

Ingatestone to Battlesbridge			Ingatestone to Wickford		
1 st walk check	2 nd walk check	3 rd walk check	1 st walk check	2 nd walk check	3 rd walk check
09 th June 2012	11 th Nov. 2014	23 rd May 2018			
Current status	Document last updated Thursday, 21 st October 2021				
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Ingatestone to Battlesbridge or Wickford

Start: Ingatestone Station

Finish: Battlesbridge station

Ingatestone Station, map reference TQ 649991, is 9 km south west of Chelmsford and 55m above sea level. Battlesbridge Station, map reference TQ 776948, is 13 km south east of Ingatestone and 8m above sea level. Both are in **Essex**.

Length: 24.8 km (15.4 mi), of which 4.9 km (3.0 mi) on tarmac or pavements.

Cumulative ascent/descent: 230/277m. For a shorter walk, see *below* **Walk Options**.

Toughness: 4 out of 10

Time: 5 hours 20 minutes walking time.

For the whole outing, including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 8 hours.

Transport: Ingatestone is on the Great Eastern Main Line from Liverpool Street to Norwich (half-hourly service, hourly on Sundays), with a journey time of 27 minutes (34 minutes on Sundays). Battlesbridge is on the single-track Crouch Valley branch line from Wickford to Southminster, which has at least one train an hour Monday to Friday, one every 40 minutes Saturday, and hourly trains on Sunday (journey time from 45 to 60 minutes).

Saturday Walkers' Club: Take the train closest to 10.15 hours if intending to eat in Stock, 1/3 into the full walk; or the train closest to 9.15 hours if intending to eat in South Hanningfield 2/3 into the full walk.

OS Landranger Map: 167 (Chelmsford) and 168 (Colchester) and 178 (Thames Estuary)

OS Explorer Map: 183 (Chelmsford & The Rodings) and 175 (Southend-on-Sea & Basildon)

Walk Notes:

This rewarding Essex walk avoids major roads and all remnants of industry and suburbia to initially traverse through grassy fields in the Wid Valley and follow the Wid itself for a while, before ascending through a delightful wood to the lunch stop in Stock. Afterwards several charming woods (some of them good bluebell woods) and Hanningfield Reservoir Nature Reserve are passed through, before a late lunch/early tea stop in South Hanningfield is reached. From there the route descends through more woods and fields into the Crouch Valley to the finish in Battlesbridge.

Depending on the season, the 1.2 kilometres of arable field crossings near the end can be a challenge.

Walk Options:

Shortcuts: It is possible to shorten the walk by taking a bus either from the early lunch pub in Stock to Billericay (frequent service), or from the late lunch/early tea pub in South Hanningfield to Wickford (approx. every two hours but not on Sundays).

Alternative ending in Wickford: You may vary the afternoon of the walk and finish in Wickford for tea. This shortens the walk to 18.8 km (11.7 mi) and cuts the ascent/descent by 64m/69m respectively. This alternative route is rated **2/10** and reverses the start of SWC Walk 157 Wickford to Battlesbridge.

Lunch (details last updated 25/05/2018)

The Bakers Arms Common Road, *Stock, Essex, CM4 9NF (01277 840 423,*

<http://www.bakersarms.co.uk/>) Open Mon-Thu 11.00-24.00, Fri-Sat 11.00-late, Sun 12.00-24.00. Food served: Mon-Thu 12.00-14.30 and 18.00-21.45, Fri-Sat 12.00-21.45, Sun 12.00-21.00. The Bakers Arms, 8.9 km (5.5 mi) into the walk, is a quintessential village pub, steeped in history and charm. It has a large beer garden and patio area at the front and private garden attached to the restaurant.

The Hoop Freehouse High Street, *Stock, Essex CM4 9BD (01277 841137, <http://www.thehoop.co.uk/>).*

Bar open Mon-Sat 11.00-23.00, Sun 12.00-22.30. Bar food served Mon-Thu 12.00-14.30 and 18.00-21.00, Fri 12.00-14.30 and 18.00-21.30, Sat 12.00-21.30, Sun 12.00-17.00. Restaurant open Tue-Fri 12.00-14.30 and 19.00-21.00, Sat 19.00-21.00, Sun 12.00-15.00. The Hoop started life as three weavers' cottages built circa 1460 and was converted to an Ale House approximately 450 years ago. The most probable explanation for its name is the hoops used by a cooper in the manufacture of barrels. The Hoop is notable for its handsome brick fireplaces. The bar is ornamented by the building's original timber framework, most of which formed part of warships lying in dock at Tilbury.

