another small Hertfordshire village, located south of Caldecote. Its 12<sup>th</sup> Century church - the **Church of St Vincent**, a Grade 11 \* listed building, contains medieval wall murals, sometimes known as Medieval **Doom** Wall Paintings of the Last Judgement. Similar Doom murals can be found on two other SWC walks - in the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Great Shelford, on TO Book 1 Walk 26 - Shelford to Cambridge, and in the Church of St Peter and St Paul, Chaldon, on TO Book 2 Walk 15 - Riddlesdown to Coulsdon. All three churches are worth a look inside.

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### Shortening the Walk

Ashwell and Morden station is an alternative station to return to London Kings Cross. Approximately 3 km south-east from the center of Ashwell, this return option reduces the length of the main walk by 5 km (3.1 miles). Directions are given at the end of the walk text.

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### Lunch

You are spoilt for choice between two good pubs and a hotel, all with character, in Ashwell, some 9 km (5.7 mi) into the walk. The first pub you come to, at 6 High Street, is the **Rose and Crown pub** which serves a variety of food from sandwiches and snacks to more expensive cooked lunches. It has an attractive, large beer garden to the rear of the pub. Lunch is served Monday to Saturday: 12 noon to 14-00 hrs; Sunday 12 noon to 14-30 hrs

Nearby, on Mill Street, close to the church, is the **Bushel & Strike pub** (Tel [01462-743984](tel:01462-743984)), which serves bar meals and main meals, and a good selection of real ale, Monday to Saturday: 12 noon to 15-00 hrs, Sundays: 12 noon to 17-00 hrs. This pub has a large beer garden.

At the far end of the High Street is the **Three Tuns Hotel** (Tel [01462-743131](tel:01462-743131)), which serves food all day on Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holidays, in very comfortable surroundings indoors plus a good size beer garden. Post Covid, this hostelry now also serves lunch from 12 noon until 16-00 hrs on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

**Tea** The suggested tea place is **Café Plus** in the High Street, Baldock, which is open until 17-30 hrs Monday to Saturday and from 10-30 hrs to 14-00 hrs on Sundays. Alternatively - and for Sunday walkers - try one of **four pubs** passed or the **Delizia Trattoria**. Note: in neighbouring town Letchworth Garden City, temperance was promoted when the new town was first built and to this day there are very few watering holes to refresh the weary traveller. Letchworth's residents must have sneaked over to Baldock, in order to explain why there are so many pubs in Baldock.

**Status** Directions last updated May 2023. Introduction reconfigured June 2023.

**Help Us!** After the walk, please leave a [comment](#), it really helps. Thanks!

You can also upload photos to the [SWC Group on Flickr](#) ([upload your photos](#)) and [videos to Youtube](#). This walk's tags are:

**By Car** **Start** SG7 5BU

**Help** National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Traveline (bus times): 0871 200 22 33 (12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234

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## Walk Directions

OpenStreetMap (not OS) mapping is used in the PDF for licence reasons.





will be evident when you reach the brow of the hill). After going uphill for 300 metres you start to go downhill.

