

# SWC Walk 264 – Sandy to Biggleswade (or back to Sandy)

- **Main Walk: Sandy to Biggleswade via Northill and Old Warden**  
Length: 19.2km (11.9m), toughness: 3/10. Four hours 15 minutes walking time.
- **Long Walk (Sandy Circular): Main Walk, extended back to Sandy**  
Length: 25.3km (15.7m), toughness: 4/10. Five hours 45 minutes walking time.
- **Short Walk: Biggleswade to Sandy via The Lodge (RSPB reserve)**  
Length: 7.6km (4.7m), toughness: 1/10. One hour 40 minutes walking time.

## Introduction

This Bedfordshire walk was inspired by the weekly Country diary in the Guardian newspaper where from time to time a nature writer, Derek Niemann, writes about the flora and fauna around Sandy.

Although this is an area of large arable fields there is no slogging through crops or over ploughed land. The walk is mainly flat and before lunch mainly follows the Greensand Ridge Walk. The route is a mix of attractive broad grassy tracks along field edges and woodland trails. Along the way you will see a number of information boards telling you about the animals, trees and plants you may see around you. Binoculars are useful as the area is rich in bird-life and a healthy population of muntjac deer and brown hares.

You visit two lovely villages – Northill and Old Warden – which both have excellent pubs. Just after Old Warden you have the chance to do a couple of short out-and-back detours along permissive paths (open from 1 April to 31 October) to see two refurbished Landmark Trust properties in Warden Warren, **Queen Anne's Summerhouse** and the **Keeper's Cottage**.

In May there is a lot of blossom to enjoy and October is also a good time to do this walk as the tree colour is particularly vibrant. Fast walkers taking an early train may be able to do this walk in winter before nightfall although the terrain is likely to be far muddier and it is recommended that this walk is done between April and October.

There are no stiles on the main walk or the long circular walk back to Sandy.

<b>Length</b>	<p><b>Main walk</b>, Sandy to Biggleswade: 19.2km (11.9m)</p> <p><b>Long Walk</b>, Sandy Circular via Biggleswade: 25.3km (15.7m)</p> <p><b>Short Walk</b>, Biggleswade to Sandy: 7.6km (4.7m). Can be extended by exploring further trails in the RSPB nature reserve at Sandy Warren.</p>
<b>Maps</b>	<p>1: 50,000 Landranger Map 153, Bedford and Huntingdon</p> <p>1:25,000 Explorer Map 208, Bedford and St Neots</p>
<b>Toughness</b>	<p>Main walk 3/10; 100m ascent</p> <p>Long Walk 4/10; 150m ascent</p> <p>Short Walk 1/10; 50m ascent</p>
<b>Features</b>	<p><b>Sandy</b></p> <p>Sandy (the high mark of Bedfordshire) was originally a Roman settlement and was probably an important trading centre and staging post in the Roman era. An ancient hill fort, now heavily wooded and known as “Caesar's Camp” although more commonly called "the sand hills" or "the lookout", still overlooks the town. This hill is now the site of <a href="#">The Lodge</a>, the national headquarters of the <b>RSPB</b> and an extensive <b>Nature Reserve</b> of woodland, heath and acid grassland (free entry). The Long and Short Walks go through the site on the way into Sandy; you could also make a short detour to visit it at the start of the Main Walk.</p> <p>Sandy is referred to in the Domesday Book as Sandeia, a derivation from the Old English Sandieg, meaning a sand-island. It is believed that there was a Danish camp on the site of Sandye Place Academy, built in 886 to protect the Danelaw. In 1086 Sandy was listed in the Domesday Book as being held by Eudo Fitzhubert, who is likely to have been the tenant. In addition there were two mills listed, both of which would have been water-powered from the River Ivel. The last mill was built here in 1857.</p> <p><b>River Ivel and The Riddy nature reserve</b></p> <p>This is a 25km tributary of the River Great Ouse which rises in Hertfordshire. It has become known for its excellent fishing (barbel, carp and roach). Parts of it are navigable by canoes and around Biggleswade there are some attractive short riverside walks. The Riddy nature reserve is a 8.4ha flood meadow which is home to a wide variety of grasses and wildflowers. Water voles are present too.</p> <p><b>Greensand Ridge Walk</b></p> <p>The <a href="#">Greensand Ridge Walk</a> is a 64km (40 mile) trail that traverses Bedfordshire, with brief sections in Cambridgeshire and Buckinghamshire.</p>

### **Northill**

A beautiful village with many thatched cottages and buildings some of which date back to the 14th century including the **Church of St Mary the Virgin**. This has been sensitively restored over the centuries and has some fine examples of 17th century painted glass.

