



Biggleswade to Sandy walk

The Greensand Ridge Walk along grassy tracks and woodland trails, with two picturesque villages



Length	<p>Main Walk: 18¾ km (11.7 miles). Four hours 10 minutes walking time. For the whole excursion including trains, sights and meals, allow at least hours.</p> <p>Short Walk, omitting Old Warden: 11¾ km (7.3 miles). Two hours 30 minutes walking time.</p> <p>Circular Walk, omitting Old Warden: 19½ km (12.1 miles). Four hours 15 minutes walking time.</p> <p>Long Circular Walk, via Old Warden: 26½ km (16.5 miles). Six hours walking time.</p>
OS Map	Explorer 208. Biggleswade, map reference TL193441, is in Bedfordshire, 7 km ESE of Bedford.
Toughness	2 out of 10 (1 for the Short Walk, 4 for the Long Circular Walk).
Features	<p>This Bedfordshire walk takes in a rural area to the west of a corridor containing the former Great North Road, the East Coast Main Line and the River Ivel, a tributary of the Great Ouse. Once past the A1 this is a predominantly flat area of arable farmland and patches of woodland, with some attractive villages of thatched cottages and ironstone churches.</p> <p>On the outward route from the market town of Biggleswade you are likely to see some light aircraft flying about as you head towards Old Warden Aerodrome, home to the famous Shuttleworth Collection of historic working aircraft and other vehicles. After skirting the airfield the walk continues through the wooded Warden Warren (where a short detour would reveal two secluded Landmark Trust properties) to the suggested</p>

lunch pub in the picturesque village of **Old Warden**. After passing its richly-decorated church a gentle climb leads onto a low ridge where you join the **Greensand Ridge Walk**. The rest of the walk follows this waymarked trail back towards the River Ivel and the town of **Sandy**, along the way passing through another attractive village, **Northill**.

Path Closures	<i>As a consequence of the Shoreham air crash in 2015 the lanes, bridleways and footpaths around Old Warden Aerodrome are closed when an airshow is taking place, typically twice a month in summer. No alternative routes have been researched, so it would be advisable to check this Shuttleworth Airshows page and avoid the walk on any of those dates.</i>
Walk Options	<p>Two contrasting options have been provided for this walk, one which shortens it by 7 km and an extension which lengthens it by 7¾ km.</p> <p>The Short Walk option cuts out the westernmost part of the walk by taking a direct route via Ickwell to Northill. The motivation behind this somewhat inferior option (omitting the many interesting features in and around Old Warden) was to encourage walkers to combine it with the second option, an extension from Sandy back to Biggleswade on the other side of the railway to make a Circular Walk.</p> <p>This extension climbs a low wooded hill which was once an Iron Age hill fort and is now the site of The Lodge, the UK headquarters of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and a nature reserve (free entry, but note that it closes at dusk). A fairly direct main route is suggested with just two short optional detours, but a longer route taking in more of the RSPB's waymarked nature trails is described in this walk's companion, the Sandy to Arlesey walk (#412). The route continues across Biggleswade Common and returns to the town via an attractive riverside stretch. Combining this extension with the full Main Walk is also possible and would make a Long Circular Walk.</p>
Additional Notes	<p>This walk's original author created it in the opposite direction: a Main Walk from Sandy to Biggleswade, with the (rarely taken) option of completing a Long Circular Walk via Biggleswade Common and the RSPB reserve. In this orientation the two lunch pubs were not ideally placed, with the one in Northill coming too soon and the other rather too late. The new author feels that it works better this way round, with the Old Warden pub well placed on the Main Walk and the Northill pub on the Short and Circular Walks. The main drawback is the paucity of tea options when finishing in Sandy.</p> <p>The old walk document is still available to download from the “Sandy to Biggleswade original option” button above, although following those written directions would take you on a slightly different route in a few places where the layout on the ground has changed. In practice you could use the revised GPS route in either direction.</p>
Transport	<p>Biggleswade and Sandy are adjacent stations on the East Coast Main Line. On weekdays there is a half-hourly cross-London Thameslink service via East Croydon, London Bridge and St Pancras; on Sundays there is an hourly service from Kings Cross. The journey time to Biggleswade is about</p>

45 minutes from central London. Unless you will definitely be completing a Circular Walk back to Biggleswade, buy a **return to Sandy**.

If you wanted to abandon the walk at Old Warden you would need to call a taxi, but there is a bus service (Mon–Sat) through Northill and Ickwell to Biggleswade.

If driving, the station car parks both cost around £4.50 after 10am weekdays, £3.50 weekends (2024). If you want to return to your car from Sandy there is a bus service (Mon–Sat) which you could use if the trains were disrupted.

Suggested Train

Take the train nearest to **10:15** from **St Pancras** or **Kings Cross** to **Biggleswade**.

Lunch

The suggested lunch place on the **Main Walk** (after 7¼ km) is the **Hare & Hounds** (01767-627225) in **Old Warden**, which has a large sloping garden at the rear.