4. **[2]** In 200 metres at the field boundary, and path junction, by the footpath post (where the path ahead links up to the Icknield Way), *turn right* along the bridleway following a line of pylons, your direction 60°. A hedge and a ditch are on your left-hand side. Keep straight on ignoring all ways off. In 670 metres you pass through a field boundary and keep ahead. The pylons now veer off to the left. There is a house in the distance to your right (you are aiming to its left) and you should continue straight on now between vast fields (the hedge and tree-line previously on your left have been grubbed up). Follow the path cum track between the fields until in 400 metres you cross over a concrete apron (often piled with smelly silage) to reach a car road.
5. **[3]** *Turn right* along the road into the village of **Bygrave**. In 90 metres ignore Wedon Way on your left hand side to continue straight on past a row of houses on your left hand side.
6. **[!]** In 300 metres and at the last house (No 1 Ashwell Road), where the road swings right, *turn left* on to a footpath through a wooden kissing gate, with a metal farm gate to its left and by a two-armed footpath sign, your direction 45°. Continue straight on with gardens to your left and vast crop fields to your right, on a grassy car-wide path.
7. In 110 metres the gardens end and you come to a junior playing field with football goal posts (In May this playing field can be covered in daisies). Continue straight on, heading downhill. 20 metres beyond the end of the playing fields you pass under electricity pylons and in a further 90 metres go through a wooden kissing gate to the right of a metal field gate (or pass through a gap to the left of the kissing gate) to come out onto a gravel access road with a detached house straight ahead.
8. *Turn right* for 15 metres, *then left*, uphill, along the left-hand edge of open fields with a line of pylons on your right hand side, your direction 20°. Continue uphill with a hedge on your left-hand side. In 100 metres pass under electricity pylons as they bear to the right and keep ahead, now between open fields. In a further 150 metres at the top of the hill, you come to a wooden bench some 15 metres over to your right and a grassy track. *Turn right* along this track and continue straight ahead, gently uphill, with a hedgerow to your left and vast open fields to your right, your direction 110°. (There are fine views here to your right across the countryside)
9. In 250 metres by another wooden bench the path *bears left*. There is a small brick building to your right and pylons on your left-hand side. Follow the pylons, eventually passing under them in 250 metres. In a further 100 metres you come to the end of this track, with a bungalow and farm buildings on your right hand side and you are now at a tarmac access road.
10. **[4]** Cross this road towards the wood (**Park Wood**) to follow a three-armed footpath sign. Enter the wood, with a piggery on your right hand side, between gateposts for

a missing farm gate and in 10 metres *take the left* of two paths, your direction 330°. Continue straight on, gently downhill on a car-wide track into the wood ignoring all turnings off (This path can be very muddy in winter - and in May you have masses of cow parsley on your either side). In 200 metres cross a path, next to a footpath post, to continue ahead for a further 200 metres, still downhill, aiming for a fence gap at the bottom of the wood (the stile previously here has been removed).

11. Pass through the gap and *bear right* across a field. **[!]** Your way ahead depends on whether the farmer has reinstated the path after ploughing. On a bearing of 40° cross this field. In 160 metres you come to a track. Here, depending on the previous path status, you may have to *turn right downhill* for a short distance before *turning left* to continue close to your previous direction - 30° - on a broad earthen way between open fields. In 300 metres you go through a field boundary to come to a T-junction, where you *turn left*, bearing 300° to continue on a grassy track with a ditch on your left.
12. In 300 metres pass a 3 plank footbridge on your left by a footpath sign and in a further 10 metres pass under pylons. Keep on this grassy track and in 400 metres you reach a road - Claybush Road (formerly Bygrave Road). **[5]** *Turn right* uphill along the road and in 400 metres you pass a lone house on the right (The Knoll) - recently rebuilt as a substantial property. 170 metres past this property, as the road levels out, you come to a derelict wooden farm building on your left hand side, to the right of which is the signposted Ickniel Way and Partridge Hill.
13. Here **[!]** *turn left* along a car wide farm track to join the Ickniel Way and in 60 metres **[6]** *turn right* with the track to continue first gently, then steadily uphill, with a hedge on your right-hand side, and vast open fields to your left, your direction due north. In 600 metres, at the top of the hill, continue straight on. The path now begins to descend and in 200 metres, as it swings to the left, *keep ahead* on a narrow path between hedges. Soon you will see **Ashwell Church** spire to your right-hand side and **Arbury Banks** to your left (which is the site of the Iron Age and Roman Settlements).
14. In 80 metres you pass a signed path to the left to Arbury Banks. In a further 80 metres you come out on to an access track and you pass two cottages on your left hand side. Continue down on this track past a yard and in 140 metres your reach a junction with a boarded-up, dilapidated house on your left hand side (now mostly hidden by undergrowth). **[!]** *Turn right* here, bearing 80° along a worn track and continue straight on with houses and allotments on your left, and later houses on your right-hand side. Ignore all ways off.
15. In 350 metres the track becomes a footpath, parallel with Ashwell Street to the left. Having passed by a new housing development on your right-hand side (the site of a former industrial property), in 140 metres you join Ashwell Street, in a further 20 metres coming to a main road junction at a bend in the road. *Turn left* at this junction into Bear Lane and descend this road, passing Dixies Close on the left in 80 metres. In a further 60 metres pass Silver Street to the right then Back Street on the