The Bear Inn 16 The Square, *Stock, Essex CM4 9LH (01277 829100, <http://www.thebearstock.com/>).*

Bar open Mon-Fri 11.00-15.00 and 17.30-23.30, Sat 11.00-00.30, Sun 11.00-22.00. Restaurant open Mon-Sat 12.00-15.00 and 18.00-21.30, Sun 12.00-16.00.

The Old Windmill South Hanningfield Road, *South Hanningfield, Essex, CM3 8HJ (01268 712280,*

<http://www.brunningandprice.co.uk/oldwindmill/>). Mon-Sat open 11.30-23.00, food served 12.00-21.00. Sun open 12.00-22.30, food served 12.00-21.00. The Old Windmill, 17.6 km (10.9 mi) from the start of the walk, has been serving food and ale to locals since at least 1799. It is a classic English country pub, with the bar at the heart of the building and a large, quiet garden.

Tea Places in Battlesbridge (details last updated 25/05/2018)

Café On The Water Hanningfield Reservoir, Giffords Lane, *Chelmsford, Essex, CM3 8HX (01268 712182, <http://www.eswater.co.uk/your-home/leisure/cafe-on-the-water.aspx>).* Open daily from 09.00, closing at 17.00 in summer, earlier in winter. Closed for a few weeks over Christmas. Café on the Water has a large decking area overlooking the reservoir.

The Old Windmill As above

The Hawk Hawk Hill, *Battlesbridge, Wickford, SS11 7RJ (01268 7672,*

<https://www.thehawkbattlesbridge.co.uk/>). Open 12.00-23.00 Mon-Sat (and to 22.00 Sun). Food served 12.00-22.00 Mon-Fri and 12.00-21.30 Sun.

The Barge Inn Hawk Hill, *Battlesbridge, Wickford, SS11 7RE (01268 732 622,*

<https://bargebattlesbridge.co.uk/>). Thu-Sat open 10.00-23.00, food served all day. Sun- Wed open 10.00-22.00, food served all day.

Tea places in Wickford (details last updated 25/05/2018)

Wickford Diner 28 High St., *Wickford, Essex, SS12 9AZ (01268 769 466).* Open 8.00-17.30 Mon-Sat, 9.00-16.30 Sun. Traditional Café/Diner offering small meals, desserts, hot drinks etc.

Plazma Bar & Lounge 54 High St., *Wickford, SS12 9AT (01268 765 050).* Open 10.30-23.00 Mon-Thu, 10.30-02.00 Fri-Sat, 12.00-23.00 Sun. Sports Bar & Nightclub.

The Duke 80 High St., *Wickford, SS12 9AT (01268 766 694).* Open daily until 23.00.

Notes:

Ingatestone

32 km north east of London, Ingatestone was established in Saxon times on the Essex Great Road that runs between the two Roman towns of London and Colchester. The name, derived from the Middle English Yenge-atte-Stone, means parcel of land at the stone. The stone in question – deposited by glacial action – is unusual for the area. It can still be seen, split into three stones, one by the west door of the church and one each side of the entrance to Fryerning Lane.

Ingatestone belonged to Barking Abbey from about 950 AD until the dissolution of the monasteries, when it was purchased from the Crown by Sir William Petre. Originally a lawyer from Devon, Petre had risen to become the Secretary of State to Henry VIII. He built a large courtyard house, Ingatestone Hall, as his home in the village, along with almshouses which still exist today as private cottages in Stock Lane.

Ingatestone Hall

Ingatestone Hall has been the home of the Petre family since the 16th century, who chose the location due to the similarity of the village's Latin name (Ginge ad Petram) with their own.

The Hall has two priest holes (hiding places for priests built into many of the principal Catholic houses of England during the period when Catholics were persecuted by law). Among the priests to have been at the hall was St. John Payne who was executed in 1582.

Ingatestone Hall is open to the public. It represented the exterior of Bleak House in the 2005 television adaptation of Charles Dickens' novel, and also appeared in an episode of the TV series Lovejoy.