On the **Short Walk** the suggested place (after 6¾ km) is **The Crown at Northill** (01767-627337; closed Mon), which also has a large beer garden. This pub would also serve as a mid-afternoon refreshment break (or a very late lunch stop) at weekends on the Main Walk, but is closed from 3-5.30pm on weekdays.

Both of these pubs are relatively up-market and you would need to book at weekends to be sure of a table.

Tea

About an hour after leaving Old Warden you could make a mid-afternoon detour to the **Cowshed Café** (open to 3pm Wed/Thu/Sat; 2pm Fri & Sun; closed Mon & Tue) at Oak Farm, but note its limited opening times.

The most convenient tea place in **Sandy** is **The Bell** (01767-448401), a traditional pub across the road from the station. Some alternative pubs and **Mama's Coffee Shop** are about 500m away along the High Street, but the café is likely to be closed by the time you finish the walk.

There is more choice if you complete a Circular Walk. The route through **The Lodge** passes close to a new **RSPB café** (01767-693333; open to 4.30pm) next to its picnic area. In **Biggleswade** two possible places on opposite sides of the central Market Square are **Surfin Cafe** (01767-220581; open to 6pm Mon–Fri, 5.30pm Sat, 5pm Sun & BH); and **Rosso Lounge** (01767-600575), a café/bar open all evening. There are also several pubs in the vicinity, including the **White Hart** (01767-314219) and a JD Wetherspoon's on the High Street, the **Crown Hotel** (01767-310510).

Allow at least five minutes to reach the station from Market Square.

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 SG18 8AL **Finish** SG19 1AW

Help

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

Version

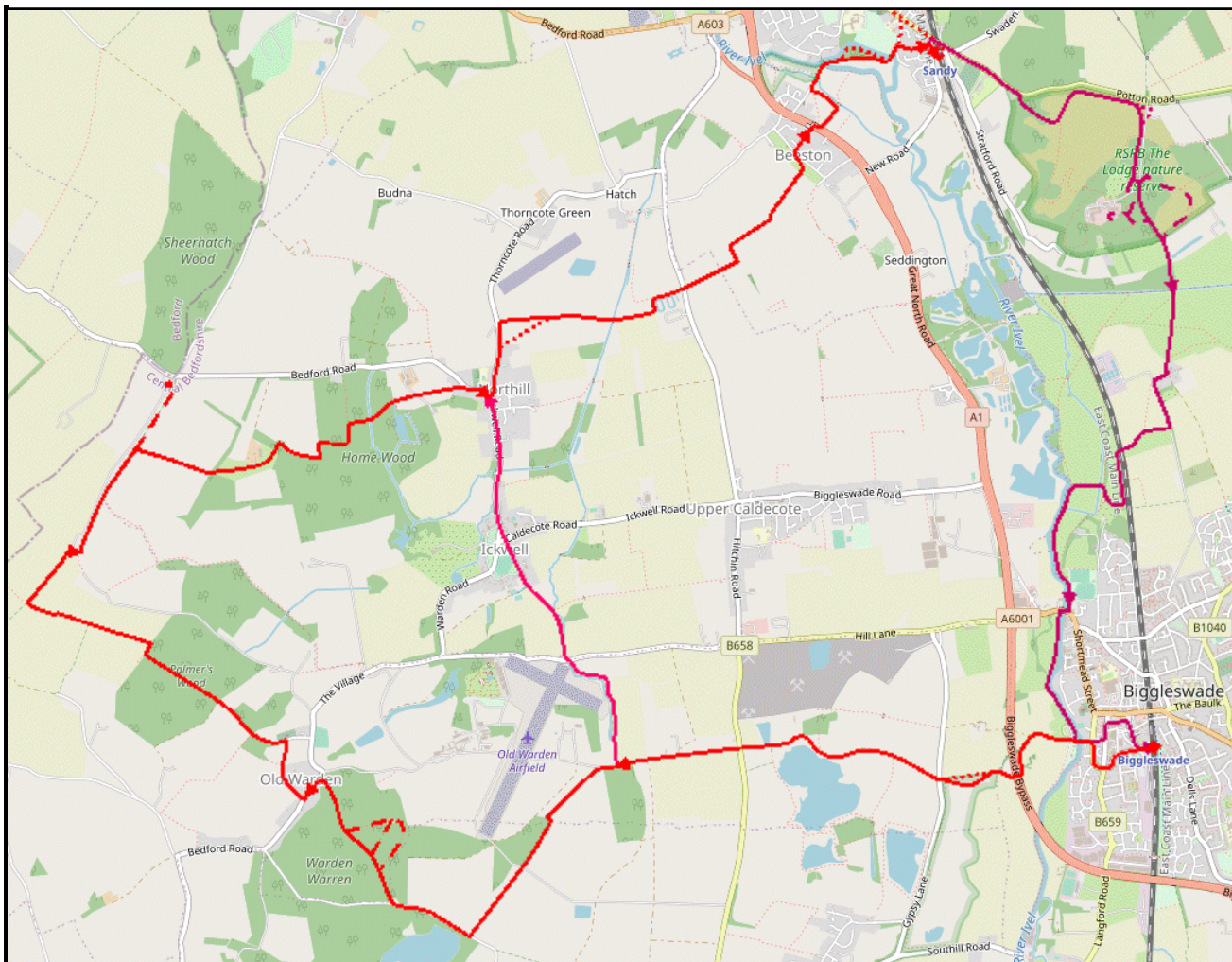
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PeterB**Sean****Copyright**