### **Old Warden**

Another picturesque village with a host of interesting houses, thatched cottages and beautifully manicured gardens. The route into the village passes the **Abbey Church of St Leonard**, which is well worth a visit: it is a Grade I listed building with many outstanding architectural features dating back to the 12th century.

### **Shuttleworth Estate and Birds of Prey Centre**

The walk route passes close to the [Shuttleworth Estate](#). This has several attractions, including a [Swiss Garden](#) and a [Birds of Prey Centre](#).

These attractions have entry charges and are just off the walk route; you would need a map or GPS device to reach them as no directions are included here.

### **Old Warden Aerodrome and the Shuttleworth Collection**

The walk route also passes **Old Warden Aerodrome**, with its collection of historic planes. However, as a consequence of the Shoreham air crash in 2015 the lanes, bridleways and footpaths around the airfield are closed when an airshow is taking place, typically twice a month in summer. While it would be possible to divert around these restrictions, no alternative routes have been researched here. It would be advisable to check this [Shuttleworth Airshows](#) page and avoid the walk on any of those dates.

### **Warden Warren and Landmark Trust properties**

Just after lunch you climb up into woodland on a grassy track and have the chance to take a couple of short detours to see two beautifully restored Landmark Trust properties tucked away in the woods:

- [Queen Anne's Summerhouse](#) – one of the poshest “bedsits” you will ever see!
- [Keeper's Cottage](#), a model cottage for four people.

### **Biggleswade**

A market town mentioned in the Domesday Book, now with a rapidly-growing population. The River Ivel runs just outside the town and there are some attractive signposted riverside walks and cycleways.

<b>Walk options</b>	<p>Before you enter Biggleswade you have the option to extend the Main Walk back to Sandy via the RSPB nature reserve, making a <b>Long (Circular) Walk</b>.</p> <p>Alternatively, the <b>Short Walk</b> from Biggleswade to Sandy would give you plenty of time to explore the paths and trails through this attractive reserve.</p>
<b>Transport</b>	<p>Biggleswade and Sandy are adjacent stations on the London Kings Cross to Peterborough main line, with a half-hourly Thameslink service from Horsham through central London (except on Sundays, when there is an hourly service from Kings Cross). For all the walk options buy a <b>return to Sandy</b>.</p>
<b>Suggested train</b>	<p>Take the train nearest to <b>9:45</b> from central London unless you are planning to stop at the early lunch pub, in which case you could take a train up to an hour later.</p>
<b>Lunch and Tea</b>	<p><b>Lunch</b></p> <p><a href="#">The Crown</a>, Northill (01767-627337)</p> <p>You will only have done a quarter of the walk when you reach this attractive pub but it still makes a lovely stop for a short break. Should you wish to eat here there is an extensive menu including good vegetarian options.</p> <p><a href="#">Hare and Hounds</a>, Old Warden (01767-627225)</p> <p>This is your recommended lunch-time pub and when you get here you will have done over 60% of the walk and so probably in need of refreshments! The pub has an extensive main menu and puddings. There is attractive outside seating at the rear of the pub.</p> <p>For both pubs you should ring beforehand as they are likely to be busy on summer weekends and bank holidays.</p> <p>The <b>Abbey Church of St Leonard</b> is a fine spot for a picnic lunch.</p> <p><b>Tea</b></p> <p><b>Biggleswade</b> has a number of pubs, cafés and restaurants dotted around the central area. For tea, coffee and cakes the suggested place is the popular <a href="#">Surfin café</a> in Market Place, five minutes before reaching the station. It has indoor and outdoor seating and is usually open until 5pm at weekends and 6.30pm on weekdays, but may stay open later in summer.</p> <p>If you finish in <b>Sandy</b> the most convenient place (just 60m from the station) is <b>The Bell</b>, a traditional pub with a back garden. They will make you an instant coffee and a cup of tea on request.</p>

