

Leagrave to Harlington			Leagrave to Harlington Shortcuts		
1 st walk check	2 nd walk check	3 rd walk check	1 st walk check	2 nd walk check	3 rd walk check
24 th May 2014	18 th May 2019	19 th Sep. 2023	03 rd Sept. 2024		
Current status	Document last updated Tuesday, 03 rd September 2024				
<p>This document and information herein are copyrighted to Saturday Walkers’ Club. If you are interested in printing or displaying any of this material, Saturday Walkers’ Club grants permission to use, copy, and distribute this document delivered from this World Wide Web server with the following conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The document will not be edited or abridged, and the material will be produced exactly as it appears. Modification of the material or use of it for any other purpose is a violation of our copyright and other proprietary rights.• Reproduction of this document is for free distribution and will not be sold.• This permission is granted for a one-time distribution.• All copies, links, or pages of the documents must carry the following copyright notice and this permission notice: <p>Saturday Walkers’ Club, Copyright © 2014-2024, used with permission. All rights reserved. www.walkingclub.org.uk</p>					
This walk has been checked as noted above, however the publisher cannot accept responsibility for any problems encountered by readers.					

Leagrave to Harlington

Start: Leagrave Station

Finish: Harlington station

Leagrave station, map reference TL 061 241, is in a north westerly suburb of Luton, 121m above sea level. Harlington station, map reference TL 034 302, is 11 km north of Luton and 95m above sea level. Both are in **Central Bedfordshire**.

Length: 23.1 km (14.4 mi), of which 5.4 km (3.4 mi) on tarmac or concrete.

Cumulative ascent/descent: 250/275m. For a shorter walk, *see below* **Walk Options**.

Toughness: 4 out of 10

Time: 5 hours walking time.

For the whole outing, including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 7 ³/₄ hours.

Transport: Leagrave and Harlington stations are on the Brighton to Bedford-Thameslink line, stopping at East Croydon, London Bridge (or Elephant & Castle), Blackfriars, City Thameslink, Farringdon, St. Pancras International and West Hampstead Thameslink, with 4 trains per hour. Journey times from St. Pancras to Leagrave are 37 - 40 minutes Mondays to Saturdays, and 43 - 45 minutes Sundays. Harlington is one stop further up the line and journey times are 44 - 49 minutes (4 trains per hour). Buy a return ticket to Harlington (Bedfordshire).

Saturday Walkers' Club: Take the train closest to 9.30 hours (assuming travel from St. Pancras).

OS Landranger Map: 153 (Bedford & Huntingdon) and 166 (Luton & Hertford)

OS Explorer Map: 193 (Luton & Stevenage)

Walk Notes:

The start to this walk in Central Bedfordshire with a long urban stretch may sound inauspicious, but most of that leads through meadows along the early beginnings of the River Lea. And the rewards are many and varied: far views from solitary North Chiltern hills, ancient woodlands, steep chalk escarpments, two of the largest Neolithic hill forts in the South East and an exceptionally fine and steep chalk down land: Barton Hills, as good as any other.

All this is linked by ancient track ways like the Icknield Way and the Chiltern Way and with rolling grassy fields and fine views up to the escarpments in the afternoon. The finish is in the tranquil hill top village of Harlington.

Shortcuts reduce the effort substantially. One of them omits the Barton Hills downland and routes through the Sharpenhoe Clappers chalk escarpment instead, with fantastic views down into the plain.

Walk Options:

Two – mutually exclusive – pre-lunch shortcuts reduce the length of the walk by 6.6 km and 55m ascent/descent, and by 6.5 km and 85m ascent/descent respectively.

Shortcut I cuts out Barton Hills, arguably the best part of the walk, and leads through the NT-owned Sharpenhoe Clappers Hills and through the Sharpenhoe Hill Fort site instead (this walk is rated **2/10**).

Shortcut II halves the time spent in the Barton Hills (this walk is rated **2/10**).

There are **several Mon-Sat bus services** from opposite the lunch stops in Barton-Le-Clay to Luton, terminating at Galaxy Centre, close to Luton train station, which is closer to London on the same train line.

Lunch if taking Shortcut I (details last updated 03/09/2024)

The Chequers Inn 171 Sharpenhoe Road, *Streatley, Luton LU3 3PS (01582 882 072)*. A traditional village pub, serving food all day Wed-Sun.

Lunch on the Main Walk and if taking Shortcut II (details last updated 20/09/2023)

The Raven of Hexton Village Street, *Hexton, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 3JB (01582 881 209, <http://www.emeryinns.com/>)*. The Raven is located 10.1 km (6.3 mi) into the full walk and is a traditional family-friendly pub-restaurant. Food served all day every day.

The Royal Oak Bedford Road, *Barton-Le-Clay, Bedfordshire, MK45 4JX (01582 881 329, <https://www.royaloakbarton.co.uk/>)*. The Royal Oak is located 16.8 km (10.4 mi) into the main walk and 10.3 km into it if taking Shortcut II. Open all day every day.

The Bull Hotel & Freehouse 77 Bedford Road, *Barton-Le-Clay, Bedfordshire, MK45 4LL (01582 882 888, <https://bullbarton.co.uk/>)*. The Bull is located 17.1 km (10.7 mi) into the main walk and 10.6 km into it if taking Shortcut II. It is **currently closed** and for sale.