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Walk Directions

Walk Map



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Walk Options

M. Main Walk (18¾ km)

- a. Short Walk, omitting Old Warden (11¾ km)
- b. Circular Walk, omitting Old Warden (19½ km)
- c. Long Circular Walk, via Old Warden (26½ km)

Walk Directions

A. Biggleswade Station to Bricklamp Covert (4 km)

1. From the island platform go up steps to the footbridge and turn left. Outside the station bear slightly left and go down to a road junction. Cross over Station Road to continue along the right-hand pavement of Saffron Road, which curves left and right and comes to a crossroads. Go straight ahead, now on the B659 (Teal Road), which curves round to the right.
2. In 200m cross the road at the pedestrian lights and **turn left** into Mill Lane. This goes past the converted **Ivel Mill**¹ and crosses the **River Ivel**. Ignore paths off to both sides to continue on a public bridleway between farm fields, heading **W**. **The next turning is easy to miss**. About 100m before reaching the A1 **veer left** off the track onto a narrow path between high hedges, which is actually the continuation of the bridleway.
 - If this path is too overgrown you could skirt around it on the field edge to the right, as other walkers appear to have done.
3. The bridleway gradually approaches the main road and in theory you could go straight across it, but a permissive path now provides a much safer crossing. Follow this path alongside the road for 150m and then veer right to go under it through one of the flood tunnels. On the other side **turn half-right** onto a stony path.
4. In 100m the path crosses a ditch and turns left onto a grassy track, briefly rejoining the original route of the bridleway. In just 30m the suggested route is to **turn left** onto a signposted permissive footpath into the north-eastern corner of the **Broom East Wildlife Conservation Site**².
 - You could simply stay on the bridleway up to Gypsy Lane (350m ahead), but this little excursion is only 50m longer.
5. Inside the conservation area **fork right** onto the main perimeter path, passing a pond on the left and coming to an information panel about the restoration project. Carry on through the grassland for 250m, never far from the bridleway, to reach a second information panel about the area's biodiversity. **Veer right** here onto a side path which takes you out of the conservation area to where the bridleway meets Gypsy Lane.
6. **Cross the road carefully** (traffic can be quite fast) onto the continuation of the bridleway, which turns half-right and goes across the middle of a large farm field. On the far side cross a ditch on a plank bridge and continue along the right-hand edge of another farm field. In 200m follow the grassy path as it curves left, away from the tree boundary.
7. In the next 700m the path meanders through the grassland, soon with glimpses of a large fishing lake behind a wire fence on the left. It then crosses an access track to the lake, passes a reed-lined pond on the right and comes to the B658. **Cross the road carefully** (again, traffic can be quite fast) and take the private road opposite, signposted as a public bridleway.
8. Go along this tree-lined lane for 800m. Halfway along you pass some agricultural college buildings on the right at Kingshill Farm, then a large detached house (sometimes with a helicopter on the lawn). You then pass a couple of places where the lane widens, with a wood (Bricklamp Covert) on the left. Near the end of the second passing place there is a gate in the hedge on the right.

If you are doing the Short or Circular Walk (omitting Old Warden), go to §E.

B. Bricklamp Covert to Old Warden (3¼ km)

9. For the **Main Walk** ignore the gate and carry on along the lane for 100m, joining the **North Bedfordshire Heritage Trail**³ (NBHT). Where the lane bends right you should **veer left** through a wide gap in the hedge with a waymarker post, to continue on a fenced grassy strip which runs parallel to the lane for 40m before turning left.
 - This short stretch can be waterlogged. It appears that most walkers bypass it by continuing briefly along the lane, then nipping through a small gap in the hedge just before the entrance to **Old Warden Aerodrome**.
10. The fenced bridleway now heads **SW** alongside a large field, with glimpses of the airfield through the trees on the right. In 400m a waymarker post directs you to **fork right** for a short interlude through a piece of woodland. The path goes alongside a stream and passes a bench with a couple of droll plaques, then zig-zags sharply left and right to rejoin the grassy path outside the wood.
11. After this mysterious little kink the bridleway heads **SW** again for 800m, initially alongside Lowsiebush Covert and crossing a private road halfway along. At the far end go out through a gate and turn right onto a minor road, soon with a lake visible through the trees on your left. You have just over 500m of road walking, but there is a grass verge and not much traffic.
12. After the road bends slightly left you pass an isolated house on the right. At the end of its garden **veer right** through a fieldgate onto a broad track through **Warden Warren**, still on the NBHT and heading **NW**. In 200m you reach the first of three tracks forking off to the right, with an information panel about one of the two Landmark Trust properties in this estate woodland.