The Hall is today open as a tourist attraction. Queen Elizabeth I spent several nights at the Hall on her Royal Progress of 1561, and the Petre family reside there to this day. The Hall largely retains its Tudor appearance following restoration carried out between 1915 and 1937 and is set in formal gardens surrounded by eleven acres of grounds.

River Wid

An innocent looking stream in flat country, the Wid regularly breaks its banks after heavy rainfall to flood extended areas. It joins with the Can near Writtle, with the Can then flowing into the Chelmer in Chelmsford.

St. Mary's Church, Buttsbury

There has been a church on this prominent site since at least the 12th century. The oldest parts of the current building are of 14th century origin. Thought to have once been the centre of a thriving village, all that remains are a couple of cottages and the church.

St. Peter's Way

A 66.1 km Long Distance Path from Chipping Ongar to the ancient chapel of St Peter-on-the-Wall at Bradwell-on-Sea. It runs across the open agricultural land of Essex, passing Hanningfield Reservoir and inlets of the Blackwater Estuary and reaching the coast to the east of Tillingham, then following the sea wall from where there are extensive views across the Essex marshes.

Stock Tower Mill

Windmills were mentioned in Stock's historical records as long ago as the 13th Century and it is presumed that these were some form of post mills. The current Grade II listed windmill was built 1816 and is a fine example of the millwright's craft of the late 19th century. Restored to working order by Essex County Council in the early 90s, it has five storeys with four single Patent sails. Open on the afternoons of the 2nd Sunday of each month from April to September (14.00-17.00) and on the National Mills Weekend in May.

<http://www.visitparks.co.uk/places/stock-tower-mill/>

Crowsheath Community Woodland

Crowsheath Community Woodland is a diverse mixture of meadows and young woodland. The site is popular especially with dog walkers – there is even a designated 'dog dip' area in the wildlife pond. Managed by Essex & Suffolk Water and Essex Wildlife Trust, it is home to barn owls, kestrels, dormice and water voles. Look out for dragonflies around the pond and birds of prey hunting over the long grass.

Hanningfield Reservoir

Hanningfield Reservoir covers 870 acres, can hold 27 billion liters of water and is owned by Essex & Suffolk Water. The reservoir was needed after WWII to supply the Essex New Towns, a growing Southend and new industries in the area. It was built 1950-57 and formed by flooding an area formerly known as Sandon Brook Valley between West and South Hanningfield, thereby covering the ancient hamlet of Peasdown; although contrary to popular belief, no buildings survive under the water. The reservoir is filled by pumping water from the rivers Chelmer and Blackford through a 15 km pipeline. It currently supplies water to around 540,000 homes in the Southend, Thurrock, Dagenham, Barking and Redbridge areas.

The reservoir has been declared a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to the important numbers of wildfowl that use the reservoir in autumn and winter, and large parts of it and the surrounding countryside have been developed as a Nature Reserve. The reservoir also is one of the premier fisheries in the UK,

providing some of the best reservoir trout fishing by either bank or boat. A fishing permit needs to be bought in advance.

Hanningfield Reservoir Nature Reserve

This 100-acre part of the estate is leased by Essex Wildlife Trust and is home to vast numbers of wildlife. There are many footpaths in the woodland around the water where wildlife can be seen and hides have been erected to afford excellent views of the visiting and resident bird population. 30 acres of the woodland are ancient in origin and spring flowers include carpets of Bluebells and Stitchwort.

Open every day 09.00-17.00 (to 16.00 Nov, Dec and Jan; closed Christmas and Boxing Day).

<http://www.essexwt.org.uk/reserves/hanningfield-reservoir>

River Crouch

The Crouch rises in Little Burstead. It runs parallel with the A176 (Noak Hill Road) for approximately 2 km and then follows a generally easterly course, passing by, near or through: Crays Hill, Ramsden Bellhouse, the centre of Wickford (where it flows along a concrete culvert), Runwell, Battlesbridge (the head of the 17½ mile 'River Crouch Navigation'), South Woodham Ferrers, Althorne and Burnham-on-Crouch. It flows into the North Sea between Holliwell Point and Foulness Point.

Runwell Hospital

A former Mental Hospital, closed in 2010. After plans to build a male prison were shelved due to spending cuts, currently housing is developed on and around the grounds.