The Waggon & Horses 105 Bedford Road, *Barton-Le-Clay, Bedfordshire, MK45 4LP (01582 882 011, <http://www.charleswellspubs.co.uk/pub-view/waggon--horses/>)*. The Waggon & Horses is located 17.3 km (10.8 mi) into the main walk and 10.8 km into it if taking Shortcut II. Open all day every day. Food served Mon-Fri only, to 14.00 hours.

Plus several restaurants, grills and a fish & chips in Barton, see the walk directions.

Tea (details last updated 03/09/2024)

The Millhouse Coffee Shop at The Olde Watermill Dickensian Village Barton Mill Lane, off Faldo Road, *Barton-le-Clay, Bedford, MK45 4RF (0845 872 0507, <http://www.oldewatermill.co.uk/>)*. The Olde Watermill is located 5.4 km/3.4 mi from the end of the walk. Open 09.30-17.30 Mon and Wed-Sat and 10.00-17.00 Sun. There has been a watermill on this site for centuries. The existing Mill standing today is approximately 250 years old and a rare over-shot mill, one of only a few left in the country. It was a working mill up until the 1970's after which it fell into disrepair and was put on the "buildings at risk" register. The Mill was then bought in 1995 and became a restaurant and hotel. It continued as this until 2000 when it was converted to The Plant and Craft Centre and now the Olde Watermill Shopping Village.

The Carpenters Arms 12-14 Sundon Road, *Harlington, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, LU5 6LS (01525 872 384)*. Under new management! Open 12.00-15.30 and 18.00-23.30 Tue-Thu, 12.00-24.00 Fri-Sun. Food served. The Carpenters Arms is a low beamed traditional village pub first licensed in 1790. The Grade II listed building was once a Coaching Inn and has the original mounting stone outside the entrance to the Village Bar. It has a Blue Plaque paying homage to the First English Grand National Steeplechase which commenced opposite the pub on 8th March 1830.

The Old Sun 34 Sundon Road, *Harlington, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, LU5 6LS (01525 877 330)*. The Old Sun is a traditional country pub. Open all day every day.

Notes:

Leagrave

Leagrave is a former village and now a suburb of Luton in the northwest of the town. The pre-historic Icknield Way passes through it. The first settlement in the area was Waulud's Bank which is a Neolithic D-shaped enclosure on a glacial ridge in Leagrave Park at the source of the River Lea, dating from around 3,000 BC and is now a protected monument. Waulud's Bank consists of a bank and external ditch of around 7 ha with a chalk and gravel bank built from the excavated ditch material. The bank still stands 2.6 m high in places and on the north side the excavated ditch was 9.2 m wide and 2.1 m deep. The site was later briefly re-used in the Iron Age and during the Roman occupation and in medieval times. The source of the River Lea is known as the 'Five-Springs' and lies in the north-west corner of Waulud's Bank.

The Lea crosses Leagrave Common and receives a tributary called Knapps Brook, a combination of brooks from East End, Houghton Regis and from the Lewsey Estate, which joins from culverts under the railway embankment.

Leagrave Marsh used to be a popular place for the Luton hatters on their (rare) days off and was, consequently, known as "Blockers' Seaside".

The Lea River

The River Lea (or Lee) originates in Marsh Farm, Leagrave, Luton in the Chiltern Hills and flows for 68 km, generally southeast, east, and then south, through Harpenden, Welwyn Garden City, Hertford, Broxbourne, Cheshunt, Tottenham and Stratford to London where it meets the River Thames (as Bow Creek). The river once formed one boundary of the Danelaw and also was the traditional boundary between the counties of Middlesex and Essex, and part of the boundary between Essex and Hertfordshire. The spelling Lea predominates west (upstream) of Hertford, but both spellings are used from Hertford to the Thames.

The source of the river is known as the 'Five-Springs' and lies in the north-west corner of Waulud's Bank, a Neolithic enclosure. According to legend, the Celtic god 'Lug' or 'Lud' or 'Lyg', presided over the springs. 'Lug' is the Celtic god of light, and the name 'Lea' may derive from this name. The town now known as Luton is named after this river which therefore may mean 'the settlement on the river of the god Lugus' ('-ton' being Anglo-Saxon for 'large settlement').

Lea Valley Walk

A linear waymarked Long Distance Path of 80 km (50 mi) located between Leagrave, the source of the River Lea near Luton, and the Thames, at Limehouse Basin, London. At Hertford the path follows the towpath of the River Lee Navigation.

Galley and Warden Hills Nature Reserve

The hills lie within the Chiltern's Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and became Luton's first local nature reserve in 1993. The chalk downland supports a huge variety of wild flowers and these attract rare insects and over 20 species of butterflies and are therefore a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Near the top of Galley Hill two Bronze Age barrows can be found. These were excavated in the 1960s and the remains of 14 burials were found in the largest barrow. In the Middle Ages gallows were built on top of one of the barrows for public executions. "Dray's ditches" run along the base of Warden Hill and were originally dug in the Bronze Age as boundaries to separate tribal groups. However, later on in the Iron Age these were built up as a way to control the traffic along the Icknield Way.