Between April and October you could take one of the following detours, on seasonal permissive paths which loop around these secluded properties and return to the right of way 350m ahead. Outside these months you would have to stay on the public footpath and resume the directions at [15].
13. **Detour via Cottage and Summerhouse (+400m)**

- a. **Fork right** onto the first track, which in 225m passes **Keeper's Cottage**⁴ down to the right (though partly hidden by trees). The track then swings round to the left and in a further 200m you reach a small clearing containing an 18thC folly, **Queen Anne's Summerhouse**⁵.
 - b. The shortest way to resume the main route is to take the right-hand track away from the folly, although the information panel about it is inconveniently situated at the far end of the left-hand track.
14. **Detour via the Summerhouse only (+350m)**

Carry on along the main track for 125m and **fork right** onto the second track, going through a wooden fieldgate with another information panel. In 225m you reach a small clearing containing an 18thC folly, **Queen Anne's Summerhouse**⁵. Return to the main route via the other track.
15. From either of the detours turn right to resume your route along the public footpath. The woodland track bends slightly right and later starts to descend, eventually emerging onto a street (The Village). Turn left to go through **Old Warden** for 150m, passing several attractive thatched properties. Shortly after passing the Village Hall you reach the suggested lunch pub on the left, the **Hare and Hounds**.

C. Old Warden to the 'tree tunnel' (3 km)

16. Turn left out of the pub to continue briefly along the road, then **turn right** onto a footpath opposite the **Old Warden Guest House**, still on the NBHT. In 175m the path goes up a short slope and swings right. Keep ahead through an old kissing gate onto a fenced path, soon with a view through the trees on the right of **Shuttleworth House**⁶ and a lake in its grounds.
17. At the end go through another gate onto a lane, with the **Abbey Church of St Leonard**⁷ opposite. The route continues to the left through the church car park, but the church itself has several unusual features and is well worth a visit.
18. Make your way to the back of the car park and go through a gate with a footpath waymarker. The path curves round to the right and passes an information panel about a nearby Field Maple tree. Keep right at a path junction to continue along the right-hand edge of a field, soon with two thinly-disguised telecommunications masts off to your right.
19. Keep ahead across an open area and then on a broad grassy strip through **Palmer's Wood** for over 500m, heading **NW**. On leaving the wood follow the path as it swings right and left to continue for 600m along the edge of two large fields, with a hedge on your right. At a kink in the second field keep ahead through a gap in the tree boundary and veer left and right to go along the edge of a third field, now with a hedge on your left.
20. In 200m **turn right** at a crosspaths in the field corner, staying on the NBHT and also joining the **Greensand Ridge Walk**⁸ (GRW). Go along this grassy path between fields for 450m, soon with a distant view on the left of the two huge **Airship Hangars**⁹ at Cardington, 4 km away. At the end of the field follow the path round to the right to come to a path T-junction in a tree tunnel.

D. The 'tree tunnel' to Northill (3½ km)

21. Turn left onto a broad track through this tree tunnel, staying on both the NBHT and GRW. In 400m ignore a footpath off to the right along a field edge. In a further 400m there is another footpath junction, with the GRW turning right through a wide gap and the NBHT carrying straight on. Unless you want to make a detour to a farm café **turn right** at this path junction, staying on the GRW.

22. Detour to the Cowshed Café (+1 km)

Stay on on the track for a further 500m, almost up to its junction with Bedford Road. The café is off to the left at **Oak Farm**. Return the same way and **turn left** at the path junction to rejoin the GRW.

23. The path passes an isolated tree as it climbs gently between two fields, heading **ESE**. After going past the left-hand end of a hedge it starts to descend. At the bottom of the slope veer left and right to go through a strip of woodland and continue on a grassy path across a field, heading **E**.
24. On the far side go through a gate onto a fenced path which skirts around the buildings of **Highlands Farm**. Eventually the path turns sharply right to go through another gate into a wood. The path soon emerges from the trees to continue along the right-hand edge of a field. Follow it round to the left in the corner, then in 100m **turn right** into the main part of **Home Wood**.

25. In 200m turn left as indicated at a path T-junction. In a further 150m **turn right** at another path junction to stay on the right of way (the waymarker here was missing when last checked). In 150m the path crosses a ditch on a footbridge and bears left. In a further 150m keep ahead at a crosspaths to come to the edge of the wood. Go out through a gate and bear right onto a grassy track heading **E**, passing a fish pond on your right.
26. In 150m keep ahead at a path crossing and continue in the same direction for a further 200m, with a hedge on your left and paddocks on the right. At the end go through a wooden barrier and out between houses to a road (Bedford Road). Turn right and follow the road round a left-hand bend into **Northill**.
27. At the end of this road you will be turning left to leave the village on Thorncote Road, but the suggested route is to **go over a low stile on the right** (or through a metal gate just beyond it) into the churchyard of **St Mary the Virgin**¹⁰. Follow the path round the tower to its entrance (and perhaps a quick visit), then out through a gate on the far side for a possible mid-afternoon refreshment stop at **The Crown**.
Continue the directions at §F.