Battlesbridge

Battlesbridge is named after the Bataille family, who kept the bridge over the Crouch in repair in its early days.

St. Margaret Church, Downham

There has been a church here since the mid-13th century and it is likely that Christians have worshipped on this site for over a thousand years. The church is dedicated to St Margaret of Antioch – slayer of dragons and patron saint of child bearing. The oldest part of the present building is the redbrick tower that dates from around 1470. The main part of the church, the nave, was rebuilt in the 19th century using much of the material from the 13th century building. In March 1977 the building was gutted by fire, therefore you may be surprised to find a bright, modern interior with comfortable chairs.

The churchyard (Best Kept Churchyard in Essex 2010) is home to some remarkable trees: sizeable yew trees, a 200 years old Californian Sequoia and a pollarded Field Maple, some 5 metres in girth and the largest of its kind in the UK. The dovecote, just outside the lychgate, originally stood in the farm below the church and was moved to its current site brick by brick in 1991. The small half-timbered building next to it was built in the early 1700s as stables.

Wickford

The town has existed since before 975. There is evidence that the area itself was inhabited in prehistoric times (probably by a tribe of Britons called Trinobantes), Roman and Saxon times. The name Wickford is of Saxon origin, Wic meaning a village, habitation, castle or dairy farm and Ford being a shallow river crossing. Wickford was referenced by the Domesday Book in the year 1086. Before the 20th century it was an agricultural village.

Wickford became the birthplace of Naturism in the UK: In 1922 the English Gymnosophist (meaning "naked philosophers", a name given by the Greeks to certain ancient Indian philosophers who pursued asceticism to the point of regarding food and clothing as detrimental to purity of thought) Society was formed and had its home in the town.

In 1958 the town centre was hit by a flood, which made national news headlines. A second bad flood in 1960 meant changes to the course of the River Crouch were made. This included turning the river into a concrete channel through the centre of the town.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Alighting from the train in **Ingatestone** on platform 2, cross over the footbridge to platform 1, and leave the station into a car park. *Turn right* through the car park to reach **Hall Lane** where you *turn left*. In 385m, where the tarmac lane turns right, head straight on through wooden posts to the left of a large tree following a wooden footpath signpost along a grassy strip. In 60m *turn right* at a T-junction along a car wide grassy path between young trees, with a ditch to the left behind the trees. **[!]** In 110m *veer left* through the trees with a grassy path. In 120m, after passing a couple of large barns and sheds on the right, *veer left* at a yellow marker, now on a car wide earth track between fields (75° initially).

To the right you have good views of **Ingatestone Hall** behind its garden wall. In the distance and on the other side of the **Wid Valley** is **St. Mary's Church, Buttsbury** – our intermediate aim. At the bottom of the valley cross the **Wid** on a two-slab two-railed concrete bridge and *veer right* with a grassy path along a field boundary, with the river to your right. Walk uphill between fields where the river bends to the right, heading towards the right-hand side of the church and then keeping just to the right of the churchyard hedge.

You get to a road where you *turn left*. After visiting the church continue along **Ingatestone Road**. You pass **Buttsbury Hall** in 190m and *turn left* with the road in 250m, ignoring a gravel farm lane continuing in the same direction and a footpath turning right over a stile in a hedge. In 200m cross a single lane bridge over **The Wid** and in 30m *turn right* by a footpath signpost across a two-railed wooden plank bridge over a ditch. *Turn right* on a fenced grassy path and follow the river for 700m. *Turn left* away from the river through a metal gate with the grassy field margin (due N).

Continue in the same direction towards a wooden strip, still with the metal fence on your left, and in 150m, upon reaching the wood, *veer right* to cross a ditch and continue to the left of the adjacent field's metal fence in the previous direction (300°), now with the wood on your left. In 290m at the end of the wood, you pass a footpath marker and in 40m *turn right* to continue between fences (250°). In 70m, on the other side of the field, *veer left* on a grassy margin with a marker post. In 30m you walk through a set of metal field gates either side of a concrete farm track and continue along the next grassy field margin, soon with a reservoir on the right behind trees.