The Chiltern Way

A circular waymarked Long Distance Path of around 214 km (134 mi), taking in some of the finest scenery in the country. There are now two optional extensions and an additional Berkshire loop taking the total to 352 km (220 mi).

The Chiltern Way passes through some of the most attractive parts of the Chilterns, including the Bovingdon Plateau, the Chess valley, the Misbourne valley, Penn Country, the Hambleton valley, Stonor Park, Bix Bottom, Ewelme, the Ridgeway, Swyncombe Down, Bledlow Ridge, Hampden Country, Bulbourne valley, the Dunstable Downs and Sharpenhoe Clappers.

The Icknield Way

Said to be one of the oldest roads in Britain, the Icknield Way is one of the few long distance track-ways to have existed before the Romans occupied the country. The name is Celto-British in derivation, and may be named after the Iceni tribe, who may have established this route to permit trade with other parts of the country from their base in East Anglia. It has also been suggested that the road has even older prehistoric origins. It stretched from the Dorset Coast to the Wash, crossing the River Thames near Wallingford. It was later one of the "Four Highways" of medieval England (the others being Ermine Street, Fosse Way and Watling Street). Today the Ridgeway National Trail follows parts of the ancient Icknield Way for 139 km (87 mi) from Overton Hill to Ivinghoe Beacon in the Chilterns. The modern day Icknield Way long-distance path then runs for 274 km from Ivinghoe Beacon to Knettishall Heath in Norfolk.

John Bunyan Trail

The John Bunyan Trail is a way-marked 124 km (77 mi) circular Long Distance Path. It starts and finishes at the Sundon Hills Country Park just north of Luton and is almost entirely in Bedfordshire, while briefly passing through Hertfordshire near Hexton. The route visits many sites associated with John Bunyan, the 17th century Puritan evangelist and writer. He lived in Elstow, just south of Bedford, and travelled this area extensively, first through his trade as a tinker and later as a non-conformist preacher. He was arrested and tried at Harlington for preaching illegally and imprisoned at Bedford, which is where he wrote his best known work 'Pilgrim's Progress'.

Barton Hills National Nature Reserve

Barton Hills are a fine example of downland and woodland in the north Chilterns. The steep well-grazed slopes are a classic downland habitat, however there were no sheep on the hills from about 1930 until the 1980s and woodland has formed on the hillside to the west of the chalk stream river which issues from Barton Springs. The area around the springs includes the remnants of a water supply system which used to feed a series of watercress beds, once an important local enterprise.

In the north-eastern part of Barton Hills, there is a good, visible example of a lynchet field system. This is where hillsides were terraced to provide flat agricultural land.

A large part of the area is managed by Natural England as a National Nature Reserve and the reserve is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Sharpenhoe Clappers

The National Trust-owned Sharpenhoe group of properties comprises four adjacent countryside areas to the north of Luton, combining ancient woodlands and chalk escarpments with fantastic views. These are (from west to east) Sundon Hills, Moleskin and Markham Hills, Sharpenhoe Clappers and Smithcombe Hills.

Reputedly haunted, Sharpenhoe Clappers is a classic chalk escarpment and part of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is crowned with traces of an Iron Age hill-fort and an impressive beech wood. 'Clappers' is thought to derive from the medieval Latin term 'claperius', one of its meanings being 'rabbit hole'. Excavation works indeed revealed the remains of a medieval rabbit warren built over the Iron Age palisade trench. Rabbits provided a consistent supply of meat and skins at the time. The suffix '-hoe' means promontory, an obvious reference to the shape of the Clappers at the very edge of the Chilterns.

Sharpenhoe Hill Fort

It's easy to see why the early Iron Age people chose this dominating site to build a defensive position of banks and ditches topped by wooden walls and a huge wooden gateway: this is a promontory fort with steep drops on three sides, located at the edge of the ice sheet formed during the last Ice Age, therefore the view is over a flattened plain. The hill fort site is now within trees, but very clear to see from Harlington and many other points in the plain.

Ravensburgh Castle

A well preserved Iron Age Contour Hill-Fort in Hertfordshire, and one of the largest in the South-East, Ravensburgh Castle lies on a spur of the Barton Hills, south west of Hexton, and occupies the western half of a plateau surrounded by deep coombes on every side but the northwest.

This fine example of a hill fort compares favourably with many of those to be found in counties notable for their earthworks, such as Sussex or Dorset.

Excavations showed there were four separate phases of construction, ranging from the Early to Late Iron Age and that the hill fort had still been occupied at the time of the Roman Conquest. Suggestions that it may have been the base of Cassivellaunus, the king defeated by Julius Caesar in 54 BC are probably incorrect, as Ravensburgh does not really match Caesar's description of the base, which more closely fits the situation at Baldock.

Now privately owned and obscured by encroaching forest.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Alight from the train in **Leagrave Station** on platform 2 or 4 and use the overbridge to exit on Platform 1 towards the *right-hand side* through the ticket barriers. Walk through the car park and in 25m *turn left* and downhill along a road pavement. In 100m *turn right* at a T-junction with a major road. Continue past a service station on the right and then by crossing a roundabout (there is a pedestrian crossing over **Marsh Road** a little to the right) and continue in the same direction along the pavement of **Bramingham Road**. In 20m a small river joins from the other side of the road to flow parallel on the right. **This is London's second river: The Lea**, close to its source.