*Note: for most of the morning leg you will be following the Greensand Ridge Walk (GRW). This is well signposted, often by yellow-topped footpath posts, but in summer some may be partially hidden by foliage.*

## A. Sandy Station to the Crown at Northhill: 5.2km (3.2m)

1. Leave Sandy station via the ticket barriers on the platform you arrived on. Turn right out of the station and go up the station approach road which soon merges with Station Road. You pass the Bell PH away to your left.
2. Cross the road 30m before a traffic roundabout to go left along the B1042 towards Sandy Town Centre. In 200m **turn left** into Ivel Road / leading to Ivel View. In 50m you pass a fire brigade station on your right. In 130m you pass Ivel View on your left and continue ahead. In a further 30m where the road swings sharp left you continue ahead down a tarmac path to cross a bridge over a branch of the **River Ivel**.
3. Here you have a choice of routes: (1) stay on the tarmac path as it swings right, heading for a weir; or (2) go through a metal gate on your right to take a narrow but attractive riverside path (which may be overgrown in summer). After 200m this path swings sharp left and in a further 50m rejoins the tarmac path just before the bridge over the weir.
4. Cross over two bridges on the main path, passing an information panel about **The Riddy** nature reserve. After 200m the path becomes a road called the Baulk and you continue ahead. You reach a T junction with the busy A1 and turn left. In 100m cross over a footbridge descending on the steps to your left to turn right along a parallel side road and in 30m turn left into a narrow path following a sign for the GRW.
5. In 50m the enclosed path opens up into a suburban road. You pass a small parking area to continue down the road to reach a T-junction with a road called the Green. (Opposite you there is an attractive town green.) Turn left here and in 100m pick up a GRW sign to cross the grassy area heading just to the right of Elm Farm. In 70m you reach a footpath sign and continue along this narrow track following a sign to Northhill Green 2 miles. You are now on the GRW, with open arable fields on both sides after 70m.
6. In 150m turn left with the track for a few metres and then right to continue in the same direction the field edge to your right. You cross a small bridge with a footpath sign and continue ahead with the field edge and a ditch to your right. In 60m **turn left** at a T-junction with a track. In 80m **turn right** onto a narrow tree-lined path.
7. In 400m you reach a vehicle barrier and cross a tarmac road (Vinegar Hill) to continue on a wide track in the same direction following a GRW sign. In 200m you pass a footpath post on your right and **turn left** with the track. In 70m there is a GRW post to your left and you **turn right** with the track. In 200m you cross a bridge with a footpath sign and continue on an enclosed path. In 100m the enclosed path comes to an end and you continue ahead. In 300m you pass an information board about **Caldicott House Farm** conservation area to continue in the same direction passing a footpath post in 30m and heading towards a road (Thorncote Road) which should be visible ahead of you.
8. At the junction with the tarmac road (Thorncote Road) there is a footpath sign on your right. Here you turn left along the road using the grass verge to go through the attractive village of Northhill. In 300m you reach Bedford Road on your right, signposted to Copall (this road is the continuation of the walk). The Church of St Mary the Virgin is ahead on your right, with The Crown pub and village green immediately beyond the churchyard.