In 400m *bear right* with the path and in 100m go through a metal kissing gate and *turn right* at a T-junction with a car wide farm track, parallel to the railway line. In 75m walk through a metal kissing gate to the left of a metal field gate and pass a railway crossing at **Church Lane** on the left with **St. Margaret of Antioch, Margaretting** (usually shut) on the right. Continue on the earthen farm track through a metal gate left of a metal field gate, **[!]** ignoring the footpath forking left along the railway line. In 750m cross **The Wid** over a car wide concrete bridge and follow a fenced gravel path around a large grassy field on the right, later with a wood (**Pound Wood**) on the left.

At the top of the path, with a double metal field gate on the right, *turn left* along a tarmac lane. In 75m pass the entrance to **Fristling Hall** on the right. Keep ahead and slightly uphill, now with **views back to Ingatestone** and the **Wid Valley**. **[!]** In 280m *turn right* through a metal kissing gate into a grassy field in the grounds of Fristling Hall. Walk along a grassy strip with a metal fence on the right towards the left of a barn (160°). In 180m walk through a metal kissing gate and then *bear right* with a metal fence on the left through trees on the right and with a pond on the left, then through a grassy field. In 110m exit from the field through a metal kissing gate and *turn left* along a tarmac lane.

In 600m, at a T-junction with a tarmac lane, *turn left* and in 20m *turn right* across a stile into a fenced-in grassy strip, at a footpath signpost with a marker for **St. Peter's Way**. *Turn right*, soon with a golf course on the left, in 40m continuing between trees. In 240m, continue in the same direction at a footpath junction.

In 200m, just after passing a pond away on the left, **you have a choice:**

- **For the quickest route** to the lunch options, stay ahead, and in 180m cross a stream on a wooden bridge to immediately ascend on a stepped boardwalk. Keep ascending a grassy path, still with the wood on your right, to reach a tarmac lane. Cross the lane through a narrow wooden strip and head *half right* across a grassy field (160°). Exit in the field corner to the right of a hedge by a footpath signpost and *turn left* along a tarmac lane.
- **For the recommended route**, *turn right* along an unmarked narrow path into **Swan Wood** and immediately *fork right* (245°), ignoring another path turning left parallel to the path just left. In 60m *turn left* at a make-shift log-bridge over a ditch on the right (135°). In 30m pass a bench on the left and in 40m *bear right* with the path (150° initially). In 40m *turn left* at a three-way forest track junction (120°) and in 60m cross a stream on a wooden plank bridge. Re-ascend and in 60m *turn right*. In 20m ignore a path turning left and up and stay on this path (195°), slowly ascending. In 180m, with a narrow bridge over a ditch on the right, **[!]** *turn left* uphill by a wooden fence post (40°), ignoring the onwards path along the ditch. In 70m *turn right* at a T-junction of paths and in 125m, just before an electric substation, exit from the wood through a wooden kissing gate on the left. Emerge onto a tarmac lane (**Crondon Park Lane**), with a grassy field opposite, and *turn right* along it.

The views out on the left are towards **Chelmsford**. Upon reaching **Stock Road**, cross it and *turn right* along the pavement, soon passing a bus stop on the left and **Green Woods Hotel, Spa & Retreat** on the right. After 165m on the road *turn left* into **Common Road**, with the recommended early lunch stop, **The Bakers Arms**, 65m ahead. [Other recommended lunch options in **Stock** are: **The Hoop**, 85m further along Stock Road (now called **High Street**) and **The Bear Inn**, a further 290m along from The Hoop, on a left fork off High Street called **The Square**.]

Out of **The Bakers Arms**, *turn right* along **Common Road** past **Birch Lane** joining from the left and the **Cricket Green** on the right, but at the end of the cricket pitch, where the road bears right, stay ahead following a footpath signpost with a **St. Peter's Way** marker along a tarmac lane to houses. In 40m you *fork right* along a concrete footpath with a ditch to your right and a garden fence on the left. In 70m continue on an earthen track past a cul-de-sac on the left and onto a wide grassy track to eventually exit through more bike barriers onto **Mill Lane**. A short detour 100m to the left would get you to **Stock Tower Mill**. *Turn right* and in 35m *turn left* along a road.

In 480m *turn right* into **Furze Lane** and in 265m *turn left* off it opposite a white cottage called **Sunrise**, at a concrete footpath signpost along a fenced-in grassy path with an orchard on the left. In 110m *turn right* with the path and in 15m *turn left* into a wood. Follow the narrow path through the wood (**carpets of bluebells** in season) with the occasional yellow marker, soon with a grassy field behind trees on the left, until you come out by a wooden footpath signpost on a gravel-and-earth lane to a house half left. *Turn right* on the lane and in 55m *turn left* with a footpath signpost to cross a ditch over a railed two-plank wooden bridge.