For an out-and-back excursion to the well head cross the road with a **Lea Valley Walk** sign into **Leagrave Park** and follow either of two tarmac paths for about 500m, past one info panel and on to another one at **The Source of the Lea**. The high amount of water in the river here at the road, so close to the well head, is explained by three tributary streams from about 3 km west of here flowing into the Lea close to the well head, none of which is considered as the source.

In 140m *fork right* along a shared tarmac cycle-/footpath with a **Lea Valley Walk** marker on a street light pole into **Limbury Meads**. After 290m the path forks and you can take either direction:

- the left fork turns right in 60m along a grassy path with allotments on the left behind a metal fence and stays to the left bank of the river, **mostly on grass**;
- the main path forks right and crosses a two-railed concrete bridge in 40m, then stays to the right bank of the river, it will continue **as a tarmac path** all the way.

Follow the river on either path, as it winds through **Limbury Meads** (there are plenty of bridges to change sides along the way as well). On the way you may spot a distant hill half left ahead (**Warden Hill**), this is your interim aim. 800m from the fork in the path **The Lea** flows under a road (**Icknield Way** to the left, **Neville Road** to the right) near a pedestrian crossing. Cross the road and continue along the river (either along the left or right bank) for another 90m. **[!]** You *turn left* (across a two-railed concrete bridge, if you were walking on the right bank) and then continue along a clear grassy path ahead up a slope (30°), i.e.: ignore a right fork. In 130m reach playing fields that were initially hidden from view. Cross the fields in the same direction towards the left of two roads on the opposite side, about 70m to the right of a playground. In 300m cross a road and continue in the same direction along **Gooseberry Hill**.

In 510m cross another road to continue along Gooseberry Hill and in 290m *turn right* at a T-junction with **Grasmere Road**. In 220m cross the **A6 (Barton Road)** at a roundabout and *veer left* along the pavement of **Weybourne Drive**. In 75m follow a tarmac path ahead where the road curves to the right. In 125m, at a garden fence corner on the right, *turn right* along an earth path, marked as a public footpath and 'The Birdsfoot Lane Trail to Warden & Galley Hills'. In 75m you have an overgrown area to the right and follow the path. In 140m follow a footpath signpost through a wooden kissing gate into **Galley and Warden Hills Nature Reserve**.

Walk up to the (false) top of **Warden Hill** visible from here on any of these paths:

- continue in the same direction (95°) for 90m and then *veer left* towards a wooden kissing gate 170m away (75°), and follow the obvious line up the rise from there;
- there is another gate 50m to the right of that wooden kissing gate;
- head to the right hand side of the grassy area and walk through a gate in the far right corner (a further 60m to the right of the other gates in the fence line); then continue on a narrow path with footpath markers, clinging to the right hand side fence with a field beyond it, in 190m *turn left* with a footpath marker and climb steeply through bushy growth from the right hand end of the hill.

Views back from the top range from open countryside to the north of town to some high rise blocks close to the well head of **The Lea** and further left over Luton Town Centre to Luton Airport (on a ridge behind the town, you should be able to identify the control tower and some hangars in most weathers). *Bear left* from the previous direction towards a wooden kissing gate at a fence corner 120m away, and – once through the gate – follow the fence line on your right with a **Chiltern Way** marker, in 180m passing a **Trig Point** in the field on the right. In 170m walk through a wooden kissing gate and in 10m, where the fence turns right, continue ahead down some steps. In 70m ignore a footpath marker on a yellow-topped pole pointing left, *but veer right and downhill* along a **Permissive Path** with a Chiltern Way marker.

In 120m *fork right* and in 50m go through a wooden kissing gate and *turn right* at a T-junction with a car wide gravel bridleway with a fence on the left. In 100m ignore a wooden kissing gate leading left into **Galley Hill Local Nature Reserve**, but *turn left* immediately afterwards at a fence corner (340°) along a grassy field boundary with **Icknield Way** and **Chiltern Way** markers, ignoring the bridleway ahead (**The John Bunyan Trail**). In 270m ignore a wooden kissing gate and a stile leading left into **Galley Hill Local Nature Reserve** and *turn right* with the fence line on the left (40°).

[!] In 175m continue in the same direction through a metal gate into a lightly wooded area with Icknield Way and Chiltern Way markers, where the field boundary and the fence turn right. Follow a clear path, eventually descending the hill, and in 320m walk through a metal gate into a golf course. Cross a fairway carefully (it is being played from right to left). In 55m pass a bridleway marker on a wooden pole near a hedge and walk past a green on the left. In 30m *turn left* along a gravel track with a marker post and in another 50m leave the golf course at a T-junction with a wide gravel track flanked by a wood on the one side and a tall hedge on the other. This is the ancient **Icknield Way** (information board opposite).

Here you have a choice:

For a Shortcut, cutting out the early lunch destination of **Hexton** and the splendid **Barton Hills National Nature Reserve**, but adding the also magnificent **Sharpenhoe Clappers** hills and the **Sharpenhoe Hill Fort** site, *cross the Icknield Way* and continue in the same direction gently descending along a car wide track through the woods. Pick up further directions at the end of this text under **Shortcut I**.