## B. The Crown to the Hare and Hounds in Old Warden: 6.6km (4.1m)

- 9 To continue the walk go along Bedford Road (from the pub you can cut through the churchyard to reach it). Just after the road swings gently to the right **bear left** onto a track, following the 2-armed GRW sign. In 50m ignore a steel gate on your left to continue past a wooden barrier with a footpath post on your right. Go through a horse-blocking barrier and continue on a wide track heading towards Home Wood.
- 10 In 150m you go over crosspaths with a footpath post on your right to continue towards Home Wood. In 80m you pass a yellow-topped footpath post and in 20m go through a metal kissing gate with a footpath sign and bench on your right and enter Home Wood. In 60m you go over a crosspaths, past a footpath post and a sign saying Home Wood Fish Farm on your left and continue ahead through the woods. In 80m you cross a bridge over a ditch and continue through dense woodland.
- 11 In 160m you reach a T-junction with another track and turn left. In 140m **turn right**, following a GRW sign. In 200m the track leaves the wood and you **turn left** along the edge of the field. Follow the path round to the right in the field corner. In 250m the path goes into a strip of woodland and soon swings sharply left.
- 12 You continue past Highlands Farm off to the right, going through gates and crossing two fields and a narrow strip of woodland. You then follow a clear track across a large field, heading towards another strip of woodland (and to the right of Sweetbrier Cottage on an OS map).
- 13 As you reach the trees there is a yellow-topped footpath post on your right. Go past this and in a few metres **turn left** onto a broad earth path through the strip of woodland, with a wooden fence and farm buildings on your right.
- 14 After 400m along this path you reach a 2-armed bridleway sign on your right and a footpath post on your left. Continue ahead on your path which soon veers slightly right.
- 15 **In a further 400m you reach a footpath post on your left with multiple signs on it.** Here you **turn right** on a clear path into open countryside. In 60m turn sharp left with the path to continue ahead in your previous direction through open countryside. Off to your right you should be able to see the two **Airship Sheds** at Cardington, 4 km away.
- 16 In 450 metres you are approaching the field corner defined by a line of bushes and trees. At the corner ignore a signposted footpath off to the right. Go through a gap into the next field and **immediately turn left** onto a signposted bridleway along the left-hand edge of the field, finally leaving the GRW. You are heading towards **Palmers Wood** in the distance, crossing over an earth bridge on your way and ignoring a path to your right further on. At the woodland edge the path swings right and in 70m you **turn left** on a signposted track crossing a bridge into Palmers Wood.
- 17 In 300m you go straight ahead over a crosspaths. In a further 250m you leave Palmers Wood to continue through an open area (note the communications mast to your left cleverly disguised as a tree!). The path continues along the edge of a wooded area to your left. Ignoring a track to your right you pass a bench on your left and continue through a former kissing gate. The path swings gently to the left and soon you go through a metal kissing gate to reach the attractive **Abbey Church of St Leonard** and its grounds which has seating for those with a picnic lunch.

18 Just beyond the church do not go down the tarmac lane ahead of you but **turn right** through a metal kissing gate with benches and a footpath sign and continue on the clear path. In 150m go through another kissing gate and continue ahead on the track which descends quite steeply for 30m before eventually reaching a tarmac road (Bedford Road). Turn left on this road and in 30m you reach the **Hare and Hounds** on the right, your recommended lunchtime pub.

### C. The Hare and Hounds to Biggleswade Station: 7.4km (4.6m)

19 Turn right out of the pub and follow the road through the village. In 150m, just before a T-junction, **turn right** onto a footpath climbing into attractive mixed woodland, **Warden Warren**. The path soon levels off and you continue through the woodland for a further 800m. Along the way you pass information panels about the two **Landmark Trust properties** (see walk notes) which you could detour off to the left to see.

20 The trail reaches a 5-barred gate and kissing gate and comes to a tarmac road where you turn left. In 600m you **turn left** off the road onto a public bridleway, with open fields on both sides. In 600m you cross over an access road and continue past woods on your left (**Lowsiebush Covert**) and more fields to your right.

21 After a further 800m on this path you come to a double wooden field gate and footpath signs. You go through a gap to the left of the gates to turn right on a tarmac road. You now continue in the same general direction all the way to Biggleswade. In more detail: you pass **Bricklamp Covert** on your right and then a small lay-by on your left, with the road soon swinging to the left. You pass an attractive detached house and stables on your left. You then pass Kingshill Farm and **Shuttleworth College** on your left.