In 80m cross a stream over a two-railed wooden plank bridge and *turn left* immediately after it over another two-railed plank bridge crossing a stream. Cross another stream in 90m and in 150m **at the edge of the wood** *turn right* on a dog-leg (265°) at a three-

way footpath junction by a white-topped wooden pole. Cross another stream in 140m and in 50m when a waymarked footpath joins from the right, continue in the same direction to exit the wood along a narrow path between trees. *Bear left* to continue along a concrete drive and past a metal gate to reach a tarmac lane in 60m. *Turn left* along the lane, with views of **Hanningfield Reservoir** in the distance through the trees on the left (foliage permitting).

In 480m, where the lane turns left, *continue in the same direction* at a bridleway signpost on a gravel car wide track between tall trees. In 460m ignore another bridleway joining from the right, [!] but in another 150m *turn left* over a three-plank railed wooden bridge with a footpath marker onto a grassy field boundary with a fence on the right. In 230m cross a couple of streams and continue between trees. In 170m *turn right* at a T-junction with a road. In 150m, just after passing a thatched cottage on the right and by a wooden footpath signpost, *turn left* through a gap to the right of a metal field gate along a grassy track, with a field on the left and trees on the right.

In 350m, with a fisheries pond behind an earthen wall to your left, walk through a wooden kissing gate to enter **Crowsheath Community Woodland**. Ignore a faint path turning right immediately, [!] but in 100m *turn right* along the second of two car wide grassy paths with a yellow footpath marker on a pole on the left (160°). Continue in the same direction until you get to a four-way path junction with a pond on the left. In 250m. *Bear left* around the pond on its right-hand side and continue on a grassy path, now with a stream on your right behind bushes (100°). In 160m a path joins from the right and over a bridge.

Here you have a choice:

For the Alternative Ending in Wickford *turn right* here (for details see the end of the main walk directions).

For the main walk, ending in Battlesbridge, *veer left* on a wide grassy path along the stream towards a wide gap in the hedge 320m away. Walk through the gap onto a car wide track, with a concrete bridge over the stream on the right. [!] **Turn left** on this track. In 80m *turn right* off the track along a narrow earthen path by a decrepit gate (80° initially, then 20°), with a mesh wire fence on the left. In 260m you emerge into an open grassy area, with electricity cables running across. Follow the right-hand side of this meadow towards a white house (may not be visible in summer) and leave it in 70m by a **Crowsheath Community Woodland** information panel, across a wooden two-railed plank bridge and through a small grassy area beside the white house.

Emerge onto a tarmac track by a footpath signpost and *turn left*. In 40m *turn right* with a yellow arrow on a wooden post and then up some steps and through a metal gate to emerge onto **Hawkswood Road** – with **Hanningfield Reservoir** on the other side. Cross the road and *turn right* along the pavement. On the other side of the reservoir dam continue along the grassy pavement. After 40m **Crowsheath Lane** joins from the right. In another 35m you reach a wooden gate by a sign for **Hanningfield Reservoir Nature Reserve Visitor Centre**.

[Most of the rest of the route to the late lunch/early tea pub leads through this **Essex Wildlife Trust**-run site. **It is run as a charity. Although no entrance fee is charged, donations are encouraged.**

If you want to avoid this, the alternative route to the lunch/tea pub is as follows: continue along **Hawkswood Road** for 1.1 km, *turn left* into **South Hanningfield Road** and get to **The Old Windmill** after another 1.25 km.]

Turn left through the gate, follow signs for the visitor centre, soon veering *half right* and passing a car park on the right. After 20m *turn left* along a gravel path towards the visitor centre (refreshments, public conveniences). A box for donations can be found at the cash till, where you can also purchase a detailed and informative map for a nominal price. Exit the visitor centre at the back, following signs for **Nature Trails**. *Fork right* just outside the Visitor Centre and in 60m at a T-junction *turn left* with a seating area to the right. In 65m ignore a left turn for **Lyster Hide**. In 190m and in another 125m paths join from the left. 120m further along *turn right* across a two-railed wooden plank bridge over a ditch and in 75m, after having passed a pond on the left, *turn right* at a T-junction and *right again* in another 200m (take any of two paths).