For the main walk *turn right* along the **Icknield Way** (70°) and in 330m reach a bridleway crosspaths with marker posts on both sides.

Here you have a choice:

For a Shortcut, cutting out the early lunch destination of **Hexton** and halving the time spent in the splendid **Barton Hills**, *turn left* along a gravel-and-earth car wide farm track, then a grassy field boundary with **Chiltern Way Bridleway** and **Bunyan Trail** markers (335°) and pick up directions at the end of this text under **Shortcut II**.

For the main walk *continue in the same direction* along the **Icknield Way** and **Chiltern Way** between trees. In 680m, at a four-way Bridleway/Byway Open to All Traffic-junction *turn left* between two tree trunk parts along a wide grassy field margin to the right of a hedge (350°). In 370m walk through a metal gate to the left of a double metal field gate and continue along a shingle/tarmac track through **Mortgrove Farm**. In 250m (having gone through a metal gate and a gap to the side of a car gate en route) *turn right* at a road T-junction. In 170m *turn left* off the road through a gap to the right of a double metal field gate with a footpath signpost into a field corner ('Public Footpath 2 – Hexton 1 ½').

Continue along a left-hand field boundary to the right of a hedge towards a wood (5°). In 550m upon reaching the wood *turn right* with a marker post and in 75m at the wood's corner *turn left* with a marker post along a grassy field boundary with the wood now on your left and a sloping field on the right. In 475m in the field corner the path enters the wood and starts to descend. In 400m emerge from the wood onto a gravel lane at a bend and continue in the same direction with a marker post. In 400m walk through a gap to the right of a metal car gate and *turn left* along a road into the village of **Hexton**. In 190m cross Barton Road/Hitchin Road (**St. Faith's Church, Hexton** is 230m to the left along the road) and continue along a road with the brick wall of **Hexton Manor** on your right. It is 370m to the early lunch pub **The Raven of Hexton**.

Continue in the same direction and in 50m *turn left* along a road (signposted **Higham Gobion**). In 150m *fork left* off the road with a Public Footpath 005 (Barton-Le-Clay 1 ¼)-signpost to cross a field on a usually well-cleared path (315°). The prominent wooded hilltop on the left is the site of the Iron Age **Sharpenhoe Hill Fort** (passed through on SWC Walk Harlington-Flitwick, as well as on Shortcut I of this walk). Just before the opposite field boundary you can see another wooded hilltop hard left, the site of **Ravensburgh Castle**, one of the largest hill fort sites in the South East. Hard right (35°) you can spot **St. Mary's, Shillington**, the 'Church on the Hill' just below the ridgeline on a smaller hilltop, or as John Betjeman liked to call it: '**The Cathedral of the Chilterns**' (SWC Walk Arlesey-Letchworth Garden City).

In 310m leave the field and cross a railed wooden plank bridge over a stream to *veer left* and continue along a grassy field boundary, initially with trees on the left, then a hedge (due W). In 360m in the far left field corner (good views back to Shillington Church) continue in the same direction through a hedge gap. For the next 1.1 km follow the field boundary, generally in the same direction, at times diverting around a few corners. The prominent water tower on the right is in **Pulloxhill** (SWC Walk Harlington-Flitwick) and the hills half left ahead are the **Barton Hills**, your next destination. In 1.1 km you walk to the right-hand side of a hedge. In 230m *turn left* at an unmarked footpath T-junction through the hedge. In 20m *turn right* with a marker post along a field boundary. In 50m the path *turns left* and then *veers right* between houses, and in 15m you cross a brook on a two-railed concrete bridge. In 100m walk through bike barriers onto a road in **Barton-Le-Clay** and *turn left*.

[**But if you need a lunch stop now**, before the excursion into **Barton Hills National Nature Reserve** (which takes about an hour): in 15m *turn right* along a tarmac path between fences; in 115m *turn right* at a road T-junction; in 60m *turn left* with the road (**Osborn Road**); in 175m *turn left* with the road, in 15m *turn right* with a footpath signpost along a tarmac path between fences; in 40m continue ahead at a tarmac path junction; in 90m continue in the same direction at a bend in a road; in 50m reach a road, opposite **The Bull Hotel & Freehouse** (currently closed). **Barton Fish & Chips** and **The Royal Oak** are a few hundred metres on the left, and **The Waggon & Horses** is a few hundred metres on the right. After lunch re-trace your steps.]

Continue along **Manor Road** and in 500m *turn right* along **Hexton Road** and then *turn left* along **Church Road**. In 150m pass **St. Nicholas, Barton-Le-Clay** church, while ignoring a footpath turning right (the Chiltern Way Extension). In 90m *turn left* with a footpath and bridleway signpost at a hedge corner. In 120m continue in the same direction along a field boundary. In 110m *turn right* with the boundary and in 20m *fork left up the hill* towards a metal kissing gate next to an information board, *ignoring* the car wide track turning left. In 20m walk through the gate, entering **Barton Hills National Nature Reserve**, and *veer left* up a steep grassy path (110°). In 60m the path *turns right* up some steps with a wooden railing on the right. In 25m go up some more steps. In 20m reach a wooden kissing gate in a fence line, with another set of steps on the left leading up to another wooden kissing gate.