E. Bricklamp Covert to Northill direct (2¾ km)

28. For the **Short Walk** go through the gate onto a grassy path across a field, joining the **North Bedfordshire Heritage Trail**³ (NBHT) and heading **N**. In 150m go through another gate and continue past some fish ponds on your left, then a stream. At a wide gap in the hedge on the left there is a view along one of the grass runways of **Old Warden Aerodrome**.
29. The path veers left and right, following the course of the stream. After crossing a ditch on a footbridge it turns sharply left, goes round two sides of a field and comes out onto a lane. Cross over and take the continuation of the bridleway, just off to the left on the other side of the stream.
30. The bridleway goes alongside a line of trees on the right-hand edge of a large field. In 300m it turns half-left and continues between the fences of properties in the village of **Ickwell**, coming out on the corner of its large village green. Keep ahead along its right-hand side.
31. On the far side cross a lane and continue on a tarmac path along the edge of a smaller green. The path gradually approaches a road on the left (Northill Road) and becomes its pavement. You now simply follow this road for 800m, crossing over to the left-hand side at a bridge over a stream halfway along, where it becomes Ickwell Road.
32. Eventually you enter the centre of **Northill** and pass an information panel about its **Village Pond** on the left. For refreshments **The Crown** is set back from the main road on a short lane running alongside the churchyard of **St Mary the Virgin**¹⁰.

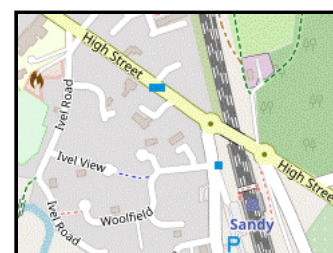
F. Northill to the Great North Road (3½ km)

33. From the pub or churchyard make your way out to the main road and turn left, heading **N**. After the junction with Bedford Road this becomes Thorncote Road, with some attractive thatched cottages; you are now on both the **Greensand Ridge Walk**⁸ (GRW) and the **North Bedfordshire Heritage Trail**³ (NBHT).
34. In 300m the NBHT takes a signposted footpath through a narrow gap in the hedge on the right, but the suggested route is to stay on the GRW: carry on along the road for 150m and then **turn right** by the entrance to Llahsram House, going past a metal fieldgate onto a broad track heading **E**. In 350m the NBHT rejoins from a gap in the hedge on the right.
 - The straight-line route taken by the NBHT is 125m shorter, but the second field it goes through is rather uneven and the entrance to it can be very muddy.

35. The track goes past an information panel for the **Caldecote House Farm conservation area**. You now follow it for 1 km to a road (Vinegar Hill), crossing a stream on a footbridge after 400m and later zig-zagging left and right as directed at a couple of T-junctions. Cross the road onto the continuation of the footpath, a narrow grassy path through a long belt of trees.
36. At the far end there is an information panel for **Beeston Fields**. **Turn left** onto a path between fields, then in 100m **turn right** to go along the left-hand edge of a field for 400m, crossing a ditch on a footbridge along the way. At the far end do another left-and-right zig-zag onto a path heading directly towards what looks like a large house 300m away, but turns out to be a main house with several outbuildings.
37. Follow the path past the left-hand side of the property (Elm Farm) and out onto **Beeston Village Green**, an open space ringed by many different tree species. Your onward route is off to the left, but the suggested route is to go straight ahead to the far side of the green, where there is an information panel listing all these trees.
38. On the far side turn left and go along the edge of the green for 100m, then **turn right** into The Crescent. At the end of this cul-de-sac keep ahead on a fenced alleyway to reach the A1 (the old Great North Road).

G. The Great North Road to Sandy (1½ km)

39. Cross the dual carriageway on the high footbridge, taking the steps down to the right on the other side. At the bottom of these steps take the signposted public footpath heading away from the road.
This appears to be a newly-designated right of way as it still has some "permissive path" waymarkers. It avoids a short but unpleasant stretch alongside the very noisy A1.
40. In 200m follow the fenced path round to the left to come to a T-junction with the original footpath (The Baulk). Turn right onto this broad tree-lined path, which soon crosses a footbridge over a stream and passes a Wildlife Trust information panel for **The Riddy**¹¹, the water meadows stretching away to the left.
41. Follow the path across a substantial bridge over the **River Ivel** (with the remnants of a mill pool on the left) and **veer right** onto a tarmac path going past a weir on the old millstream. After passing a row of riverside properties there is a metal kissing gate at the start of a patch of woodland on the left.
 - If it does not look too overgrown you could detour onto this riverside path, which rejoins the main path through another kissing gate 300m ahead.
42. After the second kissing gate the main path swings left and crosses the river. Bear left briefly onto a residential street (Ivel Road), then **turn right** into Ivel View (with a Greensand Cycleway sign, but leaving both the GRW and NBHT).
 - This direct route goes past a pub on the way to the station. If you wanted to investigate alternative refreshment places you would have to continue to the end of Ivel Road and turn **left** onto the High Street (away from the station). If you do this, return along the High Street and continue to its junction with Station Road.
43. On the direct route, keep ahead at the end of Ivel View onto a short link path between houses. Bear left onto another street (Woolfield) and go out to its T-junction with Station Road, with **The Bell** on the corner.