In 90m *turn left* with the path (views of the reservoir left through the trees). In 60m, *turn left* with the path, ignoring a stile into a grassy field towards a wood ahead. In 190m, in the field corner, *turn right* and in 70m *turn left*. In 150m at a T-junction *turn right* (signposted 'Fishing Lodge') and in 40m *turn left* where another path meets from ahead. In 30m exit the **Nature Reserve** through a metal gate. In 90m pass a display panel for **Hanningfield Reservoir** and *bear right* towards the car park by the **Fishing Lodge** with its **Café on the Water** and wooden terrace overlooking the reservoir (hot and cold refreshments, public conveniences).

Follow the path left around the Fishing Lodge, cross a tarmac lane and head through a gap in the fence **[!]** *to turn right immediately* along a gravel path along the fence. In 60m walk through a wooden gate and continue on the tarmac lane. In 200m *turn left* at a T-junction with **South Hanningfield Road**. In 140m, just before reaching the late lunch/early tea option **The Old Windmill** *turn right* into the gravel car park at a wooden footpath signpost.

Exit the car park in the far-left corner through a gap in the hedge and over a plank bridge and continue in the same direction along a field edge, slightly uphill. In 40m where the hedge on your left turns left, continue in the same direction towards the brow of the field, following a yellow marker and a clear path. In 175m at the other side of the field *veer right* with the field edge to exit onto a road to the left of a concrete barrier, with a fenced-in reservoir on the other side. *Turn right* along the road and in 70m *turn left* into a field by a redundant stile. Initially follow the fence on the left and in 115m cross the field in the same direction towards the corner of the field boundary hedge on the other side (160°).

In 100m continue with a field boundary hedge on your right, soon downhill, into the next field, now on a grassy field margin, with views into the **Crouch Valley**. At the bottom end of this field *turn left* at a junction of paths and with a marker post, now with trees on your right. In 230m *turn left* with the field boundary and in 55m *descend to the right* into the next field on an obvious but unmarked path. Stay on the right-hand side of the field through a dip. In 140m you *turn right* through a gap in the boundary hedge to *turn left* on a fenced off path with a garden on the right. In 125m pass through a wooden bike barrier onto a tarmac lane at a bend and *turn right*. Follow it for 660m.

[!] 60m after the road starts to descend more prominently, and just before **Kenel Farm** on the left, *turn right* at a half-hidden wooden footpath signpost through the hedge onto a grassy path, with a ditch and a field on your left, trees on your right and a large farmhouse half left ahead on a hill (**Runwell Hall Farm**). In 110m *turn right* into a narrow wooden strip and in 175m follow a yellow marker on a pole around to the left just inside the wood. Exit into a field and follow its right-hand edge with a ditch and trees on the right, in 125m *turning right and left again*. Head downhill and exit the field to the right of a barbed wire fence into a wooded area to continue in the same direction.

At the end of the wood you see the site of the former **Runwell Hospital** on the left (now housing), with the church in **Rettondon Place** behind it on a hill. Continue on a grassy field margin and then between hedges. This path bears left in 700m and then right in 65m. Exit it onto a grassy field and follow a yellow marker across it. In 270m continue in the same direction through a farmyard and in 90m cross a gravel lane at a T-junction to continue in the same direction, with a yellow marker on a pole and a wooden fence on the right, until you reach a road in 440m – partly between hedges, partly through grassy strips, through a metal gate and over some stiles.

Cross the road into a small grassy area and head towards a wooden pole under an oak tree in the left corner (135°), where you *turn left* across a field towards a gap in its boundary hedge (85°). In 100m cross a wooden plank bridge and a stile, emerge into another field and continue between fences, slightly uphill (due E). In 200m exit the field over a stile and a plank bridge into the next field. *Turn left* and in 20m *turn right* across this arable field on a now obvious path (105°). In 280m exit the field onto a grassy strip to cross a stream by a footpath marker post on the left. In 40m *turn right* along a tarmac lane and in 20m *turn left* at a white-topped pole across the next field (due E).