You can explore the area ahead as you wish, as long as you eventually head towards the **top far left corner** of the Nature Reserve, but **the suggested route** is: *turn left* and walk up the steps, then *turn right* through the wooden kissing gate and follow the fence line up the ridge of this hill, levelling out after about 500m. As you proceed, different views open up on the right down into the serrated valleys, this is a delightful stretch. From near the top, you will be able to see a heavily wooded hill top on the left. This is again the site of **Ravensburgh Castle**, one of Britain's largest Iron Age-Forts.

From the far left corner of the rise there are (at least) **five ways back down**:

- you can climb straight down the steep cleft from here, or down a stepped path about 100m back,
- you can follow the boundary around to the right for 220m to the brow of a rise and descend from there, either along the ridge line or steeply down the cleft,
- **for the recommended route** follow the boundary around right for 220m to the brow of a rise and continue for another 190m to the far corner of the fenced area to just before some trees and descend steeply, hard right along the tree line, along a path.

***)** Whichever way down you take, check out the **Barton Springs** at the bottom of the valley. The water gushes out of the hillside in 6 places, all year round, and it makes for a special place. If you have chosen one of the first four routes, the springs are *on the left-hand side* 370m from the top fence corner and the recommended fifth route finishes at the springs. From the springs follow the stream on its left-hand side for 800m with the steep sided **Leet Wood** on the left, then go through a metal kissing gate, ignore a two-railed wide bridge on the right and reach a place in the woods with a **two-railed narrow footbridge** crossing the stream *at a left bend*).

[!] *Turn left* (220°) on an earthen path 15m *before reaching the bridge*, parallel and to the left of the left-turning stream. In 70m *fork right*, in 60m leave the wood and the Nature Reserve through a metal gate into a field corner. Follow the right hand field boundary, with the stream still on your right behind trees initially. In 130m walk up steps through bushes and *turn right* on a tarmac lane into **Barton-Le-Clay**. In 420m *turn left* along **Hexton Road** at a T-junction. In 150m *continue in the same direction*, where the main road turns left towards a through road (Luton Road). In 90m ignore a footpath from the right along a narrow tarmac lane. In 35m reach the main road through Barton-Le-Clay, opposite **The Royal Oak**. Continue in the same direction and in 40m pass a roundabout, where **Sharpenhoe Road** turns left.

In 60m pass a Post Office and store on the left, in another 20m a convenience store on the right, then **The Shack** and **Barton Fish & Chips**. In 100m find **The Bull Hotel & Freehouse** (currently closed) and **The Pudding Shop**. [There are the **Baan Thai** restaurant and another pub within the next 150m further along the road: **The Waggon & Horses**.] Past **The Bull** *turn left* immediately into the pub car park and *veer right* along a narrow tarmac path between brick walls. Cross a small green and in 60m *fork right* with the path to the right of a disused playground. In 110m *turn right* at a T-junction with a road (**Franklin Avenue**). In 35m *turn left* at another T-junction with a road and in 15m go through concrete bollards and continue along a tarmac lane, where the road turns right. In 65m cross a road and continue in the same direction.

In 110m at a footpath junction *ignore* a footpath signpost turning left and continue ahead towards the **A6 Dual-Carriageway**. Cross the **A6** carefully, utilising the protective corridor on the central reservation, **[!]** *which also guides you 15m to the right before crossing the far lanes* and descend a few steps on the other side. *Turn left* with an earthen path and in 15m *turn right* through wooden bike barriers along a gravel path. Walk to the right of a pond (fed by the stream springing out of Barton Hills) and through the car park of **The Olde Watermill Dickensian Village** (with **The**

Millhouse Coffee Shop), a rare mix of shops, stalls and stores and a large pond. *Veer left* at a three-way footpath marker towards the far left corner of the car park just to the right of the mill and continue through a wooden kissing gate with a footpath marker along a grassy field boundary and in 20m at the corner of a wooded area **[!]** *turn right* along the grassy field boundary with the wood now on your left.

In 220m continue in the same direction through a hedge gap along a narrow path through thick growth, ignoring a couple of paths turning right. In 60m cross an un-railed wooden plank bridge over a stream and walk through a metal kissing gate into a grassy field and continue along its right hand side. In 140m walk through another metal kissing gate to the left of a wooden field gate into a pasture and *veer left* across it (275°). Leave the field in 100m through a metal kissing gate and *turn left* along a farm track. In 15m *turn right* with a marker post and continue to the left of a long hedge with another marker post. On the left you can again see the **Sharpenhoe Hill Fort** site and **Sharpenhoe Clappers**, the ridge running left of it.

In 430m the hedge discontinues and you continue through a small open space and into a wooded area, ignoring a very wide track on your right. In 50m *turn right* on a narrow path with a yellow marker on a pole. In 70m *turn left* with the path and cross a wooden plank bridge into a field. Continue on a usually well-cleared path towards the right hand corner of a line of trees on the opposite side of the field (280°). In 300m continue with a marker post in the same direction along the field boundary, with a hedge on the left. In 60m arrive at a T-junction with a bridleway (the **John Bunyan Trail**) on a farm track. *Turn left* along the farm track (with the clearest views yet of the **Sharpenhoe Hill Fort** site) and in 25m *turn right* over a two-railed bridge and along a grassy field boundary, with a wood (**Sharpenhoe Grove** on the OS map) on the left.