If you are doing a Circular Walk back to Biggleswade, skip to the next section.

44. Finishing at Sandy Station

From the pub, the straightforward route is to cross Station Road and go down the short access road on the right to the far end of the station buildings. The entrance leads onto the northbound platform, so for trains to London you have to double back along the platform – passing an information panel about **Captain Sir William Peel**¹² – and cross the station footbridge to Platform 1.

- The signposted pedestrian route for trains to London is to cross the tracks on the road bridge (the continuation of the High Street), then turn right onto a path leading down to Platform 1. This is a slightly longer route from the pub, but shorter if coming from the High Street.

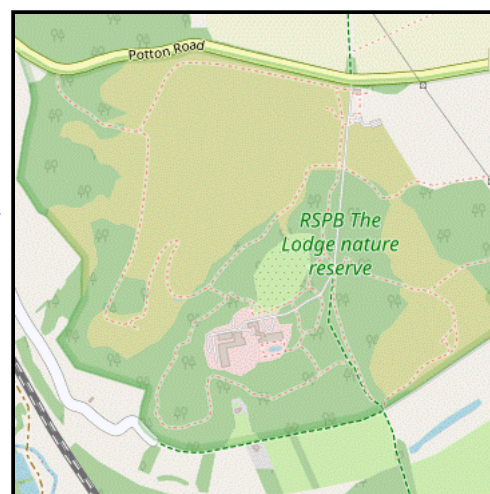
H. Sandy to Biggleswade Common (3 km)

45. Make your way to the junction of Station Road and the High Street and cross the railway on the road bridge (the B1042, which becomes Potton Road). Ignore minor roads off to both sides and walk along the wide pavement of the main road for 600m, passing the town's cemetery.

46. Just before reaching some chevrons at a left-hand bend, **turn right** through a pedestrian entrance into **The Lodge Nature Reserve**. Follow the track round to the left, climbing steadily through pine woods. In 300m you come to a path junction.

A more convoluted route through the reserve (via all three of the RSPB's waymarked trails) is described in §A of Walk #412.

47. For a straightforward route **fork left** at the junction, signposted to the Shop. In 200m the track curves right and traffic noise through the trees on the left will reveal that you are walking parallel to Potton Road. In 500m the path approaches **Swiss Cottage**, built for **Captain Sir William Peel**¹².



48. Unless you want to visit the **RSPB café** or use its picnic area, **veer right** about 50m before reaching it onto a path signposted to the Visitor centre, which turns out to be a low open-sided building with information panels about the reserve. Carry on along the main path heading **S**, parallel to the driveway on your left (which is also a public bridleway).
49. In 100m keep ahead at a path crossing, ignoring the first signpost for the Woodpecker trail. In a further 300m there is another path junction, with a choice of routes. The main route simply follows the public bridleway out of the reserve, but you could detour via the gardens in [51] or around the heathland in [52].

50. Main route

- Turn left** at the junction, signposted to (a shorter version of) the Woodpecker trail. On reaching the driveway turn right, then immediately **fork left** onto the signposted bridleway.
- The bridleway drops gently downhill through woodland for 400m. Ignore paths off to the right for the Nuthatch trail and follow it out of the reserve, passing between stone pillars.

51. Gardens Extension (+300m min)

- Keep ahead at the junction, signposted to the Nuthatch trail and Gardens. In 50m you pass a small area on the right, with a viewpoint across a small pond to a meadow. In a further 50m **turn left** at a path junction, signposted to the Gardens.

- b. Go straight across the driveway and follow the path as it curves round to the right. The entrance to the Gardens is to the left of the main building, which you might be able to glimpse through the trees on your right.
- c. Just before a gate with a "Welcome to the Lodge Gardens" panel, there is a path off to the left signposted to the Nuthatch trail which is your way back to the main route.
- d. Enter the gardens, with a view of **The Lodge**¹³ across the fountain pond. Explore them as you wish before returning to this point. You could simply walk around the pond, or wander a bit further ahead through the trees and shrubs.
- e. Leave the gardens and **turn right** at the path junction you passed earlier. Go through a gate and down steps through the woodland. At the bottom turn left at a T-junction, briefly joining the Nuthatch trail.
- f. Where the path splits **fork right**, then turn right onto the bridleway at a T-junction. In 150m follow it out of the reserve, passing between stone pillars.