- left. Keep ahead, now down a restricted entry way and in 60 metres at a T-junction with the High Street, you are now in the village of **Ashwell**. *Turn right*, in 30 metres coming to the **Rose and Crown pub**, one of the suggested options for your lunchtime stop. To get to the **Three Tuns Hotel** (another lunch stop option) keep on along the High Street, ignoring ways off. In 170 metres you pass the Ashwell United Reformed Church and churchyard on your left and in a further 50 metres you come to the hotel.
16. After lunch, to visit **St Mary's Church, Ashwell** (highly recommended), coming out of the Rose & Crown pub, *turn right* along the High Street for 130 metres, then *turn left* down Church Lane, then ahead down Church Path to reach the church **[7]**. On some Bank Holidays the church opens its tower to the public: a climb to the top is rewarded by fine views over Hertfordshire.
  17. Coming out of the church, *bear right* down its gravel drive for 40 metres and exit the churchyard by its ancient lychgate, onto Mill Street. 50 metres down the road on your right is the **Bushel & Strike pub** (your third lunch stop option). To continue with the walk from the church lychgate: *turn left* along Mill Street and in 30 metres, at the road junction with Swan Street, keep ahead down the narrow Alms Lane (with Ashwell Museum on your right).
  18. In 60 metres you come out on to the High Street, where you *turn right*, in 30 metres passing the Rose and Crown pub on your left-hand side. Walk ahead through the village. You pass Ashwell Gallery on your left. Where the road swings to the left you pass Ashwell Village Hall on your right-hand side. The road then swings to the right and Back Street joins from the left.
  19. In 80 metres *turn right* into Hinxworth Road. In 30 metres **[!]** *bear left* onto a signposted public bridleway, a grassy track, your direction west. This track gradually ascends, providing good views of Ashwell village and its church behind you. In 150 metres you pass a tennis court over to your left. After 650 metres a permissive path joins from the left. Keep ahead, still uphill, through a field boundary. In 400 metres you reach the top of the incline (**Newnham Hill**) and the path swings to the left, your direction now 220°.
  20. With some fine views out to the easterly end of **The Chilterns** (from Pegsdon Hills via Barton Hills to Sharpenhoe Clappers, and with Pulloxhill Water Tower to the right of it in the valley), the path begins to descend and in 500 metres, at a path T-junction, you *turn right*, downhill, with a hedge on your left, your direction now 300°. In 130 metres, **[!]** *turn left* through a gap in the hedge, pass over rough ground to come out onto a signposted footpath, your initial direction 225°.
  21. Continue ahead along this narrow path between fields and in 300 metres a path joins from the left. Follow the path towards a line of pylons, and in 600 metres you come to the hamlet of **Caldecote**. You pass a pair of cottages on your right-hand side then *turn right* **[8]** on a concrete road, giving access to some large industrial barns, then in 70 metres, *turn left* over a concrete apron into the grounds of the



previously derelict **St Mary Magdalene Church, Caldecote** , recently rescued from ruin by the splendidly named "Friends of Friendless Churches" organisation - as of May 2023 the church has been fully repaired and restored with all previous year's scaffolding now struck. You might be lucky and find the church open - do have a look inside when it is. Afterwards, walk behind the church, to go past a pond on your left, across grass and join a path as it swings left along a left hand field boundary, your direction 210° - ignoring a path straight ahead.