In 240m pass a bridleway marker on the left at the corner of the wood and cross a field along a usually well-cleared path (265°), now for the first time with views of the final destination **Harlington** on a hill a little to the left. In 200m leave the field through a hedge gap and continue in the same direction through a grassy field towards a burnt-out farm building and **Mill End** hamlet behind it. In 140m cross the very overgrown drive to the burnt-out farm and continue along a clear grass path. In 120m turn left by a bridleway signpost onto a road and *turn right* along it. **[!]** This road has some fast traffic and there is a bend ahead. In 50m *turn left* through a hedge gap into a field corner by a footpath marker post. Follow the right-hand boundary grassy margin.

You have the **Mill Stream** on the right and in 200m the **Sundon Hills** come into view a little to the left (SWC Walk Harlington to Flitwick). In 360m in the far right field corner ignore a first gap in the boundary hedge on the right (leading you straight into the stream), but 15m further along around to the left **[!]** *turn right* through another gap in the boundary growth along a clear grassy path. In 10m ignore a two-railed wooden plank bridge on the right, crossing the stream.

******) In 10m *turn right* along the grassy field boundary of another large field. In 165m *turn right* with the boundary and in 35m *turn left* again. In 130m **[!]** *turn right* through a narrow hedge gap and over a two-railed wooden plank bridge across the **Mill Stream** into an adjacent field and *turn left* along its wide grassy verge. In 10m *ignore* a footpath turning left over another wooden plank bridge and continue along the field boundary. In 450m in the far left field corner leave the field through a hedge gap and over an un-railed wooden plank bridge. Cross a road (**The Bottoms**) and walk through a gap to the left of a double metal field gate into another large field.

Turn right along its grassy boundary (310°). In 125m walk through a boundary gap in a field corner with a Circular Walk marker on a yellow-topped pole into the adjacent field and *turn left* along its grassy boundary. In 300m in the far left corner leave the field

over an un-railed wooden plank bridge in a boundary gap and *turn right* at a footpath T-junction along a grassy field boundary. In 90m [!] *turn right* through a gap in the growth, ignoring the obvious path ahead across a large field. *Turn left* and uphill along the field boundary towards the village of Harlington.

In 100m the path forks in front of a narrow wooded edge of a larger wooded area further ahead (**Hornes End Spinney**, a plantation on the site of a former gravel quarry, which was used for the building of the railway).

- The **right-of-way** leads to the right of the trees and along this field's boundary for 270m, where you walk through a wooden gate to the left of a double metal field gate and *turn left* along the pavement at a bend in a road. In 30m [!] *turn left* off the road along a narrow tarmac path with a brick wall on the left and trees on the right. In 20m emerge on the **Village Green** (Bury Orchard) and continue in the same direction towards **St. Mary the Virgin** church.
- The **recommended route** leads along a deemed permissive path (judged by intense use by local walkers) to the left of the trees and along another field's boundary for 100m where you *turn right* and up through an easy-to-miss narrow gap in the trees. In 20m continue in the same direction at a forest track crossing. Ignore all minor paths off and in 150m walk up a slope and emerge on the **Village Green** (Bury Orchard). Head towards **St. Mary the Virgin** church.

Pass the sunken **Bacchus Pond** off to the right (where gravel used to be extracted in the 19th century) and leave the green at its far corner through a gap in the boundary wall out onto a road at a bend. *Turn left* along **Church Road** and in 100m reach a four-way road junction with **Westoning Road**, **Sundon Road** and **Station Road**.

Now either:

- *Turn left* and in 40m reach the recommended pub **The Carpenters Arms** or in another 135m **The Old Sun**;
- Or cross the junction, follow Station Road downhill, in 230m *turn left* down Station Approach and in 90m reach **Harlington Station**. London bound trains depart from the far platform.

Shortcut I

(cut 6.6 km, 55m ascent/descent and 900m tarmac before lunch)

This shortcut cuts out Barton Hills, arguably the best part of the walk, but leads through the NT-owned Sharpenhoe Clappers Hills and through the Sharpenhoe Hill Fort site instead. Lunch is in Streatley.

In 140m emerge from the wood at an arable field corner and continue in the same direction along a wide grassy field boundary with a hedge on the right. In 600m continue past a new wooded belt on the left and in 30m *turn left* at a four-way farm track/field boundary-junction (260°), with an HV pylon line above. In 370m continue in the same direction along a grassy track, where the gravel farm track turns left, still with a wooded belt on the left and a hedge on the right. In 830m walk through some metal plant containers acting as a barrier and past some houses on the left (**Swedish Cottages** on the OS map). In 90m cross the **A6** and continue along a minor road. In 180m pass the entrance sign to **Streatley** village. In 350m, just after passing the **village pond** on the left, *turn left* along **Bury Lane** with Icknield Way and Chiltern Way signposts and a Bunyan Trail marker.