In 300m at the opposite field boundary pass another wooden post in the growth on the right and *veer left* across the next field towards the right of a large tree on the other side (70°). In 190m cross a stream on a plank bridge about 20m to the right of the tree (often overgrown) into the next field. Cross this field (without a clear path) in the same direction, heading towards a point 50m to the left of the very large pylon just in front of the raised **A130**. On the other side follow a footpath marker and signpost *right between fences*, underneath the pylon (or continue to the right of the pylon if too overgrown). At the field corner you *turn left* at a marker to walk under the **A130** and then another smaller road (the **A1245**), with a railway line to the right.

[!] 25m after the second road bridge *turn right* through a white wooden kissing gate to cross the railway line. *Turn left* with the path on the other side along a narrow and sometimes bumpy path between hedges. Continue for 280m in the same direction through gates and across stiles into a horse paddock. Leave it over a stile in the far corner. *Turn right* until you reach a tarmac lane, where you *turn left* past the recommended tea stop **The Hawk**. At a T-junction with a road (with the alternative tea stop, **The Barge Inn**, 380m to the right), *veer left* and up along **Station Approach** to reach the single platform at **Battlesbridge** Station in 160m.

Alternative Ending in Wickford

Length: 18.8 km (11.7 mi), of which 3.9 km (2.4 mi) on tarmac or pavement.

Cumulative ascent/descent: 166/208m.

Toughness: 3 out of 10

Walk Notes: While the main walk leads through Hanningfield Reservoir Nature Reserve and then rolling fields and woods, this much shorter alternative heads for Wickford on a direct route, through a few woods, but mainly through grassy fields.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Turn right to cross a stream over a wooden bridge and *turn left* for 30m on a grassy path. At a T-junction of paths with a wooden footpath pole, *turn right* uphill on a grassy path. In 95m pass another display panel for **Crowsheath Community Woodland** and cross a stile into a narrow grassy strip, wooden fence on the left, ditch and hedge on the right. After 200m a tarmac lane joins from the right and in 55m you get to a main road by a wooden footpath signpost. Cross the road and *turn right* on the pavement. *Turn left* in 60m by a bridleway sign along a car wide lane (Oak Road).

In 300m continue ahead on a narrow path with a large hedge on your left. Soon you pass a car salvage companies' grounds on the right, complete with its rather picturesque three-tier stacker storage system. *Bear left* and downhill with the path, now with a wood on the left. As the path levels out and with a ditch now on the left, ignore a footpath on the left. 70m on, at a two-way bridleway sign, *turn left* along a car wide lane. In 80m ignore a footpath off to the left over a stile. At De Beauvoir House *turn right* with the lane. Stay on this lane past a handful of houses on the left and *bear left* with it by a wooden shack with a field gate to the right to cross a small stream. In 450m you reach a road. [Well worth a short detour is **St. Margaret's Church, Downham**, 180m to the left along the road up on the hill, providing sweeping panoramic views]

Cross the road and *turn right* for 15m and then *left* along the concrete driveway of a farm. In 65m, just behind a redbrick house and its garage, *turn right* over a stile into a grassy field. Head for a stile 75m away (140°), and then for one in a further 50m. In the next grassy field stay to the left of a pond and a wooden hut with a barbed wire fence around it and head for a stile and wooden plank bridge 125m away. Cross a stream into a grassy field border with a wooden garden fence and a red roofed white house on the left. *Turn half right* towards a gap in the hedge (105°) and then further right in the next field (140°) to cross a stream over a wooden plank bridge. Cross this field, with a tall hedge on the left (110°).

Leave the field through a metal kissing gate to emerge on a shingle track by a three-way footpath/byway sign and continue in the same direction. [!] In 15m *turn right* through a car wide gap into a field and keep the field boundary hedge on your right (due S). Exit the field through a wooden squeeze gate in a hedge into another field, to continue in the same direction for 200m, with the hedge on the right, to then *veer left* across the field towards the right-hand edge of the other field boundary hedge on your left. Pass the hedge and, *with the railway line about a 100m away on the right*, *veer left* to cross this grassy meadow and leave it through wide gap in the boundary hedge.

The path now leads through a new housing development for 100m (110°) and then through shrubs and trees and a small hedge gap onto a road. Ignore all ways off, and in 430m *turn right* along Station Approach. Reach **Wickford** station in 80m and cross the footbridge to platform 1 for trains to London. **For the limited tea places though**, continue in the same direction and *turn right* under the railway line into High Street.