22. In 150 metres, in the field corner, *turn left*, to join Caldecote Road. In 40 metres ignore the turning to the left. Keep ahead on Caldecote Road, your direction 165°, along this tarmac lane between vast fields, and after 1 km the lane descends into the village of **Newnham**.
23. You now come to **St Vincent's Church** on your left-hand side - well worth a look inside if open - there are some Medieval wall paintings opposite the main entrance). Returning to the road, go over a bridge and continue on through the village. Ignore a footpath to the right. In a further 100 metres you reach a road junction. *Turn right [!]* and immediately *right again* through a narrow, low gap in a tall hedge, with a footpath signpost (PF6 Newnham Road 1/2) on the right in the hedge (it can be overgrown) on a four-way road signpost, just before a Give Way-sign. Through the hedge, *bear left* on an indistinct path to the left of a private garden and in 35 metres emerge at the top edge of a vast arable field. *Turn right* along the boundary past a house and in 35 metres follow a yellow marker on a fence post to cross this vast field on a usually well-cleared path on a left-hand diagonal bearing of 200° and once over the brow of the field you aim for the field's far left-hand corner. [ **[!]** If the farmer has ploughed up this vast field and has not reinstated the path, keep along the top field edge to the next boundary (within 100 metres) where you *turn left* down the field edge, on a clear path between open fields, and at the bottom of the field, *turn left* to follow the field's lower edge as far as the field's lower corner where you *turn right* up the flight of wooden steps as on the main path route, detailed below.]
24. In 750 metres up and over the field leave it by going up a flight of wood and earth steps up a bank to come out onto Newnham Road.
25. *Turn right here* along the at-times busy road without a pavement (watch out for the fast flowing traffic). **[9]** In 225 metres, you come to a National Grid pylon over to your left.
26. **[!]** The route ahead up past the pylon and up along a field edge used to be a permissive path, but since 2022 it would seem "permission" might have been withdrawn. The way up the field is ploughed or planted up to the field edge, where previously there had been a clear way on one side of the hedge or the other, and at the far, southern end of the route, at its junction with the Icniel Way, there is now a "No Footpath" sign. Until we can establish for sure the status of the path, and or we figure out an alternative route, I suggest we continue to

use this route up past the pylon although please be aware we might be unwanted visitors over someones private land.

27. Opposite the National Grid pylon *turn left* to cross the road and continue along an unmarked path (a field boundary), gently uphill, your initial direction 160°. If the way to the left of the pylon looks overgrown, try the route on the other side of the hedge - it might be clearer. In 30 metres you pass on your immediate right the pylon and keep ahead uphill. **Note** At the top of this path your way ahead might be blocked by a large building aggregate mound, now almost completely covered in foliage (May 2023).
28. In 430 metres, with the aggregate mound directly ahead of you, make your way best you can around *to the right* of the mound, then *left* Ignore the track to your right and *keep ahead, slightly left* your direction now 150° on a car wide track, with a hedgerow to your right and open fields to your left.
29. In 500 metres the track passes through a field boundary and joins **The Icknield Way** at a T-junction. *Turn right* onto the Icknield Way. You now follow this broad track in a south-westerly direction, gently downhill. The track soon swings to the left and in 220 metres pass through a metal squeeze stile to the right of a metal fieldgate. You now pass by two barns on your left and the track now becomes a concrete access drive. You next pass on your left a single storey farm house. Continue down this concrete drive and in 350 metres you pass on your right the entrance way to Nook Cottage and a stud farm with stables. In a further 70 metres you come out to a T-junction with a main road – Salisbury Road.
30. **[10]** At Salisbury Road, cross over with care and *turn left* along a narrow pavement. [ **[!]** If you are in a hurry to get to Baldock railway station for your journey home, just keep ahead down Salisbury Road for some 750 metres, to pass under the railway bridge, with the station's access road in a further 85 metres on your left-hand side.] Otherwise, in 30 metres there is a “Welcome to Baldock” sign over to your left. Continue straight on along the pavement. In a further 150 metres there is a footpath sign on your right next to Blackhorse Farm. **[!]** *Turn right* here on this path between the Farm and a bungalow on the right (signposted Ivel Springs Local Nature Reserve).
31. In 30 metres pass straight between a white cottage on your right and a brick house on your left, your direction 305°. Cross a stream and keep ahead, your direction 260°. Pass through a metal fieldgate and follow the path straight ahead with a wooden then wire fence on your right and a (dried up) stream on your left.
32. **[11]** Keep straight on this path as it winds through a wooded area. In 200 metres you reach a junction with a signpost marked Kingfisher Way. Directly ahead of you are horse paddocks. *Turn left* here and walk up a flight of substantial wooden steps with a dog-leg, to enter **Ivel Springs Local Nature Reserve**. Follow the path for 50 metres and you pass another Kingfisher Way sign on your left-hand side. Keep ahead along this path.