In 40m continue in the same direction to the right of a house. In 30m walk through a metal kissing gate to the left of a metal field gate and in 40m *turn right* with a marker post through another metal kissing gate to the right of a (missing) field gate. Walk uphill along a grassy boundary with a hedge on the right. In 150m continue ahead with a marker post, ignoring a track to the right through a hedge gap. In 140m in the far right field corner walk through a metal kissing gate into a narrow path between fences. 50m cross a cul-de-sac and continue along a narrow path. In 40m you enter the church yard of **St. Margaret's Church, Streatley** at a bend in the path through a metal gate and *bear right* along a tarmac path to the right of the church. In 90m go through a wooden gate and find the lunch pub **The Chequers Inn** on the left.

After lunch walk down past the car park towards a road, cross **Sharpenhoe Road** and continue along **Church Road**. Where the road veers right towards a large roundabout, you continue along the left-hand pavement with a hedge on the left. In 80m *turn left* with an **Icknield Way Trail** signpost through the hedge along a second grassy trail through allotments. In 90m walk through a hedge gap onto a field boundary and *turn right* with the fenced in path. Follow bridleway marker posts around the field boundary for 1.8 km, always with a fence or a hedge or some bushes on the left, taking plenty of twists and turns in the process, with glimpses of views down into steep wooded valleys. Ignore some overgrown metal kissing gates along the way and at a three-way junction of paths: *ignore* the **Icknield Way Trail** and bridleway markers on a yellow-topped pole pointing left along a field boundary hedge, *continue* in the previous direction with **Chiltern Way** and **Icknield Way Walkers Route** markers through a hedge gap.

You have entered the **National Trust** owned **Sharpenhoe Clappers**. Follow a fenced-in grassy path around to the right with a large grassy field on the left (335°). In 125m *turn right* through a metal kissing gate with a **Chiltern Way** marker to enjoy more open views down the slope across the valley on the right. You follow the clear grass path on the level, with views to the right to **Barton-Le-Clay** and the **Barton Hills** behind and to the **Water Tower in Pulloxhill** ahead. In 210m a path joins from the left above from the nearby main path through a metal kissing gate by a metal field gate and in 160m you re-join the main path through another metal kissing gate and *turn right*. Immediately walk through a metal kissing gate and in 150m at the far corner of the grassy field on the left, you reach the now wooded site of **Sharpenhoe Hill Fort**.

The descent is from the diagonally opposite end of the site down an easy-to-find stepped path. To get there,

- you can take the Chiltern Way-route around it: head up a slope full of tree roots and follow a forest path around the right hand fringe of the site;
- you can *turn left* and walk across to the left hand side of the fort, find a lower running footpath there on the fringe of the trees and follow it right around the left hand side of the site with a fence and fantastic views into the plain on the left,
- or you can just amble through the site at random.

In 300m at the northerly end of the hill fort site, you descend a steep stepped path with footpath and CW markers on a low wooden post, in the general direction of the **Water Tower in Pulloxhill** (due N initially). At the bottom of the steps a marked footpath joins from the left. Continue along a left-hand side field boundary. In 150m walk through a hedge gap onto a road and *turn left* along its pavement into **Sharpenhoe**. In 130m cross **Sharpenhoe Road** and follow the left-hand pavement of **Harlington Road**. In 480m, just past the last houses on the left, *turn left* with a footpath signpost through a fence gap and follow a wide grassy field margin to the left of a hedge.

In 470m, at the top of this small rise, *bear right* with the hedge on the right into the next field. In 330m at the bottom of the drop just before a two-railed footbridge over the **Mill Stream**, a footpath joins from the right through a hedge gap. This is the Main Walk. *Turn left* inside the field, with the stream on the right and pick up directions in the main walk text at the double asterisk **).

Shortcut II

(cut 6.5 km, 85m ascent/descent and 1.5 km tarmac count before lunch)

This shortcut halves the walking in the Barton Hills, arguably the best part of the walk. Lunch is in Barton-Le-Clay.

Having gone under an HV pylon line, in 800m you cross over into the next field, continuing along a car wide margin to the right of the field. In 190m in the far-right field corner continue along a wide track with a wooded belt on the left and in 50m go through a gap to the right of a wooden field gate and *turn left* along **Barton Hill Road**. In 130m *turn right* with a bridleway and **Chiltern Way Extension** signpost (Barton Hills 1 mile) through a gap to the right of a metal field gate and along a car wide farm track to the left of a hedge (355°). In 810m you reach **Barton Hills National Nature Reserve** at a fence corner with a marker post. Enter the Nature Reserve through a metal kissing gate 30m along on the left hand side of the fence. In 10m you reach an information board and a footpath marker post.

Ignore a narrow winding path turning left through bushy growth, *turn right* with a footpath marker (130°) and in 20m walk through a metal kissing gate with a **Chiltern Way** marker into a large open grassy valley. This is **Access Land**. You *can* take the path down immediately on the left in a cutting, following the fence line, *but should really* head further into the Nature Reserve along the right-hand upper rim, gently upwards, to explore the views a bit more, if not walk all the way to the far upper corner and descend from there. Take any of the many routes down and pick up the directions in the main walk text at the asterisk *).