52. Heathland Extension (+350m)

- a. **Turn left** at the junction, signposted to (a shorter version of) the Woodpecker trail. On reaching the driveway go straight across onto the path opposite. This turns left, descends a flight of steps and swings right, soon passing the small **Jack's Pond** on the right.
- b. In 200m keep right at a path junction, signposted to Old Heath and joining the full Woodpecker trail. Follow the path for 450m as it curves gradually round to the right through the heathland.
- c. The path eventually meets the main bridleway and you follow it out of the reserve, passing between stone pillars.

53. Outside the reserve keep ahead on a broad track, ignoring another bridleway off to the right alongside the boundary wall. In 100m bear right onto a path through a patch of woodland, where a small hump takes you over the barely-perceptible route of a **disused railway**¹⁴. On leaving the wood the bridleway crosses a stream on a bridge and you emerge onto the open space of **Biggleswade Common**.

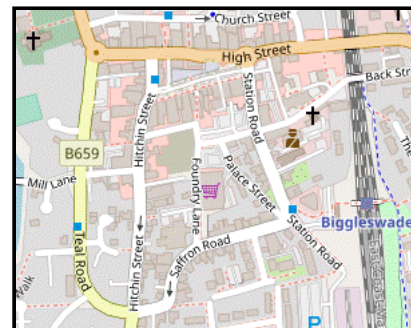
I. Biggleswade Common to Fairfield (3 km)

54. Go straight ahead on a broad mown path, heading **S** towards some buildings 500m away. On reaching them pass to the right of Furzenhall Barn and **turn right** onto a lane to pass Furzenhall Cottage and other converted farm buildings. In 100m follow the lane round to the left, now heading **SSE** on Furzenhall Road.
- Ahead on your right you will be able to see a new railway footbridge where you will be crossing the East Coast Main Line. The OS map shows a public bridleway heading directly towards it but there was no sign of this on the ground when last checked. Unless there is a clearly signposted route, use the directions below.*
55. Go along the lane for 325m, then **turn right** onto a wide cinder track with a footpath waymarker post. Follow this fenced track up to the bridge and use the steps (or ramp) to cross over the railway. On the far side continue on the cinder track, alongside the railway.
56. You could follow this track up to a T-junction at the site of the old level crossing, but there is a useful short cut: about 50m before this junction, and immediately after passing a small paddock, **turn right** onto a grassy path with a low wooden fence on your right. The entrance to a wedding venue (Shortmeads) is 100m ahead on your left and you pass its parking area as you go alongside the fence.

57. In the tree boundary ahead go through a metal kissing gate onto another part of Biggleswade Common and follow the grassy path round to the right. Where the path splits **fork left**, gradually approaching another boundary hedge. Cross a stream on a wooden footbridge in this hedge and keep ahead on a grassy path across a large meadow for 200m, heading **W**.
58. On reaching the **River Ivel** turn left, joining the **Kingfisher Way**¹⁵ (KW). You now simply follow this attractive riverside path for 700m, crossing a side stream on a long wooden footbridge along the way. At the southern end of Biggleswade Common go through a metal kissing gate to continue along the right-hand side of a narrow strip of grassland between Fairfield Sports Ground and the river.
59. In 100m go through a gate into the small Fairfield recreation area, where there are a few benches and picnic tables by the riverside path. There is a boulder on the left with a plaque for the KW, and an iron sculpture at the far end commemorating the **Ivel Agricultural Motor**¹⁶.

J. Fairfield to Biggleswade Station (1¾ km)

60. Follow the riverside path up to the A6001 (Shortmead Street). Turn right and **cross this main road carefully**, with a view of the (redundant) **Meccano Bridge**¹⁷ alongside the road bridge. On the other side of the river **turn left** by a 'Welcome to Biggleswade · Twinned with Erlensee' road sign. Go down a short slope and through a metal kissing gate onto the continuation of the riverside path.
61. You now simply follow the path for 900m to the next bridge across the river. Along the way **fork right** where the path splits, bypassing a short section of the original path which has deteriorated. Eventually you go past a cluster of park homes behind a wooden fence and come to a broad track (Mill Lane), with the converted **Ivel Mill**¹ ahead on your left.
62. Turn left to cross the river (leaving the KW) and retrace your outward route along Mill Lane to the B659. For the suggested route to the station via Market Square, cross the road onto the continuation of Mill Lane, passing the **Whistle and Flute** pub on the right. At the T-junction with Hitchin Street the **Pembroke Arms** is just off to the right, but for Market Square **turn left**.
63. Ignore a narrow street on the right after 50m, but in another 50m **turn right** into Market Square, a broad semi-pedestrianised precinct. The town's High Street is just 50m away to the left, and you will be able to see the **Crown Hotel**¹⁸ through a wide gap in the buildings.
64. Continuing along Market Square, **Rosso Lounge** is on the right and **Surfin Café** is the last place on the left. The **White Hart** pub is at the far end, on the other side of Station Road.
65. To complete the walk go down Station Road for 200m (away from the High Street). The station is off to the left of this road, with access to all the platforms from a gap at the left-hand end of the station building. Trains to London normally leave from Platform 1, towards the far side of the footbridge over the tracks.