22 You eventually reach the busy B658. You cross this with care passing road signs for Sandy and Biggleswade and continue straight ahead passing a metal fieldgate and go along the wide track soon passing a small reservoir to your left. You continue on this meandering earth track through lightly-wooded countryside ignoring ways off. You pass a large reservoir on your right and should be able to see some distant wind turbines ahead on your right (which you might also have seen from the train on your outward journey). You cross a wooden bridge and continue on the now narrower dirt track.

23 You go past a vehicle barrier and cross Gypsy Lane. Following the footpath sign continue on the track towards the roar of the clearly visible A1 ahead of you. In 400m you reach a yellow-topped footpath post to your right. You cross an old brick bridge and **fork right** to go through a wooden barrier onto a made-up path and then through one of the low tunnels under the A1. Once through the tunnels immediately turn sharp left and follow a path with the A1 above you to your left and in 150m pick up your onward direction by turning sharp right with the path.

24 Continue on the path as it turns sharp right and heads towards Biggleswade. You reach a number of footpath signs and a children's play area just beyond these to your right, immediately followed by a bridge over the **River Ivel**.

25 ***For the long circular walk back to Sandy do not cross the bridge but turn left along a signed riverside path. See Section D for walk instructions.***

26 For the Main Walk go over the bridge and continue along Mill Lane. Turn left at the T-junction with the B659 (St Andrew's Street). At the traffic roundabout turn right into the High Street. Continue down the High Street for 70m and take the first right into Hitchin Street, then in 50m turn left into Market Place where you will find the large **Surfin café** on the left, your recommended tea stop. Continue past the café for 50m to turn right into Station Road and in a further 250m you will reach Biggleswade Station. Use the pedestrian bridge over the railway lines for London-bound trains from Platforms 1 & 2.

#### **D. Optional extension from Biggleswade to Sandy Station: 6.9km (4.3m)**

- 27 Do not cross the bridge over the **River Ivel** but take a signed riverside path (the **Biggleswade Green Wheel**) to your left. Initially there is a caravan park behind the fence on your left. Continue on this tarmac path across bridges and through metal gates with the river on your right until you reach the busy A6001 (Shortmead Street).
- 28 Cross the busy road with care and **turn right** across the bridge. In 30m you **turn left** on a path heading in the same direction on the other side of the river, following a sign to Biggleswade Common. Go through a gap (a former kissing gate) on a narrow path.
- 29 In 200m go through a metal kissing gate. Here you **leave the riverside path** to take a narrow grassy path just to its right which soon merges with a car-wide grassy track. You are heading towards the edge of a wooded area which juts out into the field.
- 30 At the corner of the field you reach the wooded area and a fence immediately to your right. You continue on a narrow path, the wooded area and fence just to your right, and head for a yellow topped footpath post 70m away. You go past the footpath post which is 10m away to your left and you continue along the narrow grassy path.
- 31 You pass a cottage and other brick buildings on your right and you continue on the path. The path swings round to the right and you are heading towards a large brick building (Shortmead House). The path soon swings left with Shortmead House now away to your right.
- 32 You emerge from the wooded area with bramble bushes on your left and right and a field ahead of you. Here you **fork right** on a narrow, faint path heading towards a just visible metal kissing gate 50m away in shrubbery. Go through the kissing gate. There are solar panels and horse paddocks away to your left. You bear right with the track with shrubbery immediately to your right and soon passing a brick building again on your right. You reach a yellow-topped footpath post with signs on it and here you turn left on a clear track heading towards a railway crossing 70m ahead of you.
- 33 With the **green light showing** go through a gate and cross the railway lines. Here you have a choice of directions. The **recommended route** is to continue on the wide track ahead of you through open farmland. In 350m you come to a T-junction and a yellow-topped footpath post. Here you turn left along a rough tarmac lane (Furzenhall Road), soon passing some brick buildings on your right. In 800m you take a track on your right heading towards **Furzenhall Farm**. (Skip to para 35).
- 34 *The alternative route instead of taking the wide track ahead of you is to immediately turn left on a path parallel to the railway line. You ignore a path to your right in 200m but in a further 200m you take a clear but potentially muddy track heading diagonally across the field to your right. This will bring you to the track leading to Furzenhall Farm.*