33. In 75 metres ignore the Kingfisher Way turning left by a marker post on your left-hand side and continue *straight ahead*, your direction  $190^\circ$  ignoring the path to the left. Keep straight on and in 160 metres a path on the left leads to an information panel for the Ivel Springs Local Nature Reserve. In a further 120 metres you ignore a metal kissing gate on your right by an equestrian center and in a further 10 metres you **[!]** *turn left* at a footpath post, your direction  $100^\circ$ .
34. Follow the path uphill for 60 metres to another footpath marker post on your right hand side. **[12]** Continue in the same direction along a grassy path, keeping a wire fence and a hedge on your right. In 75 metres ignore a faint footpath to the left and keep *straight on* along this path, in another 75 metres passing a football pitch above you on your right-hand side.
35. **[!]** In 110 metres you come out into a small gravel car park area at a path T-junction. 10 metres further along with a five-way footpath signpost and a narrow, low railway tunnel on the other side of it, *continue ahead* through the railway tunnel to next walk between high metal fences on the other side. In a further 60 metres you pass on your right the modern commercial premises of ABL Circuits to reach a road at a T-junction, with a new McCarthy and Stone retirement home development under construction (May 2021) on your left-hand side. *Turn left* along the road (but notice **The Orange Tree** pub about 100 metres to your right). In 40 metres *turn right* into Church Street and you continue straight on this road, passing the Parish Church on your right hand side.
36. At the end of Church Street, at a T-junction with Hitchin Street, with a Barclays Bank on your left and a hotel, bar & restaurant called **The George at Baldock** on your right, **you have a choice** : for **Cafe Plus**, a suggested tea stop, cross over the main road opposite the Baldock Museum and continue in the same direction to the left of the Museum to find the cafe in 35 metres on your right hand side. Otherwise, *turn left* along White Horse Street. You walk straight down towards some traffic lights 250 metres away, along the way passing **The Rose & Crown** pub on your right and **Delizia Trattoria** on your left.
37. At the traffic lights *turn left* and walk past the **Old White Horse pub** - another refreshment option - on your left-hand side. In a further 40 metres you pass **The Engine** pub on your left-hand side and opposite this is the station approach road. Walk up the road and in 100 metres you have **Baldock Railway Station** ahead of you.

## Baldock Circular - shortening the walk to Ashwell and Morden Station

1. Coming out of **The Rose & Crown** pub, *turn right*, direction  $70^\circ$  to walk along the High Street. In 200 metres you pass a (road) signpost on your left, indicating Ashwell station ahead, direction  $80^\circ$  as you cross over Kingsland Way. In 20 metres

you pass **The Three Tuns Hotel** on your left. In 80 metres you pass **The Springs** on your left (a potential picnic site) to continue ahead.

2. In 300 metres you reach a T-junction (signposted to the right Ashwell Station 2 miles), to *turn right*, direction 140°, to walk along Station Road.
3. After 2.3 km you come to a T-junction. *Turn right* (there is a road sign here for the railway station). In 30 metres you pass a road sign for Odsey and 30 metres further on you pass the Odsey War Memorial on your right.
4. In 180 metres you reach The Jester Inn public house and hotel on your right (as of Spring 2024 sadly PERMANENTLY CLOSED) and in a further 40 metres *turn left* to walk down the road leading to **Ashwell and Morden Railway Station**. Trains back to London depart from platform No 1.

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