Walk Notes

1. **Ivel Mill** (or Franklin's Mill) closed after a fire in 1945, but it was partially restored and used as a warehouse before being converted into flats in 1982. A History Society plaque records that there had been a watermill on the site for over 1,000 years.

2. **Broom East Wildlife Conservation Site** is the eastern part of a former sand and gravel quarry which was restored as a wildlife site after mineral extraction ceased in 2017. The central wetland area is closed off for conservation but there is a footpath around the perimeter.
3. The **North Bedfordshire Heritage Trail** is a circular route of 111 km, taking in the county town and 23 surrounding villages.
4. **Keeper's Cottage** was built in 1878 as a model cottage for the gamekeeper on the Old Warden Estate. The estate had been acquired by Joseph Shuttleworth in 1872 and hosted regular weekend shooting parties. The property became derelict after World War II but has been restored by the Landmark Trust as a holiday cottage.
5. **Queen Anne's Summerhouse** is a square brick folly which was probably built soon after 1712, when the owner of the Old Warden Estate (Samuel Ongley) was knighted by Queen Anne. The terracotta balustrade was added when it was renovated in 1878. Like its neighbour it became derelict after World War II but has been restored as a holiday bedsit.
6. **Shuttleworth House** in Old Warden Park was built in 1875 as a country mansion for Joseph Shuttleworth, designed by the architect Henry Clutton in Jacobean style. It became an Agricultural College in 1946 and is now an up-market wedding venue. It is listed Grade II*.
7. The **Abbey Church of St Leonard, Old Warden** dates from the early 12thC, although most of the present structure is 13thC. The interior was 'beautified' with ornate wooden carvings by Baron Ongley of Old Warden in the mid-19thC; the Ongley Family mausoleum is in the north-east corner of the churchyard. The church is listed Grade I.
8. The **Greensand Ridge Walk** runs for 64 km along the low hills of the Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge, in a north-easterly direction from Leighton Buzzard (Bucks) to Gamlingay (Cams).
9. The two **Airship Hangars** visible from the Greensand Ridge are each around 250m long. Several airships were built at Cardington Airfield until the crash of the R101 caused all this work to cease (although it resumed in the 2010s with the development of a modern helium-filled hybrid airship, the Airlander 10). The sheds have had many other military and civilian uses, notably as studios for film and TV productions (including several Star Wars and Batman films).
10. **St Mary the Virgin, Northill** dates from the mid-14thC. It contains two fine stained glass panels on the south wall, installed in 1664 to commemorate the Restoration. The church is listed Grade I.
11. **The Riddy** consists of 8 hectares of flood meadows bordering the River Ivel, taking its name from the small stream flowing into the river. It was designated as a Local Nature Reserve by Sandy Town Council in 2006.
12. **Captain Sir William Peel** was the third son of the Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel. He was a naval captain and recipient of the Victoria Cross for gallantry in the Crimean War. From 1851 he lived at Swiss Cottage on Potton Road and the panel at Sandy station was erected to commemorate the 150th anniversary of his death in 1858, aged just 33. There is a marble statue of him in the parish church, with copies in Greenwich and Calcutta.
13. **The Lodge** was built in 1870 by Arthur Wellesley Peel, the younger brother of Sir William and Speaker of the House of Commons from 1884-1895. The mansion was acquired by the RSPB in 1961 and has been their UK headquarters ever since.
14. The **disused railway** was originally a short branch line from Sandy to Potton, built in 1857 at the instigation of Sir William Peel. Five years later it became part of the **Varsity Line** from Oxford to Cambridge. This section closed in 1967.
15. The **Kingfisher Way** runs for 34 km along the course of the River Ivel, from its source near Baldock to the River Great Ouse at Tempsford. However, the waymarked route made use of some permissive paths (eg. between Biggleswade Common and Sandy) which are no longer open.
16. The 1902 **Ivel Agricultural Motor** was invented by Dan Albone, a Biggleswade inventor of early bicycles and motor cars. It was the first farm machine which was light enough to plough fields directly, although stationary engines had started to be used in the late 19thC. A few of the Ivel firm's 500 tractors still exist, with one in London's Science Museum.

17. The **Meccano Bridge** was hastily erected at the outbreak of World War II to take some of the traffic from a stone road bridge which had become unsafe (Shortmead Road was the A1 before the town was bypassed). The main bridge was replaced with a similar Meccano-style bridge in 1948, then this concrete bridge in 2001.
18. A plaque at the **Crown Hotel** records that the **Great Fire of Biggleswade** started in the inn's yard on 16 June 1785, reportedly destroying half the town's buildings.

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