- 35 In 100m you reach Furzenhall Farm and turn left on a rough track. In 40m you go through a metal gate to the left of a metal fieldgate noting the bridleway sign on your left and the signs on the post of the fieldgate. You are now on **Biggleswade Common**. In 30m there is a footpath post to your right and a wooden bench to your left and you continue on the clear path across the open common.
- 36 Eventually you reach a bench and information board on your left and you go through a metal gate to cross a bridge over a stream and continue ahead on a clear track through attractive woodland. You pass over a long-abandoned and barely perceptible railway track and you continue on through a lightly-wooded area.
- 37 You reach a T-junction with a wide track. There is a footpath post and a metal fieldgate to your right. You go straight ahead through two stone columns and a metal gate to enter **The Lodge**, an RSPB nature reserve and its national headquarters. You then turn left on a track following a sign for shop and toilets 1000m.
- 38 You pass a 3-armed footpath sign on your right and you continue on this attractive woodland trail going gently uphill. You reach a tarmac road which you cross on a zebra crossing. Take the signed trail into woodland passing an RSPB board on your right and in 5m a small “no dogs” sign on your left. In 30m you reach a 3-armed footpath sign at a T-junction. You take the right-hand path with a sign saying shop and parking 500m. You continue on this track soon noticing a tarmac road just away to your right.
- 39 Your track leaves the mature woodland and enters an open area with some newly-planted trees away to your left. You pass a wooden lodge to your right and an information board on your left to continue on the track (with traffic noise ahead of you on a main road). 70m beyond the Lodge you reach a T-junction and 3-armed footpath sign. For the shop and toilets take the track to your right. Your onward route to Sandy however is to turn left on the wide track following the signs to Galley Hill and Sandy.
- 40 You continue on this wide track, the main road 30m away to your right through woodland. You pass a wooden gate on your right to continue on the track as it swings sharply away to the left away from the road. You reach a T-junction and 3-armed footpath sign. Here you take the track signposted to Sandy 1000m bearing sharply right. The track goes gently downhill passing to the right of a wooden fieldgate. You go through a wooden gate reaching a main road (**Potton Road**) in 10m where you turn left along the pavement.
- 41 You pass Sandy town council cemetery on your left and in a further 100m you reach a traffic roundabout. To go immediately to Sandy Station turn sharp left down a station approach road, ignoring the first road to the left. Use the pedestrian tarmac path which in 70m swings right to take you onto the platform for your train back to London.
- 42 If you wish to have a drink at **The Bell** cross over the railway bridge ahead of you and then turn sharp left down the Station Approach Road and the pub is away to your right. Continue down the approach road to reach Sandy Station and use the pedestrian footbridge to cross over the rail tracks for the platform for London bound trains.
- 43 Instead of turning left for the Bell or the station you can continue ahead on the main road into Sandy High Street and the Town Centre just 2 mins walk away to check out a further pub, the **Sir William Peel**. There are a few shops and an Indian restaurant – **the Ghandi** – but any cafes are likely to be closed by the time you reach the town.

## E. Short bird-watching walk from Biggleswade to Sandy: 7.6km (4.7m)

*This short walk is **ideal for birdwatchers**. There is free access to The Lodge Nature Reserve for walkers so you can lengthen the walk by devising your own route around the reserve.*

### **Biggleswade Station to the Biggleswade Green Wheel path (700m, about 10 mins walk)**

Leave Biggleswade station and go down the Station Approach Road. Cross over Station Road and into Saffron Road and continue on this road as it swings left. You cross over Hitchin Street and into Teal Road which swings to the right. You pass Sandpiper Close on your left. You soon reach Mill Lane where you turn left reaching a bridge in 40m. Cross the bridge and turn **right** down the riverside path the **Biggleswade Green Wheel**. From here you follow the instructions in **Section D**, 2<sup>nd</sup> sentence para 27.

**RSPB The Lodge Nature Reserve, Potton Road, Sandy, SG19 2DL (01767-693333